

# The Excellent Prismatic Spray

An adventure supplement for the Dying Earth RPG

VOLUME 1 NUMBER 6 • £8.85/\$15.95



Adventures, background material and advice of superb quality for Turjan-level players

*Vancian Magic:* Monte Cook describes how the Vancian magic of The Dying Earth gave rise to D&D.

*Darkening Your Game:* Mark Ricketts on the mechanics of terror, big horror, power players and other scary monsters that may be encountered by the GM.

*Dying Earth d20:* Keith Baker's d20 adaptation of the basic tenets of the Dying Earth

## ✿ Editorial ✿



With a becoming air of self-satisfied capability we note that *The Excellent Prismatic Spray* retains its obvious pre-eminence. In this edition, aimed to support those who wish to experience the darker side of the Dying Earth we concentrate on Turjan-level material. We combine this with contributions from persons of such eminence as Monte Cook, Mark Ricketts and Keith Baker, the latter with a d20 article. While it is their first appearance in XPS, their calibre is well known to all within the hobby and we are glad to have access to their wit and experience. Yet in the same edition we welcome someone who is making his first appearance in print, Greg Saunders.

To enlarge our horizons somewhat, Pelgrane Press has just released *Turjan's Tome* and *Demons of the Dying Earth*, works from authors fondly familiar to readers of this august publication. On the not too distant horizon loom other products, a Gazetteer of the entire Dying Earth, and, on-line (as our technological professional so quaintly puts it) the Scholasticarium 'website' has been greatly expanded.

As mentioned, shrewd observers will note that there is a distinctly Turjanic feel to this issue of *The Excellent Prismatic Spray*. The articles have a darker feel, the scenarios are more dangerous and for more powerful protagonists. We present a vision of fantasy, doom-laden and beautiful, violent, alien and treacherous. At this level the essential elements are an opportunity for bloodshed and a sense of horror as one searches ruined wonders for lost knowledge. And now your characters can have long term aims, objectives worth following.

---

This volume of scenarios is merely one of many. Farsighted and mathematically literate individuals may subscribe for four issues (including postage) for a mere £35 in the UK, or \$56 US and Canada. Those from elsewhere please contact Pelgrane Press and we shall calculate as economical a rate as is possible to suit your convenience.

---

Editor: Jim Webster. Page Bank, Rampside, Barrow in Furness, Cumbria UK Tel. 01229 821561  
email: [jim@websterpagebank.freemove.co.uk](mailto:jim@websterpagebank.freemove.co.uk)

Advertising and Subscriptions: Pelgrane Press, 18–20 Bromells Road, London. SW4 OBG UK  
Tel. 020 7738 8877 email: [inbox@dyingearth.com](mailto:inbox@dyingearth.com) website: <http://www.dyingearth.com>

Design & Typesetting: Sarah Wroot, Meadow View, Church Street, Litlington, Cambridgeshire UK SG8 0QB

### THE SCHOLASTICARIUM

Persons of quality desirous of advancing their education are invited to present themselves to Amserl Bassouc, admissions porter and battles overseer during the next few days to enroll in the extension courses on offer. As well as the usual array, there will be a series of lectures from persons of note over the coming weeks:

*Perrin*: The Felicitous Concatenation of students and imbecility, a cleriscal elucidation

*Mistress Flook*: Epigamic? How, why and its influence on the summoning of minor daihak

*Volune*: The expressive mode in 20th Aeon fan language, paying special regard to insult and rejection

*Grashpotel*: Oenomancy. Is it the future?

*Myrna the Rootless*: *Geografia mandas*: the dictates of landscape

The editor and the entire staff take this opportunity to thank Bilious Muberdgan, boman, exactor and cantabank for his kind attentions and the enthusiasm with which he plied us with his attentions. Indeed we feel that had he but been more fortunate in his choice of employment, his career would have been such that many would have chosen him to emulate. As it is, with his current position on the gibbet, he provides a worthy object lesson to our children and as such continues as an exemplar of personal service, the like of which is too rarely seen in this decadent age.



# From our readers...

Sir:

With regard to Nobel Endolank and his 'Travelling Spectacular': after seeing his advertisement in the last edition of *The Excellent Prismatic Spray*, I purchased a ticket to attend their performance. The fact that they did not bother to attend the same performance suggests the name 'travelling spectacular' is well chosen.

Nonetheless, seeing as your periodical gave substance to their claims, I can only assume that it is to you I turn for reimbursement of my ten terces. I trust they will be forwarded immediately.

Osao Jilk  
Kaiin

*The Editor replies:*

*You appear to misunderstand the nature of publishing. It is not the purpose of a magazine or similar venture to dispense sums of money, no matter how inconsequential, to anyone, be they writer, printer, or credulous victim of itinerant cozeners.*

*Indeed we have gone so far as to secure for ourselves the services of sundry burly but functionally illiterate individuals who regard it as their chosen role in life to stand between the editor and any small-minded, petty individuals who seek to render his life burdensome with their self-serving blathering.*

*You may wish to contemplate the ironies of this situation, that*

*the excellence of literature is best served by over-muscled individuals of severely limited intellect.*

*It occurs to me that you are at least partially qualified to serve us in a similar capacity. Should your musculature meet our exacting standards then we may be able to find you a place in our organisation*



Sir:

I write to complain about the low standard of the magazine. Where is your contribution to the higher arts? Where is your poetry section? Where indeed is a contribution from the great poet Mortiquan?

Nanvolin

*The Editor replies:*

*The editorial office does indeed have a copy of the complete works of Mortiquan, alas no longer as complete as it perhaps once was. It is kept in a special room where the staff may commune with it regularly. They are eloquent in their appreciation of the volume, especially the softness of the pages and their absorbent nature.*



Sir,

I note with interest that you occasionally include recipes in your letters column and I take the liberty of forwarding these favoured snacks for my husbands and myself; young pelgrane taken

from the nest when barely a week hatched are tasty morsels indeed.

Pelgrane Squabs

Scrub the plucked squab in warm water, before roasting for 12mins. Joint it and keep warm. Chop the entrails as finely as possible to remove as much juice as you can. Add this to the liquid left in the roast pan, then pour over a glass of good Sfere brandy and flame.

To this sauce add a teaspoon of stock, ideally a strongly flavoured one, a dash of lemon or Hisip juice and a smidgen of Val Ombrio pepper. Pour the sauce over bird in serving dish.

For a simple supper take one fresh squab per person. Lay the squab on its back, break skin over breast, then roll the skin to the side. To remove the breast meat, insert knife along breast bone working it forwards and backwards, thus producing two fillets of breast meat. Put these to one side and discard the rest of the bird.

Cut 2 fairly thick slices of good bread. Place under grill and toast one side only. Remove it from grill and turn bread over, placing the breast meat on the untoasted side with couple slices of thin streaky bacon covering meat. Place under hot grill until bacon is crispy. Season to taste.

Mistress Jul Nolwis  
Kaiin

Sir,

As those who read your esteemed organ are clearly interested in the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, rather than the profit it may bring, it seems likely that some may wish to join the 35th Annual Excursion of the Kaiin Horticultural Society. We are fortunate in having received an invitation to visit the extensive gardens and greenhouses of Lord Paramal, including those housing his magnificent collection of predatory vegetation. Interested members of the public should contact the Society's Secretary as soon as possible, as the number of places in the party are limited. Umbrellas and stout footwear are advisable regardless of the weather.

Myrna the Rootless  
The Scholasticarium



Dear Sirs,

Regarding your last issue:

Not since Grasphotel's 'The Sublimation of the Grape: The Viniculture of the Derna Basin' has such a collection of unmitigated nonsense, skewed and irrelevant, irreverent balderdash been gathered together between poorly made covers. The writing stinks like a maggot-infested dark wart, but without the redeeming qualities that cause such a thing to describe a course from putrescence to a clean picked skeleton; instead the writing persists and festers in the mind and on the page, waiting to infect other unwary readers.

To hear my factor snivelling and chuckling into his small beer as he perused the discarded rag made positively nauseous. He is the lowest common denominator, and your appeal to his miniscule intellect demonstrates your unworthiness.

The editing would have better been performed by a blind-folded mermelant, at least this would have the merit of an insouciant randomness, rather than achieving the insurmountable, nay, unplumbed: namely, making the writing worse than it already was. The editor should be put in a Hessian sack, suspended from a yard arm and beaten with Danny sticks until he screams for mercy, then beaten more, until he knows the difference between apostate and apostrophe.

The type-setting appears to have been created by a team of insane things from a non-Euclidean parallel dimension, whose very essence causes the words to cavort lasciviously across the page, and clash with the insipid art. I must once again express astonishment that despite the vile quality of the writing, made even worse by the editing, the appearance of the magazine makes the articles mark out a new low in publishing.

If you persist in these endeavours, I will have my staff drive you and your sorry shower out of Kaiin and into the bogs of Movadna Moor, where even the deodands should have the literary taste to consume you and rid the world of an unspeakable pestilence.

Arch-Magician Perrin  
Inferator of the Syncretic Symposium

*The Editor replies:*

*I feel that the Inferator has, (in a phrase he used so cuttingly in his address to the camerlengo excubants) manifested several paradigms. I recommend he use a bait of oatmeal sprinkled with arsenical sulphur, which should end this unhappy infestation.*

### KILLCROP & NOTAPHILY

Nummamorous usurers, friends to the quaestuary, can forfeit your boodle, assuage your chrematophobia, arrange frist, levant, and avert syndicalism. Shun the inferior services proffered by their ailing contenders, as you would spurn the attentions of a rabid tree weasel.

📖 Book your appointment today 📖



# ❧ Vancian Magic ❧

Monte Cook

“I am a dignified citizen of the area, not a fox-faced vagabond in an over-fancy hat.”

If there’s any aspect of childhood that I miss the most, it’s the vast, unending acres of time at your disposal. When I was 11 years old, I played Dungeons & Dragons with some kids whom I’d heard talking about it, in of all places, Sunday school. We played a lot, and despite the fact that I wasn’t actually close friends with my fellow players (most were older than me) I had an excellent time. Eventually, though, I wanted to introduce some closer friends to the game. Moreover, I wanted to be able to read my own copy of the game.

There were no game stores then—certainly not in a little town in South Dakota, anyway—and so my only doorway into the world of role-playing lay in the one bookstore in town. I went there and found, much to my chagrin, no little brown books like the ones I was used to. In fact, there was only one D&D book in the place. A large, hardcover tome called the *Dungeon Master’s Guide*. I’d never seen this before. None of the other kids had had such a book—such a mammoth, incredible-looking book.

Not only was it this gigantic book filled with two-column text in tiny print (not like the other D&D books I’d seen at all), it had the words “*Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*” on it.

Advanced? Oh my. The game had a whole new level that I’d been completely unaware of. Was I ready for this? Was I advanced? “Of course I am,” thought the precocious little 11-year-old. “If D&D is fun, Advanced D&D is sure to be far, far better. I mean, look at the size of this book.”

I paid for it and went home. Now here’s where I finally get to the part about all the free time we had when we were young. I read that book from cover to cover. Multiple times. I read the credits, the forward, the preface and the introduction. I read the appendices, the glossary and the afterword. You see, back then I had near limitless time, and very limited resources, so I had only the one book—not that there were that many D&D books to buy back then, anyway. But I had only the DMG to read or to use to play. (I have, of course, a few humorous tales about trying to play D&D with just a *Dungeon Master’s Guide*, but I’ll save those for another time.)

As I said, I read everything in that book, hoping to soak it all in. Hoping that if I digested—practically memorized—every word, somehow I would understand the game better, and discover deeper secrets. For that’s what D&D was to me. Not since my first viewing of a television preview for the movie *Star Wars* had I experienced something so totally new and so entirely compelling, so very much *right for me* as when I first heard about D&D. And when I found the DMG, I found a whole new deeper trove of secrets and treasures. When people link D&D to the occult, they are way off base because they mean it literally. However, figuratively, the comparison almost works. The DMG was to me, like an occult tome to pore over again and again, hoping to find the right formulae or a new secret.

And I did. I found Appendix N: Inspirational and Educational Reading, almost at the very back of the book, nestled between ‘Encumbrance of Standard Items’ and some ‘Summoned Monster’ charts. (With such an organizational system, no wonder the book seemed such an eldritch tome and every rule such a forbidden secret!) There, in the short list of recommended authors, lay the following entry:

Vance, Jack. THE EYES OF THE OVERWORLD; THE DYING EARTH; *et al.*

And I ignored it.

## ❧ Vancian Magic ❧

It was just too much to take in all at once. But the name stuck with me. Filed away in some recess of my brain, without my conscious knowledge.

A year or two later, I saw another reference to “Vancian magic” in *Dragon* magazine. Vancian? What did that mean? With a bit more research, I learned that D&D magic was based on the works of Jack Vance. Okay, so now I’m interested. I mean, Gary Gygax had claimed that D&D owed a lot to Conan, Lord of the Rings, and Michael Moorcock. I’d read those, and all were great, but they seemed to be related no more to D&D than to each other. But somehow the reference to Vancian magic implied a stronger relationship.

Thus began my quest for Jack Vance. Now, I grew up in a small Midwestern town, with no Jack Vance in the library, and certainly none in the tiny chain bookstore. There was no Amazon.com, and I was pretty isolated from science fiction fandom. So the quest took years—a decade, actually. Finally, scouring a used bookstore, I saw it, sitting innocuously on the shelf.

### THE DYING EARTH

I picked it up immediately and opened it. There, on the very first page that I looked at, a character was casting Excellent Prismatic Spray. I sighed in relief.

Of course, there was a part of me that said, “So what?” By that time, there were plenty of D&D related works of fiction out there. From Andre Norton’s ‘*Quag Keep*’ to the ‘*Dragonlance Chronicles*’ and the works of R.A. Salvatore. I had read some of these, and they all had their merits. Somehow, however, the books of a revered master like Jack Vance—even though I’d never read his work—intrigued me. And more importantly, unlike all those others; it had not been influenced by D&D. Rather it had influenced the game. This was D&D’s roots. Like a historian starting with the mysterious tome of the *Dungeon Master’s Guide*, I had finally traced the research to the original source, in its original language. Vancian magic at last.

Needless to say, the term “Vancian magic” took on two meanings for me. Not only were these books about magic, they in fact were magic. No simple quasi-Arthurian pseudo-Medieval tale, *The Dying Earth* described a place no one before Vance had ever imagined. Being a student of history, I have respect for historical accuracy and a portrayal of period accurately. Yet I have even more respect for a writer who can take such information and create something entirely new with it. Vance’s *The Dying Earth* was such a place. This distant future world, billions of years hence, was populated by creatures and people far different than anything we’ve known.

Further, most of the fantasy I’d read had fallen into one of two categories: They were either pulpy Conan-esque stories or Tolkien-inspired epics. *The Dying Earth* was different. Vance had carved his own niche. His characters were neither sword-wielding, muscle-bound brutes, nor were they stalwart heroes or plucky little folk. They were rogues and wizards with motivations far beyond the heroic. The characters in *The Dying Earth* are distant—held at a distance from us just as the world is so far in the distant future.

*Dragon* magazine had been correct. Dungeons & Dragons’ magic system comes straight from *The Dying Earth* (and the following books). Wizards study spells and store the knowledge and energy within their brains to release them later with great effect. The names of the spells are colorful and dramatic. But the similarities do not end there. In fact, while D&D clearly has “Vancian magic,” there’s much more to it than that.

Like its D&D child, *The Dying Earth* is not a work of emotion or passion. Nor is it really about a struggle between good and evil (which characterizes so much of fantasy). The legacy is subtle but clear—D&D characters are not all heroes, either. Although the game has mechanics for good and evil, there is an underlying influence to push characters toward the middle. D&D characters are just as much, if not more, about collecting treasure than in fighting evil monsters. By most modern, real-world standards, D&D characters are self-serving, self-interested brigands who are willing to fight and even kill to get what they want. They do not concern themselves with feelings as much as goals, and when emotion does enter the picture, it’s more often revenge than compassion. Is that so different from Mazirian the Magician in *The Dying Earth*?

Reading *The Dying Earth*, one can see an inspiration in D&D beyond simply subject matter. Vance and his characters speak in a formal, almost archaic syntax, giving the books an impression of seriousness and dignity.

## ❧ Vancian Magic ❧

Since those early days, Dungeons & Dragons writing has been characterized by a similar manner. Both value a heavy descriptive tone and an impressive use of vocabulary as well.

Further, like D&D, *The Dying Earth* displayed an appreciation of science as well as sorcery, although it never became technical. Both speak of things like clones, cells, hybrids, particles, the visual spectrum (infrared and ultraviolet) and more. Vance doesn't pretend not to know the ways of biology and technology, and neither does the game. Again, this isn't the Middle Ages. Just because the characters use swords rather than guns and ride horses rather than in cars, these are not primitive folk. To make them so might encourage us to think ourselves superior to them, and that clearly was not the goal in the stories (most likely quite the opposite). So too, for the escapist nature of D&D to work, the players need not pretend not to have modern knowledge at their disposal. D&D characters do not misunderstand the world the way similar characters in history may have. They do not believe that the sun orbits the earth and do not mistakenly think disease emanates from the chill night air. Thus, they are more like characters in the future *Dying Earth* than in the Medieval past. Like D&D characters, Vance's characters in *The Dying Earth* are an interesting amalgam of modern and historical people in their knowledge and sensibilities.

As an outsider looking in, I would say that Vance had a phenomenal influence on the original creation of D&D. Although Tolkien's world is clearly reflected in the elves, dwarves, orcs, rangers, and halflings of D&D, the wizards, spells, and magic items (don't forget the IOUN stones) were given birth by Vance long before the dice ever rolled across a table.

As a game designer who has written extensively for Dungeons & Dragons, I find myself working in a Vancian tradition—almost certainly one the writer himself would never have predicted. I can tell you that these Vancian traditions still run strong in the game, whether the writers perpetuating those traditions realize it or not. I owe much to Jack Vance and *The Dying Earth*. Without him, D&D would be a startlingly different game, if it would exist at all.

*Monte Cook has been a full time game designer since 1988 and was one of the designers of the Third Edition of Dungeons & Dragons. He currently operates his own game design studio, Malhavoc Press with his wife Sue.*

*Copyright Monte J. Cook*

It is with considered pride that we bring to your attention a revolutionary venture: the 'bank note'. We apologise for such a banal term, lacking in elegance, but we feel sure that the concept behind this phrase has considerable application.

We at MAULCULE, VODITHBUFAG & THRUMP have often noted that many of gentleman of fashion using our deposit service lament the problems carrying large quantities of terces. One is invited to a salon and, knowing that there will be an opportunity to gamble, one wishes to take a few thousand terces. Even centurms are clumsy things, distorting the cut of your britches, or weighing down your jacket so that the undiscerning assume you are carrying a brick in your pocket.

Thus and so, we have been taken by the idea that, for those customers of ours who deposit significant sums with us, we will issue notes of hand for varying values. Should you wish to purchase a bottle of good wine for two thousand terces, you need not risk personal injury struggling under the weight of debased coinage, but may merely hand over one of our notes for the value of two thousand terces. The vendor may, should they wish, return the note to us and we will play him out the full value in specie, or he may for his own convenience use the same note to pay his suppliers.

Already notes are being printed and signed by our chief cashier. The first hundred customers will also receive commemorative elegant silver cases, just the same size as the notes, so that they may keep them safe, secure in the knowledge that their garb will now remain no more and no less than the height of fashion.

*Bogol Thrump*, interim Chief Cashier, MAULCULE, VODITHBUFAG & THRUMP



# ❧ Brotherly Love ❧

Greg Saunders

“It has already absorbed a Pelgrane and a female hybrid of basil and grue.”

## Introduction

*“Fortunate indeed is he who like me has the love of a loyal brother.”*

Carloban the Proud is a powerful mage noted for two things – his mastery of those magics principally involved in shape changing<sup>1</sup> and the immense pride he takes in the appliance of these powers. The nickname is of his own devising but many people he deals with believe ‘Carloban the Arrogant’ or even ‘Carloban the Stupid’ to be a more accurate description. Although these names are used, they are only muttered out of earshot in deference to an earnest desire on the part of the speaker to retain a shape they are relatively comfortable with. It is believed that the only individual known to have insulted Carloban and survived the act is his own twin brother, Marloban the Extraordinary, another mage whose powers are not to be underestimated but whose nickname has also become the subject of discussion. Part of the antagonism is that both brothers specialise in shape changing, but use different methods to achieve the same pedestrian level of success.

No doubt any Games Master showing such discerning taste as to read this adventure will find it strange that two warring mages would let familial ties intervene in their actions, but in truth each of the brothers swore an oath to their mother that they would never harm the other, and in ‘fond’ memory of that sweet lady the oath stands even though the lady in question is long dead. Due to the brothers desire not to appear openly at war but to remain on seemingly pleasant terms they have often had to resort to increasingly devious means of one-upmanship. Over the years these games have merely increased the brother’s abhorrence of each other whilst incidentally separating a number of innocent bystanders from their lives, limbs and at the very least wits.<sup>2</sup>

## The Plot

Carloban has grudgingly agreed to pay his brother Marloban a visit at Marloban’s manse to mark the anniversary of their mother’s death. Hence it should come as no surprise that Carloban does not wish to pass on an opportunity to inconvenience his brother. He has arranged for a visit by one of his Vat creatures that he believes Marloban will not be able to ignore. During this digression from Marloban’s probable agenda Carloban intends to sneak into Marloban’s study to steal one of his most prized tomes of ancient lore, Tinkimwal’s *The Principles of Lemniscate Hamartiology with special reference to the demon realms*, which is the standard 19th aeon work. It is an item that Carloban has coveted for some time. Realising that Marloban will not allow him to leave the manse with the book in hand, Carloban has decided on a method of hiding the book so that he can collect it at a later date. Unfortunately and most unpleasantly for the participant, Carloban has chosen Mallow, his brother’s feline companion as the hiding place, intending to recover the tome from the beast at a later date when the beast roams far from the manse. The action takes place in Marloban’s manse, a low two-storied building that is set in a pleasant clearing on the fringes of the Forest Da.



1. Something one must bear in mind lest one inadvertently offend him.

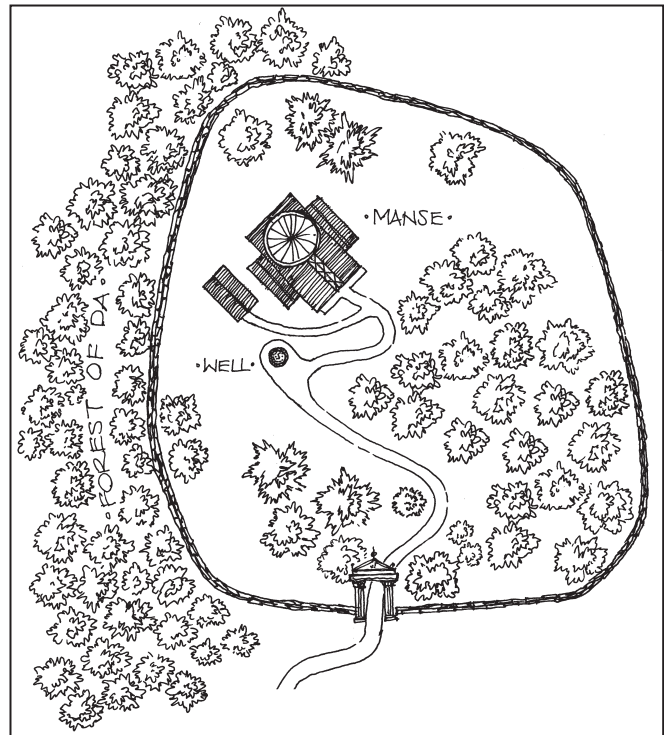
2. In light of this it may well be the immediate aim of the characters to escape from the clutches of the brothers alive and in passably human form.

## The Manse of Marloban

*A map of the manse of Marloban is included to aid the GMs' visualisation of the bucolic scene.*

### The Setting

The manse is situated on the fringes of the Forest of Da. Within a low stone wall several acres of once-pleasant parkland surround the main building, but Marloban is far more concerned with his work in the vats than the upkeep of the landscape, and so much of it has fallen to disrepair. There is much wildlife in the area, both local and exotic, an unusual amount of which seems very tame to human contact. In fact many of these are poor creatures that wear their current form only after displeasing Marloban somehow, and haunt the area around the manse in the foolish hope of being returned to their original shape. A stone-flagged path winds through the park toward the manse, lined with the overhanging boughs of great trees. Though wild, some of the magical presence which lines the walls of the manse seeps out into the park; even the vegetation seems watchful and aware.



### The Manse

A low two-storied building of grey stone and red tiles, the manse has an air of great age about it (Marloban is the last in a long line of occupants ranging from illustrious to despicable). The crest of the roof has a large crystalline skylight, and a small domed structure bulges from the roof at the end farthest from the main door. Many magicians have occupied the building in the past and the very walls seem to exude an unearthly aura that even taints the parkland. The walls are weathered and covered in lichen. In places deep scratches calling to mind forgotten runes mark the stones. The front door of the building is tall and red, depicting a gid clinched in a deadly embrace with a struggling man. Outside the main building is the stable that houses a fine horse,<sup>3</sup> and a well. The water from the well is also tainted by the magic that percolates the fabric of the building, and anyone drinking it will find himself or herself subtly changed. The most common result is that the drinker finds that they cast spells and cantraps with more success, gaining a Bonus of 1. Unfortunately the caster can only encompass half the spells they normally can. This effect wears off at sunrise.<sup>4</sup>

### The Servants

As well as Vetch other servants help with the day-to-day running of the manse. Without exception these are what appear to be wild creatures that have been cleverly trained to carry trays, mop the floor and perform many other mundane tasks. In truth they are the recent unfortunate victims of Marloban's experimentations with shape change. Vetch has promised



### Magic Taint

*Anyone who drinks from the well or indeed spends more than an hour in the house will be affected by the taint. The victim of the taint casts spells and cantraps with more success, gaining a Bonus of 1. Unfortunately the caster can only encompass half the spells they normally can. This effect wears off at sunrise. Note that living in the house for a period of more than a month allows the body to build up a resistance to the taint, hence Marloban himself is unaware of it.*



3. The horse, a great rarity, belongs to Marloban and while he claims that he grew it in his vats, it is actually a naturally conceived and reared creature, purchased by him from Sfere.

4. Should the sun not rise we are unable to give any guarantee as to what will happen to the victim's spell-encompassing abilities, which may anyway be adversely effected by the cold and dark.

them that if they serve Marloban well he may return them to their original form, in reality by the time their transformation into their new shape was completed, Marloban had forgotten they even existed. Eventually these creatures leave the manse and move into the wild; some haunt the grounds still. In shape they form a bizarre cross section of the animal kingdom – some are quite fearsome in aspect, other demure. Many still wear the remnants of their clothing. All carry themselves with the slumped shoulders (or tentacles where appropriate) and shuffling gait of beings trapped in the depths of despair.

### *The Entrance Hall*

The red door opens onto a wide, low hall. The floor is tiled in a mazy pattern of interlocking geometric shapes and the walls are coated with soft red velvet, slightly damp to the touch. The petrified torso of a deodand serves as a cane holder, currently holding the canes of all those in the manse (Carloban owns a cane which is a long shaft of red crystal, Marloban a rod of onyx). Otherwise the room is unadorned.

### *Reception*

In this room Marloban keeps the larger pieces from his collection (which more opportunistic guests may find harder to remove). White-walled and wooden floored, the room is dominated by two large statues which support the arched roof. Outlined in the center of the two columns are the faces of a man and a woman, twisted in despair – these were the last two occupants of the house transformed by Marloban into their current form. Dotted about the room are pieces of ancient machinery, carven busts of long dead heroes and large pieces of laboratory equipment, all mounted on wooden pedestals. Two divans are placed among the exhibits.

### *Grand Staircase*

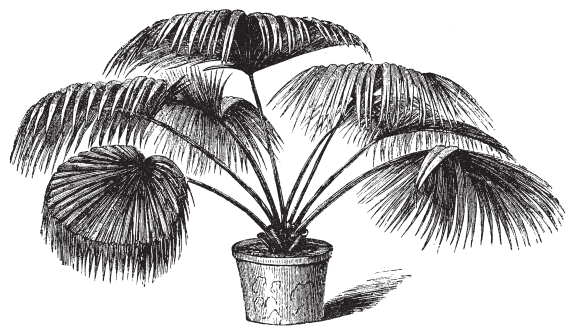
A larger staircase at the back of the reception hall winds up to the second floor of the manse. The rail that follows the curving stair is shaped in the likeness of a sinuous serpent, its glaring head at the bottom of the stair. When anyone passes the head climbing the stairs, a gong sounds in the heights of the hall (ringing around the manse and alerting Marloban and Vetch) and a hissing voice issues from the snakes carven mouth ‘As honoured guest you are welcome, as uninvited rogue you are warned.’ The eyes of the snake flash a glowing red as these words are spoken.

### *Great Hall*

This is where Marloban entertains rare guests. The hall is long and wide with a ceiling open to the level above, a gold balustrade ringing the second floor landing. A row of columns ring the room carved into the stern figures of the previous owners of the manse. Observant characters will note that the pillar at the end of the hall on the left is carved in the likeness of Marloban. The walls of the hall are dark brown and hard to discern, making the chamber seem cavernous and undefined. By day illumination is supplied by a large crystalline roof which caps the second floor of the building, by night fireflies flit around the chamber, more of Marloban’s unfortunate victims. Dotted around the hall are several gems embedded in the walls that pick up and reflect the fireflies’ light (if removed with the aid of a knife).<sup>5</sup> the gems would fetch a pretty sum of terces. In the centre of the chamber is a long thin table. Marloban’s carven chair is at one end, the stool to be occupied by Carloban at the other. In between these diametrically opposed poles places can be set for other guests. By uttering the command word Marloban can summon gentle and soothing music to issue from the very walls of the room.

### *Conservatory*

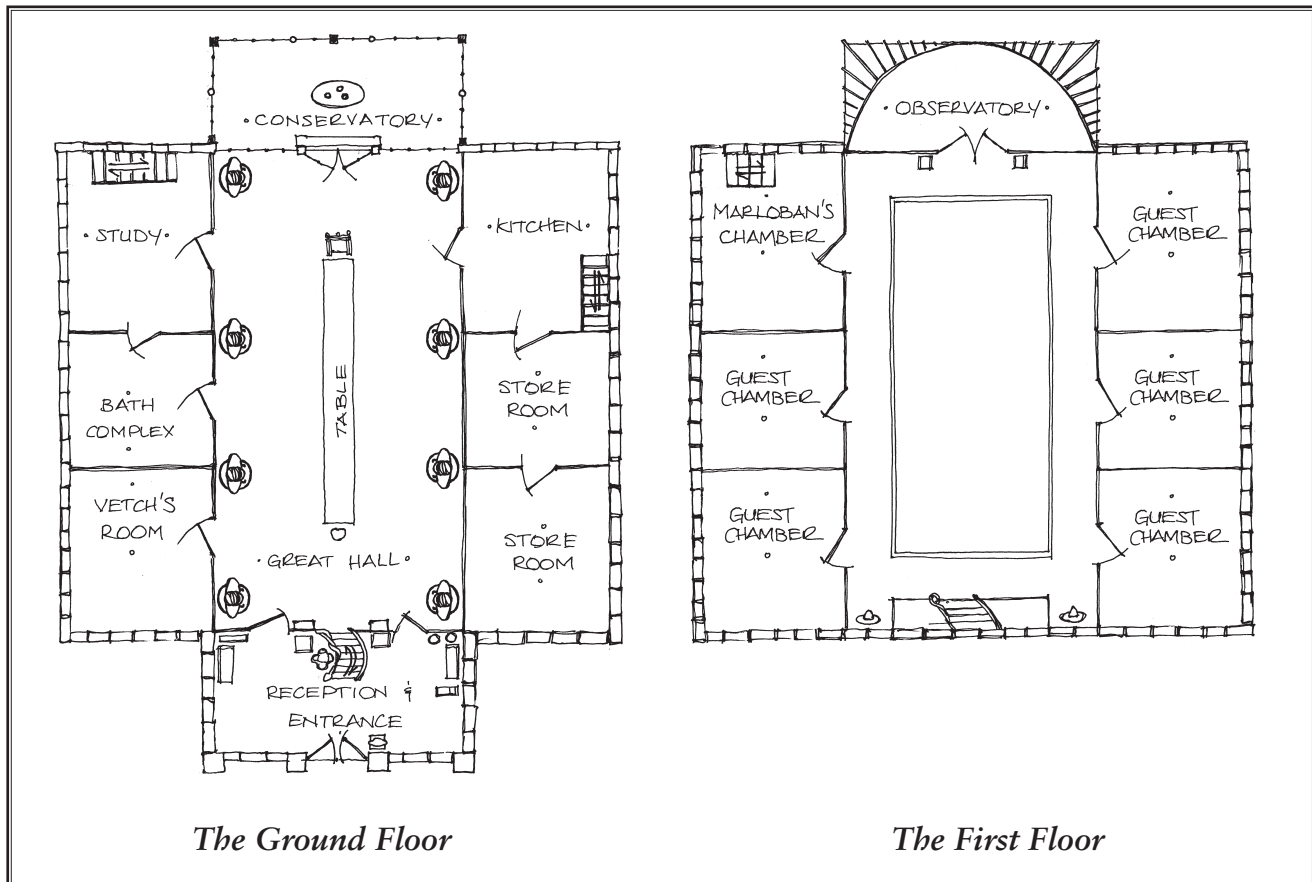
At the end of the great hall the doors open onto the conservatory, a large glass room with an iron framework. Various winches and levers allow the panes at the apex of the



*The fronds of this magnificent palm are remarkably similar to feathers. Their iridescent greens and blues are seen to good effect as they move constantly, wafting a fine fragrance through the air.*

5. An honest pedantry forces us to admit that, yes, a cold chisel and heavy hammer would serve as well for the purpose, but they somehow lack subtlety.





roof to be tilted allowing fresh air to percolate. Placed upon wooden benches within the room are many plants of different kinds. Recently, Marloban has been experimenting with transforming fauna into flora and some of his creations are to be found here. Marloban has been experimenting mainly on animals but unfortunately, many of the animals in question were once some of the transformed human servants that shuffled about the halls. Deranged by the experience of a double metamorphosis, the poor things quiver silently if anyone enters the room. Within three silver pots on the central table are samples of a magical soil. If sprinkled around a growing plant, the soil will induce growth to full maturity in one night. By contrast consumption by an animal or human will cause severe wind. Each pot carries one dose of this rare material.

#### *Kitchens and Storerooms*

These chambers house the cooking utensils used in the preparation of Marloban's marvellous repasts. Although it may seem unlikely to one who judges a book purely by the state of the cover, Vetch is an excellent chef and is currently exploring recipes from Fulbercoe's famous 19th Aeon classic *Scintillation of the Mind Through Epicurean Stimulation of the Senses*. This tome, along with several others, lines the walls of the kitchen and the whole collection would be extremely valuable to a gourmand. Accordingly Vetch will guard these treasures with his life.

#### *Bath Complex*

Here Marloban eases the vexations of research with a selection of intoxicating ablutions. As well as several chambers where the more animal requirements of the flesh may be accomplished, the complex also contains a series of baths - a tepidarium, a frigidarium and a luxuriant whirlpool. By the side of this last bath is a small control panel. Depressing the various buttons controls the speed of the whirlpool, injudicious use of the panel could induce the water to gyrate at dangerous speeds. The control panel can also be used to releases two captive nymphs, trained to meet the most vigorous requirements of the bather. Needless to say Marloban frowns upon uninvited use of these facilities.

## ❧ Brotherly Love ❧

### *Vetch's Chamber*

This beautiful adorned room is where Vetch recovers from the rigours of the day. In the centre of the room is a circular well containing a mulch of vegetable matter. Every day the butler immerses himself in the soup for two hours to gain sustenance. He can taste food with his mouth, but cannot consume it. Around the walls are a wide variety of artistic treasures - books of poetry, carven images and portraits. Vetch knows the position of each piece intimately and will immediately be aware of anything missing from the room. Such an act of theft will bring the very worse from the butler.

### *The Study*

This chamber contains all of Marloban's tomes of knowledge. The room is sumptuous with a thick golden rug adorning the floor and a beautiful painted ceiling depicting a naked maiden. An ancient writing desk occupies the centre of the room. In a holder on the desk is a golden pen, when the pen is placed on a blank sheet of paper and a stud on the side of the barrel is pressed a miniature mechanism is activated and the pen will begin automatically writing anything spoken in the room. Pressing a second stud will make the pen write in a special code that Marloban uses when transcribing his research. In a drawer of the desk is a magnifying glass, peering through the glass at the code translates the text into the viewers native tongue. The room itself is lined with books, many standard magical tomes, some rare historical tomes. If any of the books are removed from the room a gong will sound from high above, alerting Marloban to the theft.



## **The Second Floor**

### *Long Hall*

This wide chamber at the top of the circular staircase from the reception hall takes the shape of a circular balcony with a golden railing that overlooks the great hall. A crystalline roof caps the hall providing illumination by day. Bedrooms exit the hall, only one of which is currently occupied.

### *Guest Bedchambers*

These chambers are comfortably furnished but dusty, as Marloban entertains few guests. One of them has been prepared for Carloban – it is positively austere. In the wardrobes of each room but the one prepared for Carloban are a fantastic array of garments of flimsy gauze, rich velvet and silken satin. These are Marloban's less-favoured raiment.

### *Marloban's Chamber*

This large chamber is where Marloban rests after a hard day in the laboratory. A huge four-poster bed and a large portrait of a woman that nearly fills one wall dominate the room. The woman looks suspiciously like Muriel. More fantastic garments fill wardrobes around the room. On a table by the bed is a small machine surrounded by a variety of small coloured crystals. Placing any of the crystals in a receptacle in the machine activates the illusion of a beautiful nymph who dances around the chamber, enticing the viewer with the promise of exotic pleasures. Unfortunately for Marloban, the large picture of his mother<sup>6</sup> that dominates the room stops him from fully enjoying the device. A series of silver statues are stationed on a shelf under the window, depicting creatures of the forest, and several small trinkets are tossed carelessly on the floor are doubtless worth many terces to anyone with a sack and proven method of escape. Standing by the door is the statue of a deodand. Should anyone other than Marloban or Vetch pick anything up in the room, the statue will speak, repeating 'Thief' at steadily increasing volume until the item is replaced where found. Gagging the statue will prove an effective method of silencing the accusatory tones.

### *Observatory*

In this large domed room Marloban views the wheeling of the stars and the dimming of the sun. A large telescopic device set above a comfortable chair fills the chamber. The whole dome can be rotated relative to the building by pulling a brass lever set under the seat. Windows of red crystal encircle the dome giving views across the park. The Manse's defence from attack is also mounted on the dome – a large flame tube capable of firing gouts of burning liquid up to two hundred yards. The device fires automatically on all those nearing

6. A gift from his brother.

## ❧ Brotherly Love ❧

the manse unless Marloban or Vetch deactivates it (Marloban often requires live ‘guests’ for his experiments). From this high spot the charred remains of two deodands can be seen in the park. The viewing eyepiece of the telescope can be removed and used as a hand-held telescope. The controls for the flame tube would appear to be exquisite gems but in fact are worthless paste, yet removing them for closer inspection renders the device useless and opens the manse to intrusion from deodands, gids, hoons and who knows what other horrors that lurk with in the forest.



### The Cellars

#### *The Laboratory*

This is where Marloban conducts much of his research. The room is packed with scientific and arcane equipment as well as the magician’s two vats. Some of the equipment would be worth a considerable amount to a practitioner of the magical arts, most would vex the most highly regarded pedant. The room also contains Marloban’s other vat creations, creatures similar to Vetch but lacking his intelligence. They are mainly harmless unless provoked, but tend to crowd around people who enter the chamber (except Marloban – they know better). The pressure of their body sacks against characters that enter the chamber could prove considerably unsettling.

#### *The Stores*

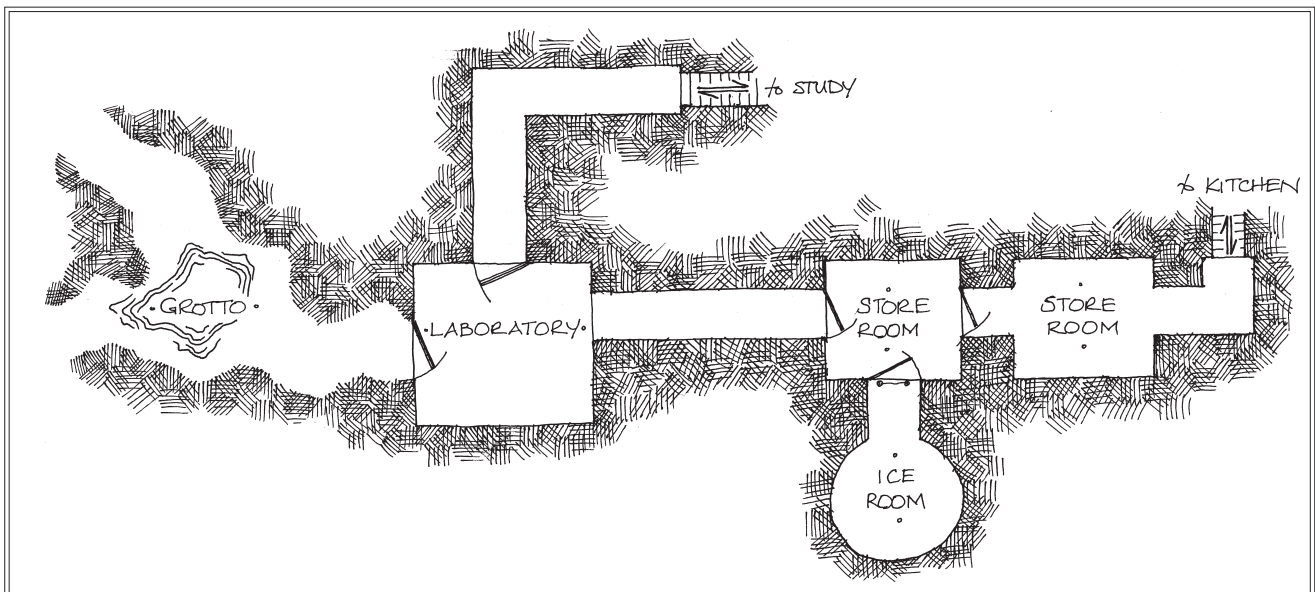
Packed with mundane items for the household, there is little to interest the educated mind in these rooms.

#### *The Ice Room*

The door to this chamber opens onto a ladder that leads down the side of a deep, wide shaft. During winter ice is dragged to this chamber from a nearby lake. Packing the ice in straw ensures that it does not completely melt even in the height of summer. The fine foods served at Marloban’s table are kept here, shipped all the way from Kaiin at no considerable cost.

#### *The Grotto*

Behind a locked iron door, a natural cave contains the concentrate of magical taint that surrounds the manse (the well collects water from the bottom of the chamber). Such is the power of the taint in this area that characters entering will suffer effects similar to drinking the well water within minutes. In the centre of the chamber is a pool of dark water. Catching the light from the mouth of the well the liquid shimmers with an unearthly glow. The cave itself winds deep below ground, and who knows what secrets of the ancient world lie undiscovered in the depths?





## *The Characters*

### CARLOBAN

*‘If you persist in distracting my attention with your rude complexion  
I shall find you a form that better suits you.’*

Arrogant, cruel and lacking in any form of common sense, Carloban represents an excellent example of what many would regard as the typical magician. Tall and thin with a wickedly hooked nose and long, thin moustache with which he constantly toys, Carloban looks down on any those he deems worthy of discourse with a fierce and unflinching gaze. He barely seems to notice the majority of people, unconsciously considering them unworthy of attention. When forced to converse with those he considers below him he genuinely struggles to communicate – he can no more converse with a tradesman than he could to flatter a tree. Carloban has two interesting character traits. He is a fastidious dresser and wears a wide variety of truly flamboyant outfits that (in the opinion of many) verge on the ridiculous. This will manifest itself all the more if Carloban becomes agitated or upset, whereupon he will often change into something better suiting his mood – light blues and creams when calm, inevitably reds and purples when angry. The second trait is that, as a child, Carloban was mortally afraid of his over-bearing and dominating mother and even in death her spirit seems to grip him still. When upset, he will mutter incessantly to the spectral matron – worryingly she appears to answer him but in a voice only he can hear.

**Ratings:** Persuade (Intimidating) 12, Rebuff (Penetrating) 11, Attack (Caution) 6, Defense (Vexation) 8, Health 6, Magic (Devious) 12, (specialization: Shape changing), Athletics 4, Etiquette 4, Imposture 6, Pedantry 8, Perception 6, Riding 2, Seduction 1, Stealth 2, Wherewithal 2

**Resistances:** Indolence 2, Pettifoggery 4



### MARLOBAN

*‘Are you still here? I thought you gone with the other foul airs.’*

Although both brothers would deny it vehemently and many have come to an unfortunate end for the merest suggestion of it, Marloban is an exact copy of his twin (or is it the other way around?). In appearance, dress, arrogance and actions the brother are as one, which perhaps gives the perceptive reader an insight into their enmity.

**Ratings:** Persuade (Intimidating) 11, Rebuff (Penetrating) 12, Attack (Caution) 7, Defense (Vexation) 9, Health 5, Magic (Devious) 11, (specialization: Shape changing), Athletics 5, Etiquette 4, Imposture 6, Pedantry 8, Perception 6, Riding 2, Seduction 2, Stealth 2, Wherewithal 1

**Resistances:** Indolence 1, Pettifoggery 5



### MURIEL

*‘Silence! Your obsequious whining is shredding my nerves.’*

Muriel is Carlobans’ latest accomplishment, a creature of his Vats that his good brother Marloban could never ignore. In form, features and thoughts she is the image of the brothers’ long-dead mother. It is with Muriel that Carloban intends to divert the watchful eyes of his brother long enough for him to enter Marloban’s study. Unfortunately, Carlobans interpretation of his mother has been colored somewhat by his memories of the great lady and diverges somewhat from the historical figure in question, being a distillate of all the extremes of that fearsome ladies character. Muriel is slender and beautiful, with raven hair and large blue eyes, but she is also domineering and smothering. In truth Carloban is not a little scared of his creation so close to his memory does she seem. She in turn realizes the power that she has over her creator and wishes to turn the situation to her advantage. Feeling she dominates Carloban already, she seeks to exert the same influence over his brother.

## ❧ Brotherly Love ❧

She partakes in Carlobans' plan but cares nothing for the outcome, only thinking it an opportune time to meet Marloban.

**Ratings:** Persuade (Intimidating) 13, Rebuff (Contrary) 9, Attack (Cunning) 5, Defense (Intuition) 5, Health 7, Appraisal 5, Athletics 6, Etiquette 2, Pedantry 2, Perception 6, Riding 2, Seduction 6, Stealth 5

**Resistances:** Gourmandism 4, Rakishness 6



### VETCH

*'You haven't perchance come across the works of Valartus, the 20th Aeon poet? Alas, I thought not.'*

Marloban's butler Vetch is a construction of his vats. With the dying sun about to wink out Marloban gave no thought to beauty when constructing Vetch, resulting in a hugely practical but utterly revolting being. Vetch appears as a large bloated sack of strange lumpy objects that rises to shoulder height over a mass of waving finger-like cilia that serve a perambulatory function. The crown of the sack is ringed with tentacles, some tipped with dexterous 'fingers', some with glistening eyes. Vetch's hissing voice issues from a mouth situated on top of the body in the midst of the nest of tentacles. Appearances are often deceptive and in fact Vetch is a very misunderstood being. Courteous, polite and thoughtful, Vetch is an intellectual imprisoned in the body of a monster. Should any of the characters wish to befriend him (which would not be too difficult once they get passed his appearance as Vetch finds Marloban's company obnoxious), he could provide an insight into his master's character (and by default Carlobans).

**Ratings:** Persuade (Eloquent) 9, Rebuff (Lawerly) 6, Attack (Furious) 12, Defense (Sure footedness) 8, Health 9, Appraisal 4, Athletics 6, Etiquette 8, Pedantry 6, Perception 4, Stealth 5

**Resistances:** Arrogance 4, Rakishness 6



### MALLOW

A feline construction of the vats, Mallow was designed to rid the manse of the many small pests that seem so partial to Marloban's fine foodstuffs. Unfortunately, Marloban was slightly hazy on the nature of the predatory feline he was attempting to copy and the result is that the bizarrely colored ball of fur that is Mallow resembles a more a hairy reptile than a graceful stalker of vermin. Furthermore, Marloban was equally vague on the exact nature of the pests in question, and so Mallow has a truly astounding collection of claws, fangs and flicking blades capable of separating the unwary from their entrails with barely a movement. Luckily for pests of all sizes within a ten-mile radius, Mallow has more the temperament of a cushion and spends most of his time asleep in his master's study or rolling about the outskirts of the manse; catching vermin is clearly not on the agenda. Marloban tolerates Mallow's presence because the pests appear to have departed – in truth they have been driven away by the Mallow's appalling smell rather than his martial prowess.

**Ratings:** Attack (Finesse) 3, Defense (Dodge) 8, Health 8



## Adventure

The Characters have several ways to become entangled in the affairs of the two wizards.

In the first it could well be that both Marloban and Carloban are nervous about the nature of the forthcoming meeting so have decided to enhance the number of their retainers. Marloban will be looking for a few extra serving staff to both assist Vetch, but also to provide muscle in case things go wrong. Marloban is confident that he can cope with his brother but is worried that Vetch will not be able to control all Carlobans' retainers. Carloban has a similar idea. If your Players are starting a new campaign it might be fun for them to be recruited individually and end up on opposing sides, leaving them to work out their own *modus operandi*.

## ✿ Brotherly Love ✿

A second way might be to have the party arrive at the behest of some other mage. Wise Characters make friends with mages (see ‘Whom do you know!’ p21 *DERPG*) because you never know when you might need a favour. The law of equivalences means that favours work both ways and Rhialto the Marvellous might well want your characters to collect something from Marloban. It is pure chance that the Character party arrives at Marloban’s manse at the same time as Carloban.

On the other hand, perhaps, while travelling and having become lost, the party see a light in the forest. Cautiously approaching they see the Manse of Marloban (or they catch up with the party of Carloban as he travels to the meeting). It is only simple courtesy,<sup>7</sup> that leads Marloban to offer these lost travellers hospitality for the evening.

A further suggestion is that your characters, already persons of some magical ability, have decided to take the opportunity to loot the possessions of Marloban and Carloban, regarding them as potential victims. Obviously this suggestion combines happily with the other three.

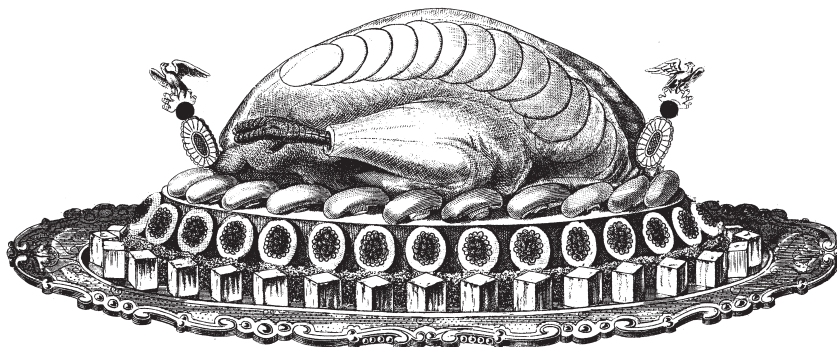
### The Dinner

No matter how they have become embroiled in the affairs of the two brothers, the characters will hopefully find themselves invited to eat with the two brothers at Marloban’s table. The brothers are dressed fantastically, Carloban in fabrics of sumptuous gold and Marloban in a tunic of shimmering silver. Tonight Vetch serves Tallow bird broiled in Ascolian wine on a bed of roasted peppers followed by dune berries in a rich Sea-dew sauce and stuffed quail with Gewgaw berries. Despite the richness of the surroundings the meal is rather poor – Marloban refuses to feed his brother well. During the meal both brothers ignore the other characters, each watching the other with a face of disgust and loathing.

Depending on whether the characters arrived at the manse with Carloban or not, they may be surprised when halfway through the meal a raven-haired beauty (Muriel) enters the dining room. Marloban and Carloban both cast an eye over the stranger. Marloban’s face freezes in an expression of horror, the color draining away like ink, while Carloban watches with a strange mixture of relish and fear. Marloban rushes over to fall at Muriel’s feet and quietly Carloban excuses himself from the table and exits the room.

For a full ten minutes Marloban rants incoherently at the feet of Muriel, until a gong sounds. Marloban leaps to his feet. “By the black beasts of Kraan, Robbed! In my very manse!!” Presently, Carloban returns to the room and the brothers begin shouting convoluted and obscure insults at one other. It emerges from their heated discourse that something has been stolen from Marloban’s study, and Marloban is accusing Carloban of stealing it. Eventually, as the argument escalates, Muriel raises her voice and orders silence, at which the brothers freeze.

Muriel says ‘Clearly your foolish brother does not have the book in question nor the wit to steal it. Marloban, do not tax your little mind on the deed. Send another to search for this book – I need my sons with me now, the ache of my weary feet taxes me mightily’.



7. ...or a need for experimental subjects.



## ❧ Brotherly Love ❧

Both brothers rush to her side. Marloban wails that some one must help him recover the tome and that in matters such as this Vetch is worse than useless. As if on a whim Muriel absently suggests that the characters could help, and both brothers stop what they are doing to fix them with a calculating stare. If the characters are not in the room at this point, Vetch is sent to fetch them.

Marloban states that they have eaten Tallow bird at his table and therefore payment is due. In return for the repast this small service is requested of them – they must recover his book that has not yet left the manse. From his pocket he pulls forth a ring, whispers the name of the book to the metal circuit and hands it to the character with the least number of sympathy points.<sup>8</sup> He tells them that the ring will locate the book and turns his attention back to Muriel's soft pale feet, refusing to answer any further questions.

### The Task

During his absence from the dinner table Carloban made his way to the study. If he sees any characters not in his employ sneaking after him he will threaten them with a most dire death unless they desist in following him. Once inside the room, he placed the book into a small magical bag that shrank the tome to the size of his palm. Carefully placing the bag in the jaws of Mallow who had been asleep on a nearby chair, he rather forcibly kicked the beast in the rump. Woken so violently from his pleasant dreams, the beast swallowed the book. Mallow was so distressed by events that he ran from the room, sounding the magical alarm and alerting Marloban to the theft.

The characters now have the task of finding the book. The ring Marloban gave to them gives a squeak of 'hot' in a high-pitched child's voice when the index finger is pointed in a direction corresponding to the books position, or 'cold' when pointed in any other direction. This would normally allow the characters to locate the book easily. Unfortunately, Mallow is on the move. Unhappy about his current plight he prowls the manse, hissing and spitting at anything he sees and occasionally attempting to cough something up. If asked Vetch would comment that this is far from normal behavior.

To further complicate matters, Marloban and Carloban will periodically sneak away from Muriel to check on progress. Depending of course on the allegiance of the characters (if they have any at all), Carloban will attempt to throw them off the scent, and Marloban will attempt to induce greater speed, using a combination of Persuasion and colorful threats of their own. In each case after a few moments the screeching voice of Muriel will be heard summoning the wayward brother back to the fold. Furthermore, as the mood of the brothers worsen in the presence of their 'mother', both will change clothes periodically, making mistaken identity an unfortunate certainty.

The astute GM will realize that this situation provides the possibility of much levity at the expense of the characters. Cornering Mallow and inducing him to release the book is no trivial task, especially with the constant interference of the brothers. No doubt the enterprising characters will note that with his current preoccupation with Muriel, Marloban is unlikely to notice the disappearance of a few small, choice items from his collection.



### *Resolution*

This scenario is very open-ended and could end in many ways, but in nearly every situation the characters will make a dubious ally and an extremely vengeful enemy. Assuming the characters secure the book, Marloban will wave them away and Vetch will show them to the door. Failing to find the book will induce Marloban's wrath, but Carloban will ensure that the characters are ejected with their lives intact – he may need their assistance in the future. Muriel will ignore the characters whatever the outcome, and in some small part they have her to thank for their lives – without her distraction upsetting either of the brothers would normally result in a painful and colorful death. Depending on their supposed allegiance, each of the characters could find themselves with a resourceful enemy who is in turn their comrade's ally.

<sup>8</sup> There is no real reason for this, other than by checking these details you will, of course, cause the players to worry. Worry is good, cherish it, water this fragile plant with your beneficent smile, and allow it to bloom into rampant paranoia.

### *Spells and magical artifacts*

The following spells may be found among the tomes in Marloban's study.

#### *Charm of the Attentive Maid*

**Range:** Manse

**Duration:** Feat

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

Using this charm, the magician can dismiss everyday chores from her mind without the need to deal with recalcitrant servants. Upon uttering the charm an ethereal maid of astonishing ability is unleashed about the manse, tidying, and cleaning as she goes. The magician must be quite precise in the description of the required duties; inaccuracies may result in a disastrously tidied workroom that can take many hours to correct. Mixing the phrases of the spell can be disastrous, resulting in a destructive whirlwind or even worse admonishments on personal care from the invisible maidservant.

**Style Affinity:** Insightful



#### *Landime's Separator*

**Range:** Touch

**Duration:** Special

**Difficulty:** Complex

Landime was a cunning magician of particular cruelty, and accordingly the Separator is one of his most sort-after spells. Uttering the pervulsions of the charm, the magician extends the right index finger and traces a line across any part of the victim's body. Once the incantation is complete the victim separates into two components about the traced line. Both parts of the victim remain alive, conscious and capable of action, and are sustained by an effect akin to a charm of nourishment. For instance, if the magician indicated the neck whilst uttering the charm the head would separate from the body leaving a talking and a walking (though obviously blind) body. The charm lasts until the two separated halves are touched together, at which point they fuse into a single part. Landime used the charm to separate limbs from his opponents to hide as a form of kidnapping. A side effect of the spell is that once the two components are fused together a feeling of separation lingers, manifesting itself in the view that the two parts might separate at the most inopportune moment.

**Style Affinity:** Forceful

#### *The Master's Mouth*

**Range:** Touch

**Duration:** 1 day

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

This spell, reputed to be a construction of Phandaal himself, allows the magician to communicate his wishes simply and easily through a third party, typically an animal or other less useful servant. The magician simply utters the pervulsions whilst holding the target of the spell in his hands, finishing by stating the command or message he wishes to communicate and the name of the intended recipient. The target of the spell then has one day to locate the recipient, whereupon a mouth will materialize on a random part of the target's body. This is not a painful process but does itch intensely. The mouth states the command or message and then seals and vanishes. It has been known for those who mix up the phrases of this spell to be cursed with an aberrant and belligerent mouth for some days.

**Style Affinity:** Insightful



#### *Fendwall's Transformation*

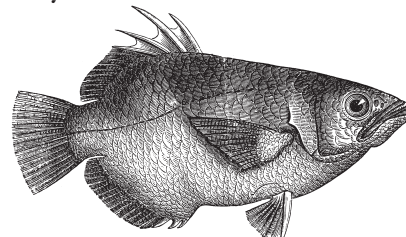
**Range:** Touch

**Duration:** Feat

**Difficulty:** Straightforward

This rare spell allows the caster to transform the victim into the shape of any other creature. To do so the magician must touch the victim and an example of the intended form such as a small animal whilst reciting the pervulsions. The victim will then be forced to adopt the physical shape of the creature while retaining all intelligence and thoughts. The spell is semi-permanent but can be reversed by uttering the victim's full name in the presence of the transformed creature. Unfortunately, magicians have poor memories and often forget to enquire as to the victim's full name...

**Style Affinity:** Devious



Magical items:

### *Icicle of Deadly Intent*

8pts, Charged

The item appears to be an ordinary but beautiful carved ivory handle, such as the hilt for a sword or dagger, which is totally indestructible by mundane means. The carving around the grip depicts a snowy winters scene. The magical properties of the item are activated if it is submerged in water, where upon a 3ft long razor sharp icicle will grow from the end of the hilt such as to form a sword with a beautiful translucent blade. The icicle can then be used as such, adding a one-time boon of two to the Attack pool of the wielder due to the unnatural sharpness of the edge. Being composed of ice the blade is liable to melt and after a few hours at ambient temperature the blade will have shrunk such that may be wielded as a dagger. After a few more hours the blade will have melted completely to leave just the hilt. The growth of the blade can be controlled to some extent by retracting the hilt from the water source before it has fully grown, but the blade must completely melt away before a new one can be grown. The item has 12 charges, each charge allowing the growth of one blade.



### *Vivaram's Gourmand Handbook*

5pts, permanent

This much sort after book is a creation of Vivaram, Magician and arch-epicurean of the 20th Aeon. Intoxicated by the viands of foreign lands but disinclined to travel, Vivaram had the handbook created for his chef to use with the imported good that filled his manse. Holding the cover in contact with any foodstuff initiates the magical properties of the handbook.

After doing so, opening the covers will reveal the pages to be filled with a tasteful selection of recipes designed to make the most of the qualities of the intended meal, giving the reader a boon of one for preparing a meal even if the ingredients have hitherto not been encountered. As a side effect, the tome will also reveal the most efficacious method for preparing poisons from unpalatable matter.



### *The Pyrogenic Flask*

4pts, 12 charges

This small glass flask glows with a deep rich light and is firmly stoppered with a heat-proof cap. Opening the flask ejects a spurt of liquid flame that will coat and burn anything it touches. With the cap fully removed the jet flies up to a foot from the neck, but it can be induced to shoot further by partially blocking the opening, and the flask can be used as a weapon, causing 20% burns on a succesful hit (DERPG p.56) Unless doused in water the flames will burn for several hours. Each release of the cap costs a single charge, yet if the cap is not replaced all the charges will be released at once spewing out about ten cubic meters of fire per charge remaining.



### *The Amulet of Amorous Attainment*

5pts, 12 charges

When activated by the keyword, an ethereal spirit is summoned which can only be seen by the wearer. The spirit takes the form of a beautiful member of the opposite sex and adopts an attitude of demure charm or boisterous sexuality depending on the sexual preference of the caster.

Attempting to induce the spirit to join the wearer for a session of couching allows the wearer to refresh their seduction pool in as little as one hour. The drawback of the amulet is that it mirrors the opposite sex too well - repeated use in a short period of time (more than three times in one week) will reveal the spirit to be stubborn, demanding and ungracious, traits that will induce a levy of 2 to the wearers Persuasion pool due to the loss of self confidence. This levy disappears after a further week if the amulet is not worn.



### *Seed of the Mighty Vine*

10pts, permanent

Created by a master thief of a bygone age, this seed resembles a large bean that can fit into the palm of the owners' hand. Planting the bean during the day will cause a miraculous vine to sprout from the ground during the night at a tremendous speed. The vine can grow up to 500ft high, providing there is a surface to support it such as a cliff or wall, and is sturdy enough to be easily climbed by a single man at a time, and the climber need not make any climbing rolls. The vine will last for the remainder of the night and then die and shrink, leaving only a mundane dead weed by morning. As the vine dies a single seed will be produced which can be replanted to give the same effect



### *Taglines*

*It seems their dress sense is inherited from their fathers' side.*

*Such an ungenerous attitude merely proves we must provide for our own reward.*

*Did he steal it, or merely visit the privy. Indeed did he visit the privy after he stole it? A hiding place indeed.*

*There is nothing to be gained from gentleness.*

*We were instructed to search diligently. Whether this means he wishes his vat creatures disemboweled  
I offer no firm opinion.*



FOR SALE: Twelve fine dolsans, of the "Short Tentacle" and "Flutter Fin" varieties, 12 terces apiece. Please contact Altarrin Vax. For sale singly or as a group; fine as pets or when boiled in a stew. Guides to training, or books of recipes, are available for a nominal additional fee.





# ❖ *Arcana* ❖

To succeed in society in the last years of earth it is necessary to appreciate the better things of life.

GRASHPOTEL looks deep into the bottom of his wineglass and shares his erudition.

## *Clan Rivalry in the Forest of Ascolais:*

Observations and a Brief History

### **Introduction**

In order to gain a full understanding of this subject, we first need to understand the demographic and political structure of the late Kang Kingdom. With their capital at Azenomei, the Kang Mage-Kings ruled over the entire middle and lower Scaum, with their boundaries extending to the peaks of the Fer Aquila in the Northwest. Heavily forested since the time of Phandaal in the Eighteenth Aeon, that area bordered by the Fer Aquila to the north, Modavna Moor to the east and south and the coastal hills to the west and south was considered the least refined province of the Kingdom.

To this remote area were sent the family Madnodlin, ostensibly to take up the honor post of guarding the northern marches, but in practice banished. There they remained, liege lords of a barony owing allegiance directly to the Mage-King in Azenomei, as the Kang Kingdom slid into decadence and finally collapsed. By the time Plemunobeith drowned in his personal jelly bath the Madnodlin had become independent in all but name, and with his death that last link vanished. Due to ferocious internal rivalries, the other noble Kang families were destroyed or became dissipated.

Thus, during the period of the Kaiin Ascendancy we see the Madnodlin, along with other, lesser families of the region, persisting as Kang, complete with the complex honour code developed in the latter days of the Kingdom. Thus, no other noble families having survived with their lineage intact the Madnodlin came to consider themselves the pre-eminent family of the Scaum Basin. It is said that when the news that Kaiin had proclaimed a King reached the castle Madnodlin the head of the family, one Greindhil, laughed so hard he died of apoplexy. His final words are said to have been “As well proclaim a farlock Emperor of all Almerly!”

While the Madnodlin were the only baronial family to survive the feuding, some of those lesser families remaining in the area owed fealty not to the Madnodlin, but to other, extinct families. This fact lies at the root of the clan system prevalent in the area to this day, and is also the primary root of current feuds. Thus carefully attention is required at this point.

Firstly: The title of the Madnodlin is “Barons Direct Incumbent of the Fer Aquila and of the Northern Marches”. With this title came the allegiance of the various Knights, Grand and Plain, of the region, and in turn, their supporters. This system of fealty remains largely intact to this day, acknowledgement of one’s liege duties being a key part of the Kang honor code.

Secondly: Prior to the banishment of the Madnodlin to the Forest of Ascolais, the Barony had been held for many centuries by the Gaulph family, who were then raised to the rank of Counts and given dominion over Kauchique, which had fallen under Kang sway following a series of marriages and assassinations. The Gaulph were destroyed in a rebellion some four hundred years later. However, a cadet branch of the Gaulph, the Gaulphkin, remained in the Forest of Ascolais, living along the northwestern margins of Modavna Moor. Therefore the Gaulphkin, while the head of the family claims only the title of Knight Grand, do not owe allegiance to the Madnodlin. Nor do those Knights Plain who look to the Gaulphkin as their liege lords.

## ❧ Grashpotel's *Arcana*: Clan Rivalry in the Forest of Ascolais ❧

Thirdly: To the west of the area lay a trio of Baronies centered on what are now Lavrraki Real, Octorus and Kaiin. All three collapsed with the Kang Kingdom, taking most of their supporters with them, but a handful of Knights remain, and these in turn are left without allegiance.

Thus I may present in Table 1 the allegiance structure among the fifteen families of the Forest of Ascolais, showing also the extinct senior lines (but not the junior, there being too many to concern ourselves with).

*Table 1. The Allegiance Structure among the Fifteen Clans of the Forest of Ascolais*

COUNTY	Barony	Knights Grand	Knights Plain
NONE	Madnodlin		
		Vitzscenth	
			Centhji Centkin
		Vitzkrai	
		(Vitzpoil)	Kraikin
			Polkin
(TAUN)	(Gaulph)	Gaulphkin	
			Ersum Largrain Aujhi
(SANREALE)	(Kaiin)	(Dernath)	
	(Octor)		Nathjhi
	(Real)	Tadthernod	
		(Muindac)	
			Pormaund Khaiveasman



With this we gain a simple understanding of the situation in the area. Inevitably, despite (or in many cases due to) the rigidity of the Kang honor code, certain important changes have taken place. Loyalties and the emphasis of loyalties have changed due to marriage, boundary disputes, and quarrels of a dozen sorts.

For example, the Aujhi, who recognize the Gaulphkin as their liege lords, at least nominally, occupy relatively rich lands to the north and west of Taun Tassel. Given this, and a somewhat casual attitude to their bloodline in the matter of marriage, they have prospered and expanded. Thus, when the Gaulphkin demanded an increase of annual fealty from one erb pelt to twelve bolts of Taun Tassel silk and a five-tier hat, the Aujhi declared this an intolerable insult.<sup>1</sup>

The resulting feud continues to this day, yet before any attack on the Gaulphkin, each Aujhi will make a polite genuflection.

Only one factor can be guaranteed, once a dispute has begun, it will be resolved only by the extinction of one or other family. To submit or confess wrong is the final degradation and condemns the soul to eternal torment.

1. An “intolerable insult” occurs when any individual or family makes a gesture, great or small, either deliberately intended as or interpreted as a studied insult. The only acceptable response is immediate feud, or in certain cases a challenge to duel.\*

\* Formal dueling was surprisingly rare in Kang society and this remains the case with the Forest Clans. Sudden and preferably unexpected attack is preferred, and dueling is reserved for the private feuds of family heads and to deal with disputes within clans. In this last instance it is rarely fatal, honor being satisfied at first blood rather than death.

## ❧ Grashpotel's *Arcana*: Clan Rivalry in the Forest of Ascolais ❧

In theory, a feud is avenged by a death, but as each death demands another in revenge this does not work in practice. Where it not for the great areas involved, the exigencies of day-to-day survival and the harshness of the local winters, we may safely assume that all but one of these clans would be long extinct. Most clans are indeed extinct, the number having reduced from in excess of two hundred to fifteen. It should also be noted that the majority of victims of these struggles are retainers rather than clan members.

Thus and so, we have a large forested region with a relatively sparse human population largely in a state of permanent conflict. Travelers need not fear these clans as such, at least not in terms of direct assault. Any stranger must, by definition, not be Kang, and is therefore an inferior. It is beneath a Kang warrior to molest an inferior save in cases of direct challenge. This applies equally to peasants and kings, potboys and arch mages. Indeed, the honor code also demands the provision of hospitality and shelter to the weak and thus any person coming to an occupied keep may be assured of a warm welcome.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, there are exceptions. Should you be with a party of any given clan, and go armed, it will be assumed that you have allied yourself to them in some way. Furthermore, once you have accepted the hospitality of a clan, you are assumed to be an ally and they will take it for granted that you wish to join them in combat. Only the very elderly, seriously infirm and improbably corpulent are exempted, and all such tend to be looked on with pity. Women and men are treated equally in these matters, although allowance is made for the later stages of pregnancy.

These difficulties are especially severe if you carry a clan's color, which becomes doubly a problem if you are not acquainted with the local heraldry. Whether you have or have not made an allegiance is irrelevant. Questions are seldom asked in advance, and after being set upon by twenty heavily armed and bloodthirsty Pormaund is not the time to explain that you selected a black and gold shirt as you felt it set off your hair and eyes. Some of these distinctions may seem slight, even trivial, to the casual observer, but may mean the difference between life and death. Thus Table 2:

*Table 2. The Heraldic Colors of the Fifteen Clans*

Clan	Colors
Madnodlin	Black, Gold
Vitzscenth	Deep Red, Silver, Gold
Centhji	Deep Red, Silver, Gold, Pale Green
Centkin	Deep Red, Silver, Gold, Verdant Green
Vitzkrai	Deep Red, Silver, Black
Kraikin	Deep Red, Silver, Black, Dull Mauve
Polkin	Deep Red, Silver, Rich Green, Naur Yellow
Gaulphkin	Rich Green, Silver, Bronze, White
Ersum	Rich Green, Silver, Bronze, Scaum Blue
Largrain	Rich Green, Silver, Bronze, Scarlet
Aujhi	Rich Green, Silver, Bronze, Agrillion
Nathjhi	Purple, Gold, Silver, Scaum Blue
Tadthernod	Purple, Gold, Black
Pormaund	Purple, Gold, Bronze, Jance Wing
Khaiveasman	Purple, Gold, Bronze, Mid Blue

2. Unoccupied keeps, generally those of extinct families, are shunned, at least by the clans. Other, less benign occupants tend to move in, and a traveler arriving at such a place is likely to be greeted by deodands, erbs, even gids, whose welcome is not to be recommended.

The wise traveler moves through the forest in nondescript garments of dull brown or grey, which have no recognition within the heraldic system and also provide good camouflage against the erbs, gids, leucomorphs and so forth that infest the place. There is also an elaborate system of devices and charges to indicate status within a particular family, a subject on which I have written a monograph available from the Scholasticarium clerks as a modest price or from any reputable dealer in librams between Old Romarth and Val Ombrio.

### An Overview of Current Feuds

While no feud ever dies out, they are frequently superseded. New feuds may arise, or the subject of a feud evolve, being added to until the feud becomes general, as is the case with the original territorial feud between the Madnodlin and the Gaulphkin. In other cases poor record keeping may mean the reasons for a feud are forgotten, or it may be that the situation becomes so complex that the older or more trivial feuds become overlooked.

It is therefore possible to make an approximate classification of the current state of feud. Currently, by my reckoning, one-hundred and eighty-three feuds may be considered active, (although should you visit the Madnodlin keep any member of the family or retainer will be proud to show you the great book in which eight-thousand seven-hundred and ninety-one distinct feuds are listed, (of these, five-thousand two-hundred and thirty-eight feuds are considered resolved in that the clan in question is now extinct)).

I have chosen to divide these feuds in a manner which certain persons at the Scholasticarium have remarked on as arbitrary. Arbitrary it is indeed, I make no denial and little dispute, save to point out that throughout the history of civilization it has ever been the lot of the scholar to attempt to place order upon systems inherently dynamic and chaotic. My categories are therefore:

**ANCIENT FEUDS**, those inherent in the Kang system, whereby any families not within the same line of fealty are automatically at odds with one another if there exists a shared boundary, conflict of marriage, inheritance, pride and so forth. The number of these may be calculated as the additional factor of the number of surviving clans less the number of extant allegiances. This number is one hundred and four. Many of these are not active for purely practical reasons. For instance, while the Aujhi are in theory bitter enemies to the Pormaund, the intervening distance between their territories and the presence of other clans between the two make hostilities impractical. Nevertheless, should an Aujhi and a Pormaund meet in say Kaiin or even so far flung a place as Mel or Cansapara, blood is likely to flow.

I estimate the number of active ancient feuds to be seventy-two. A good example, indeed the primal example, is that between the Madnodlin and the Gaulphkin. This dates from the banishment of the Madnodlin has three principal causes. First, as the Gaulph were direct kin as well as liege lords to the Gaulphkin, the Gaulphkin did not transfer their allegiance and therefore immediately took up the kin feud triggered by the replacement of their kin with a rival baronial family, imperial decree notwithstanding. Second, those clans of Knights Grand and Plain who transferred their allegiance to the Madnodlin already had a great many long-standing feuds with their neighbors. In order to satisfy the honor code as it relates to reciprocal fealty, the Madnodlin where obliged to take up these feuds. Third, the eldest daughter of the Madnodlin was already engaged for marriage to the third son of the Count of Xzan, meaning





## ❧ Grashpotel's *Arcana*: Clan Rivalry in the Forest of Ascolais ❧

she was unable to accept the traditional proposal of the second son of the Gaulph. An intolerable insult was therefore declared. Naturally this feud extends to allies on both sides.

RECENT FEUDS, those that have arisen since the arrival of the clan Madnodlin. These form the great majority of feuds, but are also those most likely passed over or forgotten as few clans trouble to record the details in writing. One hundred and three such feuds are currently active, although it is often difficult to assess which particular feud a given incident of combat relates to, even for the clans involved. A good example of this is the conflict between the Pormaund and the Khaiveasman. Until recently, these families had both been in antagonism with the Madnodlin to such an extent that they had declared a hiatus in their ancient feud and united their efforts to overcome their stronger neighbor. This condition persisted for three weeks, until one Huntjundic, a private ally of the Madnodlin, slew a Pormaund in combat and then escaped retribution while passing close by the Khaiveasman Keep.<sup>3</sup> The Pormaund immediately declared a breach of alliance and a new feud sprang up in addition to the ancient one.

PRIVATE FEUDS account for the remaining eight feuds, and are much the rarest type. These may take place only between the heads of the fifteen families, and are the result of very specific breaches in honor code. For example, during a combat between the Vitzscenth and the Nathjhi involving both Tulac Vitzscenth and Hurbold Nathjhi, Tulac engaged a Nathjhi retainer in combat before giving voice to the appropriate *hulbar*, a bellow of denunciation and challenge. Incensed at this slight, Hurbold immediately declared an intolerable insult, but as both men are family heads this related only to Tulac. So far three combats have been arranged and fought, in each case resulting in stalemate, as it does not befit a Kang warrior to slay another who has collapsed through exhaustion, and with Hurbold now in his eighty-fourth year this is the invariable outcome.

In addition to the above must be considered EXTERNAL FEUDS. None are currently active, but in the past some have been bloody and prolonged, leading to the extinction of several clans. Take, for example, the dispute between on the one hand the clans Madnodlin, Broondath and Fraimiir and on the other the Brotherhood of the Weeping Shadow. A number of rumors exist as to the origins of this feud, but given the haughty intransigence of the Brotherhood and the bloodthirsty pride of the Kang is it hardly surprising that the two should have come to blows. What is known is that it lasted some thirty years and led to the destruction of both Broondath and Fraimiir clans, while the Brotherhood was reduced to a pitiful wraith of its former self. Indeed, the Madnodlin abandoned the feud on the assumption that they had extinguished the Brotherhood.

### A Reminiscence

The situation is perhaps best illustrated by an account of my travels in the region the year previous to the classic Perfect Mist Vintage of Golden Porphiron. I had set out from Kaiin with a number of companions, intent on investigating rumors of the exposure of an unknown manse of Grand Motholam by a landslip.

*Prodbellom*, my apprentice at the time, was an extraordinarily fat young man with a wooden leg and a nervous tic in his left eye. The previous year he had been the most brilliant of my students at the Scholasticarium, and had indeed shown a greater understanding of some of my more abstract concepts than the majority of my colleagues.

*Jaskine*, a young lady who had attached herself to Prodbellom in the not unreasonable hope that he would one day become a mage. Vivacious, pleasant company if somewhat calculating, she was also a student and if I recall correctly had shown promise in the study of late 19th Aeon architecture in the Land of the Falling Wall.

*Doil*, *Juglig* and *Hance*, if I recall their names correctly. I am fairly sure there were three of them, but it may have been four. In any event they were our teamsters, a group of unremarkable young men each given charge over a mermelant.

3. Given that so much of their combat takes place in thick forest, the clans have taken to using sound and smoke to communicate.

The individual systems of whistles, shrieks and sounds produced by various horns and drums are too complex to list, but it is worth noting the custom of *Hulbar*, or *Aid Call*. If the name of a clan is called out all members of that clan within hearing will immediately rush to give aid. Strangers may also use this, and the relevant clan members are honor bound to assist, although a night of feasting will be expected in return.

## ❧ Grashpotel's *Arcana*: Clan Rivalry in the Forest of Ascolais ❧

Traveling up the Derna, we reached Sanra Water without remarkable incident, losing only one of the teamsters to deodands. But it was still early in the year, and we were caught by a wet snap, making travel highly uncomfortable. At length we came in sight of a keep, that of the Kraikin, and urged by both Prodbellom and Jaskine I agreed to seek shelter.

The Kraikin proved the very essence of hospitality, immediately slaying a young farlock and broaching a barrel of wine from their vineyards, which produce a red not intolerably dissimilar to Viliyat. The resulting feast was most worthwhile, and toasts were drunk and songs sung well into the small hours of the night. Only when a fey and somewhat maudlin youth of the Kraikin leapt up on the table to recite a poem did matters begin to go wrong.

It was a long piece, seventy stanzas, and dealt with the story of Kidhil Kraikin, a girl betrayed into false love by a man of the Tadthernod clan. This poem was at the time just under three hundred years old, yet by the time the last, haunting note of the youth's prang harp had died away there were murmurings of discontent among the throng. Before I had finished another glass these had risen to cries for revenge on the Tadthernod for the seduction and abandonment of Kidhil Kraikin (who, to my certain knowledge, died a great-grandmother and was in the habit of drinking her evening tippie from a gilded Tadthernod skull).

By dawn the keep was in full cry with an expedition raised and every able-bodied person armed and mounted for the fray. These included both teamsters and also Jaskine, who had no choice but to accept. As a graybeard<sup>4</sup> I was excused, also Prodbellom, and we spent the next three days being comforted by the remaining Kraikin for our sorrow at not being able to join the expedition.

Neither the teamsters nor Jaskine returned, but the poet did sing a really quite moving dirge of twenty stanzas in their honor. Prodbellom, sadly, was consumed by erbs on the journey home.



### *Useful Knowledge*

- ❧ Never attempt to pay a clan member in coin. This is an intolerable insult.
- ❧ Never refuse a clan member's hospitality. This is an intolerable insult.
- ❧ Never offer to defend the honor of a female clan member. This is an intolerable insult. She is undoubtedly more than capable of defending her own honor.
- ❧ Do not spit, cough, belch, break wind, in the presence of a clan member, until you have been formally introduced. This is an intolerable insult.
- ❧ Do not allow your shadow to fall on a clan member. This is an intolerable insult.

*Further intolerable insults may be added at the GM's discretion.*



#### *Note to GMs*

*Grashpotel will provide copies of his dissertations free of charge to any who present themselves at the Scholasticarium in a suitably unctuous manner. The information contained therein may bestow considerable advantages to PCs, for example, the wisdom of not wandering the Forest of Ascolais while wearing bright colors.*



4. As a stranger, it is always possible to attempt to persuade a clan member that you are too humble, corpulent or elderly to be attacked.

## ❧ Grashpotel's *Arcana*: Clan Rivalry in the Forest of Ascolais ❧

On crying hulbar the PC should throw a d6, the consequences depending on location:

### *In the Forest of Ascolais*

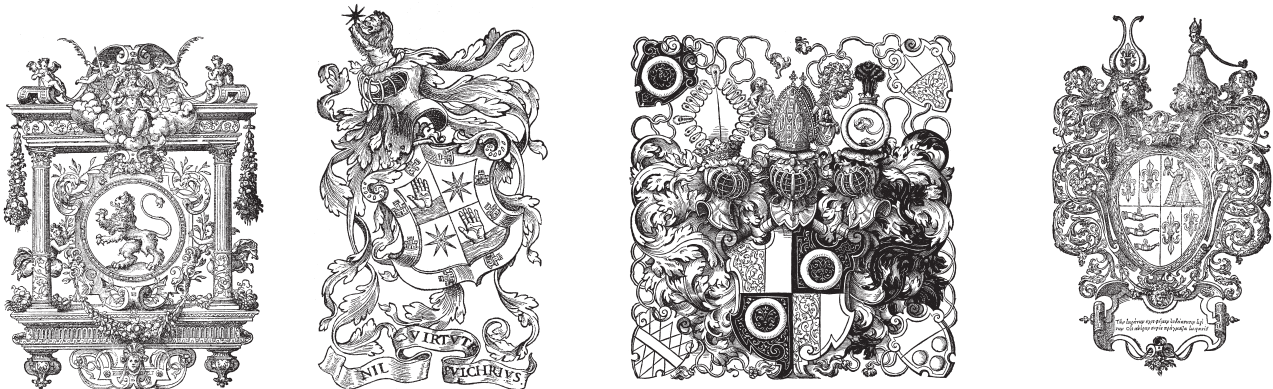
- 6 (Illustrious Success) twenty heavily armed warriors rush to your aid.
- 5 (Prosaic Success) one warrior comes to your aid.
- 4 (Hair's-Breadth Success) nobody hears you, but your call frightens a tree weasel, which proceeds to pelt your opponent with rotten fruit.
- 3 (Exasperating Failure) nobody hears you, but your call frightens a tree weasel, which proceeds to pelt you with rotten fruit.
- 2 (Quotidian Failure) your call attracts a deodand.
- 1 (Dismal Failure) you are attacked by twenty warriors of a rival clan

### *In Kaiin, Lavrraki Real, Octorus and anywhere along the Scaum as far as Azenomei*

- 6 (Illustrious Success) five clan members are nearby and come to your aid.
- 5 (Prosaic Success) your opponent assumes that you yourself are a member of the clan in question and departs with profuse apologies.
- 4 (Hair's-Breadth Success) a clan member is nearby, but he is elderly and armed only with a rolled sirloin of farlock.
- 3 (Exasperating Failure) the intent of your call is mistaken and three determined viragos attempt to sell you fish.
- 2 (Quotidian Failure) a member of a rival clan hears you and immediately takes up your opponent's cause.
- 1 (Dismal Failure) four bitter enemies of the clan you have just summoned are standing behind you looking for an opportunity to test their new battlescythes.

### *Elsewhere*

- 6 (Illustrious Success) by strange chance a clan member is within hearing and comes to your aid.
- 5 (Prosaic Success) alarmed by your ferocious battle call; your opponent reverts to negotiation.
- 4 (Hair's-Breadth Success) your opponent is sufficiently puzzled by your bizarre behavior to allow you to either run away or strike the first blow.
- 3 (Exasperating Failure) nothing happens whatever; you merely look foolish.
- 2 (Quotidian Failure) you are immediately taken up by the local constables for disturbing behavior and fined fifty terces.
- 1 (Dismal Failure) your cry proves to be a perfect imitation of the mating call of the local pack beasts, an improbably large number of which are in the vicinity.



*Crests of three extinct clans of the Forest of Ascolais. From left, Dernath, Vitzpoil, Octor, and Muindac.*

# ❧ How Prettily It Shines ❧

Lynne Hardy

A scenario for those of a discerning nature as well as a taste for baubles.

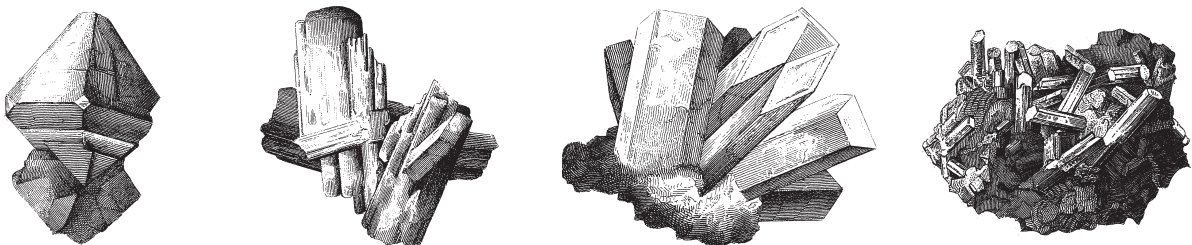
*There is always something new to explore in the Dying Earth, whether it be a region, a manse or an idea. This scenario should allow characters to aid or abet the course of magical research, rescue a single-minded mage (should they feel like it) and discover a hitherto unknown branch of the finer arts of magic. Or then again, they may choose to ignore the entire situation; such is the fickle nature of adventurers. Ideally, this scenario is for Turjan level characters, although confident Cugel or lowly Rhialto levels may deign to give it notice.*

## **1. Taking into Account Such Recent History as is Strictly Necessary**

It is, of course, widely known that only IOUN stones can be used to store magic, amongst other things. The mage Biref claimed that he had always believed otherwise and felt utterly vindicated when he discovered the writings of a much earlier researcher, one Dioptase, detailing how to use common gemstones to store certain spells. Not that it was quite that simple, mind you. Only certain gemstones could be used and then only to store certain kinds of spells. As if that wasn't enough, the writings were incomplete on exactly how you enchanted the gems, but there was just enough information to give him several fundamental clues. Highly delighted, Biref removed himself to his secluded manse with his "miraculous document", much to the disgust of his brethren.

Biref was one of several lowly mages<sup>1</sup> in the region of the River Xzan who had banded together for mutual protection and, most importantly, mutual benefit from their researches through the aegis of the Associative Investigative Council of Historical Alchemies. Biref had helped to found this group, which on occasion resembled little more than a dining society despite its claims to be modeled on the Guild of Savants Table Talk Association.<sup>2</sup> Whilst Biref's actions didn't exactly break the spirit of the mages' agreement, it did cause his eventual ostracism from the council. The fact that he did not seem to notice this ostracism at the time merely compounded his offense.

Biref was busy with his new field of research. Slowly and with great care he pieced together the exact mechanisms by which, using a small natural crystal of the gem of interest, a skilled practitioner could grow a larger "tuned" gem which could be further manipulated in order to hold spells. He also rediscovered precisely which gems were the best for any given spell, there being a strict hierarchy to each stone's use. Woe betides anyone who should attempt to force an offensive spell into the warp of a gem oriented towards more peaceable actions. His research was not all plain sailing. He kept himself utterly isolated, refusing entry to even his oldest associates. As he had once been a friendly and convivial soul, this change of manner perplexed his friends immensely. There were problems as well with the crystals themselves – despite all his efforts he could never



1. The term 'lowly mage' is not one that is bandied about in public unless the person speaking is of impressive magical force, protected by powerful artifacts and strong friends, or irredeemably stupid.
2. This latter, despite eating extravagantly at each meeting, will usually discuss matters of great import whilst sipping their Golden Porphiron.



## ❧ How Prettily It Shines ❧

reproduce the claims in the manuscript that the stones could be reused. After the painstaking process of growing the stones up from tiny shards, carving them with great care into faceted gems worthy of the jewelers' trade and inscribing them with the necessary symbology, every time he used a gem to cast a spell it shattered, usually into tiny pieces that could not be reused, even for further crystal growth. Quite often, to his great disgust, all he was left with was a fine powder.

Being the sort who could bear no waste from his endeavors, Biref took up glassblowing. It helped to while away the hours whilst waiting for his gems to grow and gave him somewhere to put the prodigious quantities of powdered gemstone he was rapidly accumulating. Those of his friends who managed to get close enough to peer through the windows of his manse shook their heads in disbelief at the ever-increasing number of distorted glass ornaments filled with glistening dust.

After many years of intense study, several explosions and innumerable glass cuts, Biref felt ready to announce his findings to the world at large. He emerged from his seclusion and approached the Scholasticarium in Kaiin, seeking permission to present a paper on the greatest discovery of the age. Great posters were erected, calling all who were interested to hear the marvel of the aeon; IOUN stones were no longer the sole method of portable spell storage. The date was set and anticipation mounted, but a mere week before he was due to make his grand presentation, he suddenly announced he needed to mount an expedition to the hinterlands of Cutz and subsequently disappeared.

Convinced that Biref was a mere fraud, the Scholasticarium canceled the appearance and nothing further was said publicly. The posters were torn down and the flyers destroyed. It caused quite a scandal at the time that such an august body could have been fooled by a total charlatan. All the local mages of lesser standing had to watch their step for quite a while lest the wrath of their more capable brethren be visited upon them. Biref's former companions were particularly castigated for not restraining their compatriot's flights of fancy and suffered from the stigma of the incident for a considerable time. Needless to say, few showed any sorrow when Biref seemed to have vanished without trace.

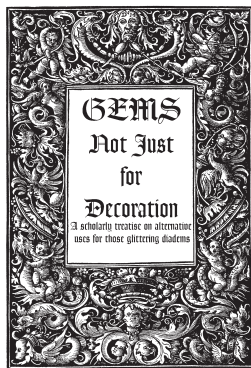
All this was many years ago and no further thought had been given to Biref and "the fraud of the age" until very recently.

### *2. An Interested Young Female Expresses Her Desire to Find A Missing Mage*

Almery is renowned for its population of mages, being second only to Ascolais in that respect. One feels that one can barely turn around for the manses that litter the landscape. A young woman, going by the name of Chatoyant Garmin, has recently been creating quite a stir by questioning any she can find about a particular tome called *GEMS Not Just for Decoration: v* written by an ancient sage of the name Dioptase.

Amazingly, she claims that a strange visitor some time ago from her family's vaults recently been discovered during an audit his father's death. As her father is in poor to find this Collector, who they believe to interest in her grandfather's folio collection

Those familiar with the story of Biref describes as the Collector is none other than her inquiries are stirring up many bitter most closely associated with Biref. Although resides in Almery, there are many who them all.



calling himself "The Collector" stole it in Old Romarth. The theft has only of the vaults her father requested after health himself, she has come to Almery be the thief by dint of his extraordinary at the time of his visit.

will be highly surprised, as the man she the missing mage himself. Needless to say, memories, particularly amongst those only one of his former compatriots still remember the taint his actions brought on

Although most will be reluctant to talk about it, should she find Hauyne, the remaining member of the Associative Investigative Council, he will tell her the rough location of Biref's manse. He isn't particularly difficult to find as he occupies a virtually permanent position on a bench outside the Iron Man Inn, the nearest to his tiny manse (after he relocated it from the Xzan to Llaio). All he can tell her about the manse (having

## ❧ How Prettily It Shines ❧

descended into a sorry state of addiction to the essence of Jacynth<sup>3</sup> is that it was built partially into a cliff face near a quiet stretch of the River Xzan somewhere along its upper valley as it passes into the foothills of the Maurenron Mountains.

Chatoyant is very keen to find the location of the mage's manse and is quite willing to recompense any brave souls who will venture along the Xzan in search of it. As should be expected though, nothing is what it seems.

### *3. Of the Falling Out of Thieves*

Despite her charm and impeccable manners, Chatoyant is not a member of the illustrious Garmin family, although she is from Old Romarth. Her father is not so much in poor health as suffering from a terminal lack of it, having been killed in an explosion several months ago. He, one Hypersthene, was a former business partner of Biref's.

Although he had a lesser talent for magic than his associate, Hypersthene had an uncanny knack for locating valuable items from the ruins owned by the Garmin family. Both he and Biref worked hard and had accumulated a modest fortune between them.<sup>4</sup> When the book was discovered both men recognized the significance of the work and Biref, always an ambitious man determined to make his mark upon the fields of magic, decided to take control of the situation.

Whilst studying the volume at his workshop on the outskirts of Old Romarth, having carefully made sure that Hypersthene had taken his wife and young daughter out for the day, Biref contrived an explosion of massive force which destroyed the entire building. He carefully constructed the debris to make it appear that he had been killed and the book destroyed whilst attempting a complex distillation required for gem growth. Taking the treatise, he escaped south to Almery and settled alongside the Xzan, to live in quiet obscurity for several years until any chance that Hypersthene should have come looking for him was vanishing small. Slowly, he introduced himself to the local mages Taaf, Sard and Hauyne, then together they formed the Associative Investigative Council.

Once he was confident that he had escaped from his former partner, he began to research the treatise in earnest, becoming more and more isolated from his fellows.

Unfortunately, his single-minded pride in his work was to lead to his eventual downfall. Not content with being the master of a long forgotten field of study, he dreamed of recognition from the celebrated members of the Scholasticarum and determined to approach them with his findings.

Needless to say they were very interested, if not slightly alarmed, at the news that mere gems could be used for the purpose to which IOUN stones, rare and valuable as they were, had been solely ascribed. After all, the wealth and status of many an arch-mage was superficially measured by the number of IOUN stones he had managed to procure.

With much fanfare, the posters were erected and flyers sent out to all areas where notable practitioners might reside. Such a place was Old Romarth and it wasn't long before Hypersthene discovered that, as he had suspected, Biref had indeed absconded with the manuscript. After certain preparations were made within his modest manse, he left his daughter in the care of a family friend and traveled south in disguise.

Whilst not as powerful as Biref, he had the element of surprise on his side, or so he believed. Having located Biref's manse<sup>5</sup> and finding it deserted, he broke in and carefully had the majority of the contents of the workroom removed to his own manse by a cunning combination of Panguine's Loyal Porter and the Agent of Far Dispatch. Amongst the items transported were the original treatise and annotations made by Biref, several delicate vats containing growing gems and all of the associated paraphernalia. Only one vat was left behind,

3. Jacynth addiction is rare and its effects little known. It seems that the victim has their perceptions enhanced and the world becomes an utterly wonderful place. Unfortunately, they begin to see more deeply into the motivation of others and eventually take to stirring the Jacynth into pure spirit as the spirit numbs the mind and allows them to merely experience the enhanced perception. Thus a Jacynth addict is virtually indistinguishable from an alcoholic.

4. Despite the extortionate fees charged by the Garmins.

5. The speed with which he accomplished this intrigues us, some accounts hint that he had assistance from an Arch mage who felt that the threat to the value of the IOUN stone was worthy of notice.

## ❧ How Prettily It Shines ❧

which contained the beginnings of a beautiful zamander sphere. Hypersthene had a particular use in mind for that gem which did not require its transport back to Romarth. Hypersthene waited in the workroom for Biref to return.

He didn't have long to wait and he was immensely gratified to see the shock on his former friend's face when he opened the workroom door to find his life's work gone. Stepping from the shadows, Hypersthene cast Interminable Interim and Untiring Nourishment on Biref followed, most wickedly, by Embracil's Aggrandiser on the zamander sphere. Due to the unreliable nature of the spell, which in this case was the entire point of its use, the gem grew to magnified proportions, consuming all that came within its arc of growth. Poor Biref, having been the virtual master of gems, now found himself encased within one of his own creations.

Hypersthene cunningly announced, whilst in the guise of Biref, that he must undertake a critical journey to Cutz in order to locate the final constituent of a vital matrix necessary for his presentation and promptly vanished back to Romarth, leaving all convinced that the Scholasticarium had been duped. Such was the air of despondency and bruised pride that none investigated Biref's manse, the entire area becoming shunned as if some virulent plague resided there.

Back in Romarth, Hypersthene began his research. Must to his annoyance it became clear that he hadn't completely surprised Biref, as a significant proportion of the necessary information for gem enchantment was missing. Not daring to return to the scene of his crime, he began his efforts to piece together the techniques required. Slowly, after many years and with constant interruptions from his growing daughter, he became confident enough to attempt a full growth and enchantment cycle. Unfortunately, his knowledge was sorely lacking and he was killed in the resultant explosion from his attempts to force the Excellent Prismatic Spray into the matrix of a sapphire, a wholly unsuitable receptacle for such a spell.

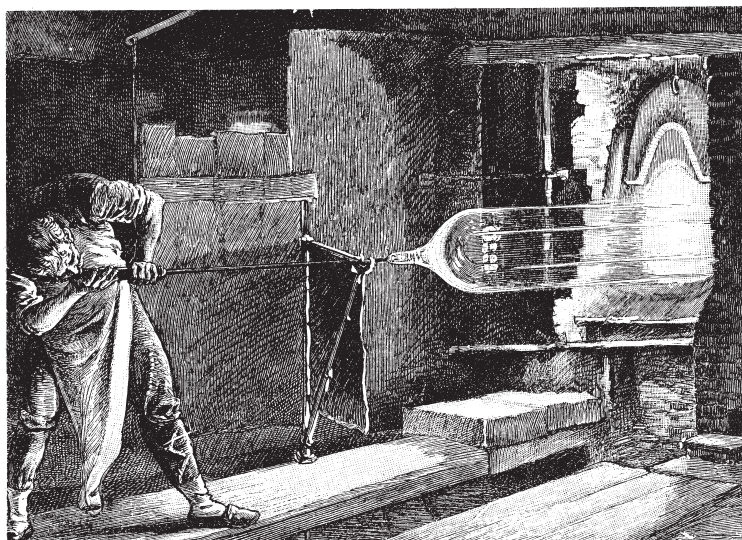
The young Chatoyant, although dismayed by her father's death, was aware that there was more to the situation than met the eye. Having retrieved the manuscript and various notes from Hypersthene's workrooms, he pieced together the entire sorry story. Being a talented and intelligent young woman, she determined to find Biref and either extract from him the remaining secrets of his work, or find the hidden notes.

After all, why should she not claim the glory that should have been her father's?

### *4. The Lost Manse of a Notorious Charlatan*

After a generation of neglect, Biref's manse is well and truly hidden beneath layers of vibrant undergrowth. The once fine furnishings have moldered away and the entire building is a playground for innumerable small beasties. Still, there is much to be learnt from a thorough investigation of the two-story building.

The lower story contains a once comfortable lounge at the front of the house and the kitchen (from which



a staircase runs up to the dining room), the workroom and the glassblowing kilns in a range along the back wall. The main staircase in the front hall leads up to the now dangerously decayed second story where bedrooms, a meager library and a dining area are to be found.

As Hauyne described, the manse is indeed built into a cliff face. This was not merely an aid to defense or seclusion, but the means by which Biref collected many of the tiny starter gem crystals he needed for his work. Hidden under the stairs at the back of the workroom is a secret door into a set of tunnels hewn from the rock by Biref. Here he plundered the mineral wealth of the Maurenrons and it is here that he secreted the missing notes on

## ❧ How Prettily It Shines ❧

gem inscription and identification. Of course, should any one be looking for them, they will not be easy to find. Not only that, several gaun have found their way into the tunnels after a landslide higher up in the hills exposed an entry way. The notes are hidden quite close to the house, in a cupboard cut into the rock. Upon cursory inspection it appears to contain nothing more than tapers, a lantern, some oil and several well-worn picks, but there is a hidden compartment containing a strong box in which are the notes and several rather nice, uncut gems of considerable size.

Of course, the other item of great note within the house is Biref's rather unique prison. Hidden in the darkness and partially overgrown, the zamander shines frostily when light hits its surface.

Although the gem is unfaceted, the figure of a man can be seen trapped within it. He cannot move, but sufficient space is available to him to speak when the gem is approached. Unfortunately, the density of the gem prevents him from being heard unless a peculiar glass instrument (to be found in the glassblowing workshop next door) is held to the gem's surface, whereupon it acts like a hearing trumpet. Turning it the other way up will allow Biref to hear whatever is said to him. Of course, the easiest way to determine what precisely is afoot is to free Biref. On the other hand, it will be possible to pump him for information without freeing him at all. After all, the notes are the only item of true interest and when combined with the treatise, they do make Biref a tad superfluous. Should anyone wish to free him, they will need to shatter the gem and Biref can instruct them on how to do that. It should be noted that Biref will not be totally helpless upon release - he still has one or two enchanted stones about his person and now his hands are free to use them (provided of course that the means used to free him weren't too detrimental to his overall health!).

Those of a more discerning nature might realize that the myriad of glass ornaments, which have somehow survived the forest's encroachments are valuable in their own right. They do contain powdered gemstones that have been impregnated with magic and several have unusual properties as a result of this.

### *5. Locations Also Potentially of Interest*

There is of course, the small matter of Hypersthene's manse in Old Romarth. It is always possible that someone may wish to investigate this if they discover Chatoyant's true identity. Should anyone journey here they will find a mostly intact building of modest, though comfortable, means. Unfortunately, the left hand side of the building is currently being shored up by a veritable forest of scaffolding, tarpaulin and rope. The signs of a blast are more than evident. The housekeeper, an irascible old man, will refuse entry to anyone he has not known since they were mere whipper-snappers and will inform them that the master is dead and the young mistress took off in high dudgeon several months ago. Breaking and entering would reveal a workshop containing many small vats containing growing gems, as well as interesting glass tubing, many odd receptacles and delicate instruments for cutting and inscribing gems. There are no notes here, as Chatoyant has wisely taken all of those with her on her journeys.

### *6. And How Might They Become Involved in These Shenanigans?*

There are many ways that your erstwhile adventurers might become involved in these events. Perhaps they knew the members of the Associative Investigative Council before their disgrace -they may even remember the events surrounding Biref's great "fraud". In this way, they may be responsible for passing information on to Chatoyant as she searches for Biref. It may just pique their interest to go hunting themselves; after all, his disappearance was somewhat of an unexplained mystery.

On the other hand, Chatoyant may well hire the characters to search for Biref's manse for her. It is also not beyond the realms of possibility that one of the other mages (Taaf or Sard) may have discovered what she is up to and are determined to beat her to finding the manse and its secrets, if for no other reason than to restore their lost reputations. The characters are a handy way of attempting this without drawing undue attention to them, should everything backfire. Hauyne, unfortunately, isn't in much of a state to do anything and isn't going to be hiring anyone, at least, not for finding Biref! Then there is the possibility that members of the Scholasticarium are also aware that someone has resurrected the specter of their shame and has sent the characters to discover precisely what is happening, with a view to ending Chatoyant's research if necessary.



## ❧ How Prettily It Shines ❧

If they are working for Chatoyant, will they discover the real reason she wants to find Biref? Certain inconsistencies in her story could lead to her discovery, especially if the characters are familiar with Old Romarth. Will she cut them in on any profit she might accrue from the plundering of Biref's manse, or will the characters turn against her and take it all for themselves? After all, Biref knows Chatoyant and he does have a strong determination to ensure that he alone gets the credit for the gem enchantment theorems. He will be more than willing to play the characters off against their employer to ensure his own freedom and success. This of course stands no matter who has employed the characters to explore the manse.

What are the potential outcomes? There are several: Chatoyant finds the notes and takes the credit, with or without the characters' help. If they have hindered her, they have made a new and potentially powerful enemy, but if they aided her, they will have a beneficial ally.

What if they free Biref? He will quickly attempt to regain his notes and present himself to the Scholasticarium.<sup>6</sup> If the characters help him, he may well be generous, but he has little time for petty squabbling should they have made a nuisance of themselves. He has bigger gems to grow, as it were.

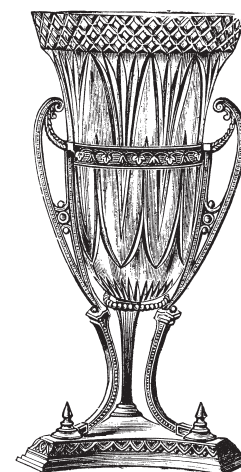
How about the Scholasticarium? That will depend upon what their views on the gem spell storage system are. If they fear it, then they may well make life difficult for anyone involved in reopening the entire affair. If, on the other hand, they want the matter out in the open for vigorous debate, anyone attempting to suppress the information is going to be in a lot of trouble.

As is ever the case, the characters are going to have to walk a very fine wire if they are to reap any benefit from this escapade, although the rewards are potentially very great indeed. After all, they may very well end up as the sole owners of some very valuable research, which could make them very famous indeed (not to mention wealthy). My own group decided to help Biref state his case to the Scholasticarium after freeing him and two of them are currently considering jumping ship to become his apprentices as he is far more competent than their current master!



### *Appendix 1: Items of Note*

1. The original treatise. Currently carried by Chatoyant wherever she goes. It contains details of the vat construction, distillations, and growth conditions necessary for gem tuning, but only limited notes on what cuts should be employed, the inscriptions necessary for enchantment and the types of stone required for the differing types of spells.
2. Biref's journal. Hidden in the strong box in the mining tunnels. These are the detailed notes that allowed Biref to virtually master enchanting gems. It does contain the information on what size and cut the gem must be, how to inscribe it and what to inscribe it with as well as very detailed instructions on what you can and can't use for spell storage. Interestingly, it also contains information on how to use tuned gems to manufacture talismans of superior quality.
3. The Ear Trumpet. Whilst this is not its actual purpose, the delicate glass spiral (an experimental piece of Biref's own design) can be used to communicate with Biref in his gemstone prison. Of course, players being what they are, they may come up with a far more interesting way of communicating with the imprisoned mage.
4. The glass ornaments. Unbeknownst to Biref, the gem-dust-filled ornaments that cram his home are often quite unusual. As they consist of the remains of enchanted stones, some of the larger ones are innately magical and can act as either detectors for or protection against certain types of enchantment, usually the one with which they themselves had been imbued. Discovery of this fact could lead to a profitable little business in Azenomei's market!



6. It has to be remembered that they will be dubious, but who can blame them?

### Appendix 2: Gem Enchantment

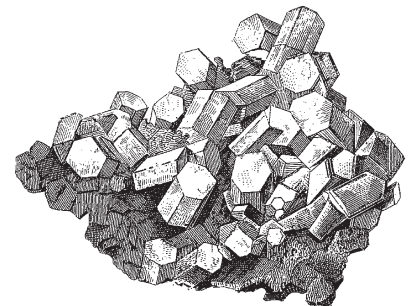
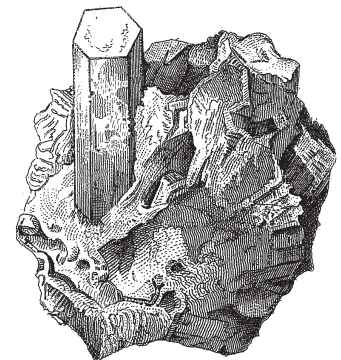
It is no easy affair to enchant gems to store spells. In all honesty, it is unlikely to replace the use of IOUN stones except as a fashion accessory unless someone manages to solve the problem of reuse. Still, there are several stages, which must be carefully observed.

1. A tiny shard of the required gem must be grown in a specially constructed vat (about the size of a teapot) in carefully distilled liquids containing the necessary growth mediators. The stone must be grown larger than the required size to allow for loss during the cutting.
2. The gem must be washed thoroughly to remove traces of growth media and then faceted carefully along certain proscribed lines to give an attractive bauble of the correct proportions, usually about the size of a lady's thumb. It must then be delicately inscribed with a small number of symbols that will enable to matrix of the stone to retain an enchantment.
3. The spell for storage must be cast into the gem along with an activation word or gesture. Great care must be taken with the dismissal type spells to ensure that the tuning of the stone is not lost.
4. The gem can then be stored until such time as it is required, whereupon invocation of the trigger word or action will release the spell. The gem will then either shatter into potentially reusable shards for further growth or it will become a fine powder. The outcome appears to depend upon the nature of the spell stored. Violent, destructive spells do seem to totally drain the essence of the gem used, leaving very little of further use behind.

### Appendix 3: What Gems and What Spells?

As can be seen from the unfortunate incidents related above, it is critical that the right gem be used for storage purposes. Below is a list of those that both the original treatise and Biref himself elucidated. Below that is a table detailing the believed properties of several types of precious and semi-precious stones to allow further expansion of this field of magic.

2nd Retrotropic	<i>ruby</i>
Behemoth's Bounty	<i>padparadscha (pinkish sapphire)</i>
Enchantment of Another's Face	<i>beryl</i>
Felofun's Thaumaturgic Poultice	<i>hematite</i>
Instantaneous Galvanic Thrust	<i>amber</i>
Interminable Interim	<i>sapphire (blue)</i>
Liberation of Warp	<i>ruby</i>
Lugwilder's Dismal Itch	<i>spinel</i>
Phandaal's Critique of Cold	<i>almandine (red garnet)</i>
Phandaal's Critique of Warmth	<i>quartz (must be white)</i>
Phandaal's Mantle of Stealth	<i>beryl</i>
Rhialto's Green Turmoil	<i>green grossular (green garnet)</i>
Seventh Sets Spells of Hiding	<i>chrysoberyl</i>
The Excellent Prismatic Spray	<i>topaz</i>
Thandaval's Stolen Life	<i>rhodochrosite</i>
The Omnipotent Sphere	<i>malachite</i>



## ❧ How Prettily It Shines ❧

### The Stones<sup>7</sup>

PROTECTION FROM EVIL, MISFORTUNE, ILL-HEALTH ; lapis lazuli, ruby, pink sapphire, chrysoberyl, malachite, hematite, turquoise (changes color when evil approaches), zircon (also changes color in the presence of danger)

CALMING: carnelian, sapphire, topaz, Sight beryl (used originally as lenses in spectacles!) jasper, topaz, Mind zircon, almandine, sapphire.

Zircon (which is not cubic zirconium) is associated with wisdom, honor and riches as well as changing color in the presence of danger (as does turquoise). Almandine is reputed to cure melancholy and warm the heart and jasper is also supposed to protect against drought! Whilst it might appear odd to use a stone like chrysoberyl for a disguise spell, it is after all hiding something from sight! The same could be said for topaz (a stone with many purported uses), but after a quick discharge of the Excellent Prismatic Spray I for one would feel that not only had bad omens been dispelled, but also that poor vision on behalf of my assailant had indeed been cured and my anger much calmed!

### *Appendix 4: Better Amulets*

As mentioned above, several gems are associated with protection from a variety of things. During his research, Biref applied his knowledge to crafting several amulets of protection and detection that incorporated fragments of “tuned” stones (often those bits left after spell discharge). Should anyone wish to create such an amulet, incorporation of these fragments will reduce the cost of any new items (created using the rules in the Magic chapter) by ICx\_. If following the proscribed protocol for any of the amulets detailed in the Magic chapter, then the cost will be reduced by \_ (e.g. for Laccodel’s Protective Rune, the cost would now be 32 - (32,4) = 24 points). For those amulets that cost only one point, then the range or degree of signaling is intensified at the GMs discretion.

### *Appendix 5: Characters of Note*

BIREF, a mage overtaken by the glimmer of bright shiny objects

*“I have had to learn to itch where I could scratch”*

Obviously, Biref will be unable to use his enchanted gems until he has been freed and he has no spells committed to memory. Little actual detail can be seen through the zamander, but in actuality Biref is a short man of medium build with a great pride in his appearance. His robes are finely embroidered and of excellent quality (although he has the sense to have scruffy clothing for the mines). Due to the level of fine work involved in his engraving and gem cutting, he wears a pair of spectacles containing lenses of beryl. His graying hair sparkles with the collected jewel dust of his trade. He is indeed an amiable man, but does have an ambitious streak. He does not harbor grudges, but is an astute judge of character.

**Ratings:** Persuasion (Charming) 14, Rebuff (Penetrating) 12, Attack (Caution) 10, Defense (Intuition) 10, Health 15, Magic Studios 15, Specialization (Gems) 15, Athletics 2, Craftsmanship 8, Etiquette 2, Pedantry 11, Perception 5, Stewardship 3.

**Resistances:** None

**Charged Stones on his person:** Topaz (Excellent Prismatic Spray); Beryl (Phandaal’s Mantle of Stealth); Sapphire (Interminable Interim); Spinel (Lugwilder’s Dismal Itch); Ruby (2nd Reintropic); Malachite (The Omnipotent Sphere).



7. These categories may be at variance with those given by Dosinan in his *Sleights of Magic*. We confidently assert that this difference occurs because Dosinan was a fool.

## ❧ How Prettily It Shines ❧

CHATOYANT, pretender and seeker after knowledge

*"A poor weak woman of my delicacy and breeding can hardly be expected to enter first through such a door."*

Chatoyant is a plain young woman with few distinguishing features, except for her amber eyes and keen mind. Having been raised by her father's housekeeper after the early death of her mother, she remains emotionally detached from most things and does not suffer fools gladly. What magical ability she has was gleaned from her father during quieter moments. Her ambition is ice cold and she is not a woman to cross. She is not stupid and prefers to act from behind the scenes if at all possible.

**Ratings:** Persuasion (Intimidating) 12, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 10, Attack (Cunning) 10, Defense (Vexation) 12. Health 12, Magic (Forceful) 10, Athletics 2, Etiquette 3, Imposture 4, Pedantry 5, Perception 4, Seduction 1, Stealth 3, Wherewithal 4.

**Resistances.** Rakishness Ω

**Spells:** Arnhoult's Sequestrious Digitalia, Enchantment of Another's Face, Excellent Prismatic Spray, Felojun's 2nd Hypnotic, Liberation of Warp, Rhialto's Green Turmoil



HAUYNE, a broken man

*"However deep one digs a well, it affords no refuge in time of flood"*

Hauyne, a once handsome and athletic young mage, is now a sorry wreck of a man. His reputation ruined by his close associate of Biref, he took to drink and then began to explore the array of narcotics available to anyone determined enough to find them. Eventual addiction to the essence of Jacynth has left him incapable of memorizing spells and his speech is so slurred that he cannot use a grimoire without immense effort. The regulars at the Iron Man Inn keep an eye out for his well-being, regarding him as a living cautionary tale of over-ambition and over-indulgence with which to frighten their children. As a result of him virtually living at the Inn, he can be a vast repository of gossip and information in his rare lucid moments (GMs discretion as to precisely when exactly those occur).

**Ratings:** Persuasion (Obfuscatory) 8, Rebuff (Obtuse) 8, Attack (Ferocity, only used if you stand between him and his essence of Jacynth) Defense (Misdirection) 8, Health 9, Magic Daring 12 (Previous to his addiction, now only for defense), Athletics 2, Gambling 2, Pedantry 4, Scuttlebutt 5, Wherewithal 4.



TAAF, SARD

*"Shame fades in the morning, debts remain from day to day"*

Should the GM require either of these two characters to appear, they have persuasion, rebuff, attack and defense of 1.5p and a magic rating of up to 5 points higher than the best mage amongst the characters (provided that doesn't elevate them to arch-mage status).

They have any spells that the GM thinks necessary to overawe the characters and are basically very bitter men who want nothing more than the entire affair to be swallowed by the mists of time. They can be located anywhere within the Dying Earth, but preferably remote regions where rumor of their previous infamy will not have reached.



### Members of the Scholasticarium

It is beyond the scope of this humble writer to suggest exactly what statistics should be assigned to the illustrious members of the Scholasticarium. Needless to say, they are powerful and competent individuals whom



## ✿ How Prettily It Shines ✿

it would be unwise to vex. Some of them are also elucidated in more than adequate detail in *The Kaiin Players Guide*.

### *Appendix 6: And Not Forgetting*

#### *Embracil's Aggrandiser*

**Type:** Straightforward

**Duration:** Permanent

**Range:** Sight

Designed by the dimensionally obsessed mage Embracil, this spell was one of his few unreliable creations. As the name suggests, it causes the rapid growth to immense proportions of any item it is cast upon. Unfortunately, the direction of growth cannot be controlled (but tends to be symmetrical) and the enlarged item will normally engulf anything unfortunate enough to be in its way. The end results are therefore widely regarded as far too dangerously unpredictable to warrant this spell's inclusion in virtually any grimoire. The spell is technically permanent as it involves the speeded up growth of the item to its utmost limits (and occasionally beyond) and as such only a spell that would shrink the item back to its original size would undo the effect.

The spell can only meaningfully be cast on objects less than a foot across and it costs one magic point for every yard the objects average radius increases by.

**Style Affinity:** Devious

### *Appendix 7: Taglines*

*The strictures of research are necessarily bland and unforgiving!*

*I think you will find that all that glitters is not a worthy receptacle*

*Nonsense! The mere application of will overcomes even the tardiest of specimens*

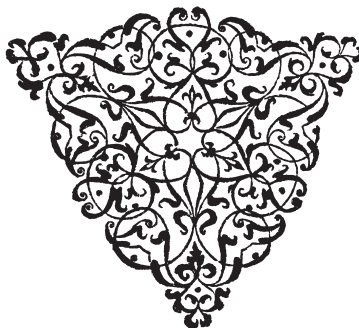
*Even the humblest person will aspire to greatness once they realize they are above the common masses*

*I don't care how tingly it is, I draw the line at eating minerals!*

*Lost wisdom is, almost by definition, lost.*

*A plain woman is every bit as dangerous as a pretty one.*

*That which is only painted should not be washed too often.*



# ✿ Dying Earth d20 ✿

*Keith Baker*

“When the sun goes out, all deeds will be forgotten together”

Adventure games are often set in golden ages filled with noble warriors, young farmhands with hidden pasts and untapped potential, crusading priests and paladins, and other heroes brimming with idealism. Wielding holy swords and rings of power, these pure-hearted adventurers slay dragons, overthrow the lords of evil, and accomplish deeds that inspire songs and stories. The world is young and evil must be overcome to safeguard the future.

Things are different in the Dying Earth of Jack Vance. Thousands of civilizations have risen only to fall, and millions of heroic deeds have been long forgotten. The sun is a dim red orb that may go out at any minute. There is no hope for the future, and the present is all that matters. Good and evil are equally irrelevant. What dark lord would seek to conquer a world that may end at any moment? And while the woods are filled with halfmen and demons, why seek out such dangers when your life may end tomorrow? Most who live in the last days of the world seek to end their lives in comfort, taking joy in good food, fine clothing, and whatever luxuries they can acquire. Should your comfort inconvenience another, so be it; in the 21st Aeon there is little time for remorse.

It is not the place of this humble article to provide a comprehensive guide to the world of *The Dying Earth*. It would be impossible to accomplish so grand a feat in this handful of pages we have to offer, and we instead refer you to the fine works of Jack Vance. The game moderator who seeks to recreate this doomed world for her friends and compatriots would also be well advised to study the products of Pelgrane Press; should you have not a terce to spare, you can still peruse the quick-start rules of this brilliant gaming system at [www.dyingearth.com](http://www.dyingearth.com). What, then, is our goal? In these few pages we shall attempt to provide you with the basic tools you need to replicate adventures in the Dying Earth within the confines of the d20 system. You may also wish to incorporate these ideas into an ongoing campaign, bringing your Vancian vagabond into a world of another's devising. While this may cause a loss of the true and intended tone of the setting, the universe is a very large place; all it takes is a *call to the violent cloud* to hurl an unsuspecting soul from the last days of Earth to a younger world under a brighter sun.

## *The Tone of the World*

*“To gain the satisfaction of one's wishes one needs only to propose unpleasant alternatives.”*

*Cugel's Saga, 'The Columns'*

Let us begin this dissertation by saying three words about the setting, making particular note of those elements that may differ from the worlds of your previous experience.

*The subject of religion and the relative merits of swords and words:* While superstitions abound and the names of ancient deities are often invoked, true faith is rare and there are no clerics to be found. This in turn creates a lack of healing magicks, making any situation where blades are drawn and blood is shed quite serious. Fortunately, this has resulted in a greater respect for the sanctity of human life; murder, even in self-defense, is likely to raise the ire of an angry mob, and should you choose to surrender to a human opponent he will likely acknowledge your submission. But while murder is an unconscionable act, beating, physical and mental torture, enforced servitude, and magical imprisonment are all considered to be reasonable alternatives. So you can choose to surrender, but you may not enjoy the consequences. Thus it is often wise to avoid combat altogether by talking your way out of trouble instead of relying on your sword to speak on your behalf.

## ❧ Dying Earth d20 ❧

Under the usual conventions of the d20 system player characters cannot be influenced by Charisma-based skills such as Bluff, Diplomacy, and Intimidate. In the Dying Earth verbal conflict is just as important as the clash of arms, and as a result player characters lose this unfair invulnerability. You may therefore be forced to accept opinions that are not your own or compelled to follow certain avenues of behavior that are against your best interests; this is why the activity is called “role-playing”, and you should endeavor to embrace it. Should you wish to avoid being manipulated by crafty swindlers, you would be well-advised to invest in Sense Motive. The art of persuasion is discussed in more detail later in this article.

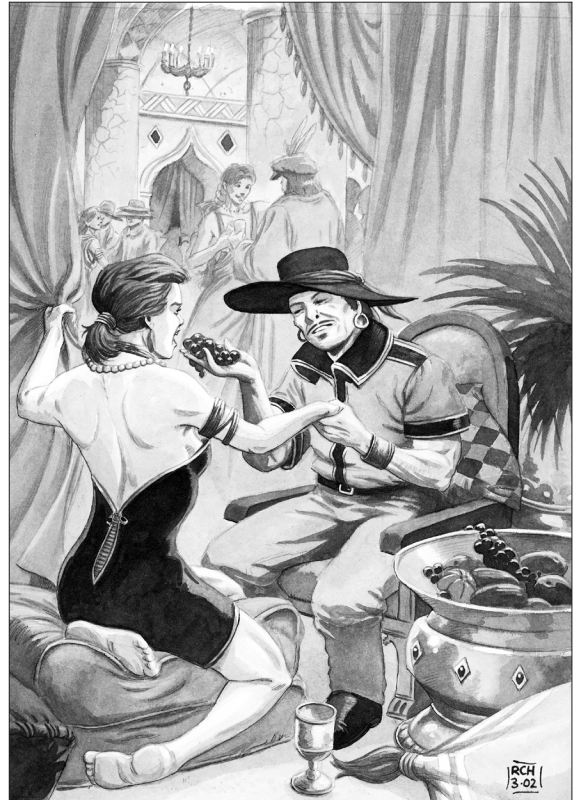


*The sad decline of the heroic ideal:* The majority of the people of the 21st Aeon care only for themselves. The needs of the one outweigh the needs of the few or the many. The protagonists of the Dying Earth are not paladins and rangers of noble blood; they are cynical and selfish tricksters, vagabonds struggling to survive in a cold and indifferent world. Adventure in the Dying Earth and you may face ghouls, bears and deadly wizards – but your enemies are just as likely to be crafty merchants or swindling slime-divers. The Dying Earth is not a place for heroes, and you would be well-advised to remember this.

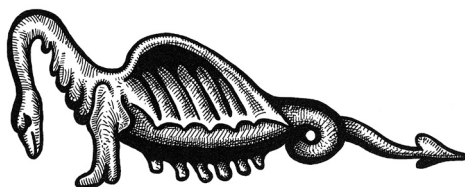
You may also have been raised with the quaint and provincial notion that the protagonist of a story will never suffer serious reverses. You would be wise to disavow yourself of this childish concept at this very moment. Unlike the heroes of legend, the vagabonds of the Dying Earth have mortal frailties and faults, and you may be swindled, imprisoned, robbed, or beaten black and bloody. Accept these misfortunes with grace and dignity, and plot a cruel revenge on those who have wronged you.



*Eloquence in all things:* The people of the Dying Earth share a taste for the finer things in life – elegant apparel, excellent viands, and a florid manner of speech that never uses one word where it could use three. The optional tagline rule presented later in this article encourages the latter concept, but you should always bear the other two in mind. Embrace your role. Envision every meal, and consider if you would truly prefer to sate your palate with ‘iron rations’ when you could instead have a succulent joint of eddel-bird crusted with tears of garlic and cinnamon and laid upon a comfit of fine ginger-pears. And your dress – what manner of hat do you wear, and how is it decorated? Does your cloak match your doublet, or have you selected a daring clash of colors to draw attention to your bold wit? While in most settings such things are of little import, in the last days of Earth comfort and style are two of the only things that still matter.



*The people of the Dying Earth share a taste for the finer things in life.*



## ✿ Dying Earth d20 ✿

### ✿ *The Elements of Character* ✿

*“Cugel is a man of discernment!” declared Bunderwal. “I would rate him an applicant of fair to good quality, and I urge you to ignore his long spatulate fingers which I last noticed on Larken the baby-stealer. There is a significant difference between the two: Larkin has been hanged and Cugel has not been hanged.”*

*Cugel’s Saga, ‘The Inn of Blue Lamps’*

*The Dying Earth* RPG does not concern itself with such concepts as class, hit points, or ability scores. But these distinctions are one of the very pillars of the d20 system, and thus we will endeavor to merge the two systems together. Should a subject fail to be mentioned, it is not through lack of perspicacity on our part; rather, it implies that the d20 system in question is not modified in any way. Most notably, ability scores, hit points, Armor Class, and saving throws are identical both in function and the manner by which they should be derived.

### ✿ Character Level ✿

Character level and the process of advancement follow standard d20 rules, although we will present an alternative method of gaining experience later in this article. If you wish to play a series based around powerful characters simply increase the starting level of all player characters. Using the protagonists of Vance’s novels as examples, the three series levels are Cugel (start at 1st level), Turjan (start at 10th level), and Rhialto (start at 20th level). Characters in Turjan and Rhialto-level games should receive all of the benefits of advanced level, including additional feats and increased character ability scores. The game moderator may choose to provide you with enchanted items as befits your level. Or perhaps you once had such fabulous possessions, but lost them in a bad hand of skax. Such is life in the Dying Earth!

### ✿ Race ✿

The protagonists of *The Dying Earth* are human. But there are many strange beasts and halfmen in the world, and powerful magicians may grow fantastic creatures in mystical vats. If you insist on playing a demihuman and your gamemaster accedes to your impudent request, you may be a representative from a strange and distant land or the creation of a master magician.

### ✿ Alignment ✿

Alignment has no place in the last days of Earth. The people of the 21st Aeon are all equally capable of despicable and morally repugnant acts, and yet may (on suitable rare occasions) be touched by the strains of mercy and act in a compassionate or generous manner. For the sake of simplicity, consider all people and things to be of neutral alignment.

In place of alignment we offer personality traits, which are described later in this section. If you are enamored with the idea of being an unvarnished hero, be Charming and Pure-Hearted; if you have an especially dark heart, select an Intimidating demeanor.

### ✿ Class ✿

The d20 system makes use of a wide range of heroic archetypes. The cleric heals the injured, the fighter battles on the front lines, and the rogue skulks in the shadows. But the Dying Earth is not a world of legendary heroes. Rather, it is filled with common folk struggling to survive in a dangerous world. This requires you to become a jack-of-all-trades with a discerning eye, a quick and ready wit, and the ability to recognize which end of a blade to hold.

On hearing these requirements, one might turn to the d20 rogue. But the rogue’s talent for deadly sneak attacks and skill with traps are not typical characteristics of the protagonists of the Dying Earth. So we present a new core class: the vagabond. Virtually all characters should be compelled to take their levels in this class. Commoners and warriors may be found among the NPC population of the world, representing those unfortunates who are not as quick-witted and capable as their peers. But clerics, fighters, druids, paladins, rangers, and their kin are not a part of the world of the Dying Earth.



## ✧ Dying Earth d20 ✧

The one standard class which has a place in the 21st Aeon is the wizard. Magic is a part of the Dying Earth, and the world is filled with wizards, from mere dabblers to the powerful archmagicians.

To summarize and conclude, there are only two classes that are well-suited to player characters: the wizard and the vagabond. But it is the prerogative of the game moderator to ignore our words of wisdom; if she should wish to allow you to play a bard or monk or what you will, so be it.



### New Core Class: The Vagabond

In the last days of Earth every man must find his own way. Brigandage and trickery are more common than honesty and fair play, and anyone who intends to travel across the Dying Earth must be prepared to defend himself against these threats – or to employ them himself. In lieu of the deadly combat abilities of the rogue, the vagabond possesses a reserve of talent and pure luck that may allow him to survive even the most unlikely and inhospitable situations: his Skill Pool.

Vagabonds come from all backgrounds and can be found in all walks of life. While less talented NPCs may be represented by commoners, most of the inhabitants of the Dying Earth possess at least one vagabond level. An emaciated farmer may well have a natural gift for Bluff and Sense Motive – something you will discover to your regret when he convinces you to exchange your fine drogger-cart for a brace of enchanted beans.

*Game Rule information: Vagabonds have the following game statistics.*

**Abilities:** All abilities have equal value for a vagabond. Dexterity can counter a lack of armor, or you may use Charisma to disarm your foes with words. Wisdom can allow you to spot hidden danger or to see through deceptions, while Intelligence will increase your repertoire of skills. So the ultimate importance of any single ability depends on the style of character you seek to create.

**Alignment:** As we have mentioned before, alignment is not a concern for the inhabitants of the Dying Earth. If used in another setting, a vagabond can possess any alignment.

Hit Die: d6.



#### HELP WANTED

A lady in distress seeks aid! A beloved family pet, the pocket erb “Snurflee”, is now missing. Madame Foremela Vithcoor seeks its routine immediately, and offers a fine reward, provided it is unharmed. It wears a ribbon of lavender silk and has a golden sting-cover, and can otherwise be identified by a unique marking resembling the Rune of Significant Discord on its back. Merely bring Snurflee to the Vithcoor estate to claim your reward.

## ✿ Dying Earth d20 ✿

### Class Skills

The vagabond's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Appraise (Int), Bluff (Cha), Climb (Str), Craft (Int), Diplomacy (Cha), Disguise (Cha), Gather Information (Cha), Heal (Wis), Hide (Dex), Intimidate (Cha), Knowledge (all skills, taken individually) (Int), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Performance (Cha), Pick Lock (Dex), Profession (Wis), Riding (Dex), Sense Motive (Wis), Sleight of Hand (Dex), Search (Int), Spot (Wis), Survival (Wis), Swim (Str).

Skill Points at 1st Level:  $(6 + \text{Int modifier}) \times 4$ .

Skill Points at Each Additional Level:  $6 + \text{Int modifier}$ .

Table 1. *The Vagabond*

NPC Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save	Skill Pool	Special
1st	+0	+0	+2	+0	1	Bonus Feat
2nd	+1	+0	+3	+0	2	Bonus Feat
3rd	+2	+1	+3	+1	2	
4th	+3	+1	+4	+1	3	Special Ability
5th	+3	+1	+4	+1	3	Bonus Feat
6th	+4	+2	+5	+2	4	
7th	+5	+2	+5	+2	4	Bonus Feat
8th	+6/+1	+2	+6	+2	5	Special Ability
9th	+6/+1	+3	+6	+3	5	
10th	+7/+2	+3	+7	+3	6	Bonus Feat
11th	+8/+3	+3	+7	+3	6	Bonus Feat
12th	+9/+4	+4	+8	+4	7	Special Ability
13th	+9/+4	+4	+8	+4	7	Bonus Feat
14th	+10/+5	+4	+9	+4	8	Bonus Feat
15th	+11/+6/+1	+5	+9	+5	8	
16th	+12/+7/+2	+5	+10	+5	9	Special Ability
17th	+12/+7/+2	+5	+10	+5	9	Bonus Feat
18th	+13/+8/+3	+6	+11	+6	10	
19th	+14/+9/+4	+6	+11	+6	10	Bonus Feat
20th	+15/+10/+5	+6	+12	+6	11	Special Ability

### Class Features

All of the following are class features of the vagabond class.

**Weapon and Armor Proficiency:** Vagabonds are skilled with all simple weapons, along with the following martial weapons: hand axe, rapier, sap, and short sword. Vagabonds are not proficient with any type of armor or with shields. Armor is cumbersome and quite unfashionable, and when the sun may go out at any moment, who wishes to be so inconvenienced?

**Skill Pool:** The greatest strength of the vagabond is the ability to persevere through luck or skill when all hope appears to be lost. By expending a point from your Skill Pool you may re-roll any single skill check. You must accept this new result, even if it is worse than the first – although, if you have additional points remaining in your Skill Pool you can spend another point to try again. Typically this represents a remarkable

## ✿ Dying Earth d20 ✿

flux in the tides of fate; however, if used with skills such as Diplomacy or Bluff, it may be seen as a hasty rephrasing of a failed argument.

Should you roll an unmodified 1 or 2 when making a skill check, you must spend 2 points from your Skill Point to reroll this dismal failure. On the other hand, if you roll an unmodified 18-20 when making a skill check that is opposed by the checks of others – skills like Bluff and Sleight of Hand – your opponents must spend 2 points if they wish to reroll their countering skill checks. You may only use your Skill Pool in conjunction with skills you are trained in; you may not reroll an untrained Listen check, for example.

Your Skill Pool is fully replenished after 8 hours of restful sleep.

**Bonus Feats:** At each of these levels you may select a bonus feat from among the following: Alertness, Combat Expertise, Deceitful, Dodge, Negotiator, Persuasive, Power Attack, Skill Focus, Skill Specialist, or any tweak feat. Feats may be taken multiple times if this is normally allowed. You must meet the prerequisites of any feat you wish to take.

**Special Abilities:** Every vagabond has a few personal quirks and specialties. At 4th level and every four levels thereafter (8th, 12th, 16th, 20th) you may select a special ability from among the following options.

*Complex Personality:* Select an additional personality trait. You receive the benefits of all of your personality traits, but when you are engaged in a contest of wits you must select one persuasion style and one natural defense for purposes of trumping or being trumped by your opponent. Personality traits and verbal combat are described later in this article.

*Expanded Skill Pool:* This increases the size of your Skill Pool by 2 points. You may take Expanded Skill Pool multiple times, gaining 2 points each time.

*Indomitable (ex):* If you fail a Will saving throw you may spend a point from your Skill Pool to reroll the failed saving throw. This works in the same manner as rerolling a skill, including the increased cost to reroll an unmodified 1 or 2.

*Redoubled Attack (ex):* You may spend a point from your Skill Pool to reroll a single attack or damage roll. This is identical to rerolling a skill check; you must accept the second roll even if it is worse than the first, and it costs 2 points to reroll an unmodified 1 or 2.

*Slippery Dodge (ex):* You may expend point from your Skill Pool to force an enemy to reroll an attack or damage roll directed against you. You must expend 2 points to force the reroll of a critical hit. You must declare your intention before damage is determined. Once damage has been rolled, all you can do is force a reroll of the damage.

*Wallop (ex):* Pick a number of skills equal to your Intelligence modifier. You must possess at least 5 ranks in each skill that you select. When making a check using one of these skills, you may expend 5 points from your Skill Pool to take 20 on the check. This does not require any additional time and may be used under any conditions. You can only perform a Wallop in place of an initial skill check; you cannot use it in conjunction with any sort of reroll. You may take this special ability multiple times; each time you select an additional group of skills that it applies to.

### Starting Gear

2d4 × 10 gp worth of equipment. This initial sum cannot be used to purchase armor.



### ASSISTANCE REQUIRED!

A large sum of terces is being offered by an unnamed gentleman to provide him with the skin (lacking body) of a pocket-erb, ideally one which has a unique or distinctive marking, such as a rune or the like, on its body somewhere. Even if the skin is damaged, pierced, or burned, the reward will be offered so long as the rune is plainly visible. To collect your reward, bring the skin to the servants entrance of the Vithcoor estate. Kknock two times sharply, then wait 5 second, then a third time.

## ✿ Dying Earth d20 ✿

### ✿ Personality Traits ✿

Traditionally combat has been the focus of the d20 system. What weapons do you use? What armor do you wear? Personality traits fill this role in social confrontations. In a debate, do you try to browbeat your opponent or do you rely on your natural charm? Do you resist the schemes of others through cunning and insight, or are you so obtuse that logical arguments wash over you with no effect?

When you create a character, select two personality traits – your style of persuasion and your natural defense. Each trait provides you with benefits or drawbacks as described below. In addition, each style of persuasion is especially effective against a particular form of defense, and vice versa. The precise effects of trumping another character's personality traits are described in the section on verbal combat.

#### Persuasion Style

##### *Charming*

You rely on your natural charm in place of any practiced art. While your arguments lack the sophistication of a trained speaker, your personal charisma may sway others to your point of view.

**Prerequisites:** Cha 12+

**Benefits:** When you cast any sort of Compulsion spell, the DC of the saving throw is increased by 1. Any time that you make a straight Charisma check (not a skill check, but a check using the unmodified ability) you get a +2 bonus. Finally, because of your natural allure you are more likely to receive invitations, seductive glances, and whispered words of enticement than those with other persuasion styles.

**Special:** Charming trumps Wary and is trumped by Contrary.



##### *Eloquent*

You weave words into a dazzling tapestry, moving the hearts of those around you with your lyrical phrasing and insightful arguments.

**Prerequisites:** Cha 12+ and Int 12+

**Benefits:** Diplomacy is a permanent class skill for you, and you receive a +2 bonus to all Diplomacy checks. You also receive a +2 bonus to any Perform check that involves oratory or poetics.

**Special:** Eloquent trumps Contrary and is trumped by Wary.



##### *Forthright*

You cut straight to the heart of any argument, impressing others with your clarity and directness.

**Benefits:** If you make a Diplomacy check with an unmodified result of 18-20, you impress observers with your straightforward honesty. This reputation spreads among the immediate community (nobility if you are at court, commoners if you are in a tavern, etc). Those affected may give you the benefit of the doubt without resorting to a skill check, and you receive a +2 to Diplomacy or Bluff checks that you make against such characters. This benefit continues until you roll an unmodified 1-2 while making a Diplomacy or Bluff check, or until you are caught in a lie. The reputation also fades if you leave the community for more than four days. Once you have lost a reputation for honesty in a community, you cannot regain it for at least one week.

**Special:** Forthright trumps Penetrating and is trumped by Lawyerly.



##### *Glib*

Combining elements of both charm and eloquence, you have learned to speak with such speed and practiced ease that others overlook the often irrational nature of your arguments.

**Benefits:** Bluff is a permanent class skill for you and you receive a +2 bonus to Bluff checks.

**Special:** Glib trumps Pure-Hearted and is trumped by Obtuse.



## ☘ Dying Earth d20 ☘

### *Intimidating*

You rely on the threat of pain or mischief to convince others to do as you require. You may be quite open about your unpleasant intentions, or you may simply carry an air of malice that others sense without your actually voicing a threat.

**Benefits:** Intimidate is a permanent class skill for you and you receive a +2 bonus to Intimidate checks.

**Special:** Intimidating trumps Obtuse and is trumped by Pure-hearted.



### *Obfuscatory*

This approach relies on a pedantic use of elaborate and archaic language and structure. Others have trouble following the path of your arguments, yet you sound so formidable that they accept your assessment of the situation.

**Prerequisites:** Int 12+

**Benefits:** As you have a natural talent for concealing the truth behind confusing imagery, the saving DC of any illusion spell that you cast is increased by 1. In addition, the longer that you draw out a conversation the more likely you are to baffle your opponent into submission. When you use Bluff or Diplomacy for the purpose of persuasion, you gain a cumulative +1 circumstance bonus every time you use a point from your Skill Pool to reroll your skill check.

**Special:** Obfuscatory trumps Lawyerly and is trumped by Penetrating.



### *Natural Defense*

#### *Contrary*

Naturally argumentative, you take issue with almost any order you are given or statement that you hear.

**Benefits:** You receive a +2 bonus to all saving throws that you make against compulsion effects and a +1 bonus to Sense Motive checks made to resist persuasion.

**Special:** Contrary trumps Charming and is trumped by Eloquent.



### *Lawyerly*

You seek to follow proper procedure in all things. This pedantic obsession with details and clauses often allows you to spot the flaws in the arguments of others.

**Benefits:** As you have a natural bent for recalling precedents and traditions, you receive a +1 bonus to all Knowledge skill checks. In addition, the longer you are engaged in an argument the more likely you are to find loopholes in the logic. During a contest of persuasion, you get a cumulative +1 circumstance bonus every time you spend a point from your Skill Pool to reroll your Sense Motive check.

**Special:** Lawyerly trumps Fortright and is trumped by Obfuscatory.



### *Obtuse*

You often find it difficult to follow the conversations that occur around you. This often reflects a diminished intellect and dull personality. But you could instead be a carefree individual with no time for the words of others, or you might be so sagacious that your mind is constantly drifting off on inner journeys of great merit.

**Benefits:** The opacity of your thoughts provides you with a +2 bonus to all Will saving throws. However, regardless of your class Listen, Spot, and Search are always considered to be crossclass skills.

**Special:** Obtuse trumps Glib and is trumped by Intimidating.



## ✿ Dying Earth d20 ✿

### *Penetrating*

Your insight into the moods and motivations of those around you often allows you to see through attempts at deception.

**Prerequisites:** Wis 13+

**Benefits:** You receive a +2 bonus to saving throws against illusions. If you take Skill Specialization in either Spot or Listen, you may also use those points to reroll Sense Motive checks.

**Special:** Penetrating trumps Obfuscatory and is trumped by Forthright.



### *Pure-Hearted*

You are pure and guileless – a remarkably rare breed on the Dying Earth. While you would seem to be a welcoming target for schemes and treachery, you often expose the villainy of others through a combination of naiveté and sheer luck.

**Benefits:** The pure of heart have a natural affinity for one another. If you tell the truth to another Pure-Hearted character (PC or NPC), he will sense the honesty of your words. In addition, if you are falsely accused of wrong-doing the GM can allow you to spend a point from your Skill Poll and make a Charisma check (DC 15); if you are successful, a Pure-Hearted NPC will appear to provide aid and succor. The nature of the NPC and the form of assistance she can provide is entirely up to the GM. This is a plot twist as opposed to an active ability – a fortuitous whim of chance that brings an ally against injustice, as opposed to a covert signal or some other intentional action.

**Special:** Pure-Hearted trumps Intimidating and is trumped by Glib.



### *Wary*

You are suspicious of everyone and everything. Which is only reasonable, since everyone is plotting your downfall and eventual demise.

**Benefits:** You receive a +2 bonus on any passive use of Spot or Listen; this does not help when you actively choose to use either skill. If you take Skill Specialization in either Spot or Listen, you may also use those points to reroll Sense Motive checks.

**Special:** Wary trumps Eloquent and is trumped by Charming.



## ✿ Skills ✿

One change to existing skills is that player characters can be influenced by Bluff, Diplomacy, and Intimidate. It is up to the game moderator to determine the modifiers to a Bluff check or the current attitude of the PCs in the case of Diplomacy. As a player it is your job to accept the whims of fate. If the merchant uses Bluff and convinces you that he has indeed lost your ancient map, you must believe him – at least, until circumstances prove him a liar.

In the case of Intimidate, you may choose to resist the skill with either a level check or a Sense Motive check.

In addition to their usual functions, Bluff, Diplomacy, and Intimidate can all be used to persuade an individual to perform a specific action. Rules for persuasion are presented later in this article. Within this section, we have one entirely new skill for your consideration: Cantraps.

### **CANTRAPS (Cha)**

Not to be confused with a cantrip – a 0-level arcane spell – a cantrap is an emotionally charged declaration that can have a mystical effect. As opposed to the powerful spells prepared by wizards and magicians, a cantrap is a simple invocation that calls on nearby spirits to enforce a minor blessing or curse.

## ☘ Dying Earth d20 ☘

**Check:** You must spend a point from your Skill Pool in order to perform a Cantrap check. After spending this point, select your target and the desired effect. You cannot target yourself with a cantrap. The difficulty of the check is based on the nature and duration of the effect:

Desired Effect	DC/DC Modifier
Mimic effect of prestidigitation <sup>1</sup>	10
Bonus or penalty to specific skill check	10
Bonus or penalty to specific saving throw	15
Bonus or penalty to attack roll	15
Bonus or penalty to AC	20
Bonus or penalty to all saving throws	20
Bonus or penalty to damage roll	20
Duration of ten minutes	+0
Duration of one hour <sup>1</sup>	+5
Duration of one day <sup>2</sup>	+10
Bonus or penalty lasts for the full duration of the effect <sup>2</sup>	+10
Restricted circumstances	-1 to -10

A cantrap normally has a value of +1 or -1. This is increased by 1 for every 5 points by which your check result exceeds the DC of the cantrap. You may reduce the DC by applying restrictions – a bonus in combat that only applies when fighting erbs, a bonus to saving throws while standing on a road. The value of the limitation is determined by the GM; a combat bonus against erbs is worth nothing if you are currently fighting a pack of deodand.

Normally, the bonus from a cantrap only applies to a single action; it is lost as soon as it is used or when the duration expires. By spending an additional point from your Skill Pool and taking a +10 DC modifier on the check, you can extend the effect to last for the entire duration of the cantrap.

If you roll an unmodified 1 or 2 while performing a cantrap, you suffer the effects of the cantrap. If it was intended to provide a bonus it instead provides a penalty.

**Action:** Invoking a cantrap is a full round action that does not provoke an attack of opportunity. It requires verbal and somatic components, just like a spell.

**Try Again:** Untrained checks can only be made once per hour. If you are trained in the skill you may make as many attempts as you wish, but you must spend a point from your Skill Pool each time.

**Special:** This is a class skill for wizards. If other classes are allowed, it should also be a class skill for sorcerers, bards, adepts, and clerics. Curses cast by the dying are especially powerful; as a final action, a game moderator may allow a dying wizard to perform a single cantrap check with a +20 circumstance bonus.

### Feats

All standard feats can be used in the Dying Earth, along with the following new feat.

#### SKILL SPECIALIST [General]

Choose a single skill. You have a talent for that skill that allows you to succeed when you might otherwise fail.

**Benefit:** You gain 2 additional Skill Pool points that can only be used in conjunction with the chosen skill.

1. You must have at least one wizard level to attempt this action.

2. Uses 2 points from your skill pool. You must have at least one wizard level.



## ✿ Dying Earth d20 ✿

**Special:** This feat may be selected multiple times. It may be applied to the same skill more than once; each selection of the feat adds an additional 2 points for use with that skill. Under normal circumstances, your points from Skill Specialist feats replenish after 8 hours of rest, like your base Skill Pool. However, if your game moderator possesses *The Dying Earth RPG*, she may instead use the more detailed requirements for restoring skills as a guideline for replenishing these points.

### TWEAKS

In addition, following the example of *The Dying Earth RPG*, we should like to present an entirely new style of feat: the TWEAK. A tweak enhances the capabilities of an associated skill in a specific situation, either allowing you to perform an action that would normally be impossible or to gain a bonus that you would not otherwise receive. A handful of tweaks are presented below, but you should think of these as but a taste of the possibilities that could be explored; we heartily encourage the game moderator to expand upon this list at her earliest convenience.<sup>3</sup>

**TWEAK:** *A Person Of The Proper Qualities Would Have Rejected The Idea Out Of Hand!*

You are a masterful slinger of mud. You may use slander and vituperation to besmirch the reputation of another individual. Your target must be present for your verbal assault, and thus he will have a chance to defend himself.

**Prerequisite:** Diplomacy 5 ranks

**Benefit:** While the normal use of Diplomacy is to improve an NPC's attitude towards you, you may instead use it to lower an NPC's attitude towards another individual. Your intended victim must be present, as this technique relies on the elaboration of his faults. In addition, the NPC whose attitude you are attempting to change cannot be hostile or unfriendly towards you, or the attempt will automatically fail. The DC of the Diplomacy check is determined by exchanging values on the standard Diplomacy table; transpose "friendly" and "unfriendly", and "helpful" and "hostile". Thus, changing someone's attitude from indifferent to hostile would have a DC of 15, while changing it from helpful to hostile would have a DC of 50.

If you roll an unmodified 1 or 2, you instead alter the NPC's attitude towards you.



**TWEAK:** *Going About One's Business*

When you are moving through a building or area frequented by servants – a manor, a farm, a factory, or the like – you may conceal your presence from people in a position of authority by assuming a servile disposition and blending in among the lower classes.

**Prerequisite:** Bluff 5 ranks

**Benefit:** Provided that you are in an area where servants or laborers are commonplace, you receive a +3 bonus to any Hide or Move Silently checks that you make to evade the notice of an overseer, lord, vizier, guard, minister, or any other individual in a position of authority. In addition, you may hide without having any actual cover. You are not physically concealing yourself, but rather assuming a demeanor that raises no suspicions in the minds of observers. This feat cannot be used while you are wearing armor.



**TWEAK:** *Have No Fear; We Will Do The Job Properly*

You have a knack for abusing the trust of your employers. When you have entered into the service of another individual, you receive a bonus on a wide variety of swindles.

**Prerequisite:** Bluff 5 ranks

**Benefit:** When interacting with an employer or supervisor, you receive a +2 bonus to Bluff, Disable Device, Open Lock, and Sleight of Hand. In the case of Bluff and Sleight of Hand, your employer simply isn't expecting duplicity on your part. The bonus to the other two skills is derived from your ability to extract useful information from your work that assists in these tasks.

3. Additional examples to spark the imagination can be found in *Cugel's Compendium* and the second issue of *The Excellent Prismatic Spray* (which is in fact the source of *Going About One's Business* and *You Should Seek Out My Brother-in-Law*).



## ✿ Dying Earth d20 ✿

**TWEAK:** *I Warn You, At Cards I Am A Hopeless Duffer*

When you encounter a group of gamblers with whom you have never played before, you may present yourself as a novice to the art of gaming and thus procure an advantage.

**Prerequisite:** Bluff 5 ranks or Profession (gambler) 5 ranks

**Benefit:** This tweak has two benefits. To begin with, you receive a +2 bonus to all skill checks you make associated with gambling, including Spot checks to notice the Sleight of Hand of other players; as you are but a novice, they take fewer pains to conceal their actions from your eyes. Second, if you possess a set of marked cards or loaded dice, you may introduce them without complaint. Should a new gambler join your table after you have won at least one hand, you lose the benefits of this feat; after all, in the eyes of the newcomer, you appear to be an experienced player.



**TWEAK:** *You Should Seek Out My Brother-in-Law*

You have a wide assortment of friends and associates, albeit of dubious morals and questionable skills. Provided that you are in a community of 300 people or more, you can usually find what you are looking for.

**Prerequisite:** Gather Information 5 ranks or Knowledge (local) 5 ranks

**Benefit:** If you have attempted to locate a person of particular skills and failed, you may instead choose to reacquaint yourself with an old friend or distant relative who miraculously resides in the very area you are in. This individual possesses the skills that you require, but is renowned as a slipshod, workshy, overpriced scoundrel. The quality of the work will be poor and the price exorbitant, and the GM may add other amusing complications to the situation.



## ✿ Equipment ✿

In the Dying Earth apparel defines the gentleman of distinction. A man without a hat is a bumpkin of the highest order, and a gentleman's doublet or a lady's gown is very nearly as important. Unfashionable or outlandish dress will result in a circumstance penalty of -1 to -5 on all Charisma-based skill checks. Stylish apparel may provide a bonus of up to +2 to such checks. Armor is extremely rare in the Dying Earth, and unless one is part of the local constabulary it will always be looked upon with great suspicion and disapproval.

Ranged weapons are rarely seen in the Dying Earth; while a gentleman may carry a rapier without raising a comment, a longbow or the like will invite suspicion and harassment by the local militia.

In the terminology of the Dying Earth, a copper piece is a GROAT, a gold piece is a TERCE, and 100 gp is a CENTUM.

## Magic

Pelgrane Press may soon present a book containing more detailed d20 conversions for the magical spells and enchanted items of the Dying Earth. But many elements of the d20 magic system were directed inspired by The Dying Earth, and as such the wizard class does a satisfactory job of duplicating the mystical powers of the magicians and dabblers of the 21st aeon. The arch-magicians of the Dying Earth perform greater works through direct control and manipulation of powerful outsiders known as SANDESTINS. A full analysis of sandestins, their powers, and the complex system of bargaining and indenture used to hold these creatures in check is sadly beyond the scope of our current work. But here are two abbreviated options that you may use, should you find yourself in the role of an arch-magician.

- ✿ Sandestins are the very essence of magic itself, and their powers are virtually limitless. As a result, the wish spell can be presented as interaction with a sandestin.
- ✿ Another option is to make use of the 'calling creatures' function of the gate spell. Instead of offering a fair trade for the services of the sandestin, an arch-wizard generally threatens the spirit with dire punishment if

## ✿ Dying Earth d20 ✿

his desires are not satiated. Such control is enforced through the use of outsiders known as CHUGS, which seek to torment and destroy sandestins. You must have a *summon monster IX* spell prepared in order to hold the threat of the chug over the sandestin. Having called the creature, you make a skill check against the sandestin using Diplomacy or Intimidate; the outsider resists using its Sense Motive modifier of +18 and a Skill Pool of 8 points. Record the amount by which you succeed; these are the indenture points that allow you to control the spirit. For every two indenture points you spend, you can command the sandestin to cast a *limited wish* on your behalf. For every six indenture points, you can demand that it perform a *wish* spell. Once all indenture points have been spent, the sandestin is freed from bondage. Sandestins are lazy and deceitful, and some will do their best to misinterpret or pervert the wishes of their masters.

If the game moderator chooses to use this method to represent the use of sandestins, *limited wish* and *wish* should not be available through any other method.

One of the critical differences between magic in the d20 system and the spells of the Dying Earth are the names used for spells, which are generally longer and more fanciful than their d20 counterparts. As a result, while Iuconnu the Laughing Magician is an expert at the use of the *imprisonment* spell, he refers to it as the *Charm of Forlorn Encystment*. The following table presents appropriate names for a handful of existing d20 spells.

Spell	d20 Equivalent	Level
Advantageous Aerostatic Association	Feather Fall	1
Arnhoult's Unimpeded Egress	Passwall	5
Bergi's Triumphant Compression	Shrink Item	3
Call to the Violent Cloud	Gate	9
Charm of Brachial Fortitude	Bull's Strength	2
Charm of Forlorn Encystment	Imprisonment	9
Charm of Necroptic Inveiglement	Speak with the Dead	3 (cleric)
Clambard's Rein Of Long Nerves	Dominate Person	5
The Definite Reduction	Reduce	2
The Depurative Pulse	Move Earth	6
Spell of Dissolution	Disintegrate	6
Enchantment of Another's Face	Alter Self	2
Felojun's First Hypnotic Spell	Hold Person	3
Drumphilo's Adequate Illuminator	Light	1
The Imperceptible Intellectual Analyzer	ESP	2
The Inanimate Assailant	Animate Object	6 (cleric)
Instantaneous Galvanic Thrust	Lightning Bolt	3
The Instantaneous Electric Effort	Chain Lightning	6
The Peculiar Peril	Evard's Black Tentacles	4
Phandaal's Critique of the Chill	Leomunds Tiny Hut	3
Phandaal's Mantle of Stealth	Improved Invisibility	3
The Second Retrotopic	Dispel Magic	3
The Seventh Set's Web of Hiding	Screen	8
Spell of Soft Silence ( <i>DE</i> p636)	Silence	2 (cleric)

### *Assorted Systems for Sundry Situations*

In the Dying Earth a high premium is placed on conversation and roleplaying as opposed to the bloody blade and the kicked-in door. To facilitate this Vancian style of play, we present a few new rules for your edification and enlightenment: Persuasion, Taglines, and Gambling.

#### ✿ **Persuasion: The Gentle Art of Verbal Combat** ✿

Persuasion plays a critical role in the daily life of the 21st aeon. Whether you are threatening a merchant, swindling a magician, or pleading with a vicious deodand, you will find a quick wit and silver tongue to be vital tools. The act of persuasion is a simple process:

- ✿ Present your basic request. Convincing a merchant to let you hold his purse for safekeeping as brigands intend to rob him is reasonable. The suggestion that the merchant slit his own throat should be dismissed out of hand. Use *charm person* as a guideline. If a *charmed* victim would perform the action, than a normal person can be persuaded to do the same.
- ✿ Select the skill you will use to present your argument: Bluff, Diplomacy, or Intimidate. This affects the basic reaction that the target will have to success or failure. Diplomacy implies a well-reasoned and logical argument, Bluff the twisting of words and emotions, and Intimidate the threat of pain or suffering.
- ✿ Your intended victim makes a Sense Motive check; the result is the base DC of your skill check. The DC is further modified by circumstances, as indicated below.

<u>Nature of Request</u>	<u>DC Modifier</u>
Target's attitude is helpful	-10
Target's attitude is friendly	-5
Suggested course of action benefits target as much as you	-5
Your persuasion style trumps your target's natural defense	-5
Target's natural defense trumps your persuasion style	+5
Target's attitude is unfriendly	+5
Suggested course of action involves slight physical, financial, or social risk	+5
Target's attitude is hostile	+10
Suggested course of action involves considerable risk	+10

The GM may apply additional bonuses or penalties as she sees fit, based on the circumstances of the request. For example, a reputation for honesty might help with Bluff or Diplomacy, while a recent display of physical force could assist an Intimidate check.

- ✿ If you are successful, the victim may use points from his Skill Pool (if he has one) to reroll the Sense Motive check. As long as he has points he can keep rerolling until his result exceeds your persuasion check. Should this occur, you may use points from *your* Skill Pool to reroll your check to try to beat the new DC. This continues until both participants agree to accept the current result. This represents an ongoing debate; every time that your target successfully rerolls Sense Motive, he has countered your current argument. If you persevere, you have come up with a new and more compelling case. This is more entertaining for all involved if you and your game moderator roleplay this discussion. If you come up with an especially entertaining line of reasoning, the GM may give you a bonus to your check!

If the target's natural defense trumps your chosen persuasion style, you must pay twice the usual number of points to reroll a check. If your style trumps his defense, he must pay the doubled cost to reroll Sense Motive.

- ✿ If you are successful, your target agrees to perform the suggested course of action. Depending on your style of persuasion he may or may not be a cheerful participant, but he will comply.
- ✿ If you ultimately fail, the target dismisses your request. Depending on the style of persuasion used, he may be angry or indifferent. For the next hour you and your allies suffer a cumulative -5 circumstance penalty

## ✿ Dying Earth d20 ✿

on any subsequent persuasion attempts against the same target. This only applies if the target recognizes you; Disguise, *disguise self*, or similar techniques can allow you to start anew with a fresh slate.

### Skill Styles

As noted above, different persuasion styles and natural defenses oppose one another. If your style trumps your target's defense, you gain a bonus; if his defense trumps your style, you take a penalty. These oppositions are summarized on the following table.

	TRUMPS	Is TRUMPED By
Charming	Wary	Contrary
Eloquent	Contrary	Wary
Forthright	Penetrating	Lawyerly
Glib	Pure-Hearted	Obtuse
Intimidating	Obtuse	Pure-hearted
Obfuscatory	Lawyerly	Penetrating
Contrary	Charming	Eloquent
Lawyerly	Forthright	Obfuscatory
Obtuse	Glib	Intimidating
Penetrating	Obfuscatory	Forthright
Pure-Hearted	Intimidating	Glib
Wary	Eloquent	Charming

### *When Persuasion is Used Against You*

Player characters have no special defense against persuasion. You may be convinced to perform actions that you know are not in your best interests. Look upon this as a roleplaying challenge and embrace it. You do not have to support the action wholeheartedly (especially if you have been intimidated into performing it), but you must carry it out.



### ✿ Optional Experience Awards: Taglines ✿

The characters of Jack Vance's tales use a distinctive style of speech that adds a unique flavor to the setting. The tagline system encourages the use of Vancian dialogue and presents players with a roleplaying challenge. At the start of the game, the GM gives each player a number of taglines. These are short phrases with a Vancian flavor, often drawn from the stories. A few sample taglines:

*"We are noted for our reluctance to talk to strangers in outlandish costumes."*

*"Since kindness has no effect, I have decided to try a new tactic, for which I use the term 'fear'."*

*"Let us drink wine and consider the matter dispassionately."*

If you use the tagline in an appropriate manner over the course of the adventure, you receive an XP award. You do not receive any award for simply saying the line; it must actually be relevant to your current situation. If you manage to heighten the drama of the scene or to draw laughter from the game moderator or your companions you receive a greater reward. In any case, you can only receive one award per tagline per adventure. The rules for *The Dying Earth* RPG present a far more extensive discussion of the use of taglines, along with a veritable host of examples. Appropriate rewards for taglines are:



## ✿ Dying Earth d20 ✿

Use of Line	XP Award
Irrelevant, no dramatic value	None
Relevant to the situation	50 x level
Especially appropriate to the situation	100 x level
Appropriate and exceptionally dramatic or amusing.	150 x level

The number of taglines distributed at the start of an adventure is up to the game moderator. Standard practice is for the GM to assign two taglines to each character, and for each player to select a third from a list.

In *The Dying Earth* RPG, the use of taglines is the only method of character improvement. This approach can also be used in d20. In this case, characters receive no experience for combat related encounters; instead, they only obtain XP as a result of story awards and use of taglines. If this option is used, the rewards for taglines should be doubled.



### ✿ Gambling ✿

*‘Cugel brought out his cards. “Will you play Skax or Rampolio?”*

*“Neither,” said Bunderwal. “We must settle on a test where the outcome is not fore-ordained.”’*

*Cugel’s Saga, ‘The Inn of Blue Lamps’*

While the customs of the Dying Earth are strange and unpredictable, in all but the most puritanical of regions a weary traveler can find a game (if not an honest one) to pass the time and drain away his terces and groats. Such contests are often a boon to those who are short of funds... and what adventurer ever truly has enough terces in his pouch? A run of good luck may bring newfound wealth and unexpected excitement, as courtesans, crafty merchants, brigands, and many more are quick to note the exchange of wealth. Perhaps a strange amulet or map will be won as part of the stakes of a game. Or a string of misfortunes may force a vagabond to perform a dangerous service to cover his debts! The possibilities are extensive.

For the sake of simplicity, we shall divide games into four categories.

#### *Challenges of pure chance*

Who can say which way a sphigale will run? In such a situation, all participants should roll 1d20; the high roller wins the contest. In the case of a tie, the GM may require a reroll or declare the contest void.

#### *Games of skill and strategy*

Most games – even ones that are seemingly left to chance – have at least some element of skill. The skillful player may memorize the plays that have been made or analyze the odds of various combinations, and otherwise make wiser choices than the pure bumpkin. In such a game, each player should make an Intelligence or Wisdom check, using whichever ability is higher. The best result wins the match, with ties being rerolled until there is a clear victor.

#### *Bluffing games*

In some cases, a good Skax face is more important than knowledge of the game. In such a contest, participants make opposed Bluff checks to determine the victor.

#### *Displays of Dexterity*

Challenges involving darts, knives, and similar implements may rely on the coordination of the hand and the eye as opposed to any element of intellect or charm; such contests should be resolved using opposed Dexterity rolls.

Many games bring multiple elements together. For example, Skax is a game of skill and strategy, but as we have already noted a master at the art of deception may still defeat a skilled counter of cards. The game moderator

## ✿ Dying Earth d20 ✿

must decide what categories a particular game includes; participants may then select any of the relevant abilities to use for their check. Thus, a player of Skax may use Intelligence, Wisdom, or Bluff in his quest for victory.

### *The use of skills and the deplorable practice of chicanery*

It is a sad fact that all too few people in the Dying Earth wish to leave games of chance to chance. In most games involving physical components, a participant may substitute a Sleight of Hand check for the usual check associated with the game. However, in this case, all other participants may make an opposing Spot check to notice this despicable behavior. Regardless of how many people use Sleight of Hand, each participant only makes a single Spot check; this single value is applied against the skill checks of all of the cheaters.

An alternative approach is the skill of Profession (gambler). Representing a thorough knowledge of all aspects of play, this can be substituted for any other skill check associated with gambling (including a Spot check to recognize dishonest play). While the use of this skill is not precisely cheating, many participants will become angry and suspicious if they repeatedly lose; it should be noted that even in the long-forgotten culture of 21st century Earth the practice of counting cards was often considered to be conduct unbefitting a gentleman.

A personalized playing set – marked cards, loaded dice, or similar accoutrements – will provide the owner with a bonus of +1 to +3 to any sort of check related to gambling. However, anyone with ranks in Profession (gambler) can recognize such a set by making a skill check (DC 15).

In a case where any sort of skill check is used in association with gambling, you may use a point from your skill pool to reroll your check. This follows the standard practices for use of the Skill Pool; notably, you roll an unmodified 1-2 or any of your competitors roll an unmodified 18-20, you must use 2 points in order to reroll the check.



## *Men and Beasts*

The primary opponents in a Dying Earth adventure are often human – competitors who wish to trick you or people whose unusual customs work to your detriment. But the world is filled with dangerous beasts and halfmen. Pelgrane Press may soon provide a more detailed analysis of the creatures of the Dying Earth, but in a pinch you can use the statistics of the following standard d20 creatures to fill in for the beasts of the 21st aeon.

<u>Dying Earth Creature</u>	<u>d20 Equivalent</u>
Deodand	Troll (Average Int 10)
Erb	Howler
Gaun	Bugbear
Ghoul	Ogre (DE ghouls are not undead!)
Gid	Krensharr
Hoon	Bulette
Leucomorph	Tyrannosaur (quadrupedal), gelatinous cube (sphere-shaped, speed 40 ft), or doppelganger
Pelgrane	Wyvern (no poison stinger)
Twk-Man	Grig

This brings our discussion of the final days of Earth to a close. If we may say three more words, let us emphasize that the most important elements of play are not monsters and treasure, but rather exuberant roleplaying and the willingness to embrace whatever chance may send your way. Throw out your preconceptions of fantasy adventure, and go out in search of a good meal, a fine hat, and a purseful of terces! And have another flagon of the Violet Mendolence, for the sun may go out at any moment!

## 🌿 Dying Earth d20 🌿

The following text is the property of Wizards of the Coast, Inc. and is Copyright 2000 Wizards of the Coast, Inc (“Wizards”). All Rights Reserved.

1. Definitions: (a) “Contributors” means the copyright and/or trademark owners who have contributed Open Game Content; (b) “Derivative Material” means copyrighted material including derivative works and translations (including into other computer languages), potation, modification, correction, addition, extension, upgrade, improvement, compilation, abridgment or other form in which an existing work may be recast, transformed or adapted; (c) “Distribute” means to reproduce, license, rent, lease, sell, broadcast, publicly display, transmit or otherwise distribute; (d) “Open Game Content” means the game mechanic and includes the methods, procedures, processes and routines to the extent such content does not embody the Product Identity and is an enhancement over the prior art and any additional content clearly identified as Open Game Content by the Contributor, and means any work covered by this License, including translations and derivative works under copyright law, but specifically excludes Product Identity. (e) “Product Identity” means product and product line names, logos and identifying marks including trade dress; artifacts; creatures; characters; stories, storylines, plots, thematic elements, dialogue, incidents, language, artwork, symbols, designs, depictions, likenesses, formats, poses, concepts, themes and graphic, photographic and other visual or audio representations; names and descriptions of characters, spells, enchantments, personalities, teams, personas, likenesses and special abilities; places, locations, environments, creatures, equipment, magical or supernatural abilities or effects, logos, symbols, or graphic designs; and any other trademark or registered trademark clearly identified as Product identity by the owner of the Product Identity, and which specifically excludes the Open Game Content; (f) “Trademark” means the logos, names, mark, sign, motto, designs that are used by a Contributor to identify itself or its products or the associated products contributed to the Open Game License by the Contributor (g) “Use”, “Used” or “Using” means to use, Distribute, copy, edit, format, modify, translate and otherwise create Derivative Material of Open Game Content. (h) “You” or “Your” means the licensee in terms of this agreement.

2. The License: This License applies to any Open Game Content that contains a notice indicating that the Open Game Content may only be Used under and in terms of this License. You must affix such a notice to any Open Game Content that you Use. No terms may be added to or subtracted from this License except as described by the License itself. No other terms or conditions may be applied to any Open Game Content distributed using this License.

3. Offer and Acceptance: By Using the Open Game Content You indicate Your acceptance of the terms of this License.

4. Grant and Consideration: In consideration for agreeing to use this License, the Contributors grant You a perpetual, worldwide, royalty-free, non-exclusive license with the exact terms of this License to Use, the Open Game Content.

5. Representation of Authority to Contribute: If You are contributing original material as Open Game Content, You represent that Your Contributions are Your original creation and/or You have sufficient rights to grant the rights conveyed by this License.

6. Notice of License Copyright: You must update the COPYRIGHT NOTICE portion of this License to include the exact text of the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any Open Game Content You are copying, modifying or distributing, and You must add the title, the copyright date, and the copyright holder’s name to the COPYRIGHT NOTICE of any original Open Game Content you Distribute.

7. Use of Product Identity: You agree not to Use any Product Identity, including as an indication as to compatibility, except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of each element of that Product Identity. You agree not to indicate compatibility or co-adaptability with any Trademark or Registered Trademark in conjunction with a work containing Open Game Content except as expressly licensed in another, independent Agreement with the owner of such Trademark or Registered Trademark. The use of any Product Identity in Open Game Content does not constitute a challenge to the ownership of that Product Identity. The owner of any Product Identity used in Open Game Content shall retain all rights, title and interest in and to that Product Identity.

8. Identification: If you distribute Open Game Content You must clearly indicate which portions of the work that you are distributing are Open Game Content. OPEN GAME LICENSE Version 1.0a

9. Updating the License: Wizards or its designated Agents may publish updated versions of this License. You may use any authorized version of this License to copy, modify and distribute any Open Game Content originally distributed under any version of this License.

10. Copy of this License: You MUST include a copy of this License with every copy of the Open Game Content You Distribute.

11. Use of Contributor Credits: You may not market or advertise the Open Game Content using the name of any Contributor unless You have written permission from the Contributor to do so.

12. Inability to Comply: If it is impossible for You to comply with any of the terms of this License with respect to some or all of the Open Game Content due to statute, judicial order, or governmental regulation then You may not Use any Open Game Material so affected.

13. Termination: This License will terminate automatically if You fail to comply with all terms herein and fail to cure such breach within 30 days of becoming aware of the breach. All sublicenses shall survive the termination of this License.

14. Reformation: If any provision of this License is held to be unenforceable, such provision shall be reformed only to the extent necessary to make it enforceable.

15. COPYRIGHT NOTICE Open Game License v 1.0a Copyright 2000, Wizards of the Coast, Inc. Open Gaming Content (c)2003 Pelgrane Press Ltd: The section on Tweaks is designated Open Gaming Content. All other content is Product Identity.

System Reference Document Copyright 2000-2003, Wizards of the Coast, Inc.; Authors Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, Rich Baker, Andy Collins, David Noonan, Rich Redman, Bruce R. Cordell, based on original material by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson.

# ❧ The Laughing Magician *Part III* ❧

*Steve Dempsey*

In which we complete the adventure begun in *The Excellent Prismatic Spray Volume 3*

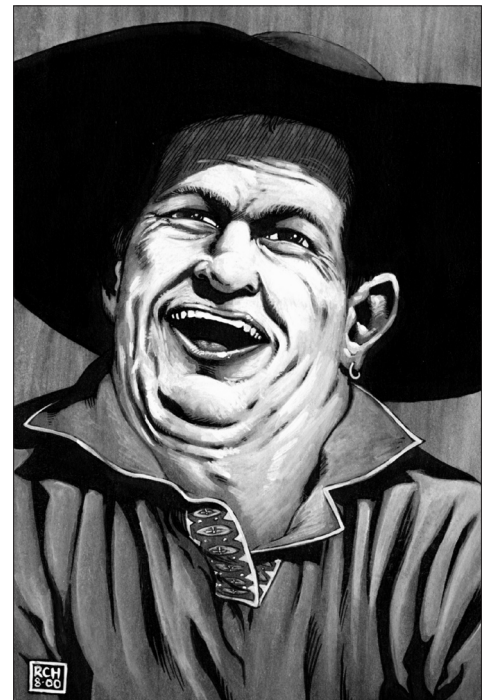
## *The Overworld*

After the party has successfully completed all their commissions for him, Tostveld will invite them to a fine dinner, at his expense, at The Doughty One, said by many to be the best hotel in Azenomei. He will also pay in advance for their rooms and breakfasts. Unless they force the issue, he will not explain this act of generosity until they have each drunk a bottle of one of the finer Tanvilkats. He is delighted with the work they have performed, so much so that he has commended them to an associate of his, a grandee who keeps a fine manse nearby. This gentleman is keen to make their acquaintance and will send a carriage for them tomorrow in the midmorning. His name? It is Iucounu, also known as the Laughing Magician.

No doubt, general consternation will follow.<sup>1</sup> Tostveld will raise one hand, calling for fresh glasses and a magnum of Golden Porphiron. If they accept the wizard's invitation, he will toast their health with it. If not, he will drink alone, taking care to chew on pastilles of his own recipe to stave off the inevitable hangover. Should they need persuading he will observe that, whatever reputation Iucounu might have among the loose-tongued scoundrels of the region, he has never acted against anyone who did not injure him first. So, provided they deal fairly with him, they will be in no danger. If they remain unconvinced, he will take his yellow wine and go. The rooms and breakfasts are still theirs and still paid for, a token of his esteem.

Alas, whatever the outcome, the party will find itself at Pergolo. The meal was drugged with a subtle, slow-acting compound poison. Each dish held an individually innocuous ingredient of an extremely debilitating narcotic. The fresh wine glasses held the antidote — motes of dry powder — in their bowls.

Tostveld had asked the waitress to put it in the Porphiron, only to be told that she would rather die than taint good wine.<sup>2</sup>



*Iucounu*

## ❧ Pergolo ❧

Iucounu's manse sits high on the hills overlooking the Xzan Valley just outside Azenomei. It is approached by a winding path of brown tiles and is an attractive yet rambling complex with steep gables, balconies, skywalks and cupolas surmounted by twisting turrets of green glass. Inside its architecture owes much to the eccentric style of its owner: there are sweeping staircases, grand hallways, and treacherous traps. Iucounu lives here with

1. If it does not, your players are either uninformed or forgetful. In either case what awaits them is sure to generate the aforementioned consternation.
2. Observe the lack of specifics about the narcotic and the omission of potency, intervals, and effects. If your players are not yet used to having their lives routed according to GM whimsy, now is as good a time as any for them to learn. If you choose to allow them to resist the drug, it devolves upon you to determine the numbers and to hook them into the adventure by some other means.

## ❧ The Laughing Magician *Part III* ❧

no companions save his magical constructs and some discrete servants. Whether the party arrives in style or merely regains consciousness on the tiles of the hall, the Laughing Magician will welcome them warmly. He will serve them extravagant refreshments such as thrice-pressed gilv, tiny red onion soufflés, and pityberry relish.

When he judges the mood to be agreeable, Lucounu will explain his desires. He understands they are talented and robust, and available for hire at reasonable rates. He has recently discovered a portal into the Overworld and would like them to go through it for him. He has fashioned a talisman that will protect them. All each of them need do is rub it, choose one of their number to wear it, and pass through to the other side. He will pay each of them well—five hundred terces and a magical trinket of some kind: he has little dolls that walk around by themselves, knives that glow in the dark, cups which turn beer into whisky or wine into brandy, clothes that never stain and boots that never chafe. He will negotiate staunchly, but will eventually settle at eight hundred terces, or one thousand but no curio. He has every intention of paying them when they return. Capable subcontractors are often useful, so it makes no sense to cheat them.

If the party is too suspicious for this transparent approach to work, he will shrug and let them leave. He still has every intention of obliging them into the Overworld, but will have to rely on the GM's guile to get them there. In these circumstances, he would not feel obliged to reward them on their return.

Whatever method you find for handing the talisman to the characters, he will introduce them to the Lallephar and they will find themselves inside the demon-plant.<sup>3</sup>



### *Cast Adrift in the Lallephar*

#### **The Lallephar**

This creature is more plant than animal and is not really sentient. It does have drives, although these are incomprehensible to humans. It is one of a rare breed of demon that actually has a simultaneous presence in the Overworld and the mundane plane. This leads to a very strange internal topography.

The creature is covered by a rough, chitinous shell that protects its nexus from the harshness of mundanity. In appearance it resembles nothing more than a large celery plant, one that is a pale violet at its root, and gradually darkening to deep purple at the tips of its fronds. Its color is not constant and varies to hues of orange and green that in some way indicate mood. It is about nine inches tall and one inch in circumference but weighs an astonishing 924 pounds.

Although it does not exactly possess organs, as (to quote Lucounu) “in the Overworld, such parts are considered unnecessary and even somewhat vulgar,” its partly mundane being has caused the formation of nodes in the nexus. It is at these nodes, junctions, or singularities, where all normally held rules of space and time break down. For example, one node might resemble a 9th Aeon fishing village, another a particularly fine Tatterblass, so little do we understand of the Overworld and its denizens.

#### *Care and Understanding*

Lucounu takes great care of the Lallephar. He has it housed under a glass dome that is embedded on the terrace of his manse and which overlooks the valley below. This ensures that any sunlight reaching it is magnified. From above, through the terrace canopy, the curved



3. It may be the players find convincing reasons for not undertaking this mission, if so, do not railroad them but let them pass their time in other ways. Yet in episodes to come let them come upon those who did undertake the mission, wealthy and successful, with a plentitude of terces and the trappings of ostentatious good living boldly displayed. At the same time keep details of the Lallephar conveniently to hand lest they “venture there by accident.” “Waste not, want not.” Such is the motto of the diligent GM.



glass magnifies the Lallephar, which appears to be enormous. The terrace can be reached through a sturdy door at the end of the hall of mirrors that runs along one side of the main building of the manse. Servants can be seen bringing supplies to the door; these are taken inside by some magical artisan and used to maintain the wondrous plant. It does not seem to draw nourishment in any usual fashion, although it does benefit in some way from the sunshine. The servants are ordered to stand around the base of the demon-plant and to think “happy thoughts.” Iucounu has them supplied with a steady supply of Azenomei stout, what dream-powder he can find, and as much gingleweed as the local economy can support.

### ✿ The Overworld ✿

The structure of the Overworld is nothing like that of our reality. It does not obey the usual rules of space and time with which we have become so intimately familiar; it is hard to say whether any rules or laws exist in it at all. Some parts seem to be fairly stable and subject to laws that allow only a certain range of behavior, such as gravity, reflection and solidity. Other regions are subject to the whim of greater beings or demons that, while they can exert their will almost totally in their domain, generally allow for some quantity of harmony and stability. There are also regions where nothing is fixed and all is confusion and change. One may be able to impose some structure through exertion of one’s will but failing that a quick death is what can be hoped for most.

The nexus in the Lallephar is a region of the Overworld that is subject to few laws. The Lallephar seems not to possess ambition, drive, or will in the usual sense, which is perhaps why it has been defined as a plant. As such, the laws that reign here are simple:

The geometry of the nexus, so far as humans can understand it, is as follows. The nexus seems to consist of a number of locations joined together by corridors of flux. It is possible to travel along these corridors; in fact one is impelled by the nexial flux to do so. At their narrowest, these corridors are fifteen feet across and the flux blasts through them at high speed. At their widest they seem like plains, hundreds of yards across, where the flux is almost like still water. The walls are made of a strange, plastic material that gives slightly to the touch. It is usually impermeable but is partly covered in glowing lichen. The flux varies in depth from about nine feet at the fastest shallow parts to over four hundred feet in the slower regions. The appearance of the flux is a bundle of colored, streaming lines that surround and touch any invaders, pushing, dragging and impelling them toward the next location. Each location is marked by a blemish in the nexial flux and is entered by plunging through the blemish. There is generally no way to distinguish between these locational blemishes as they vary with the “moods” of the Lallephar. The nexial flux around a specific node may have some constant characteristics, such as density, the mix of colors, sounds, or some impression that it may vicariously leave on a traveler’s psyche.

One such blemish exists in our world and is co-locational with the chamber that Iucounu has prepared. Once the blemishes have opened and closed they need to rest for a period before they are ready to open again. This period is determined by the number of creatures that passed through the blemish and the “local conditions,” or, in game terms, by the GM.

As the flux is not of the Earth, magic is unreliable and prone to malfunction. When any spell is cast, if the mage rolls an even number, then the spell malfunctions in some way. It will have an effect that mirrors the intended one but it will not be beneficial, although not necessarily harmful either. The characters can ensure that their



#### *The Laws in the Lallephar*

That which is, must be, and cannot not be until such time that it isn’t.

What happened before affects that which comes after, this being the manner of defining “before” and “after.”

All space is simply connected and relative to the occupant.

The Lallephar extends to its fullest extent.<sup>4</sup>



4. Any among our readership who now sit, blinking in confusion, are directed to examine the collected works of Emmon Duram Zarit, most notably his *Alternate Realities: Their Rules, Modes, and Persuasions*, from which these laws were presumably distilled. Possibly, errors in translation were made, but the editorial staff takes no responsibility for any, should they exist. Any readers still objecting over matters of discrepancy or inexactitude are referred to their respective GMs for clarification of the situation, as he or she may declare any inconvenient or overly confusing rules to be null by fiat

## ✿ The Laughing Magician *Part III* ✿

raft (which is detailed below) remains on the other side of the blemish by attaching it to a rope and bringing the tether with them through to the other side where it should be secured.

### ✿ Events in the Overworld ✿

What follows is a list of several possible and a few key events. The key events must take place in the order given but can be interspersed with as many encounters as the GM sees fit, as there is no way of telling the blemishes apart. If the characters refuse to explore the blemishes then they will be condemned to circulate in the flux forever.

#### ***Key Event 1: Swept Away***

This is the initial encounter, wherein the party, unprepared, is swept away into the nexus. Iucounu has prepared a method to magically draw the characters into the nexus. He has a device that affords him a certain measure of control over the Lallephar. He will cause the blemish to distend when the characters approach. It will engulf and absorb them, pulling them through into the nexus. On the other side they will find a small raft on which it is possible to surf the nexus. The raft is fixed to the blemish but will become detached as it distends, causing the characters to be propelled headlong into the flux. Once they manage to control the craft they will notice it appears to be the concave, thoracic shell of some large beetle. It is sturdy and hard on the outside and lined with a spongy material on the inside, affording some measure of comfort. It has a tiller formed from one of the insect's limbs but there is no visible means of propulsion. The adventurers will discover that the vessel needs none. The tiller can be used to steady the craft and direct it from one side of the flux to the other. In the center of the vessel is a small chest. This contains instructions from Iucounu to any of his staff<sup>5</sup> who might be drawn in to the nexus and some supplies. The note reads as follows:

Dear ex-member of staff,

If you are reading this, then it is my sad duty to relay that you are no longer in my employ. All indications are that you failed to follow my clear and simple instructions as to the care of my pet and, as a result of your negligence, have been digested. To show that I bear no grudges, this chest contains a week's wages in lieu of severance and enough food to last a parsimonious eater three days. If ever you contrive to escape the nexus be so good as to avoid my manse in the future.

Yours faithfully,

Iucounu of Pergolo



#### ***Miscellaneous Event: Yesterday***

The characters encounter twists in time, wherein they meet their future, embittered selves—still trapped and cursed—who blame them for such dire straits.

#### ***From a distance***

As a foreshadowing of this event, have the characters spot another raft off in the distance, but contrive for them to either drift too far away, or for an interruption by another event. When they are finally fed up with the chase, or there is a lull in proceedings, the other raft hoves into view.

#### ***The smell of ages***

As the characters approach the distant raft, the first thing they notice is the smell. It is the musty, almost tangible, reek of clothing that has not been washed for years and has accumulated such grime and sweat that it has stiffened into leather armor. On drawing closer, they will notice a raft very similar to their own, except for some improvements. The sides have been built up with what seems to be bones and a canopy has been placed over the boat, made from some form of bark. There is a net trailing in the flux behind the craft and occasionally

5. If the party enters willingly Iucounu might remember to tell them about this note and point out it does not refer to them. On the other hand he might not.

### ✿ The Laughing Magician *Part III* ✿

it is lifted into the boat, emptied out, and then re-released. The sound of snoring echoes from inside the boat, drowning out that of some fevered mumbling.

As they draw alongside they will notice some people on the craft, equal to one less than their current number. They are all tied to loops in the boat's floor by strong lanyards. These are their future selves, should they never get out of the *Lallephar*. The one that is missing is actually swimming alongside in the flux and staying hidden from the characters.

These future echoes are crotchety and wary of strangers. They want nothing more than to live the remainder of their lives in peace. They do not meet new people very often and might be persuaded to chat if the characters can say something to interest them. Their identities should not be immediately obvious to the characters. A lifetime in the nexus has changed them and they have forgotten much of whatever they knew. Treat all their statistics as being three less than they were originally except for *Living Rough* (Flux) 15, and *Pedantry* (Nexial Locations) 12. *Persuade* and *Rebuff*, which have become refined over the years, have increased by five. These disgruntled persons have long since resigned themselves to never finding the way home and, after experiencing all the blemishes they can find, have resolved themselves to a life spent in the flux.

If the characters get along with them, the one in hiding will emerge but stay in the flux. His predicament will be explained by the fact that he ate too many *coruscations* and was transformed into a flux creature. He is naked and very wrinkled; he also has some kind of gills in front of his ears. He has a rope around his waist that is attached to the bottom of the boat.

In time, the characters may learn the following from their future selves:

- ✿ *Pathicules* can be collected and used. Careful study will reveal their contents.
- ✿ The creature known as *Diskuth* is probably harmless, although of a frightening demeanor.
- ✿ The lands behind the blemishes are not to be trusted; they may appear familiar but are usually strange in cruel and unpredictable ways.
- ✿ *Coruscations*, whilst edible, visit unwanted, and usually bad, changes upon you.
- ✿ Do not trust the *Xaribanthe*.
- ✿ Stick to what you know.
- ✿ Give us your food and we will reveal a secret that might take person in your position many lifetimes to uncover (which is, "Never give your food away; you don't know where your next meal is coming from around here!").



#### ***Miscellaneous event: The Profits of Doom***

A land where everyone has to know the value of everything before any transaction can take place. A play on market economy.

##### *At first sight*

The characters arrive in a strange little pocket universe. It consists of a large cave, about a mile across, through which web-like threads have been hung. There is no particular sense of up or down, although gravity does pull toward what one's feet are standing on. In the center of the cave is a large ball of rock to which many of the webs are anchored. It is from this rock that the characters emerge. There are a number of large holes in the cave through which sunlight shines on a random basis, causing parts of the cave to be bathed in bright sunshine or hidden in dim shadows. It is possible to get to the outside of the cave through one of these holes. From there it is obvious that it is not a cave but a small asteroid floating in the void. There are strange fields covering the exterior surface with many different plants, a selection of beans, tubers and berries, in orderly rows.

The *katapanks* live here. They resemble many-legged lemurs with black and yellow fur. Their legs extend from all over their bodies and allow them to move in any direction. They also have large fluffy tails, generally used to hold themselves to the webs they spin. The *katapanks* have two sexes but no families: infants are laid as

## ❧ The Laughing Magician Part III ❧

eggs, generally in a clutch of two or three, on the inside surface of the asteroid. When they hatch, they must fend for themselves. They have sensitive paws, which enable them to develop one of their means of communication: through vibrations in the webs. Otherwise they can talk but only use this for trivialities. They are a peaceful species and owe this to the unique rules that govern their society.

The katapanks believe that in order for their society to be run in a free and open manner, all transactions must take place with all parties aware of the value of all the products involved. To this end, they use vibrations in the webs to keep everyone informed of the latest prices at which deals have been made. As the webs do not extend outside they insist that all transactions take place inside the cavern. Each individual is answerable only to himself and the marketplace. Each owns a small plot of land on which to grow food and other supplies for trade. They do not court; sex is based upon a financial transaction depending on the individual's need to breed and their previous successes in the endeavor. The first trade each katapank makes is to sell his or her own eggshell, which is prized as a delicacy. This can then be used to purchase land and supplies. They practice neither speculation nor any kind of investment, insurance or deliberate saving.

### *Trespass*

The arrival of the characters in such an insular society will be distressing. The visitors will most likely cripple the katapanks' communications by interfering with the webs. The katapanks will initially be very frightened and hide from the intruders. They will become braver as time passes, assuming they are not harmed. Once the characters manage to talk to them the katapanks will attempt to trade.

### *The price of a return ticket*

The characters' main concern is to get home. The katapanks are aware of the blemish into the Lallephar and are capable of opening it using special waves set up in the web. Occasionally this is done to expel some nasty piece of space junk or even on the whim of a particularly capricious member of their society. It takes many of them working in concert to achieve the correct harmonics and, because this interrupts the usual business of farming and trading, it costs a lot. To return home, the characters are going to have to earn this money through trading. They will probably have some interesting items with them that can aid the katapanks in their day-to-day life, but selling them will not raise enough cash. To do this they will have to attempt something alien to the katapanks. That is, they must speculate, send bogus messages, or create artificial market conditions that overvalue some commodity of which they own many units.

### *What is for sale?*

The main markets of the katapanks are:

- ❧ Sexual partners (when they are ready to breed, they bid for good prospective mates)
- ❧ Eggshells (the shells of the young are a prized delicacy)

### ❧ KATAPANK ❧

*"Your decision to communicate via inefficient means places undue strain and ambiguity upon the proceedings. Studying the market conditions I calculate that six ells of that stout cord, given over in good faith, will allow us to continue on even footing."*

Katapanks, though innocent and pure-hearted at first glance, are in reality shrewd traders. Each one is focused on market conditions as a fundamental principle of life and any given member of the community can quote the going rate for all the most popular commodities. To a degree, the katapanks are truly innocent in that it never occurs to them to distrust signals broadcast over their webs if the subject regards a trade. The idea that someone would incorrectly report the outcome of a deal is beyond imagination.

In battle against strangers, they use their environment's unique gravity to advantage, striking from strange angles and seemingly impossible vantages. Katapanks have no reason to fight amongst themselves, but the machinations of interloping strangers may have unforeseen effects on a virgin society...

**Ratings:** Persuade (Forthright) 10, Rebuff (Wary) 15, Attack (Caution) 4, Defense (Sure-footedness) 8, Health 2, Appraisal 20, Athletics 5, Craftsmanship 6, Perception (web vibrations) 7, Wherewithal 2.

**Resistances:** Arrogance: Ω, Gourmandism 2, Indolence 4, Pettifoggery 1, Rakishness Ω.

## ✿ The Laughing Magician *Part III* ✿

- ✿ Ozzel tubers (these contain a sticky substance that can be chewed up and then spun into a web. The husks can be dried in the sun and made into vessels; the seeds are also traded)
- ✿ Piberries (these are the staple diet of the katapanks; they resemble dates and taste of milk and honey)
- ✿ Bebeans (the seeds of these are very juicy and the husks can be made into utensils to work the earth or needles to spin the webs)



### **Miscellaneous event: Lowest of the Low**

The characters encounter a special blemish that is surrounded with coruscations. They are extracting miscellaneous debris from the nexus and expelling it in short order through the hole.

#### *From a distance*

The characters see a large concentration of sparkles up ahead and as they approach it can be seen that coruscations have formed into long ropes that dip into the flux. They wriggle and jerk around in the stream as the coruscation at the end grabs some debris after which it makes its way up the rope to deposit the object through a blemish. It then attaches itself to the top of the chain, which is affixed to the wall of the nexus. If a larger object needs to be grasped, several ropes latch on to it at once.

#### *Out with the old.*

As the characters come near, they will find that the ropes attempt to latch onto everything on the boat and eject it through the blemish. This blemish just leads straight back into the flux; the coruscations have chosen it because it is easy to keep open. The boat is too large and will block the hole. This will enrage the coruscations, which will fly around in a great storm, ripping up and carrying off everything that is not tied to the vessel. They will strip the characters down to their skins and leave them naked, lashed to their boat and stuck in the hole. A short time later the coruscations will arrive at the other side off the blemish and stuff everything that they took back through the hole to where the characters are. Unless they grab it quickly, the flux will wash their property away.



### **Key Event 2: Free at Last**

After what seems like an eternity the characters find the blemish that leads back to Earth. They are returned to the solarium where Iucounu awaits. He is so eager to reclaim the talisman and remake Sadlark that he will pay the characters the fee he first offered, if he kidnapped them, and 1,000 terces (plus a curio) if they went willingly. He will wave impatiently at a pile of knickknacks on a side table, rather than hand anything out. Alert characters will notice that, once he takes back the talisman, he clearly forgets they are still there. Should they wish to remain and extract any kind of revenge he will invoke some powerful agent of far dispatch and have them deposited in a far-off corner of the Earth. There they can sit on a sandy beach and contemplate their fate.

## ✿ Notes and Discretionary Events ✿

### **Fauna and Flora**

Although the Lallephar can in some ways be thought of as a creature, other equally valid descriptions depict it as a country, an assembly of disjointed locations, or that which joins together reminiscences that share common characteristics. In these further senses, it is only natural that it contain a multitude of other creatures, plants, demons and likewise. What follows is a small exposé of some of these.

#### *Coruscations*

These creatures inhabit the nexial flux and derive their nourishment from it. Although perhaps parasitic, they may be a symbiote or even the prime constituent of the Lallephar. In any case they are carried about by the flux to congregate on any impurities and endeavor to remove them by forcing them through the blemishes



### ✿ The Laughing Magician *Part III* ✿

into various locations. This they do in several ways. Firstly they surround the offending debris and attempt to persuade it to leave under its own cogency.<sup>6</sup> If this fails, they will attach themselves to the debris and attempt to fling it through a blemish. They are able to navigate the flux without hindrance and as such are very able flingers. They are generally seen as motes of light that leave glittery trails behind as they float, fly or swim. Sometimes they may register on the other senses and manifest as smells or sounds. In any case they seem to fizz and sparkle. There is one substance they find unpleasant and will do their utmost to avoid. This is the GM's choice but suggestions are:

*Shoe polish:* When smeared on them it dampens their ardor and eventually they just fizzle out into a fist-sized ball of black sticky material. They may be safely carried in this state although they are best kept in a jar of oil to avoid staining. They can be revived by careful melting of the shoe polish in a bain-marie. If the heat is applied too vigorously they explode.

*Iron filings:* this combines with the sparkles and causes them to explode in a puff of bright yellow light with a faint whiff of pepper.

*Almond essence:* this odor causes them to recoil and keep their distance. In an effort to combat anything with this smell they are likely to search the flux for something unpleasant, such as an erb or deodand, and fling it at the fetid interloper.

#### *Pathicules*

In many parts of the Overworld communication is the direct transmission of thought. Denizens simply wish it to occur and so it does. This does not happen in the Lallephar, but there are several Overworld creatures adrift in the nexial flux and they attempt to use this method to interact, both with each other and with the "outside." Unfortunately these morsels of thought have not found a welcoming target and float around, waiting to be cleaned up by the coruscations. If they encounter the mind of some living creature they can attempt to deliver their message or impose their instruction. They appear as small shiny globes with a patina that is appropriate to their content: deep purple for an expression of disgust or lemon yellow for a command to open one's central ventricle. GMs can inflict bad dreams or mad urges on their players' characters should they intercept or interfere with these items.

#### *Diskuth*

This creature is a padouk and an unwilling inhabitant of Lallephar. One of a lesser order of demons, he is incapable of life outside the Overworld. He is aware that his current circumstances have diminished his intellect, so travels around collecting sensory information out of a vague feeling that there is something he should remember. To humans he appears ferocious; great mandibles extend from his bulbous head, twelve arms extend from his muscular neck, and nine legs support his distended torso. He moves through the nexus by piercing the flux with his great claws and hauling himself forward, generally in a direction contrary to the flow. Diskuth is totally oblivious to mundane items and will not notice the characters unless they are carrying something Overworldly. He glares terrifyingly around at his environment, but does not generally threaten. If he sees an Overworld item that the characters are carrying he will stop to consider it. His main tactile sensory apparatus is his mandibles, so it may appear to the unknowing that he is attempting to swallow them. His voice is a bellowing roar that can flatten small shrubs.<sup>7</sup> Should the characters manage to communicate they will find him rather strange; he cannot convey his true sentiments, beyond feeling lost and incomplete. If one of the characters guesses that the creature needs to return home, and helps him to do so, he will not be grateful. The Law of Equivalence has no standing in the Overworld.

Since Diskuth is, for all intents and purposes, an invincible god-like creature, providing statistics for him would be both presumptuous and redundant. If characters choose to attack him, probably they will be swept aside as he passes. Missiles simply bounce off his hide and go unnoticed.<sup>8</sup>

6. Whether the coruscations speak or use some more visceral method to communicate their desires is left to the GM. Given their facility with what amounts to physical violence we rather suspect the latter.

7. Should such be found in the flux.

8. If any of your characters are capable of dispatching such a creature, you are probably playing the wrong game.

### ✿ The Laughing Magician Part III ✿

#### *Flotsam and Jetsam*

In general, the flux is pure, but the occasional thing does fall into it through one of the blemishes. Then it floats around until it is either captured by a coruscation and expelled, or is eaten by some other piece of debris that is larger and hungrier. Anytime that the game appears to be flagging GMs can increase the interest through a judiciously strange or dangerous piece of debris.

*Body parts:* the Museum of Cryozoology in Symnathis disappeared during the Sampathissic Wars, in which the Lallephar was involved on the side of Phampoun.<sup>9</sup> Ever since, parts of the exhibits have been found in the flux.

These were created through a process of exhydration through the application of Angwantibo's Chilling Preservation. The body parts can be reassembled and, if enough water is administered, the creature will regain its life. It does not matter that the parts came from different creatures, only that when fitted together there are no missing appendages.

*An abandoned ship:* a large beetle floats toward the raft. It has a shiny, flat green carapace the shape of a shield, bulging eyes, spiny mandibles, and long antennae. It waves its mandibles menacingly as it bears down on their craft. Only careful maneuvering will avert a damaging collision. The unknown creature is in fact an empty vessel of similar manufacture to the characters' own raft. They can board it by crawling in through the mouth or through a hidden hatch in the middle of its back. It has two chambers. These have been magnificently outfitted with highly polished brass and ebony. One is in the head and contains navigation controls that consist of two long needles that descend from a brass sphere in the ceiling. The pilot touches these to his earlobes and directs the craft by twitching either ear. This deck has two windows that have multifaceted panes and are difficult to see through, thus reducing the pilot's sailing skills through the imposition of a 2-point levy. There is a crystal dome attached to an ebony pedestal in the middle of the floor that indicates the craft's speed and heading by means of two small beetles, identical to the craft itself, that scurry around inside the dome. There are two exits, one through the floor and out through the mouth, the other a passageway that leads to the main chamber which fills the whole rear of the bug. It is partitioned into several areas with weighted curtains hanging from rails. There is one large central area with a low ebony table in the middle surrounded by richly embroidered, crimson red cushions. There are several buttons on the table that cause recesses in the surface to open and various eating utensils to appear. One of the buttons also activates a kind of fishing device that fetches and cooks things to eat from the flux. These do not normally appear appetizing but are always edible, although perhaps over-spiced. One final button causes a ladder to fall from the ceiling, giving access to the hatch in the center of the (ex-)creature's back. It is secured on the inside by a velvet lanyard. The six other areas radiate from the center and are bedrooms, outfitted in a similar manner to the central area. There are no personal belongings on the ship and the air of tidiness seems to indicate that it has been recently vacated. The boat will not pass though blemishes, but will wait patiently for the characters to return, should they leave through one.

*A drunken god:* Borkwarl is the 19th Aeon god of the Pergolots. These people live in a ruined castle by the side of an inland sea. The Pergolots live by diving for magical artifacts in a place they called No My. They believe that Borkwarl is responsible for keeping the sea at its high level and if he doesn't drink continuously they will lose their livelihood. For this reason they have built a brewery dedicated to him and a constant stream of strong beer is run across the altar where it is magically transformed into pure water. As a result of this stream of alcohol being poured into him, Borkwarl is extremely drunk. He is incapable of much coherent speech and never sobers up as the beer arrives by mystical means directly into his stomach. He does have some power, and it is the almost constant stream of water pouring from his overloaded liver that magically maintains the sea level for the Pergolots.<sup>10</sup>

*A smaller version of the Lallephar:* the Lallephar is multidimensional and actually contains itself. It doesn't matter which one the explorers go into as they all lead to the same place eventually and each "copy" is indestructible.

9. Whether or not the Lallephar knew of its involvement or was simply an unwitting pawn is a matter of much scholarly debate. Violent and bloody feuds have erupted between savants over this issue, as with so many others.

10. How Borkwarl came to be associated with the Lallephar is anybody's guess.

### ❖ The Laughing Magician Part III ❖

*A character's mother:* the mother of one of the characters was thought to be dead but in fact she somehow wound up inside the Lallephar. She is very pleased to see her offspring and will take him back under her wing, seeking to protect and nurture him at every opportunity.

*Toothyworms:* these ferocious predators inhabit a purely aquatic world beyond one of the blemishes. Occasionally they are summoned through by the coruscations to do their dirty work. They are carnivorous and like nothing better than to strip the meat off any warm-blooded animal they encounter. They are gray in color and adults are about four feet in length with a girth of about eight inches; they have one eye at either end of their bodies. These surmount a mouth full of sharp teeth. They grow by adding length between the two mouths and reproduce by splitting in the middle where two new mouths grow. In the period before it splits to become two creatures, the adult enters a period of torpor and its hide thickens and stiffens prior to shedding. At this point they may be captured quite easily and their center may be sluiced out with hot lemon juice thus making a nourishing and piquant soup. The outside can be used as guttering, for carrying rolled-up documents or, as in the Lallo Marsh, split into smaller pieces and treated with vinegar to form a supple armor providing protection against many blood-sucking creatures.

*Sabbossile:* this lichen grows on the inside of the Lallephar and feeds off the kaleidoscopic light emanating from the flux. This causes the lichen to glow with the color it has mostly absorbed for its food. Sabbossile can be removed by scrapping it from the walls and used as a light source. The glow fades after about four days away from a bright source of light, but can be replenished by keeping it in a pot of glow-worms or near a fire. In the later case it also radiates the heat it has absorbed, so care must be taken in its handling. If allowed to dim completely, the lichen turns to a fine gray powder that can be compressed and used as a cosmetic. The ladies of Pompodouros favor an ashen complexion and use the powder as foundation. A six-ounce pot of sabbossile powder contains enough of the dried lichen for six applications to the face of an average person, fewer if other parts of the body require coloration. It generally sells for about fifty terces. Though sabbossile is plentiful in the flux, that is by no means its only habitat: the lichen also grows in art galleries, in the cracks of stained glass windows, and shops and work-rooms of alchemists (which are famous for putting out all manner of colored lights at all hours of the day or night).<sup>11</sup>

*Gods and demons:* the great powers of the Overworld are beyond human comprehension. They have an agenda not only strange but also difficult to marry to human desires and needs. What may seem natural to a being from this place would seem not only incongruous but also pointless to mere people. That said; sandestins, who are lesser beings from this domain, exert almost endless power over the mundane world. Therefore, the greater demons and gods must wield a power that is so mighty as to be beyond comprehension.



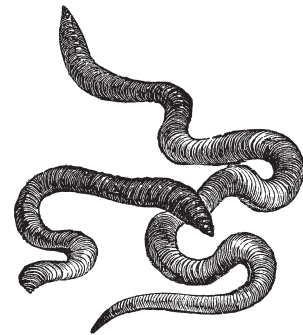
#### ❖ TOOTHYWORM ❖

*\*gnash\*grind\*rip\*slurp\**

As toothyworms lack all cognitive ability, it is not recommended that one attempt negotiations. They are quick and aggressive but tire easily after their initial frenzy. Though the statistics given are for an individual, toothyworms are almost never encountered in groups of less than eight, as force of numbers is their primary advantage. A smart GM might simply treat the pack of toothyworms as a single entity for the purposes of combat, giving the whole mass an Attack and Defense rating equal to 2~ (or 3~ if his group of characters is particularly brawny).

**Ratings:** Attack (Speed) 6, Defense (Dodge) 6, Health 1.

**Resistances:** None



11. A GM wishing to use the Lallephar without connecting his series to the Laughing Magician might contrive for someone to convince the characters that only in the Lallephar can they find this rare and much-sought-after component of cosmetics. Said person might exaggerate the value of the commodity and tell the characters the only way to open a blemish from the inside is to push large quantities of the dried lichen through first.

❧ The Laughing Magician *Part III* ❧

*Taglines*

*Opportunity for profit is easily seized by one with the proper motivation.*

*Regrettably my calendar is full and I will be unable to join the festivities.*

*The fallout from this situation is best avoided by a swift exit. If only we could find one.*

*Murder is not beyond the scope of my skills, but is certainly beneath my dignity.*

*The proposal, as stated, seems to hinge on certain assumptions we cannot be said to share.*

*This locale is alike in no way to its brochure.*

*Fear not. I once sailed the Melantine Gulf on nothing more than a plank and half an oar.*

*For myself, I have always considered Iucounu to be the apotheosis of rectitude.*

*Your foolish obstinacy in this matter is infuriating. Desist and cease, or face a penalty.*

*You must learn to itch where you can scratch.*



WAKDUN THE PANDERER

PURVEYOR of EROTIC APPURTENANCES & GENTLEMEN'S REQUISITES

Should a person of delicacy and distinction be forced to fulfil their own emunctory functions? Should the well-bred, or merely wealthy, be forced to absterge their own callipygous bombosity?

We are pleased to offer *carefully selected body slaves* trained to perform the most intimate toiletry duties. Be the envy of your acquaintances; display your wealth to its best advantage. Do not hesitate even to blow your own nose: a new life of ease awaits the affluent leisured.





# ✿ Darkening Your Game ✿

*Mark Ricketts*

‘Make your horror personal, memorable, discreet and familiar.’

*Mark Ricketts works for Hogshead Publishing Ltd, producers of the ‘Crime Scene’ and ‘Fright Night’ supplements for the d20 system. This is considered a mark of distinction in some circles.*

In the Dying Earth there is no glamour unless you like tawdry display. There are no damsels in distress; there are no heroes, only you. You, and the very wit and skill you bought with you. Survival is a difficult path in an unmerciful world and as a GM or player; you should make it so.

This particular article is for those who wish to create an atmosphere of fear in their game. Thus it considers the other players, structure and style.

Creating sufficient menace and horror amongst seasoned role-players is never easy. Many have been on too many adventures to let your manipulation intimidate them. In fact, they may pride themselves in being undaunted by any challenge you can throw at them and this is fine. Here are few pointers on how to take a party through a darkening myriad of tension, fear, adventure and horror. They are methods of connecting with your players: a way that enhances their enjoyment and allows them to enter the spirit of your game.



## *Horror: a joint effort*

Only the truly fortunate will be able to surround themselves with the perfect gamers.<sup>1</sup> That is, people who love exactly the same things you do in precisely the same way. These players will dedicate themselves with abandon to your plots and scheming, loving every nuance and trick that you play. For these people you can skip this section but for most of us, read on.

Setting the scene for your game is crucial and more difficult than you might think. For a sinister game it is a lot more than simply playing by candlelight. Think about the players that you have. Horror is a personal thing<sup>2</sup> and people will have their own approach to it. Will they enjoy activities such as those you have planned?

Those we appreciate when running a game are the players who throw themselves into our story, letting both character and player collide. They love the drama and want to feel the fear. Then there are those who crave the analysis, who play it like a big conundrum, a riddle waiting to be solved: they play the odds with little emotion. These people are harder to reach. Most players mix both of these approaches. This allows you to appeal to them, to play in a style



1. Most are grateful for those whose personal habits allow them to be seen abroad during the hours of daylight without causing embarrassment to their families.
2. Wakdun the Panderer will be glad to oblige his customers in this matter.



## ❧ Darkening Your Game ❧

that would be most suited to your story. You need to make that appeal and your players need to understand that fear is a joint effort. So do they wish to play?

And here lies the conundrum, to scare your players; to manipulate their emotions, you have to have a modicum of power over them. Will they let you do that? How do you find out if this is the case? Well, you could ask them. Yet remember, those who play the Dying Earth Role Playing Game are used to having their characters brow beaten into changing their plans at the behest of obstreperous GM controlled Characters or even other players; by the very nature of the Persuade/Rebuff system. You are, almost by definition, starting with players of the highest caliber.

On the other hand it is worth talking to them about the sort of game you wish to run. Tell them how you might expect them to react whilst playing. Ask them how they feel about this. Then get their agreement to participate. This is crucial. Why? Because of the next step, which is about ground rules.

These basically lay down the boundaries that you all feel you should stay within to ensure that the proper atmosphere is created. Do not worry about the game swinging from moments of hilarity to moments of stark terror; the contrast can, in itself, shock. Beware of banality.



### *Power players and other defilers*

There is one particular creature that you will have to look out for. Occasionally (if not all too frequently), you will find a player who does not respond well to the challenge of having to interact positively with other people. This should not be confused with a character that might suffer this affliction; rather the problem lies with the player. This is different.

Should you find one of these, you should return them to where you found them and leave them well alone. To identify this beast you need to look out for the following features:

- ❧ A willingness to do nothing in a game unless it pertains to rolling a dice based on a statistic.
- ❧ A tendency to assume full knowledge even when handicapped with complete ignorance.
- ❧ A proclivity to challenge other players in a fashion they consider discourteous.
- ❧ A disproportionate conviction towards the concept of winning
- ❧ An aversion to the concept of character vulnerability (somewhat essential here)

If you have a player who is competitive, they will find it difficult to cope with your concept of horror, particularly, if they are competitive with you. The game would be better off without this person. They simply would prefer another game. It is your call.



### *Fearful passage and your story's structure*

Your story of terror can be in four stages:

1. The Introduction
2. Aftermath Horror
3. Clue-based Horror
4. The Climax

You are urged not to design your venture in this order. It is best written with the Climax first, and then the Introduction followed by the Aftermath and finally Clue-based Horror. The reason for this will be explained below.

#### **The Climax**

It is a sorry fact that the least frightening part of your story might be the end. If the players are successful they may develop an understanding of your plot and feel confident that they can prevail. They will have discovered your clues, taken your journey and made their choices. If the evil that distracted them were hideous, they would have that expectation. If it can be defeated in a particular way – they may be adequately prepared.

Sometimes this is unavoidable: players simply make conclusions (correct or otherwise) about your plot. Once they feel they know enough, their confidence rises. You have two responses to this. You can reward either them for a job well done and allow their endeavors to work. Or, you could add a sting to your tail and reduce this confidence. You can give the characters an unexpected surprise: The door locks behind them sealing their fate; an old comrade it seems is the miscreant; the secret room was below their feet all along and so on.

Surprises make for great story telling, but be warned: too many surprises and you achieve the inverse effect of becoming predictable. Your players can also grow weary if they feel there is no certainty in your ever-convulsing game.

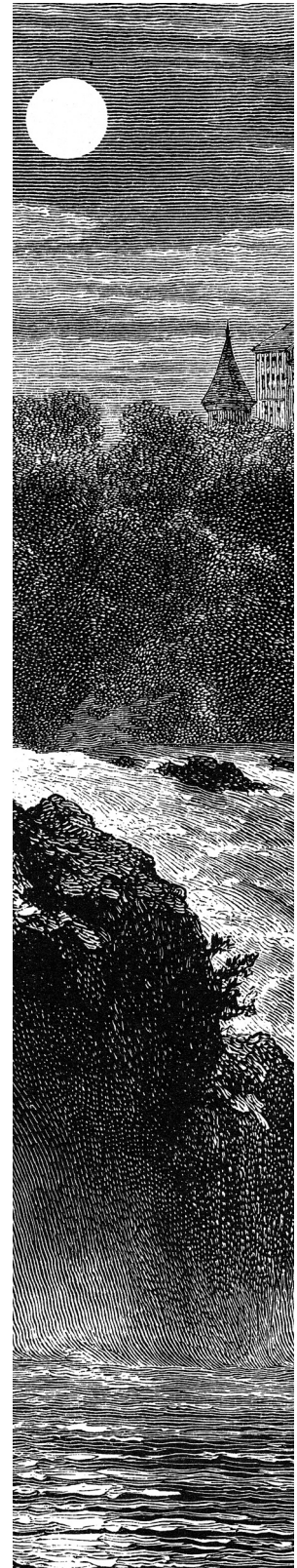
You also need to decide whether the climax to your game is the conclusion. If it is not, then you must think of another reward for their participation in the final act. Perhaps this could be romantic or financial. If you create no desire for the characters to play your final scene then your climax will overshadow your finale and you will be perceived as finishing on an anti-climax.

As a result many stories conveniently share conclusion and climax: they are one and the same. This means your scariest moments should happen then. This ordinarily involves an unveiling of the horror that has been tormenting the players to date, or maybe defeating it. It is mightily important that you consider this in detail. A clear understanding of this scene will allow you to structure the story up until that point. Write your climax first. It will help you structure the rest of the story.

Uncertainty creates more tension than certainty.<sup>3</sup> You may wish to consider at which juncture you will unravel your evil. Once it is exposed the mystique is lost. It is best to hold on to this. It is the most significant card you can play. Lay it as late as possible.

Once you are clear about your end game you can decide where to place your horror. It depends on the longevity of your story as to how many terrifying moments should

3. Any careful reading of the works of Jack Vance show that he was a master at not explaining unnecessarily. If you wish for something to happen that seems right at the time, let it happen, but do not seek to explain it. Your players will often produce a far more convincing explanation than the one you dreamed up.



## ✿ Darkening Your Game ✿

occur. It is worth noting that the more often you place fear, the more it is devalued. The occasional horrific moment is better than copious ones. The spaces in between should feel to the players as if a horrific moment can happen at any given time.

### The Opening

The opening terror should be significant. It introduces the game concept to the characters. Your torment can be generic or have a message implied. Your generic horror appeals to the iconoclastic: a face at the window, a ghost on the stairs and so on. It suggests that you are positioning archetypal horror within your plot and here it goes.

Much better is imagery that implies meaning. Take, for example, Solacius and her unfortunate demise...

**K**aris had journeyed long that day and was eager to get to the small cottage quickly. He was only an hour from this abode and the falling of night drove him onward. The letter from Solacius, his childhood sweetheart, urging his attendance, had been like no other. Solacius asked for favors from no man and the desperate tone was utterly different to her normal repartee.

Why had he been sought from such a distance both in space and time? Why had she yearned for his company on such an apparently bleak occasion? Whatever troubled her, he thought, should easily bested with his dagger. It was his most trusted ally.

As he reached the house in the clearing, he could see the candles flickering in its heart. He ran the last few paces, eager to comply with her wish to see him. The door although heavy, was open. His heart fluttered like a teenager. “Why?” he mused.

Whatever was to confront him later could never have been more horrific than now. The first thing Karis encountered were her feet, gently swaying in the cool evening air. He had only to witness this, to be aware of what had sadly transpired that day. Beyond all measure of reason, his childhood sweetheart swung from a noose of her own making above his head. Her face was waxen and terrified. She stared blankly down upon him, her eyes cursing him for not acting sooner.

He cut her down with his dagger; in her hand was a note. “I am so sorry Karis,” it read, “but in such a black lake of fear I could not wait”. What manner of beast could drive an indefatigable woman to such distraction?

The best openings generate questions rather than answers. In this case a sturdy woman, ordinarily without fear inexplicably wishes death, moments before the arrival of her salvation. Why?

You may choose an opening which is subtler than this, such as all the clocks stop or a prophetic message is discovered wishing ill omen. Whatever fits your story.

These openings are best when symbolic and sudden. This way, they have impact upon the psyche of your players. All the animals disappearing or a spate of mysterious deaths are fine but these really belong to the aftermath stage outlined below. If you need these things to happen first, start with a symbolic and sudden introduction to them. For instance, your players discover their first body unexpectedly.

It is, of course, reasonable for a maiden to run into town shouting, “There has been a terrible murder! Come and see!” but you should realize the unveiling of the body may not be very intimidating to the players simply because they expect it. You may try to describe a gratuitously gory scene that follows to elevate your surprise, but you are merely playing catch up. It is probably best to have the surprise “opener” happen soon after, so the horror may begin.

### Aftermath Horror

Now that you have read the paragraphs above we can assume that you have now designed your horrific endgame and introduction. After the introduction you can place “aftermath horror” in your story. In this

## ✿ Darkening Your Game ✿

instance, horror is introduced but the players are still unsure as to what the instigator may be. This is a neat trick when designing your story. For the first few scenes, characters can deal with the results of your protagonists' actions with little clue as to what this protagonist may be.

Aftermath horror gives little away regarding causality but creates the scene. This may be symbolic, such as strange things start happening, implying a force beyond the laws of nature. It might be psychological, people start to panic whilst characters struggle to grasp the enormity of what is unfolding. It may archetypal, a cat makes somebody jump or there is a stranger in town and so on. The purpose of this is to engender fear in a way that is easily connected with. It colors the story with a faint glimmer of suspense. Because you have not overplayed your hand, your players will add their own interpretation to your story, building their own suspense in a way they intimately connect with it.

Aftermath horror sets the tone of the game and supplies clues as to the gravitas of what lies ahead. It gives no indication of the cause of the horror, as it is horror generated by horror. This strengthens your story's flavor but gives little away.

### Clue-based Horror

The final element in between the end game and aftermath are the clue-based terrors. These start to indicate what fearful apparition the party may be facing. Gradually you are in a position to let your characters build evidence against their foe.

Be careful, you do not wish to give too much away. The balance you have to strike is between frustration and tension. You do not wish to keep characters perpetually in the dark. The players would merely become frustrated, as they feel they have little leverage and influence over your plot. Similarly, if you reveal the root cause of their woes too quickly, they become complacent and confident. They will feel that they can better their foe the moment it is known. If their foe is too powerful, they may see little need to progress the story against all odds.<sup>4</sup>

In the introduction and aftermath horror, characters tend to be more passive towards the storyline. These events happen to them and despite them, little will change. During the investigative process characters play a far more active role in events. They are the key driver for shaping the story rather than yourself. Their endeavors will now take them towards the climax; you control the speed it takes to get there.

Wise GMs retain flexibility at this point. They will design their clues in such a way that they can be moved to a different juncture in the story if necessary. This is good and recommended. If the other three stages are relatively preordained, use this stage to balance your game in both pace and horror by moving clues around, so they appear at the right time. Also remember that those who play the DERPG are difficult to railroad. They expect to be side tracked, spend a week in debauchery, and even put in a side trip to humiliate a rival.<sup>5</sup>

### ✿ Big Horror ✿

Consider this, your party of weary campaigners travel down a valley to collide headlong with a ferocious beast. As the GM, you feel this is a true monster unbridled in its fury and meticulous in its strategy. It is like a pet to you, you built this beast ready to collide, fight and potentially subdue your party. They should fear it and the dice start to roll.

There are two outcomes to this scenario.<sup>6</sup> The first is that after what (we hope) is a good evenly matched duel, the group is victorious, hitting harder or outwitting your beast. The second is that the monster wins. Those unfortunate enough not to have run away are torn apart and consumed by it. Game over. Neither outcome is particularly favorable. If the players lose their characters they are likely to be frustrated. They will ask the obvious question: why you are throwing a monster at them that is too big?<sup>7</sup>

4. Remember that the foe can be immensely powerful, a major demon, but in this case victory might merely be surviving.

5. These are the people who faced with a Princess in need of rescuing would doubtless end up swinging over an abyss carrying her ready cash while she scrambled along behind them.

6. The third outcome, where they convince it they are not the prey it was looking for, we shall set aside for the moment.

7. Merely glare icily and comment that the monster was not too big, merely the Characters were too small.



## ✿ Darkening Your Game ✿

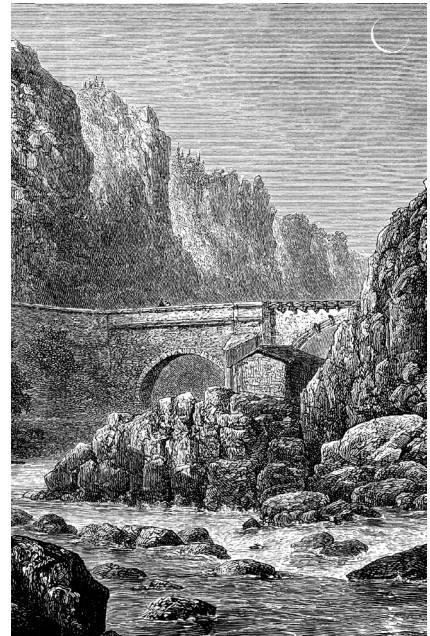
The more likely outcome is that they defeat the beast but not without some risk to their own characters. Perhaps they took a beating in their endeavors.

Whatever transpires, you are unlikely to have instilled any level of fear into your comrades. If anything, you may have created a mild anxiety in the players regarding the preservation of their characters. Some will doubtless feign fear as they are playing a coward shirking any combat responsibility and backing off. This is not enough. The element to remember here is that fear does not come in large packages. It is not big, monstrous or self-evident. What happened here was that the horror was not actually horrific.

Imagine this as an alternative. The self-same party is journeying through a valley. It is narrow and steep sided. Suddenly, the wind, which had been rushing towards them, stops for no apparent reason. Closer inspection reveals that only the bottom thirty feet of the wind has stopped, implying something has blocked that much space ahead. You may point out the stillness of the valley or the sudden lack of vegetation. Heavy breathing and strange slurping noises may follow. Their monstrous assailant may manifest itself, but the party must question the situation first, making the combative dice rolling a risky option.

This is better; you have built up your assailant, manifesting tension and creating doubt, the latter by the invisibility of their opponent. Yet, even so, this is not a scene that will leave any lasting impression on your players by way of fear. Its modest conclusion is still characterized by diplomacy or combat, hardly the tenets of any horror story. The problem lies in the monster; it is too big, as is the valley.

When designing the game try not to mix fear with intimidation. You are not sharing the experience with your players if you simply bully them with hard-hitting creatures. Neither does grandiose imagery make for creepy horror.



*What unreasonable horror might be lurking in this innocent landscape?*

## ✿ Scary Monsters ✿

Most players are more scared of a real spider in real life than a giant spider in a game. This is because fear is about conditioning; we are trained to fear certain things, like spiders. We fear the dark, loneliness, heights and all manner of things. If you wish to convey fear you have to get close to these fears. A big monster will not do it. Very few people fear big things. Make your horror personal, memorable, discreet and familiar.

Take Malikith and the Vasereal:

As Malikith lay in his bed the Vasereal began its attack. Malikith was, of course unaware that the Vasereal had tracked him to his abode. In fact, as he lay in his bed, he felt warm and comforted. For although he had seen many sights that day, of the young maiden with no face, and the contorted man with no features, now he was at home and *de facto* safe.

Malikith was a man of little imagination. In his warm bed, his contemplation was of those few precious coins he had assembled that day and rightly so.

His was not worried when he heard a creaking door. Neither did the sounds coming from the closet trouble him other than to note he ought to buy more rat poison. Only when he realized that he could not move his arms because the venom of the Vasereal was slowly beginning to work on him did he feel the first stirrings of terror...



## ✿ Darkening Your Game ✿

The best way of depicting your monster or villain is by way of evidence. Chose your definition of monstrosity well. The last section poured scorn on the idea of monstrosity simply meaning huge. Neither does your monster have to be a prolific killer to create a sinister atmosphere. It does not have to have killed a thousand people to be a threat to a character, it may only need to have murdered one (although two or more is preferable to suggest a pattern). The key element to your monstrosity is how it kills that is so dreadful.

For poor Malikith, in the example above, the fear is in the tracking and entrapment. There are also some sentences that hint at something more: “the young maiden with no face or the contorted man with no features.” Characters will infer the Vasereal to be both cunning and determined. We have yet to ascertain its features up close. With luck, by detailing the ghastly details in this way, you create a more frightening foe. Certainly more elegant than simply announcing it has claimed the lives of many people.

Scatter clues around your story that illustrate which elements of your monster they should fear. Use evidence to underline this. Build your villains up slowly and allow the players’ imaginations to make connections. The building of this picture is crucial and should consider the story’s pace as a whole.



### *Terror and Style*

Your juxtaposition of a horrific moment is critical. In the same way you think about where you put your clues, you should consider carefully how you position your horrific moments.

Not every scene should be awful and testing— that will make you predictable. Leave your players guessing as to what horror they may face as they turn each corner. If they have little way of predicting your story, the suspense will be elevated.

The more imaginative you are, the more impact this will have. If there is a disturbing scene, you could subsequently have an almost comic scene, followed by a scene involving scared people and drama. Much depends on how you describe these scenes and what brings them to life.

To do this: personalizing your story helps, villains who refer to characters by name or seem to know something about their history works. The realization that “we know where you live” will mean that not only have they no sanctuary, but also their most treasured possessions are under threat. Things familiar to the players rather than the characters, will also add to your story. “Something has just crawled across your foot” is very easy to visualize and therefore players know exactly how to respond.

Placing your characters in a position where they feel threatened because they are alone or unpopular works well because these are emotions easy to comprehend, filter and understand. The more that happens to the character that its player can relate to, the better the player will connect with it.

Horror archetypes that have appeared in films and popular culture such as ghosts or beheaded corpses also work if used in moderation. Whilst this may feel unimaginative on your part, players will be able to connect with fear that has been presented many times before to them. Sometimes the cliché is familiar and players like that.

### *This “joint effort” re-enforced*

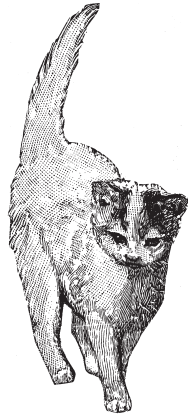
At the start of this analysis of the horror genre the concept of shared ownership was discussed. It would not bode well to subsequently railroad your party into corners and convictions they would not otherwise have taken. The best method is to let players have some leverage over what happens in the game. Listen to their discussions among themselves; it may be that what they suspect is more interesting than what you had already planned. Many times I have changed the course of an adventure in midstream because the players suspected something more horrific than anything I could have dreamed up on my own. This has the advantage that the threat is something ‘acceptable’ to your players, and they also get a sense of achievement in the way they are ‘solving’ the puzzles you laid before them.

## ❧ Darkening Your Game ❧

### *In summary...*

1. Pick the right players. Talk to them and listen to them when they talk to each other.
2. Structure your horror; end, beginning, and middle, but remember you cannot railroad, you must entice and be flexible.
3. Write good horror – make it personal. You know your players: build the story round the things that they think of as important and frightening.

Finally, remember to offer your players as many choices as possible, so that they enter into the spirit of the game. A measure of your success will be the reward of them experiencing tension, fear and horror as they follow your adventure into the unknown.



THE END

Due to a series of UNUSUAL and entirely COINCIDENTAL misfortunes, the Production Team of *The Excellent Prismatic Spray* finds itself in need of skilled, hardworking (but alas momentarily indigent) individuals to assist in the preparation of this most popular periodical.

The following positions may prove of interest:

Editor (Botanical), Editor (Cartographic), Editor (Diabolical), Editor (Ethnographic),  
Editor (Histological), Editor (Historical), Editor (Judicial), Editor (Thaumaturgical),  
Editor (Translations), Editor (Zoological)

*as well as suitably qualified sub-editors in all the above disciplines*

Also goose pluckers, quill cutters, pen wipers, apothecaries skilled in the preparation of inks and tinctures, foundry workers, papermakers, engravers and typesetters.

We would welcome applications from suitably qualified and experienced advertising executives as well as burly individuals of nondescript appearance skilled in the wielding of cudgels and brass knuckles.

Those interested in applying for any post should present themselves, together with references and proof of education (if any) at our offices within the next fortnight.

# ✿ Cults and Cabals of the Dying Earth ✿

*Lizard*

“This post does not include the offices of valet, scullion, porter, dogs-body and general roustabout.”

As the sun wanes ever more obviously, and odd pustules play across its surface on a daily basis, it becomes evident even to the most blindly optimistic that the end is growing closer and that on any day one might awake to find nothing but eternal darkness and cold.<sup>1</sup> Most, confronted with this grim inevitability, live life for the moment. They forsake all belief in any gods other than those of pleasure and hedonism. Some others, a significantly smaller number, take the opposite tack, and dedicate their lives to ascetism so extreme it is a form of hedonism in itself. Still others choose, against all logic, neither pleasure nor purity, but purpose. Odd groups form with strange ideologies,<sup>2</sup> each seeking to either preserve itself against the coming darkness or to prevent the fall of night. (Or, in the case of the Followers of the Red Path, to create darkness in themselves greater than that which comes.) These cults operate mostly in secret, and deal with strange and dark things, things even magicians would rather not face.

## ✿ The Preservationists ✿

This cabal is found wherever magicians and arch-magicians are, though they tend to deal with the former more than with the latter. The core of their belief is that the darkening of the sun is temporary; that, in effect, it will go dark for some time,<sup>3</sup> and then flare again, brighter and more powerful than ever. Yet as an article of faith, the cult assumes that the darkness will endure long enough that most unbelievers will die.<sup>4</sup> The world will be reborn without the wisdom and knowledge of past ages. Thus, the Preservationists work to make sure that the new world will contain within it some who can teach the learning of the past. This they do by capturing magicians, removing their brains, and preserving them (the brains) in jugs of green clay filled with an amber liquid. The Preservationists maintain small cells throughout the world. Usually, not more than three to five of them will be found in any one area. They work very secretly, so that none know of their plans. They fear retaliation from magicians, who do not understand the importance of their work, and also exploitation of the preserved minds of the past by those who will not care for them. Generally speaking, they act slowly; they may stalk a magician for several months before making their move. Often, they insinuate themselves into his service, so that they may know when his head is empty of spells, and it is at that moment that they strike. The magician is bound and gagged, and brought to the cell's preparation room, usually a basement area of a building long forgotten in a nearby wilderness. There, the head is removed quickly, with an axe of polished iron, and then the skull is carefully peeled back, revealing the brain, which is deposited into a waiting jug. The entire process must take less than five minutes, or the brain is worthless and ruined. Once juggled, a member of the cell will take responsibility for returning the brain to the central vault, while the rest of the cell will seek out a new recruit if there are still magicians about, or move on if there are not.<sup>5</sup>

1. True pessimists tend to use the phrase “nothing but taxes, eternal darkness and cold.”

2. It seems to be part of the human condition that some seem to crave strange ideologies, the stranger, the better. Throw in a bizarre diet and obscure erotic practices and the ideology is ready for mass consumption.

3. A comparatively brief time, less than a generation.

4. This is a common belief shared by most cults. Unbelievers must perish; otherwise what is the point of being good and staying home on Saturday nights?

5. There are rumors that the organization was in fact founded by an arch magician who felt that it would be a useful method of both culling the competition, and providing their brains for his reference. It is not known whether these rumors are true and the editorial staff specifically state that they are in no way connected with either the rumors or those scurrilous individuals spreading them..

**Preservationist Scenario:<sup>6</sup> *Telvir of Ascolais***

Telvir of Ascolais is a magician of considerable power, who is known to the PCs, and not purely as a foe. If the PCs are of a generous disposition, Telvir could be a friend or former mentor; if they are more self-serving, Telvir could be someone who owes them something of value or who is performing a service for them.<sup>7</sup> For this adventure to be most successful, it is best if Telvir is introduced earlier in the campaign, so that he does not appear out of the purple. Whatever the basic relationship, it happens that Telvir is late for an appointment. Indeed, he does not show up at all! An examination of his manse (which should involve defeating some guardians, perhaps vampire grass, a grue bound by magic to service, or a small squad of loyal automaton soldiers) shows no signs of breaching the outer doors, but Telvir's bedchambers are a shambles, with signs of struggle, the walls scoured by the Excellent Prismatic Spray, and Telvir's headless body (possibly decomposed, depending on how long it took the PCs to reach the manse) lying on the floor. The body of another man, dressed in the robes of a household servant, but wearing an amulet of odd design, is also present; he seems to have been slain by the prismatic spray as well. If the characters search the room, an Illustrious Success on a Perception check will show a thin stream of blood leading from the corpse to a point near the wall, where a depression in the rich lavender weave of the rug indicates a heavy object was placed. The amulet is unknown to the PCs, but there are sages and archivists who might be able to tell them about it, in exchange for some terces or the performing of a small service. Such a person will tell the PCs that there is a cult that decapitates magicians, but he does not know why. It's clear the cult is now operating in Ascolais. The PCs will rightfully fear the cult may strike at them next, and the GM should encourage this sentiment with a total lack of subtlety. There are several possibilities:

- a) The PCs investigate their own staff. At least one harbors a Preservationist.
- b) The PCs may choose to lay a trap, creating the rumor of a powerful magician traveling alone and unguarded. Such a magician may publicly exhaust himself in a magical dual with another magician, creating an especially tempting target. (The duel might be fought with real magic, or with simple cantraps and fireworks)
- c) If the PCs show unusual reticence to take any action, one of them may simply be attacked out of hand. After flushing out the cult, the PCs should be able to make relatively short work of it, though tracking down all members of the cell may be difficult. There should be some sense of resolution (a cult headquarters found and destroyed) along with some foreboding (it will be obvious that the Ascolais cell was but one of many across the world.)



✿ **The Fleshcrafters** ✿

As the world ages, life grows ever more wondrous and strange; even as the sun flickers and sputters, the aged Earth still clings to life, and creatures of all sorts stride in the twilight of the world. Perhaps the desperate experimentation of the world is a message, a sign. Perhaps something can be formed which will survive the dying of the sun. To this end, the Fleshcrafters work. Their goal is simple; to try to breed something which

6. All suggested scenarios are for Turjan level characters, or Cugel level characters who dabble heavily in magic.

7. It is best that Telvir does not merely owe them money, lest they merely loot his manse to recover the debt before moving on to adventures more appealing to their petty vanity.

*A representative member  
of the*

✿ PRESERVATIONIST CULT ✿

*“Another glass of wine,  
Master?”*

**Ratings:** Persuade (Glib) 8, Rebuff (Wary) 8, Attack (Cunning) 8, Defend (Dodge) 9, Health 3, Magic (Studious) 8, Athletics 2, Appraisal (Magical ability) 5, Physician 3, Stewardship 4. Wherewithal 6.

**Resistances:** Indolence 6.



## ✿ Cults and Cabals of the Dying Earth ✿

can endure endless cold and endless darkness. Unfortunately, they are also quite mad.<sup>8</sup> The Fleshcrafters work according to ancient, and woefully incorrect, theories of life, blending bits and pieces of Phandaal's valuable insights with the meanderings of lunatics and fools. They do not bother with vats, since they feel that the seeds of the 'new life' rest within species that already exist. To this end, they breed madly,<sup>9</sup> crossing all manner of species together. Most often, though, they deal not with willing subjects, but with unwilling. They are especially keen on blending 'Subworld' and 'Overworld' creatures with those of Earth, and many a bloodstained altar to an unnamable entity from beyond space and time was originally built by the Fleshcrafters.

The Fleshcrafters are an odd lot.<sup>10</sup> They tend to be familial cult, and most of them bear signs of highly mixed ancestry. The mouthparts of grue may decorate one face, while another has erb-like eyes, while yet a third wears the slick, oily, skin of the man-eels of the Sea of Slow Tides. A few, either new recruits who have yet to partake in certain of the cults more intimate rites, or odd 'sports' that come from old cult families but with few outer marks, pass for human easily, and these are the most common agents of the Fleshcrafters. The Fleshcrafters are forever on the lookout for new or unusual forms of life, or for humans who meet seemingly random criteria. If they encounter one of the former, they will usually send their agents out to procure it, by simple purchase is possible, by theft if not. If they encounter the latter, they will usually initiate a complex scheme designed to bring the individual, alive, into their control so that they may initiate an experimental crossbreed of some sort. Generally, they are most likely to go after females, hoping to find the mother of the new race, but the kidnapping of males to serve as breeding stock is also not unknown. Fleshcrafters often infiltrate cities slowly, building an infrastructure over time. Of late, their work has become more blatant and desperate, as generations of breeding have yet to produce their new race, and time is clearly running out. Thus, while once wholly unknown to any outside the cult, whispered rumors of their existence have begun to percolate. Most dismiss them as mere phantasms, thus they still have considerable freedom to act without drawing suspicion to themselves.

### Fleshcrafter Scenario: *The Gala of Maltinz*

This scenario requires that one of the PCs either be a vat-creature, or have a close friend or retainer who is one. The PCs are hired, asked, or cajoled by a powerful member of the local community to capture, alive and intact, a black-striped erb that has been lurking in the nearby swamp. (The exact creature and location are not relevant; it may as well be a grue in the desert, or a pelgrane in a ruined temple outside the city.) The battle to capture the creature should be of middling difficulty; the PCs should succeed with no serious consequences, but not so easily as to suspect that the capture of the beast is not truly the focus of the scenario! When the beast is brought to the patron, who will be named Lord Maltinz of Four Rings, he is quite pleased, and also quite taken with whichever member of the party is vat-born. (If it is a retainer, make sure there is a good reason to bring him/her along). He will fawn over this individual noticeably, to such an extent that other PCs might become jealous or otherwise annoyed.<sup>11</sup> A day later, a messenger in the livery of Maltinz will arrive at the dwelling place of the vat-born, bearing an invitation to a gala event to be located in Maltinz' manse some miles from town. It is best, for purposes of the plot that the other PCs find cause to tag along, either overtly or covertly. The manse is located in a desolate stretch of land spotted by ruins; it is not quite crumbling, but is ripe for imaginative renovation. One tower sags ominously; another is buttressed crudely with constructs which were clearly added long after the initial construction. A number of conveyances

*A representative member  
of the*

✿ FLESHCRAFTER CULT ✿

*"Yours is an interesting cranial  
type, have you by any chance  
got a sister?"*

**Ratings:** Persuade (Obfuscatory) 6, Rebuff (Contrary) 7, Attack (Strength) 11, Defend (Parry) 12, Health 8, Magic (Daring) 6, Athletics 6, Driving 3, Physician 3, Seduction 1. Wherewithal 5.

**Resistances:** Gourmandism 4.

8. This may not always be a problem. I well remember we had a type setter who fell giggling into this category and indeed was prone to... But I digress, there is alas no time for badinage and the swapping of anecdotes.

9. Both literally and figuratively.

10. Even by the current lax standard of normality.

11. This works especially well if the individuals role in the capture of the beast was minimal or non-existent.

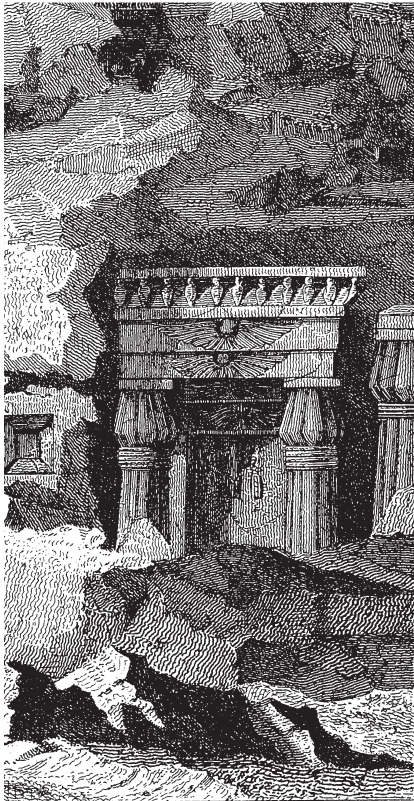


## ❧ Cults and Cabals of the Dying Earth ❧

are parked around the place; carriages, carts, walking-boats, and other, stranger things. Peculiar sonorous music is wafting from within. Once inside, Lord Maltinz, who will be distressed to see that others have accompanied his invited guest, will greet the party. The other attendees at the party are unknown to the PCs. All wear hoods or masks, and Maltinz explains that such is the tradition of his gathering, and commands the PCs to do likewise. Throughout the party, Maltinz will do all he can to get his chosen guest separated from the others. If he succeeds, he will lead the guest to a secluded area, and thence to a staircase, which, in turn, leads to an octagonal chamber. In the chamber is the recently captured beast, bound in some manner, and several of the party guests, unmasked, revealing their twisted visages. Maltinz will explain that his guest and the beast, have 'compatible plasms', and a union will produce superior offspring. It is expected that the guest will find such a prospect distressing.<sup>12</sup> Should Maltinz not isolate his guest, he will grow ever more frustrated as the party wears on and will ultimately resort to direct force. During the party, emphasize the oddness of the other guests. They speak in riddles and non-sequiters; they slur words strangely, as if their throats were unused to certain sounds; they occasionally toss in seemingly nonsense words or phrases; they are curiously uninformed of local events but mention ancient and forgotten lore with eerie familiarity, and so on. There should be a continual sense of growing wrongness.



### ❧ The Scourers Of Aldicrane ❧



The Earth is thick with the relics of man and half-man. Pick up a pebble, and close examination will show that, more often than not, that it was once part of a wall or column. Beneath any basement is another, and another, and another; cities grow outwards from the Earth like rings from a tree. Most accept this as simply how the world is, was, and must be. A few, firm of purpose but limp in sanity, disagree. Aldicrane was a philosopher/seer of the 18th Aeon, who saw the works of man as a scourge on the Earth. The sun, he reasoned, was actually an outcropping of the Earth, tethered to it by trans-aetheric forces, and it weakened as the Earth did. If the encrustations of civilization could be purged from the Earth, the connection between the two could be restored and strengthened, and the sun might once again shine with the bright orange light that the most ancient texts claimed it once had. The Scourers have been chased from almost every civilized land, because their philosophy involves the simple destruction of all the works of man, as the more grandiose and ostentatious the work, the more it places the sun in jeopardy. They thus burn cities, smash statues and walls, and otherwise act like the followers of Golickan Kodek,<sup>13</sup> save that they do not dress in grue-skin outfitted with studs of water-silver, but act (other than their enthusiastic acts of destruction) as philosophers, sages, and luminaries. Having been banished from the inhabited cities, they have taken to rooting in the Earth for the bones of the old cities, there to laboriously grind the stone to powder and scatter it over the surface. Bit by bit, they seek to remove all trace of man's presence from the Earth, and do it before the sun goes out. They are most likely to run afoul of players who are seeking to explore ruins, and

12. Obviously you know your Characters better than we do. It is possible that some will feel distaste at having compatible plasms with anything so obviously ill bred.

13. But without displaying the creophagous nature of that worthy.

## ✿ Cults and Cabals of the Dying Earth ✿

who destroy the treasures of the past only via the consequence of series of unfortunate mishaps, rather than as deliberate and purposeful acts. Lost spells, strange artifacts, and secret knowledge can be found in the ruins of cities, and these items of interest rarely survive the attentions of the Scourers.

### Scourer Scenario: *The Burning Ruins*

The PCs have heard of, or have been sent to find, the ruins of Second Lesser Kaiin, a city thought to have existed some 20 leagues to the north of where Kaiin Proper now stands. They travel there only to find that the city, rather than being lost and forgotten, is being unearthed rapidly by a team of 20 or so Scourers, who, it must be noted, do not identify themselves as such. They are trying to complete the excavation in order to destroy the entire city at once. The PCs, if they are unaware of the goal of the excavators, may seek to help them do so. Once excavated, the Scourers will begin to place rune-inscribed stones throughout the area, which will be used to focus a powerful spell of destruction. The entire city will be wiped completely. This ultimate plan should be revealed to the players only slowly. The players are focused on the slow and careful excavation of one of the many underground vaults, and the revelation that the vault will soon be scattered above the ground, along with the rest of the city, comes piecemeal. The players' choices are to rush the excavation (risking destruction of the delicate artifacts they seek), to defeat the Scourers (which is difficult due to their numbers), or to somehow convince the Scourers to hold off on their destruction (also difficult, as with the sun flickering wanly, anything which might rejoin Earth and Sun must be done with all due haste!).

*A representative member  
of the*

✿ SCOURER CULT ✿

*“If you would oblige by just stepping to one side, we have nearly got the foundations undermined and it would be embarrassing if the tower were to fall too soon.”*

**Ratings:** Persuade (Charming) 9, Rebuff (Lawyerly) 11, Attack (Speed) 6, Defend (Sure-footedness) 8, Health 3, Magic (Forceful) 9, Athletics 1, Engineering 6, Wherewithal 2.

**Resistances:** Indolence 4.

### ✿ The Dancing Seers ✿

It can be said that, with the sun flickering and sputtering through the day, and the sky bestrewn with the corpses of stars at night, that the signs of doom are everywhere and the only sane response is to go mad. The Dancing Seers, then, are among the sanest folk left on the world, as they have foregone all illusion of sanity for the comfort of madness. They wander the world in rags and bare feet, moving in a strange gait, jerking and whirling to the tune of instruments only they hear. While most are true men, their ranks admit all manner of half-men as well, and pelgranes, grues, and man-eels have all been seen in their company. Normally, they would be ignored; killing them just dulls good blades for bad gain, as they rarely have a tenth-groat piece on them. Yet it seems that something in their madness has tapped into an unknown over-world, or perhaps each is visited by a sandestin of low grade, because they will often spew out a volley of words that predict, with some accuracy, the future of whatever luckless individual they have targeted. If a Dancing Seer notices a PC, the seer may begin a particularly violent and hectic dance, rushing around and around the PC, occasionally flicking out an arm to touch him lightly. The seer will babble incessantly, but, during the course of the babble, will start to state true facts about the PC, including, perhaps, some things the PC does not wish known. It may be something like “...green fog in dark passages...flying shadows...you are Torial Moorz of Ascolais...a thousand screaming children of stone...you have the Rune of Blue Insights, which your friend thought stolen, in a secret pocket in your sleeve...a grue and a deodand share secrets in a cave...” After some minutes of this, the Seer will begin to foretell things, and these may or may not be true. The GM should roll secretly; if the Seer scores a Prosaic or better success, the prediction is at least partly true, and the GM should take effort to assure it is so. The more vague or symbolic the prediction, the better; ideally, the PC shall not be aware of what it truly means until after it is over.

## ✿ Cults and Cabals of the Dying Earth ✿

### Dancing Seer Scenario: *A Requested Revelation*

The seers are mostly legendary in white-walled Kaiin, as they have never ventured near the city, for reasons odd and obscure. Nonetheless, a citizen of Kaiin<sup>14</sup> has great fears over his future, and, having squandered many terces on false and disreputable prophets, wishes a seer brought to him. (If the PCs have recently been involved in such a scam, so much the better!) The PCs will be either asked or compelled to venture out to locate a seer and return with him. This may prove problematic. The journey will be as long and dangerous as the GM wishes it to be, and the Seer, when found, will not wish to travel. They move according to whispers only they hear, and no amount of suasion, no matter the type, can compel them. Thus, some more direct means of capture is necessary, and such must likewise be performed without killing the Seer. Then he must be returned, alive, to the patron in Kaiin. He will care little for his health during the trip, and will babble endlessly, or shout loudly, or tell the fortune of a deodand the PCs are trying to evade in a crisp, clear, voice.

*A representative member  
of the*

✿ DANCING SEER CULT ✿

*“Green it was, but flaccid, the  
death of princes and the source  
of wonder.”*

**Ratings:** Persuade (Obfuscatory) 3, Rebuff (Contrary) 11, Attack (Ferocity) 11, Defend (Vexation) 3, Health 8, Magic (Curious) 4, Athletics 8, Living Rough 6, Wherewithal 10.

**Resistances:** None



### ✿ The Followers Of The Red Path ✿

While many of the cabals noted have some higher purpose, no matter how mad their methods, the Red Followers are concerned only with the most base and foul pleasures they can find, believing that with the end of all imminent, the only point left to life is to give in to every urge and indulge every sense. If the universe is so uncaring as to permit the extinction of all, then, it makes sense to outdo the universe, being not merely uncaring, but actively malicious and vile. Rather than standing against the coming darkness, the Followers draw it to them, and seek to become darkness within darkness, foulness beyond easy measure or description. They are demon-lovers, calling forth the greatest fiends known from various subworlds, and including them in all manner of acts, most of which cannot be described fully in any magazine sold in worthy establishments.<sup>15</sup> Javanne of the Red Hair was one such Follower, one of the worst of a bad lot, but though she has suffered for her actions, as have many of her band, there still remain countless other gatherings which continue to engage in their blasphemous rites. Valdaran and his Green Legion kill them where they can, but there are always more, the seed of their twisted philosophy always finding ready soil in the cynical, indulgent, minds of the inhabitants of the Dying Earth. The cultists rarely operate openly in larger cities or towns, though there are many small villages dotted about the landscape which consist of nothing but their followers, and which often entrap passersby into their rituals. Many such are situated on the coast; they are odd, old, places, ancient even by the standards of the 21st Aeon, and their pathways and constructions do not seem to follow any known standards of geometry. Alleys meet at impossible angles, and a seemingly straight path between two buildings turns out to contain unexpected twists and bends. The folk of these towns have been Followers for generations, and while they do not speak openly of their practices to strangers (lest the Green Legion or others come upon them), they do not take all the precautions that might otherwise be required, allowing visitors to grow suspicious and curious. Within the large cities, they are generally more circumspect, and they focus, firstly, on ensnaring the powerful of the city, especially magicians and arch-magicians, who can open the way for more demons to enter. Arch-magicians who follow the Red Path will often burn indenture points by commanding their sandestins to bring forth all manner of vile entities from the subworlds, or to transform themselves into shapes suitable for indescribable rites. Once they have taken control of the city, the Followers will seek to expand their numbers, finding suitable candidates for membership or sacrifice among the populace. The process can take years, and,

14. Here the GM may wish to select a suitable entry from the Kaiin City sourcebook, with an effacious blandishment that the player acquire a copy of said book from a reputable dealer in fine antiquities.

15. Wakdun the Panderer wishes to remind valued clients that manuals, complete with delicately hand colored illustrations, are not entirely unobtainable.



## ☘ Cults and Cabals of the Dying Earth ☘

while it is going on, the city may attain a reputation as a place of forbidden and alluring delights, with few suspecting the true extremes of depravity which exist.

Readers are recommended to consult *Demons of the Dying Earth*. It is indeed a worthy publication, now available from Pelgrane Press. It will allow you to integrate your cultists into the wider world of demon summoning.

*A representative member  
of the*

☘ FOLLOWERS OF THE RED PATH ☘  
*“DIE!”*

**Ratings:** Persuade (Intimidating) 11, Rebuff (Wary) 6, Attack (Strength) 9, Defend (Parry) 8, Health 7, Magic (Forceful) 11, Athletics 3, Concealment 3, Imposture 4, Quick fingers 2, Stealth 3, Tracking 3, Wherewithal 6.

**Resistances:** None





# ✿ Weapons of the Dying Earth ✿

*Jim Webster*

*with considerable assistance from Stan Rydzewski & John Kahane*

“Let the feast proceed!”

When the original Dying Earth rules were written it was our intention to make combat take something of a back seat. Yet virtually everyone who has ever read the rules has noted the mention of “firestick” on page 19 and wanted to know what one was and where they could get one from.

All those reading this article should also remember the salient paragraph on Missile Combat, to be found on p51 of the *DERPG* rules. I repeat it here for emphasis.

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

Yet players, for all their foibles,<sup>1</sup> seem determined to emulate their heroes from a totally different era. So it was felt that we ought to look at weaponry in more detail. Many of the following have been casually mentioned by Jack Vance in passing, or included by us in scenarios. So we felt some elucidation was probably called for.

## Extra Weapon skills

STYLE	Melee Weapon	Missile weapon
STRENGTH	pole-arm, battlescythe	Dart gun, Musket
SPEED	Poison go-thither, battlescythe	
FINESSE	Poison go-thither, battlescythe, War flails	Dart gun, large dart pistol
CUNNING	snaffle irons	Small dart pistol
FEROCITY	pole-arm, battlescythe	
CAUTION	Sousanene battle spear, snaffle irons	Musket

You must pay one point to be familiar with the extra weapon. Note that carrying these weapons, very few of which can be concealed, automatically incurs a levy of 2 on all Persuasion attempts, except for those involving Intimidate.

## Battlescythes

Actually the name is a misnomer. All sorts of beast men, bandits and others who inhabit the edges of civilization carry them. Construction is simple: fasten a length of iron to a piece of tree branch and sharpen one edge of the iron. They are a terrifying weapon, if only because they are wielded by people with no firm grip on life or sanity. If a blow from with one of these weapons hits or is parried, there is at least a 50% chance that the weapon will fall apart.

There is also another form of the battlescythe as used by somewhat more civilized people. Among the petty nobility of the Derna there exists a weapon that they refer to as a battlescythe. It resembles a slightly curved

1. Which are many, oh so very many.

## ❧ Weapons of the Dying Earth ❧

sword blade attached to a long timber haft. It is very similar to the ancient Japanese *naginata* and tends to be used by the women of these noble families. The blades are normally of excellent quality and these weapons are often treasured heirlooms.

There are two very different schools of thought when it comes to methods of using a battlescythe. The half-man or bandit will rely on ferocity or strength. However as taught by the battle-masters of the Derna nobility the techniques demand considerable finesse but some concentrate on speed instead. Those who have this sort of training may also parry with their weapon. In game terms it is an axe, but one which certain styles can parry with.

### Dart Guns

Also known as arrow guns. These are relatively uncommon, consisting of a long tube that has a side-opening breech at its base. You slide your arrow, up to an ell in length, into the breech and then put a packet of gunpowder in after it. You then swing the breech back in line with the barrel, lock and seal it, point the weapon and pull the trigger. The trigger causes a length of burning match to make contact with a train of gunpowder, igniting it. This flashes through to the powder in the breech. The metal flights of the arrow ride in grooves which spiral around the inside of the barrel causing the arrow to spin. It is claimed that these weapons are quite useful against such creatures as hoon and similar because the arrow is a substantial block of pointed metal and when it hits it often tumbles inside the target's body doing wicked damage. Not only that but it hits with a pretty solid clout and many an old hunter will tell you, when deep in his cups, that he has seen leaping hoon knocked backward by the force of the arrow's impact. In spite of this they are not widely used because it can require up to twenty minutes to reload and seal the breech.

Their other disadvantages are many. As everything is handmade, the metal flights on the arrows will only fit the rifling in the barrel of the one dart gun they were initially made for, so ammunition is treasured and many hunters will spend days looking for a lost dart. Also the dart gun itself, firing a heavy dart, has to be heavy to reduce recoil, and the fact that it is breech loading reduces the charge of powder possible.

Dart guns are preponderantly used by those with an attack style based on Strength but also by some whose primary style is Finesse. They value the possibility of accuracy at longer ranges and often use the dart gun with a stand to help with aiming.

### Dart pistols

They bear no real relationship to the dart gun, as they do not use gunpowder to provide propulsion, instead using the energy stored in a spring or bow. The larger variants are made in the form of a stubby crossbow, relying on the power of the bow to fire the projectile. Smaller ones are powered by a very powerful internal spring that takes a great deal of strength to cock. They are all very much one-shot weapons: reloading one in times of stress is not to be recommended. The small ones are only really dangerous up to a range of fifteen feet; the larger ones can be dangerous up to forty feet.

The smaller ones are much loved by devious types whose combat style is based on Cunning, the larger ones are less easy to conceal but are more accurate, have a longer range and demand a degree of skill from the individual firing.



*One would be unwise to discount the effectiveness of any sharp piece of iron, regardless of the attire of its owner.*

## ✿ Weapons of the Dying Earth ✿

### Glaives and Halberds

These names, and many others, are given interchangeably in this period to any pole-arm that has not merely a spearhead, but incorporates a cutting, slashing blade as well. They are often found in the hands of civic militia and guards.

While not a complicated weapon, many of their users are semi-professional and have had at least a minimum of training in their use. The trained user tends to have an attack style based on Strength. The untrained user will not have the patience to master the various attacks and parries and instead will rely on Ferocity.

In combat the weapon has both the advantages and disadvantages of both axes and spears as explained on pages 48 and 49 of *DERPG*.

### Muskets

Very similar to the muskets of antiquity (save that Jack Vance mentions them being used only by singing fish), they are muzzle loaded. The user pours a charge of gunpowder down the barrel, then follows it with either a ball or balls. Faster by far to load than an arrow gun, muskets are not as accurate.

Interestingly two entirely different types of people favor them. Those whose primary style is Caution are suitably methodical and hence ensure the weapon is properly loaded and primed for maximum efficiency. Those who favor Strength also cope well with the weight and recoil.

### Poison go-thither

This weapon looks like a cane or length of bamboo the size of a gentleman's walking stick. Yet the end is a flexible blade that also acts like a wick, drawing poison up from a well within the shaft.

They demand considerable skill to use properly and are normally restricted to those whose primary attacks are either Finesse or Speed. When used in combat treat as a Rapier, except that any wound inflicted is poisoned. The type of poison used is obviously up to the user, most use naturally occurring venom (See page 59 *DERPG*). On a Dismal Failure the user of the Poison go-thither manages to wound (and therefore poison) themselves.

### Snaffle Irons

A snaffle iron is a long pole, almost nine ells long. Instead of a spearhead they have a mass of twisted and barbed spikes. The idea is that when you swing this weapon and hit someone you twist it, entangling their clothing and trapping them. The technique is rather less effective if the target wears tight-fitting clothing or is effectively naked. This is not a weapon with which one hunts erb. For all that, it is an unusual weapon, and can be used in two styles. Cunning, to catch, entrap and disarm, or Caution because the weapon is excellent at keeping a well dressed opponent at a safe distance.

When using this weapon where entangling clothing or the equivalent is possible, a Success means that the victim is partially entangled and has a Penalty of 1 to his or her own attacks. On a second Success (or on any Illustrious Success) the victim is disarmed and trapped.

If this weapon is used against a target that cannot be entangled, it counts as a club but with a levy of 1 in use.



*One may attempt to judge the style of the wielder from his or her appearance.*

## ❧ Weapons of the Dying Earth ❧

### Sousanene Battle Spear

This is best considered an erb spear with a shaft that is barely five ells long.

This is not a weapon found in the hands of those enthused with the desire to participate in close combat. The attack style preferred by the users is Caution. Otherwise it counts as a spear in the rules.

### War Flails

These have a timber shaft, which one holds, and which is anything up to five ells long. A length of heavy chain connects it to another timber shaft, this latter studded with heavy iron bolts. When this studded head is brought into contact with an enemy at speed it can split helmets, dismount a horseman or brain a deodand. It does demand considerable hand and eye co-ordination to use effectively.

Most casual students of the martial arts might postulate that Ferocity was the only style one could adopt when using a war flail. Strangely enough this is not so. Demanding as it does excellent co-ordination, if only to ensure one doesn't maim oneself, the only acceptable style is Finesse.

Those facing someone armed with a War Flail an individual must successfully check their Wherewithal, or will act at a levy of 1. Otherwise treat the weapon as a cudgel, except that on a Dismal Failure you have inflicted a wound on yourself.



*The glittering adornments of this group of sturdy adventurers attests to the efficacy of their weapons.*



### Firing Ranged Weapons

*This table fits in with the other missile weapon tables. Ranges are of course in feet.*

Weapon	Short	Medium	Long	Extreme
Dart Gun	0-5	6-30	31-70	71-95
Dart Pistol (large)	0-5	6-10	11-25	26-40
Dart Pistol (small)	0-3	4-8	9-12	13-20
Muskets	0-10	11-25	26-75	76-120

Muskets and Dart Guns are very powerful weapons and any one hit by a projectile at less than long range suffers a Penalty of 1 to their Health roll. Anyone hit at Short range must make a successful Athletics roll or be knocked down and suffer an extra wound.

### Firesticks

These I have kept separate from missile and close combat weapons because they are really large fireworks. Using them is easy. One merely points the firestick at the enemy, lights the blue touch paper, and awaits results.<sup>2</sup>

2. Many users suggest that prayer is usefully included at some point in the above sequence.



## ✿ Weapons of the Dying Earth ✿

Roll the dice and use your Attack ability to work out the results of your action:

ILLUSTRIOUS SUCCESS	The target is 90% exposed to the effects of fire (Page 56 of DERP rules), anyone within a three-yard radius of the target is 40% exposed to fire.
PROSAIC SUCCESS	The target is 60% exposed to fire, anyone else within a three-yard radius of the target is 20% exposed.
HAIR'S-BREATH SUCCESS	The target alone is 40% exposed to fire.
EXASPERATING FAILURE	A very broad fan of flame flickers out and doesn't hit anyone.
QUOTIDIAN FAILURE	The firestick gushes forth a huge amount of stinking, clinging, black smoke with forms a cloud ten yards in diameter, centered on the firestick. (See page 54 DERP rules for Drowning and similar Suffocations.)
DISMAL FAILURE	The fire stick explodes causing a 80% exposure on the person holding it and a 40% exposure on any within a 10 yard radius of her.

The range of a firestick is 10 yards/30 feet. It is a one shot weapon that cannot be reloaded; indeed it may not even exist after having been fired. Firesticks can be made by most apothecaries.<sup>3</sup> If your players wish to buy one, enthusiastically agree. After they have used it, see if they ever buy another.

### The Automatic Crossbow

Another device with which to amuse or bedevil those who live for tinkering with arcane mechanisms is the automatic crossbow. This is a weapon very occasionally found in the upper reaches of the Scaum watershed, and even in the barbarous communities beyond the Falling Wall. In some of these areas, ancient law and custom forbid using firearms, but the number of hoons and the like argue for powerful missile weapons.

In such cases the locals employ a marvelously crafted heavy crossbow of great draw weight<sup>4</sup> which use a charge of powder to drive an operating arm. This re-cocks the crossbow automatically when the weapon is fired. Thus the weapon is instantly ready for its next bolt, so much faster than re-cocking by using the traditional windlass. Thus and so, ancient law is respected, and half-men are struck down in great numbers.<sup>5</sup> All is well.

Of course the potential for amusing, and occasionally fatal, mishaps and misfires with such a peculiar device are legion, especially when such are acquired by footloose freebooters who haven't had the usual months of arduous training necessary to master the use of such a temperamental weapon.

### Miscellaneous Uses for Gunpowder.

Any character arriving in the small town of Nuris<sup>6</sup> carrying gunpowder will be assumed to be a nightsoil collector. In Nuris the ancient drains that serve the lavatories in every house are carved through the living rock. Unfortunately the drains no longer work as they once did, perhaps the population has fallen below a certain critical number or perhaps an underground stream has shifted its path.

#### *The Situation*

The Great Central Drain (an ell in diameter) feeds four distributor drains, which take the nightsoil from the town down to the fields. Rather than flowing smoothly as it did in times past, this central drain now sets solid, or at least the contents become so stiff they will not flow. Rather than have to empty this drain with bucket and shovel the previous nightsoil collector<sup>7</sup> cunningly bored a tube through the rock into the Great Central Drain. When the system is blocked, in this tube is placed a large charge of gunpowder.<sup>8</sup> A fuse is lit and a huge stone slab is hauled across the outer end of the tube and locked into place, thus directing the blast down into the Great Central Drain. The fuse length is cunningly chosen to ensure that those moving the stone slab have half

3. Or at least by all those with an abiding hatred of their fellow man.

4. Most can be moved only by use of draught animals and it takes two men to traverse and aim them.

5. Or at least in numbers large enough to ensure the survival of the Automatic Crossbow.

6. Town by courtesy only, far more honest to describe it as yet another small village lurking deep in the forests of Almerly.

7. A gentleman called Voiulk, alas now deceased.

8. Twice as much as Voiulk could lift is the quantity recommended by the eldest inhabitants. Whether they allow for the fact that Voiulk was not a strong man is uncertain.

## ✿ Weapons of the Dying Earth ✿

an hour to move it, which is adequate time if there are a dozen of you. The resultant blast forces the contents of the Great Central Drain out through the four distributor drains and spreads it in a thin layer over the fields below the town. Because of this, the inhabitants retire to their houses to avoid any chife. This is obviously an excellent system and is utterly fool proof. Especially if the characters remember to fit the latrine blocks in each individual house, otherwise the blast is channeled through the path of least resistance and deposits the contents of the Great Central Drain within the houses of the town.

### Diambroid

Diambroid is something of an anomaly, being a stable explosive of great power, which is safe to handle unless the fuse is in some way tampered with. The original creation of diambroid is lost far in earth's distant past, and is thought by many to have occurred in a very early Aeon. It has survived purely because of the excellence of the description of its manufacture in a 14th Aeon work by Mirchmund Slayetiledol. This work, *The Well-Bred Young Woman's Guide to the Art of Clear Exposition*, included as an example of good practice, the section on manufacturing small quantities of diambroid from a 12th Aeon textbook, now long lost. So diambroid remained, the forgotten weapon of pedagogues and librarians, the description of its mode of manufacture included by epitomists and compilers of educational texts.<sup>9</sup>

It returned to relative popularity in the later years of the 20th Aeon as an engineering explosive, and has continued to be produced and used in small amounts ever since.

#### *The use and efficacy of diambroid.*

Diambroid was used in quantities measured out in quantities known interchangeably as Ounces or minims. The Ascolian ounce is reckoned at eighteen to the pound, whereas in Kaiin twenty minims make a pound. Given that the pound in Kaiin is somewhat heavier than the pound in the rest of Ascolais, an ounce and a minim are near enough the same for most purposes.

When detonated diambroid explodes in a most controlled fashion, utterly destroying everything within a certain radius. One minim will destroy everything within a sphere of one-foot radius centered on the exploding diambroid, two minims everything within two feet. This simple yet harmonious relationship continues up to four minims. After this one finds that an increasing proportion of the explosive force of the diambroid is wasted destroying what the same explosion has already destroyed. Hence if you wish to destroy an area five feet in diameter it is wise to plant three smaller concentrations of diambroid in the form of a triangle, rather than just rely on one large concentration of five minims.



Detonation is simple. Diambroid is detonated by receiving a large pulse of energy, either in the form of heat or electricity or even a blow from a well-swung hammer. During manufacture the diambroid is sensitized on one or the other of these forms of energy and then can only be activated by that particular one.

Any scholar with access to an excellently equipped workroom can make Diambroid. It merely takes a Pedantry Success, followed by a Craftsmanship Success. It takes a day to make five minims.



9. See especially Maultis and Kutt *Essays on Schooling*, Maulwig; *The Educators of the 17th Aeon*, and Craedithiman, Croulsemé and Sush, *The Elementary Education of the Lower Orders*.