

The Roleplaying in the world of Jack Vance

Dying Earth

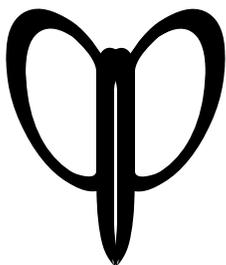
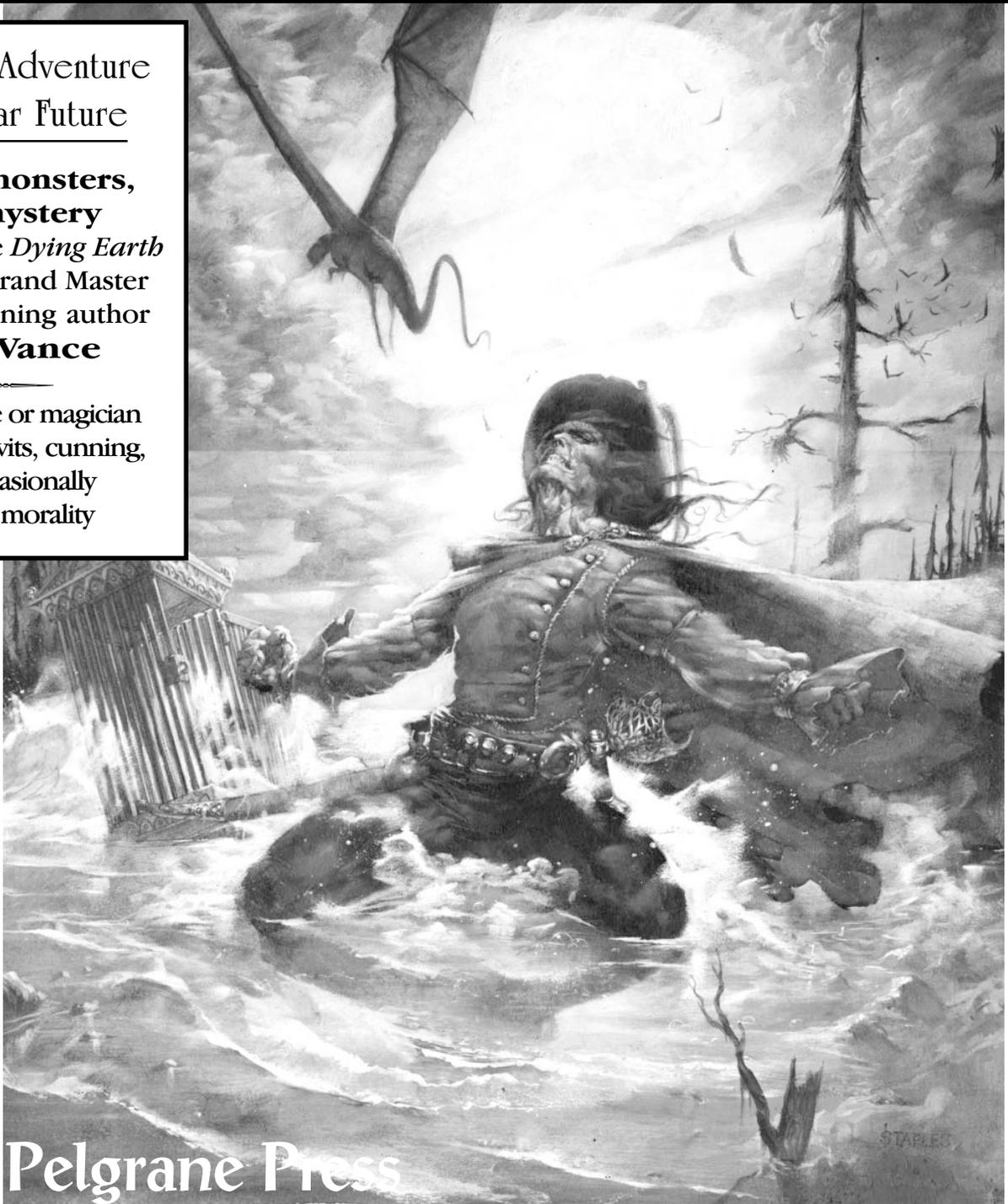
Quick-Start Rules

Fantastic Adventure
in the Far Future

**Magic, monsters,
and mystery**

based on the *Dying Earth*
books by Grand Master
Nebula-winning author
Jack Vance

Play a rogue or magician
with sharp wits, cunning,
and occasionally
flexible morality



Pelgrane Press

STAPLES

🏹 Welcome to the Dying Earth! 🏹

The Dying Earth is the authorized Pelgrane Press roleplaying game based on the fantasy fiction of writer Jack Vance.

The simplified *Dying Earth* rules in this booklet introduce the game's basic concepts. These quick-start rules let you create characters suitable for introductory adventures. Not included in these rules are guidelines for creation of magical abilities, enchanted items, or high-powered characters; details about the Dying Earth setting; or advice on game moderating. They all appear in the full *Dying Earth* rulebook.

Roleplaying Games

A roleplaying game, or RPG, is a type of social game, a form of interactive storytelling.

In an RPG, one player takes the role of the game moderator. If the game were a television series, the game moderator would be the producer, the director, the head writer, the guest stars, the extras, and all the technical staff.

One to six other players take the roles of the series' principal characters and, in a sense, of the show's additional writers. Each creates a character to play in the series.

About JACK VANCE and *The Dying Earth*

In a prolific career spanning six decades, **John Holbrook Vance** (born San Francisco, 1916) has won many awards for his science fiction, fantasy, and mystery novels. Jack Vance's first published book, *The Dying Earth* (1950), takes place in Earth's unimaginably far future, when science has passed away and magic rules the world. He revisited the setting in *The Eyes of the Overworld* (1966), *Cugel's Saga* (1983), and *Rhialto the Marvellous* (1984).

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

The cities of the Dying Earth are places of exotic and decadent beauty. Strange foods and bizarre clothing are commonplace. The world is littered with forgotten ruins and patrolled by dangerous predators. Only the foolhardy or powerful venture far from home. A few omnipotent magicians squabble over arcane secrets of magic—which, though wondrous and impressive, are mere shadows of the achievement of previous ages.

The **Pelgrane Press *Dying Earth* roleplaying game**, authorized and approved by Vance, lets you create your own magical stories with characters of any power level. The simple rules system, by noted designer Robin D. Laws (*Feng Shui*, *Hero Wars*), stresses creative roleplaying. Twin magic systems by John M. Snead (*Nephilim*) conjure a Vancian atmosphere for beginning magicians and master mages alike. All you need to play are the rulebook, a few six-sided dice, and lots of imagination.

“What great minds lie in the dust,” said Guyal in a low voice.
 “What gorgeous souls have vanished into the buried ages; what
 marvelous creatures are lost past the remotest memory ...
 Nevermore will there be the like; now, in the last fleeting
 moments, humanity festers rich as rotten fruit.”

— *The Dying Earth*

The game moderator (GM) creates situations for the characters to react to. Each player decides how his character will respond. The interaction of characters played by the game moderator and characters controlled by the players determines the course of the story—thus, every participant contributes to the “writing” of each episode.

Characters are defined in terms of their abilities. A *Dying Earth* character knows how to persuade or deceive others, how to fight, and perhaps how to cast magical spells.

In an RPG, abilities have number values. When characters come into conflict with one another, those who have the higher numbers in the pertinent ability tend to have an advantage. But higher numbers don’t guarantee automatic success; chance and luck, represented by the results of random dice rolls, also play an important part.

Entertainment, Not Combat!

The Dying Earth differs from typical fantasy games in that combat skills and bravery are not the most important skills a character can possess. It is, in fact, far better for a character to be manipulative and entertaining, not to mention always willing to put his own desires and needs before those of his fellows or the common good.

In these games, we’re not always rooting unreservedly for the characters to succeed. They are often selfish, greedy, or overconfident. Sometimes they thwart or humiliate supporting characters even worse than themselves; more often they fail, and must flee town ahead of an angry mob. What matters is not victory or defeat, but how well the story entertains us.



Familiar Terms

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Unlike other roleplaying games, we do not reward your character for succeeding at his chosen goals, which may or may not be admirable. Instead, we reward *you*, the player, for making the game entertaining, and for periodically reminding everyone of the style of dialogue to which they should aspire.

Character Creation

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

Start With a Character Sheet

A sample character sheet appears on the last page of this booklet. You may photocopy it, use the more elaborate sheet from the *Dying Earth* rulebook, or download a sheet from www.pelgranepress.com. Use this sheet to begin creating your character.

On the sheet from this booklet are columns labelled *Pool*. Here you track various point scores that change frequently during each game. If you do not wish to have your sheet marred by eraser marks, use scrap paper to track your pool expenditures.

Note How Many Creation Points You Can Spend

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

These abbreviated rules describe only one type, the Cugel-level character. Characters like Cugel the Clever, though quite competent by ordinary standards, rely primarily on their wits and luck to prevail. Events in the game will resemble those in the books *Eyes of the Overworld* and *Cugel's Saga*.

A Cugel-level character is built with 60 creation points. You spend these points on

various **abilities** to design the type of character you want to play.

Abilities, explained later, are skills and other traits your character possesses that let him accomplish tasks. Abilities are quantified as numbers, with higher numbers representing greater ability. Cugel-level characters have an **ability cap** of 10; this means ability scores higher than 10 are very rare. They cost an excessive number of creation points to purchase, as we explain below.

Rating and Pool

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

Most abilities cost 1 creation point per rating point.

It is possible to buy abilities with ratings higher than the ability cap mentioned earlier, but it is very expensive. The chart below shows how many creation points it costs Cugel-level characters to exceed their ability caps. (The full *Dying Earth* rules give the cost for Turjan-level and Rhialto-level characters to exceed their caps.) Once you buy an ability up to your ability cap, you pay the "Additional Cost" amount for each additional rating point (cumulative).

Rating	Additional Cost
11	+2
12	+4
13	+8
Per +1	+8

I am a man of resource, but not insensate recklessness.

— *The Eyes of the Overworld*

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

Every Character's Abilities

Every character in a *Dying Earth* game has some abilities in common. They are **Persuade**, **Rebuff**, **Attack**, **Defense**, **Health**, and **Weapons**.

It is possible to create characters with very low scores in these abilities. Such characters are

tongue-tied when they should be well-spoken and flail about incompetently when put in dangerous situations. Such characters are swiftly eliminated by circumstance. Authors do not tell of their exploits and players scarcely register their passing.

For these reasons, we recommend that you buy several of these skills to ratings that suggest competence at least. The chart on the next page indicates the low point beyond which you should not go and a recommended value you should consider barely adequate for a personage of note.



Bonus Creation Points

It is possible to exceed the number of creation points indicated for your series level.

You may obtain bonus creation points during character creation. Usually you get bonuses for leaving choices in the hand of fate, as represented by a die roll. In short, when presented with choices to create a more distinctive character, you can either choose the options you prefer or let a random die roll decide for you. In the latter case, the game rewards you with extra creation points.

Every time you elect to make a random choice, you get a number of extra creation points equal to your **bonus**. The size of the bonus depends on the series level. **Cugel-level characters receive bonuses of 6 points** at a time—that is, on each occasion you are told to take a bonus, it will be 6 points.

You normally can spend bonus points on anything, not just the ability on which you made the random roll. (There are exceptions to this. We will make exceptions known to you at unexpected and inconvenient intervals.)

Example: You are creating a Cugel-level character. One of the first choices you make involves what style of *persuasion* your character will customarily employ (see **Persuade**, next page). You may choose any one of the six available options (Glib, Eloquent, etc.). But you instead decide to let fate make the decision for you, rolling a die to determine which of the six your character takes. This entitles you to one bonus. Because the bonus size for a Cugel-level character is 6 points, this means that, instead of having 60 points with which to create your character, you now have 66.

Ability	Minimum	Recommended
Persuade	1	8+
Rebuff	1	8+
Attack	1	8+
Defense	1	8+
Health	1	8+
Weapons	0	any

Persuade

The most important ability in a *Dying Earth* series is not the ability to run your foe through with a rapier, or dodge his most fearsome attacks—though both talents are assuredly efficacious in certain unfortunate circumstances.

Your most important ability allows you to hoodwink, inveigle, actuate, cajole, argue, and otherwise **persuade** your interlocutors to do what you want. Thus you can convince them that you meant no harm breaking into their mansions, that you are inexperienced in the cardsharp's art, or that any deflowering of the ritual virgins was perfectly understandable, given the circumstances.

When buying your character's Persuade rating, you also determine which **style** of persuasion best suits your character. Read the

following descriptions. If one style piques your interest, choose it and mark it in the Style column beside Persuade on the character sheet. But if you have no preference among them, you may roll a die and let it determine your choice. If you do this, you receive a bonus of 6 creation points.

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

2. Eloquent—With high-flown word and lofty sentiment, you espouse your views in a manner so poetical that listeners cannot help but be moved by your entreaties.

3. Obfuscatory—The style of your speech is so opaque, the twists and turns of your syntactical structure so labyrinthine, that your interlocutors can neither grasp what you are saying, nor admit their bafflement, and therefore agree thoroughly with whatever it is you just said.

4. Fortright—You cut to the heart of the matter with unwavering directness.

5. Charming—You evince such blazing personal charisma that people can't help liking you, and wishing to please you.

6. Intimidating—You project an aura of menace, either subtle or blatant, that induces others to obey your edicts in the hopes of evading your surely violent wrath.

After determining your style, allot points to Persuasion.



Persuasion, Glib style: *“It is transparently clear to the most witless observer that you are an individual of uncommon perspicacity. Hence, to point out this seemingly innocuous fishnet’s intricate artanship, its glittering filigrees, and its surpassingly fine weave, characteristic of powerful enchantment, is doubtless supererogatory.”*

"I respond to three questions," stated the augur. "For twenty terces I phrase the answer in clear and actionable language; for ten I use the language of cant, which occasionally admits of ambiguity; for five, I speak a parable which you must interpret as you will; and for one terce, I babble in an unknown tongue."

— *The Dying Earth*

Rebuff

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

As before, you may select a style from the list below, or gain a 6-point bonus by letting a die do it for you.

1. Obtuse—You don't always understand what others are saying to you. You've learned that this is not the impediment it might at first seem. The people who get hoodwinked are always the schemers who let others play on their greed. If you don't understand the complexities of a scheme, you can scarcely be swindled by it, can you?

2. Wary—You distrust even your own grandmother. And a good thing, too, because she was ready to sell you to a pack of erbs in exchange for a treasure map.

3. Penetrating—An innate sense for the motivations of others has always protected you from those who pretend to argue for your interests, but in fact advance merely their own.

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

5. Contrary—You just don't like following the advice of others. If someone tells you to look up, you look down. If everyone else wants to go right, you want to go left.

6. Pure-Hearted—You are so utterly guileless that, without even trying to do so, you expose the black-hearted villainy of those who hope to fool you.

Attack

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

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

1. Strength—Being big and extravagantly muscled has never been a drawback when it comes to the application of force.

2. Speed—Attackers who rely on speed hit faster than their opponents can react.

3. Finesse—Training in the most effective combat moves makes an attacker not only graceful while spilling blood, but allows him to anticipate and counter the likely maneuvers of his opponent.

4. Cunning—Knowing that every combat situation is unique, a cunning fighter adapts to the contingencies of the moment. He may throw sand in his foe's face, jump up on a table to secure a height advantage, or seize an object to use as an unexpected weapon.

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

6. Caution—You hang back, rarely exposing yourself to danger, while waiting for your opponent to exhaust himself. He then makes a fatal mistake, which you, with the speed of a striking snake, turn to ruthless advantage.

Each attack style automatically makes you familiar with two weapons—one melee (close combat) weapon and one missile (ranged) weapon. You do not have to pay points to use these weapons proficiently. When you have chosen your attack style, mark the weapons related to it on your character sheet on the **Weapons** lines.

You may choose to be proficient with additional armaments, as described below under **Weapons**.

Defense

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

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

Health

This ability determines the extent of your injuries when you do get hit. **Health** has an ability cap of 10, like other abilities. You may buy a Health rating above 10 by paying additional creation points for each rating point, as with other abilities.

Weapons

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

When you determined your character's attack style above, the character automatically gained skill with two weapon types. If you want your character to be skilled with additional weapons, each additional weapon skill costs 2 creation points.

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

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

Magic

Magic is one of the most difficult and demanding skills known. Consequently, its rules differ from those governing mundane activities.

Magic costs twice as much as any other skill, 2 creation points per rating point. Buying a magic rating of 7 would cost 14 creation points.

A character's rating in Magic helps determine how other magicians look upon him. There are three ranks of magician: Dabbler, Magician, and Arch-Magician. In the full *Dying Earth* rules, the level of the campaign (Cugel, Turjan, or Rhalto) dictates the maximum proficiency a magician may attain before the campaign begins. These abbreviated rules deal only with Cugel-level characters, who may only attain **Dabbler** rank. Dabbler characters may buy a rating from 1 to 7 in their **Magic ability**. Note that a *Dying Earth* character is not required to know magic, though he will certainly find it useful.

"What have we here? A person suffering affliction?"

"Yes; Cugel has committed a series of abominable crimes, of which he wishes to purge himself."

"A total mis-statement!" cried Cugel. "No proof has been adduced, and in any event I was inveigled against my better judgment."

— *Cugel's Saga*



Individual Abilities

You may allocate any number of points to any of the abilities listed here. Each has an ability cap of 10.

Appraisal—judging the value of goods

Athletics—performing physical feats like running, swimming, and climbing

Concealment—finding ideal hiding places for things small (coins) or large (yourself)

Craftsmanship—making and repairing useful objects

Driving—operating vehicles like carts or flying boats

Engineering—designing large structures and devices

Etiquette—mastery of social conventions that make others accept you as one of their own

Gambling—winning at games of chance

Imposture—posing as someone else

Living Rough—surviving in the wilderness

Pedantry—knowing academic facts

Perception—noticing subtle details

Physician—patching the sick or injured

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

Riding—make a riding beast follow your commands

Scuttlebutt—an acquaintance with the business of local personages

Seamanship—working aboard ship

Seduction—winning the sexual favors of desirable individuals

Stealth—moving without being noticed

Stewardship—managing business enterprises and/or households

Tracking—following a trail left by man or beast

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

You may choose to acquire none of these abilities, but a character with a broad range of these skills is useful—or at least has the means to convince others that he is useful—in more various circumstances.

Choose abilities you feel best fit your conception of your character, spend creation points for appropriate ratings, and write abilities and ratings in the blanks on your character sheet.

When creating a magic-wielding character, you also choose the character's magical style. As always, you can pick your style, or get a 6-point bonus by rolling randomly.

1. Studious—You see magic as a vast academic project. You study ancient tomes, grimoires, and biographies of long-dead magicians to learn all about the magical arts

2. Insightful—The world is so much more than non-magicians will ever know. There are numerous demonic dimensions, a multitude of subtle magical planes, and a vast array of worlds and strange creatures. Amid this splendor, you seek order, reason, and pattern. Not content with dusty tomes, you use magic to uncover the true nature of reality and to make new contributions to magic. In these late and decadent days there are very few others like you.

3. Forceful—Magic is the art of bending the world to your will. You dominate various magical entities with your spells.

4. Daring—Magic should be flashy and impressive, as should you. To you, magic is a

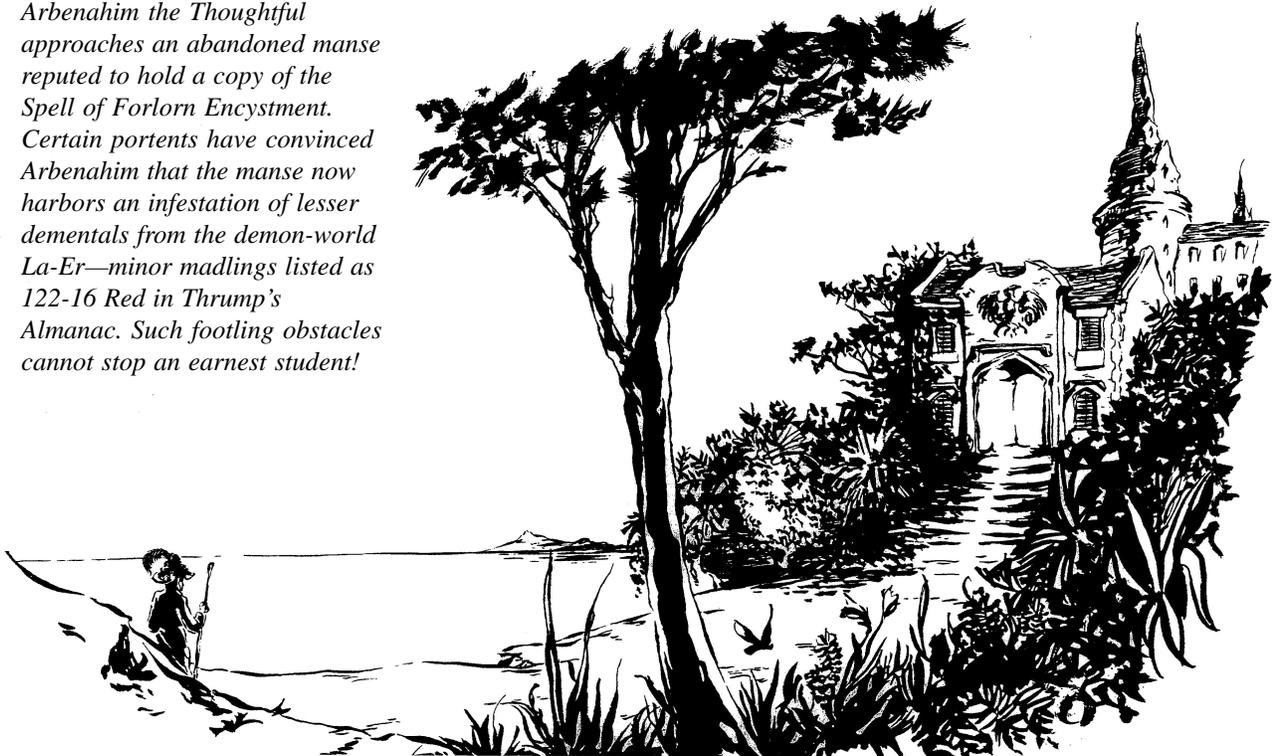
great game. Through its study you can do anything and break all the normal rules. Above all, magic is fun.

5. Devious—Magic lets you hoodwink reality. You can fool people, beasts, and even gravity. You might use magic to help with mundane thefts, con-jobs, and similar escapades.

6. Curious—The world is a vast lock and magic is the key. You are always looking to cast an untried spell, test a newly enchanted item, or visit some new dimension. You can't resist a secret, and magic holds the greatest secrets of all.

In addition to spending creation points on magic ability, a Dabbler who wishes to know spells when play begins must pay creation points for them. It costs **2 creation points for each spell known when your character enters play**, and you may buy a number of spells no greater than the character's Magic rating. With a Magic rating of 5, for instance, you could buy as few as zero spells or as many as five. See *Magic*, page 22.

Far outside Azenomei, Arbenahim the Thoughtful approaches an abandoned manse reputed to hold a copy of the Spell of Forlorn Encystment. Certain portents have convinced Arbenahim that the manse now harbors an infestation of lesser dementals from the demon-world La-Er—minor madlings listed as 122-16 Red in Thrump's Almanac. Such footling obstacles cannot stop an earnest student!



A big-bellied old man with gray wattles sidled a few steps forward. He spoke in a wheedling nasal voice: "Must your disgust be so blatant? True: we are anthropophages. True: we put strangers to succulent use. Is this truly good cause for hostility? The world is as it is, and each of us must hope in some fashion to be of service to his fellows, even if only in the form of a soup."
— *Rhialto the Marvellous*

Possessions

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

To counter this general trend, their players may choose particular **possessions** in which to invest points. If put in a situation where they're likely to lose their chosen possessions, they may roll dice to hold onto them. Although they may be briefly separated from these possessions, they'll get a reasonable chance to recover them after overcoming their enemies of the moment.

You begin the game with as many possessions as you spend points on, and no more. **Each possession costs 1 point**, unless the GM decrees otherwise. We generously assign you **two free creation points** that you may spend on items of clothing, as involuntary serial nudity can become frustrating.

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

Here are some possessions worth investing in; it is typically unnecessary to invest points in all of them.

- A weapon, such as a rapier, axe, dagger, or club.
- Good boots
- Warm cloak
- A fashionable hat
- Clothing indicating a person of station
- A length of rope
- A sack in which to carry other possessions
- A bedroll
- A tent
- A reference text, such as a treatise on edible plants of the wilderness, or a field guide to wild creatures

Cugel-level characters may *not* begin the game with the following:

- pack beasts or riding animals
- a cart, boat, or other conveyance
- any items, such as jewels or antiques, which might easily be sold for significant amounts of money
- any enchanted items, except those permitted by the GM

You can't guarantee yourself a supply of food or drink by paying creation points. Drinks, meals, and accommodations must be paid for as you go, which will require money. Hence the above reference to gainful employment.

Can You Resist Temptation?

The typical inhabitant of the Dying Earth speaks and behaves differently from characters from other fantasy series or the people you know in real life. He is arrogant, greedy, indolent, and rakish. He loves fine food to excess and can't resist the urge to correct others on fine points of obscure fact. Your character differs from the

norm only if you spend creation points on Resistance ratings allowing him to disregard these universal temptations. Each of the six major temptations requires its own rating.

The descriptions below tell you what you are like if you do not have a Resistance rating. The greater your rating, the *less* you resemble the description.

1. Resist Arrogance—When you fail to resist arrogance, you hanker after perquisites and privileges. If installed in a position of authority, you immediately seek to abuse it. If given a low station, you complain and cavil until you gain promotion. You may take foolish risks to prove your worth to others, or because you over-estimate your own abilities. Affronts to your dignity arouse vindictive instincts which may cause you to seek immoderate vengeance against their authors.

2. Resist Avarice—When you fail to resist, you covet wealth and the social status that goes with it. Gems, gold, fine fabrics, rare spices, exquisite furniture, awe-inspiring antiquities—you love them all with equal fervor.

3. Resist Indolence—Once firmly ensconced on your posterior you must resist Indolence, or find it difficult to dislodge yourself. Hard work is anathema to you, and no amount of ingenuity is wasted if it saves you from the indignity of labor.

4. Resist Gourmandism—When you fail to resist this temptation, fine food and intoxicating beverages subject you to a siren's call. If you find an amphora of moldering liquor in an ancient ruin, you will do your best to immediately drain it. Drunkenness does not inspire you to curtail your consumption, but to accelerate it. When presented with delightful viands, you change your priorities so as to allow you to devour as much as your gullet will accommodate. When presented with inadequate drink or ill-tasting food, you can't resist the urge to proclaim its inferiority to servers and cooks, no matter how tightly they may clench their meat cleavers. Neither can you resist opportunities to expound on your connoisseurship whenever the subject arises in conversation.

5. Resist Pettifoggery—When resistance fails, there is no quibble so small as to not be worth uttering. If educated, you are an incorrigible pedant. If rustic, you are a nitpicker nonpareil. Nothing pleases you more than to prove your mastery of an obscure fact, or to skewer an interlocutor by pointing out some meaningless flaw in his statement. When framing agreements, you do so in a lawyerly manner, adding as much gratuitous complexity as you can muster.

6. Resist Rakishness—When you fail to withstand rakishness, you can no more resist an alluring member of the desired sex than you can suspend your breathing. The slightest possibility of a romantic conquest inspires you to alter whatever other plans might have preceded it.

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

You may randomly roll a single temptation to which you are completely immune. You need never roll to resist it. This costs you nothing. (Mark this on your character sheet by placing an omega symbol after the name of the resistance, like so: Resist Pettifoggery Ω.) Or you may spend **half a bonus** to gain this total immunity to a Resistance of your choice. You are not obligated to do either of these things.

If you choose not to invest in any Resistances whatsoever, you gain a bonus to spend on any other step.

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

Name, Personality, and Appearance

The choices you've made so far add up to create a quick portrait of your character, which you'll develop during play. In particular, the various styles of you've chosen or rolled for Persuade,

We are a highly civilized people, with customs bequeathed to us by the past. Since the past was more glorious than the present, what presumption we would show by questioning these laws! — *The Dying Earth*

Rebuff, Attack, Defense, and Rebuff tell you about your character's personality. Don't worry about developing a long, complicated past history for him or her. It's good to start simply, especially on the *Dying Earth*, where most characters share very similar speech patterns and motivations.

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

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

Now, Demonstrate Personal Industry or Sloth!

Having created your character, you may either give in to your own indolence or continue reading this booklet until you have a more complete grasp of the *Dying Earth* rules. If you do the latter, you will have some advantages over your colleagues who do not; when faced with situations requiring that someone have a knowledge of the workings of the rules, they will be forced to rely upon the goodwill and honesty of the game moderator, and you will not.

How to Play

Ratings vs. Pool

You recall that you assigned a number to each of your abilities. That number is called the **ability rating**. It is more or less permanent. (Chapter 8 of the *Dying Earth* rulebook tells how to increase ability ratings. See page 31 for a short version.)

The same number also constitutes the **ability pool** your character has available. An ability pool is different from creation points. You can spend points from your ability pool to accomplish things and, after a while, they come back. Creation points don't.

Thus, if you originally put 8 creation points into your character's Persuade ability, he has a Persuade ability rating of 8 and also has a

Persuade ability pool of 8. (Note the separate columns for *Rating* and *Pool* on your character sheet.)

Ability pools work like a currency you can spend. When you have points in your pool, you can reroll dice results you don't like, or automatically defeat vastly inferior opponents. However, when you empty a pool for one of your abilities, your chances of success decline sharply.

You won't use the term "ability pool" often; instead, you refer to them by specific type: "Attack pool," "Persuasion pool," and so on.

Boons and Levies

Sometimes you increase an ability pool in the course of play. To do this is to get a **boon**.

Sometimes your pool decreases during play. To suffer this is to incur a **levy**. Levies are usually applied when you spend from a pool to reroll a die, as explained below.

Pools don't go negative; they can only be reduced to zero.

Unfortunately, you don't get to choose when you receive a boon. The game moderator will let you know whenever you receive a boon or are afflicted with a levy.

Refreshing

When your pools have dwindled through expenditure or levies, you can gradually regain them. For our purposes, all abilities that involve knowledge or learning refresh after two hours of rest; those involving social interaction or the casting of cantraps, after four; and those involving strenuous physical exertion or spellcasting, after eight. Abilities refresh simultaneously; after two hours' rest, for instance, all of a character's knowledge-type abilities refresh. If a character has earned a boon and his current pool exceeds his ability rating, his boon will be lost after the ability refreshes.

The Overarching Rule of Efficacious Blandishment

The overarching rule of efficacious blandishment is the most important rule in the game.

It states that if you wish your character to do something that is not within the letter of the game's other rules, you may do so, *provided* you can convince the GM that your desired course of action falls within the spirit of the story. Thus the only true circumscriptions on your actions are your persuasiveness and your GM's gullibility.

For example, your character, Sajonar the Sonorous, has discovered (to his horror) that he has been maneuvered into a high-stakes card game. The small fortune in his belt pouch actually belongs to another—an archmagician who is sure to be infuriated by its absence. And, worst of all, Sajonar does not possess the Gambling ability, though all other players at the table before him surely do. What will you do?

Scanning Sajonar's character sheet, you are reminded that he possesses the Pedantry ability. You tell the GM, "I wish to use Pedantry rather than Gambling in this instance."

"I must surely disallow this," the GM says. "Pedantry is no substitute for knowledge of the rules, the ability to discern when another is bluffing, mental retention of the cards that have been played so far in the current game, calculation of mathematical odds, knowledge of which establishments offer free drinks to the gamblers..."

"Of course," you say. "But those skills pertain to winning games of chance and skill. My aim is not to win. My aim is to provide excruciating commentary on the events at hand, leeching from every man and woman present any enjoyment of the competition or one another's company, until they feel compelled to expel me from the game."

"Ah," the GM says. "Very well, then. Proceed with your pedantry. But you do realize that you will lose each hand until you manage to persuade them to eject you."

Important: The overarching rule of efficacious blandishment does not invite you to argue about every non-advantageous situation presented by the GM. If your argument does not entertain the GM and all others gathered, the GM may cut it short and return to the action.

I will gladly perform a more comprehensive divination [...] First you are swathed head to foot in the intestines of fresh-killed owls, then immersed in a warm bath containing a number of secret organic substances. I must, of course, char the small toe of your left foot, and dilate your nose sufficiently to admit an explorer beetle, that he may study the conduits leading to and from your sensorium. — *The Eyes of the Overworld*

Chapter 4 of the *Dying Earth* rulebook contains more elaborate and interesting guidelines for refreshing each individual skill; a GM with those rules may wish to use them instead, and will inform you of the actions your character needs to undertake to refresh his skill.

Resolving Actions

When you want your character to do something, tell your GM which ability you intend to use. Then, when invited by the GM to do so, roll a die.

If you roll 4 or more, the character succeeds. If not, he fails.

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

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

If you don't like your die result, you can reroll—but it costs you. In fact, it costs you 1 from your pool in the pertinent ability. If the ability's pool is empty, you cannot reroll.

You can keep spending points and rerolling until...

- You get the result you want
- You give up
- Your pool is empty

Your first roll is usually free, allowing you to try almost anything once, even if you've run out of points—but see *Penalties* below.

Die Results

The six possible results are as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

If you are in a contest (explained below), your opponent may pay 3 from his pool to nullify your Illustrious Success, forcing you to roll again. You do not pay for a reroll forced on you in this

manner. However, if your Illustrious Success is nullified, you don't get the boon of 2.

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

Ensuring Skills Are Appropriate

When you try to do something, you must use an ability appropriate to the task. In many cases, your actions will perfectly fit the definitions of an ability. Sometimes, though, you'll want to do something without a clear governing ability. You must convince the GM that one of your abilities should allow you to at least make the attempt. If convinced, she'll allow you to proceed. If not, you have no chance of success. However, if she decides that the ability you propose is only partially relevant to the task, she'll allow the attempt, but with a levy reflecting the degree of variance between the ability's definition and the action to which you're trying to apply it.

This levy, which is 1 in most circumstances, 2 or more when the ability truly has only a remote connection to the task at hand, is applied whenever the character tries to roll his ability—on his initial attempt and on all reroll attempts.

Penalties

A **penalty** is a subtraction you make to the result of a die roll. For instance, if you have a penalty of 1 and you roll a 4 on the die, the penalty changes the 4 to a 3—changing Hair's-Breadth Success to Exasperating Failure.

Penalties apply when:

- You have an empty ability pool and attempt a new task with that ability
- You have no ability relevant to the task at hand, yet you nonetheless still attempt it

Under most circumstances, the GM will apply a penalty of 1. If the GM deems the required ability to be esoteric or utterly beyond your experience, the penalty might be as high as 2.

Note that a penalty of 2 makes success improbable—it leaves the character with a 1 in 6 chance of only Hair's-Breadth success.

If you can convince the GM that one of your abilities is at least tangentially related to the task and she finds merit in what you say, she might allow you to use that ability with a levy of 1 or 2 rather than a penalty.

Contests

Many times your character's actions will be countered by those of another. Just as often, you'll try to counter the efforts of other characters to accomplish things you'd sooner see left undone. Each of these situations is a **contest**. Contests pit the abilities to be used in opposition to one another.

The countering character waits until the acting character succeeds at the task. Then he rolls, using an ability appropriate to the task of thwarting that action.

If he succeeds, the acting character fails.

But it's not as simple as that, because the acting character may choose to spend from his pool to reroll. If he scores another success, the countering character may then spend from his own pool to reroll his countering ability.

This continues until:

- One character scores an Illustrious Success, and his opponent can't or won't pay the special levy of 3 to force a reroll.
- One contestant suffers a Dismal Failure and can't or won't pay the special levy of 3 to allow himself a reroll. (He must pay his usual levy of 2 for having suffered the Dismal Failure before the reroll levy.)
- One of the characters' pools is emptied, in which case the other wins.
- One of the characters withdraws, ceding victory to the other.

Naturally, your character can also act to counter another's actions.

Trumping

Sometimes your ability will **trump** another. Each style of the persuasion ability, for example, trumps one of the rebuff styles, but is itself trumped by another type of rebuff. The same holds for the styles of attack and defense.

A character trying to use an ability against its trump suffers a levy of 1.

Persuade & Rebuff Styles

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

Combat Styles

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



The magician Nahourezzin (right), travelling the chronoplex to Old Romarth of the 19th Aeon on a research sojourn, has taken the guise of a Transpontine Redoubtable. Here he debates with his unruly sandestin Ourchas over excessively legalistic interpretations of his orders. Ourchas, on a whim, appears as a high-status Kalsh ambassador from the distant world Kaleshe.

Wallops

Sometimes you may contest against a character whose relevant ability rating is much worse than your own. If your rating (not current ability pool!) exceeds his by 5 or more, you may spend 5 from your pool to immediately and devastatingly achieve whatever result you desire. This is called a **Wallop**. You needn't roll.

Your opponent can prevent the Wallop only with an **Illustrious Success** on his first roll to counter you—other results do nothing and the roll can never be rerolled or nullified.

You pay the cost from your pool even if he does get that **Illustrious Success**.

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

Emptying a Pool

When your pool becomes empty in any given ability, you can no longer call for rerolls. Worse, you suffer a penalty of 1 on any attempts to use it. If you are trying to use it in a situation that would normally require a levy, the penalty is 2. This leaves you very little chance to succeed.

Initiative

Sometimes a number of characters all want to act at once, seizing the **initiative**. Characters act in the order of their point totals in the abilities they intend to use, from highest to lowest. When competing characters have equivalent point totals, they roll dice. The best success wins; reroll ties. A player may pay points in the ability he plans to use in exchange for a reroll of this tie-breaker die.

Holding Off

When it is your turn to act you may choose to **hold off**. Instead of acting, you wait. When any

other character is set to act, you may interrupt him and act first. If you wait until everyone else has acted, you may then act, or pass on the opportunity to act altogether.

Rounds

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

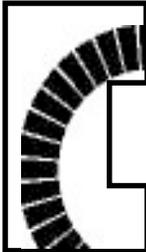
Moves

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

You may at any time be called upon to defend yourself from someone else's active move. When you do so, you're making a **reactive** move. You may undertake any number of reactive moves in a round, without paying a levy or facing a penalty. You are never obligated to react, but may face unpleasant consequences if you don't.

Exchanges

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



A Sample Contest

Sajonar the Sonorous and his rival, Eldithedel, Majordomo of Goolagath the Ritually Unclean, find themselves at the same ball, both maneuvering to fall under the eye of their host, who is known for granting lavish gifts upon those who please him. Lacking most abilities that are known to create delight in their host, Sajonar decides to rely upon his Etiquette ability; his hope is to behave in such a well-bred and proper manner that he will set the mark for all of his host's parties yet to come. He has an Etiquette rating and current pool of 10.

"In clear view of our host, but taking no apparent notice of him," Sajonar's player informs the GM, "I will withdraw my kerchief and flutter it, saying, in the Language of Kerchief Manipulation, 'What fine fate has brought about this event, so perfect in every measurable way?'" He rolls his die and comes up with a 5, a **Prosaic Success**, and he beams in the self-satisfied way for which he is known.

But Eldithedel's player chooses to counter his action with his own Etiquette, which, Eldithedel being somewhat more experienced, has a rating of 11; he, too, has a full pool of 11. He says, "I will draw out and open my lesser fan and twirl it with my customary aplomb in the pattern that states, 'How sad that barbarians have invaded and failed to discern that kerchiefs are out of fashion.'" He, too, rolls his die. He gets a 4, a **Hair's-Breadth Success**, which barely convinces the onlooking host that, indeed, kerchiefs are out of style.

Sajonar feels the early chill of panic grip him, but chooses not to yield the field. He crosses to stand before Eldithedel and performs his most graceful bow, then announces for all to hear, "How delightful to see you again, and may I present you with this frippery, which escaped your sleeve as you flirted before the lady of the house." He spends a point to permit him the reroll, reducing his Etiquette pool to 9, and rolls his die. To his great glee, he rolls a 6, an **Illustrious Success**. This gives him a **boon of 2 points**, increasing his Etiquette pool to 11, and convinces everyone within sight that Eldithedel has, in fact, brought a kerchief when they were out of fashion, flirted with the host's wife, and clumsily dropped his kerchief on this most elegant of nights.

Eldithedel gulps and stands his ground. "I fear you confuse my actions with those of some baboon you have witnessed in a mirror," he says. Instead of rerolling, his tactic is to **nullify the Illustrious Success** by spending 3 from his pool. He does. Sajonar loses that 2-point boon he received and must reroll. He does so, but achieves a 4, **Hair's-Breadth Success**. This is less than his success of a moment before, but the onlookers still see him in a position superior to Eldithedel's.

Eldithedel's pool is down to 8, and success is still with Sajonar. But Sajonar rolled last, so Eldithedel will spend another 1, reducing his pool to 7, and roll again on the strength of his last statement. He rolls... and comes up with a 1. **Dismal Failure**.

He can reroll again, but because this was a Dismal Failure, he would spend 3 to do so (1 for the reroll, plus 2 as the special levy for rerolling a Dismal Failure). This would leave him with just 4, and he has other things he must accomplish tonight with his Etiquette ability.

So he chooses not to reroll, and yields the field. Eldithedel turns the color of failure as the audience bursts into laughter around him, and his host resolves to investigate the matter of Eldithedel flirting with his lady.

Fighting

Combat—any attempt by one character to physically harm another—is a contest like any other. Characters act in the order of their initiative. Attack is an active move; defense is reactive.

Attacks

When you win an Attack exchange, you have scored a **hit**. You needn't worry about calculating damage or assessing the effects of your blow; you can sit back, smiling and nodding, as your victim does all the calculation.

This means, of course, that if *you* are hit, you have to figure out what happened to you.

When you are hit in combat, your GM will ask you to make a Health roll. Health represents your ability to resist physical harm. Health rolls can't be countered. If you dislike the result of a Health roll, you can reroll as usual, so long as your Health pool is not empty.

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

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

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

If you suffer from three injuries, you are either **dead** (if you have no Health pool left) or **dying**. If you're dying, you have 15 minutes to live per remaining Health in your pool.

Though the subject of what happens when you're dying may be of vital interest to you, we will not return to it for a short time. If this matter has you on the edge of your seat, skip down to "Recovery and Refreshing."

Unconsciousness

In some circumstances, the worst consequence you risk from a failed Health roll is unconsciousness. For example, in combat, an

attacker can always opt to knock the victim out rather than risk dealing permanent harm.

In such situations, one injury has the effect described above, while two injuries mean that you're **knocked out**, not down.

Every half hour of game time, you may make a Health roll to see if your character wakes up. After half an hour, others may wake the character by shaking him, dousing him with cold water, or otherwise jolting him.

Missile Combat

Any character with the Attack skill can fire missiles at a target. If the target has a defense ability, he may use it to counter the missile attack in the usual fashion.

If the attacker is firing at an object the size of a breadbox or smaller (the GM decides the target's volume relative to that of a breadbox), the attacker suffers a penalty of 1 to the die roll. If a target is behind cover to the extent that the portions of his body an attacker can see are of breadbox proportions or smaller, the attacker suffers the same penalty of 1.

The full *Dying Earth* rules offer more elaborate guidelines for missile combat. Still, in those rules and in these, note that missile combat is undramatic. Sensible GMs arrange adventures so as to avoid missile combat whenever possible.

Missile weapon ranges are as follows:

Weapon	Range
Sling	80 feet
Bow	80 feet
Longbow	100 feet
Throwing knife	20 feet
Rock	30 feet

Special Rules

Unarmed combat: An armed character gets a boon of 2 per exchange when attacking or defending against an unarmed opponent. If both combatants are unarmed, no boons or levies apply. This boon does not apply to missile attacks against an unarmed target.



Weapons: You gain a boon of 1 if you are familiar with the weapon you wield, and your opponent is not. This applies only to melee weapons, not to missile weapons.

Wallops (Attack abilities): If you successfully wallop an opponent with your attack ability, you may choose the condition he ends up in: hurt, downed, unconscious, or dead. By spending an additional 3 from your pool, you can kill him in spectacularly visceral fashion. You can wait to see if he managed to avoid your wallop before spending the extra 3.

Wallops (Defense abilities): If you wallop an opponent with your defense ability, he immediately disengages from the fight, certain that his attack is doomed to fail. A GM character won't return to fight again unless subjected to powerful exhortation of some kind. If the character does rally and attack again, he suffers a levy of 2 on all attack attempts against you.

Recovery and Refreshing

If **dying**, you can improve your condition to Down by getting a Health boon of 1 or more—usually through the ministrations of a character with Physician skill.

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

If **hurt**, you can fully recover by refreshing your Health pool, or gaining a Health boon of 3

or more. A Hurt character refreshes after a number of days of peaceful inactivity equal to the difference between his Health pool and Health rating.

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

Running Away

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

Once you've broken away from him, you can run away. If he chases you, a new contest, pitting your Athletics against his, begins. If you win, you manage to elude him. If he wins, he catches up to you and the fight continues. Ignore normal initiative rolls for a chase; the pursued character goes first in each exchange. Additional actions are not possible during a chase.

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

⚡ Magic ⚡

The Dabbler

As mentioned earlier, characters in Cugel-level campaigns, if they choose to learn magic, may start only at the level of Dabbler. Dabblers have learned only the bare rudiments of magic and are occasionally foolish enough to attempt a difficult spell.

A Dabbler can do the following things:

- Read the languages of the most common magical texts
- Know the name and approximate capabilities of every common Straightforward spell (the difference between Straightforward and Complex spells is explained later) and all relatively common enchanted items
- Memorize spells to be cast later
- Cast cantraps (minor, versatile magical effects)
- Cast spells from a grimoire or memorized spells with a reasonable chance of success
- Know the names of the most famous magicians

It is assumed that a Dabbler has had initial training in magic from another Dabbler or magician who owed him a favor or through the acquisition of—and subsequent survival of untrained experimentation with—one or more elementary grimoires.

Types of Magic

Almost all magic consists of manipulation and control of a magical entity. Such entities range in power from minor elementals barely able to ignite a candle, to lesser semi-sapient beings such as madlings, to the sapient, powerful, and generally querulous creatures called *sandestins*.

When the magic is performed correctly, the magician commands the entity to perform some

action, and the entity does so to the best of its ability. Almost every magical action is accomplished by these unseen entities. On occasion, entity-like abilities are instead bound into a physical object.

Magic uses one of four methods:

- Cantraps
- Spellcasting
- Enchanted items
- Sandestins

These quick-start rules cover only cantraps and the simpler spells. For rules about complex spells, enchanted items, and sandestins, consult the full *Dying Earth* rules.

Cantraps

Cantraps are the least effective but by far the most widespread magic. Cantraps are emotionally charged blessings or curses backed by a few mystic gestures or short phrases. If an entity answers the call, the target incurs some minor, specific blessing or curse. Deceptions are revealed more readily or work more effectively; gambling winnings or losses are somewhat more extensive; journeys may be more or less fraught with danger.

A successful curse inflicts a levy of 1 on any rolls within the scope of the curse. Similarly, a successful blessing grants a boon of 2 to the first activity directly within the blessing's scope.

The good or ill luck normally lasts one hour. When the caster scores an Illustrious Success, the effects may last up to a full day.

A cantrap cannot affect events that have already occurred. One cannot, for instance, cast a cantrap to nullify all the cantraps a rival has cast in the last hour.

Magic is a practical science, or, more properly, a craft, since emphasis is placed primarily upon utility, rather than basic understanding. [...] A spell in essence corresponds to a code, or set of instructions, inserted into the sensorium of an entity which is able and not unwilling to alter the environment in accordance with the message conveyed by the spell. These entities are not necessarily "intelligent," nor even "sentient," and their conduct, from the tyro's point of view, is unpredictable, capricious, and dangerous.

— *Rhialto the Marvellous*

Rules For Cantraps

Anyone can cast cantraps: A character need not have the Magic ability to cast a cantrap. A caster without Magic spends nothing. Only one roll is allowed. An Illustrious success means that the cantrap succeeds. A Dismal Failure generally means that a curse affects the caster instead, and that a blessing is reversed in intent, becoming a curse. On any other result, nothing happens.

A Dabbler who performs a cantrap spends 1 from his Magic pool. If he does not like the result, he can spend another 1 to reroll. The only limit on the number of rerolls is the size of the Dabbler's magic pool.

Cantraps never affect their caster: Successful blessings or curses produced using cantraps can never affect the caster. All blessings and curses must be cast on someone else.

The target must be visible: Blessings and curses may only be cast on a single target whom the caster can clearly see and hear.

Minor physical cantraps: Anyone with Magic ability can use cantraps to create minor physical effects. These effects never last more than a minute. They all must take place within a foot or two of the magician, and are at most capable of producing sufficient force to swat a fly or light a single candle.

Cantraps require obvious speech and gestures: Blessings or curses must be initiated by a lengthy and emotionally charged verbal statement regarding the caster's wishes for the

target. If the caster is distracted, silenced, or slain before the statement is complete, the cantrap fails. Somewhat easier, physical cantraps only require a single flashy gesture and a word or two.

Cantraps must be specific: Curses and blessings must specify what their luck will involve. For example, the caster could curse a target to fail to gain their heart's desire, or lose money in gambling, but not simply suffer general misfortune.

No multiple blessings: No one can be simultaneously subject to multiple blessings. Any blessings after the first cast on a target automatically fail. Unfortunately, multiple simultaneous curses are entirely possible.

Death curses: Death curses and blessings are the most potent cantraps. A dying caster may use either his Magic or Persuade pool to obtain additional successes. This is the *only* situation where a non-Magic pool can increase the chance of performing a cantrap. In addition, bonuses or penalties from death blessings or curses are tripled. If the caster returns to life, the cantrap instantly ends.

Spells

A spell is a precisely defined set of instructions to a specific magical being, exhorting it to perform a single defined feat. A spell can do anything from lighting a candle to transporting the caster to a distant Aeon.

Spells are written in books or recorded in other highly detailed fashion. A written spell embodies instructions on how to successfully command the entity, combined with mental exercises designed to precisely focus the caster's mind. This last aspect is vital, for commanding a magical entity requires strong will.

Spells are cast in two ways. The caster can read the spell from the grimoire (spell book), taking special care to perform necessary gesticulations and pronounce every syllable correctly. If all goes well, the magical entity does the caster's bidding. Casting a spell this way typically requires 20 minutes (Straightforward spells) to an hour (Complex spells), during which time the caster cannot be disturbed without dire consequences.

Adventurous magicians, who rarely have time to open a book and chant carefully when facing hurricanes or deodands, instead perform all necessary chants, gestures, and other physical components well in advance of need. Then the caster engages in an act of will, which temporarily imprints the proper mental focus for the spell—a process called *memorization*.

At any point after memorization, the caster can summon up this mental state and cast the spell. However, once the caster has cast a memorized spell, it vanishes. The spell cannot be cast again until the proper words and gestures are again performed and all instructions are again memorized. Magicians cannot memorize more than one version or copy of a spell at once.

Also, spellcasting is not without risk. Careless or inexperienced magicians can suffer drastically unexpected results if they mispronounce even a single syllable. A miscast spell may affect unintended targets, or have a greatly reduced, greatly increased, or even completely reversed effect.

How It Works In the Game

Casting from a grimoire: For 20 minutes (for a Straightforward spell), the spellcaster reads aloud from the book, makes appropriate gestures, etc. This elaborate process is abbreviated in play: You say, "I want to cast this spell," and the GM replies,

"Make your roll." Roll one die and spend a magic point. A result of 1-3 means you fail to cast the spell. (Note below the effects of a Dismal failure!) A result of 4-6 means you succeed. Illustrious Successes have no unusual effect.

Memorization: This works much like casting from a grimoire, except that at the end of 20 minutes, the caster has memorized rather than cast the spell. You do not roll dice nor spend points during memorization, but only when your character actually casts the spell during play. Note that each spell must be memorized individually, and each takes 20 minutes to memorize.

As with abilities, you may spend magic points to reroll undesirable die results. Dabblers may not, however, reroll Dismal Failures.

More Rules For Spells

All spells have limited durations: Most spells last from a few hours to a day, though their physical effects (healing a wound, blasting a rock into pebbles) can be permanent. Phantasmal or unnatural effects like illusions, spheres of magical force, and transformations (such as allowing the caster to breathe water) have limited duration.

Spells are limited in extent: Spells can only affect targets visible or directly perceptible to the caster. Moreover, a spell can only affect a single location. Spells can target a single individual, a moderate-sized group of targets who are all near each other, or a single location no more than an acre or two in extent. So, though a spell could turn a large cavern inside out, it could not destroy an entire mountain, or affect randomly scattered members of a crowd while leaving others in the crowd untouched.

Straightforward and Complex spells: Spells are Complex or Straightforward, depending on their difficulty to learn and cast. This set of rules deals only with Straightforward spells, so you need not toss and turn, unable to sleep from worry about the dangers inherent in Complex spells.

Memorizing spells: Characters with the Magic ability can memorize a number of spells determined by their Magic rating. A character must have 2 rating points in Magic for every

The most pliable and cooperative of these creatures range from the lowly and frail elementals, through the sandestins. More fractious entities are known by the Temuchin as "daihak," which includes "demons" and "gods." A magician's power derives from the abilities of the entities he is able to control. Every magician of consequence employs one or more sandestins. A few arch-magicians of Grand Motholam dared to employ the force of the lesser daihaks. To recite or even to list the names of these magicians is to evoke wonder and awe.

— *Rhialto the Marvellous*

Straightforward spell he wishes to memorize. For example, a character with a Magic ability rating of 11 could memorize no more than 5 Straightforward spells.

The price of failure: Ordinary failure when casting a spell merely means the spell does not work. Dismal Failure means a miscast spell. Miscast spells are almost always reversed or altered in intent. Remember that magic is actually performed by entities; such entities often treat Dismal Failure as a license to wreak havoc on the caster. Though miscast spells are rarely instantly fatal, the consequences are annoying, embarrassing, or dangerous.

Voice and gestures: Casting a spell from a grimoire requires reading the spell aloud and performing complex gestures. If the casting is interrupted, a levy of 2 is applied to the roll. If the interruption is serious (such as the caster being knocked out), the spell cannot be cast.

A memorized spell can be cast instantly, without words or gestures. However, the necessary concentration does require a few moments. Initiative for casting memorized spells is treated normally.

Starting spells for Dabblers: A Dabbler character does not begin play automatically knowing spells. To know one or more spells when play begins, the Dabbler can spend 2 creation points per Straightforward spell; he also possesses a grimoire in which these spells are recorded.

Finding new spells in play: Characters who wish to acquire new spells during play cannot

merely spend improvement points (explained below) and add a new spell to their grimoire. Instead, characters must acquire new spells by finding or stealing them. No improvement points are needed to acquire new spells, but they are bestowed according to the game moderator's wishes.

Magic Resistance and Magical Protection

Creatures that lack the Magic ability cannot resist the effects of magic. Spell automatically affect such mundane targets.

Fortunately, the study of magic also includes study of resisting its effects. Unless they willingly allow it to affect them, **those with the Magic ability automatically receive one free die roll to resist any magical effect.** They may spend magic points to reroll the resistance die.

Rolls to resist magic work like any other contest. Magicians cannot resist spells they cast (including the effects of their own Dismal Failures). As with other contests, magicians cannot spend points if they are asleep or unconscious.

Diving out of the way: Even memorized spells require a few moments to cast. Characters with no other means of resisting magic can try to get out of the spell's area of effect by diving behind a solid object or removing themselves

from the area. Characters must have the initiative to attempt a dive out of the way. To gain initiative, the diver's Athletics pool must be greater than the caster's magic pool (in ties, roll randomly to see who gains initiative). A diver with initiative may reach cover or leap out of range with a successful Athletics roll. This attempt has a **limit** of one—that is, only one die may be rolled in this attempt; you cannot reroll.

It is not possible to get out of range of Sight-range spells, but diving for cover still works. You cannot dodge if you use your Magic ability to resist magic.

Then there is always assault. If a target can down or kill the magician before the spell is cast, they have rendered the magician helpless and the spell fails. (However, see "Death curses" above under *Cantraps*.)

Sample Spells

Here are a few spells from the *Dying Earth* rulebook; the full rules contain many more.

Spells are described in these terms:

Range: How far away the target of the spell can be from the caster of the spell—*Self*, meaning the spell only affects the person casting it; *Touch*, meaning that it affects someone or something the caster is touching; *Near*, affecting a visible target no more than 10 yards away from the caster; or *Sight*, affecting any target the caster can clearly see.

Duration: How long the spell lasts—*Instant*, meaning it lasts only a moment, though its effects could be permanent; *Concentration*, meaning that the spell lasts as long and the magician concentrates on it and performs no other strenuous or demanding actions, with a probable duration no longer than 20 minutes; *Hours*, as explained in the description for the spell; *Feat*, meaning that the spell lasts long enough for the target of the spell to perform one specific feat defined by the spell; or *Day*, a full day.

Difficulty: An indication of how long it takes to cast the spell and whether the caster suffers levies when casting it. The two types are *Straightforward* and *Complex*; only *Straightforward* spells, taking 20 minutes to cast and imposing no undue penalties, appear in the following list.

Arnhout's Sequestrous Digitalia

Range: Near

Duration: Concentration

Difficulty: Straightforward

Favored by avaricious magicians everywhere, this spell creates a small warp in space through which the caster can thrust his or her hand. The warp can appear at any location within the spell's range. The caster's hand appears to vanish from the end of his arm and reappear some distance away. The ensorcelled hand remains fully functional. For the spell's duration, the caster can also move the warp anywhere within range.

The warp itself is approximately six inches in diameter, and the caster can pull anything through the warp that can be held in one hand and fits through the hole. Because the warp is invisible, this spell permits subtle thefts.

By virtue of the spell's careful design, if it is magically dispelled the warp vanishes and the caster's hand remains unharmed on his wrist.

The Astonishing Oral Projection

Range: Sight

Duration: Concentration or Feat

Difficulty: Straightforward

Often learned by Dabblers and apprentice magicians, this spell produces a highly realistic mouth on any surface. The spell can be cast equally easily upon a blank wall or the back of a rival's head. The caster can speak through this



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

mouth as if it were his own. This mouth lasts for as long as the caster concentrates on using it.

This spell can be cast so that the mouth remains closed and invisible until some specified word or phrase is spoken in its presence. Thereupon the mouth delivers a prepared speech up to 100 words long.

Behemoth's Bounty

Range: Near

Duration: Instant

Difficulty: Straightforward

Beloved by gourmands and travelers, this spell creates a feast, complete with giant plates, bowls, mugs, and eating utensils, that easily feeds more than a dozen hungry people. The food is nourishing but not exceptional, usually simple fare like sliced roast meat, boiled grain, hearty and well-cooked roots or tubers, a prodigious quantity of soup, and simple gravy or sauce. Beer, cider, fruit juice, or possibly watered wine accompanies the feast. When the spell lapses, everything vanishes, but hunger has been genuinely and lastingly satisfied.

Brassnose's Twelfold Bounty

Range: Touch

Duration: Day

Difficulty: Straightforward

A favorite with paupers and confidence tricksters everywhere, this spell makes eleven

copies of any item that can be held comfortably in one hand. Coins, vials of liquid, small exotic pets—the only limitation is that the spell cannot duplicate enchantments on items. It can duplicate their appearance, but none of the created items have magical power.

For the duration of the magic, the duplicates are substantial, solid, and durable. But when the spell wears off, all duplicates vanish.

The Charm of Brachial Fortitude

Range: Touch

Duration: Feat

Difficulty: Straightforward

The target gains 12 ability points usable in Strength-based attacks or feats requiring muscle power—for instance, breaking down a door, lifting and carrying an object weighing up to one ton, pushing a crowd of people aside, climbing a sheer cliff, or fighting a battle.

If the target already has points in Strength-based attacks, the points gained from this spell add to those points. The points granted cannot be refreshed normally, and all unused points vanish as soon as the spell ends.

Enchantment of Another's Face

Range: Touch

Duration: Day

Difficulty: Straightforward

With this spell the caster can disguise the target as any other person or humanoid creature,

male or female, fat or thin, young or old. The caster can only disguise the target as an individual whom the caster has seen clearly.

The target looks, sounds, smells, and even moves exactly like the individual imitated. Voice and fingerprints are duplicated exactly. Even people, creatures, and entities who know the imitated individual quite well can be fooled.

However, the target gains none of the knowledge, language, or abilities of the individual imitated.

Expedient Poultice

Range: Touch

Duration: Instant

Difficulty: Straightforward

This healing spell is commonly known and quite simple. It instantly heals all damage and injury caused by wounds, poison, and disease, and completely cures all normal diseases. It even restores limbs lost to injury. This spell does not restore fatigue produced by lack of sleep or reverse the effects of aging, but it heals everything from a deadly wound to a hangover. This spell works only on living targets, and does not refresh the patient's Health pool or other ability pools.

The Illusion of Vile Arthropods

Range: Sight

Duration: Concentration

Difficulty: Straightforward

This spell creates a highly realistic illusion of up to three nonhuman monsters the size of oxen, a large group of creatures no larger than small dogs, or a swarm of insects or bird-size creatures covering several square yards. The caster controls the illusory creatures' actions. This spell cannot create believable humans.

Monsters created by this spell look, sound, and smell just like the real thing. However, the illusions have no substance and cannot affect the physical world. Attacks pass harmlessly through them, betraying their illusory nature.

This spell is not limited to arthropods. Any creature liable to provoke disgust is permitted.

The question "Why, then, the term 'arthropods'?" is nuncupatory.

Liberation of Warp

Range: Near

Duration: Instant

Difficulty: Straightforward

With a sudden and drastic shock to the fabric of space, this spell instantly dispels all magic and warp within 10 yards of the caster. Permanent magical effects are unaffected, but any spell currently operating is instantly and permanently negated, as is any effect produced by a sandestin or enchanted item which uses charges. (The *Dying Earth* rulebook details these effects.) Effects produced by a permanent enchanted item are negated for one full round.

The etheric shock of this spell lasts but an instant. After the spell has ended, new spells may be cast without penalty and the effects of permanent magical items return.

Phandaal's Mantle of Stealth

Range: Touch

Duration: Hours

Difficulty: Straightforward

The target and all his possessions become invisible. The target is still audible and detectable by scent, but casts no shadow and has no reflection.

While invisible, the subject can still see himself and may act normally. Combat or shouting may give away the subject's position with fair accuracy, but do not dispel the invisibility.

Anyone fighting an invisible opponent suffers a levy of 2 points and a penalty of -1 to all attack and defense rolls. A character fighting in smoke, fog, mud, or other environment that betrays the invisible opponent's location incurs only the 2-point levy, not the -1 penalty.

This spell can also be cast on animals up to the size of an elephant and single objects no larger than a large wardrobe or a dining table.

So now, be off! Or I inflict upon you the Spell of the Macroïd Toe, whereupon the signalized member swells to the proportions of a house.

— *The Eyes of the Overworld*

Taglines

One rule that encourages *Dying Earth* players to maintain a Vancian feel is the *tagline*.

At the start of each play session, the GM gives each player two **taglines**. A tagline is a short bit of dialogue, often a barb best used against another character, especially a game moderator character. During the course of the game, stay alert for the opportunity, when speaking as your character, to use each of these lines of dialogue (no more than once).

Dying Earth characters may be unlettered or pedantic, sanctimonious or prudent—but they are, one and all, eloquent. Taglines that suit the game’s spirit display panache, rhetorical flair, and a pleasingly flowery—well, let these samples speak for themselves:

- “Come, come, you make a flagrantly unreasonable request!”
- “From your behavior I assumed that you were not only deaf and dumb, but guilty of mental retardation.”
- “I am rationality personified; it is unthinking to suggest otherwise!”
- “I have taken counsel with myself and believe I can adequately fulfill the obligations of the job.”
- “I do not care to listen; obloquy injures my self-esteem and I am skeptical of praise.”
- “You speak with neither logic nor comprehension! How can you be so absolute?”

The GM may create more or choose from the expanded list in the full *Dying Earth* rules. It’s also easy to cull taglines from the works of Vance. Choose general dialogue lines that fit a variety of situations. Use their characteristic Vancian tenor to inspire your own non-tagline dialogue.

Why use taglines? In addition to keeping the game true to the spirit of Jack Vance’s fiction, they amuse the other players and are almost the only means available for your characters to improve his abilities. See the next section.

Vancian Language

The *Dying Earth* rulebook occasionally uses old or obscure

words to evoke the *Dying Earth*’s convoluted whimsy. The rules text is meant to get you thinking in Vancian rhythms, to help you improvise suitable dialogue during play. You’ll enjoy this game more if you get into this spirit.

If big words put you off, stay calm. When you meet one, breathe deeply and check the sentence again. **The meaning is always clear from context. Really.** If you’re still puzzled, you can always pull down the dictionary—or faster yet, check the fine online dictionaries on the Internet. Soon even the most bibliophobic players will be tossing off six-syllable verbal monstrosities with the facility of the most long-winded Vancian scholar.

✠ Improving Abilities ✠

You increase your character's abilities by spending *improvement points*.

It costs 3 improvement points to improve any one ability rating by 1, up to its listed ability cap. Beyond that, it gets more expensive (see table).

Rating (Cugel-level)	Improvement Pt Cost
11	6
12	12
13	24
Each +1	24

Obtaining Improvement Points

The GM gives every player one improvement point for playing in a game session. A player who participates in four games would thus have four improvement points.

You can also earn improvement points through appropriate use of taglines (see *Taglines*, previous page).

If you say a tagline during the game, but (in the GM's judgment) the line bears no real relationship to the action, you get no points.

If the line applies to the situation, but is no more noteworthy or entertaining than the spontaneously-created dialogue around it, you get 1 point.

If the line seems especially appropriate, you get 2 points.

If the line arouses emotion among the players and GM, you get 3 points. Laughter is the most common response, and the easiest to elicit.

The GM is the final arbiter of the appropriateness of tagline use.

✠ You've Just Begun! ✠

The complete *Dying Earth* rulebook gives you a grand tour of the Dying Earth, offering many more spells, magical items, notable persons, creatures, and rules for both Turjan-level and Rhalto-level magical campaigns.

Look for the Pelgrane Press *Dying Earth* rulebook at better gaming stores near you, or obtain ordering information direct from Pelgrane Press at the address below.

✠ Credits ✠

Consultation and inspiration: Jack Vance

Rules: Robin D. Laws

Magic rules: John Snead

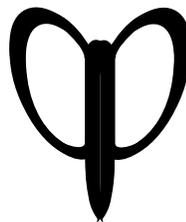
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Authorized
and approved
by *Dying Earth*
fantasy novelist
JACK VANCE

A FUTURE UNIMAGINABLY DISTANT....

The sun, now in its dotage, is a swollen maroon orb. It stutters and blinks. At any moment it may finally go out.

EARTH, IMMENSELY OLD....

Dig anywhere and find a buried city or the shore of a vanished sea. Deodand-haunted woods stretch from decadent Kaiin to the Land of the Falling Wall. Erbs and grue hunt in the wilds. Isolated villages embrace surprising customs. Larger towns favor debauchery and mincing murder.

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- an ambitious magician searching for lost lore, like **Turjan of Miir**
- a supreme mage to rank with **Rhialto the Marvellous**, commanding the omnipotent but quarrelsome sandestins

Designed by Robin D. Laws (*Feng Shui*, *Hero Wars*) with magic rules by John Snead (*Nephilim*), **The Dying Earth** features easy, fast-playing rules that encourage creativity and interaction. No knowledge of Jack Vance's work is needed for play, but fans of the stories will enjoy the comprehensive summary of the world's places, creatures, and known spells.

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