



Chapter 1

How To Use This Book

THE DECADENT, WHITE-WALLED CITY OF KAIIN, the largest in fabled Ascolais, makes a superb home base for any group of Dying Earth characters, whether they be Cugel-level ne'er-do-wells, Turjan-level adventurers, or Rhalto-level Arch-Magicians. *The Kaiin Player's Guide* tells you, the player, what your character knows as a long-time resident of, or frequent visitor to, this city of marvels.

This introductory section brims with vital advice, and the occasional dire warning, directed to the sagacious reader of *The Kaiin Player's Guide*. Purchasers more impetuous than yourself may heedlessly flip past it, assuming that it consists of the usual aggregation of self-congratulation, statements of the obvious, and standard text clipped from previous books, all decorated with spare illustrations that didn't really match the passages they were intended to illustrate. While this is often a necessary procedure when dealing with books published by our rival roleplaying publishers, in the case at hand, no mistake could be more grave! *The Kaiin Player's Guide* employs a deviously innovative approach to the usual divide between material aimed at players, and that intended for GM use only. Acquaint yourself with it now, or face inevitable bafflement.

WARNING: There Is No Kaiin GM's Guide

*The foolish reader may further assume that *The Kaiin Player's Guide* must be a companion volume to an even thicker and more lavish GM's book, in which various secrets are revealed and game statistics are provided. Let us take some time, when next we gather together at the wine table, to deride this hypothetical person. Although this book, for laudably shrewd commercial reasons, is labelled for player use, it also doubles as the only information source a GM will require to run years of adventures set in Kaiin.*

For Players

Whether you're just beginning a *Dying Earth* series or are already well embarked on one, the amenities of Kaiin should exert a siren lure on your character. Roleplaying characters naturally gravitate towards cities. They crave a home base of some sort – a place where they can rest and heal up between dangerous exploits, where they can store their hard-earned terces, and where rumors of new and profitable activities might be easily gleaned. After spending countless sessions traipsing across reeking fens, foraging in barren and wintry forests, or sailing on the waters of some turbulent sea, they'll yearn for the amenities of a large and various city. They can leave behind the slope-browed sub-humans, proudly ignorant villagers and treacherous hermits of their far-flung travels, in favor of the well-supplied merchants, learned savants and perfumed pleasure slaves of



Kaiin. PCs who behave like scholarly homebodies may see the city as a oasis of calm and tranquility. However, those whose tastes lead them to explore the city's countless nooks and crannies will find opportunities for both profit and danger so abundant that they can have their fill of death-defying excitement without ever venturing outside the city's famous walls.



The Voice Of This Book

You may be expecting us to do the obvious thing, as so many of our competitors might, and present this tome as a real document from the city, albeit one blessed with abundant illustrations and the fruits of state-of-the-art desktop publishing software. This stratagem is a time-honored one, which conveys the flavor of a world, while coincidentally making easy the freelance writer's essential task of inflating his word count¹.

However, the purpose of this book is to give you the sense that your characters know Kaiin as well as you do your own hometown or longtime place of residence. If you've lived for years in Toledo, Ohio², you wouldn't need to read a guidebook to familiarize yourself with the place. Your guidebook would be the years of memories and experiences you've accumulated while living there. To duplicate this effect, the other chapters in this book are written in the second person, with the assumption that "you" is your character. For example:

You've learned to be wary during the regatta, as its crowds act as a magnet for pickpockets, many of whom belong to the notorious Umpvold family, which has lost more members to the prince's deodand pit than any other criminal group in the city.

Obviously, not every single PC in your group had the exact same experiences in Kaiin before the series started. Most of the material is stated generally, so that they reflect basic background knowledge rather than highly specific events in your past history. When you do run across a reference that seems overly specific to

you, treat it as a flourish of creative license, not as an addition we've unilaterally made to your character background.

Similarly, apply a grain of salt to references that seem out of keeping with your particular character. If you've established that your PC is not only averse to crowds but deathly afraid of boats, chances are that he never personally attended the regatta. Presumably, he learned about the pickpocketing Umpvolds through some other means. The GM will never use this book as "proof" about your past history: the use of the second person is merely a device, and isn't meant to be taken absolutely literally.

Perusal During Play

GMs are sometimes trained to prevent their players from referring to rulebooks while a game is in progress. In some cases, this is entirely appropriate: if your character knows nothing about the exotic creatures of the Great Erm, you shouldn't get to whip out the rulebook and flip to the section on erbs and leucomorphs as soon as your character broaches the boundaries of that forbidding land. Such gratuitous



Although both are found in the Great Erm the leucomorph must be dealt with very differently from the gid.

¹ Fortunately, the Dying Earth format permits the copious use of footnotes, so that the author deprived of the chance to write in character nevertheless retains other weapons in his arsenal.

² A gruesome thought, but please bear with us for the sake of the example.



book-consultation jarringly breaks the mood, reminding us of the distinction between player and character when we should be forgetting it.

However, in the instance of the *The Kaiin Player's Guide*, we encourage GMs to allow you to refer to it as often as you like. Here we have the opposite case, where your character knows much more about the city he lives in than you do. So when you look things up in this book, what you're really doing is saving your GM the trouble of doing the same. Instead of asking her where the city's apothecaries are located, you can look it up yourself, in the handy reference starting on p180. Without having to bother her, you can find what you're looking for and tell her your character is on his way there. She may even ask you to read out the relevant passage, or perhaps just hand her the book so she can peruse it herself.

In addition to shops, you should also feel perfectly free to look for rumors to investigate, personages to interact with, and places of interest to explore.

Rumors

Were it possible to summon up a sense of ideological fervor in these last dying days of the sun, we might take this opportunity to proclaim that the *The Kaiin Player's Guide* is more than just a sourcebook: it is a manifesto for player liberation! No longer must you meekly submit to your GM's choice of plot hooks at the beginning of each new adventure. Instead, you can scan the chapters of this book at your idle leisure, looking for the section on rumors in each neighborhood description. Make a note of the rumors that seem interesting to you. When your character next finds himself at loose ends in Kaiin, send him off to investigate one of these rumors³. Don't worry that this forces your GM to improvise: the game system, with its simple game statistics and off-the-cuff GMC creation, is designed to make it especially easy for GMs to make it up as she goes along. In fact, if she's like most GMs, she'll be happy to avoid the effort of dreaming up a plot hook that matters to your character. Adventures motivated by the PCs' specific desires are almost always more memorable than ones that treat the characters as interchangeable figures with generic goals. So treat the rumor sections as catalogues of possible adventures, using them to take the reins of the series into your own hands.



Players of Rhialto-level characters should note that most of the rumors will be beneath their interest. They can solve most of the petty mysteries of the everyday city with a mere wave of their hands — or rather, a peremptory command to their favored sandestins. For them, the investigation of rumors is more a matter of entertaining diversion between adversaries truly capable of disturbing their sense of composure, such as archveults or their colleagues in Ildefonse's conclave.

Contacts

With the exception of the occasional embittered shut-in, most people who live in cities for long periods of time develop a range of contacts, people who they know casually and encounter occasionally. They may be clients, merchants, innkeepers, armorers, librarians, academics, bodyguards, assayers, drinking partners, courtesans, or anyone else your character might know by name and have repeat dealings with, without forming any great emotional tie or binding formal relationship.

³ Especially clever players will ensure that the taglines they choose will match up with the sorts of adventures they expect the rumors to lead towards.



Using Your Contacts

In general, your contacts move the plot forward without solving any truly major problems for you. To understand how best to use them, you'll need to look for a moment at the way GMs structure adventures⁴. An adventure is just a series of obstacles for you and the other players to overcome.

For example, you might need to persuade the mermelants to find the beer to give to the madman so he'll tell you why the ghosts haunt the bridge, so you can confront and exorcise them, getting the deed from the city official.

Each step in the above example is a separate obstacle in the adventure⁵. You know you've overcome one because it leads you to the next, until you reach the final obstacle, the adventure climax. Unless the GM has taken pity on you because you're stuck and can't seem to get past the current obstacle, she'll never let you solve a problem just by calling on a contact. However, contacts can reduce the time you spend flailing about between obstacles. They most often provide information.

You know you need to find mermelants, and don't know where to start looking for them. You use the contact rules to show that your character has a teamster contact. Mermelants are talkative, beery beasts of burden, and a cart owner is likely to either own mermelants, or know someone who does. Your contact doesn't help you persuade the mermelants (that's an obstacle) but he can move you to the obstacle by telling you where to find them.

In some cases, contacts may perform other minor services that your character needs in order to get to the next obstacle.

The madman lives at the bottom of a well. When you get to him with the beer, you discover that your next obstacle is a physical one: the hermit lives at the bottom of a ruined well, and you need to climb down to meet him without dropping any

of the bottles. The ruined well is near the Old Town, a disreputable part of town where honest merchants fear to tread. You check the CONTACTS section for that neighborhood, and use the rules below to show that you have a petty criminal as a contact. You find him, and he loans you some rope. He hasn't solved the problem for you — he certainly isn't climbing down any wells! — but he's brought you closer to solving it yourself.



For all but one neighborhood of Kaiin, this book provides a list of possible contacts. These are the people your character might know who live or work in that area. Whenever you find that you need help moving ahead to the next obstacle, flip to the chapter describing the neighborhood you're in⁶. Find its contact list. Keeping in mind the kind of help you need, decide which of the possible contacts on the list might provide it. Be prepared to think creatively; dreaming up elaborate rationalizations is part of the fun.

The list of contacts for The Fringe of Old Town doesn't immediately yield any likely rope-owners. To convince your GM that your criminal friend might have rope, you argue: "Thrubian has been

⁴ The same principles hold true whether the GM is improvising, running a prepared adventure of her own creation, or is using a published scenario.

⁵ Only rarely will you know all of the obstacles in advance. In an improvised adventure, your GM may not know all of them ahead of time, either.

⁶ Or one close to it. In some cases, your GM may allow you to cross the city in search of a relevant contact, but only when she can easily ignore the extra time this would realistically require.



involved in a number of kidnappings, and is always ready to tie someone up at a moment's notice." Your GM accepts your suggestion, mostly because it's amusing.

Note how this process involves you in creating details about the contact; you've become an accomplice to the GM as she fleshes out her series and her version of Kaiin. If you're good at creating suitably Vancian-sounding names, feel free to invent the contact's name, along with any other colorful details⁷.

Then (assuming that your GM has accepted your justification) your character must actually locate the contact. The GM may make this as easily done as said, or could add amusing complications to your adventure by adding a minor obstacle or two to your efforts.

When you mention Thrubian, your GM looks at her watch. Unbeknownst to you, she planned a series of scenes tonight revolving around another character, only to find herself at a loss when his player failed to show up for the session. Needing additional material to fill the length of the session, she decides to complicate your quest for Thrubian: when you find him, he'll be getting roused by vigilantes. You must persuade the vigilantes to let him go, or he won't be able to help.

When you find the contact, roll Persuasion to see if he helps you. You may reroll these Persuasion checks, as per the basic reroll rules.

The nature of the later trouble the contact will cause in the event of a Dismal Failures is left to the GM to determine. She decides both how serious the trouble will be, and when it will occur. It might happen later on in the current session, or many episodes down the line. Likewise, the extra favor granted by Illustrious Successes is also fully under GM control. In either case, you can safely assume that she'll draw inspiration from the situation, the type of contact, and how you play your character as you interact with him.

Some contact types respond especially well, or poorly, to particular Persuasion styles. If a contact type responds positively, the style is listed in brackets after



Contact Response Chart

1. Dismal Failure

Contact not only refuses, but decides to make other trouble for you at a later date.

2. Quotidian Failure

Contact refuses, perhaps impertinently.

3. Exasperating Failure

Contact refuses, apologetically.

4. Hair's-Breadth Success

Contact agrees, reluctantly.

5. Prosaic Success

Contact agrees, cheerfully.

6. Illustrious Success

Contact agrees, and does you a second, unrelated favor.

a plus (+) sign. If the type responds negatively, the style appears after a minus (-) sign. For example:

Petty criminal (+Intimidating, -Eloquent)

When rolling for a contact who treats your Persuasion style positively, treat all Prosaic Successes as Illustrious. When rolling for a contact who reacts negatively, treat all Quotidian Failures as Dismal.

You do not need to roll Persuasion when your GM has added additional obstacles to your search for the contact. Instead, you must do whatever is necessary to overcome the obstacle.

If you persuade the vigilantes threatening Thrubian, you need not subsequently cajole him, too. By overcoming the obstacle, you've won his automatic gratitude.

When you introduce a contact into the storyline, he becomes a full-fledged GMC like any other. Should the GM find herself in need of game statistics for a contact, she jots down whatever numbers she needs.

Recurring Contacts

If the group seems to enjoy the GM's portrayal of the

⁷ You can create details that add flavor, but not ones that advantage you. It's one thing to specify that a contact is married to a much younger man, quite another to say that she owes you a thousand terces.



contact, she'll likely bring him back for encore performances, as a recurring character in her series. Alternately, it might occur to her that she needs a character like your contact to perform some specific upcoming function in one of her plotlines. She might use the contact as a victim in need of rescue, a client hiring your group's services, or even as the troublemaker who turns out to be responsible for a problem they've been called upon to solve.

An obstacle you encounter in the current session may make you want to pay a return visit to a contact introduced in a previous one⁸. You might think that, over the course of successive encounters, you could cultivate a good relationship with a particular contact, building his loyalty and coming eventually to rely on his honesty and his good opinion of you. But then you would be thinking about a different game. Recurring contacts will remain as self-centered and peevish as any other typical resident of the Dying Earth. If anything, familiarity breeds contempt; GMs may choose to hit you with levies if you come to over-rely on a particular contact.

Contacts Recap

1. FIND CONTACT LIST for current neighborhood. (Other lists may be accepted according to GM whim.)
2. FIND A CONTACT TYPE on that list. Where not self-evident, contrive a rationalization to explain why a contact of that type can provide the sort of help you need.
3. ROLL PERSUASION to see if your contact, when found, is willing to help. (Or, if the GM thinks it will make the adventure more interesting, overcome a new obstacle to find the contact or make his help available to you.)
 - a) Depending on your Persuasion, some contacts may react positively (treat Prosaic Successes as Illustrious) or negatively (treat Quotidian Failures as Dismal.)
4. On a SUCCESS, the contact moves you a step closer to overcoming the present obstacle. On a FAILURE, he doesn't. The GM uses the Contact Response Chart to see how he treats you, and whether there are other repercussions, good or bad.

"I Am A Stranger Here"

Your character concept may not fit with our assumption that the PCs are very familiar with the city of Kaiin. You may be playing a barbarian, a vat-grown construct, an isolated villager, or merely someone who has never lived here. In these cases, you can't draw on contacts or make use of the tweaks that appear in this book -- at least not at first. After a year living in the city, you can make use of both⁹.

Certain fanatics might suggest, since you intend to play a stranger unfamiliar with the city, that you shouldn't read this book at all. We insist that they immediately withdraw this baseless canard! One of this guide's purposes is to present to you the sights, sounds, and smells of the city, relieving the GM's descriptive burden. If you come to the table with a vivid image of Kaiin already in mind, her job will be easier. So read the book not as an impression of your character's past experiences in the city, but as an indication of what your character will begin to see, feel, and taste as he begins to explore Kaiin.



⁸ For that matter, you might want to call upon a contact first introduced by another player.

⁹ The year must actually be spent in the city: meeting people, learning things, buying from merchants, and so on. If Kaiin is merely a place to hang your elaborately feathered hat while you traipse around the wilderness, you gain no further access to contacts or Kaiin-based tweaks.



Tweaks

As you know from perusing your well-thumbed copy of *Cugel's Compendium of Indispensable Advantages*, tweaks are special tricks you can use to boost one of your abilities whenever a certain, specific situation rears its head. Normally, a tweak costs 1 Improvement Point to acquire, requires you to have at least 3 points in the ability, and, unless your GM is unusually tolerant, is unavailable during character generation.

The neighborhood descriptions contain tweaks available only to experienced residents of Kaiin. (You can automatically specify that you are such a resident, as long as it doesn't contradict anything previously established about your character.) As you'll soon see, they tend to provide special advantages when dealing with the odd situations peculiar to each neighborhood.

No one is equally familiar with all of Kaiin's neighborhoods. Its people range from the utterly destitute to the hideously wealthy, and it is no easy thing to transcend your social circumstances. Before you acquire your first Kaiin-specific tweak, you must specify the single neighborhood in which you are most at home. Any tweak in this book can be purchased for the normal Improvement Point cost. However, Tweaks from your home neighborhood are available for free whenever you increase your rating in the governing ability. You can never gain more than one free tweak per point of ability increase, even if you're somehow trying to stack up with some other special deal on tweaks that might appear in some hypothetical supplement we haven't written yet.

Your home neighborhood should either be the place where you were raised, or the area where you currently reside¹⁰. Be prepared to dazzle the GM with a suitably entertaining rationalization if you select a neighborhood that seems out of step with your character.

Although you, the player, are adding a tweak to the character in the course of play, he isn't suddenly learning this new capability; he's had it for years. It's just that we haven't seen him use the talent while he's been "on stage", so to speak.



FORMAT

The next chapter provides a general overview of the city. After that, each of Kaiin's neighborhoods is described in its own section. These chapters share the same format, so you can easily find the information you need during play. That format is as follows:

On First Glance

Each chapter starts with a brief description containing the two or three essential facts you need to know about this neighborhood. If your character is a resident of Kaiin, he certainly knows this much about the neighborhood, even if he's never been there.

Didactic Overview

The didactic overview contains historical or background information which your character, realistically speaking, would know only if he has a Pedantry pool of 4 or more, or if he regularly spends time in the company of someone else who does. In other words, if your character has any interest in learning this sort of detail, he knows this.



¹⁰ This assumes that you have lived there for a good while.



Inhabitants

The section on inhabitants starts by describing the general population of the neighborhood. Here you'll learn how the people here support themselves, and what they offer to the city, and to curious, adventurous sorts such as yourself. This section may also contain notes on quirks of local etiquette, which may help you avoid embarrassment or the outrage of the inhabitants.

Contacts

The aforementioned contacts list appears here.

Personages

One or more prominent residents of the neighborhood are profiled in this section. As with the Personages in the main *Dying Earth RPG* rulebook, you can spend points during character creation to forge Relationships to any GMC listed in this book.

Some listings are not individualized; they describe a typical member of a group found in that neighborhood, such as a typical patrolman or mermelant breeder. After all, it would defy belief if every Kaiinese player character happened to know the same rug merchant.

You can forge a relationship to a typical character; just pick a name for him¹¹. You can suggest a character trait or two to the GM; these reflect not the typical character's actual personality, but your PC's impression of it. It's up to the GM to decide whether or not your assessment of his character is correct¹².

Note to GMs

The Personages listed in this book come with game statistics, which, obviously, the players can read. We don't need to tell you how to slightly adjust game statistics in accordance with your needs, and to keep the players guessing. If you ever hear a player say, "I can wallop him, he's only got a Rebuff of 8," it's time to begin adjusting in earnest. Otherwise, it may not even matter: in this game system, the raw numbers don't reveal that much.



Whether individual or typical, you don't need a relationship to a character to approach or attempt to interact with him. You should only spend precious creation points on relationships that you expect to use repeatedly, or which define your character. You are never obligated to take relationships, not even to any personages in your home neighborhood. It is certainly possible that you grew up in a given area without developing especially close ties to its leaders and notables.

Places of Interest

This section begins with a general account of the area's physical attributes, from the condition of its building to the smells wafting from its cooking pots. Grid references refer to a location's placement on the main map. So when we note that the main Undercity entrance is at K11, look for K11 on the map.

Commercial Establishments

A list of the neighborhood's most notable businesses appear here. It presents the highlights of the area and is not exhaustive. The absence of a listing for, say, a tavern should not be taken to mean that there are no taverns nearby. The more commonplace the type

11 If stumped for an appropriately Vancian name, pick one from the list in the appendix, on p184.

12 Our advice to GMs is to accept the players' descriptions, and play these personages more or less as described, until you come up with an interesting plot line or development that requires you to reveal the GMCs' hidden sides. Remember, a typical character to whom a PC purchases a relationship is no more likely than any other GMC to be entirely cooperative and friendly — that is to say, not likely at all.



establishment is, the more likely it is present but not listed. However, don't expect your GM to add duplicates of the strange or exotic establishments which do qualify for their own listings. If you get yourself barred from Kaiin's only hoxaxo removal stall, you won't be able to find another.

Businesses come and go. Over the course of a long series, some places might close¹³, change owners, or move. The nature of these changes is left up to your GM. GMs shouldn't bother making changes for establishments until after they've appeared in their series. Only those places you most involve yourself with should change much, if at all, from the information given here.

At the end of each description, some sample prices are presented. Unless otherwise indicated, these are expressed in terces.

Curiosities and Landmarks

Less transitory than the rug stalls and wine shops of the city are its curiosities and landmarks. These are features like the ruined, stilted stadium of Mad King Min, or the haunted ruins of the Old Town. The neighborhood's most interesting features, if any, are described in this section.

Events

This section describes any special events of interest that take place in the area on a regular or predictable basis. A prime example of an event would be Prince Kandive's annual regatta (p98.)

Rumors

In bullet-list form, the rumors you're most likely to hear while shopping, drinking, feasting and carousing in the area are provided here. We've already discussed how you can use these rumors to allow you to drive the plot.

Taglines

This section provides you additional choices for the tagline you choose at the beginning of each session. If you know the session will center on a given neighborhood, and you select a tagline from its section of the book, your chance of scoring generous improvement point awards increases. However, there's no rule preventing you from choosing a tagline you find appealing from anywhere in this volume, even if you have no reason to believe that the GM's plans will take your PC to that part of Kaiin during the current session. You could try to steer events so you do wind up in a location where your tagline will prove devastatingly apt. Alternately, you could seek permission from your GM to slightly alter a tagline, to make it relate less specifically to its location. For that matter, if you see a tagline you like, feel free to choose it, even if your character is currently adventuring in far-off Cutz, or in the Imperturbable Rift of the 19th Aeon. Only you can assess your own tagline insertion skills, and can judge how challenging it you'll find it to make use of a given choice.

Tweaks

Each section concludes with a list of tweaks available to characters who take the time to acutely familiarize themselves with the area.

FINAL WARNINGS

Immediately upon purchasing this volume from your local merchant, protect it from fire, water damage, and vermin by performing the well-known cantrap Fumator's Vehement Bookplate.



Purchase a second copy of the book and store it in a safe place unknown to your sandestin. Compare the contents of your reading copy periodically with those of your archive version. If they differ, your sandestin has probably changed your main copy, with an eye towards misleading you in some manner intended to effectuate your humiliation and/or injury. Remedy this offense with a thorough chugging. (Arch-Magicians only.)



Do not read in the presence of pine wefkins.

¹³ Often due to your own efforts, or the unforeseen destruction your activities leave in their wake.