

Doodle all the day.

An adventure for the Dying Earth RPG, suitable for Cugel-level characters

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This adventure is for use as a diversion in your regular campaign and can be slotted in as the characters are travelling between locations.

An easily won meal.

The adventure begins as the PCs encounter a small pool by the roadside containing some rather large tadpoles. Standing near the pool is an old man, Zafouc, with a sharp stick. He has a small fire going and has obviously been trying to catch some of the tadpoles, to no avail. **Pedantry** will reveal that these are **Polliwolls**, delicious if grilled over the wood of the tattervine.

It is probably time for the PCs to test their **Gourmandism**.

Zafouc will turn on any PC who mocks him with a gruff, "Well, I'd like to see you try!". He appears to have little grace but appears willing to defend his pitch. Zafouc is not as inept as he might seem. He knows that if he should catch a Polliwoll, a Polliped will soon turn up and carry off the thief. He is hoping that the PCs will do such a thing, leaving him to enjoy an easy meal and will retreat at the slightest threat of violence, skulking off into a nearby copse to lie in wait.

An uneasy digestive.

As soon as the polliwolls are disturbed, the parent **Polliped** will appear, bounding across the landscape with its great tongue swishing from side to side. Its aim is to sweep up all those who threaten its offspring and it is probably more than capable of walloping several PCs in one go. Eventually it is likely that most PCs will be captured and deposited in the next world.

An unearthly market.

The next world down through the polliped for the Dying Earth is called Marzoon¹. The most common inhabitant is not human but amphibian, the **T'sathog**. As Marzoon is covered in water and the exit point for the PCs is deep underwater they would soon die but for the provision of an air filled transparent sphere. There is a hatch in the sphere but it would obviously be folly to open it at such depth below the surface. Through the blue haze of the ocean the PCs can make out that several of these spheres have been attached to a great wheel. As each sphere is filled with new arrivals it is lifted up to the surface and a new empty sphere takes its place. The surface is not actually dry land but a great floating reed mat, several feet thick, over a mile across and supporting an extensive market. There are all kinds of shops and stalls with mountebanks selling all manner of goods and services.

The rescue service itself is provided free to each arrival but this does not cover transport of goods or belongings. These are deemed forfeit to the welcoming committee, many T'sathogs armed with spears. Items thus obtained from new arrivals are sold on the market.

The inhabitants of the floating market are mostly T'sathogs but there are also visitors from other worlds. These can use the Polliped gate, jumping out just as some poor unfortunate is swallowed, or

¹ A note on Marzoon: this planet has no sun but is heated by a great shining star deep in the center of the planet. Thus the waters are always warm and pleasant but the surface of the world is at best dingy and cool. There is no night as such although T'sathogs do sleep about 8 hours in each 24.

any other more usual method of trans-dimensional travel. These visitors possess a licence² to trade at the market and are protected from basic forfeits, such as the cost of the rescue service³.

A fair proposition.

New arrivals are marched off to see **King T'sath**, the ruler of the T'sathogs. He is an imposing figure, resplendent in his ceremonial harness, possessing fine mottled green and golden wattles as befits such a majestic figure. The King is surrounded by consorts, advisors, mages and courtiers, much as any earthly monarch would be. Once the prisoners have shown obeisance in the usual manner⁴, they are taken aside and given over to **Master Q'seth**. Q'seth explains that as subjects of King T'sath, the PCs owe him fealty. This is equal to two weeks service in the market at one of the King's booths. Here they will be entrusted the job of selling things to visitors. Once two weeks worth of goods have been sold they will be given their freedom. To show their good faith the PCs will be asked to wear the ceremonial garb of T'sath's subjects: ankle chains connected to a central ring. This ring is locked to a metal pole each night so that the PCs don't sleepwalk and fall in the ocean. A purely precautionary measure.

A busy market.

This has all the hustle and bustle that one would associate with other gatherings such as the fair at Azenomei or Kaiin's flea market. Generally traders are tight with their purses and unpleasant with the staff. Most of what is sold here has been pilfered from unlicensed visitors and is not very useful. The PCs will be given the job of selling everything that they brought with them. They might hit on the bright idea of selling things cheaply to become free more quickly but they will be soon disavowed. Any shortfall between the sale price and the expected price will come out of their already empty pockets and thus they will be in debt. Other market traders will eventually explain that this is always the case and that debt never seems to be cleared.

A better job?

If the PCs despair, Q'seth will offer them a better job. There is a rather dim-witted trader, **Wammis**, who is not pulling his weight. If they can teach him to sell, they will be rewarded with their liberty. Wammis has but one item on his stall, a rather dented metal cup that attracts no buyers at all. Try as they may, it should prove very hard for the PCs to even attract anyone to the stall. Other 'subjects' know how it works and have been warned off talking about it and buyers are waiting for the next day when many more interesting items will be up for grabs.

The truth of the matter is this: the stall is a magical artefact that enables anyone to sell parts of themselves to willing buyers. If you spend several hours at the stall, the next day small physical representations of your abilities appear on the stall, such as a small glass monkey for **Acrobatics**, a dagger for **Attack**, a scroll for **Magery** etc. If several people are at the stall, the range of items for one person will all have some common characteristic such as colour, style or material. If you sell an item representing one of your own abilities, you lose some ability in that skill, but this only works for your own items. You can trade away the items representing the abilities of others but not their skills⁵.

² These licenses take the form of a small shell, blue in color and the intensity of which denotes the extent and duration of the license.

³ Although they are still liable to punishments for other transgressions.

⁴ In fact this is so degrading that I blanch at mentioning it. Include it in the game if you will but I shall have no part of it.

⁵ In game terms, sellers can sell a point of each pool once per day. The PCs so affected should not be told of this effect until they come to use such a pool and feel 'tired' or 'not at their best'.

The items that are traded at the stall confer a one point increase to the owner's pool, as long as they keep them about their person. They will also only function for the particular person to whom they were traded and if lost, discarded or broken, the pool point thus traded will return to the rightful owner, and in any case, the points will return after one night⁶.

Thus Wammis has sold all of himself except his one remaining point of **Health**. No one wishes to buy this as Wammis might as likely die and they are concerned that this may result in criminal proceedings. It takes some time for the magical stall to attune itself to the PCs and so will not have items that represent their abilities on their first day⁷. After their first unfruitful day on the stall, the next day it will be filled with many new exciting wares which represent the PCs' pools. Excited buyers will attend in droves to purchase the most exotic items. As you have to buy from the owner of the pool nobody will be keen to buy from **Wammis** but buyers are only too happy to deal in an apparently clandestine fashion with the PCs. If a trader can be persuaded to stay at the stall for a reasonable length of time, items that represent his abilities will appear on the stall some time later.

A bitter end?

Obviously this is a very unwelcome situation for any character. So what is to be done? There are several possibilities. It will soon become obvious that they have been indentured to T'sath in such a way that they will not be able to buy their freedom. However, should they get hold of a licence, this will confer liberties on the bearer (and similarly indenture anyone thus divested). Although the King does have guards who escort new arrivals to his throne, these are not a keen bunch and are not used to resistance. As such they will not be able to organise themselves very quickly to any speedy revolt. However there are several hundred of them so any prolonged fight is likely to turn against the PCs. Likewise the King's mages are unlikely to become involved in any short action. Their position at court is dependent on resisting their greater enemy: each other!

Any self-respecting Cugel-level player will think up 19 schemes to escape this setback before breaking for pizza so concentrate on pilling on the misery and creating unctuous enemies.

The characters

Zafouc, an old man.

Zafouc is an old dishevelled man, wearing the remains of what once might have been a proud silver and green harlequin. He has no hat and his shoes have lost their curl.

Persuade (Forthright) 6 Rebuff (Wary) 8 Attack (Caution) 4 Defend (Vexation) 8 Appraisal 4
Etiquette 6 Living Rough 6 Pedantry 8 Perception 4 Stealth 4 Arrogance 2 Pettifogery 2
Rakishness 2 Health 2

Polliwoll, a large tadpole.

Polliwolls are the tadpoles of the Polliped. They are pear shaped with long tapering tails and usually iridescent yellow. They range from between 1" to 3' long. In each batch only one polliwoll will survive, by eating all the others. Paradoxically, this will be the smallest polliwoll. This champion will then bury itself in some comfortable mud and emerge as a polliped some years later.

Attack (Speed) 2 Defend (Dodge) 4 Athletics 5 Perception 3 Health 1

⁶ And that's why their use is mostly confined to Marzoon, it has no nights!

⁷ Obviously 'day' is used loosely here to represent a reasonable amount of time, Marzoon having no days as such.

Polliped, an even larger amphibian.

The adult Polliped is a fearsome sight. Nearly 40' tall and 60' wide, this squat bipedal monster seems mainly to be made up of mouth. It has no teeth but slobbering lips and a great yellow tongue with which it catches its food. Bulbous eyes sit atop its warty face and easily spy out any nearby prey. How one of these monsters grows from a single 1" polliwoll is a mystery to many savants but one that the characters are on the verge of solving. Amazingly, it is even larger on the inside than on the outside and appears to contain a whole world. The truth of the matter is even more disturbing. This polliped contains exactly one other adult Polliped which in turn appears to contain a whole world. This sequence may regress forever, or it may not⁸. In any case, each successive world is most likely unpalatable to those individuals who discover it. Those who are swallowed are always deposited in the same place in the next world and communities of migrants and those who would leech off them often spring up in such locations. It is rumoured that Kaiin is such a location for the Dying Earth and that the entry point to this world through the higher-up Polliped is somewhere in Kandive's deodand pits.

Attack (Strength) 30 Defend (Surefootedness) 20 Athletics 12 Perception 15 Tracking 12
Wherewithal 12 Arrogance Ω Avarice Ω Indolence Ω Pettifogery Ω Rakishness Ω Health 20

T'sathog, a frogman⁹.

T'sathogs are the more common inhabitant of Marzoon. Apart from their amphibious nature they are otherwise much as humans. Thus they are self-interested, mostly hard-hearted and best avoided. T'sathogs are oviparous and their young hatch fully formed from gelatinous eggs¹⁰. The more important a T'sathog, the more bedecked his ceremonial harness is with small charms.

King T'sath, the frog king.

As mentioned before, T'sath has all the characteristics one would attribute to most kings. Wisdom, kindness, evenness of temper thus excluded, you may make of him what you will. In any case, he should be untouchable to the PCs. The King's ceremonial harness, on closer inspection can be seen to bear many small trinkets or charms. These are items holding pool points to increase the King's abilities. Lesser court figures also have these harnesses but with many less charms.

Master Q'seth.

Master of the King's subjects, it is Q'seth's duty to see that they are put to work in a useful manner, and that, should they die in service, they do not clutter up the place with their corpse.

Persuade (Charming) 8 Rebuff (Contrary) 12 Attack (Ferocity) 6 Defend (Parry) 6 Appraisal 10
Athletics 2 Etiquette 4 Pedantry 4 Perception 10 Quick Fingers 8 Scuttlebutt 8 Stewardship 10
Wealth 4 Avarice 2 Indolence 3 Pettifogery 2 Rakishness 4 Health 10

Wammis, a dim-witted trader.

Wammis used to be quite a bright spark, but since he has traded away any advantage he might have possessed he is no longer able to anything much. Wammis is a complete dullard, prey to all temptations and incapable of doing anything, including remembering how he came to be in such a state.

All his ratings are at 0 except Health 1.

⁸ Only the fact that pedants have yet to discover this actuality has prevented it from becoming the talk of the more tiresome academic circles for years.

⁹ Actually many, many frogmen and women.

¹⁰ This jelly later hardens and is commonly used as a building material.

The market goers, a mean-spirited bunch.

These traders are mainly T'sathogs but other races too. Dress them in outlandish fashions as you would any other Dying Earth crowd. Generally they will have highish scores in **Persuade** and **Rebuff**, **Appraisal**, **Etiquette**, **Pedantry**, **Perception** and **Wealth**. For pools in any of these, use the lesser of 4 or 2d6. They are unlikely to resist **Avarice** or **Pettifoggery** but might have 1d6 in any other resistance.