

You poor hungry creature, allow me to step into your maw.

A discussion of Dying Earth rules

by Steve Dempsey

Imagine the scene: after spending a night on the town, our hero is chased by irate husbands and is forced to sleep in hollow out on the moors. In the morning, much to his chagrin, he notices that the entrance to his sleeping quarters is being watched by a hungry looking pelgrane. “Kind sir”, entreats the creature, “I am almost fainting for the lack of food. In such inhospitable circumstances as we find ourselves I am the most likely to survive. It is only logical that you should be my food.” A spate of dice rolling ensues and the pelgrane triumphs on an illustrious success. The character’s fate is sealed and he happily feeds the expectant bird, “You poor hungry creature, ...”

It may not seem obvious, and even though such an end is droll, this is not how a Dying Earth character should perish. Even though the game is one in which fate is both fickle and cruel, characters should always be allowed some means of escaping being persuaded to die. Otherwise, anytime they meet an NPC with 5 more points in **Persuade** than they have in **Rebuff**, a not infrequent occurrence, they can be persuaded to their doom 5 times out of six.

It is obviously quite easy for the Game Moderator to these such pitfalls. Under such circumstances as above, a more acceptable argument for the Pelgrane might be, “I noticed a herd of tasty husbands following you across the hills, persuade them to come out of hiding and I will let you free”.

It is perhaps less obvious when player characters are dealing with each other. One such common case is when a PC has resisted a strong persuasive effort from an NPC and expended most of their **Persuade** pool in the effort. Such a PC immediately becomes easy picking for some other predatory PC and might be persuaded into something egregiously against their survival instincts.

There are fortunately mechanisms built into Dying Earth for dealing with this kind of contingency. As a GM, it is your duty to apply levies, penalties and boons to prevent the abuse of this system. These rules are well known and you can find them in the rulebook on pages 40 to 43.

How are these rules to be used in practice, to ensure consistency and to keep the game interesting without being obstructive to the players. There is one whole type of scenarios where the ability to persuade is crucial: the investigation. For example, the PCs are looking for a murderer. All that needs to be done is finger the likely candidates and **Persuade** them to ‘fess up’. Taking this kind of game as my example, I’ll look at some of the ways that you can keep a lid on the guilty party until the end of the game. You might also like to read [Robin Laws’ column](#) about structuring an investigative game.

Perhaps sir might care to confess, were I to apply my boot to his fundament – Styles

Often in attempts to ensnare a guilty party, the threat of violence is used to back up any argument. In the Dying Earth, this is only appropriate if the querist’s style is **Intimidating**. As soon as the threat of violence is intimated, you may as a GM, rule that the PC use their **Intimidating** pool, however small that may be. Even if actual violence is used, the fact that the PC is not intimidating, should not lead to questions being answered.

For the same reasons, appeals to sentiment should only work for the **Eloquent** style and the friendly ‘good cop’ routine only for **Charming** PCs.

Once the issue of the appropriate style has been resolved, it is time to worry more about the mechanics of persuasion. There are three parts to this:

- whether the PCs know the answer to the questions
- whether the PCs can appeal to their subject's fear
- whether the PCs can appeal to evidence

I can say without a shadow of a doubt that Cugel is the guilty party – Belief

Someone who is persuaded to finger the guilty party might in fact not know, or even worse they might be wrong! If they firmly believe however, that they are telling the truth, there is no way that persuasion can be used to find this out. Rumour and hearsay are likely to be common in a Dying Earth setting, just make sure that some NPCs get the wrong end of the stick and the PCs are bound to set off on wild goose chases and get themselves into heaps of trouble.

I'm not sure Kandive would like me to say - Threats

Obviously real threats should carry some weight, when issued by someone capable of making them felt. This applies not only to **Intimidating** PCs, but also to NPCs. A shifty looking snitch should have a penalty against being persuaded if he knows that this will lead to the local toughs throwing him bleeding into the nearest deodand pit. The PCs' threats have to be judged not only on their own merits but also against the weight of any other threats by third parties. Suitable threats should give a boon, particularly against **Obtuse** defences that are trumped by **Intimidation** but remember that as **Pure-hearted** trumps **Intimidating**, such characters will not be affected by threats.

What do you mean, you found it in my safe - Evidence

Evidence is an appeal to the logic of the situation and can be used to back up an attempt at persuasion. For example, if you are shown that eating a particular berry can make you fly, you'll be much more happy to step off a cliff after having eaten it. As such, evidence can be used to reduce the penalties involved in trying to persuade someone to do something that might otherwise appear foolhardy.

It is up to the GM to decide how compelling the evidence is. A vague description might reduce a penalty from 3 to 2, but a personal statement from an Archmage as to the identity of the culprit is likely to remove it all together.

Another approach for evidence is to break the argument into two parts, the first being about whether the evidence is apposite to the situation. The result of this discussion can dictate the strength of the evidence to the GM and suggest the appropriate penalty, if any, for a subsequent attempt to persuade the subject to say what they know.

Book 'em, Cugel ..

That just about wraps it up for persuasion. The important thing to remember is that any attempt by the player characters to persuade someone is not performed in isolation but against a whole backdrop of complex relationships. Some are between the questioned and the questioner, but others lurking in the background may carry much more weight than any immediate and present matters. It is these lurking concerns that can be used by the Game Moderator to confuse and obstruct player characters in their pursuit of the truth.