

MILLENNIUM PRESENTS

# *The Alchemist of Istanbul*

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*This is a stand-alone  
Role-Playing game.  
It is a supplement to the  
"Daughter of Serpents" game manual.*



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### *Introduction*

Welcome to **THE ALCHEMIST OF ISTANBUL**, a role-playing game for up to six players and a Director, based on the SIGNOS computer role-playing system. Although **THE ALCHEMIST OF ISTANBUL** can be played by itself, the story in it forms a prequel to the SIGNOS computer drama **DAUGHTER OF SERPENTS**.

### *Role-Playing Games*

What exactly are role-playing games? If you already play them, you'll know what it's like when someone asks that question, how difficult it is to answer. If you've never played them, you'll probably be the one asking it.

The very first role-playing games (or RPGs as they're known to the initiated) were a hybrid of wargames and fantasy fiction. For years, wargames had allowed people to play the great commanders of history, with the advantage of 20/20 hindsight, and it wasn't long before people started recreating the great battles of fantasy, like Tolkein's Battle of the Five Armies, with dwarves and elves battling wolf-riding orcs and creatures even stranger and fouler.

What wargaming lacked, however, was the personal element. In any sort of fiction, we identify with the characters, and care about what happens to them. "HOBBIT DIES IN ACCIDENT" is one thing, "NAZGUL KILLS RING-BEARER" quite another. It wasn't long before a new type of simulation emerged, in which the strengths and abilities of individuals, rather than whole units, were given values.

In these games, players became characters in an ongoing story, but with one crucial difference. These stories were interactive. The plot was shaped by the actions of the characters in it, and gave them a history and experiences. The theme of the story varied; many were fantasies, but soon they included everything from science fiction to espionage and horror and beyond. Rule systems differed; some concentrated on combat, some on magic, some on character interaction, but all shared a number of common elements.

In any RPG, a player becomes an imaginary character, with skills and abilities which are given levels or values. When the player wants to do something, a test is made against these (usually by rolling a dice and generating a number) to see whether they have been successful or not. In most games, one player acts as a referee, giving the other players information about what they can see and hear, and telling them the results of their actions or what has happened to them.

It's very easy to get bogged down in the mechanics of RPGs, with piles of weird shaped dice, and towers of rulebooks, but whatever the differences between systems, all are fundamentally the same. The answer to the question 'what are role-playing games?' is simple — they are interactive storytelling.

### *How Do I Play This?*

First, find at least one other person. **THE ALCHEMIST OF ISTANBUL** can be played by between two and seven people. One of these acts as Director, and the others become characters of the game. The job of the Director is to

describe places, people, and events to the other players, and tell them the results of their actions. (If this is starting to sound a bit basic, you can probably skip the rest of this, and go straight to reading about THE SIGNOS SYSTEM.)

Then everyone should read the section headed THE SIGNOS SYSTEM. After this, players can start designing their characters and filling in their character record sheets, using the character generator from DAUGHTER OF SERPENTS.

Next, the Director (and the Director ONLY if you want any surprises) should read THE ALCHEMIST OF ISTANBUL itself, as well as ALEXANDRIA — A ROLE PLAYER'S GUIDE and the profile of KAMURAN IMRAN.

Then, as they say, the rest is up to you . . .

### *Being a Director*

If you've never been a Director (a.k.a. Dungeon Master, Games Master, Keeper, or whatever) before don't worry. Your job is a simple one: keep it moving, and help everybody enjoy themselves. The rules are only there to help you do that, and shouldn't become a straitjacket. The story is the important thing. E. Gary Gyax (Mr. Dungeons & Dragons himself) enjoys admitting that half the time he rolls the dice just for the sound they make. You don't want philosophy, though, you want practical advice, so here goes.

Always prepare your material. The more familiar you are with what players can do, how they can do it, and where it happens, the less delays there will be while you look something up during the game.

Keep the game moving. Don't hold people up while you make decisions, or let the group get sidetracked into long arguments over the rules, or who did what, or who would have done what, or . . .

Be confident. You know the whole story, and even if you do make a mistake, it doesn't matter if the players don't find out until afterwards. People will forgive anything except a boring game.

Be fair. Always apply the rules impartially, and NEVER take out a grudge on a player's character. Make the players work for success, or they won't have any sense of achievement.

Be flexible. Don't stick rigidly to the rules if they aren't working, and don't give the impression that whatever the players do the same thing will happen. If in doubt, use common sense. Another favorite trick of Directors (see above) is to make hidden dice rolls for the players. That way, if you want something to happen and the dice go disastrously wrong, you can just ignore them, and no one else will know.

## THE SIGNOS SYSTEM

### DEFINITIONS:

One person must always act as the DIRECTOR. Their role is to describe what is happening in the game to the other players, and tell them the results of their actions or the use of their skills.

Everyone else is a PLAYER. Each player creates a PLAYER CHARACTER, or PC to use in the game. What they can do depends on their character's attributes and skills, not their own. The player may know nothing about hieroglyphics, but if their character does they can read an inscription on a wall in the game. If the character doesn't have the right skills or knowledge, the player can still have them try to do something, but their chances of success will be much less. (In practice, the terms 'player' and 'player character' are used interchangeably, but it is important to remember that it is not the player doing things in the game, but their character.)

The Director controls anyone else who appears in the course of the game, known as NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS or NPCs.

### CREATING A CHARACTER:

This can be one of the most time-consuming and complicated parts of any role-playing system. DAUGHTER OF SERPENTS already includes an automatic character generator, and to keep things simple we haven't given a manual equivalent in these rules. Use the computer to generate as many characters as you need. Before you do, reading the sections may help in choosing professions and skills.

## PROFESSIONS

### Traveller:

Widely travelled, familiar with the customs of the countries that they visit, and speaking their languages, the professional traveller is about as far from the average tourist as it is possible to get. For them, the destination is less important than the journey. They must have the skill of Eastern Travel, representing previous experience, and can also choose from Arabic Myths & Legends, Haggle, Local Customs, and Speak Arabic.

### Egyptologist:

A dedicated academic, the Egyptologist may be unable to speak Arabic, but is at home in the Egypt of thousands of years ago. All of them have studied Egyptology, but they can then choose to specialize in Egyptian Archaeology, Egyptian Myths & Legends, Hieroglyphics, History of the Ptolemies, or Papyrology.

### Sleuth:

The model of the gentleman (or lady) amateur detective. Wealth is essential for them to indulge their passion for investigation without having to actually earn a living from it.

They can rely on Savior-Faire to create the right impression, and their powers of Deduction to solve mysteries, but they can also call on the more specialist skills of Criminology and Toxicology.

### Private Eye:

A detective from the other side of the tracks, the PI knows Lowlife at first

hand, and all their skills were learned the hard way. Often an ex-cop, they can draw on knowledge of Police Procedure and Forensic Pathology, use powers of Observation, or display their Streetwise qualities.

**Occultist:**

A scholar of magic, rather than a practitioner, their study of The Occult in general allows them to explore aspects of it like Alchemy, Astrology, Demonology, even Necromancy, or specialize in any of them.

**Mystic:**

The most unworldly of the professions, their practice of ritual magic may take them down strange paths. They can exercise Clairvoyance, employ the Seal of Solomon, or study Corrupt Knowledge and learn the Formula of Borellus and the Powder of Ibn Ghazi.

**SKILLS**

These are grouped by profession, to make them easier to find, but there is nothing to stop a sleuth having Corrupt Knowledge (except their better judgement!).

**Traveller**

**Eastern Travel:**

This represents the time that must be spent in a region or country, in this case the Middle East, before you can really know its languages and customs. Once you have this, you can choose from the other skills of the Traveller.

**Arabic Myths:**

Knowledge of the legends of The Thousand Nights and a Night, the tales told by Scherezade, and other folk tales from all over the Middle East. Useful for knowing the difference between a djinn and an efreet, and how to deal with them.

**Haggle:**

Only tourists pay the asking price for anything. A seasoned traveller will revel in the cut and thrust of bargaining, but also remember that they are dealing with experts. Fluent Arabic is an extremely useful companion skill.

**Local Customs:**

Knowing enough to avoid giving offense is important, but this skill can also provide valuable information on what people are doing, and why they do it.

**Speak Arabic:**

Alexandria was a cosmopolitan city in the 1920s, with a large European population, but it was still an Egyptian city. A knowledge of the language can help to gain acceptance and cooperation.

**Egyptologist**

**Egyptology:**

This gives the benefits of a period of higher education, spent studying the elements of archaeology, and Egyptian history, culture, and language. An essential background for any of the more specialist areas of study.

**Egyptian Archaeology:**

Covers the history, architecture, artifacts, and customs of ancient Egypt.

**Egyptian Myths:**

A knowledge of the enormous number of ancient Egyptian gods and goddesses, and the roles they played in the spiritual life of the Egyptians. Enables the player to recognize their symbols and attributes in works of art and artifacts.

**Hieroglyphics:**

An ability to interpret the earliest form of Egyptian writing, the pictorial script of the pharaohs. More advanced levels of this skill will allow the player to translate with greater confidence.

**The Ptolemies:**

The study of the Greek dynasty who ruled Egypt as Pharaohs for nearly three centuries after its conquest by Alexander the Great. Their reign was marked by bitter power struggles, but also saw the emergence of Alexandria as the intellectual center of the Western world.

**Papyrology:**

The study of manuscripts on papyrus, paper made from reeds growing in the Nile valley. For centuries, forgers have used blank scraps of ancient papyrus to fake manuscripts. Without the skills of an expert, laymen will have great difficulty telling the real from the fake.

**Sleuth**

**Wealth:**

The lady or gentleman amateur, who disdains payment for their work, has to have some way of supporting themselves while they study the art of crime. Shrewd dealing on the stock market, or a large legacy, will do nicely.

**Criminology:**

The scientific study of crime, including the criminal mind and different techniques of investigation.

**Toxicology:**

The scientific study of poisons and their effects.

**Deduction:**

Not so much a skill as a natural talent, although it can be developed by practice. This is the ability of the sleuth to draw conclusions from known or proposed facts.

**Savoir-Faire:**

Faced with an unfamiliar social situation, some people seem to know the right thing to do instinctively. It isn't the same as a knowledge of local customs, but it can help to gain people's trust.

**Private Eye****Lowlife:**

Private eyes pick up their skills and knowledge the hard way, by going down the proverbial mean streets. Learning from books is all very well, but the best degrees come from the University of Life.

**Police Procedure:**

Systematic investigation of crime. Less intuitive and free wheeling than the Sleuth's modus operandi, but gets results in the end, and earns more respect from the police.

**Forensic Pathology:**

Dead men do tell tales, if you know what to look for, and have a strong stomach. When you've seen enough corpses, and watched enough autopsies, you can make a pretty good guess at how someone died.

**Observation:**

Spotting what casual observers might miss is often the edge which makes a good Private Eye.

**Streetwise:**

Even in a strange city, a strange country, some things never change. The scams are still the same, and so are the people running them, even if you don't speak the language.

**Occultist****The Occult:**

A broad knowledge of the theory and practice of magic. Allows subsequent specialization in a number of areas.

**Alchemy:**

Usually thought of as the attempt to turn base metal into gold through the Philosopher's Stone, and the primitive forerunner of modern chemistry. More correctly, it was an occult science which used this process as a metaphor for the spiritual transformation of those who practiced it.

**Astrology:**

Based on the belief that events on earth are influenced by cosmic forces, this branch of the occult attempts to analyze character and predict events through a study of the movement and positions of the planets.

**Demonology:**

The study of powerful, intelligent, and malign spirits, and of the methods of summoning and controlling them. In this area particularly, a little learning can be a dangerous thing.

**Necromancy:**

Technically, divination of the future through communication with the spirits of the dead. Also used to include the practice of magic with ingredients from dead bodies, and the re-animation of the dead to serve the will of a magician.

**Mystic****Ritual Magic:**

Through the careful and continued practice of a particular school of magic, the Mystic is able to develop arcane powers, and becomes aware of things which Occultists know only in theory.

**Clairvoyance:**

An ability to see significant things which are hidden or out of sight, or which have not yet happened.

**Seal of Solomon:**

An enchanted amulet of protection and command, especially potent against intelligent spirits.

**Corrupt Knowledge:**

Lurking behind the thin fabric of everyday reality are darker truths about the nature of the universe, of which most people, even those who study the occult arts, are unaware. Guarded by shunned and decadent cults, and recorded in books condemned by every civil and religious authority throughout history, they can bring great power, but with it the risk of corruption just as great.

**Formula of Borellus:**

Mentioned in the writings of the alchemist Borellus, from whom it takes its name, but learned in practice only from the study of less reticent but also less readily available authors, this is a means whereby the spirit of one dead can be summoned back to the flesh it once inhabited. Woe betide those who use it casually, however, for as an authority on the subject once observed, "there is nothing but ye liveliest awfulness" where the remains are incomplete, and went on to add "do not call up any that you cannot put down..."

### **Powder of Ibn Ghazi:**

The secret of its manufacture known only to those who have read, and understood, certain books of forbidden lore, this substance is greatly prized by practitioners of magic for its unequalled ability to reveal to the human eye things normally invisible. That some of those things might be better left invisible is a lesson to be learned by bitter experience.

### **PLAYING A CHARACTER:**

#### **Dice Rolls**

The basic rule is that of the Roll To Succeed (RTS). Whenever your character uses one of their skills, the Director will give you a number, which represents the difficulty of the task. The higher the number, the more difficult it is. You must roll a number equal to or greater than this, on six sided dice, to succeed. (If the task is simple, the Director may tell you that success is automatic, and that you do not need to make a roll.)

The number of dice that you roll depends on how good you are at the skill. Anyone can attempt a task, even if they don't have the appropriate skill, but they only roll one die. Players whose character is Competent in a skill roll 2 dice, those whose character is Proficient 3 dice, and those whose character is Expert 4 dice.

Anyone - 1 die  
Competent - 2 dice  
Proficient - 3 dice  
Expert - 4 dice

The Klutz Roll and Jackpot Roll are special cases. If all the dice show 1, this is a Klutz Roll. Not just failure, but anything between a slightly misleading conclusion and spectacular failure. The Director decides exactly what has happened, but as an example if you were using Speak Arabic, a Klutz Roll might mean that instead of asking for a cup of coffee, you accused the waiter of disgusting breaches of food hygiene. A Jackpot Roll, on the other hand, occurs when all dice show 6. This could mean that a use of Egyptian Myths would reveal a detail about the worship of a certain god which would make sense of a mysterious item found earlier.

It is obviously easier to roll all ones or all sixes if only one or two dice are being rolled, and harder when three or four are used, but the general rule is that the better you are at a skill, the better your results at either end. An expert can still fail, but is unlikely to make a complete mess of what they are doing, whereas a complete novice can easily go wildly wrong. Similarly, a total novice can't do as well as an expert, just very well for their level of expertise. Experts are expected as a matter of routine to do things that other people could not, so for them to do something extraordinary should not be an everyday occurrence.

#### **Combining Dice Rolls**

Role-playing games are meant to be co-operative, rather than competitive. To encourage this, players can combine their skills to make a task easier. Any play-

ers with the same skill can make an RTS (Remember? Roll to Succeed.) together, USING THE NUMBER OF DICE FOR THE HIGHEST SKILL LEVEL.

This means that if two Egyptologists, both with Hieroglyphics skill, one at Competent level and the other at Expert level, are trying to decipher an inscription, they both roll four dice. You don't get any bonus if both players are at the same level, and this rule only applies to players with the skill involved. If there are two Egyptologists in the party, and only one has Hieroglyphics, only one can roll. If only one person in the party has Local Customs skill, anyone else can try to work out what a blue handprint on the wall of a house means, but they only roll one die. Both players attempting the task must be in the same place at the same time, as well.

This means that an expert leading a team is more effective than one working alone. You can see the same effect with something like a football team. Even if all the players are average, a top coach will get better results from them than an average one. The price you pay in game terms, however, is not having as broad a range of skills.

#### **Character Development**

During a scenario, either the Director or the Players should keep track of how many times they have used each of their skills SUCCESSFULLY. (A simple 'five bar gate' series of ticks will do.) At the end of the scenario, the skill which has been used most can be increased to the next level. If it is already at Expert level, the next most frequently used skill is increased instead. This system allows characters to get better at things as they practice their skills, but avoids having to accumulate fixed numbers of Experience Points to increase levels of skills. Those sorts of system always tend to suffer because the better characters get, the more Experience Points they gain, resulting in rampant inflation and super powerful characters.

## **THE ALCHEMIST OF ISTANBUL**

### ***Setting Up — Notes for the Director***

Before running this scenario, there are a few things to bear in mind, as well as the general advice given above in 'Being a Director.' The scenario is divided into seven scenes, which gives you neat break points if you want to play it in a number of sessions. We can't predict how many people will be playing the scenario, what occupations their characters have, or what combinations of skills and levels of skills they will have. Because of this, the information in each scene is intended as guidance, rather than hard and fast instructions, and the players should come up with many more ways of using their skills as the scenario progresses. The main things that you as Director need to know are what happens, where it happens, who is involved, and how it can happen. Where it is essential for something to happen before the plot can progress, this is made clear. We've also tried to give suggestions on how things can happen ranging from the easy-way, for novice Directors, to the more complicated options for experts. General

information about Alexandria, and a profile of Famuran Imran, are grouped together at the end for easy access during a game.

### *Scene 1-The SS Dacia*

The year is 1925, the place the Eastern Mediterranean. The players start the scenario on board the SS Dacia, one of two passenger ships run by the Romanian State Maritime Service from Constantinople to Alexandria. Your first job is to work out why the players are there, and if they aren't travelling as a party, how they can be introduced to each other. The Dacia is a twin deck steam liner, about 360 feet long, with an awning deck. (For the technically minded among you, she is a twin screw, steel hulled, oil burning ship, built in 1907 in the yard of Atel & Ch de Ia Loire, at St Nazaire.) She is equipped with radio and electric light.

The easiest way to establish a connection is to use the players' professions. Egyptologists can all be members of an expedition, Travellers can be accompanying them to handle hiring the work force and dealing with officials. Sleuths, who have to have Wealth, can be there as guests of the titled head of the expedition. (After all, it was good enough for Agatha Christie.) Private Eyes can have been hired as security, to prevent pilfering or major thefts from the expedition. Occultists and mystics are trickier to deal with, but you could either have them as guests of the expedition's patron, or if they form a majority of the players, make the expedition an occult one rather than an archaeological one. Interest in the occult was strong at the time, and Egypt would be a natural destination for prosperous members of a society like the famous Order of the Golden Dawn. Don't be afraid to let the players work out the details, just make sure that whatever they suggest won't give you problems later on.

One way to bring everyone together and introduce them is at dinner. The Dacia is much smaller than the great Atlantic liners, but still very comfortable if you are travelling First Class, and all the players would be invited to dine at the Captain's table. Their companions there (apart from the other player characters), should be a mixture of tourists and business travellers. Alexandria was a major port, center of the cotton trade, and with a large Greek and Italian population. A good way to let the players pick up some information on the city before they get there is to make one of the other passengers a British official returning from leave in England. The trip between Constantinople and Alexandria took around five days, with stops at ports in between, so there is plenty of time for the players to get to know their travelling companions, but don't spin the trip out longer than is necessary.

The most important dinner guest for the purposes of the game, however, is Kamuran Imran. (He is described at the end of the scenario.) The main purpose of this Scene is to make a link between Imran and the players, so that he will want them to help him when he gets to Alexandria. For reasons which will become clear later, he isn't keen on discussing exactly why he is going there, but he will be interested in finding out about his fellow travellers.

The purpose of his trip, although the players shouldn't know this yet, is to search for fragments of a lost alchemical manuscript, the Book of the Serpent

Staff. His main handicap in this is that although he is fluent in Arabic, he doesn't read Greek, particularly Ancient Greek, or hieroglyphics. Anyone with Papyrology, The Ptolemics, or Hieroglyphics would be very useful to him. If they share his interest in Alchemy, he won't see them as a threat since they are strangers, and any expertise in Ritual Magic would be useful, since it is so closely associated with Alchemy. If the players try to pump Imran for information, make sure that they tell him about themselves first. Once he knows they can help him, he should find out where they are staying in Alexandria, promise to get in touch with them within a day or two of the ship docking, and then politely but firmly refuse to discuss the matter further. He can still chat happily about alchemy or magic, but not his particular reasons for going to Alexandria.

#### Checklist:

- 1) If the players are not travelling as a party, have they been introduced to each other?
- 2) Does Kamuran Imran know who they are, and their areas of expertise?
- 3) Has he arranged to get in touch with them after the ship docks, and does he know where they will be staying?

If all three points have been covered, then you can move on to the next Scene.

### *Scene 2 -Just because you're paranoid...*

#### The Docks:

On arrival in Alexandria, the Dacia docks in the Western Harbour. As it comes in, the players may catch a glimpse, on the other side of the Ras el Tin peninsula, of Fort Quait Bey, site of the great Pharos lighthouse, and they will see the Khedivial Palace, now belonging to King Fuad, on theirs. The skyline of the city, especially on this side, is dotted with minarets, and although not attractive (what port is?) still has a flavor of the East about it.

The scene at the Central Quay, where they disembark, is one of barely organized chaos. Representatives of the major hotels, identifiable by caps or brass badges on their chests, try to find their guests, and organize the transfer of luggage to hotels once the customs inspection is over. Those going straight to Cairo head for the nearby rail link, which saves them having to cross the city to the main railway station, business travellers make for the city, drivers of horse-drawn arabiyehs and motor cabs compete for customers, and freelance dragomen, or tour guides, pester anyone who looks like a tourist to employ their services.

If the party of player characters includes at least one Traveller with Haggle, Speak Arabic, and Local Customs, this will be a good opportunity for them to use their skills. Anyone they deal with who isn't an official representative (of the authorities, hotels, or travel companies), will be friendly, outrageously persistent, and out to rob them blind. Charge them at least five to ten times the proper cab fare, (see the section on transport at the end for a guide to prices), and reduce the actual amount according to how well the player can haggle.

As a rough guide, the RTS should only be about 5, meaning that anyone can knock the price down a bit, but it should be taken down by about one level for each point over the minimum needed to succeed. For example, if a cab driver is asking ten times the normal fare, and a player rolls a five on one die, reduce it to nine times, and so on for each extra point. If they roll a total of more than fifteen, the cab driver has met his match, and will only charge the normal fare. Every concession should be accompanied by protests that the player is taking the bread out of their mouths, starving their six children, etc., etc.

Even when the fare has been settled, any cab driver worth their salt will ignore the destination the players ask for, and take them to the hotel that gives the driver a commission for every guest that they bring in. Get all the players to roll against Observation skill, with an RTS of 5 again, to spot their hotel as they go past it, and stop the cab. Failure to do this will mean another session of haggling at the other end. The players can't just stay at any hotel, because their trunks have been taken straight off the ship, through Customs, and direct to the Savoy Palace Hotel, where they are booked in. If no one in the party has decent Haggling or Observation skills, you may want to have a representative of the hotel meet them at the docks and do the necessary on their behalf.

#### **The Savoy Palace Hotel:**

A description of the hotel is given in the Cook's Guide that forms part of 'Daughter of Serpents,' and part of the game takes place in the hotel itself, so if any of the players haven't seen it yet, show it to them before carrying on with this game.

Once the players have settled into their rooms, let them do a bit of exploring around the city if they want to, before Kamuran Imran contacts them. They won't be looking for anything in particular, but it is a good chance to introduce areas of the city and even particular places, like the catacombs, which will become important later. If they are in the Arab quarter of the city, anywhere on the Western side, give anyone with the skill an RTS of 12 against Observation. Don't do this too often, only once in each location, and not more than two or three times in a day, but if they succeed they will notice heavily robed Arabs who are being avoided by the rest of the Arab population. Don't let them catch up with these strange figures, but if the player that spots them has Arabic or local customs (RTS of 9 on either or both), or Points them out to someone who has, they will notice gestures of protection against the evil being made, and similar charms being muttered.

Back at the hotel, when the time is right, have the desk clerk give them a message from Imran, arranging a meeting over lunch or supper in the hotel restaurant. When they meet, he is nervous and excited. During the voyage to Alexandria, the players should have found out about his interest in alchemy, but not why he was going there. He now tells them that he is searching for a lost master work of alchemy, The Book of the Serpent Staff, written by the legendary Hermes Trismegistus. (See the passage from John Niall's article below.) Fragments of it were incorporated in later works by Arab alchemists,

which is where he first came across them, but he hoped that some of the original Greek text may have survived in the city where it was written.

Despite being unable to read Ancient Greek, he started to buy manuscripts, but most of them were useless to him, and this hit and miss method was an expensive way of going about the task, even if his family were prepared to indulge his hobby, and he could sell some of them again. He was trying to work out a better way of pursuing his goal, when he read an article in a tiny academic magazine devoted to the history of magic and alchemy. The effect was like a bombshell. The author, an American academic called John Niall, had simply come to the same conclusions as Imran, with the benefit of several Classical languages and the resources of libraries throughout the world, but Imran's ego would not let him accept this.

He cannot bear the thought of 'his' discovery being shared by anyone else, and even makes dark hints about academic skulduggery, implying that Niall could only have written the article by finding out about Imran's researches and making use of them. He carries with him a notebook in which is written part of the article, and he will produce this as proof of the 'conspiracy' against him. You can read the relevant passage to the players.

"...Authorship of the Tabula Smaragdina, or Emerald Tablet, whose doctrine 'as above, so below' was at the heart of both astrology and alchemy in the Middle Ages, is attributed to Hermes Trismegistus. This shadowy figure, whose importance extends to giving his name to the Hermetic Art itself, is identified not only with the Graeco-Roman god of the same name, but with the Egyptian Thoth. The earliest certain reference to the Emerald Tablet is in the 8th Century AD, and there have been suggestions that it was the product of early Muslim alchemists, but to the same author are attributed the Hermetic Canons, and internal textual evidence in these Points to them originating in post-Christian Alexandria, from an esoteric tradition influenced by the Egyptian Mysteries. It is the purpose of this author to argue that both works are the product of a school or succession of initiates to this Mystery cult, and draw upon a now lost work, *Biblion Kayrukeion*, The Book of the Serpent Staff . . ."

Any character with The Ptolemies (RTS of 18 or greater, because a lot of this is outside that period), Papyrology (RTS of 12 or above, since they can't judge the alchemical side of all this), or Alchemy (RTS of 7 or greater), will be able to work out that the story of a lost master work is quite possible, but that the conspiracy against Imran is just as probably a product of his ego and imagination.

Having satisfied himself on the boat that the player characters are not part of the plot against him, he wants to enlist their help. Attempts to persuade him that there is no conspiracy against him will fail. Even if the players haven't noticed the strange robed Arabs, he has, and is convinced that they are following him. He will be particularly keen to involve any Private Eyes, because of their professional skills. How the players help depends on a number of factors. If there are a lot of them, it may be impractical (though not impossible) to have everybody with Imran. Because of the large European population, non-Arabs weren't as noticeable as in other parts of the Middle East, so some of the players can simply follow at a distance. Travellers with high Local Customs and Speak Arabic skills could even pass for an Arab (RTS of 12 or better).

If the players don't leap at the opportunity to help Imran, have him come back to them in a state of high excitement after the events of 'Death in the Genenah,' with the difference that only he was present. Assuming that they do, he will ask them to come with him to the Arab quarter that evening. If no-one in the party has especially relevant skills, it doesn't matter, because apart from anything else Imran just wants witnesses to prove that his discoveries were genuine. He will arrange to meet them in Place Mohammed Ali, and then return to his hotel.

#### Checklist:

- 1) Have the players had an opportunity to spot the strange robed Arabs in the West of the city?
- 2) Have they met Imran and been told about the Book of the Serpent Staff, John Niall, and the 'conspiracy' against Imran?
- 3) Have they agreed to help Imran?

#### *Scene 3 - Death in the Genenah*

Place Mohammed Ali is a long plaza in the European section of the city, dominated by a fine equestrian statue of Ali set in flower beds in its center, and the Stock Exchange at the Eastern end. (Details of some of the other buildings in it can be found at the end of the scenario.) Having met the players, Imran will lead them out of the square to the Southwest, along the Rue des Socurs. From the imposing buildings around the Place, the surroundings rapidly become squalid. About four streets away, on the right, is the steep hill now known as Kom el Nadura, but also as Fort Napoleon or Fort Cafarelli, after the engineer who fortified it for the Emperor. On the far side of the Fort, now used as a signal station and observatory by the Harbor authorities, is the Gold and Silver Bazaar in the Rue Bab-el-Akhdar.

Opposite the Fort, Imran darts off to the left, and after crossing a main

road (Rue Sidi el Mitwalli, or Rue Porte de Ia Rosette, which heads East and passes the Savoy Palace Hotel) he heads South into the Genenah. This is a maze of twisting alleys and slums, where the buildings only seem to stand up by leaning against each other. Peeling paint and cracked plaster cover the outside of houses, festering piles of rubbish line the streets, and mangy dogs and equally mangy children scavenge in them.

Eventually Imran goes into a courtyard, and knocks on a door at the far end. There is no answer, and he looks first puzzled, then worried when there is no response to further knocking. The courtyard is dark, although there is some light from the buildings surrounding it, but none from the one they are outside. The door is not locked, and will open if Imran or one of the players pushes it.

Someone may have had the sense to bring a torch, but if they didn't, it will be a minute or two before a lamp can be lit. When it is, the scene in the room is straight out of a medieval manuscript on alchemy. Even those with no skill in it will be able to recognize a furnace, various glass vessels, and shelves full of boxes, glass bottles, and manuscripts. The place is in chaos, and unless anyone makes an Observation roll (RTS 6) it may be some time before they notice that what looked like a heap of sacks in one corner is actually a person.

Imran recognizes him immediately as Sheikh Mahmoud Allam, the man who he was due to meet. It is obvious that the Sheikh does not have long to live. He is virtually comatose, and does not respond to any first aid. Before anyone can do anything about calling an ambulance from the First Aid Society, or taking him to a hospital, he starts to go into convulsions. Then, as suddenly as they started, they stop, and for a moment his eyes open, although he seems unaware of anyone around him. He says something, clearly and distinctly, and then dies. As he does so, his hands, which have been clenched rigidly, relax, and something drops out of one.

It will require Arabic (RTS 9) to understand what he said "The sons of the serpent shall not have the Eye of Thoth. It shall hatch from the egg of the phoenix." The object which he dropped was a flat oval of pottery, about three inches long, with one flat end and a hole through the other. On its face are a series of hieroglyphs. The reverse bears the design of an ankh with two intertwined snakes inside it, rising from its base and going out along the two arms.

Before the players and Imran try to make sense of this, they should work out what is to be done with the body of the Sheikh. A Private Eye with Streetwise comes into their own here. On a roll against Lowlife (RTS 6) they will know from their trip through the neighborhood that no one will admit to the authorities that they have seen anything, and on a roll against Streetwise (RTS 10) they will be sure that a cooperative doctor can be found to issue a death certificate. (In 1920s Alexandria, it was known for some doctors to issue death certificates without a body even being produced!) A Sleuth with Wealth can provide money for baksheesh in the right places, and if no one else speaks Arabic, Imran can. The ideal solution is for the death to be reported and the body taken for burial without the players being involved, and you can get the Private Eye (or eyes) to make a few more rolls against Streetwise for this by

having a neighbor report the death. Reduce the RTS by one each time to try to make sure things don't go wrong.

Once this has been taken care of, Imran will be desperate to find out what happened, and what the Sheikh's last words meant. The first place to start is with the pottery oval. Using Deduction (RTS 6) it is fairly easy to guess that it was torn from round the neck of the Sheikh's attackers, and could not be pried from his fingers. The inscription is easy for anyone with hieroglyphics (RTS 4), and not that difficult for anyone else to recognize or guess. It is in fact the cartouche (an oval containing the hieroglyphic name of royalty or a god) of Cleopatra.

The device on the back is less easy to work out. A simple Egyptology roll (RTS 5) will recognize the ankh as the Ancient Egyptian symbol of life, but not recognize the snake motif. If the roll is a Jackpot roll, or better than twelve, someone with Hieroglyphics will note that the phrase "living forever," found in the hieroglyphic titles of Ptolemies from Euergetes I onwards, is written with hieroglyphs involving a serpent and an ankh. With Alchemy skill (RTS of 7) a player can make a connection with the serpents twined around the staff of Hermes, an important alchemical symbol.

What about the Sheikh's last words? Another Alchemy roll (RTS 8) will provide the information that "It shall hatch from the egg of the phoenix" sounds like another alchemical reference. This should give the players a clue, but if not use of Deduction (RTS 6) will suggest that the Sheikh had hidden something from his attackers, and that the hiding place was something to do with fire. This should lead them to the furnace, a fairly crude brick built effort with a top which can be opened, and a door in the front. The fire inside was alight fairly recently, but has now gone out. The ashes are hot, but if they are removed the metal plate on the floor of the furnace can be lifted, revealing a hidden compartment in the brick base. Inside is a box containing several large fragments of papyrus, the "egg of the phoenix."

#### *Scene 4 - The Eye of Thoth*

The papyri are written in Greek. They are incomplete, and anyone trying to read them will have to cope with the fact that Greek manuscripts of the Graeco-Roman era were usually written without spaces between the words, and seldom used punctuation. A series of rolls against Papyrology (RTS 12) will be needed to get a good idea of what is in them. Treat each attempt as lasting an hour, so that most of the night is spent on the translation. At the end of this process, allow the players to have found out that the fragments seem to date from the Ptolemaic era (see the Cook's Guide in 'Daughter of Serpents' for a brief history of the Ptolemies), and mainly consist of passages quoted from another work.

Most of these are fairly brief, but seem to deal with acquiring "the wisdom of the serpent." Unusually for such texts, they mention women, and seem to draw a distinction between them and men in the way the wisdom is gained. With women it is described mainly in terms of insight and vision, with men in more physical terms. It is not clear whether this is meant to be taken literally, or is the usual flowery and metaphorical language of alchemy. The largest com-

plete fragment contains instructions for making something called "The Eye of Thoth," which seems to be some sort of lens.

Imran becomes increasingly excited as the fragments are translated. He reveals that he had visited the Sheikh on many occasions over the years, and learnt much from him, including the possible existence of the Book of the Serpent Staff. The Sheikh had always hinted at knowing much more than he would tell, but refused to discuss the subject in any detail, warning of the dangers involved. Recently, however, he seemed to change his mind, and had eventually promised to share what he knew with Imran. He was to have done so on this visit, and Imran is convinced that the old man's secret was the scrolls, which hold passages copied from the original Book of the Serpent Staff. If anyone stops to ask if the Sheikh knew any Greek, Imran will admit that he did not. A roll against Deduction (RTS 8) will suggest that the papyri may have been handed down from teacher to pupil for generations, but that he probably had an Arabic translation as well. If his killers had found out about this, and taken it after forcing him to reveal its whereabouts, they might well think that they had done all they needed to.

Imran is now seriously worried for his own safety, but also triumphant at having been proved right about the existence of the Book. He is determined to carry out the instructions for making the Eye of Thoth, and his obsession with this means that he doesn't think about the implications of the Sheikh's death. Whoever killed him, it's a good bet it wasn't John Niall. All Imran can think of, though, is that he has part of the Book, and a fully equipped alchemical laboratory. He will ask any player characters with Alchemy skill to help him.

Making the Eye basically involves firing a number of different colors of glass, grinding most of these into flat sheets, and one into a lens, and then mounting them in a gold frame to make a wadjet eye. (The familiar 'Eye of Horus' seen in Ancient Egyptian art, also the 'Look' micon in 'Daughter of Serpents.') In practice it's a lot more complicated than this, since each color is made by adding special ingredients, which themselves have to be prepared from other ingredients. If necessary, they can all be found in the Sheikh's workshop, but if players have Arabic and Haggle skills, it's fun to send them out to the bazaar to get some of the materials. The process will take at least a day or two, but Imran will be reluctant to stop, even to eat and sleep, and equally reluctant to be left alone in the laboratory.

While this is going on, Sleuths and Private Eyes may want to use their skills. Criminology or Police Procedure (RTS of 8) will enable them to work out that there doesn't seem to have been a struggle, and that the general untidiness is not the result of a hasty search. Use of Deduction (RTS 10), will suggest that the Sheikh was overpowered by more than one attacker, who knew what they were after, found out where it was from the Sheikh, and left as soon as they had it. Forensic Pathology (RTS 8), and a look at the body before it is taken away, will identify bruising to one cheek and the upper forearms, and four small puncture wounds, two about two inches apart on the upper surface of the right forearm, and two slightly closer together on the lower surface. Toxicology (RTS 12) will enable a player to note the slight reddening around the puncture wounds, the Sheikh's dilated pupils, and his convulsions, and

conclude that some sort of psycho-active toxin, probably of natural origin, was introduced into the bloodstream.

Another line of inquiry is to use Streetwise (RTS 7) to ask around the neighborhood. The basic RTS is low, but how much information the player gets should depend on how many they roll above this, and how imaginatively they approach the task. The player must also have Arabic (RTS 8) or someone with them who speaks it. The neighborhood is a mainly Arab one, and the Sheikh was well known and respected. The pottery cartouche will not produce much reaction, but if questions are asked about who might have murdered the Sheikh, gestures will be made to ward off the evil eye, and 'The Hooded Ones' mentioned.

Further probing will reveal that these are the mysterious Arabs who were following Imran, and who were also seen around the Sheikh's house in the days before his death. No one will say much about them, or indeed seems to know much, but they are referred to as Bedouin, tribesmen from the Libyan Desert, and are seldom seen in the city. Some members of the tribe live in the city, and have lived there since anyone can remember. The family is rich, and trades in gold, but avoids any contact with outsiders unless absolutely necessary. Marriages are almost entirely between the city branch and the desert tribe, but occasionally wealthy young men from outside will marry into the family. Unusually for Arab society, after such marriages the young men sever all contact with their families. The 'Hooded Ones' themselves are described as dervishes, a term roughly equivalent to monks, and seem to live as hermits in the desert, apart from the main tribe. Too many failed rolls, and people will clam up, refusing to say any more.

### *Scene 5 — In the House of the Dead*

The final stages of preparing the Eye of Thoth are magical. The papyrus fragment says that it must be "taken in darkness to the house of the dead where no sun has shone, and which has known no dead." There, invocations to Hermes must be made, and when these are complete, the eye must be offered to "the sun without light." Then it is promised that the alchemist will know "the great secret." There are further instructions on how the alchemist is to prepare himself for the rite, and what is to be worn. Imran is desperate to complete the process, but cannot decide what the instructions mean.

There are a number of skills which can be used to help solve this puzzle. The Occult or Ritual Magic (RTS 9) will suggest that an unused tomb must be meant. Deduction (RTS 8) can then be used to work out that if no sun has ever shone there, it must have been excavated underground. Any normal grave is open to the sky at some point in its construction. Egyptology (RTS 6) reminds the player that if the text is authentic, then the writer must refer to something which would have been around at the time he wrote. Papyrology (RTS 7) knows that the scroll is from the Ptolemaic era, so any reference to locations constructed after the Arab conquest is extremely unlikely. (The greater the success on Papyrology rolls, the more confident the player will be of the fragment's authenticity.) The Ptolemies (RTS 8) will put this lot together to come up with the ideal answer — the catacombs at Kom es Chagaufa. (If no

one thinks of using the game map in Daughter of Serpents to look for likely spots around the city, Imran can suggest them.)

The Catacombs fit the bill perfectly. They were excavated out of solid rock some time in the Graeco-Roman era, but the three elaborate sarcophagi in the main burial chamber never appear to have been used. The next night is the night of the full moon, which Imran believes will be perfect for the final ceremony. He arranges to meet the players at the catacombs later that day to plan how they will get into them at night.

Above ground there is little to see at the site, which is an old quarry. It is entered through a turnstile, and across a stretch of asphalt are two glassed over well shafts. The Catacombs are entered through the larger of these, down a circular staircase. The bottom of this leads into a round chamber with a domed roof supported by pillars with a well at its center, and a square room with three benches cut out of the rock to its left. Straight across the round chamber, a passage leads to two fairly steep sets of steps. In between them is another set of steps leading back and down to the very lowest level of the catacombs, which is flooded.

The middle level, reached by the two sets of stairs, consists of an elaborate vestibule and tomb, surrounded by a wide passageway lined with niches for mummies. Just in front of the stairs, short passages to left and right with a couple of steps at the end of them lead to the passageway. At the back of the passage, a small room leads off in front, and a large gallery with more niches leads off to the left. (The vestibule and tomb room are shown in 'Daughter of Serpents'.)

Imran is in no doubt that the central tomb is the place to carry out the ceremony. Clearly this would be impossible during the day, with parties of tourists coming and going, as well as ritually incorrect, but the catacombs are shut at night. He therefore proposes to go down during the day, hide in one of the niches, and come out at night. Someone should realize that this would mean he was locked in all night, but if not he can work it out. To get round this, he proposes that the players break into the catacombs shortly before midnight to release him and, if any of them have Alchemy or Ritual Magic, help him in the ceremony. (It should be obvious that although one person might 'disappear' in the catacombs, especially if they went in with a party but were not part of it, the same doesn't apply to three, four, five, or six people.) The players may have alternative suggestions, but however it is done, the approach of midnight needs to see the players and Imran in the catacombs.

### *Scene 6 - Disturb not the serpent*

Imran uses the room with the benches on the first level to change out of his ordinary clothes, and into the plain black robe which the ritual requires. Rather than bring the papyrus fragments, he has copied details of the ritual into his notebook, and with the aid of a torch has spent much of the time once the catacombs closed memorizing it. Now he goes to the central tomb, and begins the final ceremonies. Anyone with Alchemy or Ritual Magic can help by chanting responses, making gestures and the like. Get them to make several rolls, at an RTS of about 8-10, but keep things moving even if they don't make them

all, just have Imran look worried that it isn't going to work. (An especially good result will tell a player that a lot of the ritual is just padding. They just have to hope that anything they mess up comes into this category.) The tomb isn't massive, so have as many people as possible wait in the side passages that lead to the surrounding tunnel.

Eventually, the ritual is finished. Imran is exultant, and wants to carry out the final part of the instructions, and discover the "great secret," but as he tries to work out what needs to be done, sounds can be heard from the stairs. Signalling for silence, and gesturing to the players to hide in the passage around the tomb, Imran extinguishes the torch. Hiding in the darkness, the players will expect to hear the police or watchmen, who have discovered the open door to the Catacombs. What they hear is even more disturbing. It is the sound of several people emerging from the flooded lower levels.

It should be clear to the players that whoever is coming out into the chamber that they have just left is between them and the entrance. All they can do is wait and hope that they go away. (If anyone tries to make a run for the exit, let them, but try to get everybody to go at once, and make sure they catch a glimpse of what is going on as they dash through. Imran will still drop the Eye, for the same reasons given below, and the players should still be pursued from the tomb, and have no time to grab Imran's clothes. If anyone does anything really silly, let them suffer the consequences, but try to get the others out intact.) After a few minutes, lamps are lit in the tomb, and there is the sound of cloth rustling and other small noises. After another pause, this time a shorter one, a woman's voice begins chanting.

Her voice is deep and sensuous, rising at times to a shrill howl, but the chant is not Arabic, or any language that the players recognize, unless they have Corrupt knowledge. Then, among the guttural syllables, and strange sounds meant for no human throat, they will recognize phrases which they have read before in books of forbidden lore, or heard mentioned with a shudder by others who have passed beyond the hints and allusions of ritual magic to the deeper and darker truths beyond.

"Ia! Shub-Niggurath! Ia-gnah wluahya hndh aollhea-Leng! Ia!"

The players will realize that only a few people can get into the tomb at once, but accompanying her chant is a deep guttural drone from several other throats. The tempo of the chant increases, the lamps flicker, and the atmosphere begins to thicken almost palpably.

At some point, even if none of the players do, Kamuran Imran is going to take the risk of slipping round the corner of a side tunnel to peer into the central chamber. His expression, which can be seen by those farther back in the tunnel, is one of horrified fascination. The noise now makes it fairly easy to creep back into the side tunnels without being heard, and peer into the chamber with him.

The sight inside is a chilling one. Standing in front of the altar, with her back to them, is a slim woman in a simple dress of fine pleated linen, with her arms upraised. From the gilded vulture headdress and heavy black wig to the

simple rush sandals on her feet, she is an Ancient Egyptian goddess come to life. In front of her she holds a long pipe-like incense burner, which must have produced the line iridescent grey cloud in the air above the main sarcophagus in the tomb. What was revealed by the cloud (recognizable by anyone with the skill as the Powder of Ibn Ghazi) has faded almost to invisibility, but what still remains is hideous. There is no detail, just an impression of death in life and life in death, the blind energy of a maggot seething corpse.

It is gone in less than a second, but the scene that remains is bad enough. On either side of the woman, a line of men, naked but for pleated linen loin-cloths, kneel on the floor with their arms to the ground. The chanting is coming from them, and it is obvious from its volume that the line must go back out of the chamber and down the steps to the lower level. At first glance the skin on their backs looks diseased, but as the muscles tense and move underneath, it can be seen for what it is. Smooth scales spread out from the spine, across the shoulders and round the ribs. Finer scales cover the bald heads, and in some cases those on the back have begun to spread down the arms and legs.

As the powder settles without trace, the woman turns to hand the incense pipe to one of the kneeling figures, and as she does, her face becomes visible. It is not beautiful, the features are too strong for that, but it is unforgettably attractive. Dark eyes, wide with a savage joy, are set above a hawk-like profile and full lips. There is enormous vigor in every movement, the supple power of a great cat. As she turns, there is an audible gasp from Imran, and the Eye of Thoth slips from his fingers, hits his foot, and skids into the chamber.

At this point, there is only one sensible course of action — go hell for leather for the stairs to the upper level, and get out of the Catacombs as quickly as possible. Pausing to recover the Eye of Thoth, or stopping to collect Imran's clothes from the room above will result in the player or players involved suffering the same fate as Sheikh Mahmoud Allam. The pursuit will stop at the entrance to the Catacombs, but encourage the players to keep running until they are a long way away. Don't worry too much about dice rolls in this section, just keep the atmosphere building, and the action moving.

### *Scene 7 — Epilogue*

After this, the players have two basic courses of action.

They can go somewhere safe, like their hotel, and discuss what has happened, or go to the Police. (The Sheikh's workshop was known to his murderers, and going back to the Catacombs without some sort of backup should seem like an imaginative way to commit suicide.)

If they go to the police, they will have to choose their story very carefully. Use of *Savoir Faire* (RTS 12) will help gain a favorable reaction, and the police will send someone out to look at the catacombs in any case. The trouble is, when they arrive there is nothing to see except some wet patches on the floor. No sign of Imran's clothes or the lens. Faced with a choice between some story about devil worshippers using the Catacombs, and the likelihood that a bunch of rich European tourists have been playing a practical joke, which are the police likely to choose? Whoever was there obviously went in and out the normal way, since the door is open, and there is no point in investigating the steps

to the lower level, because everyone knows that it is flooded. The police will secure the Catacombs, and warn the players that any more practical jokes which involve breaking and entering will be dealt with by immediate deportation.

After this, or instead of this, the players can try and make sense of what has happened. Someone may remember glimpsing more of the pottery cartouches around the necks of the serpent men in the Catacombs, and someone else might speculate that there are simple ways to take things through water without getting them wet, but overall there will be more questions than answers. Who were the worshippers in the Catacombs? Who was the woman? What was the Eye of Thoth for? Was the Sheikh killed because he had part of the Book of the Serpent Staff? If he was, why did it happen now?

Imran is very worried. Although he will only admit it to another player with the same skill, he has acquired Corrupt knowledge, and recognized some of the ritual in the Catacombs. Although his notebook vanished along with the lens, he believes that he can remember enough to construct another one. There are other rock tombs for the final rituals, and although he fears what he may learn from making the Eye, he fears not knowing more.

Imran leaves for Turkey, but promises to keep in touch with one of the players. Over the next few months, he writes several times. The letters are disturbing. As well as dropping dark but unspecific hints about a terrible danger to the world, they display an increasing obsession with the woman in the Catacombs. They become wilder and more disjointed, as can be seen from part of the last one.

"There are cracks in the egg, my friends, cracks but it has not hatched yet. The Eye works, and would have worked before, but now I know. And must tell them, make them believe, believe the words of Alhazred 'That is not dead which can eternal lie...' Not dead... They found a body, true, but was it her? They say a serpent which bites itself dies of its own venom, but are all serpents the same? What if she but slept? The wisdom of centuries was in those eyes, the knowledge of the ancients. I return to Alexandria soon. The Philosopher's Stone is there, she is there, she knows I will come, she knew then. I will go now, there is a boat tomorrow, I can be there in five days. I can warn them. I can find her.

Some time later, the SS Dacia docks again in Alexandria. As the passengers descend the gangplank, one of them pauses at the top to survey the city below. The passengers behind him begin to jostle and murmur, but he seems oblivious to them. After a few moments, he starts to descend the now empty gangplank, and a white robe moves through the crowd towards its foot...

## AND DAUGHTER OF SERPENTS BEGINS...

### ALEXANDRIA —A ROLE-PLAYER'S GUIDE

#### Money:

In the 20s, English gold sovereigns and French gold francs were still in use, but letters of credit were becoming more common for sums over £100, and there were traveller's cheques from Thomas Cook and Son, the American Express Company, or the National Bank of Egypt. Cook's provided Traveller's Cheques in £5, £10 and £20 denominations, and would change money or cheques into local currency.

The Egyptian pound (£E) was worth around 20/6-1/4d in English currency in 1914, or to put it another way, one pound and sixpence farthing. (Pre decimal currency in Britain had 240 pennies in a pound, 12 pence in a shilling, and twenty shillings in a pound. Just to confuse everyone nowadays, the abbreviation for penny was 'd' from the Latin denarius.) In this era, 6d would buy a tin of baked beans or a pint of beer, and a pound would buy a couple of good quality shirts. One English pound was worth a little less than five US dollars at the beginning of the 20s.

The Egyptian pound was (and still is) divided into 100 piastres or 1000 milliemmes. Some prices are given in other sections below. Use them as a guide if the players want to buy anything, and never forget that most things can be negotiated!

#### Transport:

The two main ways of getting around Alexandria were cabs and trams. Both had their drawbacks. Even if the cab drivers spoke reasonable English, they often could not read the street signs, and knew places by local names rather than the official ones. As for the trams, a comprehensive network ran round the city, but anyone who has tried using public transport in a foreign country, especially one where they cannot speak the language, will know that it can be difficult.

Cabs were (officially) charged by time within the town, rather than distance, for a one-horse cab 2 piastres for a journey up to ten minutes (3 piastres for a two-horse cab), up to 6 and 9 piastres for an hour, and 2 piastres per additional quarter hour. Popular journeys, such as from the docks to the Cairo Station, had a standard price, but Baedeker's Guide notes that "a bargain should always be made beforehand, especially for longer drives..."

The trams ran from Place Mohammed Ali, in the center of the city, and cost 15 milliemmes for a first class ticket, and 7 for a second class.

### Shops:

#### Place Mohammed Ali

Apart from the Bourse, or Stock Exchange, the Place also held the Imperial Ottoman Bank, at No. 5, Lawrence & Mayo (Opticians), a steamship company offices (Messageries Maritimes), clothes shops, cafes, and the offices of Armand Anlyan Manufacturers Agent & Wholesale Merchant.

#### Rue Cherif Pascha

This was the smartest shopping street in the European part of town, and ran between Place Mohammed Ali and Rue de la Port Rosette, where the Savoy Palace Hotel stood. At No. 1 was Castelli's bar, No. 3 was the Ming Foo Lace Company, at No. 4 was the Credit Lyonnais bank, and above it the offices of an export company, at No. 6 a booksellers, at No. 7 was the Anglo-Egyptian Bank, and at No. 9 John Aganastopulo, Insurance Underwriter and Loss Agent. At No. 10 was Doctor Carbola, who advertised himself as "Of the University of Paris, Late Physician Neckler Hospital of Paris. A radical cure in a very short time of all venereal diseases and skin affections."

No. 13 Rue Cherif Pascha was Towa's, a shop selling silk, jewelry, and antiques. It also had a 'lucky mummy case.' This was originally given to the proprietor complete with mummy, but after it began to deteriorate, he sold it and kept only a hand. In time he sold the hand for £E5 to a Mr. Arthur Adams (Adams claimed he paid £E50) who took it to London. There it was given to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, author of the Sherlock Holmes stories, and noted supporter of spiritualism, who exhibited it in the Psychical Museum at Westminster. The mummy case remained in the shop, and was touched for luck by everyone from British soldiers on their way to the carnage of Gallipoli to young ladies hoping for a husband.

No. 18 was Hugo Hackh, a sheet music shop, D Hasaram at No. 19 sold "Jewelry, Curiosities, Silks and Embroideries," No. 19 was another bar, Pappa, 26 was Sault, a confectioners, Stobbe at 29 sold reproductions of Egyptian Antiquities, and at 30 was Kodak, which of course sold photographic equipment and supplies.

The examples given above are typical of the smarter areas of the city, but there were also the bazaars of the Turkish and Arab quarters, three cinemas, a skating rink, and much more besides. Try to give the players the impression of a thriving commercial city, in Egypt, but with a substantial European population.

### Beggars

Apart from adding local color, beggars are useful nonplayer characters. A little money and a Streetwise or Low Life roll can produce quite a lot of information.

Not just beggars, but anybody who performed any sort of small service for a tourist would stick out their hand and cry "Baksheesh." The word translates as 'gift' or 'present,' and the simplest retort is "Mafish baksheesh" (I have no present) or just "Mafish, mafish."

Any beggar worth his salt, however, would use one of the more elaborate solicitations, such as "Ya mohannin ya rabb!" (O Awakener of Pity, O Master!) "Talib min Allah hakk lukmet 'eish!" (I seek from my Lord the price of a morsel of bread!) "Ana deif Allah wa'n nebi!" (I am the guest of God and of the Prophet!) The seasoned Traveller would counter such cries with a crisp retort of "Allah ya'tik!" (May God give thee!), "Al Allah." (Go to God.), "Uskut!" (Be quiet!), or "Imshi!" (Be off with you!) There are great opportunities for creative role-playing here, also the chance to overact wildly.

### KAMURAN IMRAN

Kamuran Imran is Turkish, a native of Istanbul, in the 20s still known as Constantinople. He is of average height, slim, and balding. At the time of 'The Alchemist of Istanbul,' he is 57.

The youngest of four brothers from a prosperous professional family, he has for many years taught Chemistry at a senior boys school, and in his spare time pursued his interest in Alchemy. Because he was the youngest brother, his family did not expect much of him, and were content to indulge his hobby. On his father's death, he inherited enough to live comfortably but not extravagantly.

Imran's greatest weakness is women. He believes himself to be God's gift to women, and if he finds a woman attractive cannot believe that the feeling is not mutual. At his best he can be charming, showering women with flattery and presents, but he is also unbelievably persistent, and cannot be fobbed off politely. He isn't aggressive or unpleasant, but takes himself far too seriously. If told in the simplest and most direct terms that a woman has no interest in him, he will proceed to sulk terribly.

