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Editorial

by Dave Paul, Illustration by Delphine

ho among us doesn't have a thing for monsters? For all the amazing depth that can be found in fiction or RPGs surrounding esoteric things like economics or politics, and despite the gee-whiz fun of sorcery and magic, there's nothing quite so refreshing as a good monster.

Rite Publishing has, over the years, cranked out its fair share of monster goodness, and there are some recent contributions that really deserve mention. We've looked at many approaches to this: fighting (or running from) monsters, allying with monsters, and playing monsters.

In the Company of Medusa gives you a chance to really explore this third option. By now, who hasn't played a minotaur, ogre, dragon, vampire, or some such monster? Is there really a player out there who has stuck to the traditional races and never gotten out of the sandbox and has stayed safely tucked within the personas of elves, dwarves, halflings and the like? I remember with fondness working out a system with one of my 2e DMs a way of allowing me to play a good vampire (this was way before this theme got more airtime than it needs on both the big and little screen). With this new product, your GM can give you everything you need to play a medusa: racial traits (and alternate racial traits), physical characteristics, favored class options, class archetypes, bloodlines, paragon classes - everything you could want. And, if you are the GM, of course, this is a great opportunity to spice things up for your players. Just as players may tire of playing the

same old sword-swinging fighter or fireball flinging mage, so too do GMs tire of "Ooh, there are statues all over this place, I bet we're going to run into a medusa!"

Another product recently into the hands of many gamers is *20 Variant Foes: Red Dragons*. In addition to the dragons themselves (and who doesn't want a book of 20 red dragons, even if just for the good read?), the product is full of nice little bits like feats, spells, magic items and templates. Heck, looking through these, I can think of a handful of PCs from days gone by who would have really benefitted from Aerial Mobility (+8 dodge bonus to Armor Class against attacks of opportunity caused when flying out of or within a threatened area).

And, while not really monsters, *per se*, there's something just eerily cool about a restless soul. In this issue, you'll find more to use with your copy of the *Restless Souls* product from days gone by. (Not familiar with it? <u>Take a look</u>.) Whether you're playing in a campaign inspired by Buffy or the Winchesters, you might have reason to either play someone who has been to the underworld and back, or to have your players meet someone who has. If you've been using the product, the additional material in this issue will give you reason to go back to it. If you haven't been using it, take a look here first, and then go get yourself a copy.

Happy gaming.

# Rite Publishing Presents 20 Variant Foes: Red Dragons





By Elaine Betts and Justin P. Sluder

# Red Jester Creature Template

by Steven D. Russell, Illustrated by Jacob Blackmon

Red jester creatures are the undying remnants of court jesters who were executed by their ruler, but beware: humans are not the only race to employ fools. Some legends tell that Orcus, Demon Prince of the Undead creates them to serve as his court fools, though he often takes them out once he grows bored with them. Red jesters appear as horrid walking corpses. When they die, their skin and bodies change to appear like brightly colored clothes, floppy shoes, jingling bells, and a jester's hat, the rigor mortis permanently pulling the creature's face into a broad and horrific grin. Some red jesters, in an effort to disguise their undead nature, don masks or other costumes.

#### Creating a Red Jester Creature

"Red Jester" is an acquired template that can be added to any creature with an Intelligence of 13 or higher and the ability to draw cards from a deck of many things (referred to hereafter as the base creature). This usually means it is corporeal and has a humanoid figure of some kind along with the wit to amuse folk, though this is not always the case.

A red jester creature uses all the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

#### **CR:** +2

Alignment: Changes to Chaotic Evil.

**Size and Type:** The creature's type changes to undead with the appropriate augmented subtype. Do not recalculate HD, base attack bonuses, saves, or skill points. Size is unchanged.

**Defensive Abilities:** channel resistance +4, DR 5/good (if the red jester's CR is 6 or higher increase to DR 10/good, if 12 or higher increase to 15/good); Immune undead traits; SR 11 + the red jester's CR.

**Special Abilities:** A red jester creature retains all the special abilities of the base creature, plus the special abilities as described below:

**Fear Cackle (Su)** A red jester creature can unleash a fear-inducing cackle as a free action. All creatures within 60 feet that hear it must make a successful Will save (DC 10 + 1/2 the red jester's HD + its Cha modifier) or gain a fear condition based on the red jester's Challenge Rating (see below). If a subject makes its saving throw it is shaken for one round. Whether or not the save is successful, an affected creature is immune to that red jester's fear cackle for one day. This is a sonic, mind-affecting fear effect.

CR	Fear Effect	Duration
1-5	Shaken	1d4+ 1 rounds
6-10	Frightened	2d4 rounds
11-15	Panicked	2d6 rounds
16+	Cowered	2d8 rounds

**Jester's Deck (Su)** The red jester uses a deck of playing cards in combat that functions as a deck of many things. Once per round, as a standard action, the red jester can

draw a single card and throw it at an opponent to a range of 20 feet. This requires a successful ranged touch attack. If successful, the card takes effect that round and affects the target just as if he had drawn a card from a deck of many things. A red jester can draw the same card more than once. The playing cards only function in the hands of a red jester. To anyone else, they are merely normal playing cards.

If a red jester is CR 11 or higher he can draw and throw a card as a swift action to a range of 40 ft.

**Merriment Strike (Su)** If a red jester strikes an opponent with a melee attack, the creature must make a successful Will save (DC 10 +1/2 the red jester's HD + its Cha modifier) or fall to the ground laughing for 1d3 rounds. The opponent is not helpless, but is unable to move or act for the duration (similar to the dazed condition).

**Unassailable Mind (Ex)** The mind of a red jester is a twisted and dangerous place to journey. Being undead, it is immune to all mind-influencing effects but should a creature target the mind of a red jester with such an effect (including psionics, telepathy, or the like), the creature attempting to invade the red jester's mind must make a successful Will save (DC 10 +1/2 the red jester's HD + its Cha modifier) or suffer the effects of a lesser confusion spell (caster level equal to the base creature's HD).

If the red jester's CR is 11 or higher, this effect becomes an *insanity* spell.

Abilities: Increase from the base creature as follows: Str +4 (+2 to attack and damage, +2 to Climb and Swim skill checks, +2 to Strength, and CMB checks, +2 to CMD), Dex +8 (+4 to Ranged attack rolls; AC and touch AC, Initiative, and Ref saves. +4 to Acrobatics, Disable Device, Escape Artist, Fly, Ride, Sleight of Hand, and Stealth checks, add +4 to any of the base creature's Dexterity-based DCs), Wis +4 (+2 to Will saves, -2 to Heal, Perception, Profession, Sense Motive and Survival checks, add -2 to any of the base creature's Wisdom-based DCs), Int +4 (add 2 bonus languages, add 2 skill points per HD, +2 to Appraise, Craft, Knowledge, Linguistics, and Spellcraft checks +2 to any of the base creature's Intelligence-based DCs), +6 Cha (+3 to Bluff, Diplomacy, Disguise, Handle Animal, Intimidate, Perform, and Use Magic Device; attempts to influence others, and Channel Energy DCs, +3 to any of the base creature's Charisma-based DCs). Being undead, a red jester has no Constitution score.

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#### The Court Fool of Orcus CR 22 XP 614,400

CE Large Undead (augmented [outsider] chaotic, demon, evil, extraplanar) **Init** +15; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, true seeing; **Perception** +40 **Aura** flaming body, unholy aura (DC 29)

#### Defense

AC 40, touch 24, flat-footed 29 (+4 deflection, +11 Dex, +16 natural, –1 size) hp 330 (20d10+210)

Fort +27, Ref +21, Will +27

**Defensive Abilities** channel resistance +4, DR 15/cold iron and good; Immune electricity, fire, poison, undead traits; Resist acid 10, cold 10; SR 33

#### Offense

Speed 40 ft., fly 90 ft. (good)

**Melee** +1 vorpal unholy longsword +33/+28/+23/+18 (2d6+13 plus merriment strikes), +1 vorpal flaming whip +32/+27/+22 (1d4+7 plus 1d6 fire, entangle, and merriment strikes) or 2 slams +33 (1d10+12 plus merriment strikes)

Ranged jester's deck +31 (swift action, 40 ft.) Space 10 ft.; Reach 10 ft. (20 ft. with whip) Special Attacks: fear cackle (DC 31, cowering 2d8 rounds), jester's deck, merriment strikes (DC 31, insanity)

#### Spell-Like Abilities (CL 20th)

Constant—true seeing, unholy aura (DC 29) At will—dominate monster (DC 30), greater dispel magic, greater teleport (self plus 50 lbs. of objects only), power word stun, telekinesis (DC 26) 3/day—quickened telekinesis (DC 26)

1/day—blasphemy (DC 28), fire storm (DC 29),

*implosion* (DC 30), *summon* (level 9, any 1 CR 19 or lower demon 100%)

#### Statistics

**Str** 39, **Dex** 33, **Con** -, **Int** 28, **Wis** 28, **Cha** 33 **Base** Atk +20; **CMB** +35; **CMD** 60 **Feats** Cleave, Combat Reflexes, Greater Two-Weapon Fighting, Improved Initiative, Improved Two-Weapon Fighting, Iron Will, Power Attack, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (telekinesis), Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (longsword)

**Skills** Acrobatics +31, Bluff +34, Diplomacy +34, Fly +36, Intimidate +34, Knowledge (history) +29, Knowledge (nobility) +29, Knowledge (planes) +32, Knowledge (religion) +29, Perform (act) +31, Perform (comedy) +31, Perception +40, Sense Motive +32, Stealth +30, Use Magic Device +34; Racial Modifiers +8 Perception

**Languages** Abyssal, Celestial, Draconic, Infernal, Sylvan; telepathy 100 ft.

#### **SQ** death throes, vorpal strike, whip mastery

#### Special Abilities

**Death Throes (Su)** When killed, the court fool of Orcus explodes in a blinding flash of fire that deals 100 points of damage (half fire, half unholy damage) to anything within 100 feet (Reflex DC 31 halves). The save DC is Charisma-based.

**Entangle (Ex) If** the court fool of Orcus strikes a Medium or smaller foe with its whip, it can immediately attempt a grapple check without provoking an attack of opportunity. If the court fool wins the check, it draws the foe into an adjacent square. The foe gains the grappled condition, but the court fool of Orcus does not.

**Flaming Body (Su)** The court fool of Orcus's body is covered in dancing flames. Anyone striking it with a natural weapon or unarmed strike takes 1d6 points of fire damage. A creature that grapples the court fool or is grappled by it takes 6d6 points of fire damage each round the grapple persists.

**Vorpal Strike (Su)** Any slashing weapon the court fool of Orcus wields (including its standard longsword and whip) gains the vorpal weapon quality. Weapons retain this quality for one hour after the court fool releases the weapon, but after this the weapon reverts to its standard magical qualities, if any.

Whip Mastery (Ex) The court fool of Orcus treats a whip as a light weapon for the purposes of twoweapon fighting, and can inflict lethal damage on a foe regardless of the foe's armor.



Rite Publishing Presents

# In The Company of Medusa





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# Hero Jab®'s Pathfinder® Wizards

By Liz Winters, Community Manager for Lone Wolf Development

Hero Lab has been supporting the Pathfinder game system since 2009; but who are the brave developers behind the data files we've all come to know and love? Let's sit down with Colen, Mathias, Aaron and Hollis as we learn about their roleplaying game origins and some of their most memorable GMing experiences. You can interact with these guys and other Lone Wolf staff on our forums: forums.wolflair.com.

#### Colen



# What was the first RPG you played? How did you join Lone Wolf?

Back in 1995, I think (time flies!), my high school friends invited me to join them for games on a Saturday afternoon. I didn't really understand what type of game they were talking about, but it sounded like fun, so I said "sure!", and we started playing Advanced Dungeons & Dragons.

Over the next couple of years, we ran a campaign based around R. A. Salvatore's Drizzt novels (I played Catti-Brie). Two things kept me playing - the great story our GM built for and around us (hi Philip!), and the fun of hanging out with my friends.

Exactly what we did is now lost in the mists of my memory, but it involved defeating fearsome foes, solving traps, and exploring strange lands - everything you need for a good RPG! A dragon may have been involved, too.

We played a few AD&D campaigns, then mostly switched to miniatures games like Warhammer, 40k, and Necromunda. I had been using a cool bit of software named "Army Builder®» [a roster construction tool] to build my Warhammer armies for a while, and emailed the creator to find out if he'd be supporting the new edition of Warhammer 40,000 when it came out later that year.

Somehow I ended up creating the Warhammer 40,000 game system (and a few others) for Army Builder myself - for some reason it was easier to spend hours getting things working in Army Builder than it was to add up the points costs for my armies by hand! I'm still not sure why it feels that way...

By this time I happened to be studying software development in college, and as soon as I got my degree, I moved 6,000 miles to California to join the company! Not really a career move I had planned even a year or two previously.

#### What is your GM Style?

Rakshasa! My games are a mixture of story and very dangerous combat, and things are never what they seem... well, maybe sometimes what they seem, but the players haven't got to that point yet.

As the GM, I'm doing my job if players are invested in the game. My favorite example of this was during a major combat, when one of the players spent half the whole combat walking nervously around the table because he was worried about what would happen.

# What makes you excited about Realm Works as a GM?

My big problem with GMing is making things up for the game, then forgetting them. Realm Works has been invaluable for keeping me organized, and keeping things more consistent for the players.

I'll soon be returning to the place the players started for an offshoot of my main Pathfinder game, and thanks to Realm Works, everything is nicely integrated with my current notes, instead of sitting in a dusty Dropbox folder somewhere.





**What was the first RPG you played?** D&D red box – 5<sup>th</sup> grade (around 25 years ago)

#### How did you join Lone Wolf?

I had created a few Army Builder data files, and then stayed active on the forums, helping others make AB data files; so when Hero Lab came out, I emailed Colen and said that when they got to adding Exalted to Hero Lab, I'd love to help out, even if they couldn't pay me. He replied, saying that Exalted wasn't on the horizon at the time, but would I like some contract assignments, adding material to the d20 files? So I worked as a nights and weekends contractor for a year or so, and then when a job search wasn't going quickly, I asked if I could become a full time contractor, which eventually led to full-time employment.

# What have been some of your favorite GM experiences?

In a game I was running (Trinity, by White Wolf – a sci-fi game), one of the characters asked the rest of the party if he could go off and talk to an ally in private – the others agreed, and the player and I went through a few minutes of that conversation in another room. Then, when I returned to the rest of the group, they tried to figure out a way to eavesdrop on that conversation.

Player: "I've got the Exceptional Hearing merit, can I hear them?"

Me: "Yes, but they're speaking Portuguese, is that a language you understand?"

Player: "No, but I'll download a translation program for my computer."

Me: "Does your computer have Exceptional Hearing?"

I really enjoyed the way the player dynamics ended up working in that campaign, with one player emphasizing the mysteriousness of his character, simply for mystery's sake, and the rest of the group responding by being extremely nosy every time he tried to be secretive.

# What makes you excited about Realm Works as a GM?

The ability to have players review the events of previous sessions, just by looking at the reveal history is my favorite feature. Catching someone up to speed on the events of a previous session has always been a hassle, especially when you're having trouble remembering whether a particular event happened last session, or the session before that.

# How do you think Realm Works will improve your experience as a GM?

I think it'll be useful as a prompt for things I ought to add – I add the characters, storylines, and locations I've thought of, and in the process of organizing everything, I'll think of several other details, or side plots, to add to what I already have.



# What was the first RPG you played? What got you "hooked"?

My first RPG was the old red box D&D set. You know, the one with the dice that had numbers you had to fill in with a crayon? That would have been about 1986 or so.

I've always been an avid reader, especially of fantasy and science fiction. RPGs gave me a way to create my own adventures, to visit places that had only existed in my imagination.

#### How did you join Lone Wolf?

Mostly by accident! I was working at a hardware store, and my hours got cut. I'd been helping out a bit on the Lone Wolf forums, helping out other users, working up stock portfolios for Mutants & Masterminds, that sort of thing. So I messaged Colen and asked him if there was anything he'd like me to work on, mostly looking for something useful to do to. He offered me paying work, doing this & that for Pathfinder. Eventually, events transpired such that I was able to join Lone Wolf full time.

#### What is your GM Style?

I tend to build the world first, and then see where inspiration takes me for plot. I plan and prep for each session, but I really enjoy it when the players and I start improvising off each other. That's the point at which the world becomes not just mine, but theirs as well. Tell the players the story of the world, but always keep something up your sleeve, and never tell them the whole truth.

# What have been some of your favorite GM experiences?

I always love it when my players get that "Uh-oh" look

on their face when they realize the consequences of their actions. Once in a Mutants & Masterminds game, a player telekinetically picked up an entire bank and shook it to keep it from being robbed, doing lots more in property damage than the thieves would have gotten away with. This created something of a problem for the team.

### What makes you excited about Realm Works as a GM?

Lots of things. The ability to reveal information to the players in pieces, for one. I usually have a fair bit of mythology and backstory in my games, and even if the players don't learn most of it, it helps me keep the world consistent and the game interesting. The categories give me common templates for categories of things so I don't forget important details. And hyperlinks between related things, custom calendars, tags on things, maps that link to information on the places on the map.

# How do you think Realm Works will improve your experience as a GM?

Confession time: I am a horribly disorganized GM. My campaign notebook is usually a mess of scribbles, cross-outs, cryptic margin notes, half-drawn maps, you get the idea. It's all there, but finding it when I need it is sometimes hard. And I really hate it when I get caught contradicting myself. I've tried several electronic tools to get more organized, and Realm Works is the best one I've worked with so far.



# What was the first RPG you played? When was it?

AD&D 2nd Edition, in late middle school (maybe 1997?).

aron

#### What was it about RPGs that got you "hooked"?

I like the control that you have over the story. How it shapes itself to your actions and the actions of your fellow players. No other medium grants this sort of narrative freedom.

#### How did you join Lone Wolf?

I discovered Hero Lab at Gen Con one year and bought it for [Dungeons & Dragons] 3.5, but found that it didn't have all the custom content I would have liked. Being a lonely fellow with more time than sense, I dove into the editor and started making a pest of myself on the forums asking for help programming this or that. Eventually I had a large set of data, and thanks to the help of other forumites, that formed the basis of the 3.5 community files. It also earned me consideration when Lone Wolf was looking to hire someone, though my co-worker Mathias bested me for that first slot.

I did get the consolation prize of working as one of the paid contractors hired to enter data from various Paizo books and started to distinguish myself there with my meticulous attention to detail. That gig ran for several years, through my graduation from university, the terrible times of flailing about for a Biological Science job, and when that failed, my year teaching in Korea. When my contract with the school was coming up for renewal I knew I wanted to come home, but I didn't look forward to taking another crack at job-seeking. Instead I decided to ask Colen if he'd like to hire me on as a full time worker (since there was so much monthly Paizo stuff it was clearly a struggle to keep up with it all).

No one was more surprised than I was when he got back to me with an interview and eventually an offer. I guess sometimes life just hands you a break, y'know?

# What have been some of your favorite GM experiences?

My GM style has led to some unfortunate, but hilarious instances of death. For example, one new PC stumbled upon a burglary in progress and only the vouching of his fellow PCs (who were committing the robbery) prevented the gang leader from having him killed on the spot. When the gang leader asked him "How do I know I can trust you to keep your mouth shut?" and the new PC replied "When you think about it, how can you really trust anyone about anything?" I had to just shake my head. The crime boss gave the word and his mooks murdered the new PC on the spot. The other PCs could have jumped in to save him, but they chose to keep their cover instead.

Another campaign had a long running relationship between one of my players and an NPC which developed over (in game and out of game) years. The eventual marriage ceremony was one of my favorite memories of that game, a bright spot of hope in a very dark game of war and tragedy. That's probably one of my favorite accomplishments as a GM, being able to portray a character well enough that my players had a real emotional stake in her welfare and talked about her like a real person.

#### What makes you excited about Realm Works as a GM? How do you think Realm Works will improve your experience as a GM?

I'm excited to be able to track what I have shared with my players and what has not yet been revealed. Right now if they want to know details of my campaign I have to go on a long talk about this or that subject. I'm also looking forward to our eventual plan to have a marketplace for users to buy and sell content, where I might share some of my ideas and perhaps earn a little extra money from them.

I'm in the Beta team, so it's been nice being able to look up NPC and setting info with just a few clicks. I mostly use it at the table as a reference for myself during game creation and play.

# Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

Our world is but one of untold many, a flux of chance caught in the struggle between form and cacophony. Always, these forces are at war, shaping the infinite worlds. The immortal, self-appointed sovereigns of battle move between planes of reality with impunity: they are creators, shapers, and destroyers of worlds.

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Find out more at www.RitePublishing.com



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### Alternate Traits: Restless Souls

By Steven D. Russell, Illustrations by Hugo Solis

*n the Company of Monsters* introduces a number of new player races and a racial template; the racial template, the restless soul, allows you to come back from the dead.

I designed the restless soul template to give players and GMs a chance to keep playing the game, while holding on to the classical feel of a spirit not yet ready to lay down its labors while still retaining a sense of balance and the penalties of having died and come back. What I am introducing here are alternate traits for restless souls of any race.

### Restless Soul Alternate Traits

When you apply the restless soul template to your character you can substitute any trait (including racial traits) you possess for a restless soul trait. When you lose this template you lose all restless soul traits that you possess and they are replaced with the original traits, if there was not an original trait you can replace it with any other trait for which you meet the prerequisites (subject to GM adjudication).

**Bane of the Unliving:** The power that brought you back from the grave protects you from the undead. Reduce the damage dealt to you by an undead creature by 3 points regardless of the type of damage, so long as its source is an undead creature.

**Came Back Wrong:** Your personality has changed since passing beyond the veil and you are no longer the same person you used to be; having seen what lies beyond the veil, your mind is forever changed. Once per week if you fail a saving throw against madness, insanity or a confusion effect, you make a second saving throw with a +2 trait bonus. You must take the result of the second roll, even if it is worse. Your restless soul negative levels do not affect you in reference to this second saving throw.

**Conduit of Life and Death:** You have experienced both life and death and serve as a passage for the spiritual power that lies beyond. Once per week you can pull back that veil and when you channel energy, you add +6 trait bonus to the amount of damage dealt or healed by your channeled energy.



**Death is Only the Beginning:** You have died and come back, and no longer fear death. Once per week if you fail a saving throw against a fear or death effect you make a second saving throw with a +2 trait bonus. You must take the result of the second roll, even if it is worse. Your restless soul negative levels do not affect you in

reference to this second saving throw.

**Deathmark:** The wounds that resulted in your death result in the unhealable scarring of your new restless soul form. These deathmarks serve you as a divine focus for casting spells, and as a physical manifestation of your faith, and it increases your devotion to your god. Once per week if you failed a saving throw against a charm or compulsion effect, you make a second save with a +2 trait bonus. You must take the result of the second roll, even if it is worse. Your restless soul negative levels do not affect you in reference to this second saving throw.

**Death's Herald:** Your experience with death gives you a unique understanding and experience in dealing with the undead. Intelligent undead who encounter you for the first time always have an indifferent attitude (at worst) toward you, and you gain a +2 trait bonus on Diplomacy checks when dealing with undead, as well as a +2 trait bonus on Charisma checks made to influence undead (for example, as part of the *command undead* spell).

**Grave Determination:** Once a week as a standard action, you can joke about how you have even overcome death, and the current troublesome situation is hardly worth getting down about. You and all allies within 30 feet who can hear you gain a second saving throw on any debilitating effect that allowed a save with a +2 morale bonus to the new save. Everyone must take the result of their second saving throws, even if they are worse.

Your restless soul negative levels do not affect you in reference to this second saving throw.

**Lively Motivation:** Having died once before you never wish to do so again and this fear of death keeps you on your toes. Once per week you roll twice when rolling for initiative taking the result of the highest roll.

**Only Mostly Dead:** Having died before, you now hold on to life beyond what is reasonably possible for most mortal creatures. You do not gain the dead condition until your hit points are reduced t a negative amount equal to *double* your Constitution score, your Constitution drops to 0, or you are killed outright by a spell or effect.

**Out of Hell:** You escaped from the ultimate prison beyond the veil of death; now nearly nothing can contain you. Once per week if you fail an Escape Artist check you make a second check with a +2 trait bonus. You must take the result of the second roll, even if it is worse. Your restless soul negative levels do not affect you in reference to this second check.

**Reaper's Scythe:** The weapon that sent you to the grave now holds special significance for you. You become proficient in the weapon that killed you and any feat you possess that chooses a specific weapon now chooses that weapon. If you wield the actual weapon that killed you, you meet all the prerequisites for using it (even if it is an artifact, relic, intelligent, legendary, or legacy item) and you gain a +1 trait bonus to damage rolls when wielding it.

**Sate the Reaper:** You have a vicious desire to send foes where you have been, beyond the veil. Once per week, whenever you make an attack that reduces a foe to o hit points or fewer, you may perform a coup de grace as a swift action.

**Specter of Death:** Your sinister and deathless appearance can strike fear in the hearts of your opponents. Once per day, you may attempt to demoralize an opponent as a swift action. Once per week, if you fail an Intimidate check, you make a second check with a +2 trait bonus. You must take the result of the second roll, even if it is worse. Your restless soul negative levels do not affect you in reference to this second check.

**Taken to the Grave:** Some secrets you take with you to the grave. But when you came back, you brought mystical powers with you to protect those secrets. Once per week if you fail a Bluff check or a saving throw



against a divination or compulsion that would reveal the truth, you make a second check or save with a +2 trait bonus. You must take the result of the second roll, even if it is worse. Your restless soul negative levels do not affect you in reference to this second check or save.

**Vengeance from the Tomb:** You have come back from beyond the grave for vengeance. While you might not know who killed you, you know the nature of the creature. Choose a specific creature type, subtype and race or organization (subject to GM adjudication). Once per day when fighting your chosen foe, you gain a +4 trait bonus on a single attack roll. Your restless soul negative levels do not affect you in reference to this attack roll.

Who Wants to Live Forever?: Having come back from the dead you no longer put any value in your own life, and are extremely reckless as you move about. Once per week, if you fail an Acrobatics check, you make a second check with a +2 trait bonus. You must take the result of the second roll, even if it is worse. Your restless soul negative levels do not affect you in reference to this second check.

**Why Won't You Die?:** Having come back from beyond the veil of death, you do everything you can not to go there again. Once per week, if a failed d20 roll would result in your death, you make a second d20 roll with a +2 trait bonus. You must take the result of the second roll, even if it is worse. Your restless soul negative levels do not affect you in reference to this second d20 roll.

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# WANT FREE PDFs?



#### CAVE & CAVERN DRESSING by Creighton Broadhurst,

Illustrations by Matt Bulahao, bruno balixa, and Frederic Edwin Church

Adventurers often explore cave systems in pursuit of wealth and glory. GMs can utilise the table below to add areas of minor interest to such networks. Such features add depth and verisimilitude to delves. As always, the GM should modify the entries below to suit the area under exploration. For example, the various gnawed bones and bodies referenced in the table could belong to a specific subterranean race (perhaps troglodytes or goblins) or could even be the remains of previous expeditions.

The table is compatible with the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game, but also works (with a few minor tweaks) with the 3.5 version of the world's favourite roleplaying game.

#### D% FEATURE

**01-08** Mud fills several deep depressions in the floor. The broken skeleton of a humanoid juts forth from the filth. Picked clean by scavengers, a DC 15 Knowledge (local) check reveals it to be that of a troglodyte.

**09** Several broken stalagmites lie scattered across the floor. A DC 10 Knowledge (dungeoneering) check reveals that something large blundered into them.

**10-15** Water drips from a fissure in the ceiling, creating a curtain of water that protects the entrance to a small passageway. The water is pure (but cold).

**16** A 20 ft. deep natural shaft pierces the floor. A rusted iron spike and the rotting, frayed remains of a hemp rope bare mute witness to some long forgotten exploration. At the bottom of the pit, a small rocky overhang provides access to a space big enough for two Medium-sized creatures to lie down.

**17-25** The channel of a stream cuts across the passage. Although no water now flows here, thick cloying mud lurks ready to catch unwary travellers. Entering a square containing mud costs 3 squares of movement, (and gets the character very muddy!)

**26-28** Dim light filters through a network of cracks in the ceiling. (The light provides concealment [20% miss chance]). Hundreds of bats dwell in the cave and guano covers the floor. Characters approaching the cavern smell the guano when they make a DC 15 Perception check. Creatures with scent automatically detect the smell 60 ft. away from the cavern.

**29-31** A wide, sluggish stream flows across the passageway. Previous explorers have hurled large rocks into the water to form stepping stones. Crossing the



stream without falling in requires two DC 12 Acrobatics checks.

**32** A faded chalk arrow on the wall points in the opposite direction to the PCs' travel.

**33** A small niche high up on a wall (reached with a DC 15 Climb check) leads to a narrow crawl way, which in turn opens up into a large, dry chamber.

**34-39** A small pool fed by several narrow, submerged passages fills part of an alcove. The water is crystal clear and pure. A half-dozen blind fish meander through its depths.

**40-42** Water oozes down a wall covered with a small colony of phosphorescent fungi. The fungus glows for one hour after being removed from the wall.

**43-45** Light rubble covers the floor and cracks pierce the ceiling; entering a square containing rubble costs 2 squares of movement. A DC 15 Knowledge (dungeoneering) reveals that the area is structurally sound.

**46** Great cracks cut through the ceiling and heaps of rubble covers the floor. The rubble is not stable and shifts underfoot. It costs 2 squares of movement to enter a square containing deep rubble. A DC 15 Knowledge (dungeoneering) check reveals that the ceiling is unstable. Explosions in the area have a 5% chance of causing a further collapse.

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**47-50** A narrow sinkhole pierces the floor. Barely 5 ft. wide, the hole is unstable. Characters entering an adjacent square must make a DC 20 Reflex save or fall into the sinkhole as the floor crumbles away. A DC 15 Knowledge (dungeoneering) check reveals this fact. (The sinkhole could serve as an alternate link to another level or lead nowhere). The depth of the hole is at the GM's discretion.

**51-53** A rock fall has all but blocked a narrow side passage, leaving only a 2 ft. crawlspace. Beyond, mud and other debris fill the corridor. It extends for 20 ft. before ending in a dead-end.

**54** The gnawed remains of a decomposing arm lies behind a stalagmite. A DC 15 Heal check reveals that it has lain here for over a week. A DC 11 Knowledge (local) check reveals it to have once belonged to a troglodyte.

**55-56** A strong breeze issues from a narrow hole in the floor. Torches and other unprotected flames dance wildly in the wind, but are not extinguished.

**57-58** A powerful wind issues from a narrow hole in the floor. Unprotected flames are extinguished and hearing-based Perception checks suffer a -2 penalty within 30 ft. of the hole.

**59-60**Calcite in the passage walls and ceiling glints in the party's lights. A DC 15 Knowledge (dungeoneering) check reveals the deposits to be essentially worthless.

**61-65** A 20 ft. high escarpment (DC 15 Climb check) blocks further progress.

**66-69**A wan, yellow glow emanates from around a corridor. Investigation reveals a small clump of phosphorescent fungi. A DC 15 Knowledge (nature) or Knowledge (dungeoneering) check reveals they are harmless and safe to eat. They continue to glow for 30 minutes after being removed from the wall.

**70-71** The floor suddenly begins to slope steeply downwards. Loose rubble covers much of the area making running and charging unwise.

**72-76** Water drips from the ceiling. Lichens and mold smother the floor making it slippery. A DC 10 Knowledge (nature) or DC 10 Knowledge (dungeoneering) check reveals the lichens to be harmless (and edible in extremis).

77 A large, crystal clear pool contains the calcifying skeletons of several humanoids. Their equipment has long since been looted, but perceptive explorers (DC 20 Perception check) notice the glint of gold from within one of the skeletons. Exploration reveals a single golden earring (DC 20 Appraise; worth 50 gp).

**78** A swiftly flowing river crosses the passageway. The smashed remains of a small rowboat lie scattered along the bank. Of its occupants, there is no sign.

**79-81** The floor suddenly drops away forming a 10 ft. high escarpment. Characters must make a DC 15 Climb



check to descend safely.

82 A small rock cairn in a side chamber marks the final resting place of a previous explorer. Removing enough stones to examine the skeletal remains of the human female

takes 30 minutes. Buried without her equipment, the only item of interest is a tarnished gold ring (DC 20 Appraise check; worth 200 gp).

**83-85** Footsteps of a half-dozen booted humanoids mar an expanse of semi-dried mud. A DC 15 Survival check reveals the tracks are about one week old.

**86** The melted remains of a cluster of stalagmites yet hang from this chamber's ceiling. (A DC 20 Knowledge [dungeoneering] check reveals that only a strong concentration of acid could have created such damage. A further DC 25 Knowledge [arcana] reveals the damage was probably caused by a variant fireball dealing acid damage).

**87** The stones of a small campfire sit in a small depression in the ground. Soot covers the ceiling above. Sifting through the cold ashes reveals the bones of several small animals. Pieces of broken, discarded equipment also lie about the chamber.

**88** A decomposing corpse sits slumped against a wall. A multitude of insects writhe across it consuming the putrid flesh. A DC 15 Heal check reveals the corpse to be that of a goblin. A DC 15 Knowledge (dungeoneering) or Knowledge (nature) check reveals the insects as harmless.

**89** Small niches in the wall contain a number of votive offerings such as crudely carved stone figurines, mouldering food and so on.

**90** A small obviously worked passageway – little more than 3 ft. high – leads away from the passageway. A DC 15 Knowledge (dungeoneering) check reveals it as the beginnings of a mine. The passage leads for about 40 ft. before ending. A DC 20 Perception check reveals a rusted pickaxe lying amid the dust.

**91** A small tumble of boulders covers some of the floor. A DC 15 Craft (trapmaking) or a DC 20 Knowledge (dungeoneering) check reveals this as the remains of a crude deadfall trap.

**92** Water drips from a multitude of cracks in the ceiling, increasing the DC of hearing-based Perception checks by 2. Characters crossing the area get very wet.

**93** A shaft pierces the ceiling of the passage.

But 5 ft. wide, it extends for 90 ft. A multitude of tiny lights shift and move within. A DC 15 Knowledge (dungeoneering) or Knowledge (nature) reveals them as glow-worms.

**94** Mud covers the floor. Several deep, muddy puddles dot the floor. The floor is slippery and going is slow (it costs 2 squares of movement to enter a mud filled square).

**95** A perceptive party member realises that viewed from a certain angle, a portion of the cavern wall is reminiscent of a partially melted human face.

**96** A huge, 10 ft. diameter column dominates a small chamber. A cluster of spindly stalagmites and stalactites fills much of the remaining space. A trail of broken stalagmites betrays the path taken by previous explorers.

**97** The passageway doubles in width. An easily reached ledge against one wall provides a good vantage point over the undulating floor.

**98** A huge boulders partially blocks the passage. Characters can either go round it or scramble over it (DC 15 Climb check). Characters scrambling over it discover signs (remnants of a cold meal and scuff marks) that suggest someone or something lurked atop the boulder for a short while.

**98-100** A smear of charcoal on a wall shows where an earlier explorer extinguished a torch.

#### ABOUT THE DESIGNER

Creighton lives in Torquay, England where, apparently, the palm trees are plastic and the weather is warm. He shares a ramshackle old mansion with his two children ("Genghis" and "Khan") and his patient wife. Famed for his unending love affair with booze and pizza he is an enduring GREYHAWK fan.

An ENnie Award winning designer (Madness At Gardmore Abbey) Creighton has worked with Expeditious Retreat Press, Paizo and Wizards of the Coast. He believes in the Open Gaming License and is dedicated to making his games as fun and easy to enjoy as possible for all participants. Reducing or removing entry barriers, simplifying pre-game prep and easing the GM's workload are the key underpinning principles of the products he now releases through Raging Swan Press. You can read his thoughts on game design at raging-swan.livejournal.com.



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**Rite Publishing Presents** 

by Steven D. Russell

# 1001



# Smart Fighting

By Jacob Kellogg, Illustrations by Rick Hershey and Toby Gregory

hile there are, within Pathfinder, rewards for smart combatants, this particular angle of combat development lags somewhat behind the more traditional approaches to combat. Brute force and agility, understandably, generally get the most attention. This piece attempts to bring more options to the player who wants to focus on a PC with both a melee combat role and a high Intelligence score. A combatant's smarts should be able to directly contribute to fighting effectiveness in ways beyond a few more skill points. Here you'll find two archetypes and a few new feats. The tactical opportunist applies his intelligence in a variety of ways, but largely focuses on tactical timing. The precision striker analyzes his target and predicts and exploits where that target's defenses will and won't be.

# Alternate Class Archetypes

#### Fighter: Jactical Opportunist

**Tactical Training:** At 1st level, a tactical opportunist gains Combat Expertise as a bonus feat.

At 4th level, he also gains Combat Reflexes as a bonus feat. He must meet these feats' prerequisites as normal. Beginning at 8th level, he reduces the attack penalty from using Combat Expertise by an amount equal to his Intelligence bonus (if any). This ability replaces the bonus feat at 1st level and armor training.

**Cunning Strike (Ex):** A tactical opportunist knows that timing is critical, and beginning at 2nd level he can time his strikes for maximum effectiveness, gaining a +1 bonus on attack rolls made with a readied action or attack of opportunity. This bonus increases by +1 for every four levels beyond 2nd, but can never exceed the tactical opportunist's Intelligence modifier. This ability replaces bravery.

#### Rogue: Precision Striker

**Martial Acumen (Ex):** A precision striker's cunning aids her in combat, granting her a bonus to attack rolls. This bonus is +1 at first level and increases by +1 every 4 levels thereafter, but never exceeds her Intelligence modifier. Beginning at 6th level, this bonus is added to her base attack bonus for the purposes of qualifying for feats. This ability replaces trapfinding and trap sense. Clever Targeting (Ex): No one can cover all their weak spots at once, and the precision striker can learn to exploit that fact by observing and anticipating where an opponent's defenses will and won't be, and striking accordingly. Beginning at 4th level, the precision striker can, as a swift action, make an opposed Intelligence check against one creature she can see and that she has already identified with a Knowledge check appropriate to its type. For every 5 by which she exceeds the DC on the Knowledge check, she gains a +2 bonus on the Intelligence check against the selected enemy. Winning this check means the precision striker has predicted how the selected foe will attempt to defend itself, and the creature loses its Dexterity bonus to AC against the next attack the precision striker makes against that creature this round. Creatures with only animal intelligence or with no Intelligence score at all use their Wisdom to oppose this ability instead. This ability replaces uncanny dodge and improved uncanny dodge.

#### Feats

#### Deadly Acumen (Combat)

Your devotion to keeping your intellect keen has other advantages as well.

#### Prerequisite: Int 13

Benefit: You can choose to take a -1 penalty on all melee attack rolls and combat maneuver checks to gain a +2 bonus on all melee damage rolls. This bonus to damage is halved if you are making an attack with a natural weapon or a weapon wielded in two hands. When you have at least 4 ranks in a single Intelligencebased skill, and for every 4 ranks thereafter (in the same skill), the penalty increases by 1 and the bonus on damage rolls increases by +2 (i.e. -2 attack and +4 damage at 4 ranks, -3 attack and +6 damage at 8 ranks, etc.). You must choose to use this feat before the attack roll, and its effects last until your next turn. The bonus damage does not apply to touch attacks or effects that do not deal hit point damage. This feat cannot be used in conjunction with the Power Attack feat or similar abilities.

#### Precision Jiming (Combat)

You know how to time your strikes to get past your opponents' defenses.



**Prerequisites:** Int 13, base attack bonus +6 **Benefit:** Whenever you hit with a readied melee attack, you can make an attack against the target as an attack of opportunity after the readied attack is resolved. You cannot use this feat while under the effects of *rage* or similar effects that limit your patience, nor while using Power Attack. You can only use this feat with a readied attack action (a type of standard action).

#### Exploitive Jiming (Combat)

Not only does your expert timing allow you to open a hole in your enemies' defenses, it also allows you to make the most of that opening.

**Prerequisites:** Int 15, base attack bonus +11, Precision Timing

**Benefit:** Attacks of opportunity that you make as a result of the Precision Timing feat deal twice their normal damage.

#### Blindside (Combat)

**Prerequisites:** Int 15, base attack bonus +11, Precision Timing

**Benefit:** When a readied attack that qualifies for Precision Timing is triggered, you may move up to half your speed directly toward the target as an immediate action. You may only use this ability if you have not otherwise moved any distance this round.

#### Systemic Maneuver Training (Combat) Though you may not have specialized in a specific

Though you may not have specialized in a specific maneuver, you understand the underlying principles of myriad combat tactics.

**Prerequisites:** Int 13 and Combat Expertise; or Int 15 **Benefit:** You do not provoke attacks of opportunity for performing combat maneuvers, even if you do not possess the associated "Improved" feat for that maneuver (such as Improved Bull Rush).

#### About Jacob Kellogg

Jacob lives in Saint Paul, Minnesota, whose long winters make him appreciate the indoor nature of tabletop gaming. He's been an active player and GM in the Pathfinder Society Organized Play campaign since discovering it just over two years ago, and has begun getting his loving wife involved as well.

Despite being relatively new to the world of tabletop RPGs, Jacob has embraced the Pathfinder system wholeheartedly, always eager to read more material and learn more rules. He got his first taste of design work as a Top 32 contestant in Paizo's RPG Superstar 2012 competition, and couldn't wait to do more. Jacob's hope is to produce material that people can use as the building blocks for their own adventures, thereby giving back to the gaming community of which he's grown so fond.



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15 B





# Twenty Questions with John Four

#### By Steven D. Russell



# 1. Could you tell us a little about yourself?

I live in Edmonton, Alberta with my wife and puppy. We get up to 8 months of winter, but that's okay because I love snow. Besides, gaming in my wife's basement feels warm and cozy when it's -40.

I started RoleplayingTips.com in 1999. That opened doors for me to write a column in *Dragon* Magazine for a couple of years, contribute to the DMG2, write for other publishers, and ultimately write a dozen or so books on my own for game masters.

My most notable book is *GMMastery: NPC Essentials*. I also recently released Faster Combat with co-author Tony Medeiros. And I run a free email newsletter that's brimming with unique GM advice and tips.

#### 2. What is your home game like?

It's full of laughing and cursing, just the way it should be.

I run a combo of published and homebrew stuff. My group has been together since 2005, so we know each other well and have a good understanding of all the little nuances involved in a social activity like RPG.

I prefer a good mix of action and roleplaying. I enjoy dungeons, wilderness and urban settings. So my campaigns usually involve a bunch of all that.

And I'm especially proud of my NPCs. My players often hate them. There's murder in their eyes, and that warms the cockles of my GM screen.

#### 3. What is your favorite Paizo product?

Right now, it's the Adventure Path subscription. I like reading the books and stealing encounters and ideas for my campaign.

As for one single title, it would be the NPC Guide. Instant people to populate parleyed play.

#### 4. You are currently the owner/publisher/ dishwasher for Roleplayingtips.com, how did that start and how would you characterize the company today?

It started in 1999 when I wanted to learn how to be a better GM. I thought an email newsletter with game master tips would be the perfect way to share and receive great GMing advice. In 2011 I decided to make a go of it as a real business. Before, I was just dabbling. Then I got serious. So RPT is in an awesome place today. I made a



list of the results I want by 2015, and the person who I'd have to be by then to achieve those results. Working backwards from that, I made a list of skills I'd need to learn and XP I'd have to earn by taking action.

That became my roadmap and it's going very well. I always believe if you measure the actions, the results take care of themselves. So I'm enjoying the journey a lot.

I've launched five books this year (two free, three commercial), have just passed the 10,000 subscriber mark for the free GM Tips newsletter, and rebooted the Gamer-Lifestyle.com "How to publish your RPG work" course.

Next phase for me is building systems so everything from content generation to marketing to customer service level up and take less time and money. This phase will be the most important in the company's history.

#### 5. Could you tell us about "Faster Combat"?

My combats were way too slow. The last straw was a session where a combat took nearly the whole night, and it was a meaningless encounter. It was slow, it dragged on, and I did not even get to the grand finale encounter I had prepared hard for that week.

So something had to change and I began to research. And I discovered tons of blog posts and forum posts complaining and talking about slow combats. I copied and pasted the notable stuff and filled up a 30 page Word document!

So, I knew it was a big problem. Meantime, I was chatting with Tony Medeiros, who runs the Leonine Roar blog. Turns out he's a whiz at creating and running online courses. So we teamed up and created a 52 lesson course on how to not only make your fights lightning fast, but a lot more dramatic too.

**Pathways Magazine** 

#### 6. What was your best moment working on that product?

Each lesson has a homework section to give you practical, hands-on experience at making fights faster. One lesson is about how to create cool CombatScapes and members started posting their homework. Then other members jumped in and started giving great feedback and tweaking other members' homework! That was awesome to see. It was not just pride in the course that it was teaching people well enough they could teach others, but pride in the generous spirit of members wanting to help others make their fights better. I guess the moment was realizing we had a cool community.

# 7. What do you feel was the most ingenious part of that product?

To my knowledge, it's the world's first online course for game masters. It has checklists, examples, videos, discussion areas, homework areas and more. Often, courses are boring and passive. I wanted something engaging and interactive. So we added all that extra stuff to make things fun and to improve learning and retention.

Another thing is Tony crafted some very cool lessons on aspects of combat I had never thought about before. For example, did you know you can ensure a fast and dramatic combat – packed full of story – before an initiative die is even rolled? He created an entire section on combat encounter design, and I learned a ton from that. Tony's a genius.

# 8. What was the most challenging aspect of working on it?

Fifty-two lessons was grueling. I don't think I'll ever make a course that size again. At one point we had to take a break to recharge. We felt like wet flumphs. So we took the summer off, burned through our buffer of lessons we had created in advance in case real life came crashing in, and then took another four weeks off.

#### 9. Did you learn anything while working on it?

It's received awesome reviews and feedback from members. From the first section where you learn to analyze your players and characters for combat style, to the bonuses area where you get 400 quick combat description scripts and other goodies, it's pure GMing unicorns and rainbows.

But we totally underestimated the work needed. I thought the tech part would be the hardest. But it turned out building the content, communicating with each other on plans and progress, and running the community was a 25 hour a day job.

We both took a good long break after lesson 52 was



published. I'm working with Tony on a new course for newbie GMs now, and based on what we've learned we're taking much smaller bites. Instead of 52 lessons, we're working in sequences of 10. Publish 10, get feedback, make big or small changes, work on another 10. Chunking work out this way saves our sanity points for the inevitable day when Cthulhu arrives

to eat Tom Cruise.

#### 10. Other than your own work and Roleplayingtips.com products, what is the best Pathfinder Roleplaying Game compatible product out there?

For digital, I use HeroLab a ton. I especially use the Import Stock Heroes feature a lot. Campaign files get big and slow after awhile. So I create categorized portfolio files for my campaign. Then, during sessions, I make a temporary portfolio file and import NPCs and monsters from my campaign files. Keeps things fast and simple.

I'm also using your Faces of the Tarnished Souk for my new campaign, Chaos Keep. Those NPCs are awesome and several are villains working shadowy plots sure to vex my players.

#### 11. What in your opinion makes a good Pathfinder Roleplaying Game compatible product?

There are two kinds of products for me right now. Type one has a specific purpose and serves a very narrow need. A book of traps, for example. Type two offers wellrounded content. Take your Faces of the Tarnished Souk series, for instance. Those are giving me NPC crunch and fluff, plus plot hooks and setting hooks. So I'm getting multiple uses from them because they are bigger in scope.

In both cases, I'm looking for interesting new ideas, good GMing use and technical accuracy.

#### 12. Who is your favorite designer of Pathfinder Roleplaying Game compatible products?

I enjoy Frog God's stuff and especially Greg Vaughan's work. If I spot something with his name on it, I give it a serious look.

#### 13. What advice would you give to would-befreelancers?

Be consistent: write every day, stick to your schedule, meet your deadlines. Consistency generates skill over time. It also builds you a great reputation. This will require you to learn how to fit writing (or art, or editing, or whatever service you're offering) into your already busy life. And you will need to learn how to do your work even when you don't feel like it.

# 14. Who is your favorite tabletop RPG illustrator?

Oh man, you are totally asking the wrong guy. Not only am I artistically challenged, I never even look at art in the books I buy. I'm all about the information. I'm too left-brained for my own good.

# **15.** What has been your most memorable fan response to your work?

Lots of fans have created software, spreadsheets and apps based on my writings. That's pretty cool. It's humbling to know they spent all that time on something inspired by a reader tip or something from the newsletter.

However, the most memorable was an email that just said, "Die."

I didn't know how to take that and was afraid to respond, so I don't know what he meant by that. Did he want me to perish in a fire? Was he correcting my usage of dice in singular form? Was it a "bum dial" from his phone? I quickly closed the email and moved on....

#### 16. Could you give us an exclusive hint or teaser about an upcoming product you are working on?

Sure! Thanks for asking. I'm about to release 200 Story-Exploding Character Hooks, a GM aid ebook.

Something that bugs me as GM is players who only offer orphan PCs with no connections to the world, campaign or other PCs. How can you work such lame backgrounds into cool campaign plots and side-plots? It's tough.

So I wrote 200 character hooks - 50 each for wizards, clerics, rogues and fighters – to give poor GMs something instant and cool to build a story from or to get a player excited about. Hook the player, you hook the story.

Here's one example:

**#39.** She grew up in a sanitarium. The voice in her head drove her crazy. But the monks taught her how to control her mind and focus her thoughts. And then one day clarity struck. She understood the voice, and it was

a god. No longer a threat to herself, the monks released her unto the world. And what a strange place the world turned out to be. She now grapples with massive change, learning about the world and its beings, and devoting herself to the voice, which has a mysterious quest for her.



17. Do you have any goals as a games designer that

designer that you have yet to obtain or overcome?

Oh yeah, a ton. My next challenge is going to be writing an adventure. It's one thing to build adventures for your campaign, and it's another to build them for publication. I've been researching the heck out of storytelling techniques this past year while finishing up other projects in my queue. And soon I'll be ready to tackle my vision for an adventure that'll make GMs the real hero at the game table.

#### 18. Can you tell us a little about NPC Essentials?

I wrote it in 2003 and I feel it's still the most thorough and complete treatment of NPC design and roleplaying out there today. It took me a year to forge and was my first big writing project.

I feel NPCs are the lifeblood of a campaign – from the GM's point of view. The PCs and players deserve all the spotlight time, but NPCs are how a GM can keep the action, tension and story moving forward at a surprising pace.

I think of it like writing a screenplay. Screenplays are all about character interaction. Explosions, locations and items only get cursory treatment. The bulk of screen time is devoted to characters doing stuff and saying stuff – to each other mostly.

So too it is with RPG storytelling. Fill your campaigns up with lots of NPCs – even in dungeons – and your gaming will improve dramatically, I guarantee it.

And I wrote *NPC Essentials* to help GMs change their NPCs from walking hit point bags to foils and story drivers that'll entertain the socks off your players.

#### 19. What's your favorite GM tip?

Other than "Have more fun at every game", "<u>Say yes</u> or roll the dice" and <u>5 Room Dungeons</u>, I would say always think in story.

Too often we let the mechanics of the game and of GMing turn us into number merchants. And we lose sight that story is what unites all GM and player types together, whether they realize it or not.

For example, you create a flow chart for your next adventure. You start detailing the encounters. You build the crunch. You've got it all figured out. But then you step back and remind yourself, what's the cool story here? Then keep that running in your mind during the adventure.

I'm not saying railroad everything. Let the story change based on player decisions and consequences. But just keep thinking in story so you are more aware of creating awesome descriptions, setting up diabolical encounters within a larger context, and tying results back into the big picture.

Think story.

# 20. Is there anything else that folks should know about you and/or your work?

I believe we need to play more for happier lives. We all work too hard. Life is getting more stressful – not less – from all the info and noise thrown at us each day. Play is essential to a balanced life. And the best game of all is RPG. Not only are roleplaying games entertaining, but they make you smarter. How cool is that? So my motto is, "Have more fun at every game, and play more often." Please take time out of your busy life to play. Play something, play anything, and hopefully, play RPG.







**Reviews** Illustration by Hubert Robert

#### It Came from the Stars

Publisher: Zombie Press Reviewer: Thilo Graf 5 out of 5 stars!



Full disclosure: I was a patron of this kickstarter, but I did not contribute anything to this book. When this review refers to the dead tree version, I mean by that the limited edition full color hard-cover. It should also be mentioned that this kickstarter massively over-delivered, providing MUCH more content than

was promised.

The pdf of this massive book is 135 pages long, 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial, 1 page ToC, 1 page SRD, leaving us with a whopping 131 pages of content, so let's take a look, shall we?

We kick this pdf off with player-races that set an appropriately weird theme for the whole book, first of which would be Amoebians. Yes. Humanoid one-cell protoplasm amoebians. As a player race. Awesome! Mechanically, they get +2 to Str and Con, -2 to Dex and Wis, slow speed, low-light vision, have a reach of 10 feet due to their elastic membranes, can squeeze through very small spaces, +2 to grapple-CMB and escape artist checks and DR 1/-. They do pay these powerful basic abilities with a vulnerability versus slashing damage, though, which deals an additional +50% damage – OUCH! Overall these should make for weird, yet balanced options – kudos!

The second new race would be the enlightened – essentially the book's take on the Grey. They get +2 to Dex and Int, -2 to Con and Cha, normal speed, low-light vision, +2 to a knowledge-skill of their choice, are mute (and thus cast spells as if modified by the silent spell feat sans level increase), telepathy of 5ft. per level and may 1/day enter a state of hyper-evolution, turning into incorporeal pure thought for int-mod rounds. While in this state, they get +2 to Int and may 1/round cast levitate and mage hand at CL equal to class level, adding fly and telekinesis to this arsenal at 10th level.

The Star-touched are the descendants of one of the conquests of the aggressive interstellar magnetar-race (more on that one later) and have since developed a highly militaristic society under the auspice of their creators/masters. They get +2 to Cha, -2 to Int and Wis, darkvision 60 ft. +2 to Craft (armor) or Profession (soldier), a magnetic deflection-shield of +2 to AC versus metal weaponry, resistance 5 against either fire, cold or electricity and may 1/day unleash a 30 ft-ranged-touch plasma bolt dealing 1d6+1 for every 2 character levels damage which consists half of fire and half of electricity. Generally, plasma always deals half electricity and half fire damage, should you be not familiar with this convention – hence, while the book always specifies this, I won't – when this review from here on refers to "plasma", you'll know what I mean.

The final "regular" (as if this term could be applied to any race herein) new race would be the Tachoid: These beings are alien self-replicating robots that have travelled back through time to escape the heat-death of the universe, hence experiencing time in a nonlinear fashion, making for truly interesting challenges for dedicated roleplayers out there. Tachoids get +2 to Int and Wis, - 2 Cha and Str, darkvision 60 ft., can't be flanked, get +2 to Knowledge (history), +2 to initiative and Tachoids of Wis 11 or higher, they also may use augury 1/day as a spell-like ability. They also get resistance 5 and whenever you take cold damage, you get +2 to Int and Dex for 1d3 rounds, but take +50% damage from electricity attacks. Again - balanced race with interesting mechanics to back them up - but speaking of interesting mechanics. Next up would be the most complex options.

Coalescent characters get no modifications to any of their attributes in humanoid form - and then there's the second form: The swarm. Yes, this race allows you to play a sentient, hive-mind-swarm of diminutive creatures. In swarm-form, str is decreased by -12 to a minimum of 3. Coalescent characters have slow speed, are aberrations and, since swarms are rather unique and powerful, also get a 10-level racial paragon class to properly develop their abilities. At 1st level, this class is mandatory, offering basic swarm abilities like distraction (with the dazzled condition) and learn to switch into your humanoid form, netting you 30 ft. speed and at least the option to pass off as something akin to a humanoid. Coalescing requires a check of d20+character level+ con-mod versus DC 10, with each consecutive minute requiring a DC 10+1 per number of previous checks coalesce-check to maintain the illusion of (relative) normalcy - while this may seem beneficial at first or like a minor thing, it actually makes for a very powerful limiting factor to the coalescent character's power. The racial paragon-class get 3/4 BAB-progression, good will-saves, d8, 4+Int skills per level, no proficiency in armor and shields (which you may only use in humanoid form) and only proficiency with simple weapons. They get 1d6 swarm damage at 1st level and increase said damage by +1d6 on every odd level. Conversely, on every even level, starting with the second, they get +2 to Dex. Also on every odd level, the distraction ability increases in power, increasing the

negative condition imparted of up to "stunned" at 9th level. Now unlike regular diminutive swarms, coalescent characters are not immune to weapon damage, instead gaining DR equal to level, up to DR 10/- instead when in swarm form. Now over the levels, the coalescent swarm may learn new modes of movement, learn to exclude allies from your swarm damage or similar defensive tricks and increase your swarm damage via energy damage, make your attacks count as magical and even heal via your attacks. And yes, learning to cast while in swarm-form is also one of the options the coalescent may learn. Highly complex and yet balanced, this race is perhaps my favorite among the cool new ones, offering for a thoroughly unique playing experience indeed - how can this one be balanced, you ask? Well, as a swarm, the coalescent is never treated as one creature as a target - this excludes them from receiving most forms of magical healing and buff-spells, requiring wholly new tactics - a unique drawback and one that will provide a complex change of pace.

Next up would be the new classes, starting off with the Moon Child. The Moon Child gets d6, 2+Int skills per level, proficiency with simple weapons, 1/2 BABprogression, good will-saves and full prepared int-based spellcasting of up to 9th level. Unlike wizards, though, spellcasting for moon children is less flexible and not determined by spellbooks, but instead by so-called houses. These net access to a list of spells that become available to the moon child upon choosing it. At 4th level and every 4 levels after that, moon children get an additional house. Each house also allows moon children to learn sorc/wiz-spells of certain descriptors. 5 sample houses are provided, with the final two one being in the extra-pdf - something to be aware of. Each house also nets access to a so-called sign, which offers a passive bonus that scales up over the levels. Each house also nets access to 4 different so-called aspects - an aspect is chosen at 2nd level and at every even level after that from among the houses available to the moon child. At 10th level, these lists are expanded by 4 advanced aspects per house and finally, at 20th level, each house offers one exalted aspect as a kind of capstone to choose from. Bestowing false bravado (the target thinks it receives only half damage) to adding cold damage to your spells or creating singularity shield (which may increase encumbrance of targets - cool mechanic!), the respective aspects are rather cool - and yes, there is the house of the Starry Eye, which allows you to impart random insanities on foes or strike foes with a mutating curse that changes each day ... The moon child also gets a so-called hungry shadow as a familiar and an additional such shadow at 9th and 17th level - essentially, your shadows are weaker familiars, but you get more of them. All in all, a more than solid base-class with some

delightfully lovecraftian/weird options. It should also be noted that a sidebox in one of the adventures mentions that aspects can be influenced via feats as if they were hexes.

The second new class provided herein would be the Starseed, who gets d10, 6+Int skills per level, full BABprogression, good fort and will-saves, proficiency with simple and martial weapons and small and medium armor and 4 levels of prepared spellcasting via Int at 4th level. Now the central mechanics would be Psychic Tendril - this is treated as a melee weapon with a range of 60 ft (!!!) that deals 1d6+cha-mod, crit-range 20/ x2. Psychic Tendrils may be used versus adjacent foes and are treated as ranged weapons when determining cover and it requires somatic components to be wielded and is treated as a light weapon. When using these tendrils, starseeds use cha instead of str to determine atk and damage and may even undertake str-checks via cha instead. Manifesting one or two of the tendrils takes a standard action - if two are manifested, twoweapon fighting rules apply and tendrils can be wielded as either primary or secondary weapons in addition to regular ones. They also utilize cha to calculate CMB when attacking, but (and that is important!) NOT CMD. Furthermore, the tendrils do have a weakness sundering. With only 5 hp and a 20% miss chance, but no hardness and a reform duration of 1 minute, one well-versed in sundering can easily take them down. What's a bit of a pity is that the ability does not specify whether tendrils can eb disarmed, though logically I assume they can't be. Now where things get even more interesting regarding this very unique class feature would be at 2nd level - starting then, they qualify for both being treated as ranged and melee weapons for the purpose of feats, but not as a specific weapon - which would preclude you from taking e.g. Weapon Focus, Rapid Reload or any form of unarmed attack with them. Now it is here I expected the rules-language to stumble and it didn't - you either can make them benefit from feats based on melee weapons OR from feats based on ranged weapons, but not both - interesting indeed, since it allows for very distinct, different fighting styles. Deadly Dance also offers bonus feats throughout the levels, but only as long as you wear light or medium armor or none.

Starseeds also get a Void Pool (and no, it's not the 3.X L5R Void Pool) at 3rd level equal to 1/2 class level + cha-mod. These points can be used to make your tendrils invisible for a round, enhance will-saves, negate temporarily being flanked and also provide passive benefits as long as you at least have one left. (There also is an instance of two blank spaces missing between words in the text, but the glitch shouldn't deter from understanding the rules.) Void Pools stack, if multiple pools are available (e.g. via the extra pdf's Untouchable), though having no points left should be avoided (haha) the repercussion would be a negative level that can only be removed via rest. Now where my OP-radar first went off with a loud bang would be at 4th level – starting this level, tendrils can be used to execute combat maneuvers. Ranged combat maneuvers. Now usually I'd be breaking off on a tangent how broken they are - but here, that doesn't really apply. Why? Because the balancing factor of maneuvers would be AoOs - and since most maneuvers require melee attacks, tendrils are treated as melee weapons for maneuvers - I.e. they still provoke AoOs and the tendrils are fragile - making for an interesting balancing factor in addition to the limited 60 ft. range. At 5th level, at 7th level, and every two levels after that, starseeds may choose from 12 different talents (called Void Insights here), which allow you to either use void points to negate fire or cold damage or increase e.g. tendril damage to 1d12 damage. Also interesting mechanics-wise - there is a talent that allows you to rerolls of mind-affecting effects when your void pool is empty. Another talent allows you to utilize disable device and sleight of hand via your tendrils - sans cost. There is quite some variability here and the respective talents are rather cool - though pressure wave is a bit overpowered - for 1 void point, it can prevent all foes within tendril range. from closing any distance toward you - no save, no CMD-check, no scaling, flat-out, no save. That particular insight requires a hard hitting with the nerfbat. Worse, for 3 points, you can execute a combat maneuver versus all foes within range - and that makes for an even more broken and jarring ability in an otherwise more than solid execution of a complex, cool and highly imaginative class.

We also get new archetypes, first of which would be the Manyskins Dancer for the Druid (or any other wildshaping class): These druids gain 5 times the allotment of wild shapes, but the wildshape lasts only 10 min/level. As a further balancing feature of the archetype, failure to spend time in your base form may result in the temporary loss of proficiencies, languages and penalized skills - a cool archetype that can be easily used to supplement other archetypes for a more fluid shapechanging experience with a cool balancing factor. The second archetype would be the Symbiote-Synthesist for the summoner. The name is already a hint - this archetype endeavors to refine and modify the Synthesistsummoner - which introduces some balancing factors to the otherwise OP archetype that introduces a separate alignment (of the player's choosing) to the eidolon and makes the fused amalgam of both count as both outsider and aberration - a subtle, not crippling weakness and increased roleplaying potential make this take on the archetype superior, if not 100% fixed, then vastly

improved version of the archetype.

Now almost all crunch-books add new feats to the fray - It came from the Stars also has new feats, but goes a very interesting way by introducing [Symbiote]feats. Symbiote feats are broken down in 3 categories, minor, medium and major symbiote feats. An unlimited amount of minor symbiote feats can be taken without any adverse effects and they are required to gain access to the more powerful medium and major symbiote feats. Taking medium symbiote-feats might result in temporary blackouts and major symbiote feats offer the most significant benefits, but also the most pronounced effects regarding the symbiote's power. Now, I've mentioned blackouts: Each Symbiote-feat comes with a symbiote point score. Once per month, a character need to make a will-save versus 10+ number of symbiote points acquired to prevent a blackout that lasts for 1d8 hours - somewhat akin to experiencing lycanthropy. Those that take major symbiote feats instead need to make such a save once per week. Due to the VERY limited amount of time lost and the storytelling potential, these symbiotes work not only mechanically well, but also fluff-wise. Whether for NPCs or players who enjoy a slew of the bizarre - poisonous sprays, tentacles, clusters of eyeballs on the major side and subtle bonuses (or e.g. green photosynthetic skin!) on the minor side - symbiotes work for everyone and )I hope we'll get more symbiote-feats in future installments/pdfs. We also get 6 new spells, some of which use gravity and temporary increases of encumbrance to their benefits. We also get a void suit as a "vehicle", which can be used to navigate the airless, soundless void and upgraded with gravity boots and similar enhancements - and if you need some ideas on what to do with suits like this, take a look at the Dead Space-series...

We also are introduced to 9 so-called void-tech items – thankfully in line with magic item creation allow you to bend space to threat spaces, improve your psychic tendrils or utilize gloves for gravitation manipulation, negate some falling distance or reposition foes with gravitational whips, store void points or unleash plasma bursts.

Thus end the Player's section of the book – hence, with the gamemaster-section following now, the SPOILERS reign. potential players should definitely skip to the conclusion.

#### All right, still here?

We kick off this chapter with the one resource that, at least in my opinion, trumps any other component in roleplaying games and fiction-writing per se: Ideas.

# DUENTURE QUARTERLY



# Got Adventure?

Adventure Quarterly is coming off its inaugural year with a bang. With rave reviews, GMs and players agree Rite Publishing is bringing a plethora of options to the table.

So far *Adventure Quarterly* provides adventurers the option of unraveling a cook's dastardly plan to corner the eatery market in his city, pits the PCs against a challenge-filled complex rewarding feats of intellect and wisdom in addition to strength of arms, calls into question adventurers' presumptions about their world and their place in it, and tests characters' skill and mettle in a series of challenges in the *Ruins Perilous*.

In addition, *Adventure Quarterly* has two articles in every issue designed to aid new and experienced GMs with the details large and small supporting their worlds' authenticity. Rite Publishing invites you to join us as the adventures continue.

Adventure Quarterly is offered as a full-color softcover print version and/or a PDF with the high resolution cartography images as separate files, so you can have a physical version in your hand for the gaming table, or use it with any virtual tabletop program.

Single issues and a year's subscription are both available now at RitePublishing.com





To be more precise: Prospective DMs are introduced to a veritable treasure-trove of ideas for planets that could have come from science-fiction literature (with silicate-based lifeforms, for example!) up to those simply WEIRD: What about a planet with sentient clouds following you around, for example? Narrow habitable zones due to multiple suns/slow rotation (Hello, Twinsun! Anyone played that one?) go hand in hand with morgueworlds and from aficionados of hard scifi to those just embracing the concept-wise weird, we get more ideas in a scarce few pages than one usually encounters in whole campaign settings. Yes, that enriching. For me, this small section proved to be more inspiring than just about every other book I've read this year so far. What about e.g. monochromatic planets that feature a caste or predators that prey on colors? There are WHOLE CAMPAIGNS worth of ideas contained within these pages - even before we are introduced to hazards like crystal storms, semi-sentient and deadly solar flare birds and yes...time warps. Let's do the time warp again -and go!

Now as some of you may know, the disaster-book "When the Sky Falls" is probably my favorite 3.X-book – and thankfully, we get full-blown disasters here as well, all of which could spark whole campaigns or books: From varied Auroras to Lunar Changes, Space Debris, Radiation (yes, including gamma radiation sickness) to solar changes and solar flares (which may greatly influence how magic works via a large table), the disasters here are GLORIOUS. My only gripe is that they all demand to be used, nay, expanded into massive books of their own- This section, once again, had me glued to each and every page.

Of course, we also get a bestiary of new creatures, each of which comes with a glorious full color artwork - from the organized, warlike stellar fey, the Astreid to Space Remoras and 6 variants of elder ooze (which can absorb creatures and grow, becoming much more deadly - best take on the space-blob I've seen so far since it comes with a significant amount of absorbed special abilities depending on its prey...) to the Magnetars, which probably are one of the true signature enemies of this book: Magnetars are militaristic, intelligent elementals that get their own subcategory and armor training as well as the option to add plasma damage to their attacks and manipulate gravity. Magnetars are extremely dense fragments of stars that clad themselves in armored shells of various forms, allowing for maximum customizability in their aesthetic depiction. The Magnetars offered range from CR 1 to 9 and come with two statblocks each, one for the armored and one for the unarmored version - and all are awesome and on par with classic, iconic monsters like beholders or illithids. Yes, I consider them that cool. But even the other monsters rock – take the

memory-consuming mnemovores, clad in illusions, which make for deadly kidnappers that keep their prey alive while draining their very personalities away. Or the mockings - intelligent interstellar mushrooms that can create duplicates of the creature sin contact with their spores, generating deadly mockeries of what they consumed, all obsessed with spreading their brand of life - until they encompass all. And then there are the Star Beasts - interstellar dragons (like the one you can see on the cover) bred on dead stars and accompanying supernovas and the like, each of them has unique properties and personalities, though all are frightening indeed - from the CR 12 Betelgeuse to the CR 20 Wormwood, all have different unique qualities and ideas for 7 others are given. I love their concept, though personally, I'll upgrade them – as written, their crunch doesn't live up in deadliness to their awe-inspiring background. Still - one glorious bestiary!

And then we're off to new adventures, first of which would be Colin McComb's "Hearts and Minds". Yes. the Colin McComb. And you'll see FAST upon reading this adventure why he is gushed about. Now the basic premise has been seen in CoC, for example: A particularly fertile area (lavishly mapped with and without keys in gorgeous full color in Paizolevel quality) has recently seen archeological activity and cattle disappearances. And that is about all the PCs need to know to kick off - they are depicted in STAGGERING detail, not regarding statblocks, but regarding personalities, developments and characters. As a true investigative sandbox, structure-wise, the whole area goes through escalating stages of weirdness that can be implemented by the DM as s/he sees fit: The archeologists have become thrall to a world-devouring crystalline entity seeking to expand its consciousness into the world by drinking the lifeblood of sentient beings via an immobile crystalline array. With each sacrifice, the strange influence and mind-control the entity exerts grows through the vale, with more and more falling under the being's control. The local sect of weirdoes make for a thankful red herring and in the end, player characters may even succeed in this module without killing a single being - as they should. Slaying enslaved innocents is not a heroic thing to do. This module is, in one word Extraordinary. Detailed, legendary, awesome and not only fun in PFRPG, but also awesome in just about every other rule-set, this intelligent investigation is simply glorious both to read and run – and sets the bar extremely high, proving that intelligent horror works just as well in Pathfinder as in other rules-systems.

Well, let's just say that master of the macabre Richard Pett takes up the gauntlet and delivers with his very own blend of horror: Journeying to an island, the PCs are confronted with a mocking enclave seeking to utilize the PCs to spread beyond the confines of their island and exterminate an insane mutant of their kind. The mocking have completely subjugated and replaced – with the exception of a loner hermit and a faithful dog. Defeating the dread mutant only kicks off the inevitable, loooming and subtle build-up towards a wickerman (the classic one)-like struggle for survival on an island that is strange and disquieting in more than a couple of ways – disturbing, creepy and thoroughly estranging, this module is more action-packed than the first, but also oh so glorious – even among Richard Pett's oeuvre, this one stands out as one of his best. Yes. That good.

John Pingo's offering, the third herein, thus has some insane standards to follow - can it live up to them? Well, let's just say that it's a different breed – contacted by one Zephyr Star-caller, an oracle, the PCs are introduced to an order of secretive beings, the Empyrean Bulwark. The founder of these beings has stumbled across a crashed prison-ship that held terrible entities and created the order as a safe-guard versus the otherwise unopposed threats from beyond the stars, trying to safe-guard the wounded algae-like intelligence that suffuses the ship. As soon as the PCs settle in the monastery, things start getting ugly - fast. Alerts are sounded and the PCs will have to contend with sabotaged teleporting platforms and alien prisoners (both of the malign and deadly and of the desperate, but talkative), hopefully not botching: Not stopping escaped fugitives from releasing magnetar might e.g. result in the initiation of the ship's selfdestruct sequence. Navigating Zero-G-areas, featuring void suits and finally culminating in the PCs trying to keep a dread creature from the Dark tapestry contained, this module is essentially a weird, fast-paced dungeoncrawl that is a free-for all and introduces A LOT of content from this book, all for the DM to cherry-pick for staying in the setting and including content from the extra-pdf. Different and more conventional than the first two modules, but full of style nevertheless.

Even on the SRD-page, we get some adventure hooks and aforementioned beautiful maps for all 3 modules are included in both a version with letters and a key-less one to be handed out to players.

#### Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are good, though not perfect. While significant glitches are absent from this book, small ones like a "#" for a CR, missing blank spaces etc. can be found here and there – not many, mind you, but they stick out due to the overall quality of this book. Layout adheres to a two-column portrait standard in the print-version and to a 3-column landscape-standard in the pdf-version, both of which come in GORGEOUS full-color, or at least my hardcover (no 21 of 100, btw.) does. The pdf comes excessively bookmarked and the hardcover comes with thick, high-quality paper and good binding. Layout adheres to a glorious full-color standard and the book is FULL of original pieces of full color artwork - more so than in almost any comparable book I've seen and while I admit to at first needing to get accustomed to the unique graphic vision here, it grew from "jarring" to "wouldn't want it any other way" over my lecture of the book. More impressively than the distinct and courageous graphic vision, "It came from the Stars" massively over-delivered regarding pagecount and actually ... well. Delivers.

The player's section manages to astound me with unique races that actually offer intriguing balancingmechanisms for their distinct and lien abilities that set them apart beyond fluff and mirror their alien powers in their crunch. The two new classes follow this lead: Whereas the Moon Child is relatively conservative, the Starseed is ambitious in the extreme and while it does have its own minor issues and rough edges, it is an iconic concept that in my playtest proved to be rather exciting, yet not overpowered to play – thanks to the distinct Achilles heel integrated into the design. The symbiote-feats are glorious and the archetypes offered provide great roleplaying experiences.

Indeed, that's what this book is all about – wonder, excitement, roleplaying. This is about flirting with the Other, with the Uncanny, the Alien. It came from the Stars" could have taken ideas from other more out there supplements and e.g. expand meteorite impact-rules, as updated by Rite Publishing or take ideas from Louis Porter Jr. Design's NeoExodus-setting (LPJr joined this book by the way...) – instead, the creative team around Zombie Sky/Broken Eye mastermind Scott Gable went one step further – when I was done with the Player's section, my mind was abask with possibilities, to quote Garth Marenghi (kudos if you get the reference), reeling with ideas to integrate this content into my campaign.

And then the DM-section hit – the ideas herein are mind-boggling, versatile and quite simply superb. The bestiary offers various signature abilities and features not a single filler beastie. The hazards and planet-ideas contain literally years of campaign-ideas and the 3 modules...are stellar, one and all, excellent offerings, each in their own distinct way. I feel like I've been launched into outer space. And yes, there are minor glitches here and there -but you know what? I don't care. I have almost NEVER, in my whole career, not only as a reviewer, but as a roleplayer, read a book that blew me away like this one did. Roleplaving is a game of ideas supplemented by math and a codified language to me and this book is so rich in ideas it boggles the mind. This book (get it in hardcover if you can!) may be a small step forward for the designers, but for the cosmos of a reader's ideas, it's a huge step forward. If I could, I'd immediately rate this 6 stars, but since I can't, I'll instead settle on a final verdict of 5 stars + seal of approval – this will feature on my top ten-list of 2013!

Endzeitgeist out.

#### **Convergent Paths: Fey Archetypes**

**Publisher:** Rite Publishing **Reviewer:** Thilo Graf **Rating:** 4 out of 5 stars



The second installment of Rite Publishing's Convergent Paths-series is 16 pages long, 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial, 1 page SRD and 2 pages of advertisement, leaving us with 11 pages of content – so let's take a look, shall we? Following the direction

established in the first issue, we once again have the class options

provided herein framed by a well-written narrative – and honestly, I do really enjoy these. If you read as many crunch-heavy supplements as I do, you're welcoming supplements that don't read like an EULA. Just wanted to for once acknowledge this, as the narrative also roots the content in a thematic context and, from experience, I know that my players prefer it like this – fluff accompanying their crunch. That out of the way, let's take a look at the Faerie Knight, a cavalier archetype.

The challenge of these cavaliers is less reliable that the base challenge – the damage to challenged targets only scales up to +10, but depending on the level of the faerie knight, bonus damage equal to  $+1d_3$  (up to  $+6d_3$ ) is added to damage - nice way to represent a more chaotic version of the class feature. Faerie Knights also add the fey creature template to their mount, but thankfully not at once, instead improving over the levels. The mount is intelligent and requires gold to be replaced once it dies. The faerie knight does lose banner, greater banner and tactician for all this gained power via the mount though, and while it doesn't require Handle Animal, it has its own mind – which can be quite interesting. Not needing expert trainer, the knight also gets a bonus to social interactions with fey. At higher levels, the faerie knight may send his mount to the realm of the fey to procure assistance from the fey - though frivolous use will have repercussions...

Monks may now opt to become so-called Laughing Men - who get Bluff, Diplomacy and Knowledge (nature) as additional class skills. Laughing Men get a new array of feats to sue with bonus feats in lieu of their regular ones and also replace flurry of blows with the option to make feints, intimidates and wild empathy checks at -5 as part of a full-attack action, allowing the archetype to later even make a second check with an additional -3 penalty and at 15th level, even a third one at -7. Furthermore, he can use ki to roll social skill checks twice, taking the better result. When using this ability, the laughing man doesn't even have to speak the language of those s/he taunts and may use said options versus plants, animals and vermin, treating them as if they were not mindless. He also becomes harder to demoralize/influence, gets the wild empathy class feature of the druid. By the way - the words of the Laughing Man are just as efficient as sticks and stones and may break your bones! As part of the flurry of words, the laughing man may use words as ranged unarmored strikes with a 5 foot range increment.

Instead of purity of body, at fifth level laughing men may use wis-mod for bluff, diplomacy, intimidate and wild empathy, but need to expend their swift action to do so – which becomes relevant when learning to feint/demoralize etc. – 3 foes at once. Plus, laughing men may divide this ability between feints and demoralization attempts Starting at 15th level, he may make three of these skill checks versus one foe – when succeeding in 3 bluffs/intimidates/wild empathy, laughing men may opt to negate the effects of all successes for one unique effect depending on the skill employed.

The third archetype herein would be the masquerade reveler – for the barbarian! And be forewarned – these revelers are nothing for players shying from the task of additional book-keeping. But oh boy is it worth it – instead of regular rage, revelers create so-called masks, which consist of 4 evolution points. For the purpose of which evolutions qualify, the reveler counts as biped humanoid with arms and legs. At each barbarian level, the reveler gets another masque, providing quite some versatility. Type of ability, effective levels – all of the complex questions such a system will perpetuate, are addressed – kudos! I did try to find an instance of less than precise rules-language and found none.

The abilities the reveler gets at later levels further enhance the awesome concept of masks.

After these archetypes, we are introduced to feats of the fey,7 to be more precise: Faerie Knights may improve their whimsical challenge by expending a second use of it to maximize the d3s involved. And if you really want to get nasty, you can take another feat, that allows all allies to also get these maximized d3s when you utilize the former feat. OUCH! Three of the feats make up for a feat-tree of the Sidhe style, which adds additional benefits to those feinting or intimidating successfully at a base level. The two follow-up feats allow you to make demoralized opponents provoke AoOs from your allies or further penalize foes you feinted. Revelers may spend 3 rounds of masquerade to change masks in combat. With the second feat, you can get a bonus after using the change of masks for the second time in combat.

The pdf also provides us a new sample creature, the CR 7 Gancanagh. that secretes a new drug (provided as well!) and may exude an aura of selective silence while plying his socially based, mindbending abilities. The fey also comes with cool signature weaknesses and a bond with one of its possessions that makes for good adventure hooks/smart fighting-rewards. Speaking of adventure hooks – 3 sample ones are provided.

#### Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are top-notch, I didn't notice any glitches. Layout adheres to RiP's 2-column full color standard and the pdf comes fully bookmarked for your convenience. Special mention deserves the gorgeous cover by Kevin Ksottam as well as the neat artworks herein – two pieces in particular I haven't seen before and apart from one classic stock art image (which fits in nicely, though), they are rather impressive.

This is, at least to my knowledge, author Mark Seifter's first PFRPG-product and it is promising indeed – the whimsical challenge class feature and its featexpansions rock – though honestly, the fey mount feels bland. Yet another pet-archetype? Come on! There's nothing wrong here, but think about it - getting a horse that can change into equipment /buffs (yes, can be found in mythology!) would have imho been so much cooler than getting a strong, slightly more useful mount.

The laughing man suffers most from these archetypes:

On a concept-level, it lacks a loosening of the lawful alignment restriction and honestly, basing it wholly on demoralize and feinting has been done before as well – not in this combination, granted, but still. Beyond that, the archetype is even more MAD (multiple attribute dependant) than a regular monk – who already has it worse than any other class: Requiring cha for the signature skills and Int for skill ranks, this archetype imho requires a realignment of cha-based skills to wis or wis-based powers to cha as well as increased skills per level. Furthermore, I'm not sold on the massive skill-based usage – 3 rolls to get a unique effect at high levels? Ok, that is MUCH leeway to roll bad once and waste a lot of other potential benefits. Additionally, the unlimited use of unarmed strikes at range is VERY powerful and should have some kind of cap. Also: The fluff concept of paradoxes/words are weapons is simply not that well integrated mechanics-wise. At this point, I was rather disappointed.

And then – BAM! The Reveler. O.M.G. This one is so GLORIOUS. Seriously, this archetype ranks among my favorite for the barbarian – in ANY publication. The supplemental feats range from cool to a tad bit on the weak side and the new creature once again can be considered a winner.

Author Mark Seifter definitely has potential – there is nothing terribly wrong with the first archetype and while the laughing man fails rather miserably at what it sets out to do, the reveler makes more than up for this by its pure unadulterated awesomeness. The supplemental content and prose suffusing the pdf also do their share in making this pdf a well-worth purchase for you, if not a perfect one. The Reveler alone is worth the fair asking price and hence, I'll settle for a final verdict of 4 stars and remain in anticipation of the author's next offering.

Endzeitgeist out.

#### Village Backdrop: Golden Valley Publisher: Raging Swan Press Reviewer: Thilo Graf



5 out of 5 stars!

This installment of the Village Backdrop-series is 13 pages long, 1 page front cover, 1 page advertisement, 2 pages of editorial, 1 page ToC/foreword, 1 page SRD, 1 page advice on how to read statblocks for novice DMs and 1 page back cover, leaving us with 5 pages of content – so let's take

a look whether Golden Valley can maintain the streak of consecutive 5-star+seal of approval ratings the last installments of the series had!

Once known as sunset valley, the town known as Golden Valley is wealthy for a place of its size – prompted by a gold rush. Quickly, the man to become



known as Boss Corl staked his claim and miners and seekers of fortune poured into Golden Valley, seeking the fulfillment of their dreams. As has become the tradition with the series, we get demographics, a village statblock, a marketplace section of available items and notable locations/NPCs – but beyond that, not all is well in Golden Valley:

Prompted by the sudden influx of wealth, prices are atrociously high – and the Boss profits from this: Gear is so expensive that it takes months to pay back the debt new arrivals incur in Golden Valley for basic equipment and thus, devolve into a state rather close to slavery. Worse, it seems like the gold has dwindled to a trickle, thus prompting more risky actions from the town's de facto overlord. With mishaps and hazards accumulating, tensions rise as tempers start to flare – Golden Valley seems to have outlived its golden days...

6 rumors and 6 events also provide for further ideas and life and yes, we get full stats for miners as well as the local bailiff and Boss Corl as well as his enforcer.

#### **Conclusion:**

Editing and formatting are very good, though not up to Raging Swan's usual flawless track-record – I assume the village priest is not "sacred of" but rather "Scared of" Boss Corl. Layout adheres to RSP's elegant printerfriendly 2-column b/w-standard and the pdf comes with a glorious map of the town that can be downloaded in high-res versions on Raging Swan's homepage. The pdf comes in two versions, one optimized for the printer and one for screen-use and both come fully bookmarked for your convenience.

Author Eric Hindley has created an interesting dilemma – Corl holds the legal rights for the operation, but his increasing disregard for the safety of his workers will prove to be problematic at best -it is interesting moral quandaries like this that we see all too scarcely in supplements, though they tend to result in interesting roleplaying. Making for a great insert into Andoran akin to e.g. Falcon's Hallow, this village is yet another great offering for a more than fair price-point. And yes, I could be an anal-retentive bastard and rate this down for the one typo I found. I won't though – the streak continues: 5 stars + seal of approval.

Endzeitgeist out.

20 Variant Foes: Red Dragons (PFRPG) Publisher: Rite Publishing Reviewer: Trev W. 4 out of 5 stars!



Red Dragons have always been the hard and heavy hitting dragons for parties, capable of taking all players to an early demise if they are not careful and lucky. Evil and without real flaws, reds are a challenge. I am pleased to report that the challenge continues here.

The reds presented over 31 pages, with added pages for templates and additional material, are not all uniform in appearance. These are not just the same dragon with different stats. Some of the art is rather captivating (Inferna and Fadow), and I appreciate that although the dragons start with the CR of 30, they descend until they reach CR 3. So there is a dragon for all parties, and the real possibility that many dragons could be used over the course of a campaign, i.e. a game to hunt the ten red dragons of doom, for instance.

Some of the dragons have levels, granting them different abilities to the norm. I chuckled at the ninja dragon, the CR 10 invulnerable ranger dragon has some really nice damage, and each dragon comes with description, background material, some notes and points on tactics and special abilities.

I give this 4/5. It should be noted the Unja the dragon on the cover, is not actually the best looking dragon inside the product (I vote Inferna).

Good hunting!

#### Waysides: Hair of the Dog

**Publisher:** Christina Stiles Presents **Reviewer:** Thilo Graf **5 out of 5 stars!** 



The second Wayside is 10 pages long, 1 page front cover/ introduction, 1 page SRD, leaving us with 8 pages of content, so let's take a look, shall we?

"Hair of the Dog" is not only the name of this pdf, but also of the titular hostel provided in the pages of this pdf. Situated in a mining

town or similarly rough and tumble area, this hostel... actually is a nice place to be -from brews to lizard meat, the fare offered is actually not only edible, but even rather nice-tasting – just take a look at the menu provided for the place in the pdf! And that in spite of being led by a hard-working (!!!) gnoll-family, seeking to make it as a business, just hustling through the days and contending with what can arguably be considered racist jokes. (Hair in the soup...)

The owner, his slightly more aggressive wife and their three children are all accounted for in the pdf, as are two sample guests with surprisingly complex statblocks. We also get nice hooks, a serviceable b/w-map -and, rather cool, I hope this becomes a staple: Information on what teams according to the Ultimate Campaign-rules can be hired! Two thumbs up for especially that small, but useful addition! Have I mentioned the adventure hook that would see the gnolls framed for a barbarism they did not commit?

#### Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are top-notch, I didn't notice any glitches. Layout adheres to SGG's 3-column landscape format and the pdf comes fully bookmarked for your convenience. Artworks are thematically fitting stock and the b/w-cartography is serviceable, though no number-less player-friendly version is included – in this case, I won't hold that against it.

Christina Stiles has written a supplement here that features tender sympathy for the NPCs herein, a winking, subtle humor and overall, a place that might actually become the PC's favorite haunt – alien, yet familiar, this supplement manages to evoke a sense of compassion and sympathy from the reader, all while providing ample potential for conflict and addressing complex issues of acceptance while providing a chance for the PCs to be GOOD by ways other than slaying humanoids. After visiting this place, slaying the hyenafolk in the wilderness will never be the same again – and for achieving that while not making gnolls a joke or victims, Christina Stiles deserves just 5 stars + my seal of approval.

Endzeitgeist out.

#### **Amazing Races: Vanari**

**Publisher:** Abandoned Arts **Reviewer:** Thilo Graf **5 out of 5 stars!** 

All right, by now you know the drill – 4 pages, 1 page front cover, 1 page SRD, leaving us with two pages of content for the Vanara, so let's take a look! Contrary to what the intro-box would make you believe, this pdf starts with 5 new feats for the Vanara-race, not the Kitsune – though these also have their installment in the series. So what are the feats?

-Ki Cloud: Spend 2 ki to generate a fluffy cloud that nets you a perfect maneuverability and flying speed

equal to base movement for 1 hour – and yes, strong winds can dissipate it, as does any action that would break invisibility – like attacking. VERY cool and iconic, if a bit strong – but sometimes coolness trumps all!

-Greater Ki Cloud: The cloud doesn't dissipate upon attacking, withstands winds better and lasts longer.

-Prehensile Toes: Hold object with your feet – but not move except to climb or attack. Neat!

-Vanara Flip: As a swift action, flip around and transfer items from hands to feet or vice versa. Cool!

-Vanara Feint: When doing a Vanara Flip, feint as a free action – Neat!

We also get two new character traits – one that makes you count as having a running start when jumping from climbing a vertical surface and one that allows you to wield branches as quarterstaffs sans penalty.

We also get two new alternate racial traits – Dexterous Tail replacing nimble and allowing a Vanara to cast a spell while grappling on a successful concentration check, whereas Serene Striker allows the Vanara to use wis instead of str/dex with their AoOs, also in exchange for the nimble trait.

The issue's racial archetype is the Agile Arcanist, a magus archetype with diminished spellcatsing, but in turn the archetype gets canny defense, may substitute arcane pool points for ki points with regards to taking feats and using them as well as evasion etc. – elegant design that may utilize a lot of existing material in interesting ways – I like it!

#### Conclusion:

Editing and formatting, apart from the mentioned introductory guffaw, are top-notch -I didn't notice any significant glitches. Layout adheres to Abandoned Arts 2-column no-frills standard and the pdf comes without bookmarks, but needs none at this length.

I don't like the Vanara-race one bit – and here I am telling you: This is steeped in lore, iconic and all-killer,

no filler: Each and every feat feels properly and uniquely tied to the race, the traits/alternate racial traits rock and the archetype is concise, innovative and versatile while allowing you to create a character truly different that captures well what magical Vanara duelists should be about. Racial supplements have a hard standing with me, but this one succeeds in each and every way with bravura – and hence is worth full 5 stars plus seal of approval – Daron Woodson has done an extraordinary job here!

Endzeitgeist out.

#### **#30 More Manuals of Improvement Publisher:** Rite Publishing **Reviewer:** Thilo Graf **5 Stars out of 5!**



This sequel to the first collection of 30 manuals is 21 pages of content, 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial, 1 page SRD, 2 pages of advertisement, leaving us with 16 pages of content, so let's take a look, shall we?

As has become the tradition with Rite Publishing's supplements, we get the crunch herein framed by an

aptly-written frame-narrative before diving into new manuals for permanent character improvement. Before I go into some examples, here are some worthwhile facts about them: Each of the books comes in at least two iterations, most of the time actually three – elementary, advanced and expert levels, all with the necessary GPvalues, upping the ante of how much bang you get for your buck – there are much more than 30 manuals in here! Furthermore, each type of manual comes with its own fluff-text to introduce you to the matter at hand, making for a better reading experience than most crunch-heavy books without bloating it.

Whether it's metamgic feats, blind-folded combat, superb contortion – there are quite a few of interesting options hidden in the pages of these tomes – if you can meet the e.g. spellcasting or skill-rank prerequisites to properly digest the contents offered. Now I'm aware that the bonuses are supposed to be significant for 20K Gold books, but honestly, some of the skill-enhancing books herein are simply too strong for my tastes – By studying a manual on body language for 72 hours over a minimum of 9 days, a character may gain a +10 (!!!) competence bonus to sense motive that stacks with previous iterations of the book.

And yes, 10 ranks in sense motive are required for that particular example, but still – that's a doubling of

the capability in that field and even before the additional benefits (vastly improved understanding of secret messages), that's a tough one to swallow – at least for me. Especially since both craft and perform are among the skills also covered via these manuals. And yes, an advanced rogue talent, a style feat or improved dragging capabilities strike me as better balanced than these massive skill bonuses, which unfortunately are mirrored in various manuals.

In fact, the respective manuals to net combat maneuver-themed benefits (either via feats or further enhancements of the respective maneuvers) strike me as less significant, even though Pathfinder is a bit stingy with these resources.

#### Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are very good, I didn't notice any significant glitches. Layout adheres to RiP's full color two-column standard and the pdf comes with nice stock-art that fits thematically well the content of the pdf. The pdf comes fully bookmarked for your convenience.

I usually tend to really, really like offerings by Mike Welham, though this one leaves me with doubts - the manuals herein have interesting effects, yes, and I like that they promote PC growth via research instead of contributing to the Christmas Tree-syndrome. That being said, I'm not wholly comfortable with the massive bonuses some of these books tend to net: Yes, magic items may also net such massive bonuses, but they also occupy a slot - and for the respective price of these items, they confer permanent enhancements. And yes, while bonus types tend to limit the amount of stacking possible, still, I'm left feeling slightly uncomfortable with the bonuses these manuals deliver - not because they're broken per se, but because they are so ... significant. An item doubling what otherwise is a rather scarce resource just has this knee-jerk reaction of me going "OMG" -even when it is not wholly justified. Taking some careful deliberation (and time - there's a reason my reviews tend to take some time), there are several magic items that actually do more and could be considered just as powerful. Still, the fact that the benefits are no longer tied to physical objects that can be broken or taken away means that the manuals, per se, can be considered more powerful than their item-counterparts - which again, leaves me feeling slightly uncomfortable with these manuals, in spite of the control a DM has on itemflow. Especially for rather low-powered play, these can present some potential issues when inserted into the complex equation that is a character.

Still, on the other hand, the manuals herein will quite probably, thanks to prerequisites, rarity and at times, rather ingenious additional benefits find some thankful groups where their impact is most cherished, bringing down the total amount of necessary magic items – for these groups and especially rare magic settings/playstyles, these manuals are a godsend and absolutely gorgeous – and should definitely be considered 5 stars... for said rounds. Hence, I will stick my verdict in a middle-ground and arrive at a solid 4 stars – a good supplement, if not one that will fit the play-style of every group. DMs implementing it should definitely take heed regarding bonus types, since they are a limiting factor on what can be stacked.

Endzeitgeist out.

#### Wilderness Dressing: Ruins

Publisher: Raging Swan Press Reviewer: Thilo Graf 5 stars of 5!



This installment of the Wilderness Dressing-series is 14 pages long, 1 page front cover, 1 page advertisement, 2 pages editorial, 1 page ToC/editorial, 1 page SRD, 1 page back cover, leaving us with 7 pages of content, so let's take a look! Few locales capture the eye of adventurers as much as ruins – with

the promise of old secrets buried, of treasure and a sense of historicity bleeding from them and telling indirect supplemental stories, ruins are an integral part of the roleplaying-tropes. Making, and more importantly, keeping them interesting over the years, though, would be a challenge – and it's here this pdf comes in.

If you're like me, you had this happen – you put a pure dressing ruin somewhere to liven up the scenery and your PCs go all out for it, spinning theories and allowing you to weave a yarn spontaneously from their theories – so yes, dressing is important and at first, we get a list of small ruins with a total of 50 entries that cover neglected shrines, charred beams remaining from burned down inns, copper mash tuns in exposed basements and rectangular, moss-covered stones.

Where small ones are, so do large ones loom – 50 of them, with obsidian blocks engraved with weird iconography, cracked glass domes and half-buried stone pyramids, we get quite an array of uncommon, evocative locales – which can be further modified via a massive 100-entry-dressing table: From muffled crying suffusing a building to a stench of blood and decay or tracks of large predators – with and without skill-DCs, we get quite a lot of cool things to jog one's imagination. Now the final page offers crunchy bits appropriate for ruins – 6 new haunts, spanning the CRs from 2 to 8 and while the parenthesization of the CRs and Xp is not uniform, the haunts per se walk a tight line – without being too specific and remaining rather generic, they manage to evoke their own style – Take for example a pit which requires sprinkled potions of feather fall to lay those that perished to rest – it's small ideas like that, which shine brightest to me.

#### Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are very good, but not as perfect as usual for Raging Swan Press – I noticed some almost imperceptible minor glitches. Layout adheres to RSP's elegant 2-column b/w-standard and the pdf comes with fitting b/w-artworks as well as in two versions, with one being optimized for screen-use and one to be printed out. The pdf comes fully bookmarked for your convenience.

Author John Bennett has yet to disappoint me with his offerings and this is no different – oozing flair and style, these ruins are evocative indeed and should enrich your campaign. However, I still feel that there's something missing here – if I had one wish, it would probably be to know potential information to rebuild these ruins once cleared with the Downtime-rules. That's a minor thing, though, and hence I'll settle for a final verdict of 5 stars.



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By Steven D. Russell, Jonathan McAnulty, Will McCardell, Benjamin Rombeaut, and David Mallon

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