





# Rescue from Tyrkaven

by Dale C. McCoy, Jr.

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#### **Phrenic Spawn Creature** Template

Beware of Phrenic Scourges, for they can take more than your freedom. By Steve Russell

#### Swamp Spells Showcase #3 Another one of the spells from 101 Swamp Spells is given a spotlight.

By Dave Paul

#### Gamemastering in 30 minutes or less

Another spell is outlined in a 14 communique between two NPC friends in this article. By Steve Russell

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# LOSTR DREAM

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### Editorial

By Dave Paul

Illustration by Patricia Smith

Some people swear by a shower for sudden inspiration and insight. I'm not quite sure why that would be. For me, showers are very mundane affairs focused on soap and water. My own source of inspiration seems to come from taking walks or from driving. Maybe others find their minds are set adrift while they shower and so for them, the effect is similar to the effect I get from a long drive or a long walk. Regardless, I've had the great fortune of having a flexible schedule lately (this won't last, I assume), and I've used some of that flexible time to take my dogs for walks in the woods. The dogs are rather excitable and distractible and I can't take them together or we'd never get anything accomplished (and worse, I'd get no inspiration). So I take one and then the other and tromp around for a half hour or so and leave myself open to my role-playing design muse. Sometimes she's fickle or asleep and gives me nothing. At other times, I get a barrage of ideas. Rarely, I get so many ideas that I lose some of them before I return from the walk; they dissipate like the images in a dream moments after waking. And, try as I might, I cannot recall the few that slip away.

Today I grabbed a few more ideas from that mysterious, nebulous mental ether. For about a month, the ideas have tended to be directed toward two projects I'm working on for Rite Publishing. Every once in a while, I hit upon an idea that I'm sure is unique and brilliant, only later to find that someone else has beaten me to that idea. Today I had the weird experience of thinking I'd hit upon something quite new, spent 45 minutes typing and editing the idea, only to find elsewhere in the product that I'd already created something quite like this, months ago, but had somehow forgotten about it. Heck, for all I know, talking to my muse sometimes amounts to talking to my own memory but not recognizing myself in that.

I've also been reading a lot of non-RPG stuff lately. I polished off a dozen books on existentialism in two weeks, thanks to the preparation I've been doing for a class I'll be teaching soon. One of the books is by Carl Jung and I have this tendency to end up mentally wandering all over the cosmos whenever I read Jung (which just now makes me think I should do this more often).

What are your own non-RPG sources of inspiration? Lots of folks reference fiction (movies, television, books, graphic novels, etc.). But I consider most of those to be too close to role-playing to count as non-RPG sources of inspiration, after all, *Guardians of the Galaxy* came remarkably close to what half the gaming sessions in my life have felt like. Sometimes I find inspiration when I read articles or books of history, philosophy or religion. I've gotten inspiration from sitting across the table from management's team of contract negotiators while helping a labor union hammer out a new contract. (Doesn't it make sense that a fantasy world with big shipping cities would end up having something akin to dock workers unions? And couldn't the political and economic implications be potentially significant in the lives of the PCs?)

Do you have sources of inspiration that you think are outside the norm? Please share. Tapping into the nexus of creativity can be a challenge; maybe you know or have experienced something that other readers haven't and by sharing you'll open up new channels for others.

Happy gaming.



**Rite Publishing Presents** 

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By Jonathan McAnulty, T. H. Gulliver, and Steven D. Russell

## Phrenic Spawn Creature Template

By Steven D. Russell; Illustrations by Addison Rankin

Sometimes when a <u>phrenic scourge's</u> (see *Psionic Bestiary* by Dreamscarred Press) tendrils implant themselves within one of its victims, there is an eldritch mutation, and rather than becoming a larva, it becomes a parasitic aberration that assimilates other organisms and in turn imitates them. These imitations are so good that often times even the creature is not consciously aware that it is a phrenic spawn until its foes force it to reveal itself. Even the smallest part of these creatures can form an independent organism, if parts get chopped off it, these parts will grow new appendages and scuttle off. These are the phrenic spawn. Phrenic spawn creatures in their true from are inexplicably shaped to the point of defying description, with their body parts merging in unfathomable ways.

#### Creating a Phrenic Spawn Creature

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"Phrenic Spawn" is an acquired template that can be added to any living creature (referred to hereafter as the base creature).

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

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

#### Alignment: Chaotic Evil

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

**Defensive Abilities**: Regeneration (equal to its Constitution modifier, fire), Split (slashing, half its unwounded hit point total), not subject to critical hits or flanking. Does not take additional damage from precision-based attacks, such as sneak attack. **Immune** poison, *sleep* effects, paralysis, *polymorph*, stunning.

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

*Horrific Evolution* (Ex): If a phrenic spawn is forced to reveal itself, it transforms as an immediate action into a horrific abomination, with bizarre and alien forms of anatomy. For example, if being attacked by a weapon, it could allow the form of a large maw at the point being attacked and then bite the opponent (see attack forms). It is similar to the way an eidolon changes its form when its summoner has gained a level. The phrenic spawn's horrific form gains a number of attacks equal to the maximum its eidolon form can possess and has a number of evolutions, as the evolution pool of an eidolon. Its functional eidolon level is equal to the phrenic spawn's Challenge Rating (max 20).

Creatures who witness a spawn reveal its horrific form for the first time, or splits for the first time in an encounter, must make a Will save (DC 10 +1/2 the phrenic spawn's HD + its Cha modifier) or be subject to a fear effect based on the phrenic spawn's Challenge Rating (see below). If a subject makes its saving throw it is shaken for one round but is immune to that phrenic spawn's (and its split replicas') fear effects for 24 hours.

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

*Duplicate (Su):* If a creature absorbs the body of a victim, or its split replica does, an exact duplicate of that creature comes into being, this process takes 10 minutes, and its victim must be dead or helpless. Foes often discover it during this period. The duplicate has all the powers, abilities, feats, memories, and skills of the original (including spellcasting, extraordinary, supernatural, and spell-like abilities, and also retains its weaknesses) though not its equipment. The ethos or the phrenic deity of evil and/or trickery will take over the granting of any divine spells or granted abilities. You effectively apply the phrenic spawn template to that creature.

This is treated as a polymorph disguise (including the +10 circumstance bonus to Disguise checks). This ability does not work on construct creatures; attempts to duplicate an undead creature cause it to become a living duplicate.



**Abilities:** Increase from the base creature as follows: Str +4 (+2 to attack and damage, +2 to Climb and Swim checks, +2 to Strength and CMB checks, +2 to CMD), Con +4 (+2 hp per HD, +2 to Fortitude saves and any of the base creature's Constitution-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 checks, +3 to attempts to influence others, and Channel Energy DCs, +3 to any of the base creature's Charismabased DCs).

**Skills:** The base creature gains Bluff and Disguise as class skills, the bonus ranks usually gained from increased Intelligence are usually assigned to the Bluff and Disguise skills so it can maintain its facade.

#### The Thing from Beyond

#### XP 1,200

Phrenic Spawn Bugbear

CE Medium aberration (augmented, goblinoid)

Init +1; Senses darkvision 60 ft., scent; Perception +8

#### Defense

**AC** 17, touch 11, flat-footed 16 (+2 armor, +1 Dex, +3 natural, +1 shield)

**hp** 22 (3d8+9) regeneration 3 (fire)

#### **Fort** +4, **Ref** +4, **Will** +1

**Defensive Abilities** Split (slashing, half its unwounded hit point total), not subject to critical hits or flanking. Does not take additional damage from precision-based

attacks, such as sneak attack. **Immune** poison, *sleep* effects, paralysis, *polymorph*, stunning

#### Offense

Speed 30 ft.

**Melee** morningstar +7 (1d8+5) or 1 bite +7 (1d6+5), 2 claws +7 (1d6+5), 2 slams, +7 (1d6+5) [5 evolutions]

Ranged javelin +3 (1d6+3)

Space 5 ft. Reach 5 ft. (10 ft. claws [1 evolution])

**Special Attacks** horrific evolution (8 points, DC 13 shaken 1d4+1 rds.), rend (1d6 + 7 [2 evolutions])

#### Statistics

Str 20, Dex 13, Con 17, Int 14, Wis 10, Cha 15

Base Atk +2; CMB +7; CMD 18

Feats Intimidating Prowess, Skill Focus (Perception)

**Skills** Bluff +8, Disguise +8 (Duplicate +18), Intimidate +10, Perception +8, Stealth +10; **Racial Modifiers** +4 Intimidate, +4 Stealth

SQ duplicate, stalker

Languages Common, Goblin, Orc, Giant,

#### Special Abilities

**Stalker (Ex)** Perception and Stealth are always class skills for bugbears



 $CR_4$ 



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## Swamp Spells Showcase

By David J. Paul, Illustration by Trung Ta Ha

"Some of the men at arms have reported sightings of ghosts again, in the swamps." Tacton spoke matter-offactly in between bites of roast duck. Now that spring had finally melted away the last bits of ice and snow from another harsh winter, his men were returning to their tasks farther afield from the priory, including occasional visits just into the shallows of the nearest swamps.

"Is there anyone among them capable of dealing with the apparitions?" Chandus inquired, setting down his goblet.

"Are the reports accurate? There haven't been ghosts in these swamps for decades." Arianna had finished eating before the men at the table but was certainly enjoying the company of her adventuring companions.

Tacton grinned for a few long seconds before he spoke again, "We could check it out ourselves."

Palin and John joined Tacton, Chandus and Arianna in their excursion. Arianna's hawk, Sophie, joined Palin, who had assumed the form of a hawk himself. They were in flight far above the others who rode at a comfortable pace across the countryside. With telepathic and other links established between various members of the group, there was little chance of the party being surprised between the safety of their civilized dwellings, through the borderlands, and into the wilds of the swamps and forests farther away. Though the horses seemed to enjoy the trek, the people hadn't ridden much through the winter and were happy enough for a short break after a few hours of riding.

Palin joined them, in his elven rather than avian form. "How do things look from way up there?" Tacton asked.

"There is heavy fog, surprisingly, in and around the swamp. Much heavier than usual for this time of year. It might be natural, but, it might not be." Palin's expertise in wilderness matters was not questioned by his friends, and when he wasn't certain, they immediately began considering explanations for his uncertainty.

Chandus looked over his left shoulder at John. "Witches?"

John nodded from where he was kneeling over a fire he'd just started. "Perhaps."

Arianna conjured an armload of dry wood which appear at John's side. He thanked her with his eyes. She replied in kind. "Perhaps. There have always been reports of strange lights in the swamps; this is nothing at all new. Most of those are entirely natural," here she looked at Palin who nodded slightly to agree. "But my contacts in the towns on the other sides of these swamps have also been noticing a few more reports than usual of an unusual sort. Not just strange lights, but also things like what your men have reported," she looked at Tacton while she paused for just a second. "Ghosts." John stood. A master of fire, he took less time than most to start a fire, and produced considerably warmer, better behaved campfires than even many experienced survivors of the wilds. "Why would the hags and witches be interested in ghosts? Many of them have fondnesses that I find more than distasteful, but at least they're not necromancers. One of the benefits of having witches in these swamps is that, for all their foul cravings, they've kept worse things out."

"Perhaps these ghosts aren't ghosts John. With any luck, we'll see for ourselves." Arianna was looking at the ground as she spoke, as if reading something no one else could see.

A few hours later, a few hours before complete darkness would set in, they'd been riding in light fog for more than an hour and were just moving into very dense fog. Sophie remained aloft, high above the fog. She couldn't see into the mists below, but would be able to report on anything else above the swamp and the wet plains around it. Palin had since taken on the form of a wolf and was relying more on scent than sight. The well-trained horses were always nervous when Palin did this, but, they'd experienced the calming, steadying hands of their riders and had gotten to know the scent and sounds of this particular wolf long enough that they maintained their composure.

Minutes later, a humanoid form appeared in the mists. Chandus and Tacton instinctively drew weapons designed specifically for handling the incorporeal nature of these spectral creatures. John spoke a few worked in a pidgin of his elder god's tongue and draconic as a halo of divine protection surrounded himself and his allies.

"That won't work," Arianna said as she dismounted. The horses, she noted, did not react as they usually do in the presence of the undead. Palin was already on the other side of the shape, tasting the air. "This is no ghost."

Chandus and Tacton joined her on the ground and approached cautiously. Everyone noted that the creature did not speak, though it was gesticulating, and seemed to be expressing sorrow and worry.

Arianna poked at the creature with her sword, which, even in the fog, was glowing with its usual soft, silver aura. "See?" she demonstrated. "This poor creature is in a gaseous state, akin to that used by vampires to escape, but, rather than being formless, it, or rather, he, appears roughly as he did before this happened to him."

"A curse then," John noted, still on his horse.

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"Indeed," Arianna replied without looking, "and one with which I am not yet familiar...."

I've always enjoyed the many curses of fables. As I worked on *101 Swamp Spells*, I wanted GMs to have at their disposal a wide variety of spells that their players hadn't encountered, and ones which offered more flavor to the game than the usual flash and bang common to so many spells. While I edited the various spells in *1001 Spells*, I admired the ingenuity of the many curses in that product and sought to expand on this particular type of spell in my own work.

Arianna and her friends are going to have to find out not only how to save this poor fellow from his accursed state (or, worse, what if they free an enemy!), but also who was behind it and what their motivations were.

#### Curse of Eternal Fog

**School:** Transmutation [curse]; **Level:** Antipaladin 4, Druid 5, Sorcerer/Wizard 5, Witch 4

Casting Time: 1 standard action Components: V, S Range: Touch Target: Creature touched Duration: Permanent Saving Throw: Will negates; Spell Resistance: Yes

You curse a subject by rendering its form and equipment to fog, similar to that caused by *gaseous form* (though the subject retains its shape, similar to that caused by *flesh to fog*). The subject remains in this foggy state until restored. The effect cannot be removed by *remove curse*. However, *break enchantment* will restore the creature if the caster level check is made. In addition, *fog to flesh*, *limited wish, miracle*, or *wish* will restore the subject.

The subject may move using any of its normal movement abilities, though its speed is limited to 10 feet and it may not run. If the subject is in an area of fog (natural or magical), its speed is instead half normal (minimum 10) and it may run.

As with *gaseous form*, the subject and all its gear become insubstantial, misty, and translucent. Its material armor (including natural armor) becomes worthless, though its size, Dexterity, deflection bonuses, and armor bonuses from force effects still apply. The subject gains DR 10/magic and becomes immune to poison, sneak attacks, and critical hits. It can't attack or cast spells with verbal, somatic, material, or focus components while in gaseous form. This does not rule out the use of certain spells that the subject may have prepared using the feats Silent Spell, Still Spell, and Eschew Materials. The subject also loses supernatural abilities while in gaseous form. If it has a touch spell ready to use, that spell is discharged harmlessly when the *curse of eternal fog* spell takes effect.

The creature is subject to the effects of wind, and it can't enter water or other liquid. It also can't manipulate objects or activate items, even those it carried prior to being turned to fog. Continuously active items remain active, though in some cases their effects may be moot.

If the terrain from which you cast this spell could be considered a swamp, the curse also prevents the subject from leaving the swamp.

A few minor changes were made to the text of this spell; its in-game function remains the same. –Ed.



**Rite Publishing Presents** 

August 2014

Issue #6

# DUENTURE QUARTERLY

Mike Welham, Bret Boyd, and Alex Putnam



Coming in January

#### Game Mastering in 30 Minutes or Jess By Steven D. Russell, Illustration by Katrina Bjorsky, Cartography by Tommi Salama

**1. Map It:** You could do it with an overland map, a dungeon map ... you are a GM, I am sure you have some lying around. If not, I have some for sale. But for now let us keep it simple; you can find one by browsing the <u>Cartographer's Guild</u>, something you made while messing around with <u>Campaign Cartographer</u>, or maybe you loot it from <u>Jonathan Roberts' website</u>. In my case, I am publisher, so I get to use a map I commissioned and use it for something else; so let us take the level 3 map of the Ruins Perilous.

Now we are not going to have time to write a bunch of description for each room so we need to pick a theme that we can constantly build off, something that is constantly challenging your players, creating an environment tension. It could be that every surface is covered with some unique ooze, it could be an influx of chaos, or wild magic permeates the area, or perhaps it is just underwater and subject to strange currents and shifting tides. For this case we will change the appearance of the dungeon: it will be underwater, in the arctic. Parts of the dungeon will be iced over and there will be unpredictable currents and tides.

**2. Iconic Monsters:** Don't get crazy and hunt down the latest bestiary, these need to be monsters you know how to run already. Use good old standby monsters and adapt them to your environment. You want your players to have an emotional reaction and you need to get the monsters together in less than four minutes. We have a cold and underwater environment. Any undead or constructs will be fine, they don't have a problem with underwater; sharks of all sizes are great; shapechagers can adapt to the environment; gargoyles are stone, so they don't care about cold or water (you can use the aquatic version); orcas will scare them—they are worse than sharks. Trolls and deep ones as well, because, who does not love Cthulhu? You can even bring back an old foe (see Don't Explain It below).

**3. Make it Unique:** You have a list of encounter locations and a list of creatures to encounter, now take that list, and make a short phrase about each encounter that makes it unique. You don't want it to be just a tenby-ten room with a monster in it. For example, the orca will be awakened by a druid, uplifted by technology, or is from a world with intelligent killer whales; regardless, it will be extremely intelligent and use extremely intelligent tactics. The big circular room in the center, its "floor" is covered in broken up ice sheets and there is a hole in



the center. The currents cause it to spin. The orca baits the area around the hole with bits of treasure frozen to the thin ice pack. (It's an orca, what use does it have for gold? It wants fresh meat.) When it is time to fight, the orca simply rams the thin ice and makes it very hard for anyone to get back to the doors. Therefore, the note would be "Intelligent Orca. Broken up rotating ice floor with water underneath, hole in center, frozen treasure."

4. Fudge It: Don't be a slave to stats or dice, they are just a guideline. What you are looking for is a dramatic encounter, something neither too long nor too short. When it is time for the villain to die, have him die. Add hit points if you have to, or increase or decrease the challenge as needed. Maybe the magic holding the undead creature together fails or is renewed. The construct is malfunctioning, but a surge of nanites could repair it. There are more sharks where they came from, but they could feed on each other. The shapechanger has a one-winged angel form, but its form could be unstable. Did you not see all the other stone statues? They are gargoyles too; but, perhaps they have grown brittle from too much time in salt water. The trolls and deep ones just keep coming; most of them panic at the very sight of fire. Therefore, the note for the orca could be: "The Orca has a mate or has weak lungs and could easily suffocate underwater."

**5. Don't Explain It:** If someone asks you as the GM how this place ended up underwater, way-out in the middle of the arctic, say, "Your character doesn't know." If they ask an NPC, have that NPC give his opinion, state

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various theories, and let that NPC be completely wrong. Let the player characters put forth their own theories. If you hear the beginning of a theory you like, drop a clue to that effect to encourage it, but never give them Word of God confirmation. The same can go for the old adversary you recycled for this adventure. He is here looking for the McGuffin that will let him get revenge on the PCs, but when he's asked how he survived being disintegrated and his ashes cast to the four winds, say "Your character doesn't know." He might be his ghost simply animating his armor, or a shapeshifter mode locked and implanted with the memories of the PC's adversary, but the players don't need to know that, and right now neither do you. Again, let the PCs and NPCs put forth their own opinions and be wrong or right as the whim strikes you. You can do the same thing with a mysterious McGuffin; let the players lead you to what it is, the ultimate mystery magic item, an ancient holy relic, or a piece of indecipherable future tech. It's a Rorschach blot, it only has the meaning that the GM and PCs apply to it.

**6. Roleplay It**: Have the NPCs ask the PCs questions, keep asking questions, get them talking. Before the PCs can leave on the adventure they are invited to a dinner party where all the major NPCs of the region will be attending because everyone loves the innkeeper so much, they will even put aside hated feuds. If the PCs attack someone, the whole dinner party defeats them, and they have offended everyone. Do you have a questionnaire for the PCs? Let different NPCs ask questions from it. Are the PCs famous? Perhaps a bard or a reporter tries to ask them questions as they travel.

**7. Impersonate Someone:** So you need NPCs for the PCs to interact with, and you can't come up with one. Do an impersonation of someone your players don't know. Players might recognize that you are impersonating your best friend (who is sitting there at the table) but do they

know your grandmother, your boss at work, or even that special someone you had a crush on in school? I love impersonating my mother to folks who never got to know her. Imagine a hunchbacked bespectacled woman with curly brown hair at an inn who takes care of your every need, treats you like her own children, never asks you for anything, but is constantly talking about her friend's spouse who was checking out the report of a suspicious occurrence that sounds like your PCs' nemesis. Moreover, when the PCs go to find out more, she does not want them to be bothered, and will not discuss it anymore until after dinner as she has work to do. She then invites the aforementioned friend, whose spouse is missing, to dinner.

8. Puzzle It: I have a big book of riddles sitting on my shelf right next to big book of puzzles; you can also use an internet search engine to find endless numbers of riddles. Or, pull out a puzzle game like Jenga (find the specially marked piece), Mastermind (for every wrong answer X happens), or chess (sacrifice pieces, sacrifice PCs). Perhaps the ghoul did it, the pleasures of the flesh don't matter anymore, but pleasures of the mind do; or maybe one of the monsters hoards riddles and puzzles like a dragon hoards treasure, or perhaps it is just a riddle that is the clue to the password or a magic word like "Open Sesame" or "1234." Modern and future games make this fun if the riddle is two personal pieces of information you need to know about the original inhabitant. "What is the name of your first pet? What is your mother's maiden name?" The PCs then have to do research or talk to NPCs; "the undead creature might know stuff about the place's creator, and that painting we saw might have his pet's name on it."

**9. If all else fails:** Have someone come to the dungeon to hunt the PCs down. Hey, it's that nemesis again.



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## Twenty Questions with Eric Morton

by Steven D. Russell; Illustration by interview illustration by Camus Altamirano

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

My name is Eric Morton. My father taught me to play Dungeons & Dragons when I was eight years old and I have been playing roleplaying games in some capacity ever since. For the past eighteen years, I have worked as a freelance game designer in my meager spare time. Last year, I promoted myself to publisher.

My first design credits were a handful of articles appearing in *Dragon Magazine*, back when *Dragon* was still a print publication. In the years since then, I have had the pleasure of working with several PDF and print publishers. Six months ago I started my own publishing company, Eric Morton Presents. As of this interview, Eric Morton Presents has published eight PDF products in its *Animal Races* series (more on that shortly), with additional titles in that series in the works.

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

My friends enjoy running Paizo Publishing's Adventure Paths, so I play in those frequently. Players are usually expected to utilize only the Core Rules and an occasional Paizo sourcebook when creating characters. Those games help me stay grounded in the rules at the heart of the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game.

Then my turn to run a game arrives and things get crazy. I like making new rules, from house rules to entire game systems. If I am feeling lazy, I may run a short campaign using the Pathfinder Core Rules with a single modification, the effects of which I want to playtest. If I am feeling ambitious, I may create a new game system tailored to fit a particular story I want to tell.

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

The Pathfinder Reference Document, also known as the PRD. Paizo deserves high praise for making most of the rules for the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game available free online via the PRD. In addition to demonstrating Paizo's commitment to Open Gaming, the PRD is, in my humble opinion, a very important gateway to the tabletop roleplaying game community. I suspect the PRD has been a point of entry into the hobby for quite a few gamers new to tabletop gaming.

#### 4. You are currently owner of Eric Morton Presents, how did that start and how would you characterize the company today?

Over the course of my freelancing career, I was often asked, "Why don't you start your own publishing company?" Not long ago, I took the question to heart and started planning some PDF products I could self-publish. At first, I figured I would publish one or two products and



call it good. The more I looked into publishing, though, the more I became convinced I could produce a viable, ongoing product line.

As of this interview, Eric Morton Presents has been publishing products for just over six months. I would describe it as an up-and-coming publishing company. My current offerings are a series of small, affordable PDF products. Those have been fairly well-received by customers and reviewers alike, so I hope to continue offering products of that sort indefinitely. I also see plenty of room for growth in the future, including opportunities to tackle bigger, higher-budget projects at some point in time.

#### 5. What is your favorite Pathfinder Roleplaying Game compatible product you worked on and could you tell us a little about it?

Animal Races: Clan of the Cat was the first title published by Eric Morton Presents and the first roleplaying game supplement I wrote over which I had full creative control. For that reason alone, I had more fun designing Animal Races: Clan of the Cat than working on any previous project.

As its name suggests, *Animal Races: Clan of the Cat* is a product featuring a playable race of humanoid cats. Had I been designing this product for another publisher, I would probably have been constrained by existing material covering the same topic. As my own publisher,

I had no such constraints. That freed me up to really expand upon the concept of cats as humanoids in ways I had not seen done before.

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

Many months of planning went into the *Animal Races* series even before I started writing *Animal Races: Clan of the Cat.* That made the day I finally finished *Clan of the Cat* all the more satisfying. I have written numerous gaming products over the years, but this was the first time I had also done all of the art direction, graphic design, and page layout for a product. Pulling all of that together for the first time was an important milestone in my career as a game designer and publisher.

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

Since *Animal Races: Clan of the Cat* was the first product I ever self-published, creating it involved a number of unique challenges. Not only was I attempting to write a compelling product, but I was attempting to do so while simultaneously teaching myself the ins and outs of art direction, graphic design, and publishing. In addition, I needed this product to be as good as I could make it with the resources at my disposal because it was going to set the tone for every product that followed. Thankfully, *Animal Races: Clan of the Cat* turned out well enough to earn favorable reviews and a positive response from consumers.

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

I am always hesitant to refer to my own work as ingenious. I will leave it to others to decide if and how that particular adjective applies. I can say that I am pleased with the degree of customization I was able to work into *Animal Races: Clan of the Cat* and into the *Animal Races* series as a whole.

While each title in the series features one new character race, that race can be customized to a degree rarely seen outside of the race creation rules. In addition to standard options for customization, such as feats and traits, the races in this series allow you to customize everything from your ability score modifiers and size category to the list of bonus feats you are able to select with various class features. Each product in this series introduces hundreds of different character options rolled into one featured race.

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

I am always learning new things while working on the *Animal Races* series. In addition to learning the tricks of



the publishing trade, I am learning lots of interesting trivia entirely unrelated to game design. One of the most entertaining aspects of the Animal Races series, from my perspective as a designer, is the background research that goes into each product. Each of my Animal Races products takes its inspiration form real-world mythology, folklore. heraldry.

taxonomy, molecular biology, and genetics. The more work I do on this product line, the more interesting things I learn about animal behavior, evolution, and the perception of animals in real-world folklore—all things I attempt to incorporate into my products.

## 10. Can you tell us anything more about the *Animal Races* series as a whole?

While my above answers regarding *Animal Races: Clan of the Cat* highlight many overarching aspects of the *Animal Races* series, there are a few additional things I can add. I started with a book featuring a cat-themed race because feline races are fairly iconic in fantasy fiction, but the *Animal Races* series is not limited to conventional animal-themed races. While Cats, Dogs, and other expected animal races have made an appearance, the *Animal Races* series can and will delve into less-common animal-themed races, from anthropomorphic Raccoons to humanoid Echidnas and everything in between.

#### 11. Do you have any goals for Eric Morton Presents that you have yet to obtain or overcome?

Having been a publisher for just over six months at the time of this interview, Eric Morton Presents has plenty of room for growth. As far as I am concerned, I am just getting my feet wet with the *Animal Races* series. I plan on both continuing that series and on gradually adding different products to my inventory, tackling increasingly ambitious projects as time goes by. As the owner of Eric Morton Presents, I have a lot of work ahead of myself, but I cannot wait to get started.

## 12. What products aside from the *Animal Races* series do you envision Eric Morton Presents publishing in the future?

The *Animal Races* series creates lots of new options for player characters, not just by creating new races, but by making each of those new races highly customizable. In the future, I will incorporate that degree of customization into other aspects of the game. One of my long-term projects, for example, is a set of rules for custom class creation. I am also doing some preliminary work on a line of bestiary products that feature customizable monster

stat blocks. I hope to publish a number of products along these lines, ones that provide a toolbox of options for players and GMs looking to customize their characters and their campaigns.

#### 13. Other than your own work and Eric Morton Presents products, what is the best Pathfinder Roleplaying Game compatible product out there?

I believe in customizing rules to fit specific campaign concepts, so I disagree with the premise that there is one "best" roleplaying game product. Different products add different things to different campaigns. For a campaign with science-fiction-flavored mental powers, for example, various products from Dreamscarred Press are invaluable resources. Legendary Games, meanwhile, has several nice products tailor-made to support specific Adventure Paths. Different products fill different niches. Accordingly, I would say there are many, possible "best" products, depending upon the game one is running.

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

Whatever niche it fills, I would say a good Pathfinder Roleplaying Game product is one that appeals to three different audiences: players, GMs, and tabletop gamers who are currently between games. That last audience is an important one to keep in mind, because it is one that is often overlooked when a product is being designed. A quick glance at any of several RPG-related messageboards, though, reveals a sizable audience of gamers who consume tabletop RPG products even though they are not actively using those products in a game at the time of purchase. Keeping that audience in mind, an ideal product is fun to read for the sake of reading and provides content that can be tinkered with even if the reader is not part of an ongoing game.

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

Off the top of my head, I would say I have always been impressed by Wolfgang Baur's work, not just as a designer but as a publisher. When I think about where I am today and where I hope to be in the future, it never hurts to consider his many successes, the hard work he has put in to accomplish what he has, and the many things he has contributed to the tabletop RPG industry along the way. If I can accomplish half that much, I will consider myself a successful publisher of tabletop RPG products.

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

Never stop learning. No matter how good you get, there is always something new you can learn from other experienced freelancers. Take advantage of messageboards and other venues frequented by veteran



freelancers and thirdparty publishers. Ask questions in forums where freelancers show a willingness to answer and take the answers you receive to heart.

Based on the time one spends actually writing material, freelancing can seem like a solitary pursuit, but a freelancing community does exist. Make an effort

to participate in discussions with fellow freelancers anywhere such discussions are welcome and learn from any insights fellow freelancers are willing to share.

## 17. Who is your favorite tabletop RPG Illustrator that you have worked with?

I have not yet had the pleasure of working with an illustrator. As a new publisher, one of my goals is to make my products accessible by keeping the prices low, something I do by relying upon public domain artwork and stock art in place of custom illustrations. I do, however, look forward to working with illustrators when it comes time for Eric Morton Presents to publish larger-scale projects than the short PDFs it currently offers.

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

Every now and again, I see publishers posting on various messageboards, asking the public which freelancers they would like to see working on a given project. A few times now, I have been surprised and flattered to see my own name offered up for consideration by board members I have never met or befriended. I get a kick out of that every time it happens. It is a nice reminder that, when I do my job well, I produce content that provides entertainment value to a large number of people I have never even met. That is certainly one of the most rewarding aspects of being a content provider of any sort.

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

Readers of my *Animal Races* series will have noticed the various genealogical charts that appear throughout that series. These charts tie the various animal races together through a shared set of ancestors. They also serve as a preview of future titles in the *Animal Races* series, naming the many animal clans that lend their names to the individual products in the series.

Now for the teaser: on the genealogy chart included in *Animal Races: Clan of the Turtle*, readers will notice three references to unnamed "dead clans." Those clans, all of whom are based upon animals that are extinct in the real world, are not nearly as dead as that genealogy chart

suggests. Each of those "dead" clans will lend its name to an upcoming product in the *Animal Races* series.

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

You can purchase products published by Eric Morton Presents from DriveThruRPG.com and RPGNow.com, as well as the Paizo Store at paizo.com/store. If you have instead borrowed one of our products from a peer, please consider supporting Eric Morton Presents by purchasing something we have published in the future.









## Animal Races: Clan of the Dog



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## Animal Races: Clan of the Bear



# Animal Races: Clan of the Raccoon



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# "Oh, Yeah!"



### Reviews

#### Mythic Magic: Advanced Spells I

**Publisher:** Legendary Games **Reviewer:** Thilo Graf **Stars:** Five stars out of Five!



This massive book clocks in at 64 pages, 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial, 1 page RSD, 2 pages of ToC, 2 pages of introduction, 1 page advertisement, 1 page back cover, leaving us with 55 (!!!) pages of content, so let's take a look!

At this point, I assume you are familiar with the basic premise of the mythic magic-series – essentially, we receive all those delicious spells that are

not included in the original Mythic Adventures hardcover in their mythic versions, with each book covering quite a bit of ground – this one taking perhaps THE defining Pathfinder book, the APG. No other book has for me coined a distinct, unique identity for Pathfinder more than the APG – it turned Pathfinder from 3.75 into a proper, truly distinct system.

The pdf kicks off with an alphabetical spell-list - one that is 4 (!!!) pages long. Yeah, that ought to provide some inkling of what to expect here! Well, let's take a look at the very first spell herein, absorbing touch: The mythic version allows you to absorb magic items and via the first augment, even use them while they are absorbed if their powers are continuous and independent of the physical interaction, i.e. not rope of climbingabuse; wands, etc., use up twice the charges, making for a cool caveat. On a very nitpicky side, the wording could benefit from having "wand" generalized to encompass staves and other charge-using items.. On the "awesomecake"-side, the second augment allows you to absorb willing or helpless creatures - extractions, rescue missions and kidnappings have just become much more awesome – when a spell allows for new storytelling mechanics, you know you've stumbled across something cool!

Of course, not all different mythic versions receive such a wordy, complex upgrade – there simply is no need. Accelerating all poisons instead of one? Yeah, works! Now *alchemical allocation* allows you to spit a potion or elixir back into its container without consuming it, but at the cost of 1/2 durations of subsequent sipping from the potion. Like it! Are you commanding a fleet? *Alter Winds* can be now augmented to affect a radius of one mile... just sayin'.

Adding maximized and empowered effects to your extracts also makes for a nice, crunchy upgrade. One of my players' favorites, *ant haul*, now has mythic tier added to the effective Str-score for carrying capacity. Less straightforward, the additional options for metamagic

feats provided by *arcane concordance* deserves special mention – neat! *Ball lightning*, per se a none-too-interesting spell, via this book suddenly becomes unique, adding electromagnetic properties for mythic power at 5th level to the array for unique, cool benefits. Speaking of which, *Blood Biography* is investigation module gold – what is your home, asking for immunities/resistances and information on kin can be gleaned – and that's not where the improved version ends. G-L-O-R-I-O-U-S. If you require inspiration on how to craft a whole module around this spell, drop me a line.

But not all spells tie in with story-telling or simply increase numerical values. There is another class of spells herein that ties in with proper class abilities. Take Coward's Lament: not only does it tie the reset of penalties incurred by the base spell to a Willsave, it also increases an inquisitor's judgments in potency by the penalty AND upgrades your bane attacks to greater bane. This level of ability/spell-synergy makes for rather cool combo-potential and further helps set apart exclusive spells for certain classes, increasing the uniquenessfactor of the options available for them. Formerly subpar options like the *divine transfer* of the paladin have their mythic version increase the potency and thus render the spell as such much more viable, even before the further augmentation - which allows you to breath of life deceased targets. Pretty cool and thematically fitting!

Speaking of further distinctions, each element that can be chosen via *elemental touch* comes with its own distinct additional effects, lending more tactical depth to element selection as well as distinction for different specialists that prefer one element over another. *Fester's* mechanic (which decreases non-SR healing by 50% + 5% per mythic tier) may seem a bit clunky mechanicswise, but the pretty awesome result makes up for the slightly math intensive formula. (I am assuming you can't calculate 55% of your cleric's channel in your head. While I'm pretty good at math like that, I've seen games slowed by formulas like this, so yeah, a slightly less complicated one that increased 2 to 75% and 100% respectively would probably have been more user-friendly.)

On the cool side, what about using mythic power to scry those subject to your follow aura spell? Yes, I can see the vast potential for espionage and similar action here. Flanking with foe to friended characters also makes for quite a cool combo that adds a bit of tactical depth to the whole scenario. Action economy also receives some interesting tactical modifications; frozen note, for example, allows its maintenance while 5-foot-stepping. Another cool design decision would pertain to creature qualities interacting with spells; with geyser, for example, those creatures with the burn quality hit by it may have their abilities suppressed. Another cool component is the spell-terrain-synergy; adding heavy undergrowth or dense rubble to hide campsite would be just what the doctor ordered! What about selectively greased lily pads that send your foes into the pond, while you and your allies escape?

*Purging Finale* also is interesting: by ending a bardic performance, a negative condition can be removed. An

awesome concept and if you like it, might I suggest the maestro class' outros? Eidolon rejuvenation-spells have also been expanded, with options to decrease hit point healing and instead heal negative conditions/ability damage/drain. *Rest Eternal* also has yet another unique option available: as long as you have the spell prepared, you can utilize mythic power to spontaneously cast it on yourself, preventing you from joining the undead legions, potentially even ignoring the material components! Mythic *Slipstream* lets you ignore caltrops and similar impediments and can be discharged for a massive tierdependent movement rate bonus and even mobility-like bonuses.

Applying simple mythic templates to *snake staves*, while *transmute potion to poison* allows you to manufacture specific poisons and yes, spit them. Adding immediate action-based retribution-blasts to *winds of vengeance*?Yes, please!

#### **Conclusion:**

Editing and formatting is very good, better than in Ultimate Spells I. While I noticed a couple of minor bolding glitches, nothing particularly serious came up. Layout adheres to Legendary Games' two-column fullcolor standard and the pdf's artworks are nice, though fans of Legendary Games may recognize them from previous supplements. The pdf comes extensively bookmarked, though, weirdly, with a couple of spells listed before the proper bookmarks in alphabetical order begin - something seems to have gone slightly awry there, though this does not impend functionality. It should be noted that this pdf is extensively hyperlinked to d2opfsrd.com - each and every spell has a link to help you. Kudos for going the extra mile (even terrain peculiarities, etc., are hyperlinked )!

Jason Nelson, Jeff Lee and Morgan Boehringer have crafted a vast array of mythic spell-upgrades for perhaps the most crucial base book among the PFRPG hardcovers released so far – and this book delivers. While there are slightly more numerical-increase mythic adaptations herein than in the last Mythic Magicbook, that is also due to the significantly higher page-count. Let's cut to the chase - this is absolutely non-optional. If you run a mythic campaign that is not core-rulebook + MA only (and why would you?), there's simply no way past this pdf. Not only are \*many\* spells downright inspired in their synergy and uncommon improvements, they belong to what amounts to the very basic minimum rulekit one expects (or at least I do) from a campaign. Instead of just delivering a default job, the designers went above and beyond the first two Mythic Magicinstallments to make this book and its spells stand out, feel distinct, and most importantly, diversified them. Instead of simply going into the depth, many options herein go into the breadth, enriching the game rather than simply adding numerical escalation.

This is a required book for any mythic campaign; and yes, it has slightly more glitches than I like to see, but no game-breakers, and that, alongside its sheer creativity and breadth, are what makes this stand out. It's not perfect, but for such a straightforward topic as "make mythic spells of all of these," the designers have managed to retain a freshness and playfulness that suffuses these pages and makes the read inspiring. It may not be perfect, but I quite frankly don't care in the face of creativity like this. Final verdict: 5 stars + seal of approval.

Endzeitgeist out.

#### Prestige Archetypes

**Publisher:** Purple Duck Games **Reviewer:** Thilo Graf **Rating:** 5 stars out of 5!

This installment of the Prestige Archetype-series clocks in at 8 pages, 1 page front cover, 1 page SRD,  $\sim 1/2$  a page of editorial, leaving us with 5 1/2 pages of content, so let's take a look!

First question: what are prestige archetypes? Well, they are essentially a breakdown of a regular PrC into a full-

blown 20-level spanning class. These classes don't necessarily mean that you'll have a universal archetype (wouldn't have worked in this context, I think). Instead, it provides a retooled playing experience so you don't have to work your way up to the desired PrC via classes you don't want to play. So that's definitely a pro-side. On the con-side, \*personally\*, I treat PrCs as very much tied to organizations etc., emphasizing the "prestige"-component as opposed to archetypes, which are more like traditions in my game. I'm therefore not the target audience of these books, but I will take a stab at them anyways.

The assassin, as crafted here, must be non-good, and receives: a good Reflex-save; 3/4 BAB-progression; d8; proficiency with crossbows, blowguns, daggers, darts, rapiers, short bows, saps, short swords, and shields; and a massive 8+ Int skills per level. They also receive sneak attack, progressing up to +10d6. The assassin also receives the option to forgo 1d6 sneak damage to demoralize targets, more d6 increasing the chances the demoralize works on a 1d6 for +5-ratio. A 4th level death attack is two levels below what the PrC receives, as it can only be taken after receiving 5 ranks in stealth. Not a fan of this decision.

Receiving better options for hiding weapons, evasion and uncanny dodge – all solid. An awareness of slain targets returning to life is downright brilliant. True Death is unlocked at 8th level and quiet/swift death fit at 10th and 18th level. A new dual capstone of master strikes and soul bind manages what the PrC fails at: making resurrection HARD.

The material also provides advice on the option to trade in sneak attack for rogue talents to bring some flexibility back. The favored class options of the coreraces are solid.

We also receive NPC-builds of level 1, 5, 10 and 15.



#### Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are very good; I noticed no truly significant glitches. Layout adheres to Purple Duck Games printer-friendly two-column standard and the pdf comes fully bookmarked for your convenience.

Carl Cramér's take on the assassin can be summed up as "a rogue on speed" and it honestly works rather well. Why? Well, for one, the rogue is, even with talented/ gloryupdates not a powerful class. The death attack, while extremely powerful, still requires a lot of set-up. The resurrection-sense is downright brilliant. The new capstones are actually worth the name. The massive skillincrease to 8 (in contrast to 4 of the PrC) may seem like too much, but for me, it works. From poison use to angel of death, etc., all the iconic tricks are here, and paid for by a decreased flexibility. I would complain about this, but the note on alternatively allowing for rogue talent access constitutes this variety: If you think rogues are fine, maintain the linear nature of the assassin as a balance tool. If you think it needs an upgrade, go for the flexible version that can learn talents.

I love this Prestige Archetype and fans of assassins and rogues will want to check this out. It triumphs where the PrC fails, prevents low-level death attack-spamming abuse, and provides a damn cool take on the assassin. Two thumbs up - 5 stars +seal of approval!

Endzeitgeist out.

#### Urban Dressing: Borderland Jown



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

This installment of what I'd tentatively call the "new" Urban Dressing-series clocks in at 12 pages, 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial/ToC, 1 page SRD, 1 page advertisement, 1 page back cover, leaving us with 7 pages of content,

so let's take a look!

First: What do I mean by "new" Urban Dressing? Well, the first run of the series had a certain hit-andmiss quality; It endeavored to take components of the city and use the Dressing-formula to depict them. Alas, cities are complex and organic and the success was not always guaranteed. Then, with a certain pirate town, the series changed, moving away from describing a single component (like a park/temple etc. and failing to take some moving bit or another into account), instead focusing on a general theme and the means for the DM to evoke this theme. This, then would be the third of these new Urban Dressings. We begin our trek through the Borderland Town with a table of sights and sounds one may encounter. Spanning two pages and featuring drunken warriors, mercenaries, heads mounted on iron spikes and similar portents of a harsh environment, we have quite an array of great mood-setting pieces.

The second table sports sample businesses. From inns with great food but drafty rooms to torchlighter guilds and places for convalescence, etc., the 50-entry strong table sports an array of businesses whose very presence in a town may well spark an adventure hook! If you're like me, you have a couple of key NPCs when designing a town (those you require for a given adventure to work) and then you create some red herrings and common folk (which you develop later). This pdf takes some of that work off your shoulders with 50 sample folk in a table, all sporting a cosmetic peculiarity or a special mannerism that helps make them distinct, while also featuring race and suggested level/class in brackets.

Finally, we receive a table of 20 hooks and complications for those times you really had no time whatsoever to prepare anything – alarm bells, providing covert-ops intelligence on the town's militia or dead soldiers of a neighboring kingdom – there are plenty of different ways to develop each of them.

Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are top-notch, I noticed no glitches. Layout adheres to Raging Swan Press' 2-column b/w-standard and the artwork is thematically fitting b/w-stock. The pdf comes fully bookmarked and in two versions – one optimized for the printer and one optimized for screen-use.

Josh Vogt's take on Borderland Towns, at least for me, leaves nothing to be desired – atmospheric, studded with easily implemented, yet never generic (at least in the derogative meaning of the word) entries, this installment of Urban Dressing is extremely useful.

Now, personally, I would have liked to see at times a clearer distinction between borderland themes versus ones that could be applied to frontier's towns, but that may just be me being terribly nitpicky. This pdf isuseful, fun and well worth a final rating of 5 stars, just short of my seal of approval.

Endzeitgeist out.

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#### Shadows over Wathak: The Colonies GMs Guide

**Publisher:** Fat Goblin Games **Reviewer:** Thilo Graf **Rating:** 5 stars out of 5!

This GM's Guide clock in at 42 pages, 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial, 1 page ToC, 1 page SRD and 1 page back cover, leaving us with 37 pages of content, so let's



take a look!

Analogue to the Player's Guide, the DM's Guide begins with hand-outlevel detailed parchments providing an aptly-written in-character introduction to the matter at hand and provide a solid example of the threat suffusing the setting - and then, we dive into the respective local material. From the get-go,

one realizes one thing - the crew of Fat Goblin Games obviously realized what ought to be in the GM's guide - where the player's guide sported tantalizing hints and general information on towns, the GM's guide provides full-blown settlement statblocks. On a extremely nitpicky side, I'm not a fan of round numbers for the demographics listed for the various cities; I prefer exact numbers over general notions of population, but I'm aware that this is just me being exceedingly anal-retentive and hence will not influence the final verdict. No less than 10 settlements are provided - nice! But that's not where the pdf stops from eerie forests to cyclopean statues, quite a few local sights are provided for the DM to be inspired by and/or expand upon.

And then, immediately, the supplement turns into one downright inspiring read by providing a selection of fluffonly NPC-write-ups - and oh boy, are they AWESOME. Want examples? From shrewd politicians to cult leaders unwittingly under the control of Mi-Go to insane vampire alchemists, dhampir pseudo-monasteries seeking to teach about controlling bloodlust to twisted serial killers and beyond, these NPC-write-ups are glorious! Beyond them, we also are introduced to the local factions. From the ancient vampiric bloodlines to the werewolf packs roaming the land on to the enigmatic Church of the Unspeakable Masses and the mysterious Many Masks, quite a significant array of cool, inspiring information is given.

But that does not necessarily provide the DM with the tools to properly depict life in the colonies and that's exactly where the pdf goes next - from general information to local holidays that OOZE flavor and yes, even common phrases that have their own significance, the material can be considered downright glorious - mainly due to, for the first time, managing to provide a concise, believable vista of what life in a dread realm like Vathak would be like - without devolving into grimdark splatter-fests, instead focusing on more subtle hints and hooks. Now speaking of locations - here, the guide just becomes more awesome - a number of locations are provided alongside DCs to gather information about them. HOWEVER, unlike \*every\* similar entry I've read, the information provided is just as extensive for those failing the check as for those succeeding in it, rendering the whole experience awesome. Yes, you will want to roll these checks yourself as a DM and the wealth of information provided for either way ensures that proper story-telling will continue either way. Two thumbs up! Better, further information to be unearthed via non-specified means (PCs asking allies etc.) also reaches that level of detail, allowing DMs to easily craft a rather detailed panorama/adventure via these pieces of information provided.

Speaking of the DM - Vathak has suffered in the past from a lack of focus - does it want to be gothic horror. cosmic horror or survival horror - while it supported all playstyles, its identity suffered and hence, the extensive pieces of advice provided for either playstyle and what to consider when running them should be useful for DMs. Speaking of variance - one of the things that annoved me with the default vampires (and indeed, even with the expanded rules provided by Paizo) would be a lack of variables - we receive herein more than 3 pages of content providing alternate defenses and weaknesses, rules for more powerful, elder vampires etc. - a nice little toolkit. though honestly one I'd have loved to be expanded into a full-blown mega-template book. But that's just the Ravenloft-spoiled DM speaking who made 21 unique bloodlines (not the sorceror class feature) for vampires for his home game.

We also receive two new monsters, each with their own, glorious artwork - the worm/wolf hybrdi Volworms and the bloodsucking vamplings - I didn't do the math, but at first glance, I noticed no glitches in the statblocks - kudos!

#### Conclusion:

Editing and formatting this time around are VERY good - I noticed no significant glitches or issues. Layout adheres to Vathak's two-column full-color standard with glorious full-color original artworks - this book is drop dead gorgeous to look at. Alas, oddly, the pdf lacks any bookmarks, making navigation slightly less comfortable than it ought to be.

If you've been following my reviews, you'll probably know that my first love as a campaign setting will always be Ravenloft. I adore the setting, its content and lore and have managed to track down each and every product for it. It is with the utmost respect I thus say the following - this is the best land/region-sourcebook I've read for any horror-themed/setting are since the legendary series of Doomsday Gazetteers by Arthaus or the superb free work by the Fraternity of Shadows. Author John Bennett finally manages to provide a distinct, concise voice for Vathak, one that gets what makes the respective modes of horror tick and work. Even if you are not using Vathak, this supplement can be considered an inspiring and fun read for DMs - its prose is vivid and fluent, its ideas diverse and whether its Carrion Crown, Ravenloft or any other horror-themed setting -you'll probably get some awesome ideas out of this - the information can easily be extracted. That being said, this supplement, more so than the massive campaign setting, manages to generate a proper identity for Vathak. Add to that the nice vampiric expansion material and neat bonus critters and I arrive at a final verdict of 5 stars + seal of approval, in spite of the missing bookmarks. If that is the level of quality we

can now expect from Vathak-supplements, consider me utterly hyped!

Endzeitgeist out.

#### Ultimate Ethermagic

**Publisher:** Interjection Games **Reviewer:** Thilo Graf **Rating:** 5 stars out of 5 stars!



This massive book clocks in at 94 pages, 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial/ToC, 1 page SRD, leaving us with a massive 91 pages of content, so let's...wait. First, here's my

**DISCLAIMER:** I have a history with ethermagic. When Bradley Crouch first made the ethermancer, I was skeptical – another warlockstyle "blast all day"-class? Urgh. In my experience, they boiled down to

inflexible blasters that at the same time made logic for the very existence of bows et al. tenuous at best, were utterly OP OR resulted in plain boring gameplay. Upon diving into the class, I realized two things -a), it is a complex class indeed and b), I'd have to playtest it to properly judge it. And oh boy, did it playtest well! One of my players fell totally in love with the class and wrote an optimization guide for it. The only reason I did not completely gush about it was the existence of quite a few options that did not make much sense for the ethermancer. Fast forward to the Strange Magic Kickstarter, of which this is the first release. At this point, I had seen half a year of ethermancer in action in my main campaign and started tinkering with the system to expand it. When Bradley asked me to join the KS as a guest author alongside Jason Linker, I jumped the chance. I feel obliged to mention that I was compensated for my work on this book. However, there are significant bunches of content I had no hand in whatsoever. Additionally, I have before criticized products I contributed to and thus, will do my best to analyze, break, etc. this system, just like in all my other reviews. I felt obliged to mention this and should you consider my involvement a conflict of interest, feel free to tell me so - I am confident, however, that analysis of this book will suffice to prove the validity of the points I make in this review.

All right, that out of the way, let's dive in! If you are familiar with the basic ethermancer, you'll be surprised to see that the first class herein is NOT the old one, but rather Jason Linker's Ethermagus. But before I jump into the meat of the 3 classes, let me explain how ethermagic works, all right?

Ethermagic can be explained as pricking a whole into the fabric of reality, channeling the very stuff that separates planes and realities in a unique manner – the ability to channel this power is measured in etherpoints, or EP – so far, so common. However, unlike many similar resources, EP regenerate each round, depending on the formula of the respective base class. The EP regeneration rate is also featured for convenience's sake in the respective class-feature-tables. Ethermagic is generally treated as evocation magic and tight rules for counterspelling ethermagic are provided - though regular caster should be advised not to try to outcast an ethercaster. Additionally, much like spells, manifestations are grouped by level the higher your level, the higher the level of manifestation you may learn. Wait, what? Manifestations? Well, yes. Etherspells have two components - the etherheart and the manifestations applied to it. Etherhearts are gained at specific levels in the class progression and allow the respective class to do different things - think about them as a chassis, to which manifestations can be applied. To use a manifestation, an ether-using class needs to have at least a cha of 10+manifestation-level and the save DC is 10+highest manifestation level used + charisma modifier, analogue to spells. However, not all etherhearts become available to all classes. Let me give you a run-down:

The most basic of etherhearts would be the lesser blasts – these have a close range and constitute touch attack rays that deal 1d3+cha-mod bludgeoning damage, +1d3 for every caster level beyond 1st for the ethermancer. Ethermagi and etherslingers have significantly less scaling at 1/2 and 1/4 class level respectively. Up to 3 manifestations can be applied to them and there is no minimum number of manifestations.

Greater blasts, exclusively available to the ethermancer, have the same range, but deal 1d10+cha-mod damage, +1d10 for every 2 caster levels beyond the first. Like its lesser brother, a total of 3 manifestations can be added and there is no minimum number of manifestations.

A further, pretty basic etherheart available to all ethermagic users would be the alteration etherheart – this can be considered the utility/defense etherheart with a range of personal and a duration of 1 min/level. Duration deserves special mention here – with the exception of one etherheart, etherspells cannot be dismissed. Additionally, alterations can be modified by exactly one manifestation and only one alteration can be in effect at a given time.

The Bestow etherheart would in effect be similar to the alteration etherheart in that it sports a duration, requires exactly one manifestation to be added to it, but unlike alteration, bestow etherhearts in effect reduce the maximum EP-pool for as long they persist – essentially, the EP used in maintaining the etherspell are only regenerated once the etherspell has run its course. Unlike alteration etherspells, those cast via the bestow etherheart need to be delivered via a touch attack and cannot be targeted at the ethermagic-using class.

The Genesis etherheart, available for ethermancer and etherslinger, conjures objects out of thin ether – once again, exactly one manifestation can be added to the etherheart. The effect is permanent, as long as the object remains within close proximity of its creator, however, like bestow effects, EP remain reduced for as long as the genesis etherspell exists. Unlike any other etherheart, a genesis etherspell can be dismissed at any given time.

The ethermagus' exclusive etherheart, Voidmeld,

also has a personal range and applies to the void blade of the ethermagus (more on that later). It also reduces the ethermagus' maximum EP analogue to Bestow for as long as it persists, but unlike it, voidmeld etherspells can be dismissed by dismissing the void blade upon which they're cast. Unlike all other etherhearts, voidmeld etherspells have a base casting time of only a swift action, as opposed to the default standard action. (Which can be superseded by manifestations applied – only the highest casting duration counts.) Another peculiarity of the voidmeld etherheart would be the fact that one may apply as many manifestations as one likes, provided the total of their combined levels remains below the highest manifestation level the ethermagus knows. Once again, only one voidmeld can be in effect at a given time.

You may have noticed that obviously, etherspells seem to scale with levels and this is reflected in their cost – to cast an alteration etherspell, for example, one has to pay the base cost of the etherheart, plus the EP-cost of the manifestation applied. The base EP-costs of the etherhearts scale with levels – in the case of alteration, the base cost would be 1+1/4 caster level, rounded down. There is one more restriction imposed on ethermagic – you cannot learn more manifestations for a given etherheart than you have at a lower level – if you for example know 2 3rd level blast manifestations, you can't learn another manifestation unless you have at least 3 2nd level blast manifestations – think of it as a pyramid rule for each etherheart.

While all of this may sound complex (and the math behind it \*is\* complex, believe me...), it's really easy to understand once you wrap your head around it – whether by a manabar or pool or by cooldown timers, the ways to visualize the system are plentiful.

Okay, before I go into the basics of manifestations, let's take a look at all the classes and goodies herein, all right?

The ethermagus comes with a 3/4 BAB-progression, good fort and will-saves, d8, 4+Int skills per level, proficiency with simple weapons and light armor (and no spell failure chance in light armor), a maximum manifestation level of 5 and an ether regeneration rate that scales up from 1 EP per round to 7 at 20th level. An ethermagus has access to the voidmeld etherheart at 1st level, learns the lesser blast etherheart at 2nd level and the alteration etherheart at 5th level. Ethermagi learn up to 12 voidmeld manifestations, 13 lesser blast manifestations and 9 alteration manifestations over the course of their 20-level progression. At 10th level, lesser blasts executed by the ethermagus receive a damagebonus equal to 1/2 class level.

Additionally, starting at 1st level, ethermagi can manifest void blades drawn from the ether – these can be either light or medium one-handed weapons that deal either slashing or piercing damage, chosen upon the manifestation of the blade. The entry also features information on hardness and hit points. Starting at 4th level, all void blades receive a +1 enhancement bonus, +1 every 4 levels thereafter and at 11th and 20th level, their damage dice increase by one step. At 7th level, the void blade receives the defending quality and at 9th level, the ethermagus may expend 3 EP to temporarily entangle targets hit by your blade.

At 2nd level, ethermagi may execute so-called etherstrikes, delivering lesser blast etherspells with their void blade analogue to spellstrike – and yes, the wording gets it right. At 3rd level, the ethermagus can regain 1 EP whenever he reduces a target creature of at least 1/2 class level HD to 0 HP or below via an attack with the void blade or a lesser blast etherspell. Particularly interesting, at 11th level, the improved ether surge allows for the addition of one non-stacking additional non-shape manifestation to the next lesser blast he executes.

At 5th level, the thoroughly solid ether variant of spellcombat (sans concentration penalty-ambiguity!) is gained. At higher levels, the ethermagus additionally receives a bonus to concentration checks made in ether combat and at high levels, double the opted penalty is received as a bonus instead.

Continuous exposure to ether hardens the ethermagus' musculature and thus, the class receives a +2 bonus to one physical attribute at 13th level, another +2 to a score not chosen at 13th level at 17th and at 15th level, the ethermagus may 1/day knock a foe prone and pin the foe; +1/day at 20th level, where this can also be executed with blasts. A decompressing shock can be used with EP to end this prone condition/pinning, but deal nasty damage. The capstone, beyond aforementioned effects, can now also be shaped and create/dismiss the void blade as a swift action.

The class comes with excessive FCOs for core races, plane-touched races, puddlings, orcs, hobgoblins, drow, kobolds, vishkanya, kitsune and vanara.

Kickstarter backer Mathew Duckwitz has sponsored the Mad Evangelst archetype, who replaces spellcombat and its follow-up abilities with a metamorphosis pool of class level + cha-mod. Upon slaving targets, the mad evangelist may expend metamorphosis points equal to the slain creature's HD to revive it as a zombie under the control of the evangelist after creature's HD rounds. To maintain the revived creature, the evangelist has to spend the points again upon their regeneration, essentially making this a kind of minion pool. At 3rd level, these revived creatures may be modified at metamorphosis pool cost via an array of so-called "Aspects of the Master" - an array of options that becomes expanded at 6th level and every 3 levels thereafter by +1 aspect. Some of these aspects have the [variant] descriptor, denoting that only one such piece can be applied to a given zombie somewhat akin to tinker designs.

From touchy cilia to flanking prevention sores, applying various templates (aforementioned variants) and similar tricks, the aspects allow for some damn cool modifications...and they have rather cool synergy with the base class – think of it as a cooler version of the Battlefield Defiler archetype for the magus, with truly unique, customizable zombies.

Instead of aberrant musculature and bonus feats, the evangelist also may choose from an array of gifts from beyond – from developing a vast plethora of eyes, to fast healing and even an ether powered gaze attack, these

gifts are pretty damn awesome – mostly due to simply not being boring – want an example? Well, fast healing sounds bland, right? Well, this kind of fast healing can be activated reflexively to e.g. survive the effects of being vorpal'd as a severed head – if the head is healed to max HP within one minute, it regrows the body and is fine; Otherwise it dies – now come on, is that a unique, cool last-second save mechanism or what? Or what about a whippy tentacle that can be used to deliver voidmeld manifestations as an exception to the void blade only rule? Yeah, pretty awesome! Also rather interesting from a mechanical standpoint – at 14th level, the mad evangelist becomes immune to either fear, disease or poison – but at the cost of susceptibility to the other two!

The second archetype would be the Void Stalker, essentially a more roguish ethermagus with increases skills per level. In addition to light and medium weapons, these guys may select double weapons as void blades and receives sneak attack at 2nd level, +1d6 every 3 levels thereafter, but pay for these tricks with the lesser blast ether heart, etherstrike and ethercombat. Rather cool - they can dim the lights (at the cost of 1 EP per round and no ether regeneration), greatly boosting stealth and even providing a miss chance at higher levels instead of ethersurge. The void stalker also receives a rogue talent at 4th level (advanced talents at 13th level) and every 3 levels thereafter, but may not choose the same talent twice and cannot select ninja tricks, but pays for this flexibility with the alteration etherheart - which is good, since the combo-potential would have been pretty insane - but don't fret: The iconic ultraviolet shift is gained at 10th level (in a unique modification with reduced costs, analogue to the stealth-enhancer mentioned above) and uncanny dodge, evasion etc. should help get over the absence of this etherheart. The vorpal capstone is also nice.

Next up hereafter would be the voidstar – instead of a voidblade, 3+1/2 class level void star shuriken constitute the targets of the voidmelds of this archetype and receives an increased limit of voidmeld manifestations to apply to these shurikens, scaling up to +3 at 13th level. Instead of etherstrike, 5th level grants the ability to treat said stars as either silver, cold iron or adamantine for the purpose of bypassing DR and instead of void shield, this one receives keen shuriken – while this looks nasty on paper, the math checks out – nice, kind of ninja-ish/halfling-ish throwing specialist.

Ethermancers are the full casters of the bunch and since I have already written a more than excessive review on them AND already explained the basics of ethermagic, I will refrain from going through this guy in detail – though it should be noted that the previously somewhat uneven multiuniversal philosophies (the taking of which also determines the capstone!) have been streamlined and expanded – limited x/day reduction of EP-costs for bestow etherspells, increased raw damage output for less- or unmodified greater blasts, resistance reduction – these class features have been upgraded from "well, that exists, too" to cool enhancers that can be used to increase the effectiveness of various playstyles – increased hit points, limited instant EP-regeneration equal to cha-mod etc. – so much choices and by now, they're actually pretty hard and diverse, eliminating one of my gripes with the original iteration of the class. A fortification-like scaling effect and a 1 immune, 2 susceptible choice is still in the ring. The FCOs are more diverse than before as well!

Kickstarter backer Alexander W. Corrin has granted us the etherfuser, a class that can generate a fusion pool by reducing the maximum EP available on a point by point basis, allowing you to essentially trade the regenerating EP for the non-regenerating FP in the form of ether jelly. This gooey stuff can be used to create etherfusions that are treated as etherspells of the highest manifestation level known with a range of 30 ft., etc., but unlike etherspells, they scale with levels in an additional way – they unlock modifiers over the levels. The fusion that nets temporary hit points on a round by round basis can thus e.g. be increased to provide more every round and/or also net minor DR. What about curing ability damage and freely diving the points cured among damaged attributes? Defense buffs? Setting targets on fire?

Well, things get better – the archetype receives a unique, FP-enhancing philosophy (accessible only via a feat, alas – the general class feature is not gained!) AND learns a variant of lay on hands powered by ether jelly AND even the option to learn mercies (and duplicate the effects of cruelties via an etherfusion...), modifying even extra mercy et al. to properly work with this unique new take on healing. Essentially, these guys are ethermancers that can spontaneously reduce their pool to provide healing for their allies – damn cool concept and glorious execution!

Next up would be the Herald of Creation, essentially a specialist of alteration and genesis etherhearts, complete with increased EP-regeneration while under the effects of alterations, 2 unique multiuniversal philosophies (one of which allows for alteration-blankets at increased costs a limited amount of times per day) and thus also two new capstones - essentially the first of what I'd call specialistarchetypes. The second would be the Herald of Madness, who receives access to gifts from beyond, with some overlap with aforementioned mad evangelist, but also quite an array of exclusive gifts that help the different playstyle - hanging on walls, better touch attacks - rather cool options, including a +2d4 initiative boost, which may see you staggered on a roll of twice the same number - rather nice gamble! The archetype receives an exclusive philosophy for more gifts, the option to lace his bestow etherspells with confusion effects, but also makes the spell mind-affecting. Then again, bestowing is so much easier with a handy tentacle growing from your body... Oh, and the capstone has a confusion-causing aura as well as an aberration apotheosis. The final Herald would be the Herald of the Void, who is a specialist of greater manifestations -but more on that system later. The interstitial philosopher then would be an ethermancer who forgoes greater blasts, aberrant physiology

and aberrant form in favor of more multiuniversal philosophies and feats for massive flexibility.

The third base-class in the book would be mine, the Etherslinger, so let me explain to you the basics of the class – essentially, I noticed that gunslingers don't play particularly versatile or interesting. I love a bunch of the design decisions of the class to death, but especially in low powered campaigns and low levels, the action economy penalty, the costly ammunition, the inability to use guns with stealth - all these conspired to make the class less interesting than it should be. On a design perspective, at high levels full BAB touch at close range makes hitting ridiculously easy and the auto-granted deeds, while cool, do not allow for much customization – per default rules, there's not much variety between gunslingers. This class is designed to get rid of all of that and more. The class thus receives d8, 3/4 BAB-progression, 4+Int skills, proficiency with simple weapons and firearms and light armors and bucklers, the latter sans spell failure. Etherslingers receive class level + cha-mod EP and EP-regeneration equal to 1/3 class level, rounded up. The etherslinger's caster level is equal to 3/4 her class level. Her blasts only scale up every 4 levels, but has no etherheart at 1st level - so what does she do with the EP? Well, the class receives a linear set of base abilities called etherslinging that improves in a linear way over the levels - up to cha-mod EP can be spent per round in etherslinging abilities. These allow the etherslinger to expend EP for skill-bonuses, bonuses to her next attack... and more importantly, make the use of firearms more versatile. How?

Well, first of all, the etherslinger can repair her starting gun with ether clear as an EP-costing standard action no more "damn, I botched, now my gun is done for the battle"-crap. (Oh, and it can be further hastened by also expending grit - more on that later!) Additionally, the etherslinger may stabilize the gun to decrease misfire rates. Now at 3rd level, the etherslinger may directly generate etherbullets and propellant in her gun - these do not cost anything! No more annoyed eye-rolling at the slinger for the expensive ammunition and bullets. These ephemeral bullets, though, at least at low levels, dissipate beyond the second range increment, thus not invalidating regular bullets. At 9th level, they increase their range and at 17th level, proper sniping with these bullets becomes possible. Better yet, the action-type required to reload them can be lessened by the expenditure of EP and grit and at higher levels, free action reloads can be executed. Have I mentioned the ability to select damage types at higher levels, including elemental damage-types starting 13th level? Additionally, the etherslinging allows you to treat your guns as if they had an increased capacity for etherbullets - capacity +1 at 5th level, +2 at 15th level.

An etherslinger also receives a grit pool of up to wismod points of grit that follow the usual rules, but do not apply to deeds – instead, the etherslinger, beyond the ways to expend grit via etherslinging, has several unique tricks that require at least one grit or that require the expenditure of grit. Speaking of which – while the etherslinger needs guns to cast etherspells (now that's gun-obsession for you...), the class can also gaze 1/day as an immediate action at her gun to regain 1 grit, +1/dayat 10th and 20th level. So, instead of grit, etherslingers receive etherslinger talents - one at 2nd level, +1 for every 2 class level after the 2nd. These talents range from passive gains of abilities while she has a minimum amount of grit available to special, active tricks that let her combine the casting (or duration-extension) of an alteration manifestation with a ranged firearm attack. What about shooting targets with the firearm and transporting the otherwise woefully short-ranged bestow etherspells to the target? Beyond that, there are quite a few unique things this class can do: What about shooting haunts and determining their destruction conditions? Making your guns water-proof and functional for that underwater adventure vou've been dreading? Wrapping allies in bestow effects while you put bullet holes into the opposition and spontaneous doppler dodges? Etherslingers can also cushion their own fall by shooting at the ground, cause misfires of opponents? I also made a couple of Lucky Luke-talents that allow the etherslinger especially fast draws of the weapon, particularly compelling for those planning a lot of ambushes.

Slightly increased damage output for blasts, using grit to temporarily boost your EP-regeneration rate provide a distinct array of options and builds. A pet-peeve of mine can also be eliminated - know how a firearm-user on board wrecks any infiltration? Well, talents for the etherslinger allow them to actually participate in scenarios like that, silencing their bullets - yes, these guys can go fullblown hitman with magical silencer! Like those movies or books, where special ammunition is prepared? Well, etherslingers can do just that - against creature types and even specific creatures, with increased damage output. The cost for stabilizing guns can also be permanently reduced by talents and causing flashes of light, ricochets and the like do sound like fun don't they? Indeed, the class can also learn to treat the target of the firearm as the origin of an etherspell (relevant for shaped blasts). But, as you may have noticed, the class is not primarily about damage output - it's about terrain control, versatility and non-crippling firearm use and both the blasts as well as the talents support that - but I have failed to mention so far the exceedingly cool option to shoot bullets into unoccupied squares, creating essentially Schrödinger's bullets - as soon as a hapless fool steps in the square, the bullet is unleashed, allowing you to generate either shortlived traps or, if you choose to select a couple of talents, energy-damage dealing minefields. In playtest, mining dungeon corridors for escape or for holding positions proved to be ample fun indeed, not to speak of the nasty ambushes you can make with these short-lived pocketdimension bullet-mines. High-level etherslingers may also destabilize their guns, increasing misfire and critical threat range and yes, making ether facsimiles of her gun is not beyond the capacities of the etherslinger - nasty surprise for those bandits that caught and disarmed all of you...

Oh, and then there are the capstone talents...what about e.g. the one that lets the etherslinger know when

an intelligent creature willingly utters here name and means her, allowing her to teleport to the target? Yeah, there are quite a few of tricks like that here...have I mentioned that the class receives access to all nonclass-exclusive etherhearts? Now I know this may look very powerful on paper, but MAD, small power pool, etc. result in a balanced overall contribution – most importantly, though, one that is versatile and fun. I am extremely proud of this class and I guarantee it's playing style is much more rewarding if you prefer variety over repetition and a certain level of complexity and tinkering.

One final note for the WuXia-aficionados – yes, there is a feat in here that grants you a grit-powered ki-pool (and the option to spend that ki on spontaneous bonuses to AC), opening quite an avenue of even further tricks if you want to use books like "Heroes of the Jade Oath", "Dragon Tiger Ox", etc.

(Feel free to tell me about your etherslinger's exploits via endzeitgeist.com's contact tab – I'd love to hear how my baby is doing out there! One last piece of advice – stay out of melee...)

We also receive a whole slew of new feats, which have since the original ethermancer-pdf's inception been redesigned and vastly expanded – from vastly improved base-feats to glorious feats that allow etherslingers to gain a small time-manipulation genesis manifestation to changing voidblade damage to your etherstrike etehrspell's energy type, the vast array of feats allows for some damn cool combinations indeed – including casting a limited array of alterations as spell-like abilities a couple of times per day!

Now the manifestations – oh boy! Not only are there \* a lot\*, they also are exceedingly flexible, from temporary EP to energy-damage buffers to reflexive damage and even tricks to convert energy damage into ether – the amount of fine-tuned and expanded alterations is awesome to see, especially since the choices that before were sub-par for the ethermancer now definitely work well for the ethermagus and etherslinger!

It should also be noted that especially alteration and bestow have received quite an array of damn cool options, many of which could be considered exceedingly interesting - what about e.g. making the target a conduit for madness - potentially spreading confusion to those nearby? Or what about trapping a target creature in dream combat with a deadly shadow of the subject's mind's own making? What about becoming a hastelike hyperspace beacon that can extend its benefits to the closest ally? What about linking two creatures with quantum indeterminacy, allowing them to swap places? Ever wanted to enable your allies to blast foes as with batteries of comets? Yup, now you can! Or what about making your allies into laser batteries that pummel foes with potentially blinding rays of light? The heretofore rather underrepresented greater blasts by now have a whole array of unique manifestations that can only be added to them. What about e.g. bouncing blasts? Yeah - damn cool. Speaking of which - genesis has also seen quite an array of new, cool options. Take e.g. the option to generate an anti-gravity (or gravity) well or making a blade with a stored blast etherspell inside? (And yes, the well allows you to use the rope of teh well to pull buckets of gravity from it...I laughed so hard when I read that...) Or perhaps you fancy a sand-filled hourglass wristband that allows you to increase your actions, but have time take its toll thereafter - pretty cool! Speaking of which making ephemeral copies of objects can be quite helpful when playing investigation-heavy scenarios. Or how about making a book of ether that stores your knowledgeskill for you, allowing others to benefit from it, but at the cost of not having the knowledge available for yourself? What about a short-range beacon to which to teleport back to?

The voidmeld etherheart, completely new, has a vast array of new tricks at your disposal – from fishing crits to power lesser blasts to breaking the +5 enchantment limit (and yes, the math checks out and is NOT broken) and receiving a non-kitten-able hit-healing trick are part of the deal. And you know you always wanted to hit something with the force of a black hole's event horizon... right?

Now I mentioned Greater Manifestations - these are an optional system you may elect to ignore, but in my opinion shouldn't - two options are provided: 1) An ethermancer may lose a manifestation and a multiuniversal philosophy slot to learn one of these. Option 2) opens them for all classes, including ethermagus/slinger via a feat - whether you allow limited access, full access or none - all left in your hands -and that is awesome. Greater manifestations can be cast 1/ day and essentially constitute the true "OMG, did you see that?" hard insta-death, crowd-control etc. tricks - 5 feats can be taken to enhance them/learn them and yes, the aforementioned multiuniversal philosophy also comes with an apotheosis. And greater manifestations are damn powerful -reducing the next etherspell's cost to o? Yep. Black Hole? Check. But the very cake is taken the new and advanced Clockwork Universe: You choose a sun and planets that provide varying passive and active effects as you craft a miniature galaxy – and yes, inhabited planets in this galaxy may send forth motherships to destroy your enemies whenever one other satellite in your clockwork universe is destroyed or consumed by throwing it at your foes. Oh, and, of course, desert planets (one of the various additions to this already brilliant manifestation) have especially high capacities for mother ships...Have I mentioned moon bases and their capacity to fire teenytiny-planet-cracker missiles at your foes? This massive greater manifestation was a beauty before - now it is just one gigantic, splendid piece of awesomeness. Insta-kills, maximized numeric effects - don't get me wrong, I love the other manifestations, but this one is just too cool. What about erasing all energy-affinity from a creature? Speaking of which: HAMSTER BALL OF DEATH. Okay, It's called Firmament, is made of crystal and protects you from just about every damage, but it also allows for

particularly devastating charges, hamsterball style. I \*love\* it! And yes, +3 manifestations for utterly massive blasts can also be chosen, as well as granting allies a taste of ether magic and a small, temporary pool. Oh, and yes, one may even resurrect creatures thanks to the powers of white holes!

#### Conclusion:

Editing and formatting were top-notch even before I went over it and by now, all potentially game-glitch issues are gone and wording should be fitting- at least I found none. Layout adheres to a damn cool, unique, 2-column b/w-standard with original b/w-character artworks and thematically-fitting stock-art. The pdf is rather printer-friendly and excessively bookmarked with nested bookmarks for your convenience.

Even before, ethermagic was awesome – but it suffered from being the playing ground of just one class and not all options being made for it. Then this book came. Jason Linker's Ethermagus' concept of godblades and lead designer Bradley Crouch's new and \*vastly\* improved ethermancer, with all their awesome ideas and tricks, their combos, their glorious fluff and crunch – these two alone would have carried this book. Well, I am admittedly biased towards my own etherslinger class – however, I have received quite a lot feedback – from both my players AND complete strangers how much they love this class. So there has got to be something going for it, right? ;)

Kidding aside - this system makes resourcemanagement fun. It lets you blast or magic-slice...or shoot ALL DAY LONG without breaking the game. Each and every class and archetype herein is unique and has something to offer - this is literally an all killer, no filler crunch book of awesomeness and ever since I have it in my hands, it has become a permanent fixture in my games - as indispensable as psionics or pact magic. Have I mentioned that its system could easily be used for the representation of the force or similar scifi-themed power-sources by just changing fluff? Yeah. For me, this is an EZG Essential, a candidate for my top ten of 2014 and deserves a final verdict of 5 stars + seal of approval. This is, even without anything I added, the best crunchbook I've seen in ages - innovative, fun, complex and yet, pretty easy to grasp. (And if you need explanations/ advice or just want to tell me about your experiences with this book, don't hesitate to contact me via my hp's contact tab.)

Endzeitgeist out.





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