March 2015 * issue 47







Doom of the Sky Sword

JON BRAZER

ENTERPRISES



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Greetings. This ain't your pappy's NPC book.

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Faces of the Tarnished Souk: An NPC Collection

by Matt Banach and Justin Sluder

Coming in March





Editorial

by Dave Paul

I feel differently about certain topics in the game when I am a player than I do when I'm a GM. In this month's issue we get a template that, from a player's point of view, might be really frustrating. If there's an enemy that cannot die (or, rather, that you come to believe, from lots of experience, that it cannot die), the game can get frustrating. If the player has a skilled GM (or the player knows the GM quite well), this can be mitigated somewhat. However, I have played in campaigns, adventures, or sessions that felt just plain unfair. As a GM, of course, things are much different. If I recognize that I've created a challenge too hard for my players, I'll drop hints (and make enormous effort for those hints to make sense within the context of the game and the characters) so that the players can figure out what they're supposed to do. There are circumstances, though, where this can be unwieldy as well.

In this case, the Nigh Invulnerable template allows the GM to create monsters that, but for one Achilles' heel, is actually unkillable. You could feed the monster to a tarrasque, teleport it to the center of the Sun, hold it under the River Styx, and it would come back, unharmed. In the wrong hands, this could be ruinous. Imagine a troll with this template, pestering a borderlands town. It would eventually kill everyone who couldn't permanently relocate away from it. Sure, it might be possible to trap it in some space so that, even though it couldn't be killed, it also couldn't cause anyone harm. But, the threat it would pose — the "What if it escapes?!"-scenario — would be unnerving.

With this template, especially in the example provided here, the Knowledge check required to learn of a resource that would lead the characters to learning the creature's vulnerable spot, is low. *This is important*. If a GM is going to throw a Superman-like monster at the party, the GM had better have some way of getting a message about Kryptonite to the players without first having the players roll up new characters.

In this case, we're dealing with a behir. If you've ever encountered a behir, someone in your party was probably swallowed. So, of course, in keeping with that feature of the monster, the vulnerable spot is inside its stomach. This is brilliant design. Sure, the behir's weak spot could have been its tail or a tooth or something, but having the weak spot actually be inside a creature known for swallowing opponents adds an element to combating it that the players themselves will embrace. "Are you kidding me?! You mean the only way to kill this thing is to let it swallow me first?! Awesome! 'Eat me! Hey, EAT ME!" If you play RPGs long enough, at some point you will have characters fight their way out from the insides of monsters; somehow, it just happens. This template design takes advantage of this and makes it part of the fun.

Plunging a stake into the heart of a vampire makes a certain poetic sense - it feeds on blood, and yet, its weak spot is the organ that, in the living, is responsible for circulating that very blood. It's a fairly common theme in zombie fiction these days that the head (or brain) has to be pierced or otherwise destroyed. What do you think would be great examples of vulnerable spots for various creatures that could otherwise be made invulnerable? I'm curious what examples our readers will come up with for Nigh Invulnerable creatures. Great GMs will come up with excellent reasons for the creature to have gained the template and equally good reasons for the weakness to be what it is. In addition, there will be quests or legends that help propel the characters from awareness of the creature, to hints about where to find those who know its weakness, and finally to a dramatic (and none-too-easy) encounter with the creature itself. After all, knowing the vulnerability shouldn't lead to a downer of a final encounter. There should be extra tensions and dramatic, epic - and perhaps ethical - choices facing the heroes who have finally learned how to take out the legendary nemesis.

Happy gaming.

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Nigh-Invulnerable Creature Template

By Steven D. Russell; Illustrations by Bruno Baxlia

Some creatures cannot be killed simply. They have the truly nasty tendency to either not be affected and/or merely recover from anything. Cut off their head, and it grows back. Cut them to pieces, and they just reassemble themselves. Turn them to ashes, and scatter them to the four corners of the earth, and they reform themselves out of nothing. Merely fighting these monstrosities won't make them go away; their defeat requires one to figure out their Achilles' heel, which can often be a fabled quest unto itself.

Creating a Nigh-Invulnerable Creature

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"Nigh-invulnerable" is an acquired template that can be added to any living creature.

A nigh-invulnerable creature uses all the base creature's statistics and special abilities except as noted here.

CR: +2

Armor Class: +20 natural armor

Defenses/Qualities: regeneration (see below); **DR** 20/epic; **Immune** ability damage, ability drain, acid, blindness, cold, deafness, death effects, disease, electricity, energy drain, fire, mind-affecting effects, nausea, negative energy, paralysis, permanent wounds, petrification, poison, polymorph, stunning, sonic;

Weakness vulnerable point (see below)

Special Abilities: A nigh-invulnerable creature retains all the special abilities of the base creature, and gains the special abilities as described below.

Regeneration (Ex): A nigh-invulnerable creature's rate of regeneration is equal to its normal total hit point total. No form of attack, except upon its vulnerable point, can suppress the nigh-invulnerable creature's regeneration it regenerates even if disintegrated, drown, or starved. If the nigh-invulnerable creature fails a save against an effect that would kill or destroy it instantly, it rises from death 3 rounds later with its full hit point total. It can be banished or otherwise transported, but the method to truly kill it or destroy it is only available via its vulnerable point (see below).

Vulnerable Point (Su): A nigh-invulnerable creature has a specific point on its body that if significantly injured by the correct type (slashing, bludgeoning, or piercing) kills it (severing a tail, piecing its heel, stabbing it in its open mouth). A nigh-invulnerable creature loses any immunity, resistance, or damage reduction to this special attack when it is made against this point. Any attack that is not an attempt to damage this point affects some other part of its body, including area attacks or attacks that do not cause the correct damage type.

To attack the vulnerable point, an opponent must make a sunder attempt with an attack that deals the correct type of damage targeting the chosen point on the creature's body. Unlike normal sunder attempts, ranged weapons, spells, and effects that require an attack roll may be used in this attempt though they still require a combat maneuver check (though for ranged attacks the opponent applies her Dex modifier instead of her Str modifier to her CMB). The vulnerable point is considered a separate weapon with hardness o and hit points equal to the creature's HD, this hardness increases by 5 for every 6 HD the nigh-invulnerable creature possesses. To injure the point, the opponent must inflict enough damage on a single attack to reduce the vulnerable point's hit points to o or less. A nigh-invulnerable creature can't attack with its vulnerable point reduced to o or less, its regeneration is suppressed, as are its defensive abilities, damage reduction, immunities, resistances and SR; in addition it suffers a penalty to its AC equal to its HD. It also thereafter automatically suffers 1d6 points of bleed damage for every 5 HD it possesses, each round until it dies. Only natural healing can heal damage done to a creature's vulnerable point.

A creature's vulnerable point should be relevant to its history and/or species. An example of a vulnerable point would be to pierce its heart through a missing scale (requiring piercing damage); severing a specific appendage such as a head, or the creature's tail (requiring slashing damage); or crushing an item embedded inside its body (requiring bludgeoning damage).

The Knowledge DC to learn the creature's vulnerable point is DC + double the nigh-invulnerable creature's CR; the nigh-invulnerable creature does not know its own weakness unless it has made this check. GMs are encouraged to make this knowledge difficult to obtain and often the result of a special quest. It could only have been written on a long lost scroll, or known only to a sage





banished form the kingdom, or perhaps a man recently executed whose body must now be found so someone can speak to the dead.

Nigh-Invulnerable Constructs and Undead

A GM could modify this template to affect constructs or undead creatures, replacing Regeneration with Fast Healing and Rejuvenation (as a ghost, see *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary*) with the listed amount of fast healing being based on its hit point total. Its rejuvenation is always successful and it happens in one round; this fast healing and rejuvenation is suppressed if its vulnerable point is reduced to o hp or less.

Pertinacious



XP 9,600

Nigh-Invulnerable Behir

N Huge magical beast **Init** +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +8

Defense

AC 41, touch 9, flat-footed 40 (+1 Dex, +32 natural, -2 size) **hp** 105 (10d10+50), regeneration 105 (see below) **Fort** +12, **Ref** +8, **Will** +5

DR 20/epic; **Immune** ability damage, ability drain, acid, blindness, cold, deafness, death effects, disease, electricity, energy drain, fire, mind-affecting effects, nausea, negative energy, paralysis, permanent wounds, petrification, poison, polymorph, stunning, sonic;

Weakness vulnerable point (sunder with slashing arcane mark inside her stomach, CMD 29, hardness 5, 10 hp)

Offense

Speed 40 ft., climb 20 ft. **Melee** bite +15 (2d6+9 plus grab) **Space** 15 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft. **Special Attacks** breath weapon (20-foot line, 7d6 electricity damage, Reflex DC 20 for half, usable every 1d4 rounds), constrict (2d6+9), rake (6 claws +14, 1d4+6), swallow whole (2d8+9 bludgeoning damage, AC 16, 10 hp)

Statistics

Str 23, **Dex** 12, **Con** 21, **Int** 7, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 12 **Base Atk** +10; **CMB** +18 (+22 grapple); **CMD** 29 (can't be tripped)

Feats Alertness, Cleave, Great Cleave, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (bite)

Skills Climb +14, Perception +8, Stealth +5

Languages Common

Special Abilities

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Grab (Ex) Pertinacious' grab attack works against creatures of any size category. She can constrict the same round she establishes a hold. On any round thereafter that she maintains her hold, Pertinacious can choose to rake the grappled target or swallow it whole.

Regeneration (Ex) No form of attack, except upon her vulnerable point, can suppress Pertinacious' regeneration—she regenerates even if disintegrated, drown, or starved. If she fails a save against an effect that would kill or destroy her instantly, she rises from death 3 rounds later with her full hit point total. She can be banished or otherwise transported, but the method to truly kill or destroy her is only available via her vulnerable point.



New Iron Titan Construction Build and Construction Flaws

By Steven D. Russell,

Illustrations by Fadly Romdhani and Michael Richards

Monster Menagerie: Construct Companion (copyright 2015 Rogue Genius Games, Authors: The Four Horseman), introduced a massive number of new constructs, variant animated objects and additional rules for constructs. Listed here are just a few of the abilities found in that product that can be used with the new base class found within *The Secrets of the Iron Titan* (copyright 2015 Rite Publishing, Author: Steven D. Russell) as well as one completely new ability (slag-bomb).

Construction Builds

Each iron titan receives a number of construction build points that can be spent to give the iron titan new abilities, powers, and other upgrades. These abilities, called construction builds, can be changed whenever the iron titan gains a new level, but they are otherwise set. Some construction builds require that the iron titan be of a specific level before they can be chosen.

Construction builds are grouped by their cost in construction build points. Construction build points cannot be saved. All of the points must be spent whenever the iron titan gains a level. Unless otherwise noted, each construction build can only be selected once.

1-Point Construction Builds

The following construction builds cost 1 point from the iron titan's construction build pool.

Shovel Earth (Ex) The iron titan is capable of quickly erecting defenses by transforming one of its limb sets into giant scoop arms. This acts as the *move earth* spell with a caster level equal to the iron titan's class level, except that it has a range of touch. The iron titan must be at least 11th level before selecting this construction build.

2-Point Construction Builds

The following construction builds cost 2 points from the iron titan's construction build pool.

Cursed Aura (Su) Proximity to the iron titan interferes with the connection between mortal worshipers and the divine. A character attempting to use any spell or ability that uses positive or negative energy (such as divine conjuration healing and necromancy spells or channel energy class features) within 10 feet per iron titan class level must succeed on caster level check (DC 11 + the iron titan's class level), or the spell or ability is suppressed as if by anti-magic. If the ability has no caster level use the subject's HD to determine the caster level. The iron titan may raise or suppress this ability as a standard action.

The iron titan must be at least 7th level before selecting this construction build.

3-Point Construction Builds

The following construction builds cost 3 points from the iron titan's construction build pool.

Air Horn (Su) Once per day, an iron titan can release a deafening sound as a standard action. This sound serves both as an alarm to warn its creator or allies and can be heard up to a half-mile away, and as a weapon to soften up its victims. Anyone within a 30-foot cone suffers 1d6 points of sonic damage per iron titan class level and is permanently deafened. A successful Reflex save (DC 10 + 1/2 the iron titan's class level + the iron titan's Con modifier) halves the damage and negates the deafness. The iron titan can use this ability 1 additional time per day by spending an additional 1 construction build point (maximum 3/day). The iron titan must be at least 7th level before selecting this construction build.

Attraction (Su) As a swift action, the iron titan can choose to attract metal for one round. It may make free grapple combat maneuver attempts on all creatures wearing metal armor or primarily made of metal, or free disarm combat maneuver attempts on all creatures using metal weapons within the natural reach of the iron titan. The iron titan suffers no penalty to the combat maneuver for being unarmed or for not having hands free, and does not provoke an attack of opportunity. Any weapons disarmed become stuck to the iron titan, and it requires a successful disarm combat maneuver attempt against the iron titan to pry it off. However, any metal weapon used against the iron titan gains a +2 bonus to attack and damage for one round. This ability can be active a number of times per day equal to the iron titan class level though it shares these uses per day with the repulsion construction build. The iron titan must be at least 11th level before selecting this construction build.

Repulsion (Su) As a swift action, an iron titan can choose to repulse metal for one round. It may make a free bull rush combat maneuver attempt on every creature wearing metal armor or primarily composed of metal within the natural reach the iron titan. This bull rush attempt does not provoke attacks of opportunity. Creatures wearing metal armor, primarily composed of metal, or using metal weapons must make a Strength check (DC 10 + the iron titan's Con modifier) to move closer than the natural reach of the iron titan. However, the iron titan takes a -2 penalty to attack and damage

against any creature wearing metal armor or primarily composed of metal for one round. This ability can be active a number of times per day equal to the iron titan class level though it shares these uses per day with the repulsion construction build. The iron titan must be at least 11th level before selecting this construction build.

If the iron titan also possesses the attraction construction build it can spend 3 additional construction points and collect bits of metal all over its body through constant use of its attraction ability, and then expel it as shrapnel whenever it uses its repulsion ability. This attack deals 1d6 points of piercing damage per 2 iron titan class levels (Reflex DC 10 + 1/2 the iron titan's class level + the iron titan's Con modifier halves) to anyone within the natural reach of the iron titan. This occurs automatically in coordination with the swift action used to activate its repulsion ability, but the iron titan must activate its attraction ability in a following round before this shrapnel effect will trigger again. Any weapons disarmed or creatures grappled using the attraction ability are released and thrown to the edge of the iron titan's natural reach when the titan activates repulsion.

In addition, if the iron titan possesses both attraction and repulsion construction builds it can, by spending 3 additional construction points, make a natural attack as a swift action (using up one of its uses per day) at a range of up to 50 feet against any metallic object, creature wearing primarily metallic armor, or that is primarily composed of metal. The iron titan may also make disarm combat maneuvers at this range against any metallic weapon, or sunder combat maneuvers against any weapon. The iron titan may also initiate a bull rush or trip combat maneuver against any creature wearing primarily metallic armor or that is primarily composed of metal at this range as well.

Slag-Bombs (Sp) An iron titan core creates globs of molten slag-iron that it can hurl at opponents-this ranged attack has a range increment of 10 feet. If one of these bombs hits a target, it deals 1d6 points of fire damage but quickly grows cool and solidifies, causing Dexterity damage. Creatures immune to paralysis are immune to this Dexterity damage. If the cumulative Dexterity damage from the molten slag bombs ever equals the target's actual Dexterity score, the target remains conscious but is held immobile and cannot take any physical action (although see below) until the worthless slag-iron is removed or the target breaks free; at this time it is subject to suffocation (see Drowning in the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook), though it is considered to have held its breath. This Dexterity damage never becomes Constitution damage.

Spell-like abilities or spells with only verbal components may be used if the trapped creature can make a Concentration check (DC 10 + the iron titan's class level) though line of sight and line of effect are



blocked by the slag-iron. A Strength check (DC 10 + the iron titan's Con modifier) requiring a full round action can be made to pry accumulated slag-iron off and remove all Dexterity damage caused by the attack-a creature that is held immobile can break free with a Strength check (DC 15 + the iron titan's Con modifier) made as a fullround action (this is the only physical action the creature can attempt while encased in slag-iron). The slag-iron becomes brittle and crumbles to dust in 15 minutes, or it can be instantly removed by a *shatter* spell or similar effect; until then it has a hardness equal to the iron titan's class level (max 10) and hit points equal to the iron titan's class level (no max). The effect and the ability damage can also be dispelled with a successful dispel magic or break enchantment with a caster level equal to the iron titan's class level.

An iron titan can carry a maximum of ten slag-bombs. The iron titan's core can replenish slag-bombs at the rate of one per 6 hours, crafting new slag-bombs from scrap metal or raw ore.

Iron Titan Class Level	Dexterity Damage
1st-4th	1d4
5th –6th	1d6
7th +	2d6

Static Charge (Su) As a swift action the iron titan can charge the air around it, causing barrages of electricity. Any creature within 10 feet per iron titan class level takes 2d6 points of electricity damage plus one additional point per iron titan class level (max +10) each round (Reflex DC 10 + 1/2 the iron titan's class level + the iron titan's Con modifier negates). Creatures that are damaged by the electricity are also staggered for one round. This ability lasts for a number of rounds per day equal to the iron titan's class level. These rounds do not need to be consecutive.

Construction Flaw

Iron titans can gain more Construction Points (CP) for its pool by applying flaws, which hamper the iron titan but provide additional CP to spend on construction builds. You cannot select more than 2 flaws. These choices are not set. The iron titan can change them whenever it gains a level (and through the Reconstruction class feature).

Berserk (Ex, +1 CP) When the iron titan enters combat, there is a cumulative 1% chance each round

that it goes berserk. The iron titan goes on a rampage, attacking the nearest living creature or smashing some object smaller than itself if no creature is within reach. It then continues spreading destruction. The iron titan's creator or allies, if within 60 feet, can try to help the iron titan regain control by speaking firmly and persuasively to the iron titan, which requires a successful Charisma check (DC 10 + the iron titan's Con modifier). It takes 1 minute of inactivity by the iron titan to reset the berserk chance to 0%.

Fuel-Requirement (Ex, +1, CP) The magic animating the iron titan requires a constant source of exotic or difficult-to-come-by fuel in order to continue functioning. The iron titan must consume at least 100 gp worth of this fuel each day, or it becomes helpless. If it has been rendered helpless due to lack of fuel, this condition may be removed if it receives that fuel at any point in the future.

Gremlins (Su, +2 CP) While the iron titan is not truly hampered by intelligent saboteurs, its iron body does seem to misinterpret orders when it becomes damaged. Whenever the iron titan takes damage in excess of 1/2 its hit points, it must succeed on a Will save (DC 10 + 1/3 its iron titan class level) each round or suffer the equivalent of a *lesser confusion* spell (this effect bypasses any immunity the iron titan might possess to this effect).



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Rite Publishing Presents

The Secrets of the Iron Titan





By Steven D. Russell

Swamp Spells Showcase

By David J. Paul

Illustrations by Yuksel and Guilherme Vargas

Outside the lattice-covered windows, gray mist moistened everything and contributed to the overall gloom Arianna had been feeling for several days. Despite the warmth of the fire and the company of her father, the persistent damp and cold had permeated both her body and mood. She had just snapped at a question her father had repeated. Not only was this out of character for her generally, it was exceptionally rare for her to be cross with her father over anything.

"I'm sorry father," she said after composing herself. Arthur had lived a long life and was wiser even than his remarkable daughter. He had recognized her discomfort before she did.

"Your apology, of course, is accepted my daughter," he said with his usual elegance and poise. He paused, knowing that she was aware he was going to ask the same question for what would now be the third time. "Have you seen the site yourself?"

"No, father, I haven't," she finally answered. Saying it aloud disarmed whatever had been holding her back. "As I said, Palin and Sophie have both seen it, and it is expansive, and they independently reported seeing several human-sized figures there," she paused though needn't have, "casting spells."

"You know that you'll need to see for yourself."

"I know." Arianna cast her gaze downward though she wasn't looking at the stones on the floor of the Apothecary's Tinctures and Cures. Instead, she was gazing inward, imaging the conversation with the others, explaining to them the threat of summoners, witches, and priests of dark gods. She saw their faces harden with resolve and knew they'd jump to conclusions and seek action before it was wise to do so.

"I should go alone; the others will wish to engage."

"Of course you should." Arthur cleared his throat, hinting that he wished for his daughter to meet his gaze. "If you'd like, I'll keep watch."

"Thank you father, but that won't be necessary."

"Iknowitwon't, but I would do it anyway, if it would bring you any comfort." Arianna's lips smiled an infinitesimal smile, but her eyes continued to hold the smile for just a moment longer. "What would bring me comfort is some real spring weather. I'm sick to my bones of this endless winter."



Arthur noted that Arianna was unaware. She hadn't put together the presence of the astrologers, the weather witches, and the others with the prolonged winter and with her own sense of gloom. Arthur had lived long enough to have seen this before. More than half a century ago, necromancers from the southern empires had learned how to control the weather and bring bitter cold to their desert lands. Those were dark days. He knew better than to directly interfere. But, this was his daughter and he wasn't about to let the insidious nature of these foul magics bring greater ruin upon her already lonely and sometimes cheerless life.

"It has been a long winter, hasn't it?" He asked the question with just enough hesitation that it sounded like he was distracted by some other thought—a common enough trait that Arianna might overlook it.

"Too long," Arianna replied automatically. She hadn't noticed his hint. Perhaps she would catch it later—before it was too late.

The priory was colder and wetter, of course, than her society's shops, nestled in the metropolitan crowd of buildings. The wind here felt unchecked, raw and unrelenting. Like usual, Ari had flown here, with Sophie, landing in the woods so as to walk to the gates without causing a stir. The men-at-arms knew Lady Arianna

Ravensbridge to be as close to the Lords Tacton Wells and Chandus Stonemoor as if she were a sister. Unlike the staff, and unlike women generally, Lady Ravensbridge spoke with authority, even to the Lords. Nevertheless, and though they had seen her perform miraculous feats about which they dared not speak, she was careful to respect their more limited, hierarchical, teleological worldviews and not simply transform from hawk to woman in their immediate presence.

"M'lady," one of the guards at the gate greeted her.

Arianna nodded appropriately as her stride slowed. She addressed the man as she should have, given her station, but also with as much respect as he (in her mind, just another fellow, suffering, intelligent being) deserved. "Is Lord Wells on the grounds?" she asked as she continued walking into the sturdy wooden structure.

"Yes m'lady. He and Lord Stonemoor have not ventured out yet today." The guard stood aside as she approached.

"Thank you. Do you know if Palin is with them?" Arianna's head turned slightly as she walked by him.

Arianna noted the man's facial expressions with care. Despite Palin's frequent visits, many of the human guards remained suspicious of the half-elven man. The guard displayed no hint of concern. "I have not seen him m'lady."

She nodded approvingly as she entered the building and the guard returned to his stance.

Moments later, Arianna found Herk, Chandus, and Tacton in a heated exchange. All were standing, and, like usual, they were wearing their armor and carrying their weapons. Arianna had long ago stopped rolling her eyes at their paranoia—and not because she'd grown accustomed to their idiosyncrasies but because of the sheer number of attacks against their home.

"Ask Arianna," Tacton said hotly to Chandus.

Chandus deftly turned with a noble bow, "...Lady ... "

"Oh please, Chandus. If Tacton's right, he's right; courtesy and flattery aren't going to bring me to your side."

Chandus smiled at Arianna's playfulness. "It was worth a shot."

"What are you gentlemen arguing about?" she asked Herk.

Herk smiled down at the diminutive and strange woman he'd long ago grown to trust despite his initial misgivings. "We're talking about the witches," he boomed in his resonating bass voice.

"Thank you Herk." Arianna smiled at the hulk. He returned the smile.

Arianna stepped back. "I bring some news about them from father," she paused for a moment as they attended to her. "There are more than witches on the moors of late. Astrologers, aeromancers, at least one haruspex, and at least one summoner have joined the priests of some asyet-unknown dark god."

Chandus gripped one of his many swords, Tacton's teeth clenched, and Herk seemed annoyed by the words "dark god."

"And there's one thing more," she added. "They're *kinsfolk*." The word itself, of course, was innocuous; everyone has kin. But, when anyone in these parts spoke of kinsfolk, and did so with a slight hush, almost a whisper, then it meant something else. It meant that there were ritualists and agencies and powers overseeing the actions of mere mortals.

"How soon do we ride?"

"Easy, my friend," Arianna patted the cloak over the armor covering Chandus's enormous upper arm. "First, I scout ahead and we find out what, exactly, we're up against."

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In *101 Swamp Spells* I had an opportunity to explore not just spells but the rules of the game and opportunities to test the edges of how magic works. I've enjoyed the many alternatives available to role-players: cooperative casting, ritual casting, psionics, and the whole, wide variety of alternatives explored in written fiction, television, film, and elsewhere. With *kin on the moor* and the related *beckon kin* and *converse with kin* I took seriously the idea that some spells could be designed to require other spells.

Arianna and her powerful friends are about to discover how much more powerful a group of casters can be when they can act in concert from a distance and when their home territory emboldens and empowers them.

#### Kin on the Moor

**School:** Abjuration; **Level:** Cleric/Oracle 5, Druid 5, Sorcerer/Wizard 5, Summoner 4, Witch 5

**Casting Time:** 8 hours; see text

**Components:** V, S, M (possessions of kin; see text) **Range:** Anywhere within the moor

Area: Up to 200 sq. ft./level (S); see text Duration: Permanent (D)

**Saving Throw:** None; see text; **Spell Resistance:** No; see text

Each person who casts kin on the moor must possess some willingly- offered item (lock of hair, piece of a currently- owned garment, etc.) of at least one other kinsfolk which will be consumed during the casting. Multiple casters may cast this spell at the same time, but this is not a requirement after the region has been established. Once a region of a moor has been established by the casting of this spell, future castings use the same area chosen during the initial casting (though if a future caster is capable of producing a larger area; that larger area may be created so long as all of the original space is included in the new area, all previous kin may then select any of the new region when such references are relevant). Anyone joining an existing kinship automatically participates in the existing area of the spell if he cannot, or chooses not to, extend its size. The casting time need

not be continuous, but all 8 hours must be completed within 24 hours of the spell being originated.

The region selected must include or be adjacent to at least 200 square feet of bog, marsh or swamp.

While on the moor, each kin member is treated as one level higher for the purposes of determining the effects of spells (damage, save DCs, etc.); if any spell cast is already being cast at the highest effect possible for that spell (i.e. *cure moderate wounds* is being cast to cure 2d8+10 points), then add +1 for each level of the caster to the result, not to exceed the spell's original maximum (the *cure moderate wounds* from the previous example would still cap at 26 hp).

All spells cast while within the established region of the moor, specifically in defense of the moor or other kin on the moor, may benefit from one of the following (caster's choice, does not change level of the spell, chosen when the spell is cast) each time a spell is cast: Enlarge Spell, Extend Spell, Heighten Spell, or Widen Spell (widened spells are limited by the area of effect of *kin on the moor*).

Any casting of *raise dead* or *resurrection* by a kinsfolk on someone who, while living, was kin, requires only half the cost in material components. Anyone raised in this manner gains only 1 negative level; anyone resurrected in this manner suffers 2 points of Constitution drain instead of gaining a negative level.

In addition, several spells which are only available to kinsfolk become available: *beckon kin*, *beckon kin* (greater), and converse with kin.



## Tords of Gossamer & Shadow

## Jucien's Guide: Jegends & Jies









## Another Jook at Orcs

By Elton Robb, Illustration by David Rabbitte

The orc in fantasy literature largely stems from Tolkien's seminal work. A fictional creature, certainly a fantasy race, that is separate and distinct from goblins. Generally, the orc represents the human tendency for destruction. This is a monstrous race that stands apart from the poised elves who like the beautiful things in life. The orc race has been known to hate beautiful things, but that is just what is on the surface.

#### Appearance

Orcs are typically depicted as ugly and filthy. They are often described as squat, broad, flat nosed, and sallowskinned, often with wide mouths and slanted eyes. Typically they are combined with simian and porcine traits with the humanoid form predominating.

#### Origins

According to Tolkien, when he was writing the Lord of the Rings he drew his orcs from many sources. However, the word orc most likely comes from the latin Orcus. Orcus, in the Latin cosmology, was not a goat god as fantasy gaming would have you believe. Instead, the Romans saw Orcus as a Chthonic deity (being of the Earth) that didn't rule the underworld; he was an ancient deity with chthonic connections and was also a deity of death.

In Swiss mythology, the orc is a demon, but a wellbehaved house spirit found in wine cellars . In Serbian mythology, they have an orc-like creature that is called the Bauk. An animalistic creature, the word "bauk" is used as the word for orc when translating the Lord of the Rings to the Serbian language.

Then we come to the Warcraft series. Here, the orcs were originally portrayed as a savage race of heathen destroyers and spoilers. However, over time and numerous game versions they have been greatly refined until they bear the "noble savage" image. The orcs of Warcraft are now a race of warriors and shamans, with a code of honor.

This has become the popular portrait of an orc, but there still remain different subtypes.



### Going Against Type

For example, in the first edition of Shadowrun, the Street Samurai Catalog shows an orc looking like he came out of high society. Dressed in a dinner jacket, with a necktie, a jewel pin, and probably slacks, this orcish Street Samurai looked like he could go into a nightclub and enjoy a bit of wine before going to beat up on some bad guys with his smartlinked gun and his wired reflexes. So, what does all of this mean? Are there other ways to portray orcs in your games? Below are four alternative ways to portray orcs that can grant the race a new life in your games and make your players give them a second glance.

#### Ideas for your Orcs

#### Neolithic Canaan

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The first alternative is to use the peaceful society of Neolithic Canaan as a model. This was a society founded by the Natufians; according to legend, everything changed when Adam went there after his wife died in order to influence the Cainites and Benelites in Africa.

Using the peaceful society of Neolithic Canaan as an orcish civilization changes everything. They become a peaceful race that created pottery, herded sheep, and farmed grains. In fact, it is in Neolithic Canaan where the first canals are built, and Oleiculture (olive farming) was invented and practiced on an industrial scale.

Here, orcs are farmers and herders in a fantasy setting. Not particularly warlike, the race is innocent, where there are no fences to keep neighbors out and sophisticated pottery is made to hold olive oils or wines. The orcs would herd pigs, sheep, or goats, and grow wheat, rye, or barley for use for food. The clothes would be homespun wool from the sheep; the dyes used for coloring cloth would be made simply from plants and fibers. The orcs based off of Neolithic Canaan wouldn't be particularly warlike.

#### Sub-Saharan Africa

Using the Ashanti tribe as a basis for your orcs can work much like the "Noble Savage"-angle of World of Warcraft. This gives the orcs an African motif instead of one based on the Fertile Crescent.

The Ashanti kingdom had access to gold, slaves, and built a mighty kingdom out of the jungle. What began as seven tribes grew into a powerful kingdom backed by the wealth of the gold they took out of the ground. They traded in slaves and felt menstruation was a curse for women. They had distinctive weaving patterns and a distinctive way of making war. The Ashanti civilization was very sophisticated, using drums for long range communications.

Using the Ashanti kingdom as a cultural basis for your orcs, they become more than just savages. They have gold and will trade in gold dust. They would have a sophisticated way of communicating through drumming, using a code. They would deal in slaves and gold to procure yarn, cotton threads, and other textiles from other parts of the world. They'd have a sophisticated tax system, and distinctive architecture that included ivory in different ways. They'd have superstitions about menstruation, even to the point of thinking that menstruation was somehow a symbol of uncleanliness.

#### Horse Lords of the Steppes

Although the prototypical culture for the orcs are the huns (and Attila the Hun as a leader of barbarian scum that sacked Rome), the Mongols of Genghis Khan are perfectly suitable. Orcs as horse lords? Why not? The Mongols were a nomadic population. They relied on the horse a great deal, since their dwellings were basically tents – something they could take down in a hurry as they moved from place to place following food. This means that the horse played a significant role in Mongol daily life. The Mongols valued personal glory and honor, and hospitality.

Basing your orcs on the Mongols would be interesting to say the least. The tribes will be constantly on the move. They would depend heavily on the horse, and their culture affected by virtue of their mobile population. Not only that, but orcish horse lords would have sophisticated arts such as painting, weaving, and making beer. It would not make them any the less vicious or brutal, however, as the Mongols were terrifying warriors. There is also some basis for this orcish subtype in speculative literature: the Tugar culture from William Fortschen's Lost Regiment series are strongly suggestive of orcs and are themselves modeled on the Mongols.

#### Orcs as Hittites

Finally, inspiration can come from the Hittite civilization that existed in central Turkey and extended as far as Ugarit in the northern Levant. The Hittites are a culture that started when a band of brothers decided to found a society on the values of brotherhood and hospitality. Eventually, they went on to build one of the greatest societies in the Ancient World, as they are credited with being the first civilization to discover and use iron.

An orc culture can easily be based on the Hittites. Ruling from a central citadel and building a large kingdom the size of the Hittite Empire so long ago, orcs could band together as brothers and be a frightening empire using not bronze, but steel weapons. They could attack using light war chariots, as did the Hittites, and could be a powerful, conquering civilization.

#### Conclusion

So there you have it, four societies from our own world's past on which you can model your own orcs' culture. Orcs do not always have to be a crude barbarian society living in tents. They could be based on real empires that have a centralized home, complex politics, and a sophistication that is not usually part of orc culture, but with just a little work and imagination, can be.

### KICKSTARTER

## https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1002835148/

## Pact Magic Unbound: Grimoire of Lost Souls

by Radiance House



A compilation of Pact Magic Unbound, vols 1 and 2, with 100+ pages of new material, plus entirely new high-end artwork. favorite pledges to-date:

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Rent-A-GMI: You and up to four of your thends get an online game night; run by Alex. Pick a 4-hour scenario of your choosing and Alex will run if for you. Details (such as when the Game will be and which program is used) will be determined when the Kickstatner ends.

NOTE: THIS TIER DOES NOT INCLUDE DIGITAL OR PDF COPIES OF THE GRIMOIRE OF LOST SOULS.

Tabletop Games

**FUNDED!** (\$2,500): When we've made our funding goal, all backers receive a playtest copy of *Pact Magic Unbound: Grimoire of Lost Souls* at the conclusion of the Kickstarter as thanks for their support.

Forgotten Pact Lore (\$4,000): We'll add not one, not two, but NINE all-new Starless spirits to Pact Magic Unbound: Grimoire of Lost Souls. 'Starless' is effectively a fifteenth Constellation, a group of spirits with no affiliation to the other 14 constellations. Several of the new spirits will include Sybee, a girl who was doomed to bear a fiend's child, Pevwyrn Pervon, a character from one of Alex's home games whose soul was given to an effecti as a plaything. Kami Onmyoji, a kami who was once the guardian of pact magic, Giza Sekhemet, a war-mongrelling catfolk who bound her goddess to her body in order to transform herself into a God-Empress sphinx, Inexorus, the first inevitable, and more!

**COLOR, ENGAGED! (\$6,000):** With this stretch goal, Dario and Alex will have raised enough money to completely stuff *Pact Magic Unbound: Grimoire of Lost Souls* with new artwork. All print orders of *Pact Magic Unbound: Grimoire of Lost Souls* will be upgraded to color printing for FREE in celebration. Additionally, further stretch goals will unlock all-new chapters and content for *Pact Magic Unbound: Grimoire of Lost Souls*.

## by Alex Augunas & Dario Nardi

### Twenty Questions with Alexander Augunas by Steven D. Russell

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

Sure! My name's Alexander Augunas. I'm 26 years old and currently occupy the city of Philadelphia. I'm probably best known as co-author of the Pact Magic Unbound series for the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game, but my newest gig as a blogger and podcast personality for Know Direction is becoming pretty big, too. Additionally, I write fairly regularly for Raging Swan Press (I'm best known for my creepy villages in Creighton's Village Backdrop line) and I'm one of the featured authors of Amora Game's *Liber Influxus Communis*. I've also done some work for Louis Porter Jr. Design and last year, I founded my own self-publishing company called Everyman Gaming, LLC, which was named after my blog before it become Know Direction's Guidance.

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

Varied. I have a great GM named Justin who actually got me into the hobby back in 2006. We take turns running games, one in my homebrew world and one in his. His world is best described as a mix of Civilization 5 and Lord of the Rings, but with high magic. He's really good at political intrigue, and our current game involves my kitsune cavalier trying to found his own nation in the middle of an Amazon-like jungle. My current home game for him takes place on a demiplane called Ark where people from all across the multiverse (including other campaign settings) have been abducted by a mysterious group called the watchers and forced to live together. My players got abducted in the game's opening scene, and now they're trying to figure out what's going on. They're an interesting group in that none of them are really looking for a way home. Yet.

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

That's a tough question, so I'm going to cheat and give you answers from each of their major lines. I love Pathfinder and I try to amass as much material as possible from as many publishers as possible. My favorite RPG Rules Line product from Paizo is *Ultimate Campaign*, by far. I love subsystems and intricate rules because they help bring the world alive for me, so the book really speaks to my needs as a player. From the Campaign Setting Line, it's the *Pathfinder Society Field Guide*. Aside from having one of the best assortments of information on the Pathfinder Society of any book to date, the player crunch in



that book is simply phenomenal. From the seeker oracle and sorcerer, to the lore warden fighter (ESPECIALLY the lore warden), to the agile weapon property and comfort armor weapon property, and finally to the vanities, I honestly think that the Pathfinder Society Field Guide is one of the best products that Paizo's ever put out in terms of how much diversity it adds to the game. From the Player Companion Line, I think I'm going to have to name Blood of the Moon as my favorite; its ballsy and does a great job of introducing plenty of options that are not only appropriate for skinwalkers, the new race in the book, but also having the wisdom to keep things open to players of all races where appropriate. Finally, my favorite AP is Carrion Crown. I've never read it, but I love gothic horror and am looking forward to starting a Pathfinder Society-credit version of the campaign this month.

#### 4. You're known for working with Radiance House, but you also have your own publishing company. How did that start and how would you characterize either company today?

Well, as you probably guessed I wear a LOT of hats. In terms of publishing, my biggest two are Lead Pathfinder Designer for Radiance House and Founder/Publisher for Everyman Gaming, LLC. My career as an author basically began thanks to Dario Nardi and Radiance House; I found his old *Secrets of Pact Magic* product for 3.5 online and wrote feverishly to him, begging him to update the book to Pathfinder. I had homebrewed 3.5 stuff for several years on the Giant in the Playground Forums, and for some reason I had the idea of converting some of Dario's 3.5 work to Pathfinder to try and, "Get his creative juices flowing." Instead, he asked me to try and mobilize our Pact Magic Community to do a fan conversion, but ultimately when the book had basically written the entirety

of *Pact Magic Unbound, Vol. 1.* So Dario and I signed some legal stuff, he wrote some awesome short stories and stuck'em in with my Pathfinder crunch, sent it off to editing and *Pact Magic Unbound, Vol. 1* was born!

Everyman Gaming, LLC was a bit different. I started a blog in February of 2014 after my current gaming group fell apart because of this massive wedding that was being put together. I needed a way to keep my Pathfinder skills sharp and I had success with writing guides in the past, so I decided to write a blog. For three days a week, every week, from February up to the present. Eventually, Ryan Costello of Know Direction discovered me after I literally threw my blog in his face on one of their live recordings. We started talking and I ultimately decided to move my blog to Know Direction in order to increase the size of my audience fast. While that was happening, I had a set of game rules that were admittedly great, but no one had the time to publish for. So eventually I said, "Well, why can't I do this myself?" So I did.

Today, both companies are small but getting stronger. I've gotten tons of positive reviews on products from both companies, especially Radiance House's Pact Magic Unbound line, and I'm pleased with the direction that both companies are heading. I'm slowly working on growing Everyman Gaming in my spare time, and Radiance House is currently working on its first major hardcover print release in over seven years, *Pact Magic Unbound: Grimoire of Lost Souls.* The Grimoire's currently got a Kickstarter going to help fund its artwork, and we're getting a fair amount of public attention because of its successes.

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

Because I work for two major companies (Radiance House and Everyman Gaming, LLC) this is actually really hard to pin down to just one. So I won't. For Radiance House, I'd have to say it's the Grimoire of Lost Souls. It sounds cheesy, I know, because I'm currently trying to get it Kickstarted and all that, but I honestly believe that it's the best piece of work in the entire line, hands down. When writing the Grimoire of Lost Souls, I actually went back and redesigned Pact Magic Unbound, Vol. 1 & 2 from the bottom-up. I learned a LOT about designing and writing since I first started in 2012, and when the time came to do a third volume, I found that I just wasn't happy with past-Alex's abilities. So I brought both books up to my personal best, added over 120 pages of new content, and got the whole thing playtested and polished before starting the Kickstarter. I'm proud to bursting of that book, and I'll only get prouder as the time to finalize and print it draws nearer.

For Everyman Gaming, the answer is the *Kitsune Compendium*. It was a product that I had already wanted, a product that I felt that I would never see happen unless I made it happen. Plenty of people told me that

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a product based entirely on fox folk would never be successful, that I'd be getting nasty names and labels slapped onto myself because kitsune are anthropomorphic animals and that no one was interested in that "garbage" anyway. But I did it because it was something that I had been wanting for the game, and apparently I wasn't the only one. The Kitsune Compendium remained my best seller for almost four months,



and it was even on Paizo's Top 10 list for a few consecutive weeks because of its quality—mixed with a healthy amount of luck. I'd consider the *Grimoire of Lost Souls* to be the best product that I've ever created, but I'm proudest of the *Kitsune Compendium*.

## 6. What was your best moment working on those products?

For the *Kitsune Compendium*, it was watching the artwork get made. I commissioned Jacob Blackmon to do it, and I had him draw a picture of two kitsune kissing at a masquerade. He joked that it was the first time that anyone had ever paid him to draw people kissing, and that it was ironic that he had to draw it with fox-people.

For Pact Magic Unbound: Grimoire of Lost Souls, it was when I realized that I could write it as a compilation if I wanted to. As I had mentioned, I originally went into the project thinking that I was going to write Pact Magic Unbound, Vol. 3 and I quickly got frustrated with bits of my own naivety from two years past. I wanted Vol. 3 to be better designed then Vol. 1, but doing so would mean that the Vol. 1 options would be more powerful, because their design wasn't as airtight. Eventually, I remember thinking to myself, "Why couldn't I have waited to write [Volume 1] until now?" and then wondering, "Well, why COULDN'T I write Volume 1 now?" Doing Pact Magic Unbound: Grimoire of Lost Souls was the perfect solution. Not only did I get to publish all of the amazing, new material that my brain had recently created but I had also given myself the opportunity to errata, clarify, and outright fix many of the problems in the original Pact Magic Unbound series. It allowed me to use my Pathfinder expertise to make a classic product the very best that it could be. I've told many players that Pact Magic Unbound: Grimoire of Lost Souls is basically Radiance House's version of Pathfinder Unchained, and that feeling of absolute freedom from past-Alex's design has been one of the most gratifying feelings that I have ever felt as a designer. Ever.



I managed to sneak spirit alignments back into *Pact Magic Unbound: Grimoire of Lost Souls.* 

When Dario wrote *Secrets of Pact Magic*, he gave spirits alignments. When you made a poor pact with a spirit, they actually moved your character's alignment closer to their alignment as part of their downsides. When I wrote Vol. 1, I felt that the alignment mechanic was too punishing, and so I removed it. But for *Grimoire of Lost Souls*, I came up with a neat way to bring the mechanic back in a way that isn't punishing, which allowed me to develop neat options like a new paladin archetype that can only seal pacts with Lawful Good spirits. I'm pretty pleased with how that turned out.

#### 8. What was the most challenging aspect of working on *Pact Magic Unbound: Grimoire of Lost Souls*?

Writing over 300 pages. No, wait. FORMATTING and LAYING OUT over 300 pages. Seriously, there were some nights that I thought that my eyes were going to gouge themselves out of my sockets! Seriously, nothing I ever did for the *Kitsune Compendium* could compare with that.

## 9. Did you learn anything while working on *Pact Magic Unbound: Grimoire of Lost Souls*?

#### Yes, I learned how expensive high-end artists are!

But in all seriousness, you learn a lot from being a good author. I've found that in order to write something well, you need to know and understand it. For all of my writing, I do tons of research in order to make sure that all aspects of my writing, from flavor to rules crunch, are based on something tangible. For the Grimoire of Lost Souls, that was literally researching EVERYTHING. From occult literature and philosophy to ancient mythology to modern stories. Pact Magic is designed to be esoteric and yet eerily familiar, so I did things like watch the entirety of Marble Hornets so I could make Al'kra as terrifying as possible. I read Shadow Out of Time as to better mimic Lovecraft's writing style and themes when writing the Legend of Yith'anu. I explored social justice issues when writing Anajira's legend, and then whipped around and consulted the forms and existing rules when trying to decide how to make his granted abilities work. I absorbed as much as I possibly could to make my writing feel as genuine as possible.

**10.** Other than your own work and Radiance House products, what is the best Pathfinder Roleplaying Game compatible product out there?

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*Ultimate Psionics* by Press, Dreamscarred hands down. Not only because of the quality of their material, but because of the way that they involved their customers. Doing so allowed them to make some truly spectacular products, and when I got my copy of *Ultimate* Psionics in the mail, I looked down at it and said, "This is what I want to do someday. I want to do a Pact Magic version of this book."



Except, you know, without the Wayne Reynolds cover. That's WAY too expensive for our budget!

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

The best Pathfinder RPG products, in my opinion, have zen. Zen is harmony, and I believe that Pathfinder products are zen when there is a deep, underlying connection between rules and fluff. Take, for example, racial archetypes and options. An area of huge contest for designers. Players often dislike racial options because they'll look at them and say, "This is cool, but why can't X race take this?" And the truth is that there's no good reason for that to be so. Personally, if I can't find a way to connect rules to rules, specifically, race rules to class rules, then in my opinion it shouldn't be racially specific. Basically, strong flavor is great, but flavor is to crunch as apples are to oranges; they're not the same. Saying dwarves favor something is nice and all, but if you don't have a racial reason as to why my kitsune couldn't also favor that, then your rules are weak; they lack zen. But if the race rules and the class rules are connected, then the overall design feels stronger because the mechanics have a mechanical scaffold that lends support to claims made by the flavor. This philosophy guides all aspects of my design work, from rules crunch to flavor writing.

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

Ouch, this one is challenging. I know (or know of) tons of great designers. Based on everything I've seen, I'm going to have to say Mark Seifter, of Paizo, Inc., with Owen K.C. Stephens, of half the industry, as a close second. Mark's got this innovativeness that I admire. Most of all, if he's egotistical, he hides it exceptionally well on the forums. He listens to what people suggest to him and answers questions asked of him. He takes the time to post responses and regardless of what he actually does over

in the mystical land of Seattle, I think many people are quickly beginning to see him as a veritable ear that is willing to listen to their problems and concerns that might potentially be able to do something about it. And honestly, I find that the social aspect of our job as designers is just as important as the creative side, if not more so. We're designing content for the most popular roleplaying game on the planet. People are heavily invested into the things that we create. So logically, we need to be just as invested in the people who are invested into our work. All of the best designers that I've seen do this; Mark is simply an exemplar.

#### 13. What advice would you give to would-be freelancers?

Don't be afraid to be forceful. Standing in line, waiting, gets you nothing in this industry. Don't rely on other people to talk about you or to network for you, either. If you want to be a freelancer, you can totally be one, but you need to work for it and push yourself to succeed. Take it from a guy who has literally pestered his way into nearly every company that he's ever worked with.

## 14. Who is your favorite tabletop RPG illustrator that you have worked with?

Dario handles most of the artists for Radiance House, seeing as it's his company, so all of my experience has been with Jacob Blackmon. He's a fantastic fellow; I've gone back to him for every project simply because he's got an amazing worth ethic and better still, he improves. Every time I commission him, I get something that's a little bit better each time. Sure, art is a process and work together often to make sure that his final product meets the needs of mine, but I've never left a partnership feeling remorseful or disenchanted; it's always with giddy anticipation for the next project.

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

I've got one for Radiance House and one for Everyman Gaming. For Radiance House, it was the moment that I realized that our *Pact Magic Unbound: Grimoire of Lost Souls* Kickstarter was going to fund in less than 24 hours. I had been up all night paranoid about whether we'd get the baseline \$2,500 that we'd need in order to make a presentable book, and when we got that almost immediately, I was floored. It really opens your eyes as to how much people value your work. For Everyman Gaming, it was actually a few weeks ago, when Endzeitigeist reviewed the *Leadership Handbook*. I've read Thilo's reviews religiously for the past few years, and I have NEV-ER seen him give a review like the one he gave the *Leadership Handbook*. It's been some time now, and I'm still grinning from ear to ear.

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

Yes, of course! Since I have the *Pact Magic Unbound: Grimoire of Lost Souls* Kickstarter going on strong right now, it seems only fitting that I talk about that for my "sneak peak."

One of the occult spirits that you can bind in the *Grimoire of Lost Souls* is a fellow by the name of Tommy Greensprout. Formerly known as "Thomas Greensprout," Tommy was an occultist who was searching for a way for mortals to safely cross into the Dimension of Dreams. He and his fellows actually succeeded, and when he stepped through his occult gateway his deepest dream was immediately realized; he became an eight year old youth again, but only while he remained within the Dimension of Dreams. So he tore down the gateway from the other side, sealing his fate as a living dream.

Tommy Greensprout is cool because he gives occultists a rather unique power: the ability to steal a creature's adulthood. While you're bound to Tommy Greensprout, one of his powers allows you to attempt a steal combat maneuver check against an enemy, and if you succeed that enemy's age category is changed to Youth for 10 minutes per binder level you possess. The best part is that Tommy Greensprout is only one of many new, exciting spirits in the *Grimoire of Lost Souls*. Between Volumes 1 and 2, *Pact Magic Unbound* currently has 64 spirits available to binders. But when the *Grimoire of Lost Souls* launches, that number will increase to 144; there are 16 spirits available to occultists for every spirit level. It's insanely awesome, you'll never be wanting for new spirits to bind ever again!

## **17.** Do you have any goals for Radiance House that you have yet to obtain or overcome?

We're running our Kickstarter to try and afford all-new color artwork for *Pact Magic Unbound: Grimoire of Lost Souls.* Ultimately, we want this product to be in full-color, and in order to get there we need \$6,000. As of this article, we're tantalizingly close, but getting that last \$500 or so has proven challenging. We need all of the help that we can get from fans, new and old alike, to get there!

## **18.** Can you tell us a little about *Pact Magic Unbound: Grimoire of Lost Souls*?

#### Sure!

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Basically, pact magic is based upon a real-world religious belief called goetia. It hails from the Middle East, but in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century it was revived by a British occultist named Alister Crowley. Crowley ended up writing a whole bunch of books on the subject of invoking angelic

spirits and evoking demonic ones, but the point of goetia is understanding one's self in order to achieve a state of heightened awareness.

Pact magic is similar, except instead of angels or demons, most binders (someone who "binds spirits" to their soul) commune with these unknowable entities that exist beyond time and space called spirits. Most spirits are former mortals who, for one way or another, had their souls condemned to the cracks in reality and are unable to leave.

Compared to divine magic or arcane magic, pact magic is easy. You don't need to follow strict religious tenants to get it and you don't need to be born special or waste your life studying texts for it. An ancient civilization realized this and they basically conquered the world before ultimately getting themselves wiped from reality for committing deicide. Since then, pact magic has had strong taboos against it, and several organizations are presented that hunt occultists to this day.

Mechanically, pact magic is based around temporary, supernatural powers. You make a d20 roll (a binding check) and you compare it to a given spirit's DC. If you pass, nothing bad happens. If you fail, that spirit earns a bit of control over your soul, and it can force its influences upon you. If you ignore that influence, you take a stacking penalty on d20 rolls. If you give into it, however, nothing bad happens. As a result, pact magic is about rewarding players for convincing roleplaying. Players need to be ready to adjust their character's attitude at the drop of a dime if they fail a binding check, and usually the changes are clear enough that it's easy to get into this sort of over-the-top Golum mode where you start chanting about your precious or whatever. All of pact magic is like that; it's about finding ways to incorporate good roleplaying into a rules-heavy game and ultimately reward players for it. Even when players do well on their binding checks and don't have to alter their roleplaying style, they're still roleplaying because they're getting into that uncomfortable space of, "I don't want to have to do this or act this way;" the same mental area that their character is likely in. I think that's ultimately the character's draw; it fosters an emotional understanding between player and character.

#### 19. Anyone who follows you knows that you and the kitsune race have this "thing," as in you're always writing about them and playing them. Why do you like kitsune so much?

Ahhhh! I knew this was coming!

Well, as many of you might know, one of the columns that I do on Guidance is a character building guide called Iconic Design. Truth is, I've always been fascinated with building characters, particularly with building strong ones. As I got better at making builds, I found myself gravitating to the kitsune race for a few reasons: First, I think that change shape is the most roleplay-invoking racial trait in the world. I love the aspect of pretending to be human and not arousing suspicion in NPCs. Second, I love social skills, and the kitsune's Charisma bonus works for me as a result. That said, the kitsune is by no means an optimized race, and Third, I find that playing human is simply too easy and too boring for me. I'm human 24 hours a day, six days a week. I don't need to be human while I game too. Also, their racial traits are clearly designed in a way that makes humans the default, generally best-or-second-best choice for nearly every class in the game. So I like to tame my builds down a bit by picking a race that's generally unoptimized. (A Strength penalty will do that to you.) And finally ... I like foxes.

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

The *Pact Magic Unbound: Grimoire of Lost Souls Kickstarter* is currently running NOW! It ends at 6:40 am on Friday, March 28<sup>th</sup>. We have a host of cool add-ons, pledge tiers, stretch goals, and even SECRET STRETCH GOALS, which are sort of like missions that the backers undertake in order to unlock more stuff for the book. Dario and I need all the help and support that we can get, so we're hoping that you'll help us make *Pact Magic Unbound: Grimoire of Lost Souls* the absolute best pact magic product that's ever been produced. Ever.





# Samsaran Compendium



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## Reviews

#### Animal Races: Clan of the Bear (Revised Edition)

Animal Races: Clan of the Bear

**Publisher:** Eric Morton Presents **Reviewer:** Thilo Graf **Rating:** 5 stars out of 5 stars

This installment of the "Animal Races" series clocks in at 13 pages, 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial, 2 pages of SRD, 1 page back cover, leaving us with 8 pages of content, so

let's take a look!

Much like prior installments in this series, we receive rules herein for PCs belonging to one of the tightly- and concisely-presented animal clans, with bear therians this time being the focus of attention.

Bear Clan therians are humanoids with the adlet subtype, and have a base speed of 30 ft., scent, natural armor +1 (increasing to +2 at 10th level). They begin play with a natural primary bite attack one step in damage below what would be considered normal for a creature of the size, with the option for upgrade. More on that later.

Members of the bear clan may select one of five basic attribute arrays. Regular members of the bear clan receive +2 to STR and WIS, -2 to CHA, and may take the clan's heritage feat instead of a rage power. Dancing bears receive +2 to CHA and may take the clan's heritage feat instead of a versatile performance class feature. Grizzly bear clan members receive +2 to STR and CHA, -2 to DEX, and may take the clan's heritage feat instead of a fighter bonus feat. Honey Bear members receive +2 to STR and INT, - 2 to CHA, and may take the clan's heritage feat instead of a rogue talent. Finally, there is the Panda Clan who receives +2 to STR and WIS, -2 to DEX, and receives its own racial clan heritage feat as well as the lethargic quality; this translates to bonuses to movementrate enhancement to a bonus to CMD. Which, per se, is a cool idea that has now been stripped of a prior ambiguity. Kudos!

Now I already mentioned the clan heritage feats; the base bear clan heritage feat allows for the gaining of claws, faster movement, loner survival without food or water (and overheating, allowing you to go several days sans food and water), better bites, claw attacks, and additional damage while grappling. Upon taking the feat 6 times, you may elect to become large instead. After careful consideration and some math, the entry barrier--prescribed by both feat-taking and level-restrictions-feels right to prevent low-level reach abuse. The panda does not gain this capstone. A cool, thematically-fitting feat makes members of the bear clan less susceptible to swarm attacks (with DR and immunity to distraction) and another feat for limited daily shapechanging into human form. A new feat allows bears to gain stonecunning and polar bears may select the cold resistance racial trait.

In the cool tradition of the series, we receive information both on the genealogy of the clan as well as the clan's folklore, providing information on some of the fantasy monsters and how they pertain to the myths of the clan. A racial deity can also be found herein and, like in other installments of the series, racial traits may be exchanged for a heraldic symbol, with each granting a bonus feat, but also imposing a penalty on either a save or initiative.

Now the PDF's revised edition has received probably the coolest update in any of the revised animal races so far: we receive two massive games enjoyed by the Clan of the Bear, which can be used as awesome encounters, competitions, or skill-challenge-style challenges, namely Tooth and Claw Fishing and Twig Racing. I absolutely ADORE these; they do an incredible job at further fleshing out the race and provide inspiring ideas for Dms. Absolutely awesome! The PDF now also sports a new bloodrager bloodline--the boreal bloodline--which allows you to add ice damage to your attacks, nets you the racial clan heritage bonus feat, and is generally a nice, fun, icethemed bloodline.

#### Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are very good; there is not much to complain about here. Layout adheres to a very crisp and concise two-column b/w-standard with cool heraldic crests and stock art mixed. The PDF comes fully bookmarked for your convenience.

Eric Morton's take on Clan Bear is absolutely awesome; better yet, whereas before the supplement was neat, but not perfect, he has now updated the supplement to sport absolutely stunning, awesome new content while also fixing all the issues I pointed out in my first review. This is absolutely great and deserves to be acknowledged. My final verdict for the revised version clocks in at 5 stars + seal of approval. Now, can we have more of these damn cool racial games/challenges?.

Endzeitgeist out.



#### Character Racial Class (PFRPG)



**Publisher:** Rite Publishing **Reviewer:** by Joshua B. **Rating:** 5 stars out of 5

There's a lot of great things to pull in from this PDF.

I love the introductions of characters from someone "representative" of that somehow,

something that Rite Publishing has done quite a bit. It explains how to introduce medusas into your world. There is, all in all, a huge amount of fluff here that is incredibly useful (especially as someone who struggles a bit to introduce things like this into a game world)

The PDF introduces 2 styles of medusas that could be used as player characters: regular medusas that have feet, and larger medusas known as greater medusas which are more snake-like and have a tail instead.

There's an ample amount of alternate racial traits which is something I enjoy as well. It gives you a lot of options and flavors you could have with your character.

The main feature, though, isn't just making the medusas playable character races: it's the racial paragon class, which is something I would love to see more of in Pathfinder overall. It's one of the biggest reasons I was excited to buy this when I saw it available.

The class itself plays out much like a grappler, but with a lot of options for mobility (being able to jump from statue to statue, flight, etc.), and a good poison as well. The base gaze of a medusa starts out rather weak overall, but as they level up in the class, it becomes far more powerful and iconic: turning your enemies into statues, and eventually being able to animate them as well. The class itself is far more synergistic and powerful when used with the greater medusa (a lot of abilities affect the tail strike ), but I still believe it's quite powerful for regular medusa.

All in all, I love this book quite a bit. I can't wait to be able to use it in my games. The class itself seems strong, but not blatantly overpowered. The fluff is rather well written and gives out a lot of great information here as well.

#### The Genius Guide to Gruesome Dragons



**Publisher:** Rogue Genius Games **Reviewer:** Thilo Graf **Rating:** 5 stars out of 5

This massive supplement clocks in at 53 pages, 1 page front cover, 1 page advertisement, 1 page SRD, 1 page editorial, leaving us with a more-thansolid 49 pages of content, so let's take

a look!

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So, in case you're not aware, the term "gruesome monsters" in Rogue Genius Games' terminology points towards templates that can be applied to creatures, usually of a certain type - here, dragons. These templates sport a fear-rating mechanic called shock value, which, while optional, makes them especially useful for gritty/horror games. Better yet (and even more crucial), the gruesome creatures sport knowledge check modifications to glean information on the creatures AND reward players that fight smart/do their homework; gruesome creatures may be exceedingly powerful, but they also sport one or more weaknesses that help dealing with them. Coming from a background of hardcore Ravenloft DMing, this particular design philosophy is very near and dear to my heart. It should also be noted that each template herein comes with a sample creature, all ready for direct insertion into your home game.

That being said, what exactly can one expect from such an array of dragons? Well, first of all, templates. Lots of them. Unlike quite a few I've seen over the years, these come with quite an array of interesting special offensive and defensive abilities to set the creatures apart. Take the very first dragon herein: the acrid dragon. Striking these fellows with a slashing or piercing weapon damages the weapon (which is damn cool)! I just wish the template wouldn't use the wobbly "energy damage" as a terminology and instead settled for something like "force" or just remain undescribed. Yes, a nitpick, but a glitch nonetheless. A glitch that also extends to the elemental aura even though it's 100% obvious what it means in context. Now don't get me wrong, this template remains very much operable and working, but it still technically could have been more concise. (Yes, this is officially Nitpick Land. Beware, rabid spirits of the End Times a-roaming....)

This glitch is especially odd since the added energy damage to regular attacks follows proper wording procedures and aligns its bonus damage in an unmistakable way with the breath weapon's energy type. Same goes for the death detonation these creatures emit when destroyed; once again, the wording here is airtight.

At this point, I should point out another nice trick of the templates: following the size progression of dragons, gruesome dragons of certain sizes receive additional, particularly nasty tricks to pull off . For example, an aura that automatically ruins potions, et al. (Granted, this comes with a save for attended objects, but still...OUCH. I love it!) On the weakness side, these dragons LACK a breath weapon, which makes combat against them a whole different deal.

Of course, the iconic bone dragons can be found herein as well, including channel resistance, phylactery, and resting in scattered form; they also have rapid autohealing and telekinetic control over bones. On the downside, the lack of scales also deprives these creatures of energy immunities. Brittle dragons are also rather interesting; afflicted by constant growth of their bony protrusions, these dragons have fast healing, but at the same time, their rampant, out of control growth makes their bones fragile. On the other hand, teeth and/or claws breaking off in wounds is NOT healthy for the recipients. Worse, at higher levels, their fragility extends to quite a few other beings within their aura.

What can be worse than a dragon? For anyone with arachnophobia (and a large number of people exhibit this), the drachnid would serve as an excellent answer. A terrifying (and lavishly-illustrated) example of nastiness, these beings not only receive custom spell-like abilities, they also add a web to their breath. Yeah, nasty. However, you can probably use to your advantage their cruelty and unwillingness to go for a quick kill. Rather, you should, for these foes are "deadly" with a capital "D."

Ether dragons take the planar highjacking/near ethereal battles to a whole different level; anyone who has ever run an ethereal filcher with class levels against PCs knows how deadly that strategy can be for the unprepared. Now think "dragon." Yeah, these guys WILL frighten your PCs.

Not enough? Would you rather have something... mythic? Well, you may know how dragons are incredibly arrogant? It should come as no surprise that the false god, a particularly nasty example of the draconic ilk, can draw power from its followers' fanaticism and grant a part of that power to their believers. If played correctly, these dragons can be utterly fearsome. Two thumbs up!

What would have happened if a certain Dr Victor F. had had access to draconic corpses? Well, the fleshwired dragon would be the answer to that. You thought regular flesh golems were bad news? Oh, and yes, using their asymmetric nature against them may prove your melee guys' one chance of survival. Nasty indeed! Compared to that, the glutton dragon feels pretty straightforward. Hermit dragons are not necessarily solitary old coots; they are afflicted by something that destroys their scales, requiring them to graft pieces of armor to their flesh. Hoarder dragons, on the other hand, tend to accumulate. Everything. This creates deadly lairs where conditions are not only unsanitary, but where the debris cluttering everything might actually be used against the PCs.

Truly frightful would be the mind-collectors: dragons that obsess over living minds and endeavor to capture them within their gems, leaving comatose shells of their victims. Smart adventurers can turn this obsession against the dragon, but for me it remains a particularly creepy concept. We also have plagued dragons: harbingers of exactly what's on the lid: plagues. Another nasty option would be the spawnwyrm. Clad in defensive shrouds of eggs, these beings can unleash swarms of deadly spawns all the while being utterly overprotective. These things make for a great way to insert a sense of the alien and inhumane into the use of dragons and explore a very interesting frame of mind that is distinctly nonmammalian.

Want MORE? Well, what about no less than 5 new dragon types, so-called "abhorrent" dragons? These beings have a certain, slightly Lovecraftian vibe and are theme-wise just as nasty as their monikers suggest: aberrant, breeder, destructive, corruptive, maddening. They come with 3 sample statblocks each as well as full draconic age category progression. I love nasty dragons. I love well-executed Lovecraftiana. You gotta love dragons with decadence auras or those that can spontaneously birth aberrations, right? Right!

The last four pages of the PDF are devoted to various new spells, from six progressively stronger means of animating a hoard to better flight, from tighter, missilelike breath (to avoid killing allies, for example) to transferring your breath weapon to a creature (this latter not only rends the creature asunder, but also serves as the focus point for the breath weapon. Can I hear "false god gambit"?) What about a spell that keeps a target alive in order to allow the dragon to paralyze foes longer? Flensing foes? Automatic undead-ification of the next foe you slay? What about a spell that allows your next grapple to deal 10 x caster level in force damage? Yeah, ouch! These spells are powerful and worthy of dragons; I'm not sure I'd allow them for PCs (or dragon PCs, for that matter, if you're using In the Company of Dragons or the Dracomancer), but as nasty BBEG-spells? Heck yeah, they work!

#### Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are pretty tight, though not perfect. I noticed a couple of instances where yours truly could nitpick specific wordings, as explained above. Layout adheres to a printer-friendly two-column standard

in full-color, with plenty of downright GORGEOUS artworks on par with the cover. The art does not adhere to a uniform style, though; we receive some nice Jacob Blackmon originals (love his work) as well as a few CGImodels (which personally, I don't like as much). The PDF comes with extensive, nested bookmarks.

The Four Horsemen have crafted a great supplement of truly nasty draconic templates here. The design decisions, more often than not, have at least one unique, far-out ability, an interesting tactical option or something I haven't seen in a d20-based draconic variant (which is saying something). Now yes, some classics like the bone dragon, the eats-all-dragon, etc. may be less-inspired or representations of types that have been done before; the sheer fact that the PDF managed to bring up some ideas I haven't seen before is worth quite a bit in my book. Is the PDF perfect? No, but it \*is\* rather inspiring. I ADORE the false god template (which I'll develop further with Legendary Games' supplements) and it provides an excellent bang for buck ratio. I always value creativity over mechanical perfection and quite honestly, this PDF is pretty awesome in both regards, though the latter could have used some slight fine tuning. This represents a great resource for DMs seeking to make their dragons frightening again AND reward their players for intelligent fighting. And I \*really\*, really like that. While not all templates herein are absolutely mind-blowing, some constitute the coolest templates I've seen in any non-Rite Publishing-book. The Book of Monster Templates is still one of THE staples in my own home game. Hence, my final verdict will clock in at 5 stars + seal of approval; these dragons are just too cool!

Endzeitgeist out.

#### The Secrets of the Iron Titan (PFRPG)



**Publisher:** Rite Publishing **Reviewer:** by Trev W. **Rating:** 5 stars out of 5

This is a very neat supplement if you want golem-like characters in your setting, and want to be able to implement it without too much fuss or hard work for the DM. It can be

used for PCs or NPCs. The titan is a class you add to a character, the character having at some point been turned into an iron titan from an original form.

There are plenty of special abilities and choices to be made. Good art to show the reader what type of iron titans can be created. Iron titans get a lot of resistances and invulnerabilities making them, after they level a bit, very suited to facing specific foes and existing in hostile environments. Woe to the party that is vulnerable to iron titans.

What I most liked though, was the "we can rebuild him" section. This covers converting a dead character over to an iron titan, and it also throws in the possibility of how a party could continue from a TPK: everyone comes back as an iron titan. In doing so, the character or party are rebuilt, taking the class levels of the iron titan. What also interests me are the possibilities of multi-classing, to secure some very cool abilities to complement the MANY options for iron titans in this book.

There are also feats, including feats for huge titans. Yes, you can be huge, and that means you have huge guts.

#### Islands of Plunder: Treasury of the Fleet



**Pubisher:** Legendary Crown **Reviewr:** Thilo Graf **Rating:** 5 stars out of 5

This PDF clocks in at 24 pages, 1 page front cover, 2 pages introduction/how-to-use, 1 page editorial, 1 page ToC, 1 page SRD, 2 pages of advertisement and 1 page

back cover, leaving us with 15 pages of pure content, so let's take a look, shall we?

First of all, in case you're new to Legendary Games' plug-ins, this PDF provides a selection of new magical items, which, while per se crafted for easy insertion into the Skull & Shackles AP, can easily be integrated into just about any nautical/slightly piratey game. Got that? All right, so let's take a look at the items, shall we?

First of all, a nice convenient table: we receive the respective items in a nice, concise list, by price. The items range from a paltry 400 GP to 100K and yes, even include an artifactl. The whole gamut of price ranges can be found herein, so that's a nice start.

But what do the items do? Well, first of all, there would be the bullet buckler, a powerful magical shield that may deflect firearms and even siege weapons, retaining the AC bonus against them. (If the couple of threads on Skull & Shackles are any indicator, there'll be a lot of happy players (and DMs!) gunning for this shield! (Yeah, I know...that pun was bad even for yours truly...I'll put the bucks into the bad pun jar after the review, all right?)) Now yes, this buckler may be nice, but it pales before the cannonball breastplate. This item can conjure forth

a strange cannon of smoke to shoot it as a cannonball towards a target, which is awesome. Even better, though, the smoke obscures sight AND renders you gaseous, allowing you to escape; the plate thereafter reforms with your body. This is one glorious getaway item and utterly awesome. The designer who came up with it should be proud, as should the artist that rendered the item in gorgeous full color.

Sharkskin suits, comparably, feel less impressive, though their bleed-causing grapple-defense and swimming enhancement will fit thematically perfect into Razor Coast as well. The captain's cutlass not only helps fighting defensively, it also makes navigation and just about all tasks of a captain a tad bit easier and fans of James Bond may rejoice: there is a Golden Gun now. It's just as deadly, but also incredibly expensive; if you thought regular ammunition was costly, wait till you start firing pure gold. Suddenly the greed of certain individuals makes sense.

Hateful hooks are not only hard to disarm, they also carry a grudge that may not only cost the unfortunate sap at their end, but also their wielder his/her respective life. What about wind-controlling harpoons that can generate electricity/sonic-based equivalents of fire shield, and do so reflexively? Perhaps you'd prefer a dagger that either sings uplifting tunes or gloomy shanties that speak of the doom below the waves? A sniper's pepperbox can also be found herein, but pales before a new type of magical cannon that puts a spin on its ammunition, causing it to continue drilling into target creatures and hostile ships (and perhaps even right through them.) This can potentially cause a decrease in natural armor, as well. A silenced pistol with what a

mounts to inverse sonic damage and a repeating crossbow that can be used to blast through water-based magic further complement the beginning array of items.

A total of five special weapon abilities allow the characters wielding them to make weapons act as chainbased nets, skim weapons across the surface of water, or add a tracer on a target—all to help fighting those pesky, sneaking scurvy seadogs. These pages contain two rods: the rather self-explanatory pirate brand (guess what that one does) and the Rod of the Ebb Tide that not only acts as a defensive weapon, it also allows you to send creatures with the water subtype back where they belong. In addition, if used as a focus for un/hallow, it cal all but cripple adversaries of a specific bent, coming essentially with a built-in adventure (defend/capture) all of its own. Nice!

What is that? You want some fine dress and actually are not that nasty a pirate? Well, the admiralty's parade kit should be just what you wanted if you are aiming to make an impression (or make a governor forget about your misdeeds). Earrings to enhance your sight, flares that can be seen for miles, an ensign that allows you to convey demands for parley or similar messages to other ships, anti-gaze/dazzle/etc. eyepatches, gloves that ensure a certain grip, capes that prevent your lookout from dying horribly whenever your main mast is toppled, multi-tool pirate-hooks...there is a lot of cool material to be found herein. There are fire-extinguishing sails, tricorns that allow you to brave the most dire of weathers, sextants that allow you to enter the plane of shadows at night. The wondrous items are indeed awesome!

Now, I mentioned an artifact; that would be the Pirate Queen's Pearl — and yes, it is glorious. A onefoot statuette of pearl, it can absorb perfect ioun stones, granting bonuses depending on the stone temporarily absorbed, for a more complex ioun stone management.

#### Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are top-notch; I noticed no significant glitches. Layout adheres to Legendary Games' 2-column full-color standard and sports the good kind of hyperlinks. The PDF sports no bookmarks, which constitutes a comfort detriment. Artist James Krause deserves special mentioning for the surprising number of top-quality, evocative artworks provided for many of the items – kudos indeed!

Jason Nelson, Matt Goodall, Jim Groves, and Jonathan H. Keith deliver an armory of magic items that is surprisingly bereft of suckage; after SO MANY piratethemed books, I've become pretty jaded regarding their tools and did quite frankly not expect to like this book to the extent I do. These items more often than not either fall in the "OMG, how awesome is THAT?!" category or the no less impressive "This makes total sense and a magical society MUST have developed this!" category. They provide an awesome mix of a setting's conciseness enhancing items and rule-of-cool level items that are simply too neat to pass by. This is a great PDF, with only the lack of bookmarks remaining as a minor strike against it – my final verdict will clock in at a well-deserved 5 stars + seal of approval.

Endzeitgeist out.

#### Jeadership Handbook

**Publisher:** Everyman Gaming, LLC **Reviewer:** Thilo Graf **Rating:** 5 stars out of 5



This supplement clocks in at 28 pages, 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial, 1 page SRD, leaving us with 25 pages of content, so let's take a look!

Okay, so what is this? Well, in one short sentence, this is "Leadership for

Everyone." Yeah. You take arguably the most powerful feat in the game and give it to everyone, free of charge. Can this work? After an aptly-written piece of prose, we are introduced to the mechanics.

Each character has an LS, a leadership score, which is equal to character level + CHA modifier. If a check is called for, roll 1d20 and add your LS plus miscellaneous modifiers as per the table. Mythic characters also add their mythic tier to the LS. Now if you're like me, you always considered the leadership modifiers provided by the feat to be NOT enough; now – from frequent communication to taking decisive actions – the new miscellaneous modification table provides much more diversity.

LS determines cohorts and followers; you can also use LS to qualify for mass combat boons, special leadership perks, and the reputation of the characters. One cool option: closely entwined parties may sport a kind of party leadership.

The way in which cohorts are obtained, their maximum level, promotion options, and recruitment – all of that is covered in ample detail. Better yet, synergy with mass combat and downtime rules are provided, filling a gaping hole in the regular leadership rules. Interaction with the kingdom building rules and leadership therein can also be found within these pages.

Beyond rules, this covers some great guidelines for building cohorts that are FUN in-game are also provided and advancing them (including the advancement of monstrous cohorts). Advice for DMs on handling cohorts and a massive list of sample monstrous cohorts along with their bestiary origin can be found within these pages.

Now in a stroke of absolute brilliance, the book provides for follower recruitment during downtime, and doesn't stop there. Training followers as army commanders, contacts, etc. – all of these are covered. Better yet, a concise table provides max ranks for skills of followers, acting as a convenient and elegant balancing mechanism. And yes, training followers as teams is covered as well. Five sample followers are provided herein, so let's move on to reputation, shall we?

Reputation is tied to a sphere of influence, within a kingdome, for example. The effects are felt only within this specific sphere of influence. Increasing the LS also increases the array of hexes you can influence. This can go in both ways, however, as you can also gain infamy in certain hexes. Reputation effects utilizing fame/infamy,

cause discounts and lynch mobs, and provide tangible, concise benefits to the characters. Both positive and negative effects are covered in a huge table. But that's not where this PDF stops: party reputation, secret identities, and alter egos with completely different reputations are all covered.

Now if the mentioning of fame wasn't ample indicator, the system also ties in perfectly with the organization rules, allowing you to spend prestige points granted by your fame for different benefits.

As you advance your level, you also receive so-called leadership perks, one at 2nd level and one at every two levels thereafter. These perks can be used to strengthen cohorts, contacts, downtime, kingdoms, armies, relationships, reputations, and titles. There also are loner perks that provide a stronger benefit, but these exclude you from attracting followers and cohorts. The last eight pages of this PDF are devoted to a vast array of different perks that allow you to make a kingdom into an economical power-house and modify downtime effects. If you, for example, would be the beloved heir of the throne, there's no a perk for that. Same goes for being on personal quests, for being essentially the martial law, for being just devoted and loyal. What about filling two roles in the kingdom? What about being a one-man-army? Yeah, you \*can\* see that, can't you? The single wizard/ fighter standing before a whole army, brandishing his weapon and telling them, "Come get me." Oh yes. What about creating a group reputation with your spouse? This is absolutely awesome...BUT ....

Yeah, there's a "but" – prepare for my dreaded nitpickpowers!

The "o"s in the perk-header font seem to be a bigger size than the other letters.

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Yeah. I know. Not really a weighty point of criticism.

#### Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are very good; I noticed no significant glitches. Layout adheres to a gorgeous, yet relatively printer-friendly 2-column full-color standard. The PDF comes fully bookmarked for your convenience. It should also be noted that the PDF sports numerous gorgeous original pieces of full-color artwork.

Ben McFarland once wrote on the Paizo boards that Leadership would be the greatest gift a player can make the DM; it shows an investment into the campaign, a willingness to engage in mutual worldbuilding beyond

the norm. I tend to concur.

With the release of Ultimate Campaign, a certain discrepancy has crept into the most beloved feat at my table. Seriously, in my last campaign all but two players had it! Now, it's gone. In order to playtest this book, I had to actually integrate it into my main campaign. Just running a module or the like wouldn't have worked and I have two characters with the feat there after all. We made a bunch of modifications and ran with the system. Synergy with mass combat, downtime, fame and reputation – this system is a perfect example of ridiculously elegant design. Alexander Augunas takes all the distinct systems and ties them together in elegant, awesome ways and offers options upon options.

Okay, I can't emphasize this enough: this book is a huge blessing, a godsend. It is elegant and smart. It works exceedingly well in actual gameplay. It takes a vast array of disparate systems and forges them into a significantly more cohesive, functional entity. It fixes the issues created by the relative strength of cohorts that make other characters feel left out. It also sports neat prose and provides advice for using these rules without bogging down the game/stealing the spotlight. The Leadership Handbook will never, ever be left out of my campaigns from this day on.

I cannot fail to emphasize this enough: EVERY kingmaker campaign should get this. Every campaign using Ultimate Campaign as a book, or any of its component subsystems, MUST get this. The systems benefit greatly from the inclusions of this book and the system also perfectly works with Legendary Games' expansions.

Let me once again make this very, very clear: the Leadership Handbook is a humble, inexpensive, utterly awesome book that makes leadership infinitely more streamlined. Now it's less than a half-baked feat-remnant, but more like a full-blown tie-in with all systems. This is pretty much what I wished Paizo would do: tie disparate systems together with a concise frame, with an awareness for the functionality of them. This is utterly superb. My only regret is that I wanted this to be SO MUCH LONGER.

It is hereby awarded EZG Essential status, it becomes a candidate for my Top Ten of 2014, and receives a final verdict of 5 stars + seal of approval.

Endzeitgeist out.

#### **Psionics** Embodied

**Publisher:** Dreamscared Press **Reviewer:** Thilo Graf **Rating:** 5 stars out of 5 This book clocks in at 69 pages, 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial, 1 page ToC, 1 page SRD, 1 page advertisement, leaving us with 64 pages of content, so let's take a look, shall we?

So, we've all been there: suddenly, mid-adventure, a PC bites the dust



and the player has no time to make a new character for now, requiring the temporary use of an NPC. Or, more often, one sits on the DM's side of the screen and makes \*yet another\* NPC-build. I know I do that and it is an annoying bottleneck. There are certain tricks and combos one stumbles across and then re-uses them time and again. The issue becomes more pronounced if your campaign is like mine and sports a vast array of different third-party publisher materials. Paizo only has the CORE-classes covered with the Codex and beyond that, I may point towards Rite Publishing's superb Faces of the Tarnished Souk series, Frog God Games' Unusual Suspects and LP, Jr. Design's Usual Suspects. Beyond these, good NPC-books become scarce, with only a couple of Legendary Games books coming to mind. This was particularly annoying, at least for me, when it came to psionics (and some other subsystems I regularly use). I had to make too many of these guys from scratch and at some point, tunnel vision starts to set in.

Introducing this book, psionics now receive an array of NPCs for your perusal to insert into your campaign. The numerous characters herein are crafted with the heroic attribute array and appropriate wealth-by-level, and each character comes with three builds: one for level 5; one for level 10; and one for level 15. Now I am not going to go into the details for every NPC herein. Suffice it to say that every creature comes with a full-blown background story as well as advice on how to use the NPC as both an ally or villain; yes, this means that these guys and gals are fullblown, developed personalities, not just statblocks. From radiant heroes to plague-doctor elans gone full-blown insane evil, the characters herein take the base classes in different directions, with tacticians, dreads, marksmen, etc. all receive their due. While blues, forgeborn, and similar psionic races are well-integrated into the builds within these pages, some of the specialists of the psion class receive no representation, though.

In fact, the characters herein work exceedingly well as both allies and adversaries and, more often than not, offer some deviations from tired and true character tropes, coming to life in a surprising captivating manner. From the honorable, yet brash Desh to the ruthless, but wellsituated Count Malbor, the diverse NPCs in this book do a nice job of running the gamut from cool allies to

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despicable adversaries, with the builds themselves doing a neat job of representing the particulars of the NPC and their ideology in the crunch they provide.

#### Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are very good; apart from some rare glitches like an incorrect CR and similar minor issues, the PDF can be considered well-off in that regard. Layout adheres to Dreamscarred Press' beautiful 2-column full-color standard and each and every NPC in this book receives gorgeous full-color artwork – kudos! The PDF comes fully bookmarked as well as with a more printer-friendly version with a white background.

Jeremy Smith, Andreas Rönnqvist, and Matt Medeiros have crafted a damn useful NPC-collection; finally, an array of psionic NPCs, all ready for use, with just the flick of a finger. I \*love\* books like this, simply because they allow a DM to focus on cool storylines, preparing a module, or to simply add a spark of psionics into anotherwise non-psionics module. The NPCs are diverse, their writing is neat, and the builds solid, so there is not much to complain in that regard.

That being said, there are some minor nitpicks: the first of these would simply be scope. I would have loved this to be a NPC Codex-sized, massive book of diverse builds. I can't really hold the scope of the book against it, but still, a bigger book would have been awesome. Similarly, some people may have wanted scaling suggestions to bring these NPCs down to less powerful builds, but once again, I don't consider that the book's fault. My only true gripe with this book would be the following: unlike the NPC Codex, this book presents rounded characters and the builds feel very much linear. While some archetyped combos can be found, you won't find any nasty multiclass combos in this book and for named NPCs, I would have expected at least one or two or these. Note: this does not make the book bad in any way. It's just that making linear characters is much easier and less time-consuming than making complex, archetyped multiclass characters.

But in the end, ladies and gentlemen, this is just me being a high-level complaining nitpicker. The characters herein deserve to be called "characters" – they range from nice to inspired and some rather beg to be used, which is a neat accomplishment in my book. This collection is a permanent addition to my DM toolkit and well worth a final verdict of 5 stars.

#### Urban Dressing: Port Town



**Publisher:** Raging Swan Press **Reviewer:** Thilo Graf **Rating:** 5 Stars out of Five

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!

As has become the tradition with this rebooted series under the command of Josh Vogt, we begin with a massive table of sights and sounds to be found in a port town, one that is 100 entries strong. From wharves struck by recent cold snaps to ballistae drawn on carriages, the entries prove to be inspiring glimpses of local color.

Beyond that, 50 entries of sample businesses await the patronage of PCs taking a stroll: recruiters, fresh water supplies, maps, and scuttlers. Need some local people? You're given 50 sample NPCs (fluff-only, with suggested alignment and class level in brackets) to provide the DM with further fodder of various adventure hooks and detail. If that is not enough, a table of 20 sample adventure hooks provide even more inspiring fodder. They actually sport some pretty interesting ideas.

#### 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.

I did not expect to like this Urban Dressing; after all, author Josh Vogt has already covered Pirate Towns and I expected a significant overlap. Surprisingly, this supplement has its very own identity and it is very much distinct from the installment on pirate towns, allowing for synergy nonetheless. It is quite a feat and worthy of 5 stars and my seal of approval.

Endzeitgeist out.

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Iwen K.C. Stephens