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Editorial

by Dave Paul

With this 51st issue of Pathways we turn a corner. Thanks to the support of readers like you, the magazine is now supported by patrons! As more patrons come on board to support the magazine, we'll offer more content. If you aren't already aware, stop by <u>Patreon</u> and have a look.

Because we've already met the first two milestone goals, this issue contains both a 1500-word and a 2250word piece that wouldn't have appeared otherwise. Next month, you'll continue to see this kind of quality material. Perhaps, in the next few months, you too will be contributing material to the magazine. A number of options are on the table including a monthly fiction piece. If you're interested, keep an eve on future editorials and the Rite Publishing website for submission guidelines and more. This month we've been exceptionally luckyMonica Marlowe, the most recent winner of Paizo's RPG Superstar! contest, agreed to put herself through our interview process. (And immediately after the madness of GenCon no less!) Many people who have made it to the Top 32 and beyond have written for Rite Publishing, including within the pages of Pathways. Access to the creative mind of a winner, however, is quite a treat. I hope you enjoy it.

The topic of many of this month's pieces is plagues, diseases, contagions and the like. In addition to the templated creature, itself prone to spreading sickness and infection, we're offering up some juicy (which, when we're speaking of disease, can be a rather disgusting notion) articles on the use of diseases in your own campaign. Maybe you won't have a chance to throw the false idol creature at your players any time soon, but, with any luck, you can drop some disturbing diseases into the lives of your players' characters. After all, as Steve points out in his article, characters themselves rarely fear disease. However, there are oodles of ways to make them very nervous about an outbreak. Sometimes, you just need to be creative.

There's a sticky note somewhere on the table next to me with some scribbles on it from months ago. I remember writing something to myself along the lines of "In a fantasy world of comparatively little magic, a healer who reliably was able to restore health, care for injuries, cure diseases, etc., would be remarkably valuable. So valuable, in fact, as to be a commodity for beings with enough influence." Maybe there's a healer in your players' group who has attracted the attention of some local powers. Imagine how strange it would be for a party of adventurers to wander into some town and tangle with the critters out in the borderlands and always come back unscathed. Imagine also that one of them let slip that she could tend to the wounds of some local folks (wounds that were beyond the ability of the locals to heal). A clever enough and powerful enough being, hanging out in the distance and monitoring the party through spies, might just find a use for someone like that. Not too many parties of PCs take kindly to being kidnapped and threatened to be put to work healing evil servants of some nefarious power. What an insult to a cleric who worshipped some healer deity. Perhaps that deity would go so far as to stop granting spells to that cleric to prevent the healing. Maybe if the cleric were unable to heal a friend this would be enough to push the cleric to change deities. Imagine the possibilities!

Happy Gaming!



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False Idol Creature Semplate By Steven D. Russell; Illustrations by Melvin Chen

The deities or ethos of deception do not always need followers to worship them. Instead they sometimes seek to keep people distracted, preventing them from accepting the salvation offered by other deities; other times they simply enjoy a good swindle. They promote false messiahs and elevate con men so that they have a force and divine favor that people will recognize and believe in. They eventually ruin the lives of their participants often financially as well as destroying the relationships they have with family and friends. They also put the souls of their followers at risk when they abandon the true divine powers of the world. Creatures that have been bestowed this status are known as false idol creatures once their true nature is exposed, unfortunately there is no outward sign.

Creating a False Idol Creature

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"False idol" is an acquired template that can be added to any intelligent creature who can speak and has a language.

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

CR: +2

Alignment: Always chaotic evil.

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

Special Abilities: A false idol creature retains all the special abilities of the base creature, and gains the special abilities as described below.

Bound to the Faith (Su): Due to its reliance on faith, a false idol creature suffers a -4 penalty on saving throws against any divine spell or effect, and suffers +50% damage from any divine source. In addition, it can be rebuked or commanded as an undead creature as though it had only 1/2 the total Hit Dice (character level) it actually possesses. Establishing command over the false idol creature is performed as described in the Command Undead feat, and uses one of the cleric's or paladin's daily channel energy abilities.

Charming Gaze (Su): Any creature within 30 feet of the false idol creature must succeed on a Will save (DC 10 +1/2 the false idol's HD + its Cha modifier) or be affected as though by the charm monster spell (CL equal to the false idol's CR).

Faith's Power (Su): Once each month, determine the average of creatures that worshipped the false idol that month. For every 20 creatures with an Intelligence of 6 or higher that worshiping it, it gains 1 false faith point. The false idol creature gains a circumstance bonus equal to its false faith points on all ability checks, attack rolls, combat maneuver checks, Combat Maneuver Defense, saving throws, and skill checks. In addition, the false idol creature gains 5 temporary hit points for each false faith point it possesses. The false idol creature is also treated as one level higher for the purpose of level-dependent variables (such as spellcasting) for each false faith level possessed. The maximum number of false faith points it can possess at any one time is equal to half its CR (minimum 1).

False Divinity (Su): Each false idol creature chooses one cleric domain (or subdomain) and gains the domain spells of that domain as spell-like abilities if she could cast them (CL equal to her CR). Each of these abilities can be used 3 times per day. The false idol creature also gains the domain's granted powers as a cleric equal to her CR. It cannot select Good or Law as domains.

Favored of the Idol (Su): For every false faith point the false idol creature possesses it may grant power to a follower in a divine class such as anti-paladin, cleric, inquisitor, oracle, warpriest, etc. This divine power is actually granted by the deities or ethos of deception; the followers can only gain access to domains (and other powers associated with that setting's deity or ethos of deception) and this favored one becomes fully aware of the true nature of the false idol.

Mark of the Idol (Su): A false idol creature can grant worthy servants a measure of its power. As a full-round action, a false idol creature can touch a willing creature, marking it with a unique symbol. For as long as the creature is marked, it gains a spell-like ability it can use once per day. This spell-like ability comes from the false idol creature's chosen domain (see false divinity, above). The target can also telepathically communicate with the false idol creature over any distance while on the same plane. A false idol creature can dismiss its mark as a standard action, no matter where the bearer is. It can also, as a standard action, cause pain to a mark bearer that deals 1d6 points of damage/2 HD with no saving throw. A false idol creature can mark multiple creatures, up to a number equal to its Hit Dice.

Abilities: Increase from the base creature as follows: Dex +4 (+2 to ranged attack rolls; AC and touch AC, Initiative, and Reflex saves. +2 to Acrobatics, Disable Device, Escape Artist, Fly, Ride, Sleight of Hand, and Stealth checks, add +2 to any of the base creature's Dexterity-based DCs), +4 Cha (+2 to Bluff, Diplomacy, Disguise, Handle Animal, Intimidate, Perform, and Use Magic Device checks; attempts to influence others, and





Pox of the Pale XP 12,800

CR 11

False Idol Leukodaemon

CE Large outsider (daemon, evil, extraplanar)

Init +13; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., *deathwatch*, *detect good*; Perception +24

Aura charming gaze (30 ft., DC 20), infectious aura (50 ft.)

Defense

AC 24, touch 18, flat-footed 16 (+9 Dex, +7 natural, -1 size) **hp** 125 (10d10+60+10)

Fort +11, Ref +18, Will +14

DR 10/good or silver; **Immune** acid, death effects, disease, poison; **Resist** cold 10, electricity 10, fire 10; **SR** 20

Weakness bound to faith

Offense

Speed 30 ft., fly 60 ft. (average)

Melee bite +18 (1d8+7), 2 claws +18 (1d6+7)

Ranged +1 composite longbow +22/+17 (2d6+8/×3 plus contagion)

Space 10 ft.; Reach 10 ft.

Special Attacks breath of flies, faith's power (2 false faith points), false divinity (corruption),

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 12th; concentration +15) **Constant**—*deathwatch*, *detect good*

At will—contagion (DC 19), dispel magic, greater teleport (self plus 50 lbs. of objects only)

3/day—bestow curse, greater (DC 21), dispel good, magic circle against good, protection from good, unholy blight (DC 19)

1/day—harm(DC 21), summon(level 3, 1 leukodaemon only, 35%)

Jactics

Before Combat Pox of the Pale has gathered 50 followers who worship him as a deity that defends the followers from disease, and inflicts disease upon the enemies of the followers. If he believes he will lose control of his followers he will hold a feast of infected food, denying them salvation and the other divine powers the souls of the faithful (these faith points are already included in his stat block). Beyond this he will cast *protection from good*.

During Combat Pox always likes to make use of its breath of flies as soon as it can followed by arrows from its bow to hit each target. It then often simply flees, using its teleportation ability, returning each day to observe the progress of its disease. If a divine character is present who can heal the disease, it often strikes hard and fast until that character is dead

Morale Pox is very practical and makes good use of its teleportation ability so that it can live to fight another day.

Statistics

Str 25, **Dex** 28, **Con** 23, **Int** 16, **Wis** 21, **Cha** 20 **Base Atk** +10; **CMB** +20; **CMD** 39

Feats Alertness, Hover, Improved Initiative, Point-Blank Shot, Weapon Focus (longbow)

Skills Fly +22, Heal +20, Intimidate +20, Knowledge (planes) +18, Perception +24, Sense Motive+24, Stealth +20, Survival* +17, Use Magic Device +20

Languages Abyssal, Draconic, Infernal; telepathy 100 ft.

Special Abilities

Breath of Flies Once per minute as a standard action, Pox can unleash a cloud of corpse-bloated, biting black flies in a 20-foot cone. Those caught in the cone take 8d6 points of slashing damage. A DC 21 Reflex save halves this damage. Those who take any damage are also sickened for 1 minute. In addition, the flies linger for 1d4+1 rounds, congealing into a buzzing 20-foot-square cloud centered on the cone's original point of origin. Any creature that ends its turn in this cloud must make a DC 21 Reflex save to avoid taking 4d6 points of damage and becoming sickened for 1 minute. This cloud of flies may be dispersed by any area effect that does damage or creates wind of at least strong wind force. All daemons are immune to this effect. The save DCs are Constitutionbased.

Contagion (Su): Any arrow Pox fires from a bow is tainted with disease. If a creature is damaged by Pox's arrow, it must make a DC 21 Fortitude save or be affected as if by the spell contagion. Pox can manifest arrows at will and never runs out of ammunition.

Infectious Aura (Su) All creatures within 50 feet of Pox take a –4 penalty on Fortitude saves against disease effects.

Touch of Evil (Sp): Pox can cause a creature to become sickened as a melee touch attack. Creatures sickened by his touch count as good for the purposes of spells with the evil descriptor. This ability lasts for 5 rounds. He can use this ability 8 times per day.

Spark of Malfeasance (Su): Pox can awaken the sinful desires of a target within 30 feet with a ranged touch attack. The target suffers extreme guilt and is sickened for 5 rounds. To end the effect earlier, the target can willingly commit an evil act (if it is of good alignment) or attempt a Will save (DC 20) at the beginning of its turn each round. Creatures that succeed at their saving throws are immune to this ability for 24 hours.

Ecology

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Environment any (Abaddon)

Organization solitary or wake (2–10)

Treasure standard (+1 composite longbow, other treasure)

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Epidemics

By Wendall Roy Illustrations by Marty Kevil, Jessica Dearest and Pieter Bruegel the Elder

Some diseases go above and beyond the normal dangers of contagion in Pathfinder, overwhelming entire regions with plague. Adventuring groups caught within the boundaries of such a plague can find themselves facing challenges far outside the normal scope of their adventuring activities. The following rules can be used to simulate epidemics and their effects both direct and indirect, as well as provide an additional level of complexity and realism to diseases in general. Default epidemic values are given that can be applied to any existing disease to turn it into an epidemic.

Sample diseases to be used as epidemics are also listed. These diseases assume the optional rules for disease progression from Paizo's *Pathfinder Unchained* are being used. A separate effect description is included if only core Pathfinder disease rules are being used, and in that case assume a default onset of 1 day. Finally, less impactful versions of the sample diseases can be used by stripping out any epidemic mechanics and using them as a standard disease.

Latency: One insidious quality of epidemics is that the disease spreads at a much faster rate than when symptoms manifest. This is represented by the epidemic's latency, a measure of the disease's ability to spread prior to symptoms manifesting and of how long seemingly cured victims can still transmit the disease. The mechanics for latency and the default values are represented as follows: **Latency** contagious, linger 1 day, +4 DC

Epidemics' latency is described as either contagious or noncontagious. Contagious latency means that a creature is immediately contagious at the latent/carrier step of the disease track. Noncontagious latency means a creature does not become contagious until reaching the weakened step of the disease track.

The ability for an epidemic to linger represents the difficulty of magical healing fully treating the victim of an epidemic, and a victim remaining contagious after most symptoms have been cured. A creature with a disease that lingers remains contagious for the listed amount of time after recovering from the disease. In addition, the caster level check for a *remove disease* spell that is otherwise successful must exceed the disease's DC by the listed amount in order to prevent the disease from lingering.

Panic: Few things strike at the heart of civilization and threaten its stability faster than the threat of plague. When an epidemic grips an area, governmental structures become overwhelmed, creatures panic, and the rules of civilization begin to fray. When the GM decides a settlement or region has at least 10% of its population at the bedridden or worse step of the disease track, each creature in that area with an Intelligence greater than 3 reduces its starting attitude towards other creatures by one step. When at least 30% of the population is at



the bedridden or worse step of the disease track, these creatures reduce their starting attitude by two steps and increase the DC of Diplomacy checks to influence them by an additional +5. Panic from an epidemic is a fear effect.

Resistance: A creature who survives an epidemic may find resistance to subsequent infections. The mechanics for resistance and the default values are represented as follows:

Resistance +4, 20 years

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If a creature is completely cured of an epidemic through nonmagical means, it gains the listed bonus on any saving throws (or immunity) to avoid contracting the disease again in the future. A creature retains resistance to the disease for the listed duration.

Virulence: While an entire region can be considered to be a plague zone while in the grip of an epidemic, creatures in the region should not be considered to be constantly exposed to the disease and needing to resist contracting it. Conversely, it can be helpful to track precisely how quickly and where an epidemic spreads, especially when dealing with a particular dungeon, building or other urban area. This is where an epidemic's virulence comes in handy. The mechanics for virulence and the default values are represented as follows:

Virulence range 15 ft., exposure 5 minutes, interval 1 hour, duration 1 day

The epidemic's virulence range is the distance from an afflicted creature that a contact or inhalation epidemic can be contracted. Existing Pathfinder diseases converted to epidemics that do not normally spread through either contact or inhalation should be given one of these additional infection types. The exposure listed for virulence is the amount of time required for a creature, object or area to become exposed to the epidemic

while remaining within the epidemic's virulence range. Exposed creatures must make a saving throw to avoid contracting the disease, while exposed objects and areas become contaminated and can spread the disease to any creature coming into their proximity. The virulence interval is the minimum amount of time required between exposures before a creature has to make another saving throw to avoid contracting the disease, while the virulence duration is how long an object or area remains contaminated and capable of spreading the disease.

Objects and areas contaminated with disease can be sterilized through nonmagical means. In addition, a spellcaster capable of casting the *remove disease* spell can choose to increase the casting time to 10 minutes and incorporate 100gp of ritual incense as a material component in order to use *remove disease* to decontaminate objects and the area within a 5-foot/level radius spread centered on the caster.

Sample Epidemics

Beastgrief

Type disease, injury or inhaled; **Save** Fortitude DC 14 **Track** mental; **Frequency** 1/day **Latency** noncontagious

Resistance +4, 20 years (humanoids only) **Virulence** range 10 ft., exposure 10 minutes, interval 2 hours, duration 1 day

Effect Animals at the impaired or worse step of the disease track have a hostile attitude towards humanoids **Effect (core)** 1 Con damage plus 1d3 Wis damage (minimum reduction to 1 Wis); animals with at least 4 points of Wis damage have a hostile attitude towards humanoids

Cure 2 consecutive saves

Beastgrief is an insidious epidemic that is the bane of rural, livestock-raising communities. The disease is less virulent than many plagues but has few physical symptoms, and signs of infection in domesticated animals are difficult to detect until the afflicted creatures rapidly become aggressive towards their handlers. In humanoid hosts beastgrief is even worse, rapidly causing dementia, flushing of the face with bloodshot eyes, and eventually leading to a catatonic death. Stringent measures of culling, corpse burning and quarantine are usually the only sure ways for a desperate community to rid themselves of the epidemic without magical assistance, which far too often spirals into the threat of famine and even greater problems after beastgrief has run its course.

Bonewarped Eternity

Type disease, contact; **Save** Fortitude DC 14 **Track** physical; **Frequency** 1/day **Latency** noncontagious **Resistance** none



Virulence range 10 ft., exposure 1 minute, interval 1 hour, duration 1 day

Effect No latent/carrier state. Even if the disease is removed with *remove disease*, the condition does not improve without *greater restoration* or *heal*. Animals, humanoids and monstrous humanoids that die from the disease are animated as skeletons contaminated with the disease.

Effect (core) 1d6 Con damage that cannot be healed until the disease is cured; upon death, animals, humanoids and monstrous humanoids become skeletons contaminated with the disease

Cure magic only

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If there were a prize given for most visually disturbing plague, then bonewarped eternity would be in the running to win. This supernatural nastiness is spread only through contact with bodily fluids, but is so virulent that it quickly contaminates the environment of its victims. The physical effects of the disease begin immediately upon infection, wracking the victim with pain as their bones slowly ripple and deform. Tiny spurs begin to jut randomly from the victim's entire skeletal system, eventually covering the body in a series of weeping wounds. By the time of death, the victim is little more than a deformed wreck covered in blood and bony spikes. Minutes later, the flesh of the victim begins to rapidly putrefy and the malformed, nowundead skeleton tears its way out of the body to spread contagion and malevolence.

Deathrattle

Type disease, contact or inhaled; **Save** Fortitude DC 16 Track physical; **Frequency** 1/day **Latency** contagious, linger 3 days, +4 DC **Resistance** +4, 20 years **Virulence** range 20 ft., exposure 1 minute, interval 1 hour, duration 1 day **Effect** Creatures at the weakened or worse step of the disease track suffer a -4 penalty on the following: Stealth

checks; Swim checks made to resist nonlethal damage from exhaustion; Constitution checks made to continue running; Constitution checks made to avoid nonlethal damage from a forced march; Constitution checks made to hold your breath; and Fortitude saves made to resist damage from suffocation.

Effect (core) 1d4 Con damage plus 1d2 Str damage **Cure** 2 consecutive saves

Deathrattle is a highly infectious disease capable of spawning a civilization-ending cycle of epidemics due to its virulence. Even the briefest exposure can transmit the disease to new victims. The disease strikes quickly, attacking the host's respiratory system and causing massive inflammation and internal lesions. Within the first day or two of contracting the disease, most victims have developed the disease's hallmark gurgling, labored breath. Without medical assistance, most victims suffocate on their own bloody fluids within a week.

Hellpox

Type disease, contact; **Save** Fortitude DC 19 **Track** physical; **Frequency** 1/day **Latency** contagious, linger 1 day, +4 DC **Resistance** immunity, lifetime **Virulence** range 15 ft., exposure 5 minutes, interval 1 hour, duration 1 day

Effect At the impaired state, penalties from the weakened state become permanent until the victim receives *heal* or *restoration*. Upon the end state of death, the victim's corpse spontaneously combusts and ruptures in a 30-foot radius burst that causes 1 point of fire damage and immediately exposes the entire area to the disease.

Effect (core) 1d4 Con damage that cannot be healed until the disease is cured, plus 1 Cha drain for every 2 points of Con damage suffered. The corpse of a victim reduced to 0 Constitution spontaneously combusts and ruptures in a 30-foot radius burst that causes 1 point of fire damage and immediately exposes the entire area to the disease.

Cure 3 consecutive saves

The origins of hellpox have been claimed to be of infernal creation, but these rumors have never been confirmed. It is likely the physical unpleasantness of the disease's effect on the bodies of its victims simply fuels any panicked and superstitious minds about its origin. Whatever the case, hellpox renders its victims a mass of swollen limbs and bloody, weeping boils that rupture easily. The physical debilitations are accompanied by unnaturally high fevers. In the final stages of hellpox, the victim's body bloats as internal organs fail, eventually exploding in gouts of steaming, pestilent gore. On a positive note for those individuals lucky enough to fight off a hellpox infection, they do effectively become immune to the disease.

Manarot

Type disease, contact or inhaled; **Save** Fortitude DC 16 **Track** mental; **Frequency** 1/day

Latency contagious, linger 1 day, +4 DC

Resistance none

Virulence range 15 ft., exposure 5 minutes, interval 1 hour, duration 1 day

Effect For each step the disease progresses beyond latent/carrier, the victim suffers a -1 penalty to effective caster level. This penalty also applies to any spellcasters attempting to target the victim with magical healing. **Effect (core)** 1 Con damage, plus 1d2 Int damage (minimum reduction to 1 Int), 1d2 Wis damage (minimum reduction to 1 Wis), and 1d2 Cha damage (minimum reduction to 1 Cha). **Cure** 2 consecutive saves

Manarot is the bane of powerful, magically-advanced civilizations. The disease targets the nervous system, particularly areas which are vital for higher function and the manipulation of magical energies. Spellcasters dread manarot, and it is not unheard of for priests with a less than perfect sense of altruism to refuse treatment for fear of contracting the disease themselves. Manarot does not discriminate on who it will infect, and even mundane

Purity Rust

Type disease, ingestion or inhaled (only affects humanoids with the human subtype or without the elf subtype); **Save** Fortitude DC 15

victims risk dementia and death from the disease's touch.

Track physical; Frequency 1/day

Latency contagious, linger 1 day, +4 DC

Resistance none

Virulence range 15 ft., exposure 5 minutes, interval 1 hour, duration 1 day

Effect At the impaired step of the disease track, the victim also suffers the effects of the entangled condition. Even if the disease is removed with *remove disease*, the victim's condition does not improve without *greater restoration* or *heal*.

Effect (core) 1d4 Con damage, target must make a second Fortitude save or 1 point of the Con damage is drain instead.

Cure magic only

Purity rust is a magically manufactured disease with a particularly dark history, one that most elves pointedly pretend does not exist. The disease was brought forth from the efforts of a fringe cult of elven druids worshipping

a draconian aspect of *Our Lady of the Unblemished Verdance*, as revenge against the encroachment of civilization and dilution of the elven bloodline by what the druids saw as inferior races. While the main intent of the druids was to attack a particular settlement of humans, their purity rust proved as unpredictable as any other disease and spread on an epidemic level throughout the region.

The Blue Wasting

Type disease, ingested or inhaled; **Save** Fortitude DC 12

Track physical; **Frequency** 1/day **Latency** contagious, linger none

Resistance +4, 20 years

Virulence range 10 ft., exposure 10 minutes, interval 1 hour, duration 1 day

Effect At the impaired state, penalties from the weakened state become permanent until the victim receives *heal* or *restoration*. At the bedridden state, victims emanate a pale blue illumination equivalent to a candle.

Effect (core) 1d2 Con damage that cannot be healed until the disease is cured, victims who take at least 6 Con damage emanate a pale blue illumination equivalent to a candle.

Cure 2 consecutive saves

The blue wasting is a disease as beautiful as it is deadly. Spread mainly through drinking water contaminated by some source of arcane residue, victims of the blue wasting undergo a fast and progressive atrophy of their body's fatty tissue. A side effect of the disease's pathology is to grant a shimmering blue luminescence to the victim's fevered sweating. By the mid-stage of the blue wasting, this luminescence spreads through the desiccated victim's veins and capillaries to enmesh the entire body in a web of pale glow.

The Juggles

Type disease, contact (humanoids and monstrous humanoids only); **Save** Fortitude DC 14 **Track** mental; **Frequency** 1/week **Latency** contagious, linger 1 week, +6 DC **Resistance** +2, 5 years **Virulence** range 5 ft., exposure 10 minutes, interval 1 hour, duration 1 day **Effect** At the impaired stage, the victim suffers a 20% chance to drop any held item when it is used. **Effect (core)** 1d2 Con damage plus 1d6 Dex damage, plus 1 Int drain for every 4 Dex damage suffered. **Cure** 2 consecutive saves

The juggles is another wasting disease which affects the motor neuron system, gaining its name from the substantial tremors it causes in the hands of its victims. While the juggles are spread mainly through direct contact, the disease is virulent enough to contaminate the immediate environment of an infected creature. The juggles is a disease which progresses slowly but surely in a horrific manner, leaving the victim's mind mostly intact but trapped in an unresponsive body by the moment of death. The juggles' slow progression combined with its protracted latency are what allows this terrible affliction to reach epidemic levels.



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Technique I: Improve **Your Voice**

about that for a moment. This is a major GMing trait alking about here that has power over whether your gan

- consider these things that need your good, the game table: le, places and things, plus the action

- combat ly a partial list!
- e-based serve make up a huge portion of your and its quality. or voice and speech skills, your sessions will

How to Develop a Strong Voice

ctice Deep Breaths

eak From the Diaphrag

Tips came pouring in. I collated, edited, and picked the best of them. And I published them in the newsletter. Then I turned them into articles and compiled them into a book as a bonus for subscribers.

Which brings me to today. If you're reading this, you have some of the same problems I had. And nothing feels worse than GMing a boring session and letting your players down. So, I'd like to give you the book I made to help you rock next session for free.

The book is called 7 Ways To Instantly Improve Your GMing. Download it now, at no charge. I hope it helps. I'll also send you weekly GMing tips via Roleplaying Tips Weekly, including the GM Tip Exchange. You and I both love RPG, so it's on us to be the best GMs we can so everyone has more fun at every game. That's my point of view, at least.

I hope you enjoy the book and my weekly GMing tips. Drop me a note to say hi or talk GMing anytime!

Cheers. Johnn, roleplayingtips.com August 2015

Once upon a time oh so not long ago I ran a stinker of a session. Afterward, upset and embarrassed, I wondered what went wrong. You know how sometimes you think you did poorly, like when taking a test, only it turns out you did awesome? This wasn't one of those times. The game truly sucked.

So I said to myself, "Johnny boy, what the hell happened back there? Why was that session like a pinpricked balloon farting all over the place and then landing in a limp lump on the floor?"

Then I got an idea. And another. And another. I started writing. And I diagnosed where I had failed as a GM. After combining and tweaking a few items, I pared it down to a short list:

- * No enthusiasm I failed to inject energy for players to feed off of
- * Boring game table atmosphere I failed to inspire
- * Repetitive ho hum grinding encounters I did not make gameplay interesting
- * Dull villain He was just another stat block
- * Boring roleplaying my NPCs were cardboard

I have one advantage to fixing things you might not: my Roleplaying Tips Weekly Newsletter. I put a callout for tips from game masters around the world. I do this quite often and then share the tips out to all subscribers. I call it the GM Tip Exchange.

7 Ways to Instantly Improve Your GMing



Download Your Free Book at: roleplayingtips.com/gm-hacks

Magic Whistles

Mike Welham Illustrated by Miguel Santos and Marek Rakuč

The *Pathfinder*® *Roleplaying Game* features a number of magical instruments, but very few whistles are available to characters. The whistles below are light enough that PCs could add a couple or more to their inventories and improve their bag of tricks.

Discordant Whistle

Aura moderate enchantment; **CL** 10th **Slot** none; **Price** 40,000 gp; **Weight** 0.5 lbs. **DESCRIPTION**

This whistle, constructed of a hollowed-out, yellowing bone, releases sour notes when blown that affect all creatures in a 30-foot cone. All targets in the area must succeed at a DC 13 Will save or become nauseated for 1 minute. An affected creature can negate the nauseated condition for 1 round by making a melee attack, but it must randomly attack a creature it can reach with a move action (accounting for difficult terrain and other factors). If an affected creature is instead adjacent to one or more other creatures when it decides to attack, it can attack a random target within reach. Regardless of whether a creature made its save, the whistle cannot affect it again for another 24 hours.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item, *confusion*, *distressing tone*^{UM}; **Cost** 20,000 gp

Fogcutter

Aura faint evocation; CL 3rd Slot none; Price 3,000 gp; Weight 0.5 lbs. DESCRIPTION

Shaped like a brass boatswain's call, the *fogcutter* grants protection against low-visibility caused by fog. Many ship's captains employ these whistles, which produce a lower pitched sound than the typical boatswain's call, in areas without lighthouses or other means to see through murky conditions. Despite their appearance and normal usage, they also work well on land. When the owner blows the whistle as a standard action, it disperses a 60foot cone of fog as if a strong wind blew through the fog. The owner may take this action for a number of continual rounds equal to twice her Constitution modifier (minimum 2 rounds). For fog not easily dispersed, the whistle's possessor may need to focus the effect on the same area for multiple rounds. The owner may activate the whistle in this way twice per day.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item, *gust of wind*; **Cost** 1,500 gp





Aura moderate enchantment and necromancy; CL 9th Slot none; Price 22,500 gp; Weight 0.5 lbs. DESCRIPTION

Gleaming silver, this whistle creates a shrill noise all creatures can hear clearly up to 200 feet away. Three times per day as a swift action, a lawful aligned creature or one deputized to uphold the law in a community activates the whistle such that it will affect a targeted chaotic creature or a creature in the course of breaking the community's laws within the 200-foot range. The creature must succeed at a DC 17 Will save or become paralyzed until the possessor of the whistle touches it or 1 minute has passed, whichever occurs first. If the save is successful, the creature must succeed at another DC 17 Will save or become shaken each round it continues with its unlawful activity or attempts to escape from or attack the whistle's possessor.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item, *hold monster*, *mark of justice*; **Cost** 11,250 gp

Whistle of Animal Control

Aura faint enchantment; CL 11th Slot none; Price 15,000 gp; Weight 0.5 lbs. DESCRIPTION

Despite this wooden whistle's simple nature, it is capable of producing sounds heard only by animals. With a successful Knowledge (nature), Handle Animal, or wild empathy check (DC equal to 10 plus the animal's Hit Dice), the whistle's possessor knows which frequency to use to affect a target animal. The whistle only affects one animal at a time, and the creature receives a DC 14 (or the result of a wild empathy check, if the whistle's

owner has that ability) Will save to ignore it. An affected animal can be commanded to attack or stay calm. If either of those commands would result in obvious harm, such as attacking a significantly larger creature or remaining calm while another creature attacks the animal, it receives another saving throw with a +4 bonus. The animal will follow the command for 5 rounds, after which the whistle's possessor must use the item again to continue controlling the animal. An animal that succeeds at a Will save cannot be affected by the whistle again for 24 hours.

If the whistle's possessor has the wild empathy class ability, he can use it to affect a magical beast with an Intelligence score of 1 or 2, but the DC to determine the correct frequency increases by 5.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item, dominate animal; Cost 7,500 gp

Whistle of Communication Aura faint transmutation; CL 6th

Slot none; Price 6,000 gp; Weight 0.5 lbs. DESCRIPTION

These two-inch long, tin whistles are usually produced in pairs or multiples. The whistle's owner can take a swift action to target a flat-footed ally within 30 feet, granting that ally the benefits of uncanny dodge for 1 round. With an attuned set of whistles, each whistle's possessor gains a +5 bonus of Bluff checks to pass secret messages to any other creature with an attuned whistle. Additionally, once per day as a swift action, a whistle's owner can grant the benefits of the message spell to all the possessors of attuned whistles of communication. This effect lasts for 1 hour.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item, message; Cost 3,000 gp

Whistle of Ghostly Sounds Aura moderate illusion and necromancy; CL 7th Slot none; Price 11,200 gp; Weight 0.5 lbs. DESCRIPTION

Carved from obsidian, and shot through with streaks of ivory, this whistle produces an eerie sound when blown. With a move action, the possessor creates mournful sounds at a distance of up to 30 feet away. Once per day, the owner can continue playing the whistle as a move action, forcing all creatures within 20 feet of the designated ghostly tune's center to succeed at a DC 16 Will save or become panicked for 7 rounds. For each additional round spent maintaining the tune as a move action, the owner increases the duration of the panicked condition by 1 round, if an affected creature fails another DC 16 Will save (during the second round, an affected creature failing its save adds one more round to the total number of rounds, etc.). Creatures that succeed at the initial save cannot be affected by this whistle for 24 hours. Creatures that save at some point after the initial failed save no longer can have rounds added to the duration and no longer have to make saves. Creatures that cannot hear the whistle are no longer subject to its effects.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item, fear, ghost sound; Cost 5,600 gp

Whistle of Glass Breaking Aura moderate evocation; CL 7th

Slot none; Price 12,000 gp; Weight 0.5 lbs. DESCRIPTION

This small, steel whistle is capable of producing a near-headache inducing set of notes. While it deals no damage to most creatures, it is destructive against glass and crystal, dealing 7d6 points of damage to such objects and creatures (DC 16 Fortitude half) within a 30-foot cone. Each additional time the whistle is used per day, the amount of damage decreases by 2d6 (minimum 1d6).

By succeeding at a DC 18 Perform (wind instruments) check, the owner can hit an ultrahigh frequency note that soundlessly shatters glass, even masking the sound of breaking glass.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item, shout, silence; Cost 6,000 gp

Whistle of the Phantom Dog Aura moderate conjuration; CL 7th Slot none; Price 9,000 gp; Weight 0.5 lbs. DESCRIPTION

Wisps of fog trail from this otherwise normal-looking dog whistle. Once per day, the whistle's possessor can call forth a mostly substantial, gray dog. This Medium creature has AC 20 (+4 natural armor, +6 Dex), 12 hit points, a speed of 50 feet, and benefits from being incorporeal. It has a bite attack (+7 attack bonus, 50% miss chance, for 1d4 points of piercing damage). If it successfully bites an opponent, it can attempt to trip the foe (+7 CMB). The dog persists for 7 hours or until it is destroyed.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item, phantom steed; Cost 4,500 gp

Whistle of Quiet

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Aura faint illusion and necromancy; CL 5th Slot none; Price 9,000 gp; Weight 0.5 lbs. DESCRIPTION

This ivory whistle makes no sound when it strikes another object. As a standard action, the whistle's owner can create a 20-foot diameter sphere of *silence* at a distance of up to 40 feet away. The owner can only use this ability once per day, unless it has the bardic performance class ability, in which case it can use expend 1 round of bardic performance to reuse the whistle.

Additionally, once per day, the whistle's possessor can

also target a single creature within 60 feet, causing the creature to become deafened for 1 hour if it fails a DC 13 Fortitude save. This owner can reuse this ability by expending 1 round of bardic performance.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item, blindness/deafness, silence; Cost 4,500 gp

Whistle of the Songbird Aura faint divination and enchantment; CL 3rd Slot none (see below); Price 10,800 gp; Weight 0.5 lbs.

DESCRIPTION

This bright blue, red, and yellow whistle has a bundle

of small, brightly colored feathers attached to it. Twice per day, the whistle's owner can compel a bird to carry a physical item weighing no more than half a pound, or to remember a 15-second message and repeat it to those who can use *speak with animal*. If the bird does not reach its destination within 3 days, it loses the compulsion to make the delivery.

While carrying the whistle on a cord around the neck (taking up the neck slot), the owner can also speak with songbirds as if using speak with animal.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item, animal messenger, speak with animals; Cost 5,400 gp



Tords of Gossamer & Shadow

Gossamer Worlds: The Otherlands





by Matt Banach



20 Dungeon Statues with a Secret By Creighton Broadhurst, Illustration by Joyce Maureira

Dungeons always seem to have statues. Perhaps one of the most durable forms of art available to the average dungeon builder, they are often used to add a feeling of grandure and awe to important locations such as throne rooms, temples and grand entrances.

1. Not all statues are created equal, however. Often they can act—in some clever fashion—as an automated guardian or trigger for a secret door; some even have a secret storage niche hidden within. Use the table below to determine a dungeon statue's secret.

2. The statue is hollow and large enough to conceal a secret watcher. Cleverly hidden holes enable the guard to listen and hear what is being said in the area. Alert PCs (DC 20 Perception) spot these hidden holes, and the mechanism to open the rear of the statue.

3. Some portion of the statue is hollow—whether by accident or design—and insects swarm within. Explorers getting too close to the statue irritate the insects—perhaps spiders, ants or centipedes—and they attack.

4. The statue has a clenched fist and it holds something within—perhaps a valuable gem. Perceptive characters (DC 20 Perception) can see the item in question, but must break the hand to release the item.

5. The statue has a clenched fist holding a black bead (a bead from a *necklace of missiles*). A strange word— "Zarnoth"—is carved into the statue's plinth. When anyone speaks the word out loud, the statue unclenches its fist and the bead falls to the floor before exploding. (The GM should determine which bead to use for this trap, based on the strength of the party.)

6. The statue is intricately carved and the figure it depicts wears a billowing cloak. The cloak has several hidden niches within (DC 20 Perception spots).

7. At first glance, the statue appears to be made of pure gold, but a DC 20 Appraise or DC 20 Profession (stonemason) check reveals in truth it is a normal stone statue expertly covered in gold paint.

8. A slender pipe hidden in the floor links the statue to a hidden niche overlooking the area. A person concealed in the hidden niche speaking into the pipe creates the illusion it is the statue that is speaking.

9. The statue stands on a rotating plinth. Every hour, it turns to face a random direction.

10. The statue was used as an execution device. It is hollow (like #1 above), and enemies of the dungeon builder were often trapped inside to slowly die of starvation and thirst. A PC opening the hidden compartment (DC 20 Perception spots) is surprised by the skeletal remains of the statue's last "occupant" as they tumble out.

10. The statue has an animate skeleton encased within it. Faint sounds of scrambling issue from inside, and the statue (because of the trapped skeleton) radiates a faint evil aura. 11. The statue is precariously balanced. If it is touched, searched or hit with a weapon, it falls over and shatters. This creates a lot of noise and alerts all the occupants of nearby areas who make a DC -10 Perception check.

12. The statue stands on a revolving base. A switch on the back of the statue activates the mechanism, and can make the statue revolve in either direction. Revolving counterclockwise raises the statue up from its base (and vice versa). If explorers allow it to unscrew for five minutes they discover a small storage niche hidden beneath.

13. The statue was dropped while it was being installed and a deep crack runs through its core. If moved or subjected to a weight of more than 100 lbs. (perhaps by someone climbing on it) the statue cracks down the middle and falls apart.

14. The statue's arms are detachable (DC 20 Perception spots) and interchangeable. Swapping the arms opens a nearby secret door.

15. The statue radiates faint conjuration magic (DC 16 Knowledge [arcana] identifies), but this is as a result of a *magic aura* spell cast to distract intruders and thieves.

16. The statue was originally intended to serve as an animated object, but the crafting wizard never finished his job. A DC 20 Knowledge (arcana) check reveals the statue was likely intended for this purpose.

17. The statue was originally part of an acid-spraying trap, which has long since run out of acid. A faint corrosive smell lingers around the statue's open mouth (through which the acid was originally spewed).

18. This obsidian statue of a warrior maid originally held an ornate glaive, which has long since been removed. It lies forgotten elsewhere in the dungeon, and is also crafted from obsidian. A DC 20 Perception or Profession (stonemason) check reveals it and the statue are part of a set. Sliding the glaive back in the statue's hands depresses a hidden switch and opens a secret treasure niche in the floor behind the statue.

19. A low railing of black iron surrounds the statue. Anyone crossing the railing and touching the statue activates a trap (DC 20 Perception spots, DC 20 Disable Device disarms). The railings suddenly slide out of the floor, rising up to the ceiling and trapping the character.

20. This statue simply depicts a huge hand holding a long, ornate horn. Characters playing the correct music through the horn can summon a number of minor magical effects. These effects—and the music required to summon them—are depicted on a number of nearby frescos. Sadly, this music also summons all the occupants of the nearby rooms.

20

GM'S MISCEIJANY: Dungeon Dressing

If you enjoy the table above and like dungeon dressing, check out *GM's Miscellany: Dungeon Dressing* from

Raging Swan Press—Endzeitgeist's choice as the number one book of 2014! Crammed with over 300 pages of information and charts designed to bring your dungeon alive, *GM's Miscellany: Dungeon Dressing* is an essential part of any GM's arsenal.



RAGING SWAN PRESS GM'S MISCELLANY: DUNGEON DRESSING



20 Things to Find on an Evil Altar By Creighton Broadhurst

Illustrated by Matt Morrow and Earl Geier

23

It seems adventurers are always invading fanes dedicated to evil powers, slaying their priests and looting their valuables.

Priests worshiping evil powers perpetrate unspeakable, terrible acts upon their altars. The altars are the centerpiece of their foul rituals and such places are rarely without ornamentation or implementation. Use the table below to add items of interest to the evil altars in your campaign.

1 . A curved bronze knife encrusted with dried blood lies next to a beaten copper bowl similarly covered in blood.

2. A black velvet cloth covers the altar. Atop it, a polished skull, fashioned into a drinking cup, stands on a small, beaten silver tray along with a stoppered clay flask decorated with lewd images of demons cavorting with humans.

3. A small silver tripod holding a stone bowl along with several pots containing foul-smelling herbs have been neatly arranged on the altar.

4. Dried blood has stained this stone altar a foul brown/ black colour. The surrounding floor is similarly stained.

5. A three-pronged candlestick filled with red-hued candles stands in the exact centre of the altar. The candlestick is designed to look like a pair of lovers entwined in the midst of a particularly lewd act.

6. A wide oval bowl set atop the altar contains several rotting and shriveled hearts.

7. A low pile of skulls—all bearing the signs of violence covers the altar top. Emerging from the centre of the pile is a single, thick blood-red candle.

8. A thin book—covered in some sort of aged leather lies on the altar. It is kept shut by a ribbon woven from long, golden hair. The ribbon is frayed and speckled with dried blood.

9. The shattered shards of a mirror—laid out in a rough approximation of how the mirror would have looked when whole—lies on the altar. One large part of broken glass is conspicuously absent. The glass of the shards present seems suspiciously clouded in places as if the mirror has trapped the image of the last thing reflected on its surface.

10. A single, foul-smelling burning candle stands atop the altar in the centre of a pool of wax that almost covers the altar top. The candle's flame dances wildly, as if caught in a strong wind, but no wind is present in the chapel.

11. Channels cut in the altar top lead to a central depression with a small hole at the centre. Clumps of dried blood fill the channels and central depression. A



small knife, point towards the depression, lies at the head of the altar.

12. A thick tapestry covers the altar. The tapestry depicts angels being slain by a rampaging balor wielding a huge sword wreathed in dark energy. The tapestry is obviously old, but is in good condition.

13. A battered helmet, the stump of a broken horn and a bent holy symbol crafted from blackest obsidian lie on a scarlet velvet pillow.

14. A set of five matching daggers are laid out on the altar. Each of the daggers has an oversized, two-handed handle and flecks of ruby set in its pommel. Each also has a litany to some dark power etched in Abyssal runes along the blade.

15. A scythe lies on the altar. Dried blood covers its blade, and wisps of blond hair are stuck in the blood.

16. Niches—seven in total—have been carved into the altar's surface. A polished skull—its top removed—fills each niche. A different type of incense fills each skull.

17. The slashed and bloody tabard of a servant of good—decorated with the wearer's patron's symbol—lies on the altar. The tabard conceals other trophies including a partially melted silver holy symbol, a battered mace head and the bones of a severed hand.

18. A skull stands at each corner of the altar. A dagger has been rammed through the top of each skull, and tied to their hilts are red, scarlet and purple streamers.

19. The altar is riven with a multitude of cracks. Bent and hammered coins—silver, gold and platinum—have been forced into the cracks—perhaps as offerings...

20. A low "fence" of leg and rib bones surrounds the altar. The altar itself comprises a great mass of bones glued together in some unspeakable fashion. Three great horns emerge from the mass of bones; from each hang small banners depicting the symbols of various evil powers.

If you enjoy the table above and like dungeon dressing, check out *GM's Miscellany: Dungeon Dressing* from Raging Swan Press—Endzeitgeist's choice as the number one book of 2014! Crammed with over 300 pages of information and charts designed to bring your dungeon

alive, *GM's Miscellany: Dungeon Dressing* is an essential part of any GM's arsenal.





A Pox on Your House

By Steven D. Russell, Illustrated by Earl Greir

Player characters often have very little fear of diseases. They have access to a great deal of healing magic that can heal virtually any ailment, they have high Fortitude saves, or they are simply immune to such effects due to the benefits of their class or race. As such, a pandemic with lethal or at least very serious consequences does not really bother them. This does not mean a Game Master cannot create an interesting plague story, for there are a number of ways beyond infecting the PCs to have a plague strike the PCs where it hurts.

A Cure Is Not A Vaccine: Even with all the power the PCs possess they cannot stop the spread of a disease. Even curing a disease from an individual does not mean he won't be exposed to it again, and become infected 5 minutes after the PCs move on. PCs often only cure those folks who are showing signs of infection or those suspected of being infected. So carriers who show no sign of infection are unlikely to be cured. This means even if the PCs cure everyone they see with disease they are not stopping the spread of the disease nor are they stopping its cause.

Keep Quarantine: PCs may be immune or highly resistant to a disease but if they are tasked with stopping its spread they may need to quarantine a population of potentially infected people until they can be sure they have stopped it and if they don't deal with the root cause this disease will still pop right back up. This provides all the problems of the PCs being border guards, but instead of invading hordes of orcs, thei own people are simply trying to stay alive and escape enforced proximity to the obviously infected. Do you kill the escapee, do you kill one as a demonstration to the others that you will enforce the quarantine? Can you do the same when it's one small child or one scared old woman? What about someone who wants to go into the quarantine just to be with a loved one when he dies?

Your Little Sister Is At Risk: PCs may be stuck in the quarantine, they may be enforcing it, or they may be working in the camps to help cure folks, but regardless of what they are doing, they are not likely to be there to help every friend, family member, or lover who does not possess the powers of the PCs. Threaten a PC's little sister with infection from those who break the quarantine. Have one of the PCs' love interests working in the camps to cure folks. Have their mothers on the outside trying to get into the quarantine to be with the PCs.

The Plague Makes Monsters: Casting spells that cure disease is easy, but what about when the plague is

a zombie apocalypse, horrible mutated hosts, a mindcontrolling colony organism or old-fashioned lycanthrope on the pandemic scale? Perhaps the PCs can save those at risk or they have to cleanse the world of these abominations or risk something far more disastrous. I recommend you leave the possibility of a cure clouded in the fog of the unknown, creating great roleplaying opportunities for players based on the moral choice of attempting to cure people or making the great sacrifice to save others. You can make it an even harder choice when one of the folks attacking you is your little sister who is begging for help.

Plague Master: We have talked about the source of a disease, but what about when it is not a natural source and a villain is spreading it? Perhaps some noble feels the population of the common folk has grown too great to be controlled and he knows only the rich can afford the curative spells. Perhaps a cleric of the deity of disease feels locals are not giving his deity enough respect in these lands, or perhaps he simply plans to make money curing the nobles who will pay for it. The GM could use the plague as a prelude to invasion hoping to weaken the defenses and resources of the PCs' home country or city.

Designer Plagues: What if players do spell research? Well, the plague master's research can be far more deadly to the PCs, because he wants to hit them with things that *cure disease* and *heal* spells won't wash away like yesterday's food stains. She created a plague that has spell resistance, one that generates its own *anti-magic field*, and one that player characters can only cure by using a rare substance that the plague master has control over. I recommend leaving this as just research; as the PCs investigate, they might discover notes about this super-plague, perhaps it is finished, and perhaps it is not. Conceivably, it is in a secure vault, sitting in a vial as the ultimate death trap or retributive strike if the plague master is defeated.

I do not recommend actually using any of these designer plague variants since that takes away from the PCs' abilities and rather I encourage GMs to make the PCs be required to use them up. Make the PCs dig deep with more and more victims so they have to choose who to save and who to let die, and then discover to their horror there is one person who is infected who they PCs should have saved.

In the end, a good plague story should be a mix of good character stories, morally challenging dilemmas, and high suspense, so you do not need to infect your player characters to tell a good one.





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I hope you will consider joining us so we can bring you a better and more adventurous Pathways e-zine.







Twenty Questions with Monica Marlowe

by Steven D. Russell

1. Please tell us a little about yourself.

I have been gaming solidly for the last 20 years, but my first gaming experience was in the early '80's when a table full of boys told me I couldn't play D&D with them because I was a girl. I think I've proven that that is not actually the case. I immediately bought myself a Red Box and taught my brother how to play D&D. We never really got much farther than that, since we had no gaming group, but we were both pretty excited about the prospect of gaming. Years later my brother introduced me to a World of Darkness Vampire LARP and indirectly my husband; I've been gaming ever since.

I have two children, who are both interested in gaming and I work with my husband, Andrew, on our freelance projects. In my everyday life, I am a registered nurse. After having answered all these questions I think I should point out that I am incredibly sarcastic and love to have fun and laugh. None of my answers are intended to be malicious in any way and I love each and every person that I refer to by name, in case there is any doubt. Bet you never had someone self disclaimer before.

2. What is your home game like?

On Sunday, we game with the same people we've gamed with in one system or another for almost 20 years. I inherited them from my husband, but they are definitely good friends to both of us. We mostly play Pathfinder, but in the past we have played WoD, Star Wars, Numenera/ Cypher System, and home brewed, with a smattering of board game nights when we need a break from the real world but aren't ready to kill the bad guys. This group has undergone some changes over the years and will probably continue to change as life inserts itself.

Twice a month we play with a newly formed group that also has a core of players from my White Wolf days, but it includes two PFS players and one of my friends' 16 year old sons. I remember when he was born, it's kind of weird and fun gaming with a totally new player; we try really hard not to break him. I have had to step away from playing with this group due to the writing schedule of my adventure, but I'm looking forward to getting back to Mummy's Mask.

3. What is your favorite Paizo product?

I make no secret that I haven't even read the entire Core Rulebook, so my experience with the Pathfinder collection is very limited. I am looking forward to having time to read "Occult Adventures" and the upcoming Bestiary as well as a couple things in the pipeline that I can't really discuss. Mostly I'm hoping we'll get an "Unchained Cleric," I'd love the heck out of that one.



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

The product needs to fill a hole, whether it is a supplement or an adventure. Again, my scope of experience makes me not an expert on this topic, nor even provide me enough insight to really answer it intelligently.

5. What is your favorite Pathfinder Roleplaying Game compatible product?



The Rogue Genius Games "The Genius Guide to Domain Channeling" and the sequel, but my opinion may be a little biased here.

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

Hands down, Rogue Genius Games as a whole, but I am a lot biased on this one. Owen KC Stephens has been one of my favorite designers from back to his Star Wars days and I've used several articles he wrote for Dungeon and Dragon over the years. I consider myself a very lucky girl that he calls me his friend.

Kobold Press has some great things to offer and I found "The Kobold Guide to Worldbuilding" helpful while writing my adventure and I like what Wolfgang Baur puts out, he's a smart cookie and I'm a fan of his as well.

7. Who is your favorite tabletop RPG illustrator?

I don't think I can just pick one. There are a lot of great illustrators out there who bring the game to life. Without their amazing vision, RPGs would be pretty dry reading. Each game has a style and a feel. With the right illustrator, the text is alive, with the wrong style of illustration, regardless of talent, both works suffer.

All that said, I love (in alphabetical order, per Paizo style guide): Jacob Blackmon, Stan! Brown, Liz Courts, Crystal Frasier, Claudio Pozas, and Wayne Reynolds. This list is hardly comprehensive.

While not exactly an illustrator, I feel like I should mention cartographer Christopher West, without whose maps for the Star Wars line, my life would be a much paler reflection of itself. He is amazing.

8. Tell us all about how you became RPG Superstar!

Short story - I lost my mind, wrote a magic item, and quickly wondered what the heck I was thinking for entering in the first place.

Long story - I did kind of lose my mind for a moment when I found out that the first round would not be wondrous items. I cannot say with any certainty I ever even used a wondrous item as a PC, except for *pearls of power*, because most of them don't really augment divine spell casters. But I did come up with what was essentially a team work magic weapon, which Pathfinder as a whole really doesn't have many of, or any that I can think of. After I was selected to be in the Top 32 I spent a lot of time wondering how I managed to get myself into this position and why people kept voting for me. It's still kind of surreal.

9. What was your best moment while working to become the Superstar?

There were no "best moments" while working to become the Superstar, they were all hard fought and required a ton of work. The best moment of Superstar was the moment when I was standing in my kitchen, with Owen on the phone telling me I won, my husband and my children hitting F5 in the living room, cheering, and then being tackled by my 12 year old daughter, all while she was telling me how proud of me she was and that she wanted to be like me. I realized at that moment that I have achieved a dream that I didn't even realize I had put away as unachievable - to become a role model and a hero to my children, and apparently a lot of other people, if the conversations are to be believed.

10. What was the most challenging aspect of the contest?

I knew absolutely NOTHING about the rules system beyond what I gleaned as a player, I had never run a Pathfinder game (and I still haven't), and I had certainly never designed anything before in my life. It was basically the craziest thing I have ever done and succeeded at doing with no training, experience, or faintest clue, except for perhaps being a mother and the jury's still out on my success rate there.

11. What do you feel was your most ingenious contribution?

I'm not sure anything I created could be considered "ingenious." I stuck very close to the CRB, because it was the thing I knew best, and only with passing acquaintance. Where I feel like I shined was in my application, everything was reverse engineered - I came up with an idea and then made it fit inside Golarion in a new and apparently "old school" way. I don't think you need a lot of bells and whistles to play a good game. You don't need crunchy bits. You need to be creative and imaginative. When I was in college, I took a course on medieval literature and my professor once said that the audiences of that time period liked to see old stories told in new and exciting ways, I think that's still true today, and that's what I tried to do.

12. What did you learn while working to become Superstar?

I learned that if I have the time and the desire, I can do anything I put my mind to. I was surprised by my own success. Most importantly, I was surprised that despite the reports of continued aggression on women in gaming that I experienced almost no animosity for my gender from the RPG Superstar community. While it happens elsewhere from time to time on Paizo forums, I can say with a lot of certainty that the members of the RPG SS community are head and shoulders above the crowd when it comes to their personal generosity and consideration, both online and in person.

Also, there is something of a "survivors" club for all RPG Superstar contestants, due to the strange circumstances that we live under during the run of the contest. While I had budding friendships with many of the past contenders, getting into the Top 4 really puts you in a difficult place that only a few people can fully understand and appreciate. I was deeply touched by the number of former Tops who have quickly become dear friends, perhaps due to the shared trauma, I mean, experience. Neil Spicer lied about the decoder ring, just in case he tries that one again on the next winner, we're on to you Spicer, I bet there's no clubhouse either...

13. According to the Official Rules, "The Grand Prize is the opportunity for a paid commission to write an adventure for a product in Paizo's Pathfinder



Modules line." Can you reveal anything about what you're working on?

At this time I am only working on "Down the Blighted Path," since it is my first and biggest contribution to Paizo's catalog to date, I think they know better than to sign me on to other projects before I finish this one. I know which projects I'd *like* to

work on in the future, there's this occult thing coming out soon, but alas I fear I am too late coming to the table to be assigned anything for it at this time.

14. Is there anything cool you can share about what it's like to be "on the inside" working on an official product?

I wish there was, mostly it's a lot of "work hard, learn what you don't know, and write 32,250 words as fast as you can." I have met some pretty spectacular people at and through Paizo, I kind of feel like a kid in the locker room of her favorite sporting team though, all these people that I've admired and now I "have" to talk with them, it's a little intimidating and a lot exciting.

15. What advice do you have for people who are new to but trying the RPG Superstar contest?

As you know, by now, the contest cut off day is only a few days from the time of this writing, so any advice I have will have to be for the Season 10 folks, since this may be too late. But, you can't win if you don't enter. If I can do it, anyone can, so don't think that your lack of GM experience or rules knowledge is going to prevent you from winning. Get a few close, trusted, and experienced people to answer questions and give feedback. Don't be afraid to push the envelope, there's still a LOT of design space to be filled in Golarion. And lastly, really think about what you want out of your time as a contestant. Entering is easy, competing, and winning can be taxing, bordering on life consuming. If you don't have the time to put in, be honest with yourself, don't take the feedback personally, if it comes as a surprise that a judge didn't like something about your design, you weren't really paying attention. You should be able to find your own strengths and weaknesses. This isn't a contest for someone who is sensitive or thin skinned, I mean that in the nicest possible way, it's brutal.

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

Oh! I know this one! But I have two, both from PaizoCon. I had a gentleman (I will not name him, because it might embarrass him) come up and tell me a lot of the things that I had thought about my own

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designs and just gushed about how he loved my work. It was my first real in person fan encounter, I had never experienced it before. I hugged him. It was exhilarating to have someone know my work and be as exuberant with their opinion as I frequently am; he and I are friends now.

The next night I finally met Chris Wasko in person at the convention and to my embarrassment, I cried when I hugged him, because Chris had been my choice of Superstar potentials, I had followed him in the past and I thought he had what it took to win (and I still do). I was so happy that he had done so well and I was a little sad that I had won instead, it was emotionally complicated and we laughed at how ridiculous I can be at times.

17. Can you talk a little bit about other projects that you're working on?

At this time I have a lot of ideas and a few handshake agreements, but nothing is contracted or signed. I can say that I will definitely be working with Rogue Genius Games in the future, I want to work with Kobold Press, and Legendary at some point, and I am waiting to hear back from Green Ronin about something that they have on their horizon that makes me giddy that I might get to work on it makes me feel faint. Some of it is Pathfinder compatible and some of it is not, but you'll have to wait and see which is what.

18. What game-related professional goals have you yet to obtain that you aim to achieve?

At this moment the sky's the limit. I do not have as much free time to write as I would like and I don't think that's going to change any time soon, I have bills to pay. So, my freelance time is precious, I will only be working on things that either have a loose time frame or one project at a time. I never had any game-related goals beyond making the gaming community a stronger, friendlier place for everyone to enjoy, regardless of gender, race, sexuality, or creed, and I feel like I have achieved a level of recognition that will allow me to do that where I am right now, so I'm going to ride this part and see where it leads me to farther along the way. Although I cannot lie, it is still a whole lot of fun to see the looks on people's faces when I am introduced as "Monica Marlowe, she won Paizo's RPG Superstar contest." That is never going to get old.

19. We're almost done. Is there a question I haven't asked that you'd wished I'd asked?

I think I sufficiently bent your questions to say whatever the heck I liked, you were great! You might have asked me about my knitting, though, which actually came up at GenCon. Bless Elisa Teague for knowing me because of my geeky knitting rather than wanting to talk about silly

'ole gaming. She went up about 20 notches on the cool scale that night. 20 points to Elisa!

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

I believe that the core of role playing games is interacting with each other and telling a story. Rolling dice is all fine, but gamers are holding a sacred space that doesn't see nearly as much use as it used to - sitting around a dining room table, talking face to face, engaging with one another in meaningful ways. We live in a world where electronics now filter a lot of personal interactions and more and more people sit in the same room and never talk to one another. We should be proud of who we are and what we do, we are carrying on an ancient past time, telling stories and entertaining one another with nothing but our brilliant minds. We are seeing more and more acceptance of "nerds" and "geeks," more than I ever thought imaginable 20 or 30 years ago. There is plenty of room at the table for everyone, there is no reason for us to snipe at one another or be hurtful to others who aren't just like us. We pretend to be dwarves, elves, spell slingers, and Desna knows what else, we could certainly afford to be gentle with one another. More importantly, we are role models for the next generation of gamers, we should do right by them and show them how awesome we can be.



Rite Publishing Presents

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Bret Boyd, Mike Welham, and Nicholas Milasich





Reviews Illustration by DrDjr



13th Age Bestiary (13th Age)

Publisher: Pelgrane Press **Reviewer:** Thilo Graf **Rating:** 5 stars out 5

This massive book clocks in at 240 pages. I have received the color hardcover version of this book for the purpose of providing an unbiased,

critical review, a task that has been harder than I thought at first.

Why? Because it's a "first bestiary/monster manual"type of book. I mean, come on, how many ways can you say: "This book contains orcs, ogres, etc." To me, as a reviewer, there is NOTHING more boring than the first bestiary, ESPECIALLY since the advent of 3.X.

Let me ramble for a second: When I began playing, bestiaries were actually that: they were fashioned after the medieval catalogues of fantastic creatures. They provided stats, yes, but more importantly, they provided information on society, habitat, tactics. Flair. Things that set my mind ablaze with ideas. Then 3.X hit and as much as I like the mechanical complexity and wealth of options that 3.X systems like Pathfinder provide, I equally loathe what this has done to monsters and bestiaries. Instead of receiving a fully fleshed-out creature with a place in the world, a modus operandi, etc., we get some dry numbers, two lines of fluff and that's it.

In 3.X and its inheritors, monsters often felt more like machines and less like living, breathing creatures to me. Pathfinder has inherited this issue, though thankfully, a broad array of templates and unique signature abilities has somewhat mitigated the process of making monsters just HP-exchange units. Now, I grant you that I very much appreciate well-crafted creature-mechanics, but I still catch myself wishing for a simpler time once in a while; rather, wishing for a time when monsters still had story, still had a place.

What does this have to do with 13th Age? Well, in my original review of the core book, I called 13th Age somewhat schizoid in some design decisions. In none is that more apparent than in relation to monsters. Personally, I HATE the fixed-damage values monsters usually deal in 13th Age. However, the nastier specials, which provide upgrade abilities for harder games or to showcase elite adversaries, are downright inspired. While the core book's monsters have fallen into the blanderthan-bland routine for the most part, with no significant lore upgrade to their roles, <u>13 True Ways</u> provided a kind of personal El Dorado for me: a vast array of utterly unique backgrounds for devilkind to choose from, each more inspiring than the last? Yes, please! Gimme more!

Feel free to correct me if I'm wrong, but I very much assume that you are not that interested in my rambling

on and on about 13th Age's ogres versus that of other d2obased games or this book's version of a critter or absence/ presence herein. What I do assume you to be interested in is quite frankly the consequence of monster design for 13th Age being ridiculously easy and streamlined; namely, whether to buy this book or not. After all, it is a first bestiary; not too much uniqueness in here, right? I know I wouldn't have purchased this book based on its premise alone.

Well, you would be right on one hand, and, like me, dead wrong.

The first thing I feel obliged to mention is that each monster entry herein not only comes with one simple statblock. Instead, each beast comes with multiple ones, providing upgrades and, often, utterly unique abilities beyond what the base creature has to offer. If you're coming from a Pathfinder background, think of it as the difference between a regular critter and its mythic counterpart; if you're coming from an oldschool gaming background, think of it as the difference between a skeleton and a skeletal champion. Yes, it's this pronounced.

Furthermore, the creatures actually each get their place to shine; where Pathfinder's bestiaries are not read for inspiration (that's something I draw from the creaturethemed campaign supplements), this book provides that. With nomenclature (where applicable), advice for building battles, in-character quotes, relationships with icons, and yes, copious adventure hooks, this bestiary delivers in spades. Want an example? Well, take the chimera. These creatures actually come with a built-in template for each of the iconics, all providing different bonuses and flaws that serve to render the creature distinct for each iconic. These are based on the PC's relationships with their iconics. What about symbiotic magical items made from chuul? (Who needs Ankheg armor, anyways?)

Different approaches and philosophies within certain races and odd quirks that are downright inspired can be found in almost every entry. For example, did you know that couatl consider themselves to be the true heroes of the world? Were you aware that ettercaps make excellent information brokers? What about the myriad creatures that make up the fungal kingdom, including a race potentially suitable to be played? Why should cubes have all the fun? Unleash gelatinous dodecahedrons upon your PCs, and roll an appropriate die to see what the creature does instinctively! Whichever lore you prefer regarding ghoul bites, you're covered and inspiration for outbreak scenarios can be found in the respective entry.

Of course, some creatures receive brand new takes. At the court of the lich king, for example, being a lich may just show that you're another sycophantic poser. Manticore bards immediately conjured up scenes of Groteschi the Red, one of the more unique creatures from Catherynne M. Valente's <u>Orphan's Tales</u>. There are quite a few unique creatures in here as well, from the Crusader's Saved (which may be a fate worse than damnation) to the

clockwork Zorigami that may constitute the heart of the world and the sentient countdown for the end of the age or even the world.

Why should you care, even if you're not playing 13th Age? Well, if the huge wealth of exceedingly glorious fluff, hooks and ideas is not enough to sway you, what about sheer design ingenuity?

Wait, what?

Yes. 13th Age does not lend itself well to making interesting adversaries that have thousands of combos and options at their beck and call. However, in the case of this book, this limitation proved to be a blessing in disguise. From modifications of escalation or relationship dice to truly unique options, some of the abilities herein are, no hyperbole, GENIUS. Take the redcap. Tried and true delightfully evil fey-we all know and love the ironshodded menaces. Well, herein, they have taboo wordseven if you *think* them, they get power from it and may gain a potentially nasty array of additional actions. Now how is this represented? When a PLAYER says the taboo word, the ability kicks in. Yes. This is pretty much brilliant and can provide quite a mind-blowing experience when handled with care. This is just ONE example out of a bunch of them. This book's abilities OOZE creativity and will enrich ANY d20-based game I run for years to come.

Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are top-notch; I noticed no significant issues. Layout adheres to a nice 2-column full-color standard and the book sports a lot of unique artworks for the critters, which adheres to a uniform style and can be generally considered to be situated in the upper echelon of quality, though not yet at the top. My hardbound copy is sturdy, pretty to look and easy to use, with nice, glossy, thick paper.

Rob Heinsoo, Ryven Cedrylle, Kenneth Hite, Kevin Kulp, Ash Law, Cal Moore, Steve Townshend, Rob Watkins, Rob Wieland-congratulations. You have actually managed to craft the first "Bestiary I" since the days of second edition I liked to *read*, the first that inspired me. This book manages to succeed where the 3.X or 4E monster manuals, as well as the Pathfinder bestiaries, have failed to do: this actually inspires me to use creatures, to craft adventures around them, and to use them to make the world feel more alive. While a rare few third-party bestiaries over the years have managed this sense of wonder, it usually stems from clever mechanics or uncommon concepts and only rarely from actual narrative potential. Ultimately, this book-in spite of its "1st bestiary" handicap-did all of that and more. It makes me giddy with anticipation and hopeful we'll see more far-out creatures with the level of detail provided here.

The <u>13th Age Bestiary</u> is a superb, inspiring book, which may not be on an artistic or aesthetic level with the

big ones, but is infinitely more inspiring. For me, I'll take content over bling any day. My final verdict will clock in at a well-deserved 5 stars + seal of approval.

Endzeitgeist out.

#30 Magic Tools

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



This PDF clocks in at 13 pages: 1 page

front cover, 1 page editorial, 1 page SRD, 2 pages of advertisement, leaving us with 8 pages of content, so let's take a look, shall we?

So, do you know what I don't get? In all those high magic magocracies and settings, why are there no actual tools? You know, everyday-useful magic items to make life more convenient. I mean, literature is full of wizards using convenient items to render life more comfortable for themselves and in a setting where the crafting of deadly, costly, magical weapons, it is only sensible that some of the funds circulated would be used to actually improve the tools used to generate the respective tools, right?

Right - so here we are, new magic tools. All of them are masterwork per default. Framed by an aptly-written, short piece of in-character prose, we dive right in: The Arcane Anthology, for example, opens itself on the correct page and politely positions itself in front of the reader, levitating and leaving his or her hands free. If that is not inspiring to you in and of itself, then the short piece of history provided for each item should help in that regard. Not all items herein reach this level of coolness, though. For example, the Brass of Binding prevents the rider from being dislodged from her mount "no matter what happens." No matter how good the CMB, no matter the circumstance-unless the points of the maple-leaf brass are tapped. Alas, the book does not specify what type of action is used by tapping the maple leaf's points. Oh, and it costs 1,000 GP...for never being dislodged, ever. WHAT? This sounds like it needs a hard whack with the nerf-bat or rather, a tighter wording. It is clear this should only prevent dislodging due to the rider's own failed checks. Yes, I am very much aware that this is supposed to be a tool for the Ride-skill only, but as written, it looks like it can be used in other settings AND it still fails to mention the action required for (de-)activation.

(This is a glitch I noticed a couple of times when the item's text provides no clear means of determining the activation action, though I do assume the standard action default for wondrous items. But I'm rambling about a nitpick, so onwards!)

We are given a spoon that can purify any poison from food 3/day and detect it 3/day as well; a cool item though personally I think I'd prefer the detecting and purification to be based on poison DCs. I'm aware, however, that this

is just a personal preference and won't hold it against the work as a whole. There is an enchanted chisel that can carve into wood on its own. A compass that can lead you to food, animals, or locations pictured in your mind is nice, as are gloves that turn held items invisible. The Flawpicker item needs a scaling mechanism–picking out flaws from gems is fine with me, but eliminating curses from cursed items, on the other hand, should have a scaling rate of success.

I do like the sight-enhancing magical kohl. Mantles that help you avoid detection are nice, but what about shoons that 1/day create a platform mid-flight to push off, adding +10 ft. height and length to a jump? Yeah, awesome. Pins to improvise opening locks and and manacles are A-OK with me. There's also a patch that allows for quicker application of liquids and slippers that allow caught thieves to generate an illusion of an animal darting away, providing an excuse for any noises created? A needle to animate cloths and the like to entangle foes? Cool! What about a babelfish-like translating butterfly? Nice!

Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are good, though not perfect. I noticed a couple of typos, italicization glitches, and the like. Layout adheres to Rite Publishing's two-column full-color standard and the PDF comes fully bookmarked for your convenience. Artworks consist of thematicallyfitting stock art.

Liz Smith's items are glorious; they make sense and in many, many cases, they can be considered awesome in their flair-breathing the spirit of fairy-tales and feeling like actual MAGIC instead of an accumulation of numerical bonuses. The tools herein may not be 100% perfect, but they have more soul than many magic item books I've read. Yes, there are some minor ambiguities and yes, I pretty much prefer Scaling options over those that work as a default, but in the end most of the gripes I have apply mainly to my personal preference. This has never been a sufficient reason for me to rate a PDF down; valid gripes are reserved for the glitches and nonpreference hiccups, which ultimately are offset by the sheer imaginative potential herein. It should be noted that the items within fit perfectly as rare items in a low magic game, so yeah, versatility is accounted for.

Hence, my final verdict will clock in at 4. 5 stars, rounded up to 5 for the purpose of this platform.

Endzeitgeist out.

Animal Races: Clan of the Frog

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

This installment of the Animal Races-series clocks in at 15 pages: 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial, 2 pages SRD, 1 page back cover,

leaving us with 10 pages of content, so let's take a look!

The Frog (and Newt) Clans presented in this installment as the most civilized of boggards, once again, are presented in the trademark level of detail and believability one expects from Eric Morton. The intriguing psychology, distinct differentiations in aptitude and calling between parents and offspring, and the resulting deviations of social structures from the default—these all create a familiar, yet still alien, society.

Members of the Frog Clan are either medium (+2 Dexterity, -2 Strength) or small (+2 Desterity, -2 Strength), have the boggard subtype, low-light vision, normal speed of 30 ft. Or 20 ft, respectively, scent (5 ft., scaling up to 30 ft. at 6th level), natural armor +1 (scaling up to +2 at 10th level), and they get a sticky tongue that provides a penalty to AC and a movement limitation to those hit with it. The tongue can only be removed by an opposed Strength check analogue to the boggard's ability. A total of four Frog Clan variants are provided. Bull Frogs get +2 Strength and can select Frog Clan Heritage as a combat feat. Frog Clan members get +2 Intelligence and can choose the Frog Clan Heritage as an alchemist's discovery, while Toad Clan members get the same modification, but may choose the feat in lieu of a hex instead. Tree Frog Clan members must be small, but gain +2 to Wisdom and the grippli subtype in addition to the boggard subtype, also gaining the Tree Frog heritage feat -which they may choose as a ranger's combat style feat.

Newt Clan base racial traits are identical with those of the frog clan, except that they gain a primary bite attack at 1d4/1d3 instead of the tongue. The Newt Clan members get +2 to Intelligence and may select Salamander Heritage as a witch's hex, while Salamander clan members also get +2 to Intelligence and may choose Salamander Heritage as an alchemist's discovery.

Now as to the racial heritage feats, Frog Clan offers hold breath or swamp stride, adding leap and terrifying croak thereafter. Tree Frogs can get camouflage, climb or swamp stride, adding glider, leap, and toxic skin to the fray . Salamander's hold breath, flame resistance, and swamp stride complement these options. The PDF also provides a feat that hearkens to the race's proclivities to strange science: Test Subject, which allows you to learn a discovery that modifies either physiology or body chemistry.

The PDF also provides six different alchemist discoveries, one of which nets a natural attack with adamantine properties (in my opinion, a bit too soon at



Animal Races: Clan of the Frog



level 6). This infuses metal into natural attacks, grants gills, a +4 to Intimidate at the cost of -4 to Disguise, and an internal cavity (to store items in), as well as minor DR/ piercing + slashing. Apart from the adamantine issue being granted slightly too early (in my opinion), it's a solid array.

The goddess of the new moon and alchemy, the genealogy, and the diverse mythologies of the Clans once again provide compelling intersections with established creatures, thus rooting these Clans in the respective cosmology and ecology. As always, we are also introduced to heraldic crests, though this time around, they are assigned to the symbols for alchemical substances, with partial negation of attribute-drain/damage providing interesting options.

This PDF goes beyond that with a second "deity" (or rather, cult), the Templar Cult, an evil organization devoted to literally worshiping technology. The PDF also sports five new technological items, from circuit threading to ray guns. Nice! The PDF also provides a new cleric domain with Technology Guide synergy.

Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are top-notch; I noticed no glitches. Layout adheres to the series' elegant, printer-friendly two-column b/w-standard with thematically fitting stock art. The PDF comes fully bookmarked for your convenience.

Eric Morton's Frog and Newt clans are interesting and compelling. Over all, there is nothing truly wrong with any of the pieces. I really enjoy many of the options provided ehrein. That being said, some of the small balance screws, while not loose, could have used some slight additional fine tuning, at least in my opinion. Primarily the adamantine discovery, which is, as I said, granted a tad bit too soon in my book. Still, this constitutes a truly fun addition to the series and ranks among the more unique and culturally distinct files in it. Hence, my final verdict will clock in at 5 stars +seal of approval.

Endzeitgeist out.

Adventure Quarterly #6

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

The sixth installment of Rite Publishing's spiritual heir of Dungeon Magazine clocks in at 72 pages: 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial, 1 page ToC, 1 page SRD, 1 page back cover, leaving us with no less than a massive 67 pages of content. Quite a lot, so let's take a look! As always, we begin the issue with a nice editorial by Robert N. Emerson before jumping into the meat of the respective modules. This being a review of an adventurebased magazine, the following contains **SPOILERS**. Potential players should jump to the conclusion.

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All right, DMs still here? Great! The first module herein takes us back into the iconic training ground/ artificial dungeon of Questhaven's Questor's Society, the Ruins Perilous, wherein 4th-level PCs are challenged by Mike Welham to enter the Fungarium! What once was a gigantic banquet hall has -since the various cataclysms befell the ruins-turned into a kind of interesting fungal habitation, one that is by now separated in two factions of fungoid lifeforms that exist in a brokered, uneasy truce. Yes, this means that the best option indeed boils down to actually negotiating with the strange fungoid creatures. If Diplomacy is not up your PC's alley, fighting remains an option, although they will miss out on a boon for the PCs. However, this is not where this dungeon level shines-indeed, the creepy atmosphere is wellsupplemented by a diverse array of cool hazards, with strange mushrooms adding a nice dimension to the encounters. Fungal forlarren queens that share a mind are there for negotiation, but unaligned fungoid creatures and a dangerous spiny otyugh do make for quite a few nice, challenging foes for combat-centric PCs to defeat, rounding out one of the arguably coolest levels in the ruins yet. It's fun, diverse and consistent-I love it! It is even more awesome with supplemental tidbits like stats for the trap-resetting ratfolk workers, an anti-fungus weapon and stats for groundkeepers, etc.

The second module, Bret Boyd's "Fire and Ice" (not related to the neofolk band of the same name) begins with the death of adventurers, though thankfully not the PCs. Instead, a company of competing adventurers has been all but wiped out while trying to thwart an evil organization's plan to harvest divine essences. Their sole survivor, as it happens, is on the same ship as the PCs, and draws the ire of the primary antagonist, the immortal assassin Malkin, and an iceberg vessel. Upon temporarily defeating the threat, the poor survivor comes clean and asks the PCs for aid and so they're off to the island of pleasure, Mibre, a small paradise, where an order of enigmatic monks poses an interesting puzzle (including trouble-shooting advice and means to brute-force it). Without the help of the monks, the PCs will have a hard time bringing the magical crystal to the plane of fire to sunder it and thwart the plans of the evil cabal. My one gripe here would be the lack of vessel stats for the iceberg ship and the PC's ship, but on the plus side, the settlement at least does sport a full settlement statblock.

The final module within these pages, penned by Alex Putnam (and Danielle Doss), would be "In Iron Clad," wherein 14th level PCs have their business trip rudely interrupted while aboard a massive, dwarven sandsteamer used to traverse the lethal badlands, only to have

it be attacked by a behemoth. This is only the first of things to come; deadly divas herald the shape of things to come, as the PCs happen upon the massive artifact: the metal heart. When they bring this to the metropolis, the PCs are tasked to pilot the Iron Knight-we're talking about the Saber Rider/Power Rangers-style mecha also featured in the glorious Kaiju Codex. Much like its rendition there, the rules provided could be a teeny tiny bit more precise, though they should not overtax the capabilities of most groups. The task thereafter is to pilot the gigantic mecha to vanguish the corrupted, elemental-themed kaiju-sized creatures. But that is not where the module ends; indeed, the PCs have to brave a legendary, vast tomb to find a magic weapon for the Iron Knight-the Sword of Ages' End-and use it to vanquish the legendary corruptor in one massive boss battle of, quite literally, gargantuan proportions!

After these modules, Creighton Broadhurst provides an array of complex, multi-round hazards/encounters to drop into your game—some of his best work—while Steven D. Russell continues his advice for wide open sandboxing campaigns, including some handy lists to use at one's convenience.

Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are very good on a formal and rules-level. Layout adheres to Rite Publishing's 2-column full-color standard with a significant array of gorgeous, original full-color artworks AND there are A LOT of awesome maps in here. If you need any more proof that Tommi Salama is perhaps THE heir to Jonathan Roberts, this one delivers; in diverse styles and color, the maps are ridiculously beautiful. Better yet, the maps also come as high-res JPGs for use with virtual tabletops or the printer AND there are player-friendly high-res versions of the maps as well. The PDF comes fully bookmarked for your convenience.

For the first time in the run of Adventure Quarterly, more than just the modules blew me away; quite honestly, I really like all three. Each sports unique locations and nice, compact story lines; each delivers, in spades, some absolutely imaginative vistas. Better yet, Alex Putnam's final module is perhaps the best high-level module in any Adventure Quarterly: high-stakes, unique, and supplemented by lavish, copious maps, this module is a stroke of genius and will have your players talking about it for years to come. It may well be the perfect transition from regular gaming to making full use of the superb Kaiju Codex and truly high fantasy gaming! This installment is creative in all the right ways and sports glorious ideas as well as Rite Publishing's trademark focus on high concepts-even the supplemental material went above and beyond-making this well worth a final verdict of 5 stars + seal of approval!

Endzeitgeist out.

The Emergency Willain Collection

Publisher: Run Amok Games **Reviewer:** Thilo Graf **Rating:** 5 stars out of 5

This PDF clocks in at 43 pages: 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial, 1 page ToC, 1 page SRD, leaving us with a massive 39 pages of content, so let's take a look, shall we?

We've all been there, at least I know I have: you just can't bear to crank out *YET ANOTHER* villain statblock, lavishly crafted, only to have the poor sop quickly curb-stomped by the PCs, whether by dumb luck, by exceedingly strong PCs, or by some other combination of factors. Enter this collection of NPCs, ready to drop into your campaign! What exactly do we get?

Well, first of all let me explain the basics. Some of the villains work best in certain environments; therefore the best suited terrain, etc., is summed up in the beginning. The PDF also contains information on villain motivation, advice on using the NPC, henchmen (if appropriate), as well as suggestions for ramping up the difficulty of the respective adversaries (advice I know I need for my players). Notice that you should not consider the characters herein as nameless statblocks; while their respective write-ups sport generic monikers, the entries themselves do have significant and well-written background stories, including names and so forth. This collection is not an NPC Codex-like accumulation of nameless statblocks, but rather a collection of NPCs that deserve the "character" C.

But what villains do we find herein? The first would be the Verminous Brawler: a worm-that-walks *cum* pit fighter who is NOT actually evil, despite his monstrous appearance. This villain is designed story-wise to put a beating on PCs, but not a lethal one, offering a builtin mystery and quite an impressive adventure in the making. With 2 brothers as henchmen, the write-up is fun and compelling.

Grammy Knuckles is the product of adventurermurder-hobos: when her tribe was slain, the goblin bard/ witch turned midwife and her nasty goblin runts began campaigns of pillaging and theft, making this NPC an interesting moral conundrum. Add a unique vehicle to the fray and we have a nice low-level investigation with a twist.

Most doppelgangers are narcissists and schemers, but few are as nasty as Dax. He gives psychopaths a bad name, using his powers to frame the PCs. The PCs need to play their cards right or they'll end up in jail...or worse.

Lady Viedda Warborn is not a villain, *per se*. The halfelven maid is actually a hero in the traditional sense. Unfortunately for the PCs, the same cannot be said about her nasty squires: compulsive liars and manipulators, they are dandasukas who are doing their best to taint the hero and guide her towards a seemingly inevitable downfall. Even the nastiest of fey do have a sense of what is proper and when a lurker in light vivisectionist

particularly fascinated by fungi and biological warfare was exiled from her own, you know you have a nasty, nasty adversary, even before her cadre of nasty fungal blindheims.

A story of exotic tragedy, the yuki-onna samurai, Matsuya is hunting the grating and honorless drifter that proved to be her undoing. She hunts alongside yeti ninjas (!!) as footsoldiers serving their winter demon queen. Pirates that encounter unspeakable horrors, driven mad, haunt the coastal stretches – and when the PCs find the ruined hometown left in the wake of cosmic horrors, it may not only pit the PCs against the maddened captain and his crew, but also against the all-consuming threat that broke the mortals' spirits.

I am a big fan of Lovecraftiana; the subtle themes in the influence of the denizens of Leng in various Adventure Paths makes me hope for a payoff of these subdued themes in some future Adventure Path; until then, a denizen of Leng assassin with hounds of tindalos as hunting dogs should make for an uncommon and highly lethal build to challenge those meddling PCs. Finally, we have a treant consumed by rage and his satyr entourage, which provides a nice and deadly encounter in the end. The CRs herein range from CR 1/4 to CR 13, and are listed in the index by CR at the end of the PDF.

Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are top-notch; I noticed no significant glitches. Layout adheres to Run Amok Games' printer-friendly two-column b/w-standard. The PDF comes with ample of original pieces of b/w artwork and is fully bookmarked for your convenience.

Ron Lundeen's builds are interesting in that they go beyond the requirements of the format. They not only provide compelling builds, their use of uncommon template combinations and interesting base creatures render these builds more than basic throwaway creatures. Indeed, the NPCs herein breathe thanks to the combination of interesting build choices and the compelling prose. Granted, you can ignore the prose, but the sheer inspiration that suffuses some of them-and the wide breadth of scenarios provided-can be considered the true star here. When a write-up and presentation inspires you to craft a module (or at least an encounter) around these villains, one can definitely call a PDF a wellrounded offering. My only gripe here is that I have been terribly spoiled by the builds in Faces of the Tarnished Souk and Scions of Evil. This book would be my primary NPC reference, were it not for those two books. That being said, this still ranks among the best villain collections out there and deserves a final verdict of 5 stars +seal of approval.

Endzeitgeist out.

In the Company of Angels

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

This massive installment of the "In the Company of..." series clocks in at 57 pages: 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial, 1 page SRD, leaving us with a massive 54 pages of content-quite a bunch, so let's dive in....

As you may know, the "In the Company of.." series is devoted to making high concept, monstrous races viable options for PCs and this one tackles angels, out of all creatures. I very much like this concept and, following the standard of Rite Publishing books, the introduction to the race is delivered in glorious in-character prose, rendering the reading experience of this book surprisingly fun. Alas, the introductory paragraphs are riddled with punctuation errors, which did somewhat detract from my reading experience of an otherwise glorious introduction. The race presented herein would be the grigori.

Now those of you interested in mysticism and mythology in general have a smile on your face and, at least in my case, this smile broadened when I saw the optional rule of a setting-specific curse that renders all children of grigori horrible monsters. It should also be noted that the amount of minor glitches and typos decreases over the course of the text. The narrating grigori explains physical appearance, alignment, relations with other races, etc.. Over all, this section served as a very flavorful introduction to the race.

On a formal level, grigorigain +2 Wisdom and Charisma, -2 Constitution, which renders the base race somewhat lopsided. While I won't bash the race for this, personally, I prefer races with an equal distribution of attribute bonuses between physical and a mental stats. Grigori are humanoids with the extraplanar, angel and good subtypes, and no, they do NOT receive "aura of menace" and the other nifty, yet often overlooked and powerful angel abilities. Grigori are medium humanoids and may choose either acid, cold, electricity, or fire resistance 5, gain +2 to saves versus poison and petrification, +2 to Sense Motive and Perception, darkvision 60 ft., and a racial curse that makes all attempts to prevent the conception of offspring with mortals moot. Okay, the base traits, while powerful and providing a net bonus of +3 to Sense Motive and Perception, are interesting and would fly as provided in my game.

Next we are given the alternate racial traits: here, we have an alternate array of attribute modifiers I personally prefer (Constitution and Intelligence +2, -2 Wisdom) as well as a rather broad array of options to customize the grigori. Do you want to affect magical beasts with handle animal but without a penalty? Check. Bonuses versus evil outsider? Check. Expanded spell lists for arcanists that transform the divine spells into arcanum applicable? Check. (This latter is somewhat of a corner-case for me. While I absolutely adore the fact that it lets you portray

a healing arcanist that makes sense, at the same time, I'm a bit reluctant due to exactly that factoid.) Resistance against negative energy (akin to AAW Games' colliatur) can also be found among the traits for grigori sworn to defeat the undead. There is a defensive hole here, as well as spell-like ability corruption resistance against evil and lowlight vision. 1/day fiend-smiting is a trait that allows paladins to stack damage against the hordes of abyss and legions of hell appropriately. Sounds all awesome, right? There even is a balanced wildcard feat trait: 1/day as a free action upon the beginning of the grigori's turn, he may be eech the heavens to grant him one feat for which he meets the prerequisites, but only for one round. While looking powerful on paper, its impact remained appropriate in my playtest; significant, yes, but not overpowered.

Grigori also receive a smattering of favored class options for bard, cleric, inquisitor, monk, oracle, paladin, skald, sorceror, summoner, and warpriest. Beyond those, there is one for Rite Publishing's cool luckbringer and divine channeler classes. On a purely aesthetic point, the warpriest's benefits are slightly different in formatting, but that remains a cosmetic gripe and should not faze anyone. Thankfully, we do receive age, height, and weight tables and, of course, also a racial paragon class (for which favored class options are provided as well); this is the angelic paragon.

The angelic paragon must be neutral good, gets skills at 6+Intelligence modifier, full BAB-progression, good Fortitude and Reflex saves, proficiency with natural attacks, greatswords, heavy maces, javelins, longbows, morning stars, and warhammers (wait, no scythes?) and neither armor nor shield proficiency. While I understand the armor, the lack of shield proficiency did not make sense to me: how do they raise their AC? Well, that would be the job of Celestial armor, which consists of 1/2 armor bonus, 1/2 natural armor bonus; this begins at +2 and scales up to +18. The bonus is lost when wearing armor. I assume shields are exempt from this, though I admittedly am not 100% sure. Now if you've been following my reviews for some time, you will have noticed that I did not mention the HD of the class. That is due to one simple fact: none is given. This is a pretty glaring glitch for the class and a severe detriment, especially considering the fact that the framework of the class is already powerful: 6+Intelligence skills, 2 good saves AND full BAB? That's nasty. The framework does point towards d8 or d10 as HD, but as provided, I am not sure.

At 1st level paragons are treated as both humanoids and outsiders; then native outsider apotheosis at 10th level. Angelic paragons also begin play with a pool of providence equal to 3 + class level. An angelic paragon may not spend more than one point of providence from this pool in a given round and begins play with three uses, learning an additional trick every 2 levels thereafter, to be chosen freely from the selection. The base abilities allow for the enhancement of the paragon's weapon with various, scaling special weapon qualities and bonuses, stacking up to a +5 enhancement bonus, with proper wording for the application of the bonuses to be added to already magical weapons. The +10 cap remains in effect.

Secondly, as a standard action, they can cause a target within 100 ft. to burst into soulfire, causing 1d6 points of damage, +1d6 for every 2 levels thereafter, with a Charisma-governed Reflex save for half damage. This damage is one-half fire damage and one-half divine damage (the latter is not reduced by resistance, much like certain cleric spells). Non-good creatures slain by this ability must succeed at a Will save or be subject to the *sequester* spell with a caster level equal to the paragon's class level. This is an odd choice; I get the anti-divination prevention, but what about the invisibility component? Furthermore, the spell mentions that the target remains in suspended animation until the spell ends, which is confusing when taken in conjunction with the soulfire ability itself. In other words, the target is killed and then sequestered, but does that mean the coma effect hits before the target is killed or not? I assume that the sequester effect affects the target's remains, but I am not 100% sure.

Finally, immediate action can prevent truespeech, with 10th level making the ability permanent. As someone with a background in academia and a serious interest in linguistics I am no fan of this ability. Why? Because it further marginalizes languages. That is no base for a proper criticism, though; however, the spell effects duplicated here are usually reserved for higher levels. This means that, at lower levels, the PCs opposition probably won't have a good means of countering them. Granted, the spell-like effects won't break the game, but still. The soulfire ability feels overpowered to me in the context of the already impressive framework of the class: full BAB, good saves, many skills and a ranged spell-like ability that can't be completely negated by resistance? The totals, while not broken on their own, represent overkill when taken as a whole.

We are given abilities powered by providence, such as group telepathy as a supernatural ability, including ranged aid another for Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma based skills. One cohort in my game is an aid specialist and, were he a grigori, this would be NASTY. My advice for GMs regarding this ability is to watch it carefully. Cleric spells as spell-like abilities with scaling level selection can be found here; it works, though it took me a bit to get whether the ability grants scaling spelllike abilities or not. Access to orisons is also in here, as are angelic senses; these allow for at-will detect evil, detect magic, discern lies, know direction as spell-like abilities as well as the missing sense, whether that be darkvision or low-light vision. On a nitpicky side that will not influence the verdict: the default granted sight is darkvision, which makes less sense than lowlight vision since the race's default is darkvision. As a standard action and for one point of providence, see invisibility is part of the deal. 9th level nets commune and 17th level provides true seeing and detect snares and pits. The latter, at 17th level, is probably way past its usefulness.

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The angelic paragon also gets a powerful, fear-based save (with a hex-like 1/day/target clause), with shaken going directly to panicked and cowering. Why skip the frightened in the condition progression? 11th-level paragons can add +2d6 damage and save or 1d6 Strength and Constitution damage or object breaking to attacks, though thankfully with the same caveat. What about devastating charges that deal additional +6d6 soulfire damage, include a free trip, the possibility to blind foes, AND speed-increase? Magic jar possession of mortals is also part of the deal.

17th-level paragons can journey to the astral plane. The angelic paragon can also gain an aura that modifies memories, erasing the paragon and her allies for one minute in the past. This ability only affects creatures the paragon would want to protect; adversaries get a save. This ability is at once exceedingly powerful and crippled. The shenanigans you can pull off with such a trick are extensive, even modifying memories; the psionic power, can be VERY powerful when handled correctly. This is area of effect and less limited, but at the same time, the non-scaling 1 minute duration of memory modified feels very conservative. All in all, this ability feels like it would be well-served by a slight reconfiguration.

Providing a brand that buffs anyone who attacks the recipient and +1/2 class level enhancement bonus to an attribute for one round are also in here, with the latter being one example for an ability that just begs to be abused like crazy. I am also not a fan of death and soul targeting effects that otherwise do not grant saves being allowed saves (at a +4 to the save) and allowing immunity to negative energy effects, including channel energy, as a free action. Granted, it's only for one round, but still....

What about an ability, available at first convenient choice, that allows the angelic paragon to spend a providence point to intercept an attack and take hit point, ability damage, level drain or death effects. This outclasses shield other, but does not stop there. The ability ALSO allows for instant, long-range exchange of positions with an ally as a swift action; it is also not denoted as conjuration [teleport] and thus impossible to negate. The ability also allows for the prevention of adjacent allies falling. Finally, the ability allows for the expenditure of all providence points to take the effects already determined upon herself, applying immunities and resistances as normal. That's ONE ability. Each component would be valid and worthwhile; in combination, however, they're broken for the limited investment they require: spell-like abilities invisibility, mirror image, and alter self. There are other abilities that seem underpowered in comparison (although they're not); for example, a scaling single target sonic damage that may damage foes or expending all your providence to do a divine damage burst that blinds foes. Frankly, there are A LOT of overpowered options here. At 19th level, you receive solar's slaying arrows; the array of options also allows for the immediate substitution of soulfire as an energy type. While this deviates from how metamagic usually works for spontaneous casters, I have no issue here.



At 2nd level and every 2 levels thereafter, the angelic paragon also receives a so-called heavenly gift. There are quite a few cool options here: channel energy at -2 levels, unassisted flight (at 6th level, thankfully), not being attacked by animals. It's also a tool that provides variable bonuses to attributes, which is once again an invitation to min-max. Increasing protective auras, eidetic memory, hard to pronounce truenames, planar adaptations—all interesting. However, the lack of a caveat to sacrificial healing means that a ring of regeneration—or any other form of regeneration—could translate into infinite healing for the group, sacrificing hit points in increments of 2/level to heal another creature. Broken.

The majority of the options here, like improving natural attacks and scaling Spell Resistance can be considered flavorful and fitting without breaking the game, unlike the providence-powered abilities. Limited spell-like abilities work. 10th level expands the gifts available, providing one energy immunity and scaling up the progression of resistances chosen so far: this is organic and nice. A sanctuary-style aura is also part of the deal here, as is damage reduction. High-level angels may stun an opponent hit twice in one round on a failed save, but only once per 24 hours. Fast healing and a celestial animal companion and even a size increase are available here. 20th level nets you a host of celestials to command and renders you immune to being permanently slain unless bested on your home plane.

The angelic paragon class also sports an array of archetypes that provide further customization options: the archon, azata, cherub, ophanim, and sereph archetypes, with the brijidine archetype further modifying the azata archetype. Archons may, for example, choose shortrange, scaling teleportation, become a tiny harbinger that can blast foes with scaling force damage AND perfect flight at 50 ft. Sounds lame? You do know the "songbird of doom" build and its variations, right? The Lyrakien form providence (once referred to as "archon" instead of azata) also falls into this mold. Archon weaponry and exclusive gifts can be found here as well as in the other archetypes. This review is already very, very long and hence I will spare you the detailed analysis of each everyone of them.

It should be noted that some providences replace the default grigori ones. (Steal Magic also has a cut copy paste error that still refers to yamah.) Cherubim get claws, grab and rake. Yeah, combine that with the other abilities; that equals SICK. Lillends get FULL bardic performance progression. What about 1st level immunity to all mind-affecting effects that would make you do negative things? Or what about Soulfire BREATH WEAPON in a cone with a cool-down of 1d4 and at the cost of only 1 providence?

The feat section contains an array of interesting feats, from the obvious class resource enhancers to some monster feats (buffs when spells/spell-like abilities fail to penetrate Spell Resistance) to touches that spring Will save based manacles, the feats also cover retributive curses and an ability that forces a geas-like obedience from a target. Extradimensional prisons for prisoner storage while adventuring is a cool concept; refreshing limited spell-like abilities via providence is also part of the deal. Unfortunately, Siphon the Divine is absolutely broken: 2/ day, refresh your providence pool by destroying a divine magic item, regaining 1 providence per spell slot used to create it. This allows for much longer bursts at a pretty low cost; negligible, in fact, at higher levels.

Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are not particularly good; numerous punctuation glitches, typos, minor italicization glitches, and even a whole paragraph of nothing right in the middle of an ability text make the book feel rushed. Layout adheres to Rite Publishing's beautiful 2-column, full-color standard and the PDF comes fully bookmarked for your convenience. Artwork is diverse and includes thematically fitting stock, a gorgeous former Pathways cover, and other beautiful pieces.

Let me ramble a bit: I love the concept of playing angels. Perhaps it's Kaori Yuki's manga <u>Angel Sanctuary</u>, perhaps it's the iconic imagery. If someone asks me what my favorite 3.X setting is, I answer, without hesitation, "Engel" – the post-apocalyptic setting in which the angels are pitted against the dreamseed insectoid demons of the lord of flies; it's stunning and awesome and, while not mechanically perfect, just brilliant. It is a tragedy that the numerous sourcebooks have not been translated to English. If you are capable of reading German, I strongly urge you to seek them out. At the same time, <u>Anger of Angels</u>, the more widely known sourcebook by Malhavoc Press, was extremely disappointing with its lack of fluff, balance or mythological themes.

The good things first: Steven D. Russell's <u>In the</u> <u>Company of Angels</u> gets the feeling right. Abilities are highly complex, interesting, and wild in the realms of the respective imagery, both real world and in-game. There are a lot of options here that are downright fun and the superb prose is glorious. I also consider the grigori race as such a very fun choice; I like its flair and its options. At this point in my first reading, I was truly excited.

But then the paragon class came. That was one of the most heartbreaking experiences for me. Why? Because while Steven D. Russell manages to put extremely complex concepts into a rules-frame; he does so with panache and flair and more often than not, I found myself smiling at the respective abilities and their imagery, the angelic paragon class is broken. My first impression was confirmed in the playtest (FYI, we used d8 as HD). This is essentially a paladin, or rather, a magus on steroids. The reason WHY it doesn't work as provided, at least not in a balanced manner, are manifold. There's the glass cannon argument: the lack of armor, shield, and so forth means the angelic paragon is pretty fragile in the AC department. The framework of the class itself, on its own, is too powerful. Now, one could field the "attack the angel first"-clause, but unlike e.g. the tanimin, the angels herein have all the tools at their disposal. From stealth to mind-games and switcheroo-teleportation that cannot be stopped, they have the movement advantage and thus, better chances of avoiding and mitigating attacks. Add to that infinite heal exploits and we have a trinity of avoidable glitches. The attempt to balance the excessive power of the providence abilities is founded on their relative costliness and short duration, but in-game, this leads to nova issues.

Full bardic progression, channel energy, flight, copious natural attacks, great framework...this class can get all that without necessarily excluding that many other tricks, with balance varying wildly between what was obviously based on monster abilities of different CRs and what was intended for player use. Soulfire's massive range and impossibility to fully mitigate the damage via resistances, magus-like weapon enhancement at 1st level-this class poaches among the established classes, dials down the minimum required level and then adds its own options. "But it does not get spellcasting!" Yeah, so what? The flexibility in combat provided by spellcasting is there and the collective of abilities and basic class frame, all of which would be strong on their own, coalesce into a class that feels woefully rushed and BROKEN. It is obvious that the significant array of complex options provided required a lot of time and effort: it shows. However, how they come together is a mess in everything but the most high-powered of games. This is one of most overpowered classes I've seen for Pathfinder; it needs a redesign of its bursts, several abilities need to be made into trees and there needs to be mutually exclusive clauses to balance this monster.

Now if that all sounds awfully negative, then because for me, it is. This is a tragedy in that the constituent components are great: the rules-language, while sometimes haunted by punctuation errors and the like, is precise and skillful. The concepts are great. The fluff is glorious and the race is fine. But the class is extremely rushed and requires a massive retooling.

I agonized over this. I really, really want to like this book. I can't. With this amount of glitches and, MUCH more importantly, the glaring balance issues, my final verdict will clock in at 2.5 stars, rounded down to 2 for the purpose of this platform.

Endzeitgeist out.

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