

PATHON April 2016* Issue 57 DATHON AUX

Irina Kuzmina



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Editorial

by Steven D. Russell, Illustration by JOHN

What's not to love about weapons? From fangs and claws to spears and swords, the game seems to be all about weapons. We have a handful of nice pieces in this issue to keep your mind on bashing and slashing your enemies (not that you needed any help with this, I'm sure).

The cover shows off a wyvern made of blades (don't get in its way). The template to match will give GMs even more opportunities to terrify their players. The critter shown deviates somewhat from the Walking Weapon name of the template, given that it will tend to fly instead of walk. But, being poisoned and electrocuted doesn't seem all that much fun, especially since it's going to be happening while you're trying to keep your hands on your own weapons. I'm curious what our readers will come up with. Walking weapon spiders? Walking weapon sharks (swimming weapon sharks)?

Speaking of weapons, and horrors, and not wanting to die... Creighton Broadhurst has given us a couple of fun pieces, one of which helps GMs answer the question "What's in that gelatinous cube?" Clever responses might include "Your items, in a few minutes," and "Why don't you go look?" While this article isn't specifically oriented to the theme of the issue, there are several nice tangents. I suppose a clever way to get a muchneeded magical weapon into the party's hands is to hide it in a gelatinous cube. This month, Mike Welham gives us nearly two dozen new weapon special abilities. I love the trouble that could be caused by the reanimating ability. At the other end of that spectrum of fun is the deanimating ability, which, frankly, would have helped any number of my characters in the past. Once you've read the surfeiting special ability, you'll want all your close-quarters combatants to get their hands on it.

Scott Gladstein gives us a nice bit of flavor this month. His piece on Weapons of India offers a wonderful variety of weapons to spice up any game. I learned a whole bunch of new names for weapons and really enjoyed thinking about how Scott explored some issues about game mechanics with these weapons. Sometimes the game is best played when the GM doesn't need to go beyond "The orc ranger hits you with his long sword for 10 damage." But, sometimes players want to hear that the being who just stepped around the corner, its face still shrouded by an embroidered hood, has revealed something you've never seen before, and that at first glance it appears as though the creature's arm and this blade were merged into one, terrifying weapon.

Also, and this is one of my favorites, we have Endzeitgeist's Top Ten of 2015. I'm sure you're eager to find out which of his contenders made it to the very top.

Happy gaming.



Walking Weapon Creature Template

by Steven D. Russell, Illustrations by Irina Kuzmina

Sometimes the massive collection of wrathful emotion on a battlefield carries beyond the physical world. When it does, this empathic force animates the very collection of weapons which can gain a life of its own. These piles of animated armaments are known as walking weapons and do nothing but seek out more arms to add to its own "body." Walking weapon creatures always take on the appearance and nature of the creature that collected these remnants of war.

Creating a Walking Weapon Creature

"Walking weapon" is an acquired template that can be added to any intelligent creature who hoards treasure or collects weapons.

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

CR: +0

Alignment: Always neutral evil.

Size and Type: The creature's type changes to construct. Do not recalculate hit dice, base attack bonuses, saves, or skill points. Size is unchanged.

Hit Points: Walking weapon creatures gain bonus hit points as a construct based on its size. See the *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Bestiary*.

Defensive Abilities: A walking weapon creature gains fast healing 1 and hardness 10 (15 if CR 10 or higher, or 20 if CR 15 or higher). **Immune** construct traits.

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

Animated Composition (Ex): All walking weapon creatures are animated objects and, as objects, take only half damage from energy attacks. Divide the damage by 2 before applying the walking weapon creature's hardness. Spells and effects that deal additional damage to objects (such as shatter) deal additional damage to walking weapon creatures, ignore this ability, and the walking weapon creature's hardness. All walking weapon creatures' natural attacks bypass all damage reduction material types (though not other types), and any hardness that is less than 10. (This increases to 15 at CR 10 or higher, and 20 at CR 15 or higher.)

Disarming Strike (Su): Once per round when a walking weapon succeeds with successful melee attack against a creature wielding a weapon, make a disarm combat maneuver check (with a +4 bonus, this does not provoke an attack of opportunity). The creature struck takes damage as normal but on a successful check also loses the most valuable manufactured weapon it is wielding, this weapon becomes a part of the walking weapon creature; it can be recovered from the creature with a successful grapple check or if the walking weapon creature is killed. For each weapon

absorbed, the walking weapon creature heals 5 points of damage or gains 5 temporary hit points (maximum equal to double the walking weapon creature's normal hit point total) for one hour.

Obsessed with Weapons (Sp): A walking weapon creature is constantly drawn in the direction of the most valuable (per market price) weapon within 400 ft. + 40 ft. per hit die, as per *locate object* with a caster level equal to the walking weapon's hit dice. It will then seek to absorb it with its disarming strike ability.

Possessive Power (Su): Any magic weapon that has a constant or use activated ability, such as a +1 *flaming sword*, is applied to the walking weapon creature's melee attack. Weapon enhancements apply to the walking weapon's melee and ranged attacks.

Selfish Shield (Su): If a weapon touches a walking weapon creature (this only requires a successful touch attack), the weapon is absorbed as per the disarming strike ability. If the disarm is successful by 5 or more, no damage is dealt by the weapon's attack. This ability is not limited to only working once per round.

Abilities: Adjust the base creature as follows: Str +4 (+2 to attack and damage, +2 to Climb and Swim skill checks, +2 to Strength, and CMB checks, +2 to CMD), Wis -4 (minimum 1; -2 to Will saves, -2 to Heal, Perception, Profession, Sense Motive and Survival checks, -2 to any of the base creature's Wisdom-based DCs), -4 Cha (minimum 1; -2 to Bluff, Diplomacy, Disguise, Handle Animal, Intimidate, Perform, and Use Magic Device; attempts to influence others, and Channel Energy DCs, -2 to any of the base creature's Charisma-based DCs). As a construct, a walking weapon creature has no Constitution or Intelligence scores.

Feats: As an unintelligent construct a walking weapon creature has no feats

Skills: As an unintelligent construct a walking weapon creature has no skill ranks or class skills.

Languages: As an unintelligent construct a walking weapon creature does not understand any language

Treasure: A walking weapon is composed of the treasure award of its base creature, and anything it has absorbed via its disarming strike ability.





CR 6

XP 2,400

Walking Weapon Wyvern

N Large dragon

Init +1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, scent; Perception +18

DEFENSE

AC 19, touch 10, flat-footed 18 (+1 Dex, +9 natural, -1 size)

hp 75 (7d12+30) fast healing 1

Fort +5, Ref +6, Will +4

Defensive Abilities animated composition, hardness 10, possessive power, selfish shield; **Immune** construct, paralysis, sleep

OFFENSE

Speed 20 ft., fly 60 ft. (poor)

Melee sting +13 melee (1d6+7 plus poison, 1d6 electricity, and disarming strike +17), bite +13 melee (2d6+7 plus grab and 1d6 electricity), 2 wings +8 (1d6+4 and 1d6 electricity)

Space 10 ft.; Reach 5 ft.

Special Attack rake (2 talons +16, 1d6+7 and 1d6 electricity)

TACTICS

During Combat Bladewing has no discernable tactics, seeking out the most valuable weapon it can find and absorbing it and then moving on to the next piece. This usually puts it at odds with creatures who don't want to give up their weapons to its desires.

Morale Bladewing is utterly fearless and will flee if it knows the armaments it wants are not near, avoiding combat when there is nothing worth absorbing.

STATISTICS

Str 23, Dex 12, Con -, Int -, Wis 8, Cha 5 Base Atk +7; CMB +14 (+17 grapple and disarm); CMD 25

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Poison (Ex) Sting—injury; *save* DC 13; *frequency* 1/round for 6 rounds; *effect* 1d4 Constitution damage; *cure* 2 consecutive saves. The save DC is Constitution-based.

ECOLOGY

Environment warm mountains

Organization solitary

Treasure +1 *shock longsword,* plus remaining standard treasure value in weapons.



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10 Things to Find in a Gelatinous Cube

By Creighton Broadhurst, Illustration by Malcolm McClinton

Quintessential dungeon scavengers, gelatinous cubes, engulf all in their path. Untold numbers of neophyte adventurers have met their doom in the depths of a gelatinous cube. Sometimes their death leaves behind treasure for luckier, or more skilled, adventurers to retrieve.

Gelatinous cubes secrete powerful acid that destroys most of what they swallow. However, some things, typically made of stone or metal, can survive a gelatinous cube's acid, and canny adventurers often search such slain beasts for treasure. Use this table to populate a gelatinous cube with objects of minor interest:

- 1. This cube contains a yellowed and pitted skeleton still wearing a suit of battered chainmail.
- 2. Soft shards of a spear's shaft hang suspended in the cube along with a long, slender steel spear tip. The spear tip is surprisingly clean—as if it had recently been polished—but the spear shaft disintegrates if touched.
- 3. Shards of wood and scraps of rapidly deteriorating leather and cloth wrapped around the stark white, brittle bones of some unfortunate hint that the cube consumed its last meal not too long ago.
- 4. A jumble of small chunks of rubble and shards of rock fill the lower portion of the cube.

- 5. Silver and gold coins glimmer in the party's light. Suspended in the cube, they must be dug out individually. Each coin must be cleaned thoroughly or the acid on the coin's surface slowly burns through whatever is used to store the coins.
- 6. A skull and a jumble of bones fill the gelatinous cube. The bones are old and disintegrate if touched, leaving a yellow stain on the investigating character's hands.
- A hooded lantern cleaned to shining brilliance by the cube's acidic excretions hangs suspended in its body. Its oil has long since intermingled with the cube's body giving it a slightly mottled appearance.
- 8. A handful of silver and gold coins hang suspended in roughly the middle of the cube. As the cube moves about, the coins undulate and move about the cube's body like a glittering, segmented snake.
- 9. A half-dozen arrow heads float within the cube's body. One glows brightly (it is enchanted with a *continual flame* spell) which makes it virtually impossible for the cube to ambush—or creep up on—its prey.
- 10. This cube has consumed many unfortunates in its hunting. Some of the remains of its victims including a crude battle-axe of orcish artifice,

three small short swords and an even dozen sling bullets yet resist its acidic excretions. All are in excellent condition. Of their previous owners, there is no sign.

GM's Miscellany: 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 See During an Orc Raid

By Creighton Broadhurst

On the frontier, life is tough. As well as the unending battle to grow enough food, the threat of raiding—either by orcs, bandits or a rival kingdom—is a constant worry.

Use the table below to add minor points of interest to a raid on a frontier settlement. Of course, many of the entries below can be used for raiders of any ilk; simply change any mention of orcs to suit the raiders' identity.

- 1. A small, snivelling child huddles behind a barrel, trying to hide from the rampaging orcs.
- 2. Fire suddenly takes hold of a nearby building and smoke from its burning thatch fills the air. Indistinct screaming comes from within...
- 3. Shouts, screams and the sound of battle fill the air. One particularly loud, piercing scream ends suddenly.
- 4. A mother dashes across the street dragging one child behind her. In her other hand, she carries an old spear.
- 5. The sprawled and bloody corpse of a militia member lies in the street. He has been hacked to death and lies in a pool of his own blood.
- A jumbled collection of scattered household goods — clothes, a cooking pot and so on lies scattered on the ground outside a home.
- An orc raider covered in blood and gore sits slumped against a wall. An arrow protrudes from his throat and the orc's face is frozen in a grimace of hate and pain.
- Smoke blows across the street, obscuring the PCs' view of events. Humanoid shapes move within the smoke — and they seem to be running directly toward the party!
- 9. A broken barrel lies on its side amid a puddle of wine. A crude, bloody handaxe is embedded in the barrel.
- 10. A villager an axe embedded in his back crawls down the street. In great pain, he spots the party and loudly begs for aid.
- 11. Two orc raiders drag a woman from a smouldering house. Their backs are to the PCs and they do not appear to have noticed the adventurers.

- 12. A javelin flashes passed the lead PC's face and embeds itself in a nearby wall.
- 13. With a crash, a blazing outbuilding collapses in on itself, throwing up a cloud of sparks and smoke.
- 14. Two children one clutching a baby to its chest — dash from a side street and run straight at the party. Their soot-stained faces are streaked with tears. Behind the pair lumber two drunk orcs — intent on easy pickings. At sight of the PCs, they turn away.
- 15. The frenzied squealing of a horse in tremendous pain breaks through the clamour of battle.
- 16. An arrow falls from the sky and lands quivering at a PC's feet. There's no indication who shot the arrow in question.
- 17. A handcart lies on its side in the street vegetables along with a few hand tools lie scattered on the ground.
- 18. A villager clearly very dead stands transfixed against a wall by a large spear driven through his chest.
- 19. A raider lies dead in the street, his skull caved in. Near his outstretched hand lies a yet burning torch.
- 20. The thatch of a nearby building is beginning to smoulder — a raider threw a torch onto its roof moments ago. A villager dashes out of the building clutching a load of possessions to his chest. He dumps them onto the street and then dashes back into the building.

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Shadow Spells Showcase

By David J. Paul, Illustration by Kaitlynn Peavler

A rianna leaned forward, the sleeve of her deep green gown brushing against the table. "Take this," she said to the younger, eager wizard. "The others will not be prepared for this; they have little experience with magic having to do with the realm of shadow."

The clear-skinned, boyish faced young man nodded solemnly as he accepted the scroll tube. "I am honored your ladyship, thank you for this gift."

"It's not a gift my friend." Arianna allowed herself to flash the young man a smile. She knew better; her charms even without any magic, were sufficient to cloud most men's minds.



"Yes," he stuttered as he blushed. He continued in a rushed voice, "Of course m' lady. I apologize." He nodded as he backed away before he bowed more formally prior to leaving.

Tacton cleared his throat from the window across the room. Ari knew what he was getting at. "Yes," she said matter-of-factly, "all that *was* really necessary." She turned quickly, executing a bit of a twirl from a dance. The stone floors of this portion of Tacton's priory were excellent for such moves.

"No," Tacton replied, "I don't think it was. The poor kid isn't going to be able to sleep for three nights. He'll be picturing your smile, your perfect dimples."

"I know," Ari said playfully, casting her chin somewhat downward while looking up girlishly at Tacton.

"Knock it off," he said. He'd obviously watched her in action a hundred times before.

"Let me have some fun with your wizards Tacton. There are so few in this country."

Tacton gave her a thoughtful look for a moment. "True." He closed the book that he had been pretending to read. "What's the scroll do, anyway?"

"It taps into the shadow realm," she said mysteriously. She paused a moment, "and coats your sword with blinding energies from the inky beyond."

Tacton raised an eyebrow. "Yeah, but what does it do?" He'd heard every overblown bluster from one shore to the other.

Arianna dropped the act. "It allows the caster to alter her own weapon so that its strikes push the creature struck deeper and deeper into darkness. The darkness radiates from that creature, but only for an instant. Just enough to startle those who would be frightened of such things."

"Like the fools in the area, the ones who wouldn't know a real potion from a bottle of cold, spiced tea." "Precisely."

"Why bother?"

"It's mostly for show. Your wizards, especially the ones with some martial training, need more practice. This spell is mostly harmless, but it makes quite a spectacle, especially in full daylight."

"Any serious risks?"

"You mean other than permanent blindness?" "What?!"

Blinding Battering

School: Transmutation [shadow]; Level: Antipaladin 1, Bard 2, Bloodrager 1, Magus 2, Sorcerer/Wizard 2, Witch 2

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Components: V, S, DF

Range: Touch

Target: Your weapon touched

Duration: 1 round/level; see text

Saving Throw: No and Fortitude negates; see text; Spell Resistance: No and Yes

ou infuse your weapon with shadow energy; the weapon blackens and dark, wispy smoke trails closely around it when it moves. The first time a creature is struck by this weapon, a pulse shadowy darkness of radiates from the point of impact to 5 feet for but a moment. If the target struck fails a Fortitude save, it is dazzled until the end of your next turn by this effect. If you successfully strike the same target while it is dazzled, a darker pulse radiates to 10 feet, again for only a moment. If the target fails a Fortitude save, it is blinded until the end of your next turn by this effect. If you strike successfully the same target while it is temporarily blinded, pulse of utter blackness radiates to 15 feet and persists until the end of the target's next turn; if the target fails a Fortitude save, it is permanently blinded.

If you permanently blind any target or stop wielding the weapon, the spell ends.

All creatures within the persisting 15-ft.-radius region of utter blackness are rendered blinded by the blackness unless they have darkvision until the blackness ends. This blindness is the natural consequence of the absence of light and is relieved immediately when the region returns to normal. While it is in effect, a spell with the light descriptor of 2nd level or higher cast so that its area of effect touches any of the darkness region will remove the persisting region (though this will have no effect on the target blinded by the attack).







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23 New Weapon Special Abilities

By Mike Welham, Illustrations by Sade

It's surprising how many inquiries I receive about weapons, considering I am reticent to attack even the rats that infest this library. Also to my surprise, I have discovered many references to esoteric magical qualities associated with various weapons.

-Melnor, Sage (second class) of Questhaven

Antagonizing: An *antagonizing* weapon features jeering faces along its length. A creature struck by this weapon must succeed at a DC 16 Will save or it must attack the weapon's wielder on its next turn. This is a mind-affecting, compulsion effect.

Faint enchantment; CL 7th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *confusion*; Price +1 bonus.

Attuned: This ability can only be placed on ammunition that deals piercing damage. A piece of *attuned* ammunition is magnetically attracted to all other ammunition enchanted with this ability at creation. Attuned weapons are not attracted to other *attuned* weapons that have separately been enchanted. For each matching *attuned* weapon that has successfully struck a creature, an *attuned* weapon gains a +1 circumstance bonus on attack rolls (maximum +5) against that creature.

Moderate transmutation; CL 9th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *telekinesis*; Price +2 bonus.

Blood Seeking: A *blood seeking* weapon vibrates in the presence of blood. If a creature is suffering bleed damage from any source, the weapon grants its wielder a +2 morale bonus on attack and damage rolls. Additionally, if this ability is placed on a weapon that deals bleed damage, it doubles the possible bleed damage inflicted (1 becomes 1d2, 1d2 becomes 1d4, and so on).

Faint enchantment; CL 5th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *rage*; Price +1 bonus.

Bone Bruising: A *bone bruising* weapon feels denser than similar weapons. While this provides no bonus to attacks and damage, the weapon creates an impact that stresses bone. A creature struck by the weapon must succeed at a DC 14 Fortitude save to avoid taking 1 point of Strength damage. On a critical hit, the weapon deals 1d4 points of Strength damage (DC 14 Fortitude save halves). A *bone bruising weapon* cannot affect creatures immune to critical hits.

Faint necromancy; CL 7th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *chill touch*; Price +2 bonus.

Deanimating: When wielded, a *deanimating* weapon projects a disruptive field that has no effect on living creatures. When a *deanimating* weapon strikes a construct or undead creature, the creature must succeed at a DC 14 Will save or become stunned for 1 round. A successful critical hit with the weapon stuns the creature without allowing a Will save

Will save.

Faint necromancy and transmutation; CL 5th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *disrupt undead, disable construct*^{ACG}; Price +2 bonus.

Discordant: An indistinct hum emanates from a *discordant* weapon. When the weapon strikes a creature, the weapon unleashes a jangling noise that surrounds the creature. For 1 minute, the target incurs a –4

penalty on Perception checks involving sound, it cannot take 10 or 20 on skill checks, and it must succeed at a concentration check (DC 15 + the level of the spell being cast; increase the DC by 5 for all other concentration checks) to successfully cast a spell. On a critical hit, the target is nauseated for 1 round before suffering the above penalties.

Faint evocation; CL 6th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *distracting cacophony*; Price +1 bonus.

Dispiriting: A *dispiriting* weapon gives off a faint mocking laugh when used. When the wielder successfully strikes a creature with a *dispiriting* weapon, it inflicts a -2 penalty on the creature's attack rolls or skill checks against the wielder. If the wielder attacks a different target, the creature no longer suffers this penalty. This is a mind-affecting effect.

Faint necromancy; CL 1st; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *bane*; Price +1 bonus.

Explosive: This ability can only be placed on ammunition that deals piercing damage, and the energy type must be selected when the ammunition is enchanted. An *explosive* piece of ammunition harmlessly leaks the energy type it inflicts when it explodes. On a successful attack,

the ammunition will explode 1 round later at the beginning of the wielder's turn. Removing the ammunition requires a standard action and renders it harmless. The explosion deals 3d8 points of damage of the chosen energy type to all creatures within a 15-foot radius of the target creature (Reflex DC 16 halves). The target creature receives a –4 penalty on this save and does not benefit from evasion (improved evasion still works as normal). On a critical hit, the *explosive* ammunition instead deals 6d8 damage, and the target creature receives no save.

Moderate evocation; CL 7th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *detonate*; Price +4 bonus.

Forget-me-not: A creature struck by a *forget-me-not* weapon must succeed at a DC 16 Will save, or it effectively disappears with respect to its allies for 1 minute. An ally must succeed at a DC 16 Will save to remember the forgotten creature, but, even then, the ally cannot see or hear the creature. While the affected creature cannot provide flanks for its allies or aid them in any other way, it can still affect its opponents, who are aware of the creature's existence.

Moderate enchantment and illusion; CL 7th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *invisibility*, *modify memory*, *silence*; Price +2 bonus.

Forty Winks: This ability can only be placed on weapons that deal nonlethal damage. When a *forty winks* weapon damages an opponent, the target must succeed at a DC 14 Will save or fall asleep. This is a mind-affecting effect; creatures with more than 10 Hit Dice are immune to this effect.

Faint enchantment; CL 5th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *deep slumber*; Price +1 bonus.

Ghost Smiting: A *ghost smiting* weapon acts as a *ghost touch* weapon, and it acts as a *bane* weapon against incorporeal targets. Additionally, the weapon grants a deflection bonus to AC against incorporeal creatures equal to its enhancement bonus. The deflection bonus provided by the weapon stacks with other deflection bonuses.

Moderate abjuration and conjuration; CL 9th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *plane shift, shield of faith, summon monster I*; Price +3 bonus.

Juxtaposing: This ability can only be placed on a melee weapon. When wielded, a *juxtaposing* weapon makes it so the wielder appears to be in two locations at once. While this has no effect normally, if the weapon hits a creature, the wielder can attempt to trade places with the target as an immediate action (Will DC 17 negates). On a critical hit, this juxtaposition happens with no save allowed.

Moderate conjuration; CL 9th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *hostile juxtaposition*; Price +2 bonus.

Pushing: This ability can only be placed on a bludgeoning weapon. A *pushing* weapon gently repels objects placed next to it. Three times per day, the wielder of a *pushing* weapon can attempt a free bull rush attempt with a successful hit. The wielder gains a bonus equal to the weapon's enhancement bonus, with an additional +2 enhancement bonus, on the attempt. The wielder does not provoke an attack of opportunity when attempting to bull rush the target. On a critical hit, the bull rush attempt occurs automatically and does not count against the total uses per day.

Moderate transmutation; CL 9th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *telekinesis*, creator must possess Improved Bull Rush feat; Price +2 bonus.

Pustulating: A *pustulating* weapon drips sickly smelling ichor. When it strikes a foe, the creature must succeed at a DC 16 Fortitude save or become wracked with painful pustules that inflict a –2 penalty on all attack and damage rolls and skill checks involving physical ability scores. Creatures immune to disease are not affected by the weapon, and creatures who have bonuses to saves against disease benefit from these bonuses when attempting the Fortitude save.

Additionally, if the struck target has been inflicted with a disease with an onset time that has not elapsed, a *postulating* weapon reduces the disease's onset time to immediate.

Moderate necromancy; CL 7th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *contagion*; Price +2 bonus.

Reanimating: A *reanimating* weapon has fragments of bone or decaying flesh attached to it. The weapon can only be wielded by evil creatures without penalty. It bestows two negative levels to a good creature and one negative level to a neutral creature attempting to wield it. The negative level remains as long as the weapon is in hand and disappears when the weapon is no longer wielded. If the weapon deals the killing blow to a living creature, the creature arises one round later as a zombie. The weapon can animate and pass control of creatures with a total number of Hit Dice equal to twice the weapon's total enhancement bonus. Once it reaches that limit, it can no longer animate creatures, until creatures it animated have been destroyed. The

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wielder maintains control of the undead while she wields the weapon. If she stops wielding the weapon for whatever reason, the undead become uncontrolled.

Moderate necromancy; CL 7th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *animate dead*, creator must be evil; Price +3 bonus.

Retargeting: A *retargeting* weapon allows its wielder to more easily strike opponents it has missed previously. It adds a +1 luck bonus on attack rolls for each failed attack on a creature. If the wielder strikes the creature, the luck bonus decreases by 1 (minimum 0). If the wielder attacks a different creature, the bonus resets to 0, but it will increase its luck bonus if the wielder misses the new target.

Moderate evocation; CL 7th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *divine power*; Price +1 bonus.

Ricocheting: This ability can only be placed on ranged weapons or ammunition. A *ricocheting* weapon deals damage as if it were one size smaller as it bounces off its target to hit another target. If the wielder strikes a target, she can attempt to hit an additional target within the same range increment as the original target. She makes a new attack roll (with a –4 penalty) and deals half damage to the second target on a successful hit.

The first time a secondary target is struck during combat with a *ricocheting* weapon, it is considered flat-footed against the attack. This only occurs once per combat.

Moderate evocation; CL 7th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *divine power*; Price +1 bonus.

Surfeiting: A *surfeiting* weapon ensures extra damage done beyond necessary to drop an opponent carries over to the next opponent. If the wielder deals enough damage to kill a creature or knock it unconscious, he can make a free attack against another creature in range. The attack against the second creature uses the same attack roll; if successful, the leftover damage from the first attack is dealt to the second creature.

Faint necromancy; CL 1st; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *deathwatch*, creator must possess Cleaving Finish feat; Price +1 bonus.

Sympathetic Wounding: The wielder of a *sympathetic wounding* weapon can take a move action to designate a creature within line of sight. If that creature fails a DC 19 Will save, it takes one half the damage dealt by this weapon for 11 rounds. The wielder can designate a new target, ending the effect for the original target.

Moderate necromancy; CL 11th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *unwilling shield*^{APG}; Price +2 bonus.

Telescoping: This ability can only be placed on a melee weapon. A *telescoping* weapon has numerous folds in its design that allow the wielder to extend its reach. Three times per day, the wielder can command the weapon to extend its reach by 5 feet as a swift action. The weapon retains this extra reach until the wielder commands it to return

to normal. The extended weapon is awkward, inflicting a -2 penalty on attack rolls. However, if a creature is attacked by a *telescoping* weapon on the round that the wielder extends it, the creature is considered flat-footed against the attack. This only applies the first time the weapon is used in any given combat this way.

Strong transmutation; CL 15th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *polymorph any object*; Price +2 bonus.

Unbalancing: This ability can only be placed on a weapon with the trip special feature. Three times per day, the wielder of an *unbalancing* weapon can attempt a free trip attempt with a successful hit. The wielder gains a bonus equal to the weapon's enhancement bonus, with an additional +2 enhancement bonus, on the attempt. The wielder does not provoke an attack of opportunity when attempting to trip the target. On a critical hit, the trip attempt occurs automatically and does not count against the total uses per day.

Moderate transmutation; CL 9th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *telekinesis*, creator must possess Improved Trip feat; Price +2 bonus.

Vertiginous: This ability can only be placed on a bludgeoning weapon or one that deals nonlethal damage. A *vertiginous* weapon has swirling patterns that cause mild nausea. A creature struck by a *vertiginous* weapon must succeed at a DC 14 Will save or become nauseated for 1 round. If it fails the save, it must also succeed at a DC 14 Acrobatics check or fall prone.

Faint illusion; CL 5th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *wall of nausea*; Price +1 bonus.

Withering: A *withering* weapon howls when wielded. A creature wounded by this weapon must succeed at a DC 16 Will save or the wound created by the weapon cannot be magically healed for 1 hour, unless the caster succeeds at a DC 16 caster level check.

Moderate necromancy; CL 7th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *bestow curse*; Price +2 bonus.

OFFICIAL DED CONTENT

THE VIRTUAL TABLETOP Is Now a Reality!





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Weapons of India

By Scott Gladstein

Ancient India had a rich military history that is, more often than not, overlooked in light of European or Asian traditions. Their weapons of war, tactics, armor, and equipment are explored within this section. The weapons presented below are weapons suitable for an Indian- or Hindu-mythology-inspired character or setting and if used outside the specific setting it is assumed that these weapons would be treated as exotic weapons (rather than their listed type). Many of these weapons are drawn from the Mughal period (1500s to 1600s in India).

Name	Cost	Dmg (S)	Dmg (M)	Critical	Range	Weight	Type	Special
Aruval	4 gp	1d4	1d6	x2	-	3 lbs.	S	Disarm
Bhuj	35 gp	1d6	1d8	x2	-	6 lbs.	S/P	Finesse
Fakir's Crutch	10 gp	1d3	1d4	x4	-	4 lbs.	В	Monk
Fakir's Horn	3 gp	1d3	1d4	x2	-	2 lbs.	Р	Double, monk
Gorz	12 gp	1d6	1d8	x2	-	6 lbs.	В	Sunder
Haladie	5 gp	1d4	1d6	19-20/x2	-	3 lbs.	P/S	Double, monk
Katar	6 gp	1d4	1d6	x3	-	1 lbs.	P/S	Monk
Khanda	45 gp	1d6	1d8	19-20 x2	-	4 lbs.	B/S	-
Nezah	20 gp	1d6	1d8	18-20/ x2	-	5 lbs.	Р	Finesse, reach
Noklang Sword	30 gp	1d10	2d6	x2	-	8 lbs.	P/S	-
Parashu	15 gp	1d8	1d10	x3	-	6 lbs.	S	Sunder
Pata	15 gp	1d6	1d8	x4	-	5 lbs.	P/S	Blocking

Aruval

Simple One-Handed Weapon

This large, hand-scythe-like weapon measured an impressive 3-6 feet in length. It is a barbaric weapon for it is, in effect, a billhook with the weighting of a machete or hatchet. Employed mostly by farmers, rebels, and gangsters, it turned from a harvesting tool into a weapon of self-defense (or savagery) in times of need.

Bhuj

Martial Two-Handed Weapon

Also called the "elephant knife" due to frequent elephant stylizations on the weapon, the bhuj is essentially a large, flat knife affixed to an axe shaft. The blade itself was a 10 inch, single-edged flat knife with a swivel in the middle, giving it a curved edge. It was capable of both stabbing and slashing and, due to the long handle and axe-like weighting of the weapon, it made for a very nasty hacking weapon. It was often employed in two hands, though a skilled user only required one; thus it is an exotic weapon. A character can use a bhuj twohanded as a martial weapon. A bhuj only has the finesse quality when wielded in one hand.

Fakir's Crutch

Bhuj

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Exotic Light Weapon

This 2-foot walking stick with a pick-like mace head is formed from a single piece of brass or other metal. It is a weapon that is commonly mistaken for a simple metal cane, but it can be used to great effectiveness to those trained in the art of its use. An observer must make a DC 20 Perception check to realize a fakir's crutch is a weapon rather than a cane, unless the fakir's crutch is wielded in a fashion that would make it clearly apparent.



Fakir's Crutch and Horn 1111111111111

Fakir's Horn

Simple Light Weapon

This weapon is a pair of twisted buffalo horns pointing in opposite directions with metal spear tips on either end. They are bound where they pass each other, the end of one coming up about half way on the other end. They could be wielded in one hand and may have served as a predecessor (or at least a contemporary) to the horn styles used on the madu (though much shorter).

Gorz

Martial One-Handed Weapon

The gorz was a saber-hilted mace with a heavy basket hilt. The grip was set back very far on the weapon so it could be swung with tremendous force while still providing a degree of protection. The heads could be spiked or flanged but were always at the very end of the long metal shaft whose tang ran through the grip like a sword's.

What is a Fakir and what did they need all these weapons?

A Fakir is a Muslim, wandering religious monk who relies on begging and alms for his sustained existence while he seeks the divine. Fakirs often traveled long distances, forsaking earthly needs like possessions. They often got around some of their restrictions against carrying conventional weapons by making some every-day items (like canes) suitable for combat should the situation arise. This is not only true of the Fakir but of yogi sadhu and other religious aesthetics in India who are credited with the widespread use of weapons like madu (called *singhauta* in Hindi).

Haladie

Martial Light Weapon

The haladie is a pair of double bladed daggers attached to either end of a central hilt. Each blade was about nine inches long and a knuckle guard bridged the gap between them. When paired with a larger weapon in the main hand, it was a great parrying weapon. When used exclusively as a parrying weapon, a third, shorter, wavy, thin, krislike blade was affixed to the knuckle guard. When not used as a parrying weapon or in a ceremonial role, they were often serrated and made excellent backup weapons.

Single Handed Double Weapon?

A haladie is an example of a double weapon wielded in one hand. A double-weapon must be used in two hands to grant the additional attack and thus this weapon doesn't grant that. However, the advantage is in the fact that when wielded as a single-bladed weapon the owner still has the capacity to independently enchant the two blades-giving its wielder a wider range of on-hand enchantment options. You'll notice a number of Indian weapons used multiple-blade edges; this is something, while not exclusively unique, very prevalent in their weapon design (haladie, Fakir's horns, madu, etc.).

Katar

Martial One-Handed Weapon

A thick-bladed punching dagger is gripped via a crossbar in the center of two sidebars. Unlike smaller punching daggers, the katar was not only an excellent thrusting weapon but was often used as a slashing weapon (as many Gatka weapons do). Its fat blade could deliver enough force to pierce the



with a buckler or as a weapon of last resort. Khanda Martial One-Handed Weapon The famous two-handed, doubleedged straight sword of the Sikh and Rajput warriors is the "khanda." Unique in that their blade gets increasingly wider from the hilt until it reaches the tip, the weapon had a great deal of versatility. Often its tip was blunted, able to deliver dangerous blows not unlike a mace. While this prevented it from thrusting, it added weight to the blows and could even be gripped to form an impromptu, staff-like blocking weapon. The hand was protected by a heavy guard and a long stalk protruded from the base. As the tang of this weapon runs all the way to this spear-like stalk, it could be gripped to be wielded in two hands. It was typically between two-and-a-half and three feet long, quite heavy for its length, but well balanced. This meant the brutal swings of this massive straight sword with its widening head delivered an immense force. Nezah Martial Two-Handed Weapon This thin, bamboo, dueling spear of about seven feet was used by cavalry in India. While it could be used on charges, it was mostly a very dexterous weapon used when they had to fight with closer targets. Its handle was at the very end of the weapon, giving it a unique type of balance among spears. The long spear shaft ended in a wicked, flat, triangular head. It was said to be very strong despite being made of bamboo, due to

ring-mail of the period, but many katars actually had subtly curved blades to help with their cutting. They obviously lacked reach so they were commonly employed

Martial Two-Handed Weapon

This great weapon is about 4 foot 10 inches long, and is about half blade, half handle. The thin, solid, brass shaft of the weapon has three brass balls (one on the end, one about 8 inches up from that, and the second 8 inches up from the second) that serve as spacers for one's hand. The blade itself has little in the way of a cross guard, is sharp on both edges, has a tapering tip and is somewhat flexible. It most resembles a rapier or longsword blade affixed to a long hilt. Large blades were rare in India and most great weapons made up for his by having large shafts and small heads and this rare great weapon is one of the few examples of a weapon with a great blade. Though uncommon, they were not particularly difficult to use if one was skilled with other swords or polearms. These weapons came in a great variety but were all based on the same principle. The most common variant, from Assam, had small quillons in place of these balls, were about 9 inches shorter, and tended to have a single edge, designed more for slashing.

Parashu

Exotic One-Handed Weapon

These four-to-six-foot long axe-headed polearms were use used as both reach weapons and as singlehanded weapons by those who were strong enough to wield them. They were typically made entirely of metal but the shaft could be hollow. They typically had a handle set at the very end of the weapon and, when used in one hand, were swung like a very long axe-headed mace. When wielded in both hands it is used more like a traditional axe, though with a much longer handle that can employ the strength of the wielder more evenly than a normal one. As such it is an exotic weapon. A character can use a parashu two-handed as a martial weapon.

Grip

Many Indian weapons had their grip placed at the very far end of the weapon, even for very long weapons like gorz, nezah, longspears, or the parashu and had a sort of saber grip with a handguard built in. This gave them tremendous power when swung but may not have been as useful in terms of dexterity.

Haladie

bracing. While mounted, you can

Pata

Exotic One-Handed Weapon

The pata was an Indian gauntlet sword hybrid. It has a long, flat blade measuring about 35-40 inches (on par with that of a rapier in terms of length) designed for both cutting and thrusting. Like a katar, the pata was gripped by a crossbar within the gauntleted hilt and a strap near the back of the gauntlet. Interestingly, while mounted on a distinctly Indian hilt, most of the blades used were German broadsword blades or even (occasionally) some Spanish or Italian rapier blades. While they resemble katars they are not employed with the same fashion as a punching dagger-they were more often used like a broadsword or heavy rapier. A para provides a +10 bonus to your Combat Maneuver Defense to keep from being disarmed in combat (in the same fashion as a locked gauntlet).

Use of Shields In Indian Martial Arts

Many of the one-handed weapons presented here including the katar, pata, and khanda were often paired with a lightweight, domed shield known as a "dhal." Some were as small as European bucklers and others were just shy of a typical round shield (about 2 feet in diameter). Many Indian weapons locked the wrist in one way or another (even a talwar's grip did this slightly) and their proper use often involved a lot of elbow and shoulder movement. The dhal was used in the off hand as a sort of "assumed" partner weapon. One would not, for example, go into combat with just a katar, you were assumed to have a shield too. The exception to this would be a weapon like the khanda or parashu which could be wielded in two hands if needed.

Pata

Existing Weapons

Many existing weapons in Pathfinder closely approximate Indian weapons. The following list can help you make choices for an Indian character.

- Scimitars are very similar to *tulwars*, the predominant curved blade of the Mughal period.
- The aforementioned dhal shield effectively has the same stats as a buckler. The ottoman *"kilic"* was another weapon similar to this.
- A falcata is similar to a *bichwa*. A bichwa is a curved Indian blade of about the same size (about a foot or so) with a looped handle used in much the same way. There are examples of bichwas with two blades on the same hilt.
- A *dhup* is similar to a falchion. The dhup was an earlier form of the famous khanda. It had a thrusting tip and a single edge rather than the blunt end that a khandar had but retained the widening blade tip the khandar would later have.
- A composite shortbow is a good approximation of a *"kaman"* (bow). They were typically made from sinew and horn and bent the opposite way when unstrung. The *kamanth* is the name given to their equivalent of a longbow. They had an interesting tube, cut in half, that would aid in accuracy called the nawak to help them shoot birds.
- Armor of India, called "silah", is as varied as it was in other parts of the world. They particularly employed a lot of coats of mail or coats of mail with plates built into the chest. These typically went all the way to the wearer's knees. Heavier armor was typically achieved by layering rather than great plates.

Special Thanks: To the Higgins Collection for their excellent assortment of historical oddities available online, Matt Easton of Schola Gladiatoria for his insights into the proper use of Mughal period weaponry, and the authors of the Smithsonian's DK book "Military History: The Definitive Visual Guide of the Object of Warfare" for their visual reference guide.

The Secrets of the Metadventurer



Are you cool enough to play me?!

Do you like to win Pathfinder?! If you understand that this is a competition between yourself and the GM, then I may just choose you as a player. Come discover *The Secrets of the Metadventurer*, the most awesome character class ever and join me in pwning the entire make-believe world that GM jerk spent years creating. Marvel at the power of my **Metagaming Poo**l to game the system! Witness the firepower of the fully armed and operational third-party supplements I can drag into your game with my **Third Party BS** class feature! Exult as my 20th level capstone ability **Make the GM Cry** reduces that jerk into to a weeping mass huddled in a pile of post-its and

crumpled paper containing a lifetime of world-building notes! Cower before my mastery of overusing exclamation points in my ad copy!!!!

This is Rite Publishing's April Fool's day product, from the same brilliant and sexy mind that brought you last year's *In the Company of Gelatinous Cubes* and will bring you next year's *In the Company of a Dreamy Game Designer* (in sonnet form). The publisher describes me as a new 20-level base class that is, "serious fun, functional, and balanced, but with tongue in cheek," some reviewer will describe me as, "a blatant cash grab that's not even funny," and I describe myself as the greatest character concept that ever allowed itself to be written.

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Twenty Questions with Robert Gresham

By Steven D. Russell

1. Could you tell us a little about yourself?

Well, I'm a father of three children, a 16 year old daughter, a 2 year old son, and a 5 month-old baby girl. I work from home after surviving a multiple pit-bull assault that's left me partially disabled (they gobbled up my feet). My partner works as a hairdresser (Hi Natali!). I enjoy spending my summers eventing with the SCA, though I'm not as active as I once was. I began writing at an early age, second or third grade I think. By the sixth grade I was pouring over books by Hunter S. Thompson, H.P. Lovecraft and Stephen King, and I still haven't been able to shake off their influence in my own work. My first published article was with my college newspaper covering politics and movies. I developed a love for fantasy writing while submitting fan work to the Pathfinder Chronicler website and from there began editing submissions for Wayfinder.

2. What is your home game like?

I love props and use hundreds of miniatures, often building 3-D maps for my adventures. Right now I play with the Guardians of Pathfinder Society lodge in Portland, Oregon. So Society-play has been my "home game" for the past year. I've even reached my first star as a GM! Some members of the group just started a Shattered Star home campaign that I am joining. I'm playing a halfling unchained rogue. Pretty excited for that.

3. What is your favorite Paizo product?

Hmmm. Technically that would be *Dungeon* issue 120 featuring the Lost Temple of Demogorgon, by Sean K. Reynolds. I was lured in by the Greyhawk map. *I had to have that map*. My second favorite product is the *Pathfinder Campaign Setting: Inner Sea Gods* book. The myths of the game are my favorite parts.

4. You are currently publisher for Wayward Rogues Publishing, how did that start and how would you characterize the company today?

The company name comes from a Wayfinder story I wrote featuring my pirate dress-up camping buddies. I actually wanted to publish a fantasy novel so I created the world of Celmae as a foundation for that work. As I researched publishing and selfpublishing I decided to take a chance with some home brew material my group really enjoyed. I look a long look at the OGL, taught myself Photoshop,



and then created my first product: "The Players Guide to the Town of Brighton." Using the profits from that I created my next book, and so on. Now I believe I have two dozen products available for sale. Several of those early products became best sellers at RPGNow.com, which attracted freelancers to contact me about employment. Now I work with several freelancers crafting several projects at once.

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

I am very proud of the *Cultures of Celmae: Udaeus* book. I had allowed my brother to play one in a home game and their culture was so fun to explore, I wanted to share it with players around the world. I wanted to create myths around the udaeus that were familiar yet obviously fantastical, which I think grounded them well for my players. I also get bored with the very common "evil, devilworshipping humans" that often control the villain countries, and wanted ones whose people felt they were justified in doing what they were doing...the best types of bad guys.

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

I loved tying them to the Tarrasque, who in my setting is called "The World Dragon," it felt very Lovecraftian tying together two disassociated elements into a new, stranger myth.

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

I like the paragon class build. I feel that it stays true to the spirit of the udaeoi, while not creating many game-breaking abilities that make the mythic race too powerful. The ingenious part, if I can even call it that, was incorporating their real world historical myth into my fantasy word's myth. That was fun to reshape.

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

Not making it too obvious a "300 meets Elric race." Not sure if I succeeded.

9. Did you learn anything while working on it?

I learned I am not a big fan of the *Mythic Adventures* rules. They really slowed down my game while playtesting these guys.

10. Other than your own work and Wayward Rogues Publishing products, what is the best Pathfinder Roleplaying Game compatible product out there?

1001 Spells! That book has been with my group a long time.





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

The writing. If the writing can't keep me interested, why pick it up? Good writing inspires good ideas, which inspire great adventures. If it's an adventure, I want all the work done for me. If it's a sourcebook, I want engaging lore. Most GMs I know will let a cool, creative idea fly faster than a mechanical rule that's been play-tested to death.

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

Sean K. Reynolds. I am such a fan of the mystery and magic that he brings to his god articles. I loved them in *Dragon* magazine and I love them in the *Inner Sea Gods* book.

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

The old boring, "read and write every day, and play as many RPGs as you can." Both are invaluable to honing the freelancer skill. I'd also add: "don't be rude on social media" that other gamer you are arguing with could be your editor someday.

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

Michael Jaecks. He was the first artist to treat me with respect as a publisher. He delivered his work with blinding speed and at such quality that I still can't recommend him enough. Beatrice Pelagatti is wonderful and the designer of my iconics. I'm so happy to have her gorgeous work.

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

The negative response to the *Vivisectionist Hybrid Class.* Some folks thought the concept was too horrific to explore in an RPG.

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

"The best adventures all begin at the local Inn." I am currently producing an anthology of onesession adventures centered around a town's inn, featuring some very popular 3pp writers.

17. Do you have any goals for Wayward Rogues Publishing that you have yet to obtain or overcome?

I'd like to finish and release the complete Shattered Skies Campaign Setting this year, and produce a print product to sell at Guardian Games in Portland, Oregon, and other hobby shops around the country.

18. Can you tell us a little about Cultures of Celmae: Udaeus?

If you ever wanted to play a mythic race, or have some mythical abilities then this is the book to grab. It has a complete 1-20 paragon class, a rich cultural history, and an angry, violent god to worship. These are some of the boogeymen of the Shattered Skies campaign setting. To fully immerse your characters in the world of Celmae, you *have* to have the Udaeoi.

19. Is there anything you wish you could have included in that product?

I would like to go back and add some udaeoispecific equipment and some more information about the types of mounts they use and maybe some archetypes for clerics of Saint Thero. One of these days I will do just that. Maybe a follow up book for a freelancer?

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

I am a huge fan of James Bond. That's my "Star Wars." I probably know way too much about the James Bond film and book franchise than is healthy for any one person. One of my favorite works is an homage to 007: *The Mohrg with the Golden Tongue*. That story is available at Paizo.com in the Pathfinder Chronicler Anthology Vol. 2. Fastest way to get published with my company is to send me something scary.



Rite Publishing Presents

In the Company of Anicorns





by Bj Hensley



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- Order of the Crow
- Frankenstein's Monster



Endzeitgeist's Jop Jen of 2015

Let's begin this year's Top Ten list with a recap: 2015 has been an awesome year for the 3pp-scene. Beyond a huge amount of superb releases and the start of my patreon, I have branched into other systems beyond Pathfinder - so starting 2016, my Top Ten list will include all game-systems I cover. As always, the list that will follow will reflect my own preferences - and be less about refinement and more about what I love. That being said, all of these books are truly superb. I have one rule for the Top Ten: If a book or component of it has already featured on the list, a further book that compiles/expands it, is not eligible for the list - this rule exists mainly to prevent the same type of book from scoring multiple times.

Before we go into the respective lists, I wanted to thank everyone who supported me over the years and particularly thank the 3pps that continued to step up their game - I have never been able to write this many positive reviews before, with the average quality being exceedingly high. A special, second "Congratulations!" should be expended to every publisher and author who managed to get even one book nominated as a candidate.

And yes, this brings me to the following books that have been disqualified due to this one rule (and would otherwise feature on the list):



Ultimate Charisma by Everyman Gaming:

The significantly expanded book that collects last year's winner Psychological Combat and combines it with the excellent Leadership Handbook is one of the most-used books in my game. Its streamlining of Demoralize and Bluff and introduction of the Antagonize social maneuver is brilliant. A musthave book and worthy EZG-Essential I use in every campaign!

Cyclopean Deeps II by Frog God Games:

Last year, Matt Finch's first part of this masterpiece scored on my list and it remains one of the most awesome Underdark Sagas I know; brilliant,

evocative and awesome, part II in no way falls short of the superb qualities of part I - but it also very much is an essential second part, one that works best when combined with part I. Hence, I elected to retroactively add this superb book to last year's Cyclopean Deeps I as a winner of last year's award - the combination of both is awesome.





Snow-White by AAWGames:

The original iteration of Snow-White

scored on a previous Top Ten; however, this book really made me grit my teeth regarding my own rules - with over 50% new content, absolutely superb production values, huge amounts of glorious ideas...and, more importantly, it features rewrites that eliminate all potential hiccups the original iteration sported. The result is a superbly gorgeous book that is a blessing for one's bookshelf.

All right, so these would be the three superb books that would be on the list, were it not for the aforementioned, one rule I established for myself.

Since the current year has seen a significant array of non-PFRPGreviews as well, let's take a look at three particularly inspiring books that I feel obliged to note as highlights of my year:

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Esoterrorists 2nd Edition by Pelgrane Press:

If you like horror-gaming...well, then you damn well NEED this. No exceptions. Beyond being basically compatible with the superb Night's Black Agents, Trail of Cthulhu and similar GUMSHOE-settings, Esoterrorists is simply mind-bogglingly good and inspiring; I was pretty drained regarding Cthulhu and horror and this book totally changed that - by virtue of its smart offerings, concepts and downright awesome adversaries, this (and to a lesser extent, the Fear Itself sister book) humble little book is currently my favorite horror book. Yes, that good.

Poetica Mundi by Rite Publishing

This humble little pdf for Rite Publishing's Diceless system is actually written in verse...and so is my review of it. Writing it was a joy and

beyond being a glorious little pdf, I had a LOT of fun writing the review for it. It has a very low price, so even if you're not interested in the system, checking it out is a great idea!



Ryuutama: Natural Fantasy Roleplay by Kotodama Heavy Industries:

A wonderful roleplaying game that emphasizes travel, is a superb first setting

and family friendly to boot - if you'd ask me for what would be a great first supplement to introduce kids to roleplaying - this would be my recommendation.

2015 Jop Jen

All right, so all of these out of the way, here is my Top Ten of the best PFRPG-books of 2015!

#10: Spheres of Power by Drop Dead Studios

Spheres of Power is a truly evocative, brilliant alternate spellcasting system that literally allows you to play a vast array of unique, different and evocative



types of character and construct completely different games - were it not for a couple of rough edges in the details, this would rank even higher on this list.

*9: Fields of Blood by Frog God Games

Okay, so if you've been following my reviews, you'll know that I absolutely LOVE good environment-sourcebooks...but, alas, there simply aren't that many. Suffice to say, while I can rattle off a list of underdark sourcebooks or desert/frozen-reaches-themed books, once we get to PLAINS of all regions...there was none. Until this book hit shelves. Fields of Blood is a glorious GM toolbox and inspired a significant array of glorious modules in my game. Oh, and the sample adventures also rock hard.





#8: Jegendary Rogues by Jegendary Games

And here, we have what the rogue should always have been. Modular, fun, diverse, well-researched and presented, this is simply superb. This is THE definite rogue for a d20-based game. 'Nuff said.



#7: Southlands Campaign Setting by Kobold Press

One of the most beautiful books I've ever read, Southlands is a thoroughly inspired, brilliant and creative campaign setting that breathes the glorious spirit of Midgard, that takes a bow to real world mythology and that feels concise, almost novel-like in its superbly evocative prose. Southlands is absolutely superb in every way.

#6: Kaiju Codex by Rite Publishing

What can I say?? I'm a huge sucker for Kaiju, massive high-level foes, super enemies...the like. It was pretty clear I'd absolutely adore this book and the added rules for piloting a Power Ranger-style mecha just complements this further. Awesome.



*5: Microsized Adventures by Everyman Gaming

The book you didn't know you needed until you did - Microsized Adventures is a truly superb book

that lets you create a huge assortment of new options, all around shrinking and sizes. This humble book is small, concise, and it opens a huge amount of new ways to play the game, with rock-solid, impressive and complex rules for creatures of vastly different sizes...and sizechanges. Get this glorious little book!

#4: Shattered Heart Adventure Arc by AAWGames

Joshua Gullion has given us a true gift; when he championed Michael Allen getting the gig to write this adventure saga, little did I know how absolutely mind-blowing this would become: Steeped in Aventyr-lore, this wonderful saga managed to keep its exceedingly high quality, smart premises and diverse environments and progress them through the installments, with none of the modules like the other. Shattered Heart is a truly superb saga and I sure as hell hope it will get an expansion/ epilogue in the future -as it stands, it is a superb example of how AAW Games has ramped up their game throughout 2015, releasing a huge array of truly premium modules.









#3: Holy Islands and The Reign of Terror by 4 Dollar Dungeons

Richard Develyn is not only a gifted author, he has elevated adventurewriting to a form of art. At a ridiculous four bucks per module, you will not find any module out there on par with this bang-to-buck-ratio. The fact that Richard's modules have continuously not only managed to be nominated, but actually WIN Top Ten-spots in the highest echelons should speak volumes for the quality, thought and creativity that went into every one of them. Not content with simply providing great modules, each has a vastly different style and pushes the envelope of what can be done with a given adventure. These belong in any GM's library.

#2: Strange Magic by Interjection Games

The literally only reason Ultimate Ethermagic, Composition and Truenaming

did not make my list last year was that I knew they'd be collected in this book. The make-it-or-break-it magnum opus of Bradley Crouch sports three perfectly balanced, customizable, complex alternate casting systems, all of which feature heavily in my campaigns - whether it's THE definite manabar/ warlock-y system ethermagic, the actually "feels-like-music"-composition system or the impressive and definite take on truenaming, these systems blew me away, each and every one of them. I adore this book and its impact on my games is only rivaled by Dreamscarred Press' Ultimate Psionics.





*1: The Sword of Air by Frog God Games

Okay, this probably did not surprise anyone, right? Sword of Air has been in limbo for pretty much as long as Necromancer Games and Frog God Games existed. No other adventure ever had to live up to such a huge legacy of hype and overblown, impossible expectations. In fact, I didn't really dare read this for a while...because I was convinced that this would, by necessity, disappoint me. The opposite turned out to be true: It exceeded my wildest dreams. Sword of Air is a huge book - and it needs every damn page in it: There is no other module, perhaps not even a campaign setting out there, which manages to instill this sense of cohesion; with a firm, modular plot-line, it combines the best traits of wide-open old-school sandboxes and narrativedriven gameplay; it brims with unique ideas and ranks as one of the densest, most flavorful campaigns I've ever read. There is no doubt - this is a true masterpiece, a once-in-a-decade-level of quality saga that should, even among

FGG's massive mega-adventures, be considered the crown jewel. If I had to take a single adventure to a remote island...I'd probably take this one. Not only is it vast, it can be run in wildly different ways and never is bogged down, redundant or bland - a masterpiece in every way, this is literally a must-own saga if there ever was one. This book very much exemplifies how Frog God Games' team has honed the craft of each member and combined their significant strengths to turn this into a collective larger than the sum of its parts and if you need to see what's great about 3pps, old-school gaming and mega-adventures - look no further. This would work in no other way or format - neither as an AP or as a similarly structured series; Sword of Air is a mega-adventure in the truest sense; this is the benchmark for mega-adventures and truly deserving of being called "magnum opus."

All right, so that's it - ladies and gentlemen among the designers, developers, publishers, layout-artists, artists, cartographers, you made my year a truly blessed one. Thank you for your effort, creativity, work and, more importantly, for spreading joy to thousands of tables all over the world! My heartfelt congratulations to all winners, though I'd like to emphasize that even a nomination is a HUGE feat in itself! Here's to 2016 and may it bring us as many awesome books as last year! - Endzeitgeist out.

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PATHWAYS MAGAZINE





Cerulean Seas: Celadon Shores

Publisher: Alluria Publishing **Reviewer:** Endzeitgeist **Stars:** 5 stars out of 5

This massive supplement for aquatic adventuring clocks in at 138 pages, 1 page front cover, 2 pages of editorial, 1 page ToC, 1 page kickstarter-

thanks, 1 page SRD, leaving us with a massive 132 pages of content, so let's take a look!

So, after a brief introductory text that introduces us to the subject matter with well-crafted fluff, we enter the meat of this book: Much like previous Cerulean Seas-expansions (which btw. is the must-have underwater-adventuring resource for PFRPG), this one depicts in lavish detail a part of the submerged world and the plethora of options that accompany it – after venturing to the lightless depths and the frigid regions of the world, this book basically can be considered to be the Far Eastern supplement for Cerulean Seas. If you're new to these books, rest assured that we begin with the level of precise detail one can expect from the whole series: From types of lakes to environmental peculiarities, rules-relevant and concise basic information sets the stage for the things that are to follow, namely, the more detailed components.

But unlike Cerulean Seas supplements so far, there is a crucial secondary twist to the subject matter at hand - a distinction between salt- and fresh water, between the themes of assimilation versus tradition...but more on that later. In an admirable level of involvement with the setting, anthromorph and merfolk subspecies are revisited and explained as how far they work within the context of Celadon Shores, before we're introduced to the respective new player character races. Part of this is a new humanoid subtype, the kamigei, which are aligned with a particular eastern element, which can then, as a supernatural ability, add minor elemental damage. The subtype also is in tune with nature and receives resistance based on the associated element.

The new races mentioned before are interesting – for one, taking breathing and the ability to exist in salt/fresh-water into account – in a world where depth tolerance and swim speed are most important, e.g. the avian Benitsuru may be interesting, but their lack of gills means that they

are severely limited – and the focus on underwater adventuring means I actually for once will not complain about a race that begins with a fly speed instead of upgrading gliding wings. And yes, each of the races herein has at least one flavorful, interesting and unique trick, like knowing the weather. The heikegani crab-people adhere to a code of honor reminiscent of the samurai and sport an artwork that is downright awesome. The lobster-like creatures begin play with deadly crabclaws as well as Improved Grapple and may utilize their power over metal to form it into objects – an intriguing one, though a rather powerful race.

The hitogoi carp-people, denizens of freshwater, are accomplished craftsmen, while sea kappas have a cool twist: These kappa sport a bubble on their head - as lunged creature, they need to resurface to refill their bubble, otherwise following the mythology regarding the Strength-draining effects of a kappa's bowl being emptied. The four-armed mizugumo, bell spider-like centaur-y individuals with 4 arms may be powerful, but needing both lungs and requiring fresh water means that they ultimately are fragile as far as their ecological niche is considered. Like the heikegani, though, they can be considered one of the more powerful races that can cause issues in less high-powered games that handwave the complex interactions of depth etc. and have a different focus. And yes, they can weave spider silk. The Mizugumo also have a lopsided attribute-distribution in favor of the physical, while the river ningyo is lopsided in favor of the mental attributes.

The shark-like Sembito with their blindsense, blood fury and emphasis on physical attributes similarly are a bit lopsided in their focus on physical prowess. The bioluminescent Suibo, gorgeous jellyfish people with their tendrils and boneless bodies similarly adheres to this, slightly more advanced power-curve, while the fearless Uobei, based on betta-fish, once again adhere to a slightly more conservative racial balancing. The races all feature age, height and weight tables and generally can be considered to adhere to roughly two different power-levels -there are some races here obviously intended for lower-powered games, while the others exceed them, but remain on a level playing field amongst themselves. Now noted, depth tolerance and racial buoyancy as well as lungs/ gills and salt/fresh-water all constitute balancing mechanisms that can be used to reign them in, but it's still a component I wished had been handled slightly more streamlined, perhaps with scaling options for the races.

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The next chapter would be devoted to class options, with a short discussion on class roles in the context of Celadon Shores being the first component...and thereafter, we have samurai orders. Not one, not two - 7 full-blown orders with their own edicts and abilities can be found on these pages, constituting the single largest concentration of orders designed for the class I know of. The order of the crab is an order of dedicated bodyguards that can mitigate attacks on allies, while the order of the crane is a specialist of non-lethal combat and taking foes in alive. The sebek-ka-exclusive order of the crocodile is thoroughly devoted to the emperor and may enhance their defenses with a variable mystical armor that allows for some flexibility regarding special qualities added. The order of the imperial dragon may negate crits/sneak attacks a limited amount of times per day and is basically the most "default" feeling of the orders, while the order of the shark can cause retributive bleed damage and, at high levels, maintain functionality while near death - and even transcend death, provided he can keep on dishing out ever increasing amounts of damage. The order of the snake gets poison use and vindictive, retributive attacks, while the order of the wheel is all about the elements and a serene understanding of the forces of the world, allowing him to ignore certain amounts of damage a limited number of times per day. All in all, a flavorful, wellcrafted array of diverse orders here!

The book also contains multiple relatively complex archetypes for your perusal, the first of which would be the hoiyomi wizard – these guys don't have spellbooks; instead, they have spell tattoos, which they can quickly and temporarily apply to their skin. Beyond regular magical tattoos, they also receive at higher levels the option to spontaneously convert spells into blasts of energy and their familiars similarly are tattoos they can call forth from their skin. Nice one! And yes, the capstone ability allows them to make the tattoos of targets rip them practically asunder.

The kawakage is an archetype of the mariner class, modifying the movement superiority of the base class to particularly affect the interaction with rapids, waves on water and even offer land speeds that don't suck quite as hard as those of many a race herein – particularly in a world where the land/fresh/saltwater differences become important, this one makes for a well-crafted, intriguing choice. The Yamabushi presented here would be a variant of the paladin class who is particularly focused on upholding the natural order and as such, opposed to the undead, though at the cost of lay on hands and mercies.

The book also sports two base classes, the first of which would be the Godaikishi, who gets simple and martial weapon as well as shield proficiency, d10, 2+Int skills per level, full BAB-progression as well as good Fort- and Will-saves. The class is determined by the attunement with a mystic element, with an additional element being gained at 5th level and every 5 levels thereafter. The element chosen determines other class abilities and changing attunement is a full-round action. While unarmored, the class adds Wis-mod to AC and CMD and sports a scaling bonus as well, though the attuned element determined the additional effects conveyed by this mystic armor, ranging from being treated as spiked to offering protection versus the cold climate. At 5th level, a similar enhancement based on the attuned element is available for the weaponry of the class. The class can also generate an elemental lash to add to his regular attack, a kind of elemental-themed smite, if you will, with daily uses scaling over the levels.

2nd level provides a 1/2 level-based scaling elemental touch as well as growing resistance versus elements that can later be extended to allies. Said resistance also becomes full-blown immunity at higher levels, which is interesting. At 4th level, these guys can unleash the elemental touch within sight as a ray...though one that could have used a proper range – as written, it's line of sight – granted, not as far underwater, but still...fixed values tend to be less prone to abuse than sight. 4th level provides arcane spells of up to 4th level, curiously governed by the Wisdom modifier, which need to be prepared and are drawn from the spell-list of the class. Higher levels provide SR and full-blown immunity to spells and effects of certain descriptor and, rather intriguing, the capstone is similarly variable and dependant on the attuned element. All in all, a well-crafted elemental-themed class that did not bore me – the relative simplicity of the class and its great magical defenses make this a relevant addition to the game., though I really wished it got 4 skills instead of just 2.

The second class is the Wokou, who gets d10, 4+Int skills per level, proficiency with simple and martial weapons as well as light armor and buckler and gets full BAB-progression as well as good Reflex-saves. They also begin play with an animal companion – and this is pretty much one factor of the class: Basically, the wokou is a teamwork-based pet-class with a front-line fighter who can ignore difficult terrain, with higher levels providing sizeincreases, abilities like evasion and (improved) uncanny dodge and the like, while also sporting

a secondary focus on intimidating foes. There's nothing wrong with this class, but it is very linear – not much choice or strategy beyond the base framework. Not bad by any means, but not mind-boggling either.

The book also sports two PrCs, both spanning 10 levels. The Mambabarang gets d6, 4+Int skills, 1/2 BAB, Fort- and Ref-progression and 1/2 spells per day progression...and the PrC is kinda awesome, if disturbing: You see, the idea here is to imbue spells with a range of touch in Vermin, which then receive improved defensive capabilities. The spells are then delivered to the target touched by the vermin. Yes, this is tactical and narrative gold. Furthermore, unnatural lust regarding vermin to recruit creepy-crawlies, gain a vermin companion and yes, they can make their creatures explode and clothe themselves in a halo of bugs - awesome, unique, fun and perfectly functional beyond the confines of the waves, this is one of the best vermin master/caster type of takes I've seen in a long, long time. Kudos!

The Tsuwamono is a lawful PrC that gets d10, 4+Int skills, full BAB-progression and 1/2 Fortprogression as well as DR increasing from 1/- at 6th level to 5/- at 10th. They offer 1/2 challengeprogression and gain attribute bonuses as well as physical-attribute dependant bonus feats. At 4th level, they can manifest an ephemeral imperial sea dragon and maintain his presence for 4+Cha-mod rounds. 9th level allows them to 1/day declare an attack a natural 20 or maximum damage – both requiring the use before rolling the respective dice. A solidly-crafted PrC with a nice blend of unique abilities and a more common ones. Nothing to complain, though not as awesome as the Mambabarang.

Oh, but the lands of Nikaikoku have so much more to offer: The next chapter not only has detailed information on currency etc. - it also sports a colossal amount of weapons and armor the weapon table alone spans two-pages! And yes, mounts can be found here as well and suffice to say, many of the weapons have rather lavish fullcolor illustrations, something that btw. extends to armors. And yes, the balance here is tight kudos! Very important for the dynamics of this book would also be the Hitogoi inventions, which contain e.g. an apparatus that allows the wearer to breathe saltwater as though it were freshwater or bioluminescence suppressors. A significant array of racial feats can also be found here, though going through all of them would bloat this review even further. The array of new spells also features the

respective dichotomy between salt water and fresh water and provides a pretty intriguing array of well-crafted spells - racial trail spells that provide continuous damage, loud gong strikes - the spells range from numerical effects to those that make sense from a utility perspective - nice. 5 magical items and 5 mystic shards can be found here as well – the latter of which represent the elements and probably, the fractured balanced of the very world: There is, for example, ghost water, which does not dissolve anything and refuses to freeze. Similarly, true steel or livewood allow for nice, mystical tricks - basically, these can be considered to be interesting magical materials that you can use for puzzles, explaining how things work and so much more. It's an uncommon item-class, but one I really adore.

The fifth chapter of this book covers the settinginformation and as such. sports a glorious map of the area covered as well as information on sample cities, factions, languages, histories and deities as well as the racial histories of the people there, including remarkable NPC-write ups, though these remain fluff-only, we receive an inspired chapter that should suffice as a gazetteer to the region.

The next chapter once again displays one of the most impressive aspects of the Cerulean Seas - the bestiaries: The creatures sport awesome artworks, are concisely created and usually sport a whole array of unique abilities: What about a cross of a long-hair witch and a coral? Yes, this is just as disturbing as you think it would be. Or Foo Otters and Seals? Sea Worm/Cephalopod crossovers? Newts equipped with howdahs? Snail-Oni? Killer clams with tentacles? Oh YEAH! And trueform river otters made me flash back to South Park, but in an awesome way. As always, we get appendices: Monsters by CR and source book (and by freshwater/ saltwater), a brief pronunciation guide (!!!), an index of tables, an index of art by artist, cardstock minis for PC-races and a colossal, detailed index that makes handling the book easy. Finally, we close with a brief haiku - as befitting this tome.

Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are top-notch, I noticed no significant glitches – kudos to Margaret Hawkswood, Patricia Hisakawa and Steven O'Neal. Layout adheres to Alluria Publishing's gorgeous two-column full-color standard and the pdf is fully bookmarked. Both cartography and artwork are STUNNING – the artwork in particular is absolutely gorgeous and reaches Paizo/WotC-levels in most cases – this is a truly gorgeous, beautiful book.

Emily Kubisz, with help from Sam G. Hing and Cameron Mount, has crafted yet another fantastic addition to the Cerulean Seas canon - this series of books continuously maintains an exceedingly high quality standard and produces a vision of a world both alien and familiar - one that suffused by the believable. Even biologists among my friends comment on how the books feel "right" to them, concise and ultimately, "realistic" – as far as a completely flooded world of fish people can be. But beyond the obvious usefulness in a Cerulean Sea context, quite a lot of the pieces herein, from classes to archetypes etc., can easily be scavenged for landlubbing Pathfinder campaigns - while the design-aesthetic tends to focus less on player agenda and variance than I'd like and while the balancing of the races is not always perfect, these components ultimately do not unduly mar the package as a whole: Celadon Seas sports a huge array of truly inspiring components and ideas, has a great bestiary and the overall quality is certainly impressive. The unique ideas like the mystic shards are inspiring -and I really wished the book had done a bit more with them, introduced perhaps devices or vehicles based on their fluctuation of the like – but I can't put that omission forth as a valid means of criticizing this book.

While I am not sold on the balance of all the races and while I really liked only one of the two classes, 1 of the PrCs, and at least the class/PrC components can be chalked up to personal taste....and there's a lot of other cool crunch to adore. In the overall context of this book, the flaws literally remain a drop of tainted water in the gorgeous, endless sea. My final verdict will hence clock in at 5 stars.

You can get this massive supplement <u>here on</u> <u>OBS</u> and <u>here on d20pfsrd.com's shop!</u>

Endzeitgeist out.



In the Company of Rakshasa

Publisher: Rite Publishing **Reviewer:** Endzeitgeist **Stars:** 5 stars out of 5

The latest installment of Rite Publishing's "In the Company of..."-series clocks in at 23 pages, 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial, 1

page SRD, 2 pages of advertisement, leaving us with 18 pages of content, so let's take a look!

This review was moved up in my review queue as a prioritized review at the request of my patreons.

We begin this supplement, as always, with a letter

from a member of this race to Qwilion of Questhaven, one that has a sense of decadence and the disturbing reverberating in it, setting a great precedence, themewise, for what's to follow. The pdf asks the question whether you ever did *STARVE* – not just hunger, starve. Now if the implications of this very concept are lost, I'd very much recommend Knut Hamsun's legendary "Sult" (Hunger) Now here's the powerful imagery: The in-character narrator states "We are that hunger." That actually did send shivers down my spine.

When the in-character narrator speaks of "hunger and desires so terrible they transcend death", you believe it – the yaksha are CREEPY. Terribly so. And in fact, the leitmotifs of hunger and desire extend throughout the whole fluff, providing a slick and surprisingly suave justification for the predations of these beings – in case you haven't gleaned that by now – yes, the relationships with races, adventurers etc. actually are a joy to read here.

The rakshasa base-race here is the yaksha, a medium shapechanger which gets +2 Dex and Cha, -2 Wis. The race gets +4 to Bluff when lying (NOT when feinting) and has darkvision 60 ft. and they may alter self at will, but sans modifying ability scores and retaining darkvision. This ability allows the character to become small or medium. Thanks to their shapeshifting, yaksha get +2 to CMD vs. grapples and +2 to Escape Artist checks made to escape grapples. Now here's the deal, though: Yaksha are defined by their hunger, which can only be sated by consuming humanoid flesh – said flesh may come from a living or dead humanoid, but may not come from the undead (which interestingly puts them at odds with necromancers). Yaksha must consume their weight in humanoid flesh in a given month – failure to do so results in 1 negative level, more if the yaksha is starved further. See, this is interesting - by tying hunger to a long time frame, it becomes less of an active hindrance for adventuring and still retains its theme. Before you're asking – yes, I'd allow this race as presented, though the shapechanging is pretty powerful. The race sports age, height and weight tables and 7 alternate racial traits with which you can modify the base race. These include natural armor, saving bonus versus divine spells; a 2 RP or less wildcard ability representing the host race, better impersonating, +atk versus outsiders, better CL or better positive/negative energy - all of these are valid and feel balanced versus the abilities they replace - kudos!

The race also has favored class options for bard, brawler, luckbringer, monk, slayer, sorceror, time

thief, rakshasa paragon...and vizier! Yup, we actually get support for the great Akashic class here! There also are racial archetypes in this book, the first of which would be the Cheeno (slayer) these guys only get simple weapon and light armor proficiency. Instead of studied target, the archetype provides a predation pool equal to class level +3. These points can be used to activate predations, supernatural abilities, as a swift action, expending 1 predation point. And these are...brutal. Blissful Ignore of the Prey makes all humanoids within 30 ft ignore the cheeno for 1 round, being treated as unaware...ooh, and the memory of events involving the cheeno are eliminated as if subject to *modify memory*...and yes, this is properly classified as a mind-affecting compulsion effect. As long as the cheeno has at least 1 predation point, the character is protected from cold by *endure elements*. Cheeno can also use these points to gain scent, which increases in effectiveness versus the starving, cannibals as well as humans upon which the cheeno has fed and a 15-ft-range to pinpoint humanoids. At 1st level, the cheeno gets a 1d6 primary natural bite and gets a morale bonus after consuming sufficient humanoid flesh as well as counting as a rakshasa this is known as hungerborn.

4th level provides a 10-ft. aura of 1d6 cold, Fort save to mitigate fatigue, which can be activated as a swift action, but only when in the original form. It can similarly be dismissed and otherwise lasts for 1 minute. At 7th level, the archetype gets the cannibalism rarefied taste (see my breakdown of the paragon class later) and an original form with features of a starved stag. At 10th level, the chenno can shapechang into a large form, complete with a gore primary attack and thabkfully sans shapechange-stack abuse. Additionally, at higher levels, the archetype may choose predations at full level and sports two unique ones - Snow striding (which also mitigates sleet or hail) and *feast* of ashes as an SP - note that, as a predation, this is subject to predation point consumption and has a solid DC. Quarry is limited to creatures fed upon, cannibals or the starving and 16th level allows the chenno to add class level in cold damage to a single melee or ranged attack, with the target also being denied Dex-mod versus these strikes, while 20th level provides full shapechanger apotheosis with cold immunity, SR and powerful natural weapons.

The second archetype would be the Hokhoku for the luckbringer class, who gets a pool of predatory chance that can be used interchangeably as predation points or moments of chance. Predationwise, the aforementioned blissful ignorance trick is part of the deal...as is perfect maneuverability fly at 60 ft. (40 if wearing medium/heavy armor), but only for one round, upgrading to 1 round/level at 8th level. While this is restrictive, it still violates the prohibition versus unassisted flight at the lowest levels and can break quite a few modules - not a fan and, depending on your campaign, OP. This replaces weal or woe and narrow escape. At 1st level, hungerborn is gained. Instead of 3rd level's nothing is written, the hokhoku gains a rarefied taste (more on that in the paragon class) based on misfortune, which features an original form with avian features - they can feed on humanoids that fail at something of great importance (or that roll natural 1s on their saves) and may use fatespin to force rerolls of saves, using the lower of the two. Instead of 4th level's improbably, the archetype gets an ability that I have used in my home game for YEARS for some creepy magic – consuming the eyes of the dead plays the last minute of the dead person's life before the hokhoku's eyes. Creepy and awesome! 8th level allows for the consumption of the brain of the deceased for a speak with deadlike ability and 10th level allows for predations to be gained instead of improbables, basically streamlining them and using them interchangeably, with two exclusives being included: Both are activated as immediate actions - one combines a visually neat vanish with a debuff for the attacker, while the second increases the crit multiplier of the bite to x4 – based on action expenditure, of course. The archetype sports a similar apotheosis that instead of cold focuses on better crits.

The taotie monk gets an expanded skill-list and begins play with hungerborn and the archetype begins with a pool or predation, as with the other archetypes – predation-wise, they can use the pool to bite off chunks off her opponents, adding Condamage and counting as having consumed 10 lbs. The second predation allows the taotie to ignore class level hardness when sundering objects with the bite - magic items consumed can potentially be reconstructed upon killing the monk...but that is not easy. Taotie are also excellent liars, gaining a predation that provides a significant bonus and may be even proof versus magic. As long as the taotie is not starving, she gains Cha-mod to AC instead of the monk's usual progression and 2nd level provides predatory resilience at fool level (see rakshasa paragon) instead of evasion/improved evasion. 3rd level provides rarefied taste: gluttony, which allows the taotie to feed on gluttonous humanoids and upgrades bite damage to monk unarmed damage. 5th level provides a 30 ft.-cone belch that sickens



foes and may even stagger those that fail the save – nasty predation! 9th level provides addictive feeding and 11th level and every 3 levels thereafter provide a new predation, with a scent to smell out valuables or assume the form of statues, urns, etc. This one is full of potential! finally, 20th level provides an apotheosis, this time with an added focus of better DR and unarmed strikes.

All right, so the archetypes heavily intersect with the paragon-class – is it good? Well, frameworkwise, it provides proficiency with simple weapons, no armors or shields, d10 HD, 6+Int skills per level, full BAB-progression, good Ref- and Willsaves, 1/2 AC-bonus progression. 1st level provides the hungerborn class feature and similarly, the class begins play with a pool of predation. The class gains the blissful ignorance trick, the option to smell out mortals affected by emotion or feareffects or that have been fed upon and they also get the silver tongue-ability. Every two levels above 1st, the paragon gets an additional predation some of these require more predation points and/ or have minimum levels - high-level paragons can, for example call adhukait, make illusions supplemented by shadow, compress her form (great for infiltrators) or become a predatory protector of the humanoids that nourish her - dismissal bite versus outsiders.

Size-increase to large, aforementioned gluttonous bite, marking humanoids on who's she fed as property (potentially useful not only offensively), sight that can pierce darkness and*deathwatch*...cool. But the most fun would probably be "playing with one's food" – i.e. *magic jar-ing* corpses or undead while in spirit form. Oh yeah, spirit form. HP-based precision damage that will end most foes via killing blows, assuming forms of specific individuals, *beast shapes* **and** *suggestions*, forming scaling figments, mesmerizing prey – there are a LOT of thoroughly unique, awesome tricks here – tricks that make the class highly viable beyond the martial role expected by the chassis – indeed, these often allow for awesome new tricks.

Now I did mention rarefied taste – chosen at first level, this determines the animal head and features and may draw nourishment from the respective rarefied taste – anger, cannibalism, curiosity, creativity, fear, heresy, lust, etc. – and yes, these allow the rakshasa to work in the context of good groups, depending on the taste chosen. However, this is not the limit of customization options – 2nd level and every 2 levels thereafter, the paragon may choose a hungerborn gift – these include making being fed upon addictive, an affinity for asura, claws, at-will nondetection or a second head and high-level paragons may even get extra limbs, complete with hand and ring slot-rules-clarification – kudos. Better DR and SR are also provided...wait? Yeah, second level nets scaling DR and 10th level provides an outsider apotheosis and SR of 4+class level...as well as at-will *command* of lesser yaksha with HD of 10 or less. Finally, 20th level provides better SR, DR and unlimited yaksha command.

The pdf closes with 2 feats – one for +1 rarefied taste and one that allows characters sans the paragon class levels gain hungerborn and rarefied taste.

Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are top-notch – I noticed no significant glitches in either formal or rules criteria. Kudos! Layout adheres to Rite Publishing's two-column full-color standard and the pdf comes with plenty nice full-color artworks. The pdf is fully bookmarked for your convenience.

One caveat before we start: Yes, this is a powerful race/class; one definitely intended for high-powered gameplay – but you could have guessed that, right? It's a monster class/race and they don't necessarily mix well with gritty low fantasy. (Though, provided other PCs have similarly cool tricks, I can see this race working well in a gritty, but high-powered game.)

Wendall Roy shows how it's done. It's as simple as that. Wait...it totally isn't. Apart from the one unassisted flight ability of an archetype, which may be problematic for some campaigns, I'm pretty much left sans complaints. This is PRECISE. Exceedingly so. Natural attacks specify their type and damage dice properly; mind affecting effects are properly codified; otherwise boring spells-in-a-can-abilities get modifications that make them unique; there are ROLEplaying abilities that are super-useful and completely unique. Sure, you can go natural attack shredder...but you'll miss out some awesome tricks that make the class unique. The Full BAB-high-skillcombo is an uncommon chassis, but works. Best of all, though - beyond being a highly customizable array of options that puts player agenda high on the table, the concepts are awesome. Visually stunning. Oh, and as a further plus, guess what? This book's prose is also excellent.

So basically, we get a powerful, but balanced array of options with a cool base-race, awesome class options with great ideas and a superb paragon class that is also a joy to read. This is how such books ought to be crafted. I tried so hard to pick this apart, but can't find anything that sucks. Finally, one should not fail to mention the elegant sustenance

mechanic utilized here – relevant and nasty, but it doesn't cripple the character. Overall, my favorite part about this book remains the fact that the pdf doesn't chicken out – it sports rakshasa as what they are, adds dimension to them and still allows PCs with less problematic alignments to use this book. Triumphant. My final verdict clocks in at 5 stars + seal of approval. This is how a race book's done.

You can get this great installment of the series <u>here</u> <u>on OBS</u> **and** <u>here on d20pfsrd.com's shop!</u>

Endzeitgeist out.



Monsters of NeoExodus: Dragons

Publisher: LPJ Designs **Reviewer:** Endzeitgeist **Stars:** 5 stars out of 5

This monster book clocks in at 34 pages, 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial/SRD, 2 pages of advertisement, leaving us with a massive 30

pages of content, so let's take a look!

Ah, dragons! Who doesn't love them? They're the apex-predators, the big, nasty super-killer creatures and there is no adversary as iconic out there. Suffice to say, I've read a lot of dragon-variants over the years and I very much loathed the "everything needs to be a half-dragon"-trend in the dying days of 3.X – the tendency cheapened dragons in my opinion and took away from their impact. I've also been pretty vocal about my preference for dragons to be smart adversaries that should be played and presented as such...but that's just my take on the concept.

More important for the purpose of this review would be another component: Both in official bestiaries and in supplements pertaining dragons, I've noticed a tendency towards cop-outs or, if you like, less thorough presentation: Dragons, traditionally, sport a massive table that lets you customize them by age category; in the better installments, we also get sample builds for some different age categories. This, at least in my opinion, in important – it further emphasizes the iconic place these magnificent beasts have in our games and sets them apart - basically, a dragon is already a customizable threat, an entry already covers diverse variants for different CRs. Now this does take up space, sure -but know what? It's a significant part of draconic identity as far as their status as monsters is concerned. This pdf begins by doing this honored tradition justice with the required tables and summary of dragon senses, no breath and similar fun abilities -yes, including starflight.

The respective entries for the dragons themselves sported in this book provide 3 different sample builds, for the young, adult and ancient age category, respectively and each dragon gets a thoroughly AWESOME, truly evocative mugshot – I'm not kidding when I'm saying that these are absolutely gorgeous. Obviously, the respective dragons also sport individual tables that denote ability-progressions over the respective age categories. The cool thing, at least in my book, is that this book does not simply add more chromatics or metallics to the fray – instead, we are introduced to two categories of the dragons with multiple subtypes. The first of these categories would by conflict dragons, and they are nasty. No, really.

Take the first kind and look at the name – In clear letters, one reads "Armageddon Dragon." Yeah, these guys are not playing around - with a starvation aura that fatigues creatures, SPs that include cup of dust, waves of exhaustion and many more and a slashing/dehydration-based breath weapons, these creatures' abilities make pretty clear that they are about the ruination of...everything. More unique still would be the fury dragon - while an acidic breath weapon may seem pretty conventional, these dread beings are plague carriers have an aura that increases the potency of diseases (and makes them more virulent) and they can incubate an insanity-causing berserker-disease. Oh, and they pretty much look like a horrid blending of insects and dragons, with a CR 6 parasite swarm being provided as well. Why? Because they can disgorge increasing amounts of these nasty, lamprey-like worms! Disgusting and glorious!

The holocaust dragon would be the necromancythemed of these nasty dragons – with an aura that weakens the living and strengthens the undead, a negative energy-based breath weapon (that alas, does not heal undead) and a limited ability to throw disgorged souls at his foes (dealing negative levels AND reanimating present corpses...) as well as the soul devouring abilities of these beasts make clear that they are not to be trifled with. Now wrath dragons would be basically the big, nasty and rather unsubtle destroy-em-all type of grinders – beyond a berserker-rage-including aura and additional fire damage, they can breathe burning shrapnel (which doubles as caltrops), eat most metals easily (ignore 10 hardness) and combine bites with lower-strength breath weapons for truly apocalyptic damage. Oh, and what about a limited breath of molten metal or retributive damage versus weapons that strike these beasts? Yes, pretty awesome!

The second class of dragons introduced here are stellar dragons - where conflict dragons are predisposed to an unraveling, an end, stellar dragons strive to maintain balance and existence - though that does NOT mean they're necessarily nice: Alignment-wise, they are LN or CG and take the VERY large picture into account – which means that yes, they may sacrifice a kingdom or even world to maintain balance and defeat a greater evil. Their abilities are no less unique, mind you: The first of these dragon types would be the gravity dragon: With a *slowing* presence, gravity-increasing breath and particularly brutal melee attacks, they are intriguing. As a minor complaint – their natural attacks increase as though they were one age category older, but no progression for dragons beyond great wyrm is given, which is a small oversight. One easily rectified, granted, but still. They can also create massive singularities a limited amount of times per day - with devastating effects.

The Nebula dragons can cause cold damage as well as radiation exposure with their breaths and they do receive a nice, defensive concealmentgranting cloud of particles and may unleash a magic-suppression cloud a limited amount of times per day. Pulsar dragons can dazzle those nearby and suppress darkness-based magic completely. Oh, and they have laser breath that may not be effective versus all creatures...but it can pass through e.g. walls of force. Additionally, they may use their breath weapon in pulsing blasts, customizing the damage output of each blast according to his needs. The final stellar dragon herein would be the supernova dragon, whose very presence heats metal and hampers cold creatures. His breath incinerates all that fall before him and he may use is breath in a massive radius around him – said breath is btw. a combination of fire and electricity and yes, their SPs are deadly.

This is not, however, where this pdf ends – instead, we are introduced to the two dragon lords – masters of all conflict/stellar dragonkind. Conflict dragons revere the CR 25 monstrosity called Eschaton. If the name was not ample clue, yes, this basically takes the mythic beast from revelations and codifies it not as a metaphor, but as a fullblown engine of annihilation. Whenever one of the 7 heads of eschaton is destroyed, it regenerates a new head associated with whatever destroyed the head, growing stronger...or more versatile. An aberrant head grown can breathe a cone of devastating, mutating slime; a mechanical head has teeth of adamantine and breathes poisonous steam...and a spectral head increases the reach of this engine of destruction to the incorporeal. Oh, and if you're like me and consider that not enough yet...well, there is a mythic version: CR 30/MR 10.

This beast...is so beautiful. An aura that staggers AND has a 50/50-chance of inflicinting*murderous command* **or** *terrible remorse*. Nigh indestructible. Mythic power to make the breath linger or rip open reality to *gate* **in** tentacley doom – awesome.

The adversary of this all-destroying master of annihilation would be the infinity dragon Ananta, CR 25. Encompassing both male and female, this dual-headed dragon (you can see the picture on the cover) has devastating sonic and cold breaths and is quicker when undertaking starflight journeys. The combined blast of the dragon's breath weapons can destroy just about anything utterly... oh, and ananta can exist in two places at once, treating either as her location for attacks, reach, etc. Similarly to Eschaton, we do btw. receive a truly awe-inspiring mythic version of this steward of the multiverse - at CR 30/MR 10, this iteration of the mighty infinity dragon can create creatures to fight from the dust of the foes vanquished by Ananta. Similarly, the multi-existence ability and a benevolent, exceedingly powerful music of the spheres complement an awesome, unique take on the mighty dragon lord.

Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are very good – beyond minor hiccups, I noticed no significant glitches. Layout adheres to LPJ design's gorgeous twocolumn full-color standard and a smaller version is provided in case you want to use this on mobile devices. The artwork is absolutely staggering and excellent – both the mugshots of the dragons and the two full-body renditions of the dragon lords are gorgeous. The pdf comes fully bookmarked for your convenience.

Jeff Lee delivers here – the dragons presented in this book utilize unique, evocative mechanics, have cool, unique themes that set the apart and the superb artwork further emphasizes that – seriously, one glance and you'll want to use these asap! The pure imaginative potential of these dragons is impressive indeed and the book, as such a steal for its price-point, particularly if you're like me and enjoy truly devastating adversaries to challenge your players. My final verdict will clock in at 5 stars + seal of approval.

You can get these superb dragons <u>here on OBS!</u>

If you enjoy the high-concept awesomeness of this pdf, you may also want to check out LPJ Design's kickstarter Crisis of the World-Eater – as

per the writing of this review, the unique saga is fully funded and has but 16 hours to go – so it's now or nothing! You can <u>find the KS here!</u>

Endzeitgeist out.



Occult Character Codex: Mediums Publisher: Julian Neale Reviewer: Endzeitgeist Stars: 5 stars out of 5

This installment of the Occult Character Codex-series clocks in at 28 pages, 1 page front cover, 2 pages editorial, 1 page ToC, 1 page how-to-

use, 2 pages of advertisement, 1 page SRD, 1 page back cover, leaving us with 19 pages of content, so let's take a look!

Occult Adventures is a great book, but the rather complex classes in the book do provide a challenge regarding time-investment to create sample NPCs. This is where this series comes in for the time-starved GM – basically, we have a collection of characters herein, spanning the CRs from 1 - 20, all ready and set for your perusal.

So how were they made? Well, for one, the builds use Pathfinder Unchained's automatic bonus progression, which means that the characters have a better chance to stand against the PCs sans flooding the campaign with magic items. The builds are not made to be sheer exercises in powergaming superiority that exist in a vacuum, instead championing the approach of making viable characters that work concisely as though they were proper characters, complete with a brief personality sketch, but expect no lengthy elaboration of motivations etc.. Options and buffs are included in the statblocks, though handy prebuff sections provide the information sans them, should your PCs be able to catch the character unaware. There are also some minor pieces of advice for GMs using the character

As far as diversity of the statblocks is concerned, there is, particularly concerning the racial variety, enough going on: Beyond the core-races, we actually get e.g. centaurs and berbalangs. Now, as in previous installments, e.g. the berbalang and centaur-builds look similar in archetypes used, but that similarity comes apart almost immediately once you take a look at feat-choice, spells etc. – so no, no boring straight progressions.

Archetype-wise, we slightly deviate from the formula established by the series – that is, this time around, three archetypes are used in builds:

Here, that would be the relic channeler and the storyteller and we also get a reanimated medium - unfortunately, the others aren't covered. On the plus-side, the tactics-section for the respective builds is relatively detailed and the statblocks include buff-suites, where applicable as well as stats for the unbuffed iterations of the respective character. Now, class-specific things to consider would be the following: The mediums presented here are presented with the spirit they usually channel - different spirits obviously have different ramifications. The general selection of spirits featured in the builds is pretty diverse. Taboos have not been preselected – an array of suggested taboos would have been nice. The pdf also noted that archmage's spells do not suffer from arcane spell failure and tactics are based on mediums not gaining additional influence.

The builds themselves, as organic characters, sport barkeepers, con artists and master merchants as well as adventurers; quite a few flavors are covered and provide different foci for the respective characters. Skills and magic item selection is similarly diverse, offering a broad selection of foci for the respective builds.

Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are top-notch, I noticed no glitches. Layout adheres to a beautiful, two-column full-color standard and the pdf sports several beautiful pieces of full-color artwork, some old, some new. The pdf comes fully bookmarked for your convenience

Julian Neale's collection of mediums is diverse, concise and covers a significant array of different roles and builds. While I would have loved to see all archetypes covered, I get why not all of them are part of this pdf's cadre of NPCs. All in all, this is a solid collection of NPCs that does what it says on the tin. My final verdict will clock in at 5 stars.

You can get these mediums <u>here on OBS</u> and <u>here</u> <u>on d20pfsrd.com's shop!</u>

Endzeitgeist out.



Places of Power: Valley of the Rocks

Publisher: Raging Swan Press **Reviewer:** Endzeitgeist **Stars:** 5 stars out of 5

This installment of the Places of Power-series clocks in at 11 pages, 1 page front cover, 1 page advertisement, 1 page editorial/ToC, 1 page SRD, 1

page back cover, leaving us with 6 pages of content, so let's take a look!

This review was moved forward in my review-queue as a prioritized review at the behest of my patreons.

Sheltered away within the wooden ranges of hills untouched by current civilization, a steep-sided, deep valley's ancient, sculpted rocks bear witness to the ages, remnants of a civilization long gone, flanked by majestic cliffs and clad in perpetual shadows. A living, breathing temple to nature itself, the wondrous valley contains huge falls where the Malinrae river tumbles down the steep cliffs.

Within the shadows of this gorgeous place, mosscovered lupine statues, untainted pools and mystic rocks carved in the likeness of deer and bear await the intrepid explorer, while willow-fringed Lake Vontyr awaits explorers. PCs versed in ancient lore may unearth some intriguing facts about this place – like that it actually is the site of an ancient elven realm or that it in fact is built on a place of power. The few explorers who dared venture into this place can provide one of 6 rumors – but is it true that this place was created when two gods met in fierce battle? Or that the strange sculptures come alive at night? You'll have to travel there to find out!

And while you're there, you may encounter 6 sample events that exemplify the beauty and marvel of this place...speaking of which: This pdf actually contains a mini-dressing table of 12 entries that helps you bring alive this wondrous place...and not all is mist-clad branches and crystal waters: You see, the custodians of this place roam its breadth still: Using both age-categories and even multiclassing, two of the 4 characters are fully statted herein (the others get RSP's neat fluffy treatment covering mannerisms etc.), as the powerful guardians stand in their eternal, ghostly vigil. While, for the most part relatively benevolent (unless you despoil the place...then run for the hills!), one of them has more of a hardliner stance regarding trespassers. As in: "Stalk and kill them all"-hardliner-stance.

As always – beauty and danger are close compatriots...

Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are top-notch, I noticed not a single glitch. Layout adheres to Raging Swan Press' crisp and printer-friendly two-column b/wstandard and the pdf comes fully bookmarked for your convenience. The pdf has no artworks, but needs none and comes in two versions – one optimized for screen-use and one optimized for the printer. The cartography of the valley by Tommi Salama is absolutely GORGOEUS and may be worth the asking price all on its own.

With Creighton Broadhurst, chief of Raging Swan Press, most embroiled in the nit and grit of publishing, it can be easy to forget how exceedingly talented he is in the fields of writing. Back in the day, when there was only ONE Raging Swan Press product out, Retribution, I bought it on a hunch and was blown away. If anything, Creighton has honed his craft. This pdf is quite frankly better than it has any right to be at this page-count: In a superb example of concise writing, with each word carefully chosen, Creighton takes us on a tour into a truly wondrous, lavish place of natural beauty. The "valley of rocks" sounds none to impressive on paper and is a prime example of British understatement - what we receive here is a truly gorgeous, fantastic place that could be used in pretty much any campaign – heck, replace elves with humans and this would work in our world.

This is not what sets this apart, though: While reading these pages, I could perfectly envision the majestic cliffs, I could almost hear the proud Kanae Falls. This is an exercise in stellar prose and a truly superb location that deserves being added to your campaign. Get this now! Oh, and yes, final verdict of 5 stars + seal of approval, obviously. Now excuse me, I need to dream of visiting a gorgeous place, where lichens cover sculptures that tell tales of ages long past...

You can get this glorious little pdf <u>here on</u> <u>OBS</u> **and** <u>here on d20pfsrd.com's shop!</u>

Endzeitgeist out.



Shattered Heart #4: Crucible of Faith Publisher: AAW Games

Reviewer: Endzeitgeist **Stars:** 5 stars out of 5

The (for now) final installment of the superb Shattered Heart-saga clocks in at 48 pages, 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial, 1

page ToC, 1 page SRD, 1 page back cover, leaving us with 43 pages of content, so let's take a look and answer the question whether this installment managed to retain the ridiculously high quality of the first three parts of the series!

This being an adventure-review, the following text contains MASSIVE SPOILERS. Potential players should not read ahead and jump to the conclusion instead.

Still here? Only GMs around? Great! So the worst is done, right? I mean, this powerful paladin has been establishing an outpost on the wild, jungle-

island with its volcano, what can possibly go wrong? Everything. The PCs are on trek to the burning isle...and it's not looking good. Upon arriving at the newly established colony, they are not welcomed as saviors – for the few people that do exist still on this accursed land lack the strength to do so. Diseases run rampant throughout the settlement – from bubonic plague to slimy doom and worse, all are afflicted...including the paladin Faerilon. Provided the PCs can care for the weakened populace, they'll notice a couple of disquieting developments - when an ashen giant with a rather dark sense of humor arrived, people were all too happy to have the massive brute help with construction – even though his tree-slingshot-like means of transporting proved perilous for the smaller population...but when people started disappearing, getting sick...well, who if not that leprous brute to blame? Under pressure, the poor sap of a paladin ventured forth to slay the giant – who happily obliged in combat, but ultimately proved to be no match for the holy warrior...who had, in fear and ignorance just slain a creature based on prejudice...and promptly fell. This is when a grotesque, equine-skull-headed monstrosity took the paladin...and did things to him. From there on, it only took a dead cleric to make the local situation escalate at a horrid pace - welcome PCs, enjoy your all-expenses not paid trip to killer plague island incorporated!

Kidding aside, the module goes into ample depth regarding the fighting of the various plagues and caring for the populace and, much like in the installments before, the PC's actions do matter – the community point score (handy tracker included) determines the ultimate outcome of this module. Whether or not the PCs manage to save the populace or not, the module can be pictured as pretty much a sandboxy exploration of a rather hostile wilderness environment: Strange ape-men (kech) are hiding in the jungle alongside their disease-carrying ape companions and if the PCs don't intervene, even reaching the final temple, much less restoring it, will prove to be nigh impossible. In the forests, multiple fully mapped encounters await and grisly talismans lead deeper and deeper into kech territory. A particularly grisly find awaits the PCs upon finding the remains of the slain ash giant entombed in mud and focus of dread magics, the mud-baked carcass rises as the new monster herein – lavishly illustrated the dread vercindere with its tentacles and diseases makes for a dread agent of the mastermind behind the kech's aggressions - in case you haven't figured that out by now: A

leukodaemon stalks the jungles and he and his allies make for brutal foes and deadly ambushes – but unless the PCs stop these dread beings, there's probably be no colony left to return to...

Making their way past the hellish jungle (potentially infected with a disease/poison-combo that is a truly nasty affliction), the PCs will have to make their way in the direction of the badlands, where steam geysers and vaporized flesh provide icky hazards and fallen gobbets of leprous flesh bespeak a horrid sense of humor on the side of the remaining, though not necessarily hostile ash giant, who btw. takes the news of his brother's death with a cynic pun...and provides directions, when prompted - to either the "big" trouble of the "little" one. Hint: Both are truly nasty territories titan centipedes or HUGE amounts of army ants the PCs will unknowingly pick their poison, while hopefully not falling prey to the roaming belkers. Btw.: The ant-combat may be actually the more lethal of the two – one careless application of fire and the PCs face off against a nasty grass fire - full, detailed hazard rules provided.

And yes, in the end, the PCs will have to scale the mountain - these climbing challenges take magic into account...and if you're like me, you may actually want to flesh out that section a bit:<u>Call to Arms: Ropes</u> by Fat Goblin Games inho makes with its pioneering a nice supplement to enrich the trip through the jungle further. Well, suffice to say, the climbing PCs may well draw the attention of multiple flame drakes. The crater itself sports a unique type of magical flora, firefrost moss, which can provide an interesting edge - for, within the crater, a massive tree of obsidian looms, as lava trickles in streams from it – the PCs have to brave magma oozes and elementals crazed by the desecration of the tree in a furious and truly intriguing combat – with streams of lava and the tree standing at the very edge of the volcano, the PCs can meet rather grisly demise due to the smart selection of foes. Attaching the proper, healthy branch may see the tree come back to health and the PCs return home to live happily ever after...right?

Wrong. Instead of a hero's welcome, the PCs are greeted by emissaries from the eldermoot and a newly reinstated paladin, with papers that show Carlyetta (and them!) to have been deemed guilty of heresy–uncommon harshness for the eldermoot, for sure. However, neither the inevitable waiting in the wings, nor the paladin or the halflings seem to care much...let's hope that astute PCs realize that one of the envoys is indeed their asura foe in disguise, which can potentially make the finale easier... but still challenging. Should the PCs prevail, it's

once more time to tally up the community points and see how Carlyetta's mission has went – how much communal spirit and openness is within the hearts of halflings very much depends on them... and whether Carlyetta has to rejoin the fallen leaves among the clergy. Their foe may be defeated...but the corruption at the heart of the eldermoot and the accusation of heresy surely provide ample means for further adventuring...and hopefully epilogue modules in the future...

As always, the pdf does contain player-friendly versions of the gorgeous maps, with and without grids.

Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are top-notch, I noticed no significant glitches. Layout adheres to AAW Games' two-column full-color standard for the series and the book sports multiple awesome fullcolor artworks. Cartography is absolutely superb and quality-wise excellent. The pdf-version comes fully bookmarked for your convenience and the PoD-premium dead tree version sports a neat glossy cover, thick paper and vibrant colors.

Michael Allen's final installment depicting the re-consecration of the holy tree-shrines of Piccolo is perhaps the most conventional of the modules compared to the mind-bogglingly evocative third installment, the overall set-up is less complex, less fantastic...and needs to be played to truly work its magic. The combination of elemental themes and pervading sense of decay suffusing the environments herein work in more subtle ways, but they do work - where the previous installments required quick thinking and focused on a wide diversity of tasks, the structure of this module very much mimics the flame and fire of its element: It begins with a slow burn, ignites and then continues to increase the heat. Unlike the previous modules, this one's focus is less on investigation and more on pure wilderness survival against a cadre of lethal adversaries and challenges. This does not, by any means, make the module bad, mind you the modular, somewhat sandboxy depiction of the island and its perils fits the theme and provides a welcome change of pace, with "burning" - both physically and metaphorically (fear, faith, rage, disease, etc.), constituting an apt leitmotif for the module. While my personal favorite remains the third of these modules, ultimately all of them, this included, can be considered to be masterpieces; to what extent depends on your taste, but their quality as such cannot be doubted.

My final verdict will clock in at 5 stars + seal of approval and, yes, nomination as a candidate for my top ten of 2015.

Since this seems, for now, to be the last of the Shattered Heart-adventures, let me with some observations regarding the whole adventure arc (APs are whole campaigns in my book that span at least two thirds of PC-levels...):

Shattered Heart is one of the smartest and most rewarding linked series of adventures I've read. The saga constantly takes note and the community point gauge for moral behavior works well, though the farther the modules progress, the easier it becomes to maintain a good chunk of them. The tactics of the primary antagonist are a joy and befitting of a creature sporting this intellect and agenda. Maps that feature illusions as handouts remain one of my favorite things to see in a given module and going the extra mile in that regard is fantastic. The awareness of modularity and fact that this series assumes smart players is refreshing – players are rewarded constantly for using their brain and showing compassion.

The critical achievement of the series, to me, lies in the fact that it takes basically one of the blandest plotline-structures (Re-consecrate elemental temples? Oh, haven't seen that one before...) and blows you away with it - both thanks to the unique cultures and downright awesome environments you explore, this series manages to make the old trope of elemental temples actually work with a narrative vibrancy that invigorates one's inspiration. The problem for all authors out there, though, is that from now on, any elemental-themed module will automatically be compared with this series...and beating it will be exceedingly difficult. The end of the saga if open and deservedly so - the Shattered Heart-series presented herein very much inspired me as a GM...and it certainly could use two or three follow-up modules...perhaps the "Sickened Heart"? The curious amount of two rather rare outsiders, time and again, do point towards further threats to Piccolo...and I sure as hell want to see the PCs trying to clear Carlyetta's name, engage in the shadow politics and backdealing of the society here...heck, should this ever be made into a hardcover, rest assured that both setting and expanded adventurepossibilities exist in abundance. The fact that each module plays differently, but manages to retain the same exceedingly high quality standard is impressive - most series sooner or later falter, at least a bit. This does not. Shattered Heart, as a collective, is a gem that establishes Michael Allen as one of my favorite adventure authors. Get these modules they're worth every single penny.

You can get this inspired module in the Pathfinder-rules <u>here on OBS!</u>

Want the Fantasy Grounds-version for PFRPG? You can <u>get that here!</u>

Do you prefer D&D 5th edition? The module <u>can</u> <u>be found here!</u>

Want the 5e-Fantasy Grounds version? Well, <u>it's here!</u> Endzeitgeist out.

Snow Dhite

Snow-White Publisher: AAW Games **Reviewer:** Endzeitgeist **Stars:** 5 stars out of 5

This massive book clocks in at 243 pages, not counting front cover, back cover, editorial, etc; if you take away the KS-thank-you page and the SRD, this huge

book still remains 240-pages strong. My review is based primarily on the hardcover of this book.

I backed Snow-White on kickstarter, but have contributed to this massive book.

All right, first: A brief history of this project. Back in 2013, AAW Games released a two-part adventuresaga as part of their A-series of modules, set in the campaign setting of Aventyr. The adaptation of Snow-White as a module was heavily inspired by traditional, non Disney-fied versions of the folktales; basically, the ones I grew up with, and did a LOT of things right – with several highlights and takes on the tropes, a lot of imaginative potential and unique environments, the series made my Top Ten list of that year. When the kickstarter was launched to expand upon this already excellent basis, I knew I'd have to get it. Now, a massive hardcover in full color graces my book shelf – but has getting the revised version been justified?

The short answer to this question is frankly "OH YES!!". The more complex answer is a bit longer. Before diving into the meat of this mega-adventure, let me clearly state that this is not just a module – this book basically doubles as a city/wilderness sourcebook and has greatly expanded upon the concepts of the original iteration of the adventures. All right, but before we do: A piece of advice for both players and GMs – try to not SPOIL yourselves – this mega-adventure works best when you do not immediately know what you're actually playing, so put up those GM-screens, fellows.

In order to avoid SPOILERS, potential players should jump to the conclusion.

All right, only GMs around? So the Klavekian kingdom and its more loyal vassals often have rather strained relationships – there is racism versus non-humans, the ever-present tax man looming and then monsters and hazards both mundane and magical exist in the world of Aventyr...plenty of work for adventurers. Unless you're at the wrong place at the wrong time. Sometimes, the war is far away and the resident adventurers are out there smiting the villains, who wisely hide in their hellholes to bide their time until more turbulent times arrive. Indeed, in the lull and pastoral idyll seem to be but the precursor for a new golden age for the town of Morsain: The daughter of the town's lord Herttua Valta is about to be wed - to royalty, no less: Gorgeous, intelligent Lumi Valkea Valtatytar is about to be joined in wedlock to none other than the Klavekian Prince Ruhtin - and, seeing how the job-situation is pretty bad, the PCs have accepted guard duty - not knowing they'll be guarding nothing short of a royal wedding!

Suffice to say, the module thus begins in an unconventional manner – guarding the festivities, after all, is not an undertaking you embark on while armed to the teeth with weapons of magical mass destruction and in grimy, blood-caked armor - the PCs will be pretty much naked regarding the magical arsenal, which provides a unique change of pace from the get-go. So, Castle Morsain - in the original, this place was little more than a backdrop for the mechanically relevant components. Here, nothing could be further from the truth: The castle sports a huge full-page illustration (one of many, just fyi) and detail-wise even explains the flagbased warning-system employed. Moreover, the massive castle actually sports drop-dead-gorgeous isometric full-color maps made by map wizard and heir apparent to Jonathan Roberts, the one and only Tommi Salama. Yes, I may be a bit ecstatic regarding them...but they're just so beautiful!

Ahem, beyond the gorgeous presentation, the beginning of the module has been streamlined in order to prove their mettle, PCs will still have to deal with the security of the castle's respective rooms, which conspicuously contain a significant gauntlet of traps - now here's the interesting component: The respective traps escalate in power - in a surprisingly linear way, but they did so in the original...the trick this time around is that the skill DCs provided generally sport degrees of success. Of course, the increasingly devious traps and poisons employed only are a means to determine the capabilities of the PCs and, if in doubt, there is a means to save lethally poisoned PCs in the guise of the famous and beloved queen attendant Haijvin. Of course, this should already incite paranoia and distrust – are the grinning ragamuffins (think of them as a cross of racial-equality/anarchist/

anonymous-like guild) behind the traps? To make that clear – No. The traps are there to provide a means to judge the competence of the respective adventurers – for, eventually, after investigating the local crème-de-la-crème, sooner or later, Lumi is very likely to drop down during the pre-wedding banquet – and a member of the elusive group is running – fast.

Whether or not the PCs manage to grab the fugitive, Lumi will be unconscious, courtesy of a brilliant, nigh impossible to detect 5-componentbased super poison. Under the stern auspice of a less than amused prince Ruhtin, the PCs will be assigned guard duty....and, obviously, the night will not be kind: Awoken by a hustle, the PCs will have to storm Lumi's room, only to witness swarms upon swarms of bats and even dire bats trying to abduct Lumi! Worse, each area of effect attack in the noble chambers will be VERY expensive... so yeah, fireballing the swarms is NOT a smart move... This particular encounter was a bottleneck in the original module - well, this time around, we have scaling bats depending on the capability of your PCs and the proceeding chase across the roofs is wonderfully detailed and smart. And yes, the module goes on whether the PCs manage to retrieve her or not - Lumi will be kidnapped... potentially by a doppelgänger of a PC, whisking her away right from under Ruhtin's eyes, implicating the PCs to be in cahoots with the ragamuffins...but I'm getting ahead of myself.

On the next day, the PCs will certainly have their work cut out for them - after convincing Ruhtin of their noble intentions, the hunt is on - how exactly, well, that does very much depend on the sensibility of your group – thanks to a scroll of *locate object*, the PCs may actually find a culprit – who promptly dies when captured, of course...but there is a more..let's say, wicked: The Huntsman, with Lumi in tow, leads 4 horses into the woods – and the PCs will have a highly complex and entertaining chase on their hands (it is here that you can use the chasedeck, should you own it) - the chase offers alternate obstacles and is pretty brutal, as the PCs make their way through the never-ending sea of trees. However, the huntsman actually is VERY smart – 4 horses, an orb of misleading and invisible correct horse – unless the PCs are up to their very a-game, they'll be on a wild goose chase. But, alas - while Lumi may be lost in the woods, the Huntsman doesn't manage to finish her off – instead, he is destined to meet his end at the poisonous mandibles of strange albino-centipedes...and the PCs will stand in front of royalty without anything to show

for. However, the albino-centipedes and complex investigations (with a streamlined mini-game) may provide a means that points towards the catacombs beneath caste Morsain, sealed beyond a logical lock with a connect-the-dots-puzzle.

However, before (or while the PCs are crawling through these catacombs, you may wish to have them explore the massive, fully detailed town of Morsain - the colossal place is a true fairy tale town – perhaps THE evocative fairy tale town. What do I mean by this? Well, know how I said that this was a sourcebook as well? Guess what: Morsain has enough material to run a whole campaign in it - and I certainly hope we'll see many more adventures here, for the potential is MASSIVE. If you consider yourself a scholar or someone versed in mythologies and fairy-tales, this will be an exercise in proving your mettle: No less than 144 locations (!!!) are provided, plus 6 delightful adventurers - these are fluff only, but hilarious: Sandoval Poe with his tame ravens Eddga and Alleynne is fun, but obvious; a kid grippli ranger is fun - but see, the 144 locations and shops cover... just about all of Grimm's Fairytales - including the more obscure ones. The truly astounding achievement about them, though, is how they all add a unique spin on the material, codifying it in the context of the roleplaying system: The Bremer Stadtmusikanten become polymorphed bards in the guise of animals; Hansel and Gretel are selfish witch-killers, spirit-bottled secrets sold by a night hag in disguise, shops that always see you make a loss, Bluebeard as a barber – all of this just breathes imaginative potential and literally can occupy you for years, should you choose to develop the material. The chapter also features rules for varying proficiencies in a given language (simple and long overdue!) and, as a whole, renders this massive chapter exceedingly compelling. Obviously, the city is fully mapped.

Speaking of maps – the aforementioned catacombs, which, in the original, were nothing more than a short filler, now are a proper dungeon, 4 levels strong, with the elements as a theme – before you groan at an elemental dungeon: One, it comes with superb isometric maps. Two, and more important, this is a dungeon for the thinking man – sure, you can waltz through this one – but the whimsical fairy-tale style riddles and puzzles contained in this dungeon actually make it a delight to run – with a lock of hair as rewards for braving the dangerous dungeon, the PCs return to an enraged prince and lord, if they manage to survive the snipers, that is. Only to have Hajyin teleport

them after the hair, smack into the middle of the haunted forest – which has its name for a reason... and it's COLD. VERY COLD.

Remember when I said that this was also a wilderness sourcebook? Well, the haunted forest comes with a massive alchemist's journal of magical plants - from bladebark leaf to ghost flute shrooms, the massive chapter sports a huge array of lavishly illustrated plants that have intriguing alchemical uses, come with harvesting and use-information... and yes, this section also covers unique noncombative fauna - fey elk, frost crickets, frogs of ice, beetles with leprechaun-like faces...and have I mentioned the miniscule minitaurs or the laughing squirrels...there also are paralytic fleas... angel moths...and quite frankly, with these unique plants and creatures and the detailed random encounter pages, you can run encounters for weeks before even touching the main plot of this freeform section of the adventure. The haunted forest does have several places that can prove to be rather lethal, depicted in more detail, though. The first of these and one of my favorite hazard-encounters ever, would be the bottomless pit - a predatory, intelligent pit. No, I am not kidding. And yes, careless groups can actually be TPK'd by this beast.

More on the whimsical side, which is never far from the dark in this eerie forest, would be an opportunity to play kasta, a unique mini-game with some fey in their fully mapped glade...and also find out about a fey currently entombed in a coffin of crystal - this being is tied to another sub-storyline of the forest, namely the forest's maze. The maze now sports a much more complex design, has an absolutely gorgeous map, more versatile encounters – and, it has a twist: Like every good maze, it obviously has a minotaur – who waits, weapons drawn, at the center, guarding a girl forever asleep - though the strange fruit that caused this sleep can also be found in the forest, obviously their effect can only be broken by true love's kiss – something you either roleplay or check via tables provided. This girl is btw. tied to the fey - they both fell afoul of the dread fruit - and yes, the minotaur, fearsome though he may look, is the girl's guardian and family, so murder-hobos will potentially be in for a shock.

Anyways, sooner or later, the trail will lead the PCs, e.g. via the girl they just saved, to a hidden cabin close to some gushing waterfalls – and yes, the cabin is fully detailed with isometric maps as well...and by now home of the 7 dwarves (AAW Games' crew being represented in their awesome artwork – including my dear departed friend

Joshua...he would have loved this...) who are currently kinda-but-not-really are holding Lumi hostage/thinking on what to do with her – after all, the position of non-humans in Klavekian society is anything but nice: Capable and actually nice, their traps and fighting capabilities are pronounced, so a friendlier approach may be in order – whether by fight or party, the misunderstanding is hopefully cleared - but meanwhile Lumi has fallen to the wiles of her adversary, put into stasis by the queen attendant's cursed items, guarded by dangerous flora – and yes, you can actually run this first and then have the PCs search the forest for potential cures, leading to the girl etc. - the whole haunted forest, ultimately, is thoroughly modular – and so is the solution to this module.

You know, there is more than one way to awaken Lumi - alive or unconscious, in love or not, allied with the dwarves or not – and this ultimately determines the social climax of this module, the homecoming – no less than 8 (!!!) final scenarios are detailed for the GM. Now here's the catch, though - the PCs may, even after all this, potentially not realize what they played...or they lack evidence of the exceedingly cunning queen attendant - who has a superb means of escape in her repertoire. So yes, she will probably get away...but there may be a wedding after all. Sure, the honorable and reasonable scenario sees a wedding with Ruhtin, right? Well, I always had a thing for pale, blackhaired women with red lips and blue, grey or green eyes...so personally, were I playing this module as a PC...I'd try to go for true love, become an outlaw and try to fulfill my childhood fantasy of living happily ever after with Lumi...which would put the mightiest nation of Aventyr hot on my trail...but I guess that would be a tale for another module...

Now obviously, this module is not limited to the adventure - there is an array of unique magical items to be found in here and none other than Wolfgang Baur has crafted an array of unique spells -which includes spinning straw to gold or animated, dancing hatchets? Have I mentioned the wall of animated gloves that may chaotically poke or slap you around? There is also a poisonand trap-index, full stats for 3.5 and PFRPG and Ed Greenwood provides a tragic twist on the classic tale in his "The Things We Do To Chase Beauty" short story, which expresses sympathy for the devil. If you're not familiar with the unredacted tale...the classic Grimm-tale is included herein... oh, and one thing made me grin from ear to ear: You know, all those gorgeous, massive maps? They come in an appendix...and with extra, player-

friendly, key-less versions. And yes, beyond the isometric ones, we ALSO get top-down versions – now THIS is how map-support for such a premium module ought to be done – absolutely gorgeous!

Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are very good - for a book of this size in particular, the editors did a great job. A special shout-out to the layout artists Justin Andrew Mason and Jensen Toperzer - the 2-column layout is STUNNING – with apple blossoms and apples as borders for read-aloud texts and gorgeous initials, this very much aesthetically feels like a beautiful, old fairy tale tome. Similarly, the artists Mates Laurentiu, Jacob Blackmon, Justin Andrew Mason, Jen Page, Bruno Baxila, Eric Quigley, Jack Holiday and Jeff Ward have achieved something remarkable – in spite of the different artists, this book's huge array of artworks, many of which span whole pages, are not only original - they have a distinct, unified visual identity and style, basically think about classic roleplaying artwork in full color quoting fairy tale imagery. THEN add the absolutely superb maps by Tommi Salama, playerfriendly versions included. Oh yeah, the electronic version is fully bookmarked - but if you have the option, get the hardcover. It's gorgeous.

SERIOUSLY, if you usually skip my conclusion's first paragraph, please read it this time around – these folks deserve recognition for the fantastic work delivered. This is one of the most beautiful, huge adventures I've ever read and seriously is so concise in its aesthetic direction it is a pure joy to just flip through the pages.

Stephen Yeardley, Jonathan G. Nelson and Will Myers, with contributors Jacob Blackmon, Justin Andrew Mason and Joshua Gullion (R.I.P.) have taken an already legendary two-part-saga and crafted something thoroughly outstanding from it. Where the original modules had some bottlenecks and minor filler places/weaknesses, this new iteration of the material is absolutely legendary in every way: What was before a bland filler mini-dungeon is now a thoroughly unique dungeon; what was before a bit opaque or linear is now thoroughly modular: If your PCs outor underperform in the module, the narrative is there to catch you – basically, this module is now as nonlinear as it can be and can be considered a thoroughly unique take on a tale as old as time. The adversaries are smart and the book goes one step beyond - the city of Morsain and the haunted forest would be great stand-alone source-books even as "only" a scavenging ground of backdrop

for your own stories, this is a massive success and worth every cent of the asking price a hundredfold -personally, I'm particularly impressed by the immense feat of making a linear tale we all know thoroughly modular and FRESH.

So no, there can be no question, not even an ounce of a doubt regarding the final verdict of 5 stars + seal of approval + BUY THIS!!!-recommendation. As a reviewer, I face only one conundrum – the original modules already made my Top Ten-list of a year (which should tell you something about how good this is now!) and I have a policy of not nominating books twice for my Top Ten lists – otherwise, e.g. <u>Strange Magic</u>'s constituents or <u>Ultimate</u> <u>Charisma</u> would grace my lists in the respective follow-up years. As crunch-books, I could at least designate them as EZG-essentials, though.

However, there is a huge amount of new material in this book...so what to do? Well, Frog God Games' Cyclopean Deeps was a two-part-saga and Part II has been retroactively added to my Top Ten of 2014. Here, however, that wouldn't feel right, for this would score higher than the initial books. I thought long and hard...and know what? This deserves a Top Ten of 2015 spot...so I'm cheating my own system, hopefully retaining my fairness regarding the other nominees: This gets an unranked bonusspot on my Top Ten of 2015 -this would be on the list, high on it, were it not for the previous wins. Consider this as basically a thoroughly impressive, wonderful book that could work just as well with younger audiences. I know who I'm running this for soon... Ähem...oh yeah, once again: Get this!

You can get this gorgeous mega-adventure <u>here</u> on OBS!

Endzeitgeist out.



Southlands Campaign Setting

Publisher: Kobold Press **Reviewer:** Endzeitgeist **Stars:** 5 stars out of 5

This massive campaign setting-style book clocks in at 302 pages, 1 page front cover, 2 pages of editorial, 4 pages of ToC, 2 pages of KS-

backer thanks, 1 page SRD, 1 page advertisement, 1 page back cover, leaving us with a massive 290 pages of raw content, so let's take a look!

I was a (hesitant) backer for this book's KS, but otherwise unaffiliated with the production of this massive tome. My book is mainly based on the print version, though the electronic version was

consulted for the purpose of determining electronic functionality of e.g. bookmarks and the like.

What do I mean by "hesitant"? Okay, before we dive into this book's subject matter, a brief history lesson: I consider myself a pretty faithful fan of Kobold Press, ever since it was Open Design -I own literally every supplement and even have, back when I actually wasn't dirt poor, acted as a high-level-patron to get my very own special, unique module. I *really* like Midgard and the evocative potential Kobold press brings to the table. Alas, Deep Magic, the previous big book, was a heartbreaking exercise for me (see my review of that book) and it took, frankly, quite some prodding to dive in. I had a minor windfall and invested that, back in the day, in this book, as a kind of "make it or break it"-test. Did it pay off? Let's see!

The Midgard campaign setting's allure, so far, did lie primarily in its dark fantasy Germanic/ Slavic flair, somewhat expanded upon by the Argonaut-style adventuring in the Journeys-books, but yeah – the focus was arguably euro-centric and thus, I was very much interested to see how the respective mythologies and power-dynamics would interact with the massive Southlands. The first thing you'll notice, though, is that the structure and organization of this book eclipses that of Deep Magic by leaps and bounds: We begin this book with a deatiled history of the Southlands – and it is a glorious read.

No, really – I mean that – the history as presented already takes you right into this book's world; it's prose is evocative and makes you remember immediately what you wanted, what you craved in fantastical settings. Still, this is the general history, the time-line. The book also is suffused by small sideboxes, where an in-character narrator provides quotes as a guide and adventure hooks/bucketlists for adventurers for the respective regions can be found. The book also provides 5 general, new races that can be found throughout the Southlands: Gnolls, Trollkin, Tosculi (see the advanced racesinstallment for more on the wasp-people), Nkosi (feline shape-changer humanoids) and Kijani (plant humanoids that seek to become mammalian). The races themselves are pretty powerful (plantimmunities, for example), but not excessively so – they should work within the context of most fantasy games, though, if your gunning for gritty gameplay, you may want to take a close look at them. An innovation used here for the first time (for the tosculi exclusively) and later expanded in the Advanced Races Compendium is advice on racial scaling - so yes, you can scale down the tosculi by

a bit, though imho the race does not require this in all but the grittiest of games. On a nitpicky side, some races are "lopsided" with attribute bonuses allocated to physical attributes, so if you're like me and prefer your races with a strong suit in both physical and mental attributes, that may be something to be aware of.

It should be noted that ethnicities of regular races as well as age, height and weight tables are part of the deal here. Now the interesting component here, ultimately, does not lie in the crunch (though it is significantly more solid - kudos to the authors! The intriguing component, however, would be the seamless and smart integration of literally thousands of years of history within the mythology of Midgard as a whole – whether it's the origin of Boreas, the frigid northern wind and the tie to the survivors of sunken Ankheshel or Umbuso, the ancient empire of titans, fleeing from the domains of Wotan – the most intriguing aspect here is that this massive continent of pure historicity manages to weave its meta-narrative seamlessly into the overall context of Midgardian mythology, extending the diversity and organic feeling of the world by leaps and bounds. An interesting component is also how mythic rules are handled – as a basic tenet, they are considered to be the effects of remnants of divinity sparks, left behind by fallen pantheons and titans, which provides a nice in-game rationale for the existence of powers like that.

Now, it is after this that we focus on the first overall region, which would be Nuria Natal, the eternal realm - Nuria Natal, at first glance, seems very much like the pseudo-Egyptian realm, but it is distinct from e.g. Osirion and Khemit or similar realms in several key aspects, the first of which is the focus on the river that defines it – springing from a planar rift of the world-tree Yggdrasil, it blends the mythologies of the Nile and Midgardian theology in a truly distinct and unique vision. Similarly, the trope of undying godkings has a twist that goes far beyond what you'd expect - the legendary rulers of the land, semi-divinities and halfgods, have achieved a sense of immortality and may return from the grave to vanquish the foes of Nuria Natal, thus also explaining why the powerful, draconic sultanate Mharoti has failed to conquer this powerful nation. Similarly, the gods, while utilizing the themes of real world mythologies, never feel like simple carbon adaptations of real-world mythology, instead acting as a properly woven-in essential component of the vista portrayed.

Nowhere does this become more apparent than in Per-Bastet, the city of the everlasting cat, home

of the deity...and basically a modern metropolis seen through the lens of the fantastic: A distinct patriotism unifies the quarters and their diverse residents, which contains gnolls and catfolk in abundance alongside werelions; from planar alleyways to a churning river of elemental-inhabited sand making its way through the chaotic jumble of the metropolis, the influence of Bastet, her church, the god-queen and her agents or the vampiric masterminds in the shadows, the vision of a true melting pot of fantastic ethnicities resonates with a character one usually only ascribes to real world cities. The writing here is impeccable and, much like the entries on a certain city and its necropolis, the staggering panorama extends in its quality throughout the whole chapter – from sandships as a vehicle-modification to a well-written ecology of the mummy (with ample variants and death curses), this chapter is abask in inspired writing and makes the places jump forth from the pages – whether they be the aforementioned places or the Ghatazi salt pits or the dreaded city of Per-Anu, devoted to ending lives in all manner of ways. The church of Aten and its diverse teachings, variant mummies, a city of undead and 4 archetypes (including archetypes for Theurge and White Necromancer) as well as a 10-level-PrC complement this chapter. While not universally awesome and sporting some minor deviations in rules-language, the content herein still is rather solid and well-ingrained within the context of the world. The book also sports multiple nice traits for further customization. The book also sports a HUGE number of hieroglyphs these work akin to how rune magic or ankeshellian glyph magic work – and, while powerful, their limitations per associated cult do offer a rather easy way for the GM to control their availability – want that trick only followers of Anu-Akma have? Well, you better buckle up and join that organization!

The second, massive chapter details the nation under the auspice of the remaining wind lords, the same entities that sent Boreas packing with his aspirations of genocide – but that does not mean these eternal lords of the lands are kind – far from it. Their description very much makes clear that these elemental spirits do not adhere to the same morality as mortals. It is also in this domain that the twin lands of the gnolls (with a delightfully nasty gnoll-tactics sidebar) can be found. What do I mean by these? Well, here's an entry: "Three words: leucrotta sorceror chieftain." If you're like me, this made you grin from ear to ear. The pages chronicling these harsh regions also tell of a depressed sphinx and her honor guard watching over the verdant ruins of a fallen empire and of the fate of Roshgazi, minotaur-nation and Cathargeequivalent – the nation has been razed to the ground by Mharot's might, but in the ruins of this place, the sentient maze still draws visitors inside, hoping for salvation...before its other personality comes to the surface – and the "Broken" does not take kindly to intruders...

Goblin-occupied Mardas Vula with its black pyramid still exerts a lure on others and, wandering the sands, a colossal dire camel prophet sports howdah-like gnoll-encampments. The jinnborn race hearkens back to the genasi or planetouched and can be pictured as the elemental-themed mortals and the race sports quite a diverse and well-crafted array of options, including limited protection versus one's element, endure elements and elemental blasts that can be upgraded via feats. That being said, this is very much a strong race, stronger than the "core"-races of the book, so take care when using them. At the same time, I thoroughly enjoyed their unique psychology and culture... but still. At their pretty high power-level, I wished more abilities were alternate racial traits instead of jamming all those abilities into the base frame of the race. The archetypes here are interesting – an elemental-themed paladin, gnoll caravan raiders and janni-calling summoners can be found and a PrC depicting the elite guard of aforementioned sphinx priestess is part of the deal. The chapter, like those before and after, also sports several unique spells and magic items - the latter of which deserve special mention, after all, we get an enchanted bed of nails and several unique carpets. One belt should be eved very carefully, as it lets you pilot willing outsiders, fusing your body with them, which is exceedingly powerful when not handled with care.

Beyond the dominion of the wind lords, the book finds its full-blown stride with the high jungles, where access to the fabled well of urd can be found, as powerful aeromancers guard the Black Lotus Mesa as intelligent white apes afflicted with arcane wasting prowl the jungles. More unique and perhaps one of the most awesome and disturbing components of the whole book would be the fact that an Old One, verdant and all-consuming, ever-growing, extends its tendril'd reach beyond the confines, ever seeking to mutate and grow - it should then come as no surprise that the nation of Kush has, in efforts to stem the tide, turned to all manners of magicks most dark - but it may not be enough, as the corrupted Kijani that couldn't escape its influence spread spore pods far and wide, creating horrid tendril slaves. The

chapter also is a JOY to read due to an actually neat aeromancer archetype and, more than that, due to the vast array of hazards and the 8 lotus-types, which act as addictive, yes...but they also serve as powerful power components. This chapter is twisted, inspired and absolutely glorious.

The kingdoms of salt and steel, bustling and defined by commerce – here, the land of serpentscholars beckons, while in the land of ancients, the living reliquaries roam. This section is not only brilliant for its take on themes usually not represented – a royal mythic naga lich rules over Ankhrimari, while the Narumbeki legions with their battle tactics and unique combat options represent a powerful militaristic force – the themes evoked here are seldom seen, borrowing heavily from Africa's mythologies, with magical masks and awesome incantations sweetening the deal, while powerful combat divinations make for a unique and compelling magical tradition.

On the Corsair Coast, the holy city Shuruppak beckons, while the city of Sar-Shaba contains horrific demonic legions, warded and sealed await intrepid adventurers. The fabulously wealthy island nation of Shibai and wicked corsairs can be found...but there is also the happiest land, Kesara, realm of the saffron rajah, where everyone smiles – a smile of desperation and fear, for the tyrannic rajah of the land is capricious and nasty indeed – a realm devoted to the decadence of the horrible rakshasa master that sits bloated on its throne. Fiercely meritocratic lion kingdoms of Omphaya, led by a returned titan and his rakshasa vizier may not be a nice place to visit either. – but it sure should prove interesting.

The heartlands of the Southlands, the abandoned lands contain vast stretches of desert - it is here that the massive, black towers of the disturbing hivecities of the tosculi can be found. Why disturbing? Well, there is one that consists of the resinhardened corpses of the fallen. Yes. Awesome and so perfectly evocative. Someone has also probably read China Miéville's excellent "The Scar", for there is a floating city in the style of Armada to be found. Mechanically, these lands are brutal, as the web of lev lines is damaged, which makes primal magic rather powerful...and excessively dangerous. The long-limbed Ramad are a balanced race sported here and significant ley line magic expansions and delightfully disturbing living tosculi items complement this evocative, harsh land as we turn our gaze southwards, to the fringe of the southlands, where dinosaurs roam and the minotaur nation of Sudvall stands guard. The xorn

sultanate of Zanskar can also be found here...and should you hesitate to set a whole campaign in the southlands...did you know that one particular bottle contains a whole city of assassins? Yeah...if you don't come to the Southlands, they may well come to you.

The pdf's last chapter is devoted to the pantheons and gods of the Southlands – and their depictions are inspired, utilizing concepts and names from real-world mythology, but putting a thoroughly unique spin on them. The book concludes with an equipment table as well as a feat-index. My copy also sports a truly superb, glossy poster-map of the gorgeous cartography.

Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are top-notch for a book of this size – while I did notice an instance where the page-reference was still the layout-stage's "\$\$", the crew of Kobold Press has done a vastly superior job when compared to Deep Magic; the formal editing is more than solid and while I consider not all crunchy bits to be perfectly balanced, the ruleslanguage is significantly more precise than in Deep Magic. Layout adheres to a 2-column standard in full color and is absolutely stunning; much like the lavish amount of original full-color art, the aesthetic components render this book frankly one of the most beautiful RPG-supplements I own. The pdf comes fully bookmarked. The hardcover uses high-quality, thick, matte paper and glossy, highquality paper for the huge map. The cartography of the book is superb for the most part, though some of the more ruined cities look "only" very good still, overall, this is one of the most beautiful books you'll ever see.

Wolfgang Baur, Eric Cagle, David "Zeb" Cook, Adam Daigle, Dan Dillon, Amanda Hamon Kunz, Steven T. Helt, Steve Kenson, Ben McFarland, Richard Pett, Marc Radle, Stephen Radney-MacFarland, Ted Reed, Stephen Rowe, Adam Roy, Owen K.C. Stephens, C.A. Suleiman, Brian Suskind, Henry Wong – ladies and gentlemen, congratulations are in order.

You see, Golarion and similar setting have often drawn upon the tropes of Arabian nights and pharaonic Egypt – but never this way. The creative approach to this book could be summed up as follows: The book took the classic real-world mythologies that resonate with us and put a spin on it – so far, so common. However, the true excellence of Southlands lies not within this; no. The massive achievement of this book lies in the concise manner in which it brings the truly fantastic to the table

and treats it seriously; the Southlands feel alive and concise, because it takes a very much logical, concise approach to world-building - whether as standalone or as part of the Midgard campaign setting, the Southlands excel. The blending of mythologies and use of more obscure themes collides with pure imaginative potential in a true, creative firework. I wouldn't have expected this book to be that great a read – as a huge fan of Catherynne M. Valente's "Orphan's Tales", my bar for myth-weaving is ridiculously high...but here's the thing: I loved reading this book. Much like the best of mythpunk novels, much like the most inspiring of fantastic novels, this tome is a true page-turner and contains more imaginative potential than just about every setting I could list. This is not Al-Qadim v. 2.0. – it surpasses this excellent classic and mops the floor with it.

Now granted, I am not sold on all designdecisions herein, not perfectly convinced regarding the balance of some components – but all of that ultimately pales before a book that is true excellence. I haven't enjoyed reading a campaign setting this much since the original Midgard Campaign Setting and honestly, enjoyed this book even more - because it takes less familiar concepts, because it brims with the spark of genius and more evocative locations than multiple settings **combined.** There is not a single campaign setting book that is comparable in scope and ambition and, better yet, while not all the crunch reaches the constant, almost frightening level of genius of the prose, there are ample instances where I simply fist-pumped - the lotus-magic is pure awesomeness and similarly, quite a few of the magic items just feel magical, unique, awesome...and the hazards... oh boy, do I love me some hazards!

Here's most important component, the though: Beyond simply being a superb read and surprisingly, in spite of heavily quoting real world mythologies, Southlands is a book of jamais-vus, of the novel and still familiar, an accumulation of brilliant ideas that practically DEMAND that you run modules, campaigns, whole APs in this wondrous, exceedingly captivating setting. My only true gripes while reading this tome pertained to the organization of player-material - out-sourcing that to a Player's Guide would have probably been a prudent move - but I'm ultimately just nitpicking. If anything, just about every nation herein made me crave more; each chapter made me want a whole AP set in it so bad... Southlands is a furious return to form for Kobold Press. This book very much shows how and why Kobold Press became as popular

as it now is – even if you're not actively gaming, this is well worth buying: Flip open those pages, start reading and dream a dream of harsh jungles, enchanted deserts and gorgeous cities, both bustling and ruined, of a savage land of splendor and glories untold. Go to the Southlands. Get this book. Dream. There are very few books of this size that manage to maintain a sense of narrative consistency, much less at the thoroughly impressive level of quality the ideas in this tome have.

This may well be the best sourcebook Kobold Press has released (I'm a fanboy of some adventures...), perhaps this is even one of the best sourcebooks I've ever read. If anything, I do hope that Northlands at one point get a similarly detailed second edition. Southlands is excellence – if you even remotely are interested in the subject matter, do yourself a favor and get this glorious tome – it contains enough ideas and adventure for a lifetime and I am not engaging in hyperbole here. My final verdict will clock in at 5 stars + seal of approval and I'll also nominate this as a candidate for my Top Ten of 2015. (Scheduled for release soon!)

You can get this glorious tome here on OBS!



Southlands Bestiary Publisher: Kobold Press **Reviewer:** Endzeitgeist **Stars:** 5 stars out of 5

This massive bestiary for use with the <u>Southlands</u> <u>campaign setting</u> (but not limited to it) clocks in at 122 pages, 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial, 2 pages of

backer-lists, 1 page ToC, 1 page SRD, 2 3/4 pages of advertisement, 1 page back cover, leaving us with 112 1/4 pages of content, so let's take a look!

I was a backer of the Southlands kickstarter, but am otherwise not involved with this book. My review is primarily based on the softcover print version of this book, though I consulted the electronic version to verify e.g. presence of bookmarks and similar components.

This book is pretty much a sans frills experience – the brief version of this review would be as follows: After an introduction by Jeff Grubb, we dive into a ton of monsters; in the end, there is a table of monsters by CR; they span the breadth from humble CR 1/2 to massive CR 26.

Yeah, I know, not very fulfilling now, is it? Let's try to do this more justice: We have, at this point, seen more than one book (or chapter) on creatures of the deserts – there usually are a couple

of undead, some ambush predators, a killer scarab, the like. We know the tropes and this book very much is aware of this – instead of simply resorting to trying to re-invent the wheel, it pretty much says: "So yeah, you do – but guess what? You haven't seen THIS done!" What do I mean by this? Well, for one, the massive book has something unique going on for every creature – there is no boring rehash of old tricks in this book. That tentacley ambush-predator cactus you've seen done before? Well, it can generate a lethal aura of spikes by shooting them all at once in a pinch. That undead, doomed to wander the desert? Let's just say that it can be used in Ravenloft sans modification, since it requires brains to defeat it.

The second component that sets this apart is that, much like the Southlands-book, it borrows heavily on real world mythology and adds a unique spin to it – Mechuitl and Camazotz, for example, are statted as full-blown demon lords – including e.g. information on Camazotz in the underworld... Similarly, monster tropes are combined with great panache with Midgard flavor – Clockwork Shabti and Ushabti, for example tie in perfectly with the gearforged concept, while the types of tosculi and their master, dread Arbeyach, prince of swarms also get their due.

Speaking of resonance with real world myth – if you're familiar with Prester John's myth, you'll be like me and grin from ear to ear upon seeing the Blemmyes statted. The lightning-infused swarm "Bolt of Ekwanes" similarly resounds with a deep pulse of the familiar and yet unique. Fans of ancient mythologies will also cheer at the rendition of noble Buraqs, while drought swallows threaten the land and well-being of those foolish enough to attract their attention. Salt-devils scour the lands and demonic idolic deities await to be unearthed, while owl-headed harpies prey on the travelers.

Intelligent ambush predator spiders called J'ba Fobi or the smoke-lions mngwas, carnivorousnandi bears or an ooze camouflaging as whole oasis - the breadth and depth of adversaries and creatures covered herein is wide indeed. Perhaps you want a pygmy trumpeteer elephant companion? Heck, even the tired old desert worm gets a new twist, with Sathaq worms sporting a pain-inducing aura and a hunting style based on dragging foes beneath the sands. Even the classic hybrids that in earlier days sometimes ended up being less than interesting have great representations herein - the lethal serpopard (serpent-leopard-hybrid) is a brutal foe, while an orangutan-choker hybrid should, by all accounts, end up on a ridiculous monster-list...but it does work! Insectoid Xhkarsh

can afflict their victims with oracle curses and creatures mentioned in the great setting book, from the twisted vine lords to the arcane wasting-bearing intelligent white apes resound with themes of our collective cultural consciousness.

The mythic Southlands titans do sport notes on words of power (and an optional, non WoP-array of SPs) while the wakane, a feathered pterosaur, is particularly feared for sinking boats – have I mentioned the huge, burrowing pitcher plants masquerading as an oasis, commanding whole swarms of its rootlets to defeat resilient prey? There is a lot of downright inspired material to be found herein and not one of the creatures in this book felt lazy or bland.

Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are top-notch – while e.g. MR is not capitalized in a statblock and while I noticed some small hiccups, overall, the book is solid. The statblocks I checked sported no glaring glitches. Layout adheres to a gorgeous two-column full-color standard and the pdf is fully bookmarked. The book has a huge selling point: The artwork is absolutely fantastic. original and truly evocative, full-color artworks for all creatures are provided and they are downright baffling, eclipsing even most 1st party bestiaries. Some of the artworks are so beautiful, they make you immediately want to use the creature they represent – and this holds true for just about all of them. Look at the cover: This is the level of awesomeness you get throughout the whole book.

Here's the awesome thing, though: As a longtime supporter of Kobold Press, I have, time and again, bemoaned the fact that some of the truly astounding full color pdfs were translated "only" into b/w-print copies. Not so here: The Southlands Bestiary's print version is a truly gorgeous full color softcover that features thick, glossy paper and thus is a joy to simply flip open – if you can, get the print edition.

Okay, so here is the list of designers:

Kristian Ahonen, Eric Anderson, Anonymous, Joshua Banks, Wolfgang Baur, dpb, Clinton Boomer, Marina de Santiago Buey, Angelica Burns, Jarrod Camiré, Aaron Cheung, Jim Davis, Lee DeBoer, Dan Dillon, John Doh, Chris Doyle, Harold Farmer, John Foster, Erik Freund, Leonard Grand, Amanda Hamon Kunz, Andrew Harshman, Jacob Haywood, Steven T. Helt, Jeffrey Hersh, Andrew Hind, Richard Iversen, Alex Kanous, Henry S. Kurtz, Richard Lawson, Jeff Lee, Chris Lockey, Ari Marmell, Ben McFarland, Jesse McGatha, Brett A. McLean, Brian Wiborg Mønster, Matt Morrissette, Robert H. Nichols,

Stacy Nichols, Kalervo Oikarinen, Gunnar Ólafsson, Richard Rossi, Stephen Rowe, Adam Roy, Wendall Roy, Matt Rupprecht, Allen F. Schell, Brian Suskind, Troy Taylor, James Thomas, John Tolios, James Whittaker, Clarence Wisdom, Henry Wong – in spite of the established names among these ladies and gentlemen, one would expect quality to fluctuate. At least as far as I could tell (or where it would become jarring or problematic for the GM), I could not observe any tendency like that – Ben McFarland, Justin Riddler, Alistair Rigg, Brian Suskind, Jason Nelson and Amanda Hamon Kunz have done a glorious job reviewing, editing and developing these creatures – and the effort show. This is a superb bestiary, perhaps one of the most compelling ones I've read all year.

Even if you're not interested in Midgard or Southlands, I very much recommend you get this gorgeous tome – this is a glorious bestiary and well worth 5 stars + seal of approval as well as nomination as a candidate for my Top Ten of 2015.

You can get this glorious bestiary <u>here on</u> <u>OBS</u> and <u>here on d20pfsrd.com's shop!</u>

Endzeitgeist out.



Ultimate Relationships: The Cassisian Detective Publisher: Legendary Games Reviewer: Endzeitgeist

Stars: 5 stars out of 5 This installment of the Ultimate Relationship-series

clocks in at 8 pages – 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial, 1 page how to use, 1 page SRD leaving us with 4

pages of content, so let's take a look! All right, so this series provides romantic interests for the PCs as per the Ultimate Relationship-rules,

so I'm assuming you're familiar with them. If not, check out that pdf first (and/or my review for it).

All right, so this time around...we romance a helmet with wings. No, I'm not kidding. Look up the artwork. The statblock is the most complex we've seen so far in the series, though, unlike another review I noticed, I saw no glitches pertaining class abilities – the archetype has been correctly added in the iteration of this pdf I read.

Affinity-wise, the cassian detective prefers introverted, silent characters, particularly investigators and the like and obviously has a fondness for riddles and puzzles and, obviously, as a good outsider, he loathes evildoers. A sense of requiring completion makes keeping him around rather easy and he is available for being a cohort as soon as 4th rank. The detective, interestingly, is devoted to the empyreal lord of departed lovers and as such, entering a proper romantic relationship, abstract though it may be, ultimately would result in conflicting notions, particularly since the entity is currently in a chaste crush on Verity it/her/himself. (This gender-thing is getting confusing regarding helmet-shaped outsiders...apologies. And no, I'm not using "they" – it sounds wrong to me, like finger nails on chalkboard. Sorry.)

That being said, the ranking up procedure of the romance with the cassisian detective easily is the most intriguing so far: For one, the outsider loves riddles, so Int-checks (or out-game riddle-savvy players) are preferred. Secondly, the entity has a perfect memory, so if you're like me and have a better memory than your players, this can really be hilarious...otherwise, I'd suggest taking notes to properly roleplay him. Which is also, by far, the most awesome thing about this installment of <u>Ultimate</u> <u>Relationships</u> – you see, the cassisian does not know about a chaste crush on his mistress and is interested in the gaps and holes of actions and behavior having a perfect, gapless memory, he feels intrigued by lack – the objectivity of nothing, the concept of presence heightened through absence, making this character truly well-rounded and unique.

Boon-wise, the relationship unlocks either Linguistics or Perform (Oratory) as class skills and +1 to saves versus visual and sonic effects, stacking with celestial obedience, if present. At 10th rank, the boon, you can 1/day expend 3 full-round actions to duplicate the detective's careful teamwork performance lasting 10 minutes and affecting only you and double campaign bonuses associated with the detective.

Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are good, though not perfect. Layout adheres to a nice two-column fullcolor standard and the pdf has no bookmarks, but needs none at this length. The pdf has a nice artwork of the outsider.

Mark Seifter's Cassisian Detective is by far the weirdest of the relationships so far – but it's also the most unique, intriguing and well-rounded – the character has depth, means for philosophical engagement and character beyond being a relationship-stereotype – in a nutshell, this feels organic and well-crafted. Personally, I consider this by far the most intriguing of the relationships provided so far and well worth a final verdict of 5 stars + seal of approval.

You can get this nice romance/character <u>here on</u> <u>OBS</u> and <u>here on d20pfsrd.com's shop!</u>

Endzeitgeist out.



PATHWAYS MAGAZINE

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