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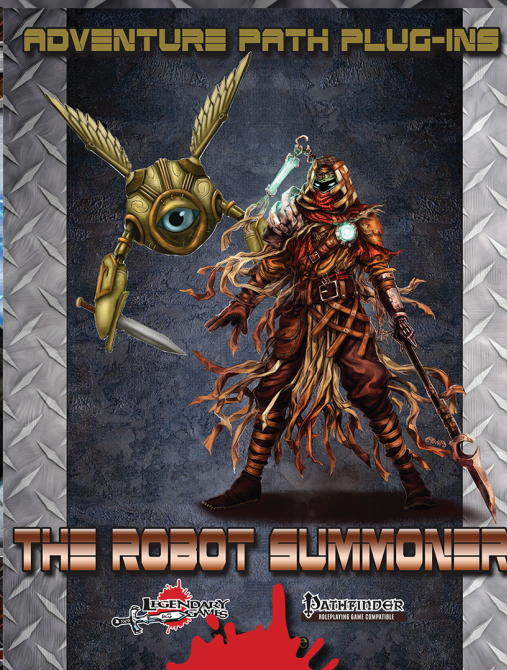
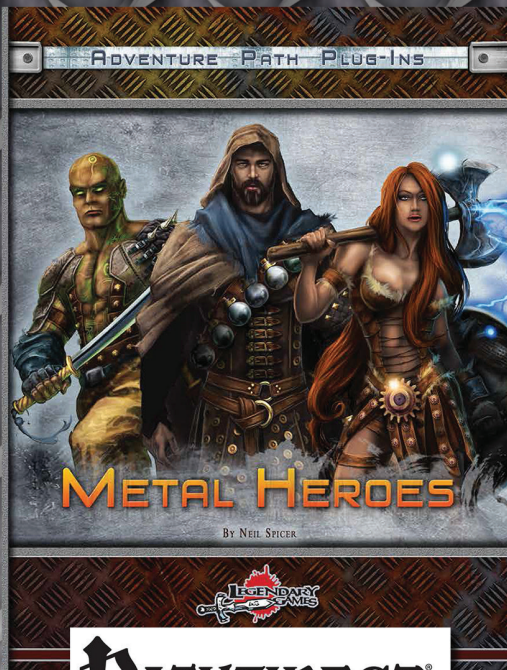
January 2017 \* Issue 62

# PATHWAYS

KAI DRIESEN



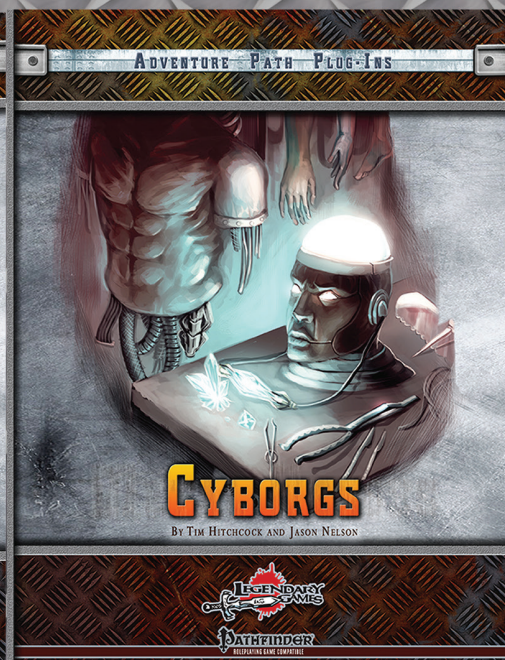
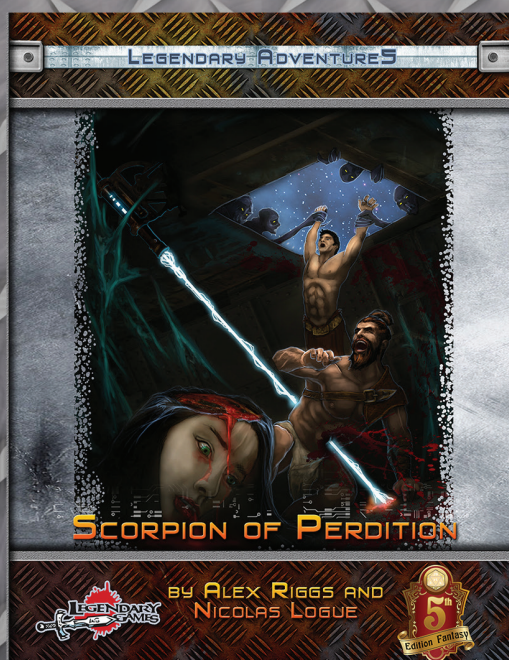




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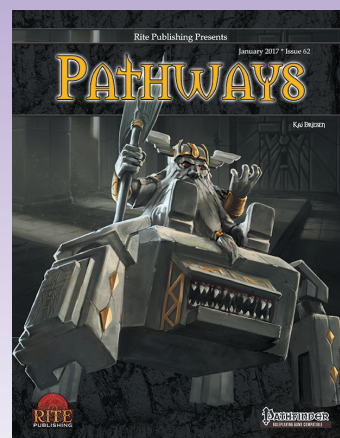
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## Editorial

by Dave Paul, Illustration by VityaR83-Ratushnyak Vitaliy

This month's topic could be rather macabre but for the fact that the style of RPG that Pathfinder belongs to has a long association with death and the dead. We have a wonderful selection of articles for this issue to give GMs really excellent new options and ideas for handling these issues in their games. This issue's material doesn't focus on how to prevent characters from being killed, how to bring them back from death or how to embrace or avoid undeath. Instead, this issue embraces the reality that in (almost) any fictional world, individuals within that world will eventually pass on, either to some other plane of existence, or some kind of heaven or hell, or into nothingness. Regardless, the societies that remain will be filled with people who will rationalize their experiences, will have rituals to help them explain and accept what has happened, and will use these rituals as parts of their community experiences. In some respects, this

gets a bit farther afield than is usually embraced in campaigns that are oriented only around the heroes and their deeds while they are heroes. But, any game has legendary personalities from days gone by, any game has NPCs who have to cope with the everyday and awesome reality of death, and so every game can benefit from the kinds of resources found within this issue.

We've also provided some non-themed content. Creighton Broadhurst's usual pieces provide GMs with fantastic extras; there are no finer ornaments for the game than what Creighton provides. I pulled a couple of spells from a product from the past because they have appropriate names and themes; but, they aren't limited to the theme and could have been showcased elsewhere. And, as always, we have another installment of Jacob Blackmon's the Path Less Traveled comic. I find all of Jacob's work to be, um, groovy. This one is the grooviest.

Happy gaming.





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## Funerary Golem Creature Template

by Owen K.C. Stephens, Illustrations by Kaj Driesen

Among many of the rich and powerful, and those with rich and powerful families and friends that wish to see their loved ones undisturbed after death, funerary golems are considered the last line of defense against tomb raiders, necromancers, and ghouls. While this occasionally causes problems for those left behind (a funerary golem doesn't care if you didn't MEAN to leave Uncle Basalt's noble sigil in the casket when he passed away, it's not letting you get it back), it also provides eternal protection with a guardian that does not age, stave, choke, or grow bored. A funerary golem is built in the form of a sarcophagus, usually given an appearance matching the dead held within or a religious figure appropriate to the beliefs of the passed, into which a fully-sealed coffin (and in some cases up to three nested layers of coffins) are placed. Once the funerary golem is closed, it is designed to literally never open. Lead seals make the closure airtight, and the magic of the golem fuses the lid to the rest

of its frame permanently. To access the remains within the golem need to not just be defeated, it must be smashed open. In extreme cases, smaller funerary golems (often funerary wood golems) are used as additional layers of protection and are sealed within the larger golem.

A funerary golem is passive until a resident corpse is placed within it, and the golem is shut forever. In most cases, a funerary golem does not react when other creatures enter the tomb it resides in as long as they make no effort to touch or effect the golem or its contents. For cultures where tombs are places of worship or offerings are made at them, the golem is often roped off for the safety of visitors. Of course another function of funerary golems is to entomb undead that defy permanent destruction, and these funerary golems are generally set to attack any creature that comes within 120 feet of them. In either case this instruction is set when the funerary golem receives its charge, and cannot be changed.

### Creating a Funerary Golem Creature

Any golem can be a funerary golem.

**CR:** +2

**Hit Dice:** The funerary golem's hit die do not change, but it does gain bonus hit points equal to its new CR total x2.

**Attacks:** A funerary golem has the same number of attacks at the base golem, though they may deal a different damage type depending on the form of the golem (slashing instead of bludgeoning, for example). It additionally gains a bite attack it can use whenever it takes a full attack action.

**DR:** A funerary golem does not gain DR, but if the base golem has it the value of the DR is increased by +3.

**Save DCs:** The save DC of any spell, spell-like ability, or supernatural ability the funerary golem has increases by +1.

**Feats:** A funerary golem gains improved Disarm as a bonus feat, though it can only use it with a bite attack.

### Special Abilities

The funeral golem gains the following special abilities.

**Ethereal Tomb (Su):** A funerary golem's physical form extends into the ethereal plane, as if it was a force effect. Teleportation, etherealness, and even being

incorporeal do not allow a creature to bypass the physical form of a funerary golem, even after it has been deactivated. Only cracking its shell, exposing its interior to the air, causes this effect to end.

**Immobile (Su):** A funerary golem cannot be moved against its will by any force when it is in its assigned tomb. This includes telekinesis, teleportation, plane travel, and even bull rush. Funerary golems rarely leave their assigned tombs, though they will do so if it is the only way to protect their contents.

**Involuntary Offering:** Whenever the funerary golem succeeds at a bite attack against a foe, it can immediately make a disarm combat maneuver as a free action. If the maneuver is successful, the disarmed object may be swallowed, becoming part of the golem's contents. The golem does not swallow anything that would clearly damage its existing contents.

**Undead Bane:** All of a funerary golem's attacks act as if they had the bane magic weapon ability against undead. Additionally, the gain a favored enemy bonus (as the ranger class feature) equal to 1/3 the golem's final CR against undead, clerics with the death domain, and anyone who has ever taken anything of value from a formal tomb or grave.



## Construction

Creating a funerary golem takes more effort than creating a typical golem of the same type. All materials used in a funerary golem's construction cost 10% more than for a standard golem, and additional incenses and oils costing 100 gp per CR of the final golem also be used. In addition to the standard spells, creating a funerary golem requires casting *deathwatch* and *gentle repose*, both once each day. If the golem has a final CR of 13 or higher, *death to undeath* must also be cast once.

## Sample Funerary Golem

This massive stone construct moves on heavy rock feet, with the integral dwarven statue sitting up atop it, wielding a rock axe.

### Stone Funerary Golem CR 13

XP 12,800

N Large construct

**Init** -1; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +0





## DEFENSE

**AC** 26, touch 8, flat-footed 26 (–1 Dex, +18 natural, –1 size)

**hp** 133 (14d10+30+26)

**Fort** +4, **Ref** +3, **Will** +4

**DR** 13/adamantine; **Immune** construct traits, magic  
Offense

**Speed** 20 ft.

**Melee** 1 slams +22 (2d10+9) and 1 axe +22 (2d10+9)  
and 1 bite +22 (1d8+9 plus disarm)

**Space** 10 ft., **Reach** 10 ft.

**Special Attacks** slow

## STATISTICS

**Str** 28, **Dex** 9, **Con** —, **Int** —, **Wis** 11, **Cha** 1

**Base Atk** +14; **CMB** +24 (+26 disarm); **CMD** 33 (35  
vs. disarm)

## ECOLOGY

**Environment** tombs and cathedrals

**Organization** solitary

**Treasure** double normal (all internal)

## SPECIAL ABILITIES

*Eternal Tomb:* See above.

*Immunity to Magic (Ex)* A stone funerary golem is immune to any spell or spell-like ability that allows spell resistance. In addition, certain spells and effects function differently against the creature, as noted below.

A *transmute rock to mud* spell slows a stone golem (as the slow spell) for 2d6 rounds, with no saving throw, while *transmute mud to rock* heals all of its lost hit points.

A *stone to flesh* spell does not actually change the golem's structure but negates its damage reduction and immunity to magic for 1 full round.

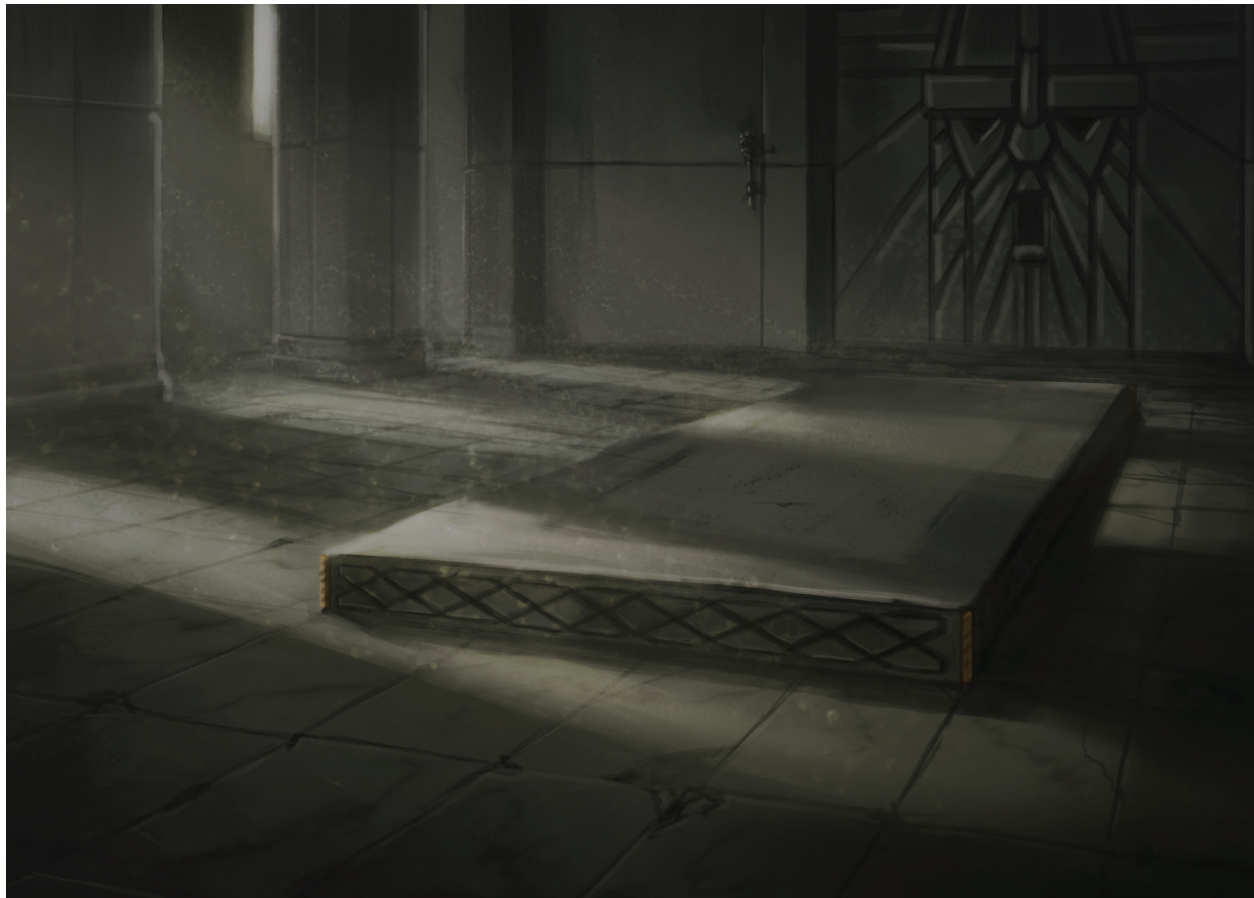
*Immobile:* see above.

*Involuntary Offering:* See above.

*Slow (Su)* A stone funerary golem can use a slow effect, as the spell, as a free action once every 2 rounds. The effect has a range of 10 feet in a burst centered on the golem and a duration of 7 rounds, requiring a DC 18 Will save to negate. The save DC is Constitution-based.

*Undead Bane:* See above.

Like most golems, a stone funerary golem cannot speak and makes no sound other than the grinding of stone against stone when it moves. A stone golem is 7 feet tall and weighs around 2,000 pounds.





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# Strange Weather

Jeff Gomez  
Michael Ritter  
Treyson Sanders





## 20 Things Left in an Inn's Bedchamber

By Creighton Broadhurst, Illustrations by Sintel

Inveterate wanderers, adventurers spend much of their downtime patronising inns and taverns. Staying in such an establishment overnight is almost always preferable to a night under the stars. After all, an inn probably has a roof, four walls, hot food and alcohol. Those resting outside may suffer rain, wind, insects and the ever-present threat of a wondering predator disturbing the party's sleep. Inns are an excellent place to seed adventure hooks and suchlike. Almost every GM on the planet does this in the tavern's taproom, but what about its bedrooms? Use the table below to generate things of minor interest left in an inn's bedroom. These things could be nothing more than a minor distraction; they could also serve as a plot hook for the next adventure.

1. A small, half full vial of woman's perfume is wedged between the bed and the wall. The glass vial is intricately made and worth 10 gp. The perfume is worth an additional 5 gp and smells of lilac and roses.
2. Several pieces of rubbish have been pushed under the bed. A tray holding a plate of mouldering food covers a piece of smudged parchment. It looks like the parchment once depicted a map, but a great smear has rendered it unreadable.
3. A muted red cloak hangs on a hook on the back of the door. Dried mud clings to the cloak's hem and a large rip pierces its back.
4. The previous occupant of this room was paranoid and slept with a (normal) dagger under his pillow. Sadly, he forgot it when he left. The dagger is small, light and wickedly sharp.
5. The initials CB and CRB are deeply carved into the bed's headboard.
6. A large bloodstain mars the bed sheets. A blanket covers the stain from casual view, but a character getting into bed without checking first could be in for a shock.
7. An empty wine flask lies on the floor by the bed. A perceptive PC smelling the flask might detect a subtle, but definitely out of place, odor.
8. A wooden shield leans against one wall; it's in poor condition, with several gouges hacked out of its surface. The shield's strap is worn and frayed. If used in combat, the strap snaps after three rounds.
9. A rat—its back broken—lies on the floor, squeaking pitifully. The rat's injuries look like someone has intentionally stomped on it before leaving it to suffer







and die. If a PC heals the rat, it becomes a loyal pet (or it could be so much more—perhaps a wizard’s familiar, a polymorphed adventurer and so on).

10. A wine-stained, frayed tunic rolled up in a ball lies in one corner where it was tossed. The garment stinks and is sized for an obviously overweight human (or perhaps a half-orc).
11. A single frayed sock lies under the bed.
12. A pile of folded blankets stands on a sideboard against one wall. A letter—a love letter speaking of forbidden love—has fallen behind the pile. One of the lovers—a prominent member of the community—is mentioned in the letter; apparently she must never find out about this relationship...
13. A small soft leather pouch containing three small black stones (onyx worth 10 gp each) has been stuffed into a pillow. The pouch is embroidered with initials, “J.P.L.” and is of fine quality.
14. A blood-stained scrap of fabric lies in the shadows under a sideboard. It looks like it was used to clean a dagger or similar weapon.
15. A note pinned to the back of the door reminds the occupant to lock the door when retiring for the night because of “the regrettable incident last month.”
16. Small flakes of metal lie under the room’s door. Careful investigation of the lock reveals it’s been tampered with. Even if the key is turned in the lock, the lock doesn’t actually engage;

thus the door is not locked (even though the occupant believes it to be secured properly).

17. A dreary watercolour hanging from the wall depicts a local landmark on a particularly bleak day. A waterproof pouch tacked to the back of the painting holds a map of a cellar. Although the location of the cellar is not shown, a link to a nearby sewer is clearly visible.
18. A small wardrobe in one corner of the room holds a hooded cloak forgotten by the previous occupant. The cloak is voluminous and fur-lined and worth 20 gp. Unfortunately, it is a distinctive light blue in colour and its owner is actively looking for it.
19. While in bed, a perceptive character may notice strange etchings on the ceiling directly overhead. When a light source is placed at the end of the bed on a small occasional table, the flickering shadows create a map on the ceiling.
20. Graffiti scratched into the wall by the door holds the following, unsettling message, “Curse the unending scabbling. Beware the rats in the walls.”

## 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.



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## 20 Bulky Treasures Difficult to Get Out of the Dungeon

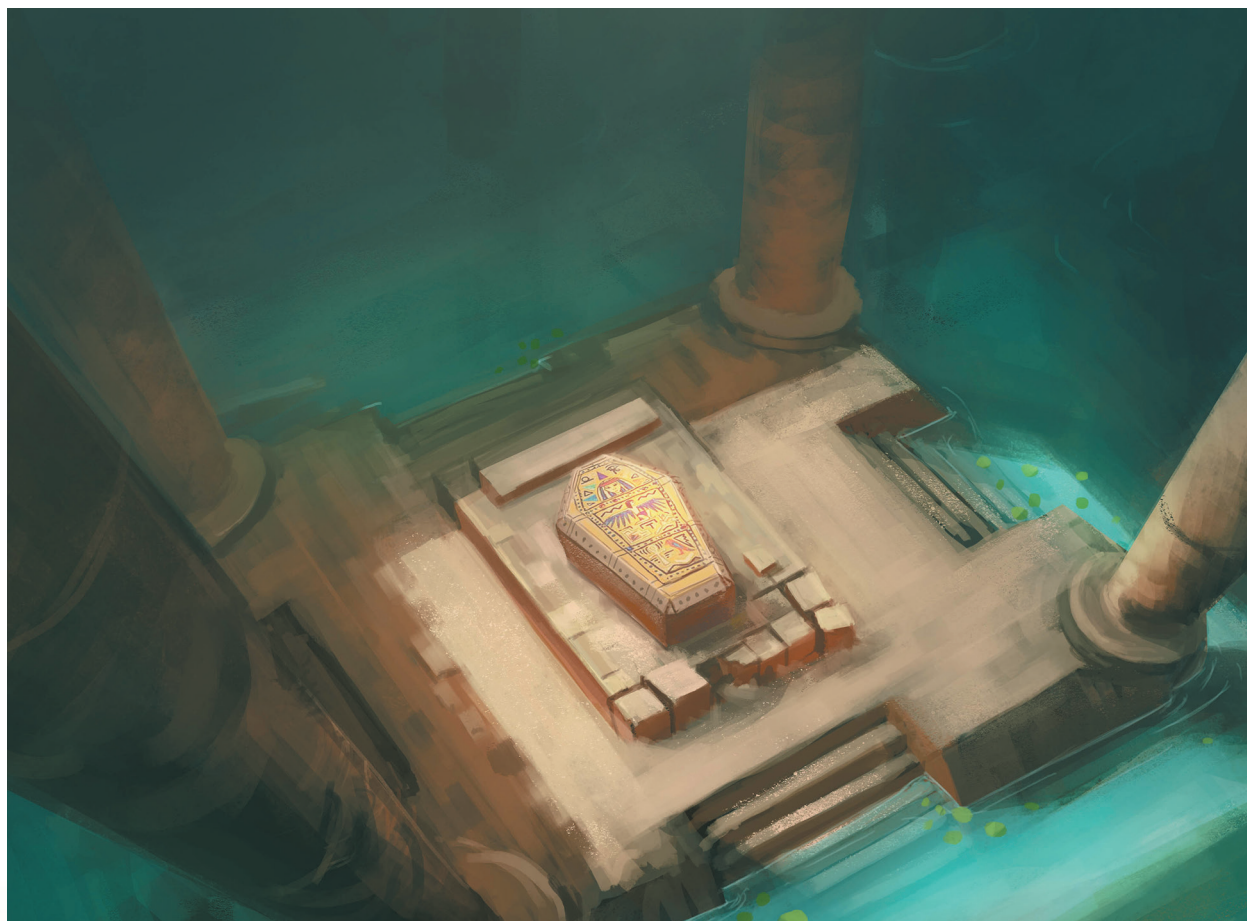
*By Creighton Broadhurst, Illustration by Tom Prante*

The other day I wrote an article about the Fallacy of the Adventurer's Backpack. Loads of people read the article and I enjoyed very much the ensuing conversation. One reader waxed lyrical about bulky treasure and how it was fun to give the PC the challenge of actually getting it out of the dungeon.

I couldn't agree more! I used to love that kind of challenge, in the Good Old Days. You know the thing: you've killed the dragon, now how do you deal with its hoard? With mountains of coins (hopefully), suits of armour worn by less fortunate dragon hunters and other bulky treasures, sifting, sorting and carrying away the treasure could be an adventure in itself.

With the near death of encumbrance, such challenges have faded away. That's a real shame. So with that in mind, behold: 20 pieces of bulky treasure difficult to get out of the dungeon!

1. A 10-foot square tapestry hangs on one wall. The tapestry depicts a bucolic woodland hunting scene, is worth 50 gp and weighs 120 lbs.
2. A cast iron chandelier easily 5 ft. across hangs from the ceiling. It has five arms forged to depict writhing dragon heads. Within each dragon's open mouth writhe magical, heatless flames. A long metal rod leaning against the wall enables the user to open or close each mouth, to increase or decrease the amount of light. The whole is worth 200 gp, but weighs 75 lbs.
3. A huge giant's breastplate has been pressed into service as a brazier. Full of hot coals, the breastplate is heavy (45 lbs.) but finely decorated with intricate lightning bolt engravings picked out with silver. Worth 400 gp, the item is nevertheless worthless as armour because the entire back of the breastplate is missing.





4. A map of the local area showing all major landmarks and settlements decorates this 15 ft. long and 10 ft. wide rug. Of great interest and value to local nobility and suchlike the rug is worth 75 gp (but weighs 100 lbs.)
5. This 10-foot tall stone statue depicts a medusa—its snake-hair waving about its face—staring down at those in front of it. The statue is (ironically) tremendously detailed and life-like. As a piece of art, it is worth 200 gp (but weighs 2,000 lbs).
6. This long, narrow ornate oak box has a hinged lid decorated with beautiful geometric shapes picked out with wood stain. Displayed within, amid velvet compartments, is a full set of silver cutlery with enough place settings for a dozen diners. The whole is worth 100 gp, but weighs 20 lbs. Dumping the box and keeping the cutlery reduces the value by 20 gp.
7. Of beaten silver, this shallow 2 ft. wide display bowl could be used for hand washing, to hold fruit or as the centrepiece of a formal dining table layout. It is worth 10 gp.
8. A mass of glass bottles and retorts along with a small cauldron and dozens of small tools and other pieces of equipment sit upon a side table. Obviously the equipment of a wizard or alchemist, the whole is worth 200 gp, but weighs 40 lbs. If packed carefully, the rest of the equipment is designed to fit into the cauldron (but if packed poorly without padding much of the glass items won't survive rough handling).
9. This long blood-red ball gown complete with short train is a stunning mix of lace and chiffon and worth 30 gp. However, although light—only weighing 6 lbs.—it is bulky and must be carefully folded to avoid damage.
10. This thick coil of rope is 400 ft. long and designed to hold twice as much weight as a normal rope but is heavy (160 lbs.) and only worth 16 gp.
11. This portable battering ram is crafted from some kind of super heavy and dense wood and is tipped with a great wedge of iron shaped like a clenched fist. It is twice as heavy as a normal ram (40 lbs.) and requires two people to swing properly. It provides a +6 Strength bonus to opening doors.
12. This huge bullseye lantern was clearly crafted for a giant (or perhaps a ship or lighthouse). It burns a pint of oil in three hours but provides double the illumination produced by a normal bullseye lantern. The lantern weighs 6 lbs., is five-foot high and worth 25 gp.
13. These ornate metal scales are large enough to weigh a human being or similarly-sized object. Along with the matching set of weights the whole is worth 150 gp to a merchant or similar person. However, the scales along with the weights weighs 400 lbs.
14. Four tightly rolled bolts of silk—blue, red, yellow and black in colour—fill a large sack. Each roll is worth 25 gp. While light, the sack is bulky.
15. A four-foot square steel cage holds a great mass of dried and then oil-soaked wood logs. The oil used to impregnate the wood is particularly fragrant and pleasant. Used to heat noble's houses, the taproom of upmarket taverns and the like the wood is valuable. The whole mass of wood—weighting 100 lbs.—is worth 20 gp.
16. This heavy iron door bar is intricately engraved with a depiction of two muscular arms grasping each other about the wrists. The bar is worth 20 gp, is seven-foot long and weighs 50 lbs.
17. This high-backed wooden chair is intricately carved. The armrests look like a mass of writhing serpents and a red velvet cushion provides a modicum of comfort to the user. The chair weighs 100 lbs. and is worth 50 gp to a nobleman or similar person.
18. With a set of drawers on either side, this ornate oak desk and been stained a deep brown. Each of the drawers is lockable and one has a well-hidden secret compartment. The desk weighs 150 lbs. but with its matching chair (and set of draw keys) is worth 200 gp.
19. These four matching tapestries are only five-foot wide and reach from floor to ceiling. Designed to conceal doors, alcoves or perhaps windows, the four are a deep red in hue. Each weighs 20 lb. and is worth 10 gp. As a set, however, their value doubles.
20. This chainmail barding—designed for a truly monstrous horse—weighs 80 lbs. and is worth 750 gp. It is so finely made, it could be magically enchanted.

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# Creature Components



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*Magic Has Evolved...*



## Subterranean Spell Showcase

By Dave Paul

I know we're going backwards here, but, in order to stick to the theme of the month I decided that I might need to peer into the past to find something appropriate. My investigation turned up a couple of spells from [101 Subterranean Spells](#) that I hope you enjoy.

While the theme of this month's issue is the dead and not undead, the two often coincide. There are plenty of undead critters in the game that utilize powers that drain life energy or that have attacks that are all about death. There are spells that protect against these things, but many of them are powerful spells designed to protect against powerful effects. Why not a less powerful spell that provides some, but a little less, protection? Here we have *blessing of the dead*, a spell that acknowledges the role and function of death while at the same time serving this limited function. A beneficiary of the spell can gain many hours of limited protection (a morale bonus to remove negative levels isn't, as it were, a game changer, but depending upon the kind of campaign you're in, this could be quite helpful). The less powerful save bonus is actually more likely to be employed, and for many, this will be the primary reason for selecting the spell. But, the one-time-only use could really save the day for some characters, and it is this that taps into the title of the spell. I see the spell working in that case (if it works) as being described in game terms as spirits of the dead protecting and defending the spell's recipient. It is as if the death attack is being thwarted by the powers of those who have gone on before the spell's beneficiary. This could also give a GM an opportunity to introduce a character (albeit perhaps one that died long ago) into the campaign or into the lives of the characters.

### Blessing of the Dead

**School:** Abjuration; **Level:** Cleric/Oracle 2, Paladin 2

**Casting Time:** 1 round

**Components:** V, S

**Range:** Close (25 ft. + 5 ft./2 levels)

**Target:** One living creature

**Duration:** 1 hour/level; see text

**Saving Throw:** Will negates (harmless); **Spell**

**Resistance:** Yes (harmless)

You acknowledge the powers of the gods of the dead as you speak a prayer of protection against life-draining energies and the powers of undeath. For as long as the effect lasts, the target receives a +4 morale bonus on saving throws to remove negative levels. Additionally, if the target is affected by any special attack or special ability by an undead creature that allows a saving throw, the target receives a +2 morale bonus on that save. At any time while the spell is in effect, the

target can choose to end the spell as a free action to grant itself a saving throw against a death attack when that attack normally would not allow a save.

~~

I wanted to go for a certain creepiness when I penned *only the dead may speak* and I think I achieved it. There are all sorts of interesting ways to satisfying the conditions of the spell. For instance, a high level wizard who has recently cast *control undead* is, while that spell is in effect, able to command certain undead by voice, and I would argue this satisfies the requirement of *only the dead may speak* which then grants that wizard the ability to communicate with anyone else in the area who is also somehow able to satisfy the requirements of the spell. Suppose there is a vampire in the area. Its ability to speak isn't compromised. Suppose it speaks to an elf (who otherwise is not undead or dead or affected by a spell or effect allowing it to communicate with the dead or undead). Because the vampire is not restricted, it should be permitted to communicate with that elf. But the elf has no particular special means of speaking to the undead. It could normally do so, but barring some special ability to do so, it can hear the vampire but not respond. Furthermore, if there were a gnoll in that same area, it could also hear the vampire but couldn't speak to or hear the elf.

### Only the Dead May Speak

**School:** Illusion (glamer); **Level:** Bard 4, Cleric/Oracle 4, Sorcerer/Wizard 4, Witch 4

**Casting Time:** 1 round

**Components:** V, S

**Range:** Medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)

**Area:** 40-ft.-radius emanation centered on a creature, object, or point in space

**Duration:** 1 minute/level (D)

**Saving Throw:** Will negates; see text or none (object); **Spell Resistance:** Yes; see text or no (object)

This spell duplicates the effect of a *silence* spell except as noted here. Undead creatures, creatures that are dead, and creatures that can currently speak with undead or the dead can speak normally with one another. Any creature that is not undead, dead, or able to speak with undead or the dead is unable to converse normally.

The spell automatically fails if the caster does not meet one of the conditions allowing it to speak within the area even if the caster is not within the area when the spell is cast.



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## Questhaven: The Leviathan Archipelago Part V: The Melusines of the Archipelago

By Elton Robb

Note that this article uses *Cerulean Seas: Waves of Thought*, *Ultimate Psionics*, and *Cerulean Seas* as resources.

Dear Qwillion,

*We have met strange merfolk called the Melusine under the waves. They live in the undersea city of Lashkar, which is too deep for our submarines to reach. There seem to be three kinds. We could easily tell them apart. It was the freeminds who met us and some of them joined our crew for a while.*

*The freeminds explained that they were so called "free minds" because they could think for themselves and weren't treated as workers. It's the lowminds of their society that were workers.*

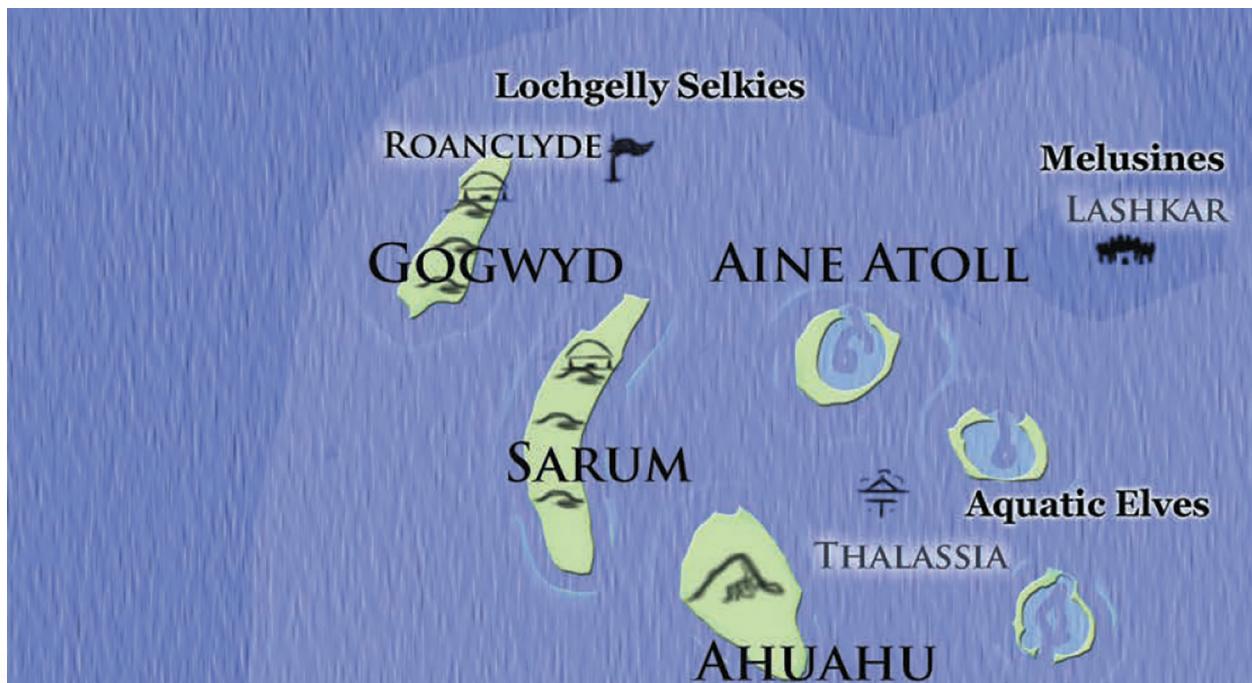
Your servant,  
Captain Harmony

The Melusines of Lashkar live peacefully two hundred and fifty fathoms and below. They primarily use the labyrinthine city of Lashkar as their home, since they are hiding from the Nommos of Ahodhya who have persecuted them. A people of triune genders and strange genetics, the Melusines are persecuted for who they are and for their own abilities in psionics compared to their parent race, and for their talent for magic. The Melusines are one of two psychically talented races living around the Leviathan Archipelago. The other being the mysterious benthic nagas.

### Racial Appearance and Culture

The Melusines are descended from the Nommos, but the Nommos will not accept the Melusines as their descendants. Like the Nommos, the Melusines are merfolk with a humanoid torso and an eel's tail that is forked at the end. Except for the Lowminds, which are fully humanoid with advanced muscle structures. The Melusine head looks alien in appearance: their eyes are fluorescent green to luminous blue, their skin is smooth and light gray and is often tinged with mauve. Their gills have long, fingerlike protrusions. They have eyespots. The males have two spots above each eye; the females have two below each eye. The race has three base forms; each is designated to a caste.

There are three castes. The lowminds are fully humanoid and are used for labor; they also happen to be sexless. The next caste are the freeminds, which choose for themselves their profession and are the most likely to adventure under the waves. The last caste are the overminds, which act as the leaders of the Melusines. The entire race is psionically active, with the lowminds having latent psionic abilities. The freemind and overmind castes have active mental powers.





Here, they enjoy freedom from persecution from their Nommos brethren who regard them as a genetic anomaly at best, and aliens at worst. During the original Nommos visit to another world, the change happened gradually over a thousand years. The Melusine is an evolved form of the Nommos on that world. Now the Melusines thrive by psionically hiding their city from the Nommos. Here, they explore west to form new colonies free from Nommos persecution.

## Melusine Psionics

The Nommos hold to the standard that they are masters of the use of magic, and believe that they are without mental powers. This isn't true, as the Melusines are a testament to ancient development of mental powers by the Nommos.

Every 2,000 years or so, a natural gate opens to another world. This world the Nommos have dubbed the world of the Venmu. Here, the Venmu visited the world of Questhaven and encountered the Nommos. Both have made a treaty where the Nommos could learn psychic talents. The Melusines is the result of that treaty, and a source of embarrassment for the Nommos.

Every Melusine has some psychic ability. They primarily communicate using telepathy and telempathy. They reserve their use of Aquan when it is expedient to talk, especially to less evolved creatures. Most freeminds of the Melusine know and can manifest *mindlink*. And almost all the overminds can also manifest *mindlink*. Some of the lowminds can also use *mindlink*, but they typically use empathy to communicate. Very few, if at all, Melusines can use magic.

### Lashkar

LN metropolis

**Corruption** +0; **Crime** +2; **Economy** +5; **Law** +2; **Lore** +5; **Society** +2

**Qualities** insular

**Danger** +10

### Demographics

**Government** psionic council

**Population** 6,000 (400 overminds; 2,000 freeminds; 3,600 lowminds)

### Notable NPCs

**High Counselor Avitrix** (LG female melusine overmind psion (telepath) 7/aristocrat 3)

**Hunter Ryan** (CG male Melusine freemind soulknife 4/hunter 3)

**Healer Stanza** (LG female Melusine freemind vitalist 8)

### Marketplace

**Base Value** 12,800 gp; **Purchase Limit** 75,000 gp;

**Spellcasting** 9th

**Minor Items** 4d4; **Medium Items** 3d4; **Major Items** 2d4

Originally built by humans at a time when the archipelago was one large island, the city of Lashkar had been repurposed for the use of the Melusines. Existing some 3,000 feet beneath the waves, Lashkar was a bustling metropolis. Before the sea drank the ancient city, it could house over two million people. Now it's a home for the Melusines, which protect it with psionic powers of forgetfulness. The undersea metropolis is divided into quarters: the suburbs, the marketplace, downtown, and parkway. The city itself is home to 6,000 Melusines.

The suburbs are where most of the Melusines live, although most of the lowminds work the industrious downtown. The marketplace is where most goods are traded. Finally, parkway is a huge park, some of which is in the photic zone of the ocean.

## Monster Encounters

The monsters that frequent the waters about Lashkar almost certainly have mental powers of their own. Aside from the benthic naga that exist in another region of the Archipelago, the waters are home to creatures of psychic talents.

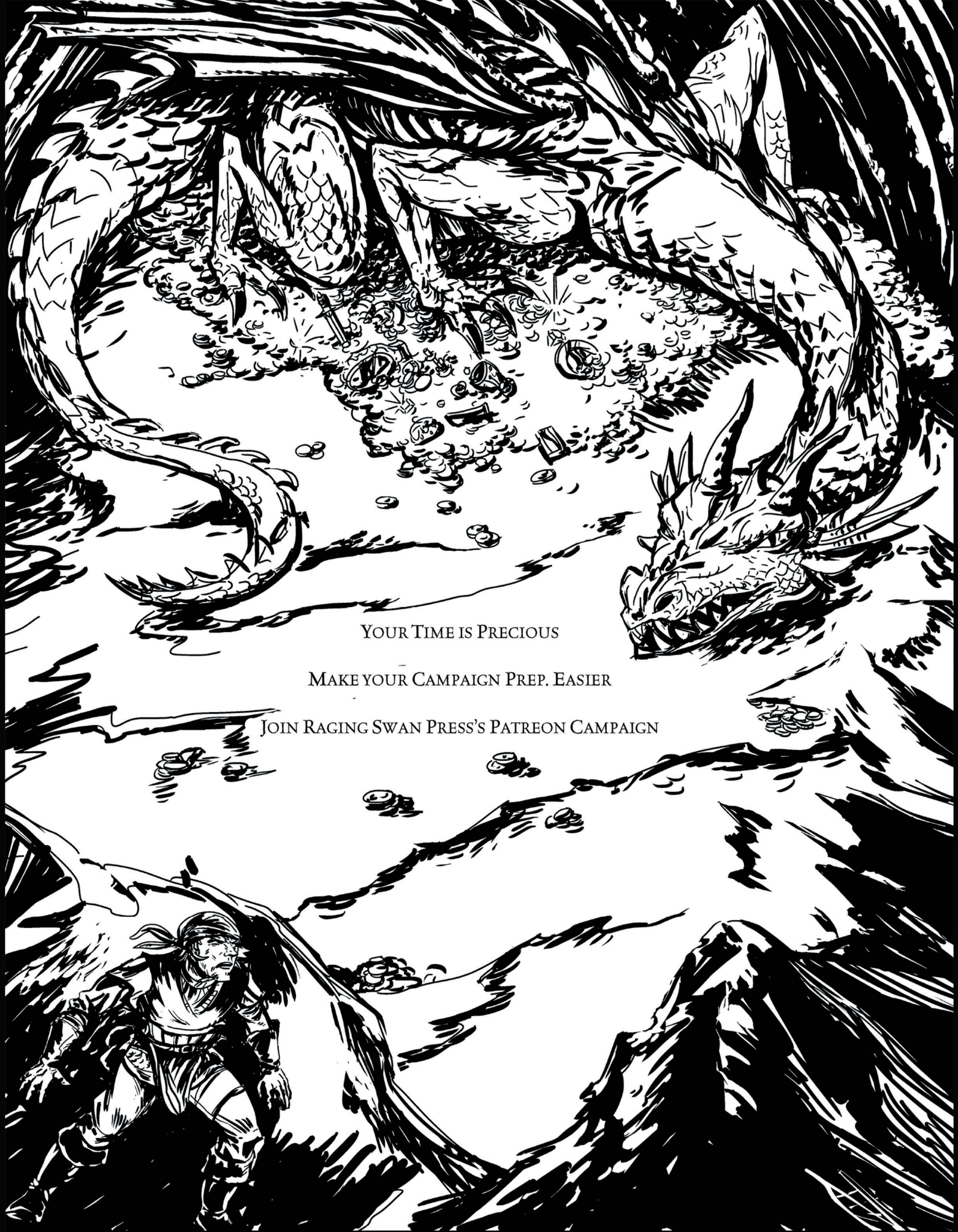
In the beautiful coral reefs of the north side of the Archipelago is a brain coral. Not an ordinary one, but one capable of psychic talent (EL 4, Waves of Thought). The brain coral itself is young and does not have full count of its powers yet, it is still considered to be a menace. The Melusines, having some experience with brain corals of this type, are watching it closely. Also in the coral reefs is a nightmare eel as deep as 100 fathoms beneath the waves (EL 5, Waves of Thought). The eel hunts using its psychic talents for food. Like the moray eel, it will lock its jaws on its prey. Deeper still is an adult chant dragon (EL 11, Waves of Thought). The chant dragon is here in the deeper part of the ocean, and it manages with some slaves. It's being watched, closely, for signs of it trying to take Lashkar for itself.

There are a few mundane encounters aside from the psionic ones. Characters diving to explore the reef will encounter a school of sharg (EL 5, *Cerulean Seas Campaign Setting*). The sharg do not venture to Lashkar, their weak minds are sufficiently bent by the Melusine overminds. However, that does not mean that they pose a problem for diving adventurers using certain spells. Aside from the sharg, one may encounter lockgelly selkies and aquatic elves. These encounters will have their own articles.

## About the Author

Elton Robb has been playing *Dungeons & Dragons* since 1986 and owns a fair number of campaign settings from TSR and Wizards of the Coast and many roleplaying games himself. His favorite places to adventure in include *Eberron*, the *Forgotten Realms*, and the undersea world of *Cerulean Seas*. He also enjoys creating campaign settings for others to use.





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## Reasonable Necromancy

By Ben McFarland, Illustrations by Evgenyaverin

Almost all societies revere their elders, respecting their experience, utilizing their knowledge, and mourning their loss when old age and death claim them. Cults celebrating and venerating ancestors are common from the Norse, to the Egyptians, to the Indonesian tribes, who still parade mummified and skeletal remains of dead elders, occasionally entreating the silent corpses for favors.

In a world with true necromantic magical traditions, however, death would not mark an end to the duties of a culture's senior citizens. The ability to animate, contact, or control the Dead adds a whole new phase of contribution for members of the society. Even from the afterlife, they may be called into service, providing some skill, knowledge, or advice from beyond the grave.

But why not simply bind a spirit to a corpse and animate the remains with magic, keeping the now undead individual available at all times? There are several reasons why others might only be called up temporarily, when circumstances demanded their presence. First, the culture may maintain the belief (or really with magic, the knowledge) of an eternal rest, one the elders have earned over the course of a long life. Second, religious strictures may establish this rest as a spiritual right, not to be impinged upon without a valid reason. Third, cultures need to avoid stagnation and when undead personalities persist for hundreds of years, their paradigms, prejudices, and personalities never stop influencing the society, inadvertently

forcing those cultures to remain stale and slowly, if ever, changing. By only summoning ancestors' spirits when situations require their help, their behavioral impact is reduced, but the community still benefits.

The following two options provide for a society to incorporate their dead ancestors as a part of their advisory infrastructure, drawn from historical examples and given a fantastic spin.

### Hall of Vaunted Ancestors

The sumptuous atrium of the Domus Geganus opens into a rear courtyard in the family's urban compound. Appointed with polished marbles and sporting broad skylights, the last 7 generations of the extended Geganus family grace the walls and pedestals through their bronze death masks and sculpted busts. Thirty-seven individuals of historical notoriety stare down upon the prepared casting space, set into the floor with a copper ring and silver arcane symbols incorporated into a masterwork mosaic. This area provides a +2 circumstance bonus on skill checks made as a part of an incantation. A successful DC 25 Knowledge (Nature) check, requiring 3 hours (-1 hour per 5 the check total exceeds 25), can provide an appropriate horoscope indicating the most favorable time to perform an incantation in the atrium, which





provides another, different +3 circumstance bonus to skill checks made as a part of an incantation and which stacks with other bonuses to casting.

Some of the family members who might be of interest here are:

- Titus Geganius Macerinus: Consul who served three terms, master sculptor.
- Lucius Geganius Priscus: General and commander of the 13th Legion for 15 years.
- Servius Geganius Tullius: Archmagus in residence of the Domus Geganius.
- Thalaëa Geganius Macerina: one of the first Vestal Virgins, King Numa Pompilius selected her.
- Gnaëia Geganius Dolabella: insurrectionist and spy, she died in a riot.
- Lucius Geganius Macerinus: brother of a Consul and far traveling merchant, he visited the distant empire of Aksuum.
- Tiberius Geganius Mamercinus: a naval hero and navigator, he saved a war-winning fleet from a storm.
- Claudia Geganius Furia: Archmaga who studied among the witches of Thessaly.
- Salvia Geganius Pompeia: Playwright and philosopher, renowned historian.
- Quinta Geganius Sabina: an excellent architect and engineer who helped renovate the city's sewer system.

## Benefits of the Atrium

Those who perform sufficient service to House Geganius receive access to the atrium as a sign of appreciation. This means another member of the family can then be asked to perform the Incantation of Dutiful Elders, or if they know it, they may perform it themselves.

Common questions which might be asked include:

- Internal family secrets
- Information regarding politics, magic, and historical firsthand accounts
- Magical information
- Political secrets
- Religious secrets

The Incantation of the Dutiful Elders requires death masks fashioned within a day of the individual's death. These masks are the physical equivalent of the individual's True Name (detailed in *Ultimate Magic*), and each one requires a ritual to cement its link to the spirit of the individual it is fashioned from. This ritual costs 5,000 gp and takes one day. The mask can be used to fashion a bust or a bronze casting of the mask, and those more permanent

masks may then be subjected to the ritual. The masks serve as foci for the incantation.

## Incantation of Dutiful Elders

*"I invoke thee, fathers of my father, mothers of my mother, souls of my house and foundation of my people. Speak, and let your wisdom guide us now."*

**School** divination, necromancy; **Effective Level** 9th  
**Skill Check** Knowledge (Local) DC 23, 4 successes; Knowledge (History) DC 23, 3 successes; Knowledge (Religion) DC 23, 3 successes

**Casting Time** 90 minutes

**Components** M, S, V, F

**Material Components**—myrrh incense, sandalwood oils, lotus infused candles.

**Focus**—At least one death mask of an ancestor invoked in this incantation, worth 5,000 gp

**Secondary Casters**—Up to 10 secondary performers may assist the primary performer

**Range** Touch

**Target** An individual involved in the casting, usually the primary caster.

**Duration** up to 9 hours (D)

**Saving Throw** none; **SR** yes

## DESCRIPTION

Cast by invoking the death masks of at least one ancestor as a focus, this incantation allows for one of four effects:

- Mystical instruction of a spell, item construction, or other unique information known to the individual linked to the masks invoked.
- Casting a *legend lore* spell, involving one of the invoked ancestors' areas of expertise, the result is always as if the person or thing is at hand.
- Casting a *commune* spell, involving one of the invoked ancestors' areas of expertise, the result is never structured to further the spirits' own purposes.
- Casting a *divination* spell, involving one of the invoked ancestors' areas of expertise, the result is given as if the Caster Level was 17th, and the primary caster may ask a number of questions equal to their Wisdom modifier +1, minimum 1 question.

The ceremony and duration call up ghostly images of the predecessors who swirl and envelope the participants. However, only the participants can hear them.

## BACKLASH

All performers participating in this incantation gain the exhausted condition and one negative level.



## FAILURE

Failing three skill checks during the incantation causes it to fail completely. The participants become inflicted with leprosy and each focus must make a DC 20 Fortitude save (using the primary caster's bonus) or the mask gains the broken condition. It cannot be used in this incantation again until repaired and the ritual cementing it to the spirit is performed again.

## Regal Tower of Perpetual Delights

In far and storied Aksum, the King of Kings, the Emperor of the Lion Throne, rules over the land from the Palace of the 100 Towers. Standing tall in the courtyard, looming 80 feet above the paving stones, the Regal Tower of Perpetual Delights serves as a residence for the spirits of all 43 previous Emperors, where they may be approached by whomever wears the Thinning Veil's Mask and provides the proper responses. The Regal Tower is truly an obelisk, carved in a symbolic representation of a tower, complete with a door and nine stories to represent the nine layers of the afterlife.

Inside, ancestors lounge in an extradimensional space, sumptuously appointed with fine couches and silk pillows, with magical food which constantly refreshes, and decanters of sweet, cool wine which never become empty. They can peer out the windows, and many do, observing the outside world and both the passage of time and the transformation of the nation they once led. They spend time discussing the current events of the day, the consequences of the days and events past, and the possibilities of future events. They bicker, they argue, they debate, and they laugh, sharing in their love of their empire and the knowledge they are no longer responsible for its leadership.

## Benefits of the Regal Tower

Anyone donning the Thinning Veil's Mask may enter the door at the base of the Regal Tower as if it were a normal door, and may interact with the ghostly emperors. The Mask allows the wearer to eat and drink from the food available inside. The spirits ask any visitor three questions, set by the current emperor. If properly answered, the past rulers become Helpful, and willingly discuss, lecture, or instruct the Mask's wearer for as long as they stay. Any who claim the current Emperor is dead is told to bring the Royal Scepter as proof; once shown, the presenter is considered the Emperor and may set three new questions. The Regal Tower is an extradimensional space which cannot be

entered except by the Thinning Veil's Mask; however nothing prevents someone from crafting multiple Masks. Things the dead emperors might teach include feats, magic spells or item formulae, specific skills, or even a few True Names of both angelic and demonic entities. The formula for the Thinning Veil's Mask is reserved for the current emperor. They are generals, politicians, wizards, priests, and historians who once had the power and resources of a potent imperial nation at their fingertips.

Intruders who do not answer the questions properly find themselves ignored, and if they attempt to coerce ghosts, the deceased lords turn and attack; each is at least a character of a 15th level adventuring class with ghostly powers. With a proper tuning fork, one could plane shift inside the Regal Tower, but would be unable to see or interact with the emperors. The ghosts reform after a day if somehow killed; they remain happily tied to the tower until it is completely destroyed.

## Thinning Veil's Mask

**Aura** moderate conjuration and transmutation; **CL** 9th **Slot** none; **Price** 7,500 gp; **Weight** 4 lbs.

### DESCRIPTION

Forged of mithral, with a carved obsidian visor, this full-head, half-face mask bears necromantic, planar, and royal Aksumite symbols. It covers wearer's face above the nose to the crown of the skull to the nape of the neck. Anyone wearing the Mask may open the door of the Regal Tower of Perpetual Delights as if it were a normal portal, consume any of the food found inside, and interact with any of the ghostly emperors.

### CONSTRUCTION REQUIREMENTS

Craft Wondrous Item, *plane shift*, *spectral hand*; **Cost** 3,750 gp

## Story Seed: The Stolen Mask

Someone has stolen either an important death mask or the Thinning Veil's Mask and intends to use it to blackmail an important NPC who supports or patronizes the party. The group must not only recover the mask, but ensure the thief's memory of the event is either destroyed or their spirit is somehow bound and unable to share the information. The previous owner's enemies are numerous, and finding the actual culprit means sorting a great number of false leads and framed victims. Can the party discover the thief's hideout before the thief can decipher the mask's secret and use it?



Rite Publishing Presents

# IN THE COMPANY OF GENIES



by T.H. Gulliver





## These Mortal Remains

By Amber E. Scott, Illustration by Tom Prante

The way a culture buries its dead says much about the culture's values, history, even environment. Villages on rocky mountaintops may dry their dead, while towns in loamy valleys might bury their deceased instead. Townships plagued by undead could cremate their dead, or create elaborate mausoleums meant to keep its inhabitants in as much as to keep tomb-robbers out. Cultures whose members believe the soul departs when a person dies, leaving only empty remains behind, could bury their dead in mass graves without ceremony.

This article details four common methods of burial to inspire GMs when creating adventures or world-building. Some of the rituals that follow might be the genesis for villains or create a necessity for quests. These rituals can also flesh out PCs, inspiring backstories or sparking in-character discussions about how each member of the party wants to be interred when the resurrection spells finally run out.

### Interment

Interment is the act of placing a body in a grave, either a structure (such as a sepulcher or mausoleum) or in the ground (with or without a coffin). In areas where the ground is easy to dig and there is ample territory for a graveyard, interment is common. Regions that have hard, stony ground might see above-ground tombs built instead.

Wood is the most common material for coffins, but even among cultures that use coffins there can be a wide variety of material and styles. Any type of wood, from maple to oak to pine, can be used. Some cultures believe an unadorned wooden box is the proper container for a body, symbolizing the equality that death bestows on the living. In other regions, important or wealthy individuals might have coffins decorated with brass fittings, engraved with artistic scenes, or even enjoy coffins made entirely of metal. The latter are expensive and hard to manufacture, reserved for the most powerful people in the land—or those most likely to awaken as a vicious undead creature beneath the ground.

Some areas have natural terrain features that aid in interment. Bogs and swamps make for easy disposal of bodies, though villagers usually designate a burial site far from their community. No one wants to see bits of a departed loved one bob to the surface a few days after the funeral. Sometimes the body is wrapped in a shroud or scattered with dried herbs before it is ritualistically lowered into the swamp. Other times the body is released quietly, the ceremony occurring back at the village.

**Bloody Bricks:** Mausoleums are used to inter people of great wealth or importance, or to house the bodies of families. Mausoleums are built when the ground isn't suitable for digging graves or to ensure extra security for the body or bodies within. Often traps or guardians (most often constructs or undead) are placed in the mausoleum as a further deterrent to tomb robbers.

In some cultures, when a mausoleum is built, its future occupant's blood is mixed into the mortar. If the mausoleum is built for a person still living, at least a pint of their blood must be freely given to the builders (this may be donated over the course of the construction; it need not leave the body all at once). This method supposedly infuses the mausoleum with the spirit of the deceased once they are interred, and if the mausoleum's seal is ever broken, the bloody spirit of the interred will rise to defend its remains.

**Glass Coffin:** Glass coffins are sometimes constructed for heads of state whose bodies will be displayed for days, or even weeks, while the populace pays their respects. Often a *gentle repose* spell is used on the body before it is sealed inside the glass coffin. The deceased remains in the glass coffin until the ceremonies conclude, and then the coffin is transported to a heavily-defended vault.

While glass coffins are used this way for a beloved ruler, they can also be used to display a tyrant or notorious criminal, as proof that the villain is truly deceased. In this case, the glass coffin protects the body from attacks by the outraged populace until the body is ready to be disposed of—usually by burning.

Glass coffins are generally fragile, but rumors tell of ancient rituals that harden glass to the strength of iron. Any transparent material can be used for the coffin construction, from transparent gemstones for great monarchs, to tinted glass artworks by master glassblowers, to a permanent *wall of force* for an archmage.

### Cremation

Cremation is the destruction of a body by fire. One of the most common burial rituals is that of the funeral pyre, a heap of wood and straw on which a body is set before the pyre is lit. Different cultures approach this ritual in different ways. Some place the body



## Mummification

atop the pyre, others hide the body within. Some tie the body upright to a stake before burning, often if the deceased was a criminal or evil creature of some sort (such as an evil werewolf). In some regions, an elaborate scaffold or statue—that of a wooden bull, wooden cage, or a wicker man—is constructed to hold the body before it is consumed by flame.

A well-known form of cremation is that of the funeral barge. In this tradition, the deceased is placed in a narrow wooden boat, often along with belongings of significance from their life. Awards, favorite weapons, even magic items might be set adrift with the body. As the boat leaves shore, it is set alight and slowly burns to the waterline as it drifts across the water. The boat can also be set on fire from shore with flaming arrows, alchemist's fire, or fire magic.

Cremation is a popular method of burial for creatures that the living do not want to see returned in undeath. Monstrously evil individuals, such as serial killers, undead, and demonic creatures may be burned after death and their ashes scattered, or stored in a holy place. Often this practice is enough to keep evil spirits from arising, but can sometimes lead to the creation of smoky spirits, their eyes filled with flames.

**Fire Magic:** Fire magic adds a dimension of drama and magic to cremation. Wizards are sometimes asked to attend funerals to ignite the pyre with blossoming fireballs. For the cremation of a pious figure, a *flame strike* spell might consume the body in one dramatic blast.

The destruction of an incredibly evil creature might require even more powerful fire magic. To send a mythic creature to its permanent rest, or to make absolutely sure a legendary villain never rises again, heroes may seek to immolate a body in a *wall of fire*, *fire storm*, or even a *meteor storm*.

Legend tells that a fiend's body, incinerated by the *fire storm* spell of a solar, can never rise again in any form. Its consciousness is obliterated forever. Likewise, an angelic being's body destroyed by a balor's fire storm or flaming whip shall never rise.

**Lightning Pyre:** In storm-ridden areas, some people have mastered the art of incinerating bodies with lightning strikes. Lightning pyres are difficult to assemble and unreliable on a regular basis, though druids and other practitioners of magic can often determine when lightning is likely to strike. Bodies are placed on a tall pyre on a mountain peak or other high, non-flammable point. Then a pointed metal structure, such as the frame of a pyramid or the sculpture of a tree, is placed atop the bodies. When the lightning strikes, the platform catches fire. The metal structure can be retrieved from the ashes and used for future pyres.

Mummification is one of the most involved methods of preparing the dead for burial. Technically, mummification is a pre-burial step. A body can be mummified and then interred, cremated, or even left on display. Given the time and effort needed to mummify a body, though, many think of the process as a burial rite in and of itself.

Mummification is the process of drying out and preserving a body. In its most elaborate form, the body is drained of blood and may have some of its organs (notably the brain, liver, lungs, and heart) removed. Alchemical mixtures may be placed in the body to speed its drying, and the organs may be likewise preserved. When the body is dried, it is wrapped in bandages. Some cultures place small tokens, amulets, or holy items in the layers of bandages to protect the deceased. The body is then usually interred, either placed in a tomb or buried in a coffin.

At its simplest, mummification occurs when a body is placed in a hot, dry environment away from predators. Bodies buried in hot desert sands naturally mummify. Some cultures place the bodies of the dead atop drying platforms during summertime. Family members, priests, or even children are stationed near the racks with long poles to chase away carrion birds. Wailing mourning songs may also be sung by the platforms, which helps frighten away scavengers. Once the body has been mummified, it is usually buried, though some cultures leave the bodies of their dead atop these platforms.

**Scroll Wrapping:** Some archmages who opt for mummification have their corpses wrapped in arcane spell scrolls instead of bandages. The archmage spends weeks, even months, inscribing spells of all levels and schools on soft linen scrolls. These spells are usually painted, but may be embroidered instead.

The archmage believes that after death, the arcane spells on the wrappings will seep magical energy into their spirit, allowing them to rise as a powerful spectral mage. This theory remains unproven, but tomb robbers have reported strange ethereal guardians near the tombs of mages mummified in this fashion.

**Elevation:** In cultures where the dead are dried on platforms, the elevation of the deceased can represent their social status in life. Important persons are placed on the tallest platforms or carried to the highest mountain peaks for their final rest. Often a special location is used by a community to dry their leaders and heroes, a place that is elevated and full of natural beauty, such as a mountain look-out. These locations





can be remote, though, and sometimes dangerous to reach. A community might hire adventurers to ferry an important body up a mountain, or call on the deceased's relatives to make the trip.

## Predation

One of the oldest methods of disposing of a corpse is to leave it for nature to consume. Many cultures practice some form of predatory burial, but the details of these rituals are as unique as the cultures themselves.

A body can be prepared in different ways before it is left for insects, animals, weather, and time to dispose of. Some cultures strip the body before carrying it into the wilderness, believing that a person should leave life as they entered it, without possessions. Some cultures dress the body in its finest clothes and arm it with favorite weapons before disposing of it. Travelers encountering such a corpse might wrongly believe they have stumbled on a victim of violence. Body-robbers also seek out these corpses and relieve them of their valuables, an act which can raise angry spirits.

Though bodies are usually left whole when they are disposed of, some cultures employ "body breakers" who prepare the corpse in specific ways. A body breaker drains the body of blood, which is saved in a ceremonial urn, and then removes the limbs and head. Sometimes specific organs are removed from the body as well. The corpse's pieces are then laid on the ground at the predation site and a ring of blood is poured around the body. Practitioners believe that as the body is dismembered, any trapped regrets or lingering echoes of the spirit are set free. The fresh blood also attracts predators more quickly.

A specific place can be used to place the bodies of the dead, usually marked with a ring of stones or wooden markers. Strong taboos exist about using these sites for purposes other than funerals. Even gathering herbs or making camp within the borders of these places can draw hostility from local communities.

**Bone Relics:** Once a body has been left in the wilderness for a time, usually a month, some cultures travel to the site to collect any lingering remains. Priests often collect the bones of the deceased, by now picked clean by scavengers, and preserve them in a reliquary. This can be as elaborate as an entire building, or as simple as a large basket in which the bones of the community's dead are mingled. Evil necromancers sometimes covet such reliquaries for their nefarious rituals.

Sometimes no bones remain from a corpse. The deceased's family may search for the bones or hire others to do so, wanting their loved one's remains to join those of the community. Most often, the remains are simply lost.

**Monstrous Predation:** For a particularly revered individual, predation by wild animals might not be enough. A community might show its respect by seeking a vicious monster to consume the body. Any dangerous wild creatures in the area, such as manticores or owlbears, would satisfy, though for extremely important personages—monarchs, archdruids, or great heroes—adventurers could be hired to transport the corpse to a dragon's lair. For animalistic monsters it may be enough to leave the corpse by the creature's lair, but for intelligent creatures, some persuasion might be needed to convince the creature to eat the body.



Rite Publishing Presents

# In The Company Of Giants

A 1<sup>st</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> level player character racial class



By Steven D. Russell



## Twenty Questions with Perry Fehr

By Dave Paul

**1. Could you tell us a little about yourself and your company?**

First off, thanks for asking me to be part of your magazine! I live in a very small town in Saskatchewan, Canada, and I teach high school English and Social Studies. I am getting rather close to retirement (single digits) and hope to spend that time with my wife of 22 years and my two children, wherever they end up in the world. I have been a writer even longer than I have been a tabletop RPG gamer, and I like to combine the two whenever possible.



I began RPG gaming in 1980, when I was 12, basically at the birth of the hobby, and my memories of those early booklets and Red Box sets are very strong, and integral to my youth. My friends and I basically had to hide our hobby, as most of our families did not approve, demons and devils and all that. I found that just increased our enthusiasm, and it has not dimmed.

Purple Duck Games does mostly OGL tabletop RPG material, and we spread the net far and wide for the most varied input. We have been coalescing our focus on our campaign setting, the Patchwork Planet of Porphyra, and Mark does a brisk business in stock art for tabletop gaming.

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

My home game(s) have evolved as my life has done, from playing with my children and my friends' children, some OSR, but really taking off with the new Pathfinder system, which was a shock to my system, I can tell you. Whether I am GMing or playing, I tend towards the old 'Red Box' of roleplaying over dice-and-rules-lawyering, for good or ill. One of my favorite stints as GM was with my daughter and her college friends, they were so fresh and did not even know what a "treant" was! Though I don't often have time for playing homegrown RPG setting versus store-bought, I enjoy creating settings with grand conspiracies, persistent villains, secret societies and ancient legacies, much like old J.R.R. Tolkien, but with elements of Michael Moorcock, my favorite fantasy writer.

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

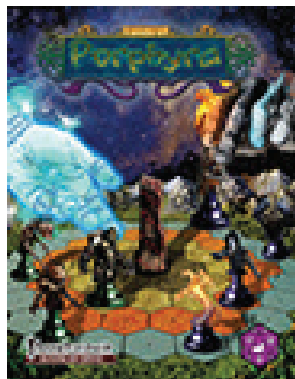
This might be surprising, but I get a lot of use out of the *NPC Codex*, to see how a functional character works, and how the racial characteristics interact with their abilities and possessions. When I get to GM, a quick grab from the *NPC Codex* makes even play-on-the-fly characters usable. I am also, well, intrigued by *Ultimate Intrigue*, and wish there was a group nearby that I could play with—I might surprise my own someday and do an intrigue campaign, if only to accentuate roleplaying and character development.

**4. You are currently editor for Purple Duck Games, how did that start and how would you characterize the company today?**



I did not start in any industry involvement until 2012, when I was invited to the home game of Mark Gedak, publisher of Purple Duck Games, and shortly thereafter he asked me to help him with editing some product he was seeing, as I was already kind of used to the process, being an English teacher. I remember that Mark sent me a document to edit, I sent him back several pages of edits, said it was rough piece, but was pretty good... he looked at me for a moment and said that he had mistakenly sent me an old, already published piece. I hope that encouraged him regarding my editing skills. Soon, I brought forth some thematic ideas I had with fantasy races, he published them, and we were on our way!

Purple Duck Games is Mark Gedak's brainchild, and is a company that lives up to its byline, "Our games are what you want!" because we try, as much as possible, to publish the things that gamers themselves write, for the purpose of gaming, pure and simple. Alternate races, quirky archetypes, new character classes, short dungeons, long dungeons, campaign settings, deity pantheons, short & cheap pieces on a niche aspect of RPG tabletop gaming, you got it! PDG has shown itself willing to take chances on new writers, and allow people to expand their horizons. You want stock art to put on the cover of a product, or for an aid in your home game? You got it.



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

That would have to be *Lands of Porphyra*, the campaign setting book that Purple Duck Games published in 2015! Basically everything PDG had been working on up to that point was centered around it, and it had a very unique genesis—all of the nations of the setting worlds were generated by writers and contributors brought together by a submission call, all of the pantheon of deities to (*Gods of Porphyra*) as well as the various magic item and adventure products. After *Gods* was released, I was put in charge of taking all 52 submitted nations (some of which were mine) reedit and collate them, fit them into the backstory and setting, and make

sure everything fit together—Mark and I call that "Porphyrizing"—into a semi-cohesive whole. Then, when the nations are put together, I wrote the world-mechanics for Porphyra, time, money, agriculture, magic, climate, history and just how the world functions. I drew the rough map of the planet, placed the nations and their cities, physical features, oceans, islands, everything. It was a massive project, took the better part of two years, and engaged my mind like few things ever had before, I suppose save community theatre!

Porphyra is the cornerstone of all of PDGs tabletop RPG products, and we try at all times to develop the story of the world with the products that we publish. It serves as a benchmark for product submitters as to whether they "get it" when it comes to integrating their product with our campaign setting.

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

I would say that it was the moment when Mark and I were discussing the direction of the project in his classroom (we were teaching colleagues for 8 years) and we brainstormed the idea that Porphyra was a "Patchwork Planet" with disparate regions stuck together willy-nilly like mismatched puzzle pieces, and held together by a magical mineral that generates a force-field, called "porphyrite". Mark thought, "Hey, that's just like Battleworld from the comics!" though I didn't know what he was talking about. We brainstormed most of the backstory of Porphyra in that one discussion, and came up with vast ideas in a short period of time, that we are still in the process of developing. And it all came into published being, lots of people (I hope) adventuring in the world we created, and my ideas being given form.

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

Though I personally feel that the ingrained dynamic of the Deists (those who support the New Gods, summoned to godless Porphyra) versus the Elementalists (aboriginals who supported the Elemental Lords, who recently ruled Porphyra) was the most ingenious part, setting up a lot of gray-area us-vs.-them scenarios, most of the comments I have seen from others about Porphyra comment on the "anything goes" nature of the setting. If you want horror, it is there in the Barony of Tuthon; if you want courtly shenanigans, look to the Middle Kingdoms or Iffud. Any trope can be accommodated there, and still maintain the



history and timeline of the setting. When our table does adventure paths, we always try to accommodate the world-setting, especially the pantheon of the New Gods and the ever-growing list of other, marginal deities like the Slithering Symphony and Ushers of the Psychopomps (look them up on porphyra/wikidot!).

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

Apart from the time that it took to edit, collate and “Porphyrise” 52 separate nations into a coherent world-setting, the toughest part was turning the hand-drawn, pencil-crayoned map with made-up names into a digital product. Once I was done drawing, coloring and keying it, photographs were taken and sent to a digital cartographer, with whom I had to correspond for 3 months and, if I recall, 17 different correction sessions to get to the final release. Then, in the end, it was far too big and beautiful to put into a normal-sized book without sacrificing quality or costing a mint, so it exists only in digital form; I encourage everyone to take a look and get it for themselves, free, from RPGnow, just search for Lands of Porphyra map. A lot of work, I really respect cartographers; I sometimes see that map in my dreams, with six different spellings of “Illuria” that I can never get to come out right...

## 9. What did you learn while working on it?

I learned that even the biggest project comes to an end, and that you have to be as determined to make it a good product, with good quality, at the bitter end, as at the enthusiastic beginning. You cannot let yourself get tired of doing things and just say “what the hell” and wind it up. If you start getting those thoughts, stop and do something else, so you can look at it with fresh eyes when you start again. And specifically with campaign setting material, you have to be willing and determined to revisit it, even make a point of revisiting it, so that the product comes alive, like it’s part of a dynamic system. I always try to write from an “ecological” point of view, where all the parts of the scenario, monster, or any gaming aspect make holistic sense, like someone or something somewhere would really act this way. When you write a world, you have to be able to believe that world could come into being and progress, even prosper, though you might have to say “A wizard did it” occasionally.

## 10. Other than your own work and Purple Duck Games’s products, what is the best Pathfinder Roleplaying Game compatible product out there?

Currently I am getting a lot of enjoyment out of Mongoose Publishing’s *Classic Play Book of the Planes*, which is attempting to solve some issues for me in my current piece of writing, *Demon Lords of Porphyra*. It takes a view in writing that I enjoy, in that a generic product should have as broad a span of application as possible, to let the purchaser get the most material, with the most use, for his money. The goal should be ease and fun of play, and the maximum creativity, and *Book of the Planes* is very creative!

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

A good PRG compatible product, first and foremost, should maximize fun. We don’t play RPGs for some kind of spiritual experience, or to plumb the secrets of the universe (well, some tables...) we do it to have fun. Products shouldn’t be a chore. I have a problem with products that force players to complete mindless tasks for some kind of point system, unless the party players have expressly shown an interest in it—experience points included. Secondly, clearness of approach and execution. I don’t want to have to get a degree in philosophy or accounting to be able to play a game, though I know there are some out there that enjoy complexity and arcane rules systems. If I am keeping track of a myriad of points, charges, coins, uses, etc. it takes away from the make-believe game-play that we all are seeking. I remind myself often of the old classic books that our hobby is based on, and I wonder, when I see a product, would this product hold up if it was turned into a book? Would I read about this place or these people if it were put before me in text? Good translation into story, if that can be applied to a product, makes for a good product. Enter room, kill 4 goblins, is not for me.

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

The designer that I had the most contact with and furthermore, enjoyed his products, was Robert Thomson from 4 Winds Fantasy Gaming, out of Great Falls, which is where I got my first real taste of gaming conventions; Purple Duck Games bought out 4WG a few years back, and in the reediting process, and with processing the unpublished stuff we received, I got to see how a previously active company polished and published their material and how things should look. We have just finished getting out all of their backlog, and it looks pretty good, all credit due to Robert. There are so many



other publishers that have lent a hand in our work in the industry, it is all just such a small community, really. A shout-out to Rick Hershey at Fat Goblin Games for his propensity for helping and sharing, and overall good quality stuff.

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

It might seem like something that has been overtold, but always get hold of the Guidelines for Submission that the publisher has for freelance writers; most will have one. Whether they do or not, get some examples of things that the company that you are sending your manuscript to has published, so you can get an idea of their standards and a feel for their product. To send material to a company whose material you have not looked at is a big no-no. You should give the company the assurance that you have tried to get on board with what they are doing, not just shoving text at them in exchange for money! A pet peeve I have with freelancers is the "I found this in my files, can you use it?" method of submission, it gives the impression that the writer does not care about his work. If something is worth submitting, it is worth polishing and editing BEFORE you send it in. As someone who writes as well, I do know that the temptation just to get a piece of writing finished and in because you are sick of looking at is strong, but some post-writing work is worth it. Finally, be your worst critic. Have high standards and always seek to improve, and get a lot of feedback.

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

I would like to name some of my favorites, as I have experienced the wonder that it is to describe a fantasy creature or character, and have it drawn in amazing art! Kristin Collins does amazing, detailed beautiful work, especially with water fairies and the like; Brett Neufeld has been wonderful for us at PDG, fast, hardworking, and detailed, he did the *Kineticists of Porphyra* series, very popular, my own *Zif of Porphyra*, and the new *Mesmerists of Porphyra*. Matt Morrow does great character work, he has done some great figures for us and has a great eye for detail. I really admire our contract artists, as publishers and writers are very demanding and cranky.

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

When I was in Great Falls, MT at their fine gaming convention the Great Falls Rendezvous, a

fellow named Sam, who won their Iron GM contest two years in a row, traded some of his winner merchandise for some books I had written and some other PDG books, and then asked me to sign them. I really didn't know what to think, but it impressed me very much.

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

You will read more about the one I am working on, *Demon Lords of Porphyra*, later in the interview, and I am hoping it will help mold our setting cosmology and give some incentive for writers to send in some exciting stuff. I am also asking for good wishes and prayers (LOL) to me in order to finish Purple Mountain 8, which I have been stalled on for a ridiculously long time—it is trying to be a sandbox in a dungeon (!) seeking the lost loves of an Elysian Prince and a Demon Lord... playtesting didn't go real well, but I am hoping for inspiration for rewrites any day now.

## 17. Do you have any goals for Purple Duck Games that you have yet to obtain or overcome?

Oh, I have a few, and Mark always has some double-secret project waiting in the wings, but one thing I would like to develop some day is a hex-and-counter board game like I used to love when I was a kid, incorporating the Lands of Porphyra and the various factions that inhabit it. We would also like to break into some other types of gaming if it can be made profitable, like horror and superhero gaming. When you are little like us it is hard to pursue projects that are outside the main stream and you are not sure how big an audience you have. Getting more recognition and notice by the community would be great, to spread the word about our great stuff, new and old. Putting more product in brick-and-mortar stores would be great, too, but we have made some inroads there, and I just saw a Facebook post of some Purple Duck stuff on a shelf in a store in the American Midwest, so we are making progress!

## 18. Can you tell us a little about *Demon Lords of Porphyra*?

I am currently working on a piece to develop the cosmology of Porphyra, *Demon Lords of Porphyra*, though it has gotten a little stalled due to some editing assignments that needed some attention. Because several of these villain/deities have been mentioned in previous works, we at PDG like to follow up on the "big things" mentioned for our campaign world, and make things more complete.



My take on the topic is that you need good villains to make good heroes, and the backstory of a villain makes for fertile ground for developing adventures. Fiends have always been a staple of fantasy gaming, and we need only look to Tolkien's creation of Durin's Bane, the Balrog of Moria to see how exciting an implacable, unnatural foe can be. There will be a dozen or so big players in the Realms Below, statted up similar to *Gods of Porphyra*, as these beings are popular enough to have their own cults on the Patchwork Planet. I am also trying to put in some more "crunch" to the product, which will extend writing time, but I hope will give more value. Some feats, spells, magic items, and traits will give the sinister worshippers of demon lords like Balakor the Unrepentant and Ayporos the Counter, vassal to the evil god Vortain something to be feared. Wish me luck in getting it done!

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

When talking about whole races of outsiders and such, I found that it brought up a lot of questions regarding the cosmology of Porphyra,

the mechanics of "Other Planes" and the grand structure of the physical and metaphysical universe... enough questions to fill a whole book, and many publishing companies have done so. When you try to write in an ecological manner, you can't ignore the aspects brought up by a single work—if you say that dwarves hate orcs, you cannot just drop it there, you have to explain the "Why?" I wish I had space, time and motivation (the REAL three dimensions) to include a planar atlas into *Demon Lords of Porphyra*, but that is not going to happen.

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

I would like folks to know that I would love to see their ideas cross my computer screen, as a fresh eye is a wonderful thing in the publishing industry. It is natural that I would like to see work that is similar to my own interests, fantasy with a literary, ecological focus, and I always get excited when I see and get to edit that sort of thing. For example, one recent product of ours, I don't even know if it is out yet, is *Vigilantes of Horror*, where you get to play a classic movie-monster type of dual persona vigilante! How much fun would that be?

Rulesets full of crunch are all well and good, but a piece of writing, no matter where its origin, that inspires, is like a diamond in a field of stones. To that end, if anyone is interested in my point of view, skill set or wants to know more about what I do, please drop me a line at [pf857426@gmail.com](mailto:pf857426@gmail.com) and check out PDGs stuff at [porphyra.wikidot.com](http://porphyra.wikidot.com) or on Facebook or RPGNow, regarding Purple Duck Games. Thanks again for letting me be heard!





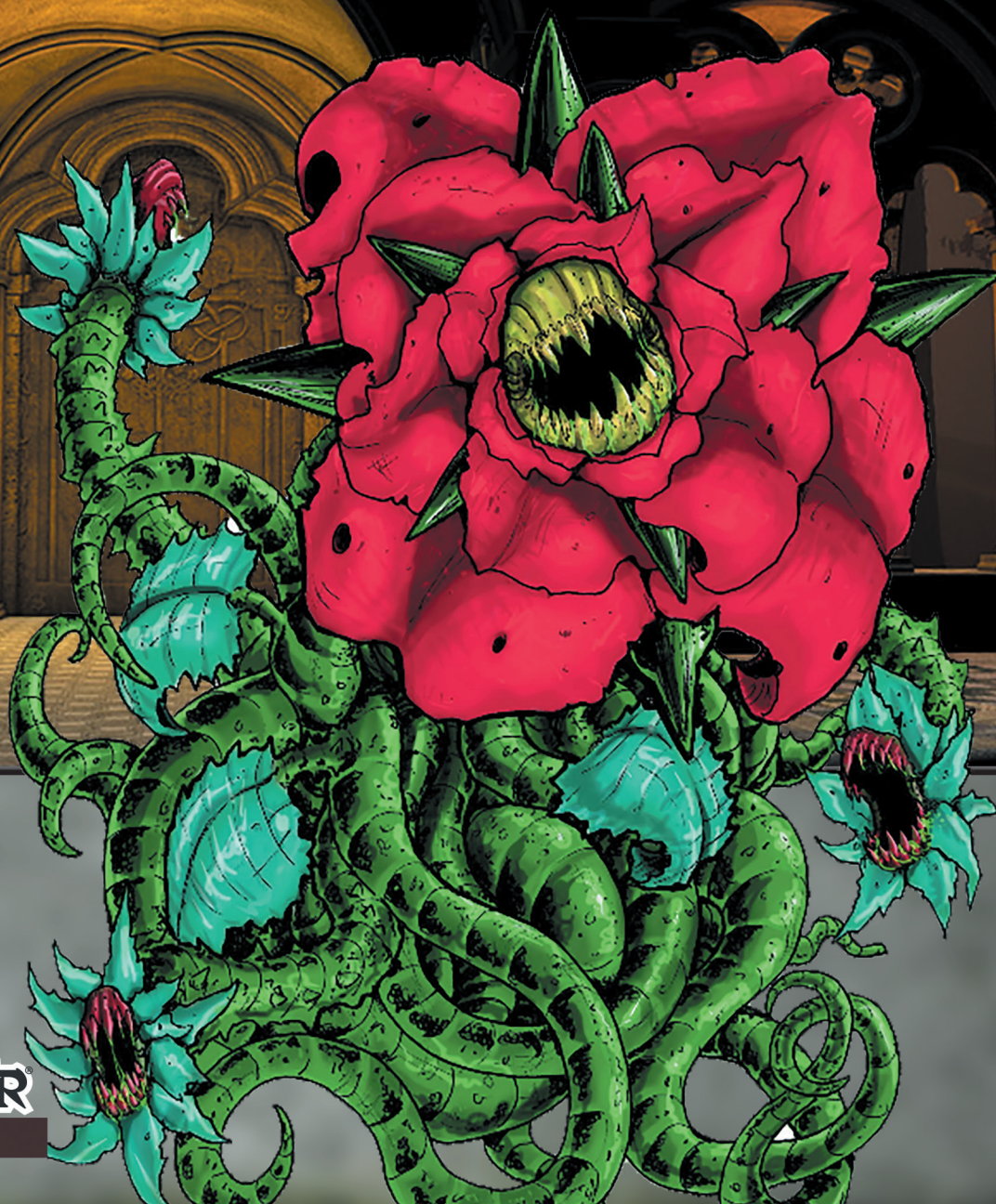
Rite Publishing Presents

October 2016

Issue #8

# ADVENTURE QUARTERLY

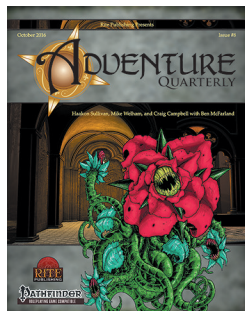
Haakon Sullivan, Mike Welham, and Craig Campbell with Ben McFarland



**PATHFINDER**  
ROLEPLAYING GAME COMPATIBLE



## Reviews



### Adventure Quarterly #8

**Publisher:** Rite Publishing

**Reviewer:** Endzeitgeist

**Stars:** 5 stars out of 5

The 8th installment of Rite Publishing's spiritual successor to Dungeon magazine clocks in at 55 pages: 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial, 1 page ToC, 1 page SRD, 1 page back cover, leaving us with 50 pages of content. So let's take a look!

This book was moved up in my review queue due to being prioritized by my patrons. Additionally, I received an early access iteration, which allowed me to complete actually testing these modules prior to release—one of the reasons you're seeing this review so relatively close to AQ #8's release, in spite of the issues that have haunted real life for me in the last couple of weeks.

We begin this installment, as always, with an editorial by Robert N. Emerson—and it is here, I'd like to echo his sentiment: the former commander of Rite Publishing, a great friend of mine and a visionary author, Steven D. Russell was taken from us this summer. It is his wife, Miranda Russell, who has taken the reins of Rite Publishing and done so with an aplomb and grace that is, frankly, extremely amazing. It is my firm conviction that Steve would be proud of the "Rite way" of gaming not being lost.

**Anyways, you know the drill—this book contains modules and as such, the following contains SPOILERS. Potential players should jump to the conclusion.**

All right, only GMs around? Great! We begin with Haakon Sullivan's "Race for the Cage," intended for characters of 4th level. The small village of Kingsden was terrorized in the past: a strange entity was killing people—then, a witch came and the murders stopped, her endeavors obviously successful. Thus, this unpleasantness sank into history's obscurity. Now, as the PCs happen to travel through town, the murders seem to have resumed—the first victim being a poor dwarf. Why him? Well, there is a good reason for that and the PCs will soon be pointed towards the truth: an abandoned wizard's lab, which may, according to a local poem, contain the dread beast. After this brief intro (which took about 30 minutes of asking questions and the like), the module proceeds to...

well, take no prisoners: two paths lead towards the goal within the complex. One is collapsed by the death cultists, who are on a sacred mission to once again unleash the beast that stalks these realms.

From here on out, the module becomes a race: the PCs have 6 minutes to reach the end of the gauntlet of traps, puzzles and challenges—plus 1 minute of out-of-game discussion per room. At least, that's the suggestion. If you enforce this hard time-limit, then rest assured that the sequence of interesting obstacles will push the PCs hard. In one room, for example, a flesh golem remains—a foe beyond the capabilities of the PCs to defeat...but it is still connected to tubes and wires...perhaps the PCs can use those funny-looking levers to defeat it... If the PCs do lose the race, they'll have a hard time—a vampiric spider is the insane beast the cultists seek to free, but once again astute observation can help the PCs prevail against this overwhelming boss. Success in the race (surprisingly difficult, mind you!) renders the finale pretty simple, obviously... but frankly, if you're a bastard-GM like moi, you may well choose to spring free this boss still...

A highlight since the inception of *Adventure Quarterly*, at least for me, would be the post-modern mega-dungeon-crawl "Ruins Perilous." This complex was created by Questhaven, a city ruled by adventurers, and progress within this dungeon can actually enhance your status and increase your standing within the city's strata. As such, the complex has a very unique feeling, both one of a supremely dangerous obstacle course and one of a constructed dungeon that is a dungeon for a dungeon's sake—and still retains the feasibility and internal consistency you'd associate with such an artificially created dungeoneering environment. #7 sported one of the best levels in the whole run, so let's see whether Mike Welham's 6th level of the complex, the Test Lab, can maintain this level of quality!

I was speaking of internal consistency—and indeed, there is more to the adventuring life than murder hobo-ing through scores of hapless dungeon dwellers; as such, the Dungeon Dragon in charge of this complex has made this level a proving ground for adventurers that focuses on more than just "I hit it with my weapon of choice"—the theme here is the solution of problems with both brain and brawn. With passwords, pure strength, skill or willpower, the PCs can enter the first section of the level. There are 4 wings that lead to the final challenge; each wing requires a different skill set to complete: one for physical exertions; one for stealthy tricks; one requiring willpower; and one that rewards keen wits.



The respective challenges in each wing are intriguing and creative...and slightly more deadly than you'd expect, for a cadre of disgruntled ratfolk of the groundskeepers ultimately made the level even less pleasant. Now, if your players are REALLY good and if you are similarly an experienced GM, I'd suggest making each wing only available to the respective, fitting characters. While this eliminates the otherwise really pronounced replay value of the dungeon, it also lets you experience the totality of the level...and frankly, it's so damn good it's worth it. Beyond the potential to use the disgruntled ratfolk as combat encounters, the place, as a whole, is simply an inspiring experience to play through. Taking the leitmotif one step further, actually activating the guild forge requires the use of a complex, evocative machinery. Frankly, I could rattle off the challenges the PCs will face, but that would do the genius of this glorious level no justice.

The third module herein would be the "Vault of Shaju," crafted by Craig Campbell and none other than Ben McFarland, is intended for 9th-level characters and the chronicle of the love of an unlikely pair: the necromancer Viuslethiem and the rogue Shajuyumil—who found true love. To thwart death, Shayumil would place his soul within the confines of a sword of transcendent quality, thus allowing him to stay with his love even after she ascended to lichdom. The PCs, then, are assumed to have been hired by lore master Pickwendy to guard his expedition, but upon arrival, they happen upon giants that have decimated the camp. Pickwendy only wants the artifact, the aforementioned rapier; yes, the module actually has notes for GMs who do not want such a powerful tool in their game. Alas, as mentioned before, Pickwendy and his ilk have met their fate—it is thus sans competition of the like that the PCs will sooner or later happen upon the complex, where an ephemeral voice accompanies their exploration, pronouncing, surprisingly, not death, gloom and doom, but rather sensible challenges. Indeed, this whole complex, this whole gauntlet, proves to be a test of both mettle and character, which leads ultimately to the powerful rapier Shajuyumil, who only asks to be reunited with his love—this vow alone is required to claim the powerful item once the PCs have reached it...though reaching it is anything but simple. Both the unique combat challenges and the obstacles presented, including an intriguing moral dilemma, can test PCs in creative and intriguing manners.

## Conclusion:

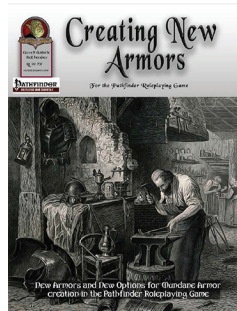
Editing and formatting are top-notch; I noticed no significant hiccups. Layout adheres to Rite Publishing's beautiful 2-column full-color standard

for the series. The PDF sports several nice, original pieces of artwork. Deserving of a special shout out would be Tommi Salama's absolutely stunning full-color cartography and the fact that this comes with player-friendly maps...including high-res versions.

Haakon Sullivan delivers the best module I have read from his pen, finally making the leap from very good/good to awesome. Mike Welham is one of the best 3pp-authors out there, so it should come as no surprise that his module frankly is phenomenal—he should write more of these! Finally, Craig Campbell and Ben McFarland's third module in no way falls behind the quality of the first two: In short, this installment of AQ is all killer, no filler. There is not a single module here that is content with just spamming combats; there is not a single dungeon here that does not have its copious sparks of brilliance, its unique challenges. Add to that the superb cartography and we have an issue here that frankly transcends the generally exceedingly high quality the series features anyway.

So yes, this installment is worth its more than fair asking price; I'd even go so far as to claim that the modules herein are good enough to warrant conversion if you're playing a different system! Unsurprisingly, my final verdict will clock in at 5 stars + seal of approval for this glorious book.

**Endzeitgeist out.**



## Creating New Armors

**Publisher:** Fat Goblin Games

**Reviewer:** Endzeitgeist

**Stars:** 5 stars out of 5

This little PDF clocks in at 12 pages: 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial, 1 page SRD, 1 page advertisement, leaving us with 8 pages of content. So let's take a look!

We have all probably been there, at least the GMs and designers among us—the point where you want to make a new armor. The system presented herein is simple—there are 3 base armor types and shields featured: First, you take the basics and base-price... and then you multiply the price by the DP (design points). You can have armors or shields of horn or stone and then you determine the armor qualities.

The heavier the armor, the more often you can gain additional design points, a 0 DP quality. Adding boots, helmet, and gauntlets is covered and modifies cost, but not DP; camouflages/muffled armor, etc. and the different base types, like chain, can be added via DP to modify the basics of the respective armor, fleshing out the abstract



proto-armors. Pretty amazing: lamellar material, dependent on the base material, can be found. The book is also VERY useful in that an easy one-glance table codifies the DP for the respective qualities and to which type of armor they can be applied: one glance, done. Two thumbs up!

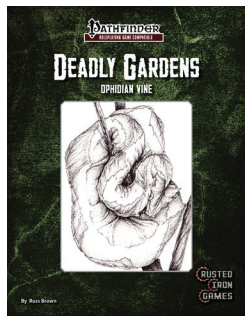
Obviously, there need to be shield-only options as well. Want a lightweight tower shield with a blinder? Sure, why not. Quickdraw, weapons, and weapon slits...really neat! The PDF also presents two sample items created with the system. Oh, have I mentioned that NOT using the points makes the armor/shield less expensive? Yep, rewards for not going feature-bloat! Cool!

## Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are top-notch; I noticed no glitches. Layout adheres to a nice two-column, full-color standard. The PDF sports nice full-color art and the PDF comes fully bookmarked for your convenience—with nested bookmarks. Kudos for going the extra mile for the brief PDF!

Garrett Guillotte's little system is amazing; for the low-price point, it provides a balanced, immediately useful design tool at the tip of your fingertips. Simple, elegant, and fun, the system is easy to use, fun, and inexpensive...in short, this PDF is awesome and more than worth the fair asking price. Can we have expansions for special materials, please? This is a fine purchase, well worth 5 stars + seal of approval.

**Endzeitgeist out.**



## Deadly Gardens—Ophidian Vine (revised edition)

**Publisher:** Rusted Iron Games

**Reviewer:** Endzeitgeist

**Stars:** 5 stars out of 5

This installment of the Deadly Gardens-series clocks in at 7 pages: 1 page front cover, 1/2 a page SRD, leaving us with 5.5 pages of content. So let's take a look!

We begin this installment of the Deadly Gardens series with 4 new feats, the first of which mitigates the penalty of Handle Animal to deal with plant creatures and allows you to use it in conjunction with plant creatures bereft of Intelligence. The second feat, Toxin Wrangler, lets you harvest poison from living creatures with an indifferent attitude towards you. Third, Venom Doctor, is intriguing—it lets you use poisons to treat diseases—the patient suffers the effect of the poison once, but is not further poisoned, with the next save DC versus the disease

the patient has to make being decreased by an amount equal to the poison's DC, up to a minimum of 5. Additionally, you have no risk of poisoning yourself when making poison, harvesting poisons or treating diseases or afflictions. I like the idea, though, depending on the importance of diseases in your game, I'd suggest, depending on campaign, 1/2 DC for grittier games—just an observation, mind you! Finally, Poison Resistant nets you +2 to saves versus poison and a 1/day reroll.

Now the next section of this book may, on its own, be worth getting this PDF. Why? Because it collects a metric ton of poisons from creatures in the bestiaries in a MASSIVE table that exceeds one page in scope, providing an easily referenced collection, with yield of harvested doses, market prices, etc., all included. And yes, there are some new ones (variants of magical, poisonous animals) here as well. Kudos for this section!

Now the eponymous ophidian vine comes in three iterations here—one at CR 1/2, one at CR 4 and one at CR 7—and yes, the b/w-artwork used for the critter is, as we've come to expect, gorgeous! Obviously, to maintain thematic consistency, the creature has a poisonous sap and the greater variant can be pictured as basically a stronger, tougher iteration of the snake-shaped vine. The ophidian vine can freeze to camouflage itself and may execute AoOs versus those that strike it in melee...which is a cool new ability! Also cool: the new CR 7 version added to the PDF actually gets 1.5 Strength modifier to bite attacks. Oh, and it is available as a plant companion, with proper stats!!

The PDF also sports a natural item, the ophidian vine sap, which now collates the respective saps in one entry—kudos!

## Conclusion:

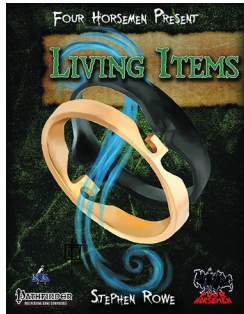
Editing and formatting are top-notch; I noticed no glitches. Layout adheres to Rusted Iron Games' two-column full-color standard and the PDF comes fully bookmarked, in spite of its brevity—kudos! As mentioned before, the b/w-artwork by Becca Bean is simply stunning.

Russ Brown has listened. I absolutely LOVE it when publishers care and fix their books, not content with "only" delivering something good, striving for excellence instead. This is pretty much what happened here. While the original critter was nice, it was comparably unremarkable. The upgraded version is unique and we actually get more material: plant companion stats, a new feat, a complete new build. See, that's what I'm talking



about! From nice to excellence, the PDF now goes the extra mile and is well worth getting—compiling the poison table alone would probably take a day or two and the upgraded critter is amazing. 5 stars + seal of approval for the revised version.

**Endzeitgeist out.**



## **Four Horsemen Present:** **Living Items**

**Publisher:** Rogue Genius Games

**Reviewer:** Endzeitgeist

**Stars:** 5 stars out of 5

This installment of the Four Horsemen Present series clocks in at 29 pages: 1 page front cover, 1 page SRD, 1/2 a page of editorial, leaving us with 26.5 pages of content. So let's take a look!

So, what are living items? Well, for one, they are one step beyond intelligent magic items: they are potentially complex personalities beyond the confines of the purpose-driven aspects we usually associate with them; personality-wise, they are ultimately alive as such, they are prone to switching outlooks over the course of their existence. From a roleplaying perspective, the question of identity and its representation becomes particularly intriguing. For balance purposes, living items are treated as constructs, not objects, and begin play with a clumsy fly speed of 20 ft., which increases at 4th level and every 3 levels thereafter by +10 ft. and one maneuverability class, culminating in 60 ft. + perfect maneuverability at 16th level. Living items begin play with only mental attributes and as such, concise guidelines for various attribute generation methods are provided. They are always masterwork and don't get starting gold, but do gain WBL.

Each living item, obviously, represents an item given life and thus, you choose an item definition, which collates the item to a respective slot or a category of item to be wielded. Living items heal naturally, but otherwise have the healing restrictions imposed upon constructs, which serves to balance out their impressive array of immunities. Wisdom acts in lieu of Constitution to determine negative hit points. Yeah, realize something? This pretty much opens a vast, colossal can of worms—after all, PFRPG's engine employs a significant array of values that derivate from the physical abilities...and the PDF goes on to systematically define them: CMB and CMD, initiative, AC, atk, HP. It is pretty hard to picture a more excessive

incision into the core character-constituting aspects of the engine...and surprisingly, the living item engine presented here retains its functionality in spite of this significant modification.

Living items are either Small or Medium and are capable of speech—that would be the basic engine. From here on out, we categorize living items by type: Body, Charged, Egoist (usually a ring, amulet, etc. that is too small to work on its own, acting by proxy via hijacking wielders), Protector, Weapon, or Wondrous would be the subtypes available and all have different properties. Whether you want to play the floating sword or the criminal ring mastermind that switches from possessed underling to possessed underling, chances are that you'll find your particular concept represented here.

Living items do gain levels akin to regular characters and it is with the class provided that these stand and fall: chassis-wise, we get d8 HD, 2 + Intelligence skills per level and convey proficiency of themselves to their wielders. They have auras, all good saves, and 3/4 BAB-progression. They also get their choice of either spontaneous arcane- or divine spellcasting based on Charisma of up to 6th level, with spells drawn from either the sorcerer/wizard or cleric spell-list and they may fulfill somatic components with weird movements. They also choose a school which then further defines the item, granting bonus spells over the levels as well as school powers at 2nd level and every even level thereafter. 5th level and every 5 levels thereafter allow for the taking of school powers from any school, not just the one chosen. They may eschew materials and absorb other magical items and their properties, effectively wielding them with concise and elegant rules. Living items increase their senses and natural AC over the levels and the capstone would be the attaining of a special purpose alongside one of 3 powerful abilities.

If all of that does sound pretty nasty, then because it is—living items are pretty strong...but they have a HUGE Achilles heel: anything that hampers magic can render them unconscious. Considering the widespread use of *dispel magic*, etc., this actually renders them manageable even in the context of grittier games. Now obviously, the school powers are on tantamount interest in a context where they pretty define the living item, as they can be pictured as pretty much revelation-like sequences of abilities which sometimes build upon one another. Abjuration specialists can learn to suppress items or store alternate slotted items for further use; conjuration items can come to the



aid of bonded creatures or banish adversaries, heal their wielder...and even summon a wielder to them. Yeah, that can be really hilarious, also from a narrative point of view. "Okay, living item—you suppress your magic and hide among the weapon shipments to evil fortress of doom. Once in, you summon your wielder and we'll crack open those gates." That actually happened in my game.

Spotting traps, forming a group connection, calming the bearer, controlling wielders, breaking the sanity of those in contact, faster flight, causing strange illusions...what about items that can animate the undead to wield them, that hex foes or store poison...or ones that can be healed (but also become susceptible to negative energy?) or mimic properties? Yeah, this engine provides a ridiculous amount of amazing customization options.

The PDF also provides notes on how to create living items, how to use them as cohorts (they are awesome cohorts, but only available for mythic character per default)—the PDF is pretty extensive here. Wait, mythic? Yep, mythic living items are covered as well, providing full 10-tier progression notes for them...including 9th-tier artifact apotheosis!

## Conclusion:

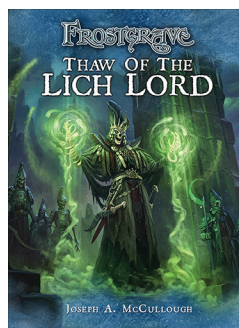
Editing and formatting are top-notch; I noticed no hiccups. Layout adheres to Rogue Genius Games' two-column full-color standard with a blend of new and stock art in both full color and b/w. The PDF comes fully bookmarked with nested bookmarks for your convenience.

I pride myself on having a pretty precise radar when it comes to an author phoning in content. This is the antithesis. Stephen Rowe's living items are so lovingly WEIRD, so magical and frankly ODD that I never expected to see a book like this, much less review it. More importantly, I never expected to find an engine this robust, this well-crafted. Now newsflash, rare magic games with few spellcasters and items may not need this; the magic item interaction and peculiarities assume pretty much a standard level of fantasy for PFRPG as a balancing guideline. DUH. That being said, it is absolutely impressive to witness a concept this mechanically radical to actually succeed in presenting a balanced and diverse toolkit that basically can be summed up as a resounding success. It is the level of consideration for the small aspects, whether it is the minutiae of attribute substitution or character generation, that make this stand out above and beyond its already impressively difficult design-goal.

It is a true joy to report that Stephen Rowe delivers in spades. The engine depicted herein is exceedingly versatile and allows you to play anything—from the sage staff to the xenophobic chalice to the schizoid double sword. The level of abstraction and care required to create this framework is impressive; the attention to detail heart-warming and the narrative potential is vast. Beyond its obvious oddity and novelty, reading this book made me come up with at least 10 kinds of plots wherein living items are culprits, masterminds or otherwise involved without even trying.

In short: this is worth its asking price tenfold for all but the most gritty of low-magic games (seriously, not the target demographic for a book of talking, floating magic items—unless you want a really nasty villain the PCs never saw coming; for that purpose, this'll do the trick in a particularly nasty and, dare I say, perfect manner in such a context!) and represents one of the most mechanically impressive feats the horsemen have crafted so far. 5 stars + seal of approval...and because I really dig how this enhances my games and how it can be used in pretty much any game in one capacity or another whether it'll be NPC or PC, I'll also nominate this creative supplement for my top ten of 2016.

**Endzeitgeist out.**



## Frostgrave: Thaw of the Lich Lord

**Publisher:** James A. McCullough

**Reviewer:** Endzeitgeist

**Stars:** 5 stars out of 5

The first expansion-book to Frostgrave clocks in at 62 pages, minus 4 if you subtract editorial, ToC, etc., leaving us with 58 pages of content. So let's take a look!

This supplement/expansion is the first big campaign for Frostgrave, and it is a cool one (pardon the pun)—but before we go to the linked scenarios, let's take a look at the supplemental material, shall we? The first of these would be the bard—at 100 gc, he clocks in at the upper end of the soldier cost-spectrum, and at Fight +2, Armor 11, he looks like a pretty sucky choice; however, he has a phenomenal Will +4 and conveys a +1 bonus to Will to all soldiers within 6" of him, but only if they have line of sight. Nice—these benefits cannot be stacked. The Crow Master is just as expensive,



but has both Fight and Shoot +0, armor 11 and +2 Will...so why get him? Well, each crow master comes with a domesticated blood crow that has Move 9, flies, armor 14 and +3 Will...but only 1 Health. So yeah, deadly skirmisher potential held in check by low Health...and by the restriction that your base needs to have one Blood Crow Roost per such soldier hired...and these restrictions better should be in place, for the blood crow does not count towards the soldier maximum.

Can't afford an archer or crossbowman, but need ranged capability? The javelineer, for only 25 gc delivers that. These guys can use their weapons in melee and ranged combat, but only have a range of 10" and +0 Fight and Shoot—you get what you pay for, but a couple of these guys still can wreck your day. Finally, for 20 gold crowns, you can recruit a quasi-noncombatant with only a dagger and +0 in all relevant stats as well as armor 10. This would be the pack mule and his draw is that he may carry up to three items and hand them to other characters as an action. Wizards may use actions to take the item from the mule as well....or exchange it. All soldiers presented here have in common that they enrich the tactical options of the game in pretty interesting manners—Blood Crows can e.g. easily follow wizards abusing the Leap spell.

Speaking of spells—in that regard, the book offer three out-of-combat options: witches may create homunculi; these miniature versions of the wizard decrease his health while in existence, but if he dies during survival checks, his homunculus grows to full size. This is basically an extra life. The other two spells pertain to the ascendancy to lichdom; these guys are VERY powerful, but pay for that with increased experience point requirements to level...and, well, obviously, being undead. Thirdly, soldiers that died may be reanimated as revenants by necromancers...though that wrecks the reanimated corpse's Will down to +0.

The book also features a new treasure table alongside 23 new magic items...some of which become relevant in the aforementioned campaign... while others simply allow for something pretty cool. Crystal Roses that help survival, a book that allows for the recruitment of a rangifier (think savage, undead-hating elk-humanoids introduced in the book's bestiary that are pretty badass: At M 7, F +2, A 12, W +3 and H 12 plus attacks count as magic versus undead and are made at +1.), or the eyes of amoto deserve special mention. The latter is a set of two amulets that allow the caster to cast 1/ game through the line of sight of the wearer of the other amulet.

As already mentioned, the PDF does have a new bestiary, including a random encounter table—the bestiary spans 10 creatures, two of which I have already mentioned. Beyond death cultists (who have a REALLY good Will – +5!), the rest, surprise, would be undead of various powers...including zombie trolls or wraith knights. And yep, several are immaterial and may move through obstacles... which can be really painful. The most impressive creature here, obviously, would be the lich lord, though: his "AI," i.e. his priority list, contains no less than 9 conditions, which makes facing him surprisingly difficult. That being said, the book does suggest to get a player/GM-like entity to play the part of the monsters in the finale of the campaign and I get why.

Now how does the campaign play out? Are the scenarios worthwhile? Well, it all begins as ominous as it gets: in scenario 1, there is a timer running down towards a total eclipse that is accompanied by a significant surge in magical power...but which also limits line of sight while in progress, allowing for some cool tactics and gameplay—this one's mechanics can easily be scavenged and yes, there are bonus experience points for actually being on the table when the eclipse happens, so wizards have a reason to wait at least until it happens before vacating the premises. Scenario number 2 is slightly more complex in its set-up: it takes place on the Meregile, the frozen river; the first 6" from the tables edge are land—beyond that, you have the river's unsure footing. From a barge on that river, a spellcasting servant of the lich lord sooner or later will emerge and taking the guy out before he can flee would be the primary goal here...though it's easier said than done in the nasty terrain. Scenario 3 is simpler: the PCs basically attempt to loot a caravan of death cultists that had bad luck and a broken down wagon; while reinforcements arrive, they proved to be not too big of a hassle in my tests.

Scenario 4 ups the ante and is called "Storm of Undeath"; not only is a magically charged snowstorm reducing sight, the goal is also risky—in the middle of the table, there'll be pylons with corpses. Each round, there is a chance for magic lightning to hit the pylons, with potentially lethal consequences...the dead may be animated...but being in the area is also the way to gain the big experience points here. Just be careful to not die, or you'll have a revenant on your hands. In #5, the evocative rangifers are in the center—and they are deadly...and it's up to the wizards to prevent them being killed by a deadly wraith knight...problem is, that the rangifers are NOT nice guys...they



prioritize destroying undead...but are not above splitting some wizard skull...

In Scenario #6, you best have a second table or cordoned area—the second are, ideally 1' by 1', represents a treasure room. Arcs and doors placed have a chance of teleporting those passing through to the second area, the fallen house's treasure room...problem is, you can also be teleported out of the game or killed by the attempt...risky and interesting. Oh, and if you botch it, you may well end up facing death cultists all alone in the room... One of my favorites in the campaign, however, would be #7, the "lair of the ghoulish king." Situated in a vast underground chamber, the players are trapped in the ghoulish king's throne room. On his throne are levers that may allow for escape...but you have to get there first. The chamber is also dark and limits sight and makes for an amazing playing experience. Scenario 8 and 9 are somewhat similar: they focus on one unique aspect. In #8, you have the Black Cauldron in the middle, which continuously spawns zombies; tipping it over is the goal here. In #9, the center of the scenario would be a bone wheel with sacrifices to be in the middle; freeing these guys and getting the treasure is hard, as the wheel is ever turning...oh, and there are the banshees.

After all of that, the lich lord has had enough: exerting his magical might, he lets his castle fly above the city, held in place by taut chains; escape is not an option and lethal (unless you have the amulet to slow falls...) and the lich lord is a deadly foe...oh, and if you kill him, a generous countdown's running down...be too slow and you die. Yes, DIE. This one has a very real chance of failure and is really epic in its feel. If the wizard persists, he does get bragging rights and cheaper recruitment from there on out, though.

## Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are top-notch; I noticed no significant glitches in either formal or rules-language criteria. Layout adheres to a beautiful one-column full-color standard and the PDF sports several evocative pieces of fluffy sideboxes. Artworks are the usual blend of amazing artworks and color-photographs of minis. I can't comment on the electronic version, since I don't have it, but the softcover is a nice little book with high-quality, glossy paper.

James A. McCullough's "Thaw of the Lich Lord" is an evocative expansion—the new soldiers in particular are great paradigm-changers and the scenarios allow for cool tweaks that can easily be combined, changed, modified—but it is also here

that the campaign varies a bit in its set-up. You see, there are a couple of scenarios that play like truly unique, interesting experiences...while a few feel a bit more like filler or don't make maximum use of their modifications. The bone wheel is cool, but its engine tweak could have, for example been expanded upon. The book improves the base Frostgrave, though, and playing the campaign certainly is a rewarding experience. Hence, my final verdict will clock in at 5 stars.

**Endzeitgeist out.**



## Mini-Dungeon: The Spinner's Hole

**Publisher:** Jonathan Ely

**Reviewer:** Endzeitgeist

**Stars:** 5 stars out of 5

This PDF clocks in at 2 pages and is a mini-dungeon. This means we get 2 pages content, including a solid map and all item/monster-stats hyperlinked and thus,

absent from the PDF, with only deviations from the statblocks being noted for the GM. Oh, and the series now comes in an archive that also contains... \*drumroll\* a .tif-version of the map! Yeah, that's pretty amazing!

Since this product line's goal is providing short diversions, side-quest dungeons etc., I will not expect mind-shattering revelations, massive plots or particularly smart or detailed depictions, instead tackling the line for what it is. Got that? Great!

**This being an adventure-review, the following contains SPOILERS. Potential players may wish to jump to the conclusion.**

Still here?

All right!

There is a little village called "Spinner's Folly" — and it may be aptly named, for they have an... interesting local tradition: thrice a year, nature-affine adventurers are invited to a local dungeon, the selfsame one depicted herein, and given an interesting task. They are to enter the dungeon known as the eponymous spinner's hole...and subdue the giant spiders therein. You see, the local economy is relying completely on the giant spider silk, so killing them as per the usual adventurer *modus operandi* just won't do. This also means that this level 1 adventure would make for an interesting "man/womanhood rite" type of introduction to the adventuring life.

Within the dungeon, remnants of animal sacrifice, spider swarms, and poison darts can



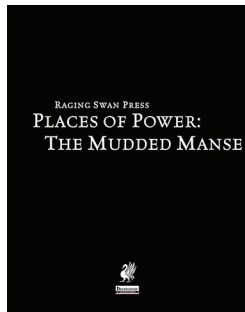
be found and sheets of webbing as well as secret doors contain sections of the dungeon, providing some serious challenge.

## Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are very good; I noticed no significant glitches. Layout adheres to a beautiful 2-column full-color standard and the PDF comes sans bookmarks, but needs none at this length. Cartography is full color and surprisingly good for such an inexpensive PDF. The .tif version included here, which you can easily cut up and hand out to the players as they progress is a huge bonus. The PDF does sport one nice piece of original full-color art—kudos!

Jonathan Ely's "Spinner's Hole" is perhaps the most concise of his mini-dungeons that I've analyzed so far. On paper, it may not sound like much; the traps, for example, with their exclusive emphasis on poisoned darts, could be more diverse. In play, however, the module actually works really well. I used it as part of playtesting and the unique entry vector of the scenario with the emphasis on the odd, local economy/custom, alongside with the challenge of dealing with swarms at level 1 made this a fascinating module that turned out to be more fun than its very focused theme would lead you to believe. It is hence that I award this 5 stars.

**Endzeitgeist out.**



## Places of Power: The Muddled Manse

**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, 2 pages of advertisement, 1 page

editorial/ToC, 1 page SRD, 1 page back cover, leaving us with 5 pages of content. So let's take a look!

Deep in the midst of the dreaded Salt Mire, near Thornhill, there is a manse at the top of a foreboding cliff, in the midst of the murky swamp. It is rumored to be haunted...WAIT. Wait, I tell you. Seriously, this is going somewhere you did not expect. Serious research via the high lore DCs can provide the information that one Vississ Leeai cleared out the place a couple of years ago and that it stands where once a powerful earth elemental existed. Sounds ominous, right?

Well, guess what: When your players actually get there, past the no-nonsense half-orc ranger (CR 9, full stats provided) that guards the place they'll be greeted by a cheerful, immaculately clean staff. While local druids do exist and some strange—creepy even—circumstances can happen around here, the muddled manse, ultimately, remains one of the best-guarded secrets of the elite. You see, the sylph Vississi (fully stattd at CR 10) has determined that the local mud can help against nigh incurable conditions and diseases. Yep, you heard right—this is basically a high-class, magical spa disguised as a haunted manor! And yes, this is not an operation of purely benevolent beings, but it certainly is a unique place to get massages and wind down from the horrible rigors of adventuring while also making some nice connections with notable folks who'd otherwise have no reason talking to the PCs. Obviously, as always, we actually get local dressing and mannerisms as well as rumors and sample events to add spice to the trip. As a nice aside, this place makes for a great way to plug in one of the various "going on vacation" CoC modules into your campaign without breaking a sweat. Just sayin'.

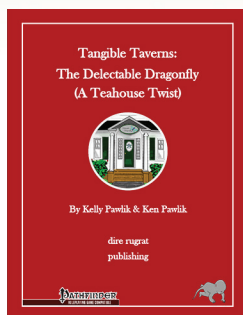
## Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are top-notch. Layout adheres to RSP's elegant 2-column b/w-standard and the PDF features some nice b/w-artwork. The PDF comes in two iterations, one optimized for screen-use and one made for the printer—kudos there! The cartography by Simon Butler and Dyson Logos is excellent. I think by joining Raging Swan Press' patreon, you can actually get the high-res map for the evocative place, but I am not 100% sure. The map provided is cool, but sports keyed rooms.

Mike Welham rarely fails to deliver. When I read the title "Muddled Manse," I was yawning internally. When I started reading this, I realized the downright genius idea and its seamless integration into a fantastic context and knew I was hooked. Evocative, useful, unique—this has it all, and for a ridiculously fair price to boot. 5 stars + seal of approval, given sans hesitation. Get this and provide a bit of relaxation for your PCs. As a nice note: I actually had a local hire the PCs to deal with the "haunting"—imagine their surprise when they arrived, armed to the teeth...Yeah, that was something I don't get to see too often anymore...

**Endzeitgeist out.**





## Tangible Taverns: The Delectable Dragonfly (A Tea House Twist)

**Publisher:** Kelly & Ken Pawlik

**Reviewer:** Endzeitgeist

**Stars:** 5 stars out of 5

This installment of the Tangible Taverns series clocks in at 18 pages: 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial, 1 page foreword, 1 page advertisement, 2 pages of SRD, 1 page back cover, leaving us with 11 pages of content. So let's take a look!

A gorgeous white mansion caters to the ladies of good taste; it is frankly a fact that whomever has two X-chromosomes alongside a certain standing and pedigree should most certainly not be seen slumming in rowdy taverns. Instead, it would indeed be significantly more rewarding for such privileged ladies to visit the Delectable Dragonfly, a tea house of exquisitely good taste, where the gossip of the local elite and rich and powerful coalesces.

And yes, dear ladies—there are delectable additions to add to the menu, which include massages...and everything else a discerning lady might wish for, particularly if her lord has certain...ahem...shortcomings. Prudes out there: you can put away the pitchforks; anything sexual herein is conveyed via innuendo and is absolutely PG. That being said, personally, I applaud this often neglected and stigmatized aspect of the facts of life. Run by Prim, a fetching expert/luckbringer and most charming hostess (who comes with full stats), this place is indeed a veritable oasis of delights—and information. The detailed rumors and events provided further emphasize this.

The ruggedly handsome staff comes with well-drawn b/w-mugshots as well that could have been taken straight from a fantastic romance-novel, further underlining this theme. The fluffy write-ups themselves are flavorful: what about a halfling masseur with meticulously clean feet who can feel knots with them? Then, there would be the ruggedly handsome investigator Vadim (with full stats) as well as his multiclassed devotee/friend Sonia (similarly, with stats) and several regulars provided for a rich array of NPCs to interact with—including the local inquisitor (again, with full stats and the truth-seeker archetype), convinced that a brilliant serial killer is stalking the town. Well, guess what? She is right.

If some of the classes and classes features mentioned before just generated question marks above your head, rest assured that the PDF's appendix will cover all relevant components—from

the Sensuous Charm and Love's Devotion feats to the complex truth inquisition and the relevant class features for the mistress' luckbringer tricks.

## **Conclusion:**

Editing and formatting are top-notch; I noticed no significant hiccups. Layout adheres to a no-frills two-column b/w-standard. The b/w-artworks featured herein are all originals and well-made indeed. The cartography featured is rudimentary, but serves its purpose and the PDF comes fully bookmarked for our convenience.

I really enjoyed Kelly & Ken Pawlik's Delectable Dragonfly—it is a unique and flavorful establishment that represents a nice change of pace—a sanctuary of women, a place to enjoy gossip and the finer things in life, the tea house is evocative and flavorful. The NPC-builds are creative and varied and the adventuring potential conveyed via the rumors and events as well as the serial killer subplot, is extensive. There isn't much more one can ask of such a nice humble PDF. 5 stars + seal of approval.

**Endzeitgeist out.**



## Uncommon Callings Book 1: Archetypes for Outcasts, Vagabonds and Pariahs

**Publisher:** Forest Guardian Press

**Reviewer:** Endzeitgeist

**Stars:** 5 stars out of 5

The first Uncommon Calling book clocks in at 23 pages: 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial, 1page SRD, leaving us with 20 pages of content. So let's take a look!

We begin this collection of archetypes with the wild shot brawler, whose unarmed strike damage does not increase beyond 4th level; instead, he begins play with training in either a hand crossbow or a one-handed firearm. The former nets +1 to attack rolls with the weapon; the latter gets Gunsmithing as well as a battered pistol as the gunslinger. Both obviously also net the respective proficiencies. This replaces shield proficiency. If hand crossbows are chosen, 1st level lets the wild shot pay 1 martial flexibility as a free action to resolve all hand crossbow attack against targets within 30 ft as touch attacks. At 4th level, the archetype may expend one use of martial flexibility to halve the Stealth penalty on sniping for one round. If one-handed firearms are chosen instead, he gains Quick Clear Powered by either 1 daily use of martial flexibility (standard action) or 2 uses (move action). 4th level provides a



martial flexibility powered utility shot. Regardless of the choice made, 10th level allows for the expenditure of 1 daily use of martial flexibility to perform a ranged dirty trick or disarms maneuver or gain Improved Precise Shot for 1 minute, though it counts towards the maximum amount of feats you can gain through martial flexibility.

At 2nd level, the archetype receives Desperado's Flurry, which allows for the use of the respective firearm in conjunction with Brawler's Flurry, provided the target's within 30 ft.—and reloading is still a thing, which means that Rapid Reload or a similar ability is pretty much a must. Also at this level, the wild shot no longer provokes AoOs for attacks with said firearms from foes if she also threatens them with a melee weapon and starting at 5th level, reloading doesn't provoke AoOs anymore. Nice. The archetype may reload sans a free hand, provided she is holding a monk or close fighter weapon group type of weapon. At 15th level, aforementioned Flurry's range restriction may be ignored when spending one daily use of martial flexibility. The archetype pay for all of this with two bonus feats as well as Martial Training and Knockout.

3rd level nets +1 to damage with the chosen weapon type, which is doubled within 30 ft. The bonus increases by +1 at 7th level and every 4 levels thereafter. At 4th level, Weapon Mastery is replaced with Opening Volley, but in addition to the feat's regular benefits, when a melee attack benefits from it, the wild shot adds  $\times 1.5$  Strength modifier to damage, provided it was made with a close or monk weapon. Nice. If you already have the feat, you get to choose an alternative. This replaces Weapon Mastery. The archetype comes with a unique favored class option that increases critical confirmation rolls

Next up would be the cavalier Order of the Veil, who may never voluntarily divulge the identity of his masters and basically is a shadowy info-broker. The challenge ability provides a +1 morale bonus to damage versus the target, increasing by +1 per 4 class levels attained. The damage is doubled versus flat-footed opponents and those denied their Dexterity bonus to AC. Skill-wise, they gain Linguistics and Stealth as class skills and add 1/2 class level to Bluff checks to pass hidden messages and Linguistics. 2nd level's ability provides a +2 bonus to saves vs. mind-reading and to feint checks, which increases by +1 at 6th level and every 4 levels after that. Additionally, the cavalier is treated as having Intelligence 13 and Combat Expertise for the purpose of qualifying for Improved Feint

and TWF and all feats based on those two, which is nice. 8th level allows the cavalier to produce a hypnotizing stare as a full-round action, focused on a creature within 30 ft. The target forgets most details about the cavalier on a failed Will save. Cool. If the cavalier does this multiple times, the DC gets higher and the ability knows degrees of failure. The more significant the failure, the more pieces of misinformation the cavalier may plant. The ability can be used  $2 + \text{Charisma modifier}$  times per day, minimum 1. 15th level provides a constant *mind blank* that he can suppress or resume as a standard action. The order also gets a nice FCO. All in all damn cool order. I'd play that!

Next up would be the Lurking Predator hunter, who gains proficiency with bolas, brutal bolas, boomerangs, harpoons, and nets and does not gain any spellcasting, caster level, or ability to use spell trigger/completion items. Instead, he begins play with a pool of ferocity equal to his Wisdom modifier, minimum 1. When the lurking predator or his animal companion reduce a creature to 0 or fewer hit points in combat, he regains 1 point of ferocity. And yes, before you ask: Kitten-proof. Nice! The lurking predator's animal companion has as much ferocity as the lurking predator and access to all deeds—basically, the two share a ferocity pool. At 1st level, the lurking predator may expend ferocity to get move, standard, and swift action in a surprise round (or a full-round action) and also spend a swift action in a surprise round for + class level weapon damage.

Additionally, +10 ft. land speed and no running start required for jumps and a bonus of 1/2 class level to Acrobatics is gained as long as he has ferocity. Said bonus may be doubled by spending a ferocity point, but only for 1 minute. At 4th level, the lurking predator's allies are treated as having the same teamwork feats for determining the bonus they convey, but only while he has at least one ferocity. Additionally, he may spend 1 point of ferocity as an immediate action to make foes that 5-foot step or withdraw still provoke an AoO or not provoke an AoO for using or reloading ranged weapons in melee, but effects lasting for one round, just fyi.

Starting at 8th level, as long as he has at least 1 ferocity and is within 30 feet of the animal companion, he can command the animal to attack, granting it an AoO versus a foe it threatens. For 1 ferocity, the deed may be used as a move action instead. the animal companion may also make use of this, in which case it is the ferocious predator that receives the AoO. Interesting duality tricks here! Also at 8th level, the lurking predator may



spend 1 ferocity as a standard action while under the effects of a harmful effect that was prompted by a Fortitude- or Will save, ending his turn, but also suppressing it for a number of rounds equal to his class level. Best take on the mettle concept I've seen so far.

At 12th level, the archetype gains +1/2 class level to Stealth while he has at least 1 ferocity and may expend 1 ferocity to move at full speed while using Stealth sans incurring the usual penalty. This effect lasts 1 minute. Similarly, he may spend 1 ferocity to gain 30 ft climb and swim speed and + 8 racial bonus to Climb and Swim checks for 1 minute. If the lurking predator would be reduced below 0 hit points, he may spend 2 ferocity to gain 2 x class level temporary hit points for one minute... and no, they cannot be maintained indefinitely... uncheesable. Kudos!

16th level allows the archetype to take 10 in all hunt/nature associated skills while he has at least one ferocity and also receives ferocity powered quarry. 17th level allows both lurking predator and companion to use Stealth sans cover or concealment, replacing one with nature. Again, nice FCO included.

Up next would be some support for the amazing occultist class—the vault raider. This guy replaces Diplomacy with Escape Artist and Stealth and begins play with 1 implement and the Delving implement: these usually are bracers, keychains, padlocks, pistons, watches, etc. As a resonant power, the implement provides a +1 bonus to Reflex saves and initiative per 2 mental focus invested, with a maximum of 1 + 1 per 3 class levels. Once the bonus reaches +4, Evasion is gained and at +6, you're in for Improved Evasion. The base focus power would allow for the expenditure of 1 mental focus as a free action to deal +1d6 damage versus flat-footed or Dexterity-denied targets, increasing by +1d6 for every two levels after the first and otherwise works pretty much like sneak attack. The focus powers provided allow for the expenditure of 1 mental focus for the gaining of the vault raider's class level as a bonus to Stealth...but as a nice twist, starting at 4th level, this also deceives scent and at 7th level, allows the character to bypass Tremorsense and vibration-based Blindsense...VERY cool!

Alternatively, the occultist may lay a supernatural version of a ranger trap as a full-round action. Also for one point of mental focus, he may inflict or heal 1d8 +1 per two caster levels to a construct, object or the like, bypassing even magic immunity. As a standard action and also for 1 point of mental focus, he may grant himself +1/2 class level to

Disable Device and Perception and also disarm magical traps; starting at 8th level, he may even take 10 with these skills. The effect, FYI, lasts for class level minutes. For 2 points of mental focus he, may scry and receive an impression of the 40 ft.-radius, which increases by 20 ft. at 11th and 15th level...and NOW you know how to justify handing your PCs that dungeon map AND make them feel good about it! The spell selection, just FYI, is nice and similarly thematically fitting.

At 5th level, vault raiders may expend 1 point of mental focus to receive the benefits of *detect secret doors* as an extraordinary ability, with the immediate benefits of 2 rounds of Concentration and a duration of 1 round per class level. Additionally, he may determine whether an object is locked or unlocked simply by looking at it...which can prove very handy in that long corridor with 100 fake doors and a big Indy boulder rolling your way...Alas, he does lose Aura Sight for this. 8th level nets the Quick Disable and Trap Spotter rogue talents, 12th level Cunning Trigger and Quick Trapsmith and 16th Defensive Roll and Frugal Trapsmith, replacing Magic Circles and Outside Contact...and, as a whole this archetype is amazing! Oh, and yep, FCO included.

The brigand is the next archetype, intended for the unchained rogue class. The archetype receives 6 + Intelligence skills and receives a modified proficiency list: Simple weapons, greatclubs, light hammers, longswords, shortswords, and warhammers, as well as light and medium armors. At 1st level, they replace finesse training with basically 5 ft. movement added after detracting the medium armor's movement penalty. Additionally, either a Strength- or Dexterity-based skill checks ignore armor check penalty, with 3rd level, 7th, 9th, 11th and 19th unlocking another skill to ignore ACP. 2nd level locks the brigand into Strong Impression and also adds free Intimidate to foes subjected to sneak attack instead of evasion. 4th level adds + class level damage to sneak attack versus foes suffering from any of the fear-based conditions (yep, including cowering). 8th level nets +2 to attacks that qualify for sneak attack, +3 with two-handed weapons. Master strike is modified to have the DC modified by Strength rather than Dexterity. The archetype does pay for the increased sneak prowess with uncanny dodge and its improved brother. Once again, an FCO is provided. Decent one, but my least favorite in the book so far.

The torrent duelist fighter gets a modified class skill list and gains Combat Expertise at 1st level, increasing the AC by +1 dodge bonus when using it, increasing this by a further +1 at 4th level and



every 4 levels after that. If he already has it, he may choose another feat and the archetype is treated as Intelligence 13 for feats based on Combat Expertise. Instead of 1st level's bonus feat, he receives Weapon Finesse with all weapons, but if wearing an armor, he receives the armor's arcane spell failure chance as a miss chance—now that is a creative use of mechanics! Love it! 3rd level decreases voluntarily placed penalties to attack (such as through Combat Expertise et al.) by 1, with 7th level and every 4 thereafter decreasing it by a further 1. Instead of Weapon Training, he may choose Advanced Weapon Training in lieu of any bonus feat starting at 5th level and 9th level nets Advanced Weapon Training instead of another group. 7th level nets Uncanny Dodge and a choice: One-handed torrent duelists calculate their damage as though wielding a two-handed weapon; two-handed duelists further decrease the penalty reduction mentioned before. TWF torrent duelists may treat one-handed weapons as light. This replaces Armor Training II and 11th level nets evasion. 15th level unlocks the option to accept -2 to attack to combine a move action with a full attack action as a full-round action. 19th level nets Stalwart and the archetype nets a nice FCO. Archetypes like this are hard...and it remains mathematically solid...kudos.

The eye collector slayer only has proficiency with light armor and selects a number of exotic slashing/piercing weapons equal to Intelligence mod at first level, gaining proficiency in them. 2nd level allows the option to perform Rend Brow attacks, which inflict 1/2 class level bleed as well as the dazzled condition, with a save to negate. This can be done class level times per day, replacing 2nd level's slayer talent. 8th level nets an upgrade that may blind foes. At 10th level, the eye collector may remove eyes from corpses and if the enemy has rolled a natural 1 on the save versus Rend Brow, he similarly loses his eyes. Delightful. Putting the eyes against his face, the eye collector gains a significant bonus to impersonate the adversary. The archetype gets 3 advanced slayer talents. One lets her Disguise at -10 instead of saving versus a mind-affecting effect. The next combines main hand and off-hand attack as a standard action or as part of a charge and the third nets a bonus to Heal and increased DCs as well as eye-stealing synergy with Assassinate. Damn cool and horrific and yep, FCO's part of the deal.

The shawled viper swashbuckler receives Stealth as a class skill and begins play with Poison Use instead of Derring-do. The archetype also has a modified deed list: At 3rd level, while she has at least one panache, she can use a poisoned light or

one-handed piercing weapon to increase the save DC and spend a panache to increase the damage dealt. Targeted Strike lets the archetype target arteries/veins, giving immediate onset of poisons and increasing the range increments. 16th level lets them Perform /dance) versus CMD to use Targeted Strike or Perfect Thrust as part of a charge.

Instead of Charmed Life, the archetype receives Deadly Arts, which include poison application as part of panache spending, Master Alchemist at 5th level using Charisma instead of Intelligence, Deadly Cocktail at 10th level and at 14th level, use Craft (alchemy) to create poisons in one round, including unstable toxins that quickly deteriorate, but cost less. 18th level provides immunity to curses, poisons and diseases as well as take 20 for poison creation. Nice, more flexible take on the swashbuckler, supplemented with a neat FCO.

The final archetype herein would be the Studied Theosophist, a cleric archetype. This fellow uses Intelligence rather than Wisdom as governing attribute for all class features, extending to spells etc. 1st level nets all Knowledge skills as class skills and instead of domains, he may 1/day while preparing spells select a domain associated with the deity and choose it, gaining its benefits until another domain is chosen. Also at 1st level, he receives a metaphysic pool equal to 1/2 class level (min 1) + Intelligence mod. These points may be used in a variety of ways: He may spend any number of points to cast a domain spell of a level equal to or less than the number of points expended. I assume that to only work for the domain chosen, as per the example, but I am not sure- this represents pretty much the one instance where the rules are not mega-precise. Secondly, any number may be expended to spontaneously cast a cleric spell of equal or lower level than the points spent. Thirdly, the theosophist may lose a prepared spell and spend an amount of metaphysic points equal to the spell level to spontaneously cast any cleric spell of that level. All of these abilities do follow spontaneous spellcasting rules and if this looks powerful, it's because it is...however, the archetype loses spontaneous casting and channel energy. And yes, once again, an FCO's provided.

## Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are excellent on both a formal and rules-language levels; apart from one nitpick, no complaints. Layout adheres to Forest Guardian Press' two-column standard and is pretty neat, with numerous of the evocative and well-made paper-cut-style artwork providing a unique sense of identity on a visual level. As a minor complaint, the ends of archetypes tend to leave a bit

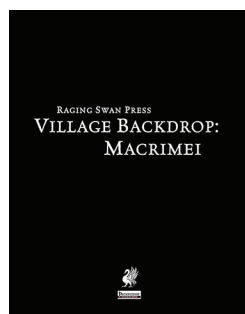


of blank space on the pages. The PDF comes fully bookmarked for your convenience and also with a second, more printer-friendly version—kudos for going the extra-mile here.

The author has penned this under the nom de plume of “Secret Wizard”—and frankly, dear lady or gentleman out there, let me thank you: I read A LOT of uninspired, bland archetypes. This is the anathema to that. Each and every single one of these archetypes is meticulously balanced; additionally, and more importantly perhaps, in spite of some hybrid-y themes, each of the archetypes herein features not one but multiple unique tricks that set it apart and make it more than the sum...wait, scratch that. This is not the “Let’s cobble stuff together” school of design, this is “Blend two concepts and make them UNIQUE.” This PDF manages to actually make me excited about some classes I am not the biggest fan of. Oh, and it does so with rock solid rules operations I HAVE NEVER SEEN BEFORE. It’s actually creative as well!

In short: This is one massive all killer, no filler file for an amazing price point. Well worth 5 stars + seal of approval, given sans the slightest bit of hesitation. Get this gem!

**Endzeitgeist out.**



## **Village Backdrop: Macrimei**

**Publisher:** Raging Swan Press

**Reviewer:** Endzeitgeist

**Stars:** 5 stars out of 5

This installment of RSP’s Village Backdrop-series is 11 pages long: 1 page front cover, 2 pages of advertisement, 1 page editorial/ToC, 1 page SRD and 1 page back cover,

leaving us with 5 pages of content. So let’s take a look at the settlement!

Know then, young prince, that in the days of yore, when Atlantis had first sunken into the seas, there was a place called Macrimei, situated amid windswept hills in colder climes, where ruins howl of ages long past, its populace descendants of a once glorious culture, now reduced to a state that is but a shade of their former glory; a place where once towers of ivory pierced the sky, everything looks as though a certain Cimmerian’s sandaled feet had cut a swath through the landscape. Into this desolation came the wizard Anazturex with his own private little army of henchmen, dubbed after the strange local deity “Soryan,” his Sons of Soryan. It’s been years under this small magocratic rule, and nowadays, everyone is barred from the red obelisk where Soryan’s Sons supposedly worshipped, as the wizard’s tower watches over a village born in ruins.

It is rumored in town, that one day a strange silvery child appeared and subsequently vanished... and the wizard’s tower has an odd tendency to disappear for weeks on end, only to suddenly reappear...but to what ends, no one knows. Now, I could spoil the truth about the wizard’s nature and the power of the artifact *orb of soryan* (which comes with full game-rules/information, just fyi) that is found in the red obelisk...but that would do the village injustice. The former village priest Kulway and Grul, brutal leader of the Sons of Soryan, get full statblocks herein and the sample events provided similarly add to the book...but can the PCs unearth the truth of Macrimei? Oh, and in case you are not too keen on the reveal of the nature of the wizard, an alternative is provided as a designer’s suggestion... kudos for going the extra mile!

## **Conclusion:**

Editing and formatting are top-notch; I didn’t notice any glitches. Layout adheres to RSP’s smooth, printer-friendly two-column standard and the PDF comes with full bookmarks as well as a gorgeous map, of which you can, as always, download high-res jpegs if you join RSP’s Patreon. The PDF comes in two versions, with one being optimized for screen-use and one to be printed out.

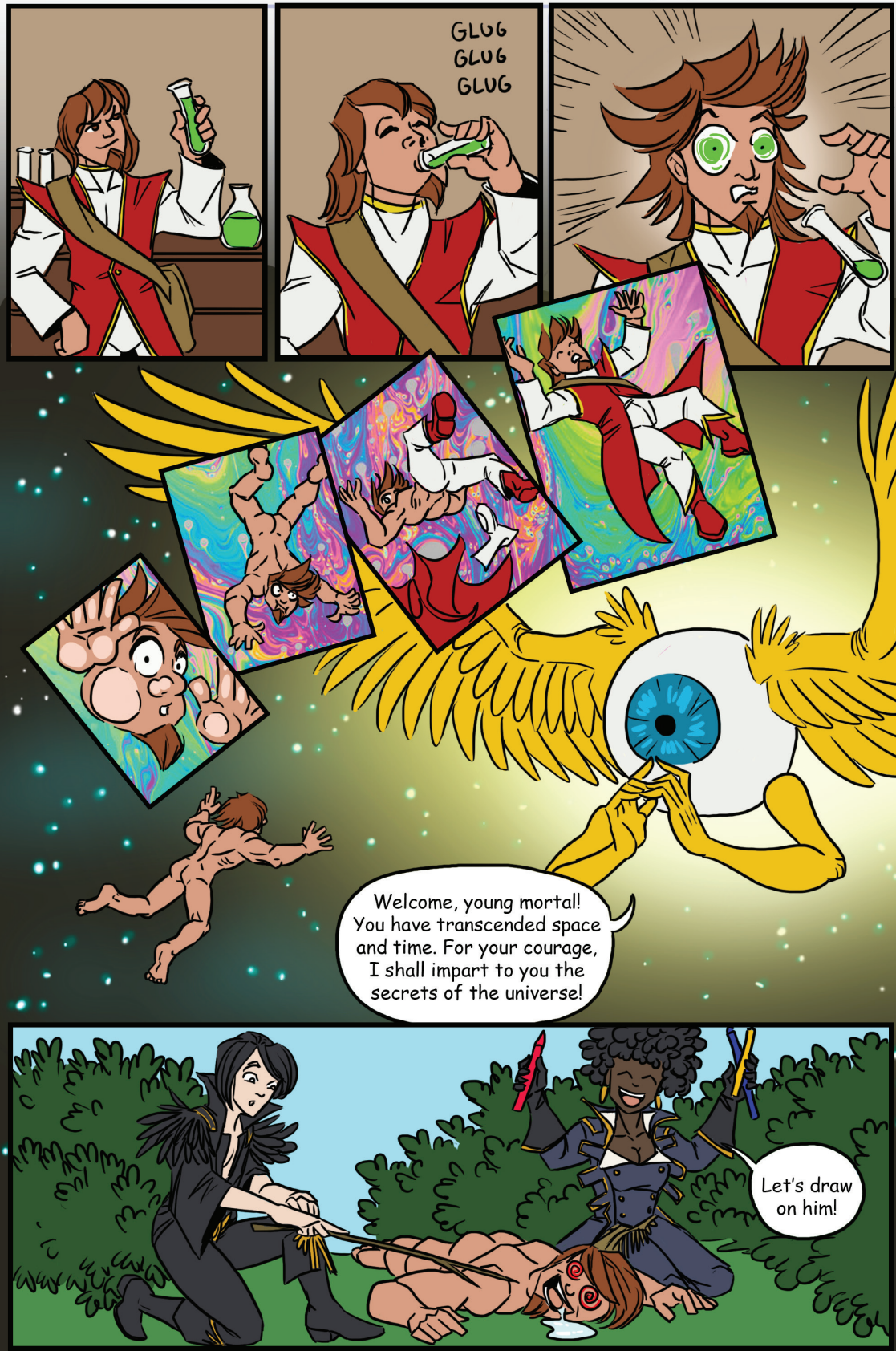
In case my ample allusions to the genre-classics were not ample clue: this village is a perfect bow to the tropes of Swords & Sorcery, a village dripping flavor and atmosphere out of every pore. Just as useful in a post-apocalyptic scenario, Macrimei is a fantastic village that manages to evoke the primal sense of the ancient, of decay and ages long past with panache and prose so concise and dense you feel like you could cut it. While it could just as well be tinted through the shades of high fantasy, unlike most sojourns of PFRPG into the genre, I’d strongly advise against that, for this village backdrop GETS what makes Sword & Sorcery so amazing—it’s neither flowery prose, nor the themes...it’s the room for growth, for question-marks, the precarious balance of blanks and filled-in information, the tone.

This is a place through which Red Sonja, Kull or Conan could have ridden—so saddle up, adventurers and get a taste of the taste of iron and spice, of dust and lotus and check out this village. If you even remotely like the genre, you will love this village—which also doubles as proof that John Bennett not only excels at writing horror... My final verdict will clock in at 5 stars + seal of approval for one of the strongest entries in the whole series.

**Endzeitgeist out.**



THE PATH LESS TRAVELED #31: Adventures in Alchemy By Jacob E Blackmon





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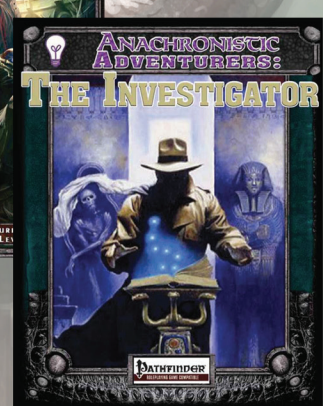
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