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Paths Less Traveled

PUBLISHER Rite Publishing LLC EditOR Dave Paul LAYOU† Lj Stephens COVER AR†i8† Daniel Yang PROOFREADER Jaren Rencher

PATHWAY8 #63

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Editorial

by Dave Paul, Illustration by 06ilker

"I don't do this for the money, I do it for the love of the game."

I've heard this from dozens of people in the gaming industry and while some of them certainly would like to make a lot more money doing what it is that they love, I assume that it's true that they'll continue to do it anyway.

This very hobby, that you're reading about, and that you're participating in by reading this, inspires devotion from many of its most creative members. If you talk to enough of the writers, editors, designers and developers in the industry, you'll find that many of them, including many of those highly admired by the others, will point out that one of the things that keeps them going is their own love of the game, but also the admiration they have of others in the industry and the admiration that others have expressed to them.

Honestly, this has been true for me as well. I have been working in the RPG field for more than a decade now, and I've been playing RPGs for nearly 40 years. I play the game in part because I love it; it fulfills me in ways that other things do not, and it serves for me as an artistic and creative outlet that I just can't tap into in other ways. I also play the game because it's an opportunity for me to spend time

with friends, or, at a large event like a convention, it allows me to spend time with people I don't know but who share similar passions. I continue to work in the field because I enjoy it. I get to engage myself and others in ways that are deeply satisfying.

I hope and trust that you also love the game and that playing and participating in it brings you happiness and satisfaction.

In this issue we explore a handful of different ways in which love manifests in the game. There are all kinds of ways this can work itself out, from the characters being hired to rescue a loved one of an NPC to relationships between characters in the party, to relationships between the players. Some of the ways this can work are more appropriate, some less, for different groups of players. In a weird twist of fate, my partner and I got to know each other, way back in the spring of 1988, over a few gaming sessions, among other things. My kids grew up at the gaming table (sometimes literally, crawling or sitting on the gaming table as babies). It's easy to focus on lust or romance when talking about love and RPGs, but there's far, far more to it than that. We look into some of these here in this issue.

Happy gaming.



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by Owen K.C. Stephens, Illustration by Daniel Yang

An avatar of love is a supernatural creature that has, through the power of true love, been transformed into a creature that exists to spread love, both in specific expressions and as a general concept, and protect her beloved or beloveds. Normally some rare, precious moment of true love alters the supernatural nature of a creature that becomes an avatar of love, which may be love at first sight, finding a soulmate, or being moved by the art or actions of another creature. Indeed, any Perform check that hits a DC of 75 or higher has a 1% chance of turning any dragon or outsider exposed to it into an avatar of love, though each such creature checks for this only once over the course of their entire existence.

Creating a Funerary Golem Creature

"Avatar of love" is a template that can be added to any dragon or outsider. If the base creature had the evil subtype, it is removed. The avatar gains the good subtype.

Alignment: Alignment changes to any good. While it is true evil and neutral creatures can experience some degree of love, the pure, selfless, true love of an avatar of love cannot exist in a creature without turning that creature into a force for good.

CR: +2

HP: An avatar of love gains bonus hit points equal to double the base creature's original CR.

Offensive Abilities: All of an avatar of love's attacks gain a +2 bonus to attack rolls and a +5 bonus to damage. Her CMB and CMD increase by 3. The save DCs of all her spells and special abilities increase by 2.

Defensive Abilities: The avatar of love gains a +2 untyped bonus to all AC (including flat-footed and touch). If the avatar of love's base creature had DR or SR, its value increases by 2. If it had energy resistances, they all increase by 10. If it had a resistance of 30, that becomes an immunity.

Saving Throws: An avatar of love gains a +2 morale bonus to all saving throws.

Special Abilities

An avatar of love retains all special abilities of the base creature, though the adamant alignment ability may alter how some of her previous abilities work. She also gains the following additional abilities:

Adamant Alignment: The alignment of an avatar of love is an integral part of what she is. If any force, ability, spell, or effect alters the avatar of love's alignment into a non-good alignment, she becomes a good alignment 1 round later. Only by somehow removing this template is it ever possibly to alter an avatar of love's alignment to be non-good for more than 1 round.

If the avatar of love has spells or spell-like abilities that are not good fits for a good-aligned creature, they are swapped out for spells or spelllike abilities of the same general effectiveness when she becomes an avatar of love. Similarly, if she had DR/good, it becomes DR/evil.

Beloved (Ex): An avatar of love works to promote and protect love in all forms to the best of her ability, but she also has a number of specific beloved creatures she adores and protects above all others. Of course the love of such an avatar is not possessive or proscriptivethe avatar wishes only what is best for her beloveds, and thus will not imprison or coddle them to protect them, nor take any other action that would prevent her beloveds from leading full lives and developing into the best possible versions of themselves. Nor will she allow her love for a beloved cause her to aid them in evil endeavors. An avatar of love can have an evil creature as a beloved, but such a situation is an endless trial of disappointment and misery for the avatar, who believes with all her heart that an evil beloved CAN become a creature of good, but is not willing to suppress their free will to force such a transformation. Nor is she willing to allow them to commit evil acts if she can prevent them without harming the beloved.

Normally the first beloved of an avatar of love is the creature who inspired such love as to transform her into an avatar. She can choose to select an additional beloved to a maximum number equal to half her hit dice plus her Charisma bonus (though there is no requirement she do so). Once selected, a beloved remains a subject of special affection until it is beyond the avatar's reach for 100 years and a day (and death is only beyond the reach of some such avatars), or its alignment changes to become less-good and remains the new alignment for at least a year and a day.

The avatar of love gains the following feats as bonus feats, but can only use them with a beloved creature: Back to Back, Bodyguard, Covering Defense, and In Harm's Way. For the Back to Back feat, any beloved adjacent to the avatar of love is also considered to have this feat.

The Final Sacrifice (Sp): An avatar of love can sacrifice herself to save any of her beloveds. If the avatar has 17



HD or more, this acts as a *mass heal, miracle*, or *true resurrection* spell to undo any one negative effect, condition, or circumstance for one or more of the avatar's beloveds. If the avatar has fewer than 17 HD she can only use this effect as a *miracle*, with the level of spell she can duplicate in each category (cleric spells, and all other spells – see the *miracle* spell) reduced by 1 for every 2 HD she is below 17, to a minimum of 1st level spells. Whenever the avatar of love uses *miracle* for an effect or request not duplicated by a spell, the GM should have the effect be commiserate with the power of a cleric spell of the highest level the avatar can duplicate with *miracle*.

This spell-like ability is a swift action or reaction, and has no material cost regardless of how it is used. However, the final sacrifice is FINAL. Once an avatar of love invokes this power, she is transformed into pure supernatural love and dispersed across the universe. Nothing, not even the direct intervention of a deity, can restore, recreate, duplicate, or communicate with her. This is the power of pure love, and even the gods cannot change that.

This power is often torturous. Each avatar who sees her beloved suffer or struggle knows in her heart that she could end their suffering in an instant. However, to do so is to remove all further assistance the avatar can ever offer anyone, forever.

Harmony of Love (Su): Being in the presence of her beloveds drives the avatar of love to achieve a level of excellence greater than she can reach alone. An avatar of love can act as though all her beloveds are constantly using the bardic performance class feature to inspire courage, with a bard level equal to the beloveds' hit dice. She can benefit from a total

7



number of rounds of the harmony of love equal to her HD each day. As long as she has a beloved in range, she may choose to use a round of this ability as a free action at the beginning of her turn.

Milena

Marilith Demon Avatar of Love

This snake-bodied fiend has a six-armed woman's torso, pointed ears, and glittering, otherworldly eyes.

Milena CR 19

XP 204,800

CG Large outsider (chaotic, demon, extraplanar, good) Init +4; Senses darkvision 60 ft., true seeing; Perception +31

Aura holy aura (DC 27)

DEFENSE

AC 36, touch 19, flat-footed 32 (+4 deflection, +4 Dex, +15 natural,+2 template, +2 shield, -1 size) hp 298 (16d10+176+34)

Fort +27, Ref +20, Will +15

DR 12/cold iron and evil; **Immune** electricity and poison; **Resist** acid 20, cold 20, fire 20; SR 30

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft.

Melee +1 longsword +26/+21/+16/+11 (2d6+13/17–20), 5 +1 longswords +26 (2d6+9/17–20), tail slap +19 (2d6+8 plus grab)

or 5 slams +24 (1d8+12), tail slap +19 (2d6+8 plus grab) Space 10 ft.; Reach 10 ft.

Special Attacks constrict (tail slap, 2d6+15 plus crushing coils), infuse weapon, multiweapon mastery

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 16th)

Constant—*true seeing, holy aura* (DC 27)

At will—greater teleport (self plus 50 lbs. of objects only), project image (DC 26), telekinesis (DC 24)

3/day-blade barrier (DC 25), fly

1/day—*summon* (level 5, 1 brijidine azata 20%, 1 ghaele azata at 40%, or 1d4 raelis azata at 65%)

STATISTICS

Str 25, Dex 19, Con 32, Int 18, Wis 18, Cha 25 Base Atk +16; CMB +27 (+28 grapple); CMD 45

(can't be tripped)

Feats Bleeding Critical, Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Critical Focus, Improved Critical (longsword), Improved Disarm, Power Attack, Weapon Focus (longsword); **Bonus Beloved** Feats Back to Back, Bodyguard, Covering Defense, In Harm's Way

Skills Acrobatics +23, Bluff +26, Diplomacy +26, Fly +18, Intimidate +26, Knowledge (engineering) +20, Perception +31, Sense Motive +23, Stealth +19, Use

Magic Device +26; Racial Modifiers +8 Perception Languages Abyssal, Celestial, Draconic; telepathy 100 ft.

ECOLOGY

Environment any

Organization unique

Treasure double (5 mwk longswords, mwk large steel shield, other treasure)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Adamant Alignment See above

Beloved See above

Crushing Coils (Ex) A creature that takes damage from a marilith's constrict attack must succeed on a DC 25 Fortitude save or lose consciousness for 1d8 rounds. The save DC is Strength-based.

Infuse Weapon (Su) Any weapon a marilith wields gains a +1 enhancement bonus to attack and damage, and strikes as if it were a chaotic and evil cold iron weapon (in addition to retaining the qualities of its actual composition).

The Final Sacrifice See above

Harmony of Love See above

Multiweapon Mastery (Ex) Milena never takes penalties to her attack roll when fighting with multiple weapons.

ilena was the general for the Queen of Graves, **IVI** a rising demon queen who sought to achieve true godhood. A century ago on a blasted battlefield around a gate that gave planar beings access to the Material Plane, Milena used an enslaved efreeti to gain a *wish*, which she used to augment the power of her true sight. She did so at the split moment that a young aasimar farmer and a tiefling merchant of the Material village at the other end of the gate encountered each other for the first time, and fell instantly in love as they were true soulmates. With her over-boosted true sight, Milena was exposed to the total truth of love and its potential. She realized her existence to date had not only destroyed love, it had never brought her happiness. She came to love the two commoners with a deep totality, and desire to protect and guide them for all their existence, unconsciously making them her first beloveds.

Then she realized they were about to be killed.

Milena saved her beloveds, and has since fought valiantly to protect love and lovers, especially those at special risk, or who are misunderstood or mistreated because their backgrounds or heritages don't match social norms, or they dare to love those whom their cultures feel are undeserving of love.

Milena is 8 feet tall in a common posture and measures 20 feet from head to tail tip. She weighs 4,000 pounds.



Captains Joshua Root Jacqueline Shanks

A TREE THAT RIVALS MOUNTAINS! FEATURES: HISTORY AND ECOLOGY OF THE TREE NEW RACE OF BOTANICALLY AUGMENTED TRIBAL WOMEN

Letters

aming

World Tree

Kim Frandsen Ken Pawlik Tina Porter



10 Iich Phylacteries

By Creighton Broadhurst

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Liches are among the most powerful undead and are dangerous foes for virtually any adventurer. As well as being puissant spellcasters, liches are virtually immortal; they cannot be destroyed until their phylactery is also destroyed. Thus, a lich's phylactery is a tremendously important object both for the lich itself and the adventurers seeking to defeat it. However, a lich's phylactery is rarely described. The default phylactery is a small metal box filled with runecovers scraps of parchment, although—obviously other examples exist. No matter, in whatever form it takes, the phylactery is tremendously difficult to destroy. (And obviously such important items would be heavily guarded or well hidden—they might even be enchanted so they don't radiate as magic.)

Use the table below to generate the details of a lich's phylactery.

- 1. This hinged, plain, iron amulet opens to reveal a small, seemingly empty recess, perhaps once used to hold a small picture of a loved one. The recess is actually a very small inter-dimensional space which can only be accessed by speaking the lich's name. This space contains the lich's research it used for its transformation.
- 2. This seemingly rusted iron comb was once apparently inlaid with several small gems, but these have long since fallen from their fixings. The comb itself lies—hidden in plain sight amid a pile of mouldering and rusty equipment taken from corpses of the lich's enemies.
- 3. A seemingly innocuous platinum coin lies among a hoard of similar coins hidden away in a dusty vault. The coin is one of a handful of very old coins intermixed among more recently designs. Most of its features have been worn away seemingly through use and age.
- 4. A lump of magical hardened platinum lies at the centre of a large stone boulder created by *stone shape*. The boulder is so thick, *detect magic* and the like do not detect the phylactery's magic, although a perceptive PC may notice the boulder was formed by magic (and wonder why).
- 5. This lich painstakingly etched the secrets of lichdom onto the teeth of a great golden wyrm it slew centuries ago as part of its transformation. It keeps the wyrm's skeletal remains behind a cunning hidden secret door. The skull is hidden amid a great bone pile comprising the remains of all those who have attacked the lich in its lair.

- 6. This phylactery takes the form of an over-sized amulet. It hangs from the mouldering collar worn by a huge skeletal dog lying in state in its own sarcophagus hidden in a secret recess in the floor.
- 7. This lich used the very first dagger it ever owned as the vehicle for its transformation. It etched the secrets of lichdom onto very thin sheets of gold which were then wrapped around the weapon's blade. The phylactery was then buried deep at the bottom of a pool somewhere in the lich's lair.
- 8. An animal lover in life, this lich decided to use the animate bones of its first animal companion—or perhaps a beloved pet—as its phylactery. The bones were drenched in molten adamantine before being animated (rendering them virtually indestructible).
- 9. Diamond—one of the hardest substances known to man—makes an excellent phylactery. This lich spent years hunting down a diamond as big as a man's fist. Magically enchanted and inscribed with various special command words, the value of the thing is virtually incalculable... unless it is destroyed, in which case the magic lurking within its form causes the various pieces to evaporate like ice in the midday sun.
- 10. Vastly powerful, this spellcaster defeated a powerful paladin during its quest for immortality. The paladin bore a holy sword that was shattered during the confrontation. The lich used the hilt of the once powerful weapon as it phylactery, revelling in the irony of transforming such a powerful good-aligned weapon into an object powering its unholy life. To make matters worse, the hilt is very distinctive-carved from the bone of a balor and inscribed with the symbols of various good-aligned deities. The PCs may recognise it as the shards of a legendary, lost weapon. The lich has kept the shattered piece of the blade and in extremis may offer up the various shard in exchange for its "life" (gambling the PCs will either hesitate to destroy such a weapon or-more likely-not notice the lich's sinister modifications to the hilt).

GM's Miscellany: Dungeon Dressing

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10 Strange Things to See Behind a Seedy Tavern's Bar

By Creighton Broadhurst

Most adventuring parties spend a lot of time in bars, pubs, inns and taverns. Often such places are a party's home away from home. Occasionally, the party will spot one or more strange items behind the bar. Often, such items have a history and reason for being there. They could have great significance to the tavern's owner or to one or more of its regular patrons. Alternatively, they could serve no purpose but decoration.soulmate

Use the table below to determine what strange items the party spots behind the bar.soulmate

- An oversized dagger—more the size of a short sword—with a wickedly serrated blade hangs behind the bar. The tip of the weapon is missing. The weapon once belonged to a hill giant and is poorly made; a local claimed to have slain the giant and swapped the dagger for a month of free drinking.
- 2. A dusty glass bottle stands on a pedestal in a niche high up behind the bar. Cobwebs cover the bottle and the label is faded and unreadable. Local lore has it that as long as the bottle remains full, good fortune will befall the tavern and its owner.
- 3. A battered hat of strange design and appearance rests on one of the ale barrels behind the bar. The hat has a red brim and a covering of yellow felt. A ragged hole—where the wearer's forehead would be—pierces the fabric.
- 4. A cage stands on the counter behind the bar. A single, obviously malnourished and agitated, stirge lurks in the cage. Anyone who tries to leave without paying, or who molests one of the servers, is forced to thrust a hand through the bars to feed the creature. Shockingly, there is little violence and few disturbances in this tavern.
- 5. An array of battered and hacked shields decorate the back wall of the bar. They hang from wooden pegs and sometimes the staff rearrange them (for no apparent reason). A few of the shields are plain wooden affairs, but most bear heraldic devices. Present are the symbols of several nearby humanoid tribes along with the devices of five adventuring bands (two of which were wiped out during their adventures).

- 6. A collection of fine and delicate goblets and wine glasses cluster thickly upon a narrow shelf lined with faded yellow cloth. The innkeeper never lets anyone use the glasses—saying they are for "quality" customers only. What he means by this is anyone's guess. When the inn is quiet he often takes the various glasses down and polishes them carefully.
- 7. A yellowing giant's skull hangs from the ceiling over the bar. Burning candles set in the eye sockets give the whole thing an eerie appearance.
- Copper coins fill a metal bucket behind the bar. Customers are encouraged to throw their spare coppers into the bucket. At the end of the month, the owner distributes the coins to his staff (or perhaps local needy children). He may—or may not—be skimming some off the top for himself.
- 9. A portrait of the current king or other local ruler stares down haughtily over the bar. The barkeep is particularly patriotic and does not brook any unkind words about the portrait's subject. People uttering such are refused service.
- 10. A tapestry hangs down behind the bar completely obscuring the wall. The tapestry is one of several the tavern possesses and every now and then the barkeep replaces it with another. Some of the tapestries are worn and faded while others are almost brand new. The owner will pay good gold for new additions to his collection. (Unbeknownst to the customers—and most of the staff—the tapestry covers several secret viewports in the wall the owner uses to spy on his customers; each new tapestry has small holes cut in it over these holes.)

GM's Miscellany: Dungeon Dressing

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DATHFINDER

By Justin Andrew Mason

Plains Spell Showcase

By Dave Paul, Illustration by Fadlyromdhani

There are many different ways for love to manifest including love of community. In several of my spellbooks in the 101 series there are spells like *plains clan* (you'll find *kin on the moor* in 101 *Swamp Spells* and *friend of the forest* in 101 *Forest Spells*). These spells are a bit like rituals, a bit like communal spells, and a bit like a few other things. Several individuals, including several different caster types, can help one another and can be more powerful together. In *plains clan* in particular, I wanted to address what it can mean to be a community. The spell is designed to be cast on several members of a community at once, but can be added later with future castings. The spell also has a long casting time, reflecting in part the realities of things such as outdoor activities and festivals that

Plains Clan

School: Abjuration; **Level:** Adept 4, Cleric/Oracle 4, Druid 4, Ranger 3, Shaman 4

Casting Time: 10 minutes

Components: V, S, M/DF (possessions of clan; see text)

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

Targets: Up to 2 creatures/level, no two of which can be more than 60 feet apart

Duration: 1 year + 1 week/level (D)

Saving Throw: Will negates (harmless); Spell Resistance: Yes (harmless)

asting *plains clan* is normally done as part of a community ritual attended by nearly everyone in the group. For extremely large populations, these rituals will often include multiple casters casting the spell at roughly the same time (though selecting different targets). The spell fails if cast in a region other than plains terrain and no one may be selected as a target who is not in plains terrain. Each person selected as a target delivers some small item (which could be a possession, a lock of hair, or just about anything, so long as it is freely given) into the caster's space at some time during the casting. People can designate proxies to deliver items for them, for example, a mother might place several items into the caster's space for herself and her children. Those who cannot designate proxies (the very young, the infirm, the unconscious, animals considered to be part of the community, etc.) can have proxies assigned to them by elders or other leaders in the community.

If more than one casting of *plains clan* occurs and their casting times overlap by at least 1 minute, then everyone who is affected by one casting is considered to have been affected by the other bring people together. Another feature is that the recipients willingly offer small tokens that serve as a kind of surrogate for themselves and which are merged together (magically, symbolically) as they are consumed in the casting. All of this binds the recipients together.

In people's lives, there are all kinds of community rituals that bring people together, and I wanted to show how this can work within a spell. In order for this to have value to players and GMs, I wanted this spell to serve as a means for empowering other spells and for making communities stronger. To get more of a glimpse of that, you'll have to see how this spell pairs with others. I've given you a sense of that here by including the spell *converse with clan companions*.

appropriately overlapping castings. (If several such castings occur, and some of them do not have overlapping casting times, then the targets of those groups are not considered to have been so affected.) Everyone affected by one or more simultaneous or appropriately overlapping castings of *plains clan* are thereafter connected to one another in profound ways. Each recipient of this spell (or one of the simultaneously or appropriately overlapping cast spells) is thereafter recognized as a clan companion.

Future castings of *plains clan* can add new individuals as clan companions, and they will be added to all the clan companion groups to which the caster belongs (which could be significantly many). In large communities, the casters will often not include themselves as targets of their own spells, inviting other casters to target them, fostering trust within the community. Small, sometimes isolationist or xenophobic groups will often intentionally create insular groups of clan companions and intentionally not include other people.

Each clan companion who is also a spellcaster is treated as one level higher for the purposes of determining the effects of spells targeting other clan companions (damage, healing, save DCs, etc.); if any spell cast is already being cast at the highest effect possible for that spell (i.e. *cure moderate wounds* is being cast to cure 2d8+10 points), then add +1 for each level of the caster to the result, not to exceed the spell's original maximum (*cure moderate wounds* would still cap at 26 hp). Whether the caster casts *fireball* or *protection from* energy, if a clan companion is the target or within the area of effect, that *fireball* or *protection from energy* is treated as though it were cast by a caster 1 level higher than is actually the case.

An individual clan companion (or group of individual clan companions) targeted by *dispel magic* or a similar spell or effect will lose the benefits of *plains clan* if the dispel check (or similar effect) is successful. That person will not be a clan companion for purposes of this and similar spells until another casting reestablishes that person as a clan companion.

A caster may dismiss the effect on any target of its own casting (which does not affect the other targets of its casting). This has the effect of removing that target as a clan companion from all the appropriately overlapping castings as well. This is sometimes done to free an individual from the group for various reasons (perhaps spiritual or otherwise), and it is sometimes done as a form of punishment. In either case, a future casting of *plains clan* reestablishes the connections and is often cause for celebration.

In addition, several spells which are only available to clan companions or which have additional effects when targeting clan companions, become available: *converse with clan companions, recognize clan companion,* and *we change together*.

The *plains clan* spell and others like it found in *101 Swamp Spells* and elsewhere are designed to give GMs and players opportunities to expand the way other spells are used and to help shape narratives for play. GMs are encouraged to use such spells to build and maintain interesting NPCs and communities with which the PCs may interact.

Converse with Clan Companions

School: Evocation; Level: Bard 3, Cleric/Oracle 4, Druid 4, Shaman 4, Sorcerer/Wizard 4, Witch 4 Casting Time: 1 standard action Components: V, S Range: See text Targets: One clan companion (as determined by *plains clan*)/level; see text Duration: 10 minutes Saving Throw: None; Spell Resistance: No

A t the outset of the spell, the caster identifies the clan companions to be targeted by the spell; each individual clan companion may then elect or deny to participate. If a subject is on a plane other than the plane from which the caster has cast *converse with clan companions*, there is a 10% chance that the initial contact was prevented (in such a case, the intended recipient is never aware of the attempt, though the caster is aware that the recipient was not contacted because of an interruption between planes—the specifics, however, are unknown).

For the duration of the spell, all of those who elected to participate may converse as though they were all participating in a normal conversation in the same room. Anyone participating in the conversation who changes planes (including using any form of teleportation or dimensional travel) before the spell ends interrupts her own connection to the others and no longer remains part of the conversation.



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Heart Thief

By BJ Hensley

Introduction

The Day of Love approaches and the city of Louve is abuzz with excitement in anticipation of the Queen's annual ball. She hosts this event each year to honor her love of the King, and the love of the citizens for their friends, family, and partners. Many a resident has found their true love at the Queen's ball and most look upon it fondly. But this year, something has changed. The citizens of Louve seem quiet, withdrawn, and less inclined to celebrate. They're going through the motions of preparation, but those who look closely can see a pall over their actions. Something is amiss...

This mini adventure/drop in location is a fun Valentine's jaunt created for 4-6 players of 1st-2nd level.

Summary

Love can make people do crazy things, but in the city of Louve, love has gotten downright out of hand. Of late, the King began to fear that his brother, Aaron wished to usurp the throne, and has, therefore banished him from the Kingdom. The Knave of Heart's love for Aaron has caused him to plot behind the scenes for retribution, and the townspeople are caught in the crossfire.

The Knave of Hearts — Court Jester to the King and Queen of Louve—has a broken heart. His most beloved companion has been taken from him and he's wreaking havoc on the court to make the King as miserable as he is. Using his alchemical skills, the normally fun-loving bard has crafted a tincture from the famed Louve flower that makes the townsfolk more susceptible to his bardic charms. He's been using this tincture to lure the loved ones of others to the Queen's court and hold them there by convincing them their only love is for Queen and country, creating many broken homes and a court that is swiftly turning against the ruling family. The Queen herself has become so enamored with her court and her "beloved" Jester she no longer has time for the King.

The PCs must aid the townsfolk by breaking the spell on the Queen's court. To do that they need to mend the Jester's broken heart, or convince the loved ones they are bespelled.

Getting the PCs Involved

Here are a few options the GM can use to get the PCs involved:

Louve Flowers: The PCs are approached by a young noble in the neighboring Kingdom. He wishes to purchase a bouquet of rare Louve flowers for his sweetheart but is hesitant to go and purchase them himself. He offers to give the party 50 gp if they retrieve the flowers rumored to mend arguments and refresh the heart. While the PCs aren't sure why he needs these flowers so desperately, he has an air of guilt about him.

Town Residents: The party could easily be from the Kingdom of Louve, in which case they may have noticed just how strange things have become recently, and that the residents of their beloved city seem miserable. Perhaps one of the PCs has a loved one that the Court Jester has recruited for the Queen's court.

The City of Louve

A cheerfully decorated city, nearly every street and building is bustling with activity, pink or white banners and spring flowers hang from every house, and even businesses are brightly decorated in the colors of love.

The city of Louve is the seat of a small Kingdom known for its pleasant climate and the fragrant bouquets of flowers and herbs available for sale. The Kingdom is most known for the Louve flower.

Louve Flowers: The Louve flower is a delicate pink bloom with heart-shaped leaves. Its exquisite beauty and intoxicating scent, along with more quasimagical properties, make those nearby feel safe and secure. Affected creatures suffer a -2 penalty to Will saves against mind-affecting spells, and are treated as one category more friendly when attempting a Diplomacy skill check to influence their reactions.

The Queen's Ball

As the PCs traverse the streets of Louve, they quickly discover from any number of residents that the city is preparing for a grand ball. This annual event is meant to be a celebration of love, and an exciting treat the residents look forward to each year. No invitations needed, all are welcome.

Encounters About Jown

Market Madness

A flower vendor stands wailing in the street while starring sadly at his stand of once beautiful bouquets. Scattered about the road are the remains of many pink flowers with heart shaped leaves, none of which look salvageable.

If the PCs inquired about where to find the famed Louve flower, this is a market stall to which they were directed. Or, if they do not ask, the PCs may simply stumble upon it as they go about their daily business. The man wailing in the streets, Ferin, is responsible for the sale of flowers from Louve farm and is beside himself with grief. If the PCs can calm him, and depending on time of day, he has the following answers for what might have occurred.

Morning: He doesn't know what happened, his stall was like this when he arrived and has clearly been vandalized! If the PCs are from out of town and stick around too long he begins to grow suspicious they are at fault and threatens to call the guard. A successful DC 15 Diplomacy check can change his mind.

Midday: Seth, the boy who helps work his stall most days hasn't shown up to work all week, Ferin was starving at lunch time and stepped away just long enough to grab a bite to eat. When he arrived back a short time later he found the stall like this, he believes he saw a small cloaked, individual running off as he approached.

Evening: Ferin heard a commotion a few stalls over and a cry for help. He investigated but found nothing awry. When he returned to his stall, it was destroyed and the flowers trampled. He's convinced the cry for help was a clever ploy meant to lure him from his booth.

Should the PCs ask if there's another place to acquire the famed bloom, he tells them sadly that these were all that were left. All the rest were sold, or sent to the palace for the Queen's ball.

Continuing this Encounter: It is possible, by asking the neighboring market stalls, to expand this encounter into a search for the culprit. Should the PCs choose to do so and GM wish to pursue it, the Jester charmed Seth away late last week and then paid him to destroy the Louve flowers "so everyone could be miserable with him." The teen is at Rosemary's Inn, no longer charmed, thoroughly confused at his own actions, and drowning his sorrows in drink.

Tavern Trouble

A lovely brown haired human stands behind the bar absently wiping a counter that clearly doesn't need the attention any longer.

If the PCs seek a place to rest or revitalize, they come across the Rosemary Inn, a local tavern and guesthouse frequented by the average traveler. The barkeep introduces herself as Rosemary and has her own tale of woe. Her live-in barmaid, and dearest friend, Dalila has been gone for weeks. The Court Jester came drinking one day and offered Dalila a place in the Queen's court. Dalila not only accepted, but she abandoned her two children here at the Inn. The children are out back in the inner court yard, should the PCs wish to question them.

Two adorable but gloomy children, rest on a bench in the inner court yard of the Inn. The children, a boy and girl, look to be around age six and seven, and are clearly suffering from the sadness that seems prevalent in Louve these days.

Should the PCs approach them they can discover the following information:

"Why are you sad?" Mommy's in the castle and won't come out.

"Have you tried talking to her?" Rosemary has tried a bunch of times but she doesn't listen!

"Have you seen her yourself?" No, they won't let children inside the Queen's court.

"How long has she been gone?" Forever, and we really, really miss her!

More than a handful of questions send the children into tears, rendering them useless for more conversation.

Forget Me Not

A young elf loiters outside the palace gate, a fresh bouquet of forget-me-nots clutched in his hand as he gazes longingly up at the castle walls. Around the bench to the right of the gate other flowers in different stages of wilt lie scattered about.

This sad young elf introduces himself as Turan and relays his story of woe to any who listen. He rants that the Queen has stolen his true love and turned her against him. He's exhausted and not entirely coherent. The guards, if questioned, say that he has been here every day for the better part of a week, hoping to get a glimpse of the woman he claims to be his true love. He caught her once, as she was headed to market to run an errand for the Queen, but to hear the guards tell it she seemed no more in love with him than anyone else. In fact, she was quite clear that the only love she felt was for Queen and country.

Gathering Information

City Residents: With a few Diplomacy checks the PCs can easily gather relevant information from the townspeople.

- DC 5 and above reveals the story of how the King sent his brother away for fear he would usurp the throne.
- DC 10 and above finds a delivery person who claims there seems to be something amiss with the Queen's court and her relationship with the King.
- DC 15 and above details the Jester's foul mood due to rumored heartbreak.



 DC 20 reveals that a palace worker was heard to say that the King didn't banish his brother at all but has him secretly locked away in the palace dungeons.

GMs Note: The above are example encounters that can be used to involve the PCs in the trouble about town. The end goal is to inspire the PCs to attend the ball, either in search of Louve flowers or to find the missing loved ones.

Saving the Day

Should the PCs attend the ball, they soon discover not all is as it should be. The Queen is ignoring the King in favor of the Jester and her court. The court is fawning over the Queen more so than usual, and the Jester is making jokes at the King's expense. It all goes sideways from here as loved ones arrive and try to convince their counterparts to come home.

Solutions to the Problem

True Love: If the party can find Delila and bring her children to her, they can break the spell the Knave of Hearts has on her. The other spelled occupants of the court, seeing this event, are then more susceptible to hearing the pleas of their own loved ones with the aid of the party.

To break the spell on the other court members the PCs need to succeed on a DC 15 Diplomacy check for the first court member after Delila, and a DC 10 Diplomacy check for the rest. When three members are free, the others break free without further coaxing. Once this happens, the Jester has a mental breakdown and begins to rail at the King, wailing about Aaron, whom he's convinced never cared about the throne at all.

With a DC 20 Diplomacy check, the PCs can convince the King to release his brother from the tower.

Award 400 XP: Should they fail, the Jester is taken away to the dungeons and the loved ones are saved, but the court is going to need a long time to heal from the damage done.

Award 800 XP: Should they succeed, the Jester rejoices and thanks them profusely, and the court is largely returned to its happy state.

In any case, even if they have to battle the Jester, the PCs earn a few days' free stay at Rosemary's as well as a free bouquet of Louve flowers.

Battling the Jester

If all else fails, fighting and destroying the Jester technically solves the problem. Should they defeat him, the court is a bloody mess and the celebration is cancelled. The townsfolk are, however, grateful for the return of their loved ones.

The Jester CR 3

XP 800

Half-elf bard 3/rogue 1 NE Medium humanoid (elf, human) Init +2; Senses low-light vision; Perception +10

DEFENSE

AC 15, touch 12, flat-footed 13 (+3 armor, +2 Dex) hp 22 (4d8+1)

Fort +1, **Ref** +7, **Will** +4; +2 vs. enchantments, +4 vs. bardic performance, language-dependent, and sonic Immune sleep

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft. (20 ft. in armor) **Melee** mwk rapier +2 (1d6-1/18-20)

Special Attacks bardic performance 11 rounds/day (countersong, distraction, fascinate [DC 14], inspire competence +2, inspire courage +1), sneak attack +1d6

Bard Spells Known (CL 3rd; concentration +6)

1st (4/day)—charm person (DC 15), disguise self, disguise weapon^{ACG}, innocence^{APG}

0 (at will)—dancing lights, flare (DC 13), ghost sound (DC 13), lullaby (DC 14), prestidigitation, spark^{APG} (DC 13)

STATISTICS

Str 8, Dex 15, Con 11, Int 14, Wis 12, Cha 17 Base Atk +2; CMB +1; CMD 13

Feats Persuasive, Skill Focus (Craft [alchemy]), Spell Focus (enchantment)

Skills Acrobatics +3 (-1 to jump), Appraise +6, Craft (alchemy) +12, Diplomacy +12, Disguise +8, Escape Artist +4, Intimidate +10, Knowledge (nobility) +10, Perception +10, Perform (act) +8, Perform (comedy) +10, Sense Motive +8, Sleight of Hand +4, Spellcraft +6, Stealth +4; Racial Modifiers +2 Perception Languages Common, Elven, Gnome, Halfling SQ bardic knowledge +1, elf blood, trapfinding +1, versatile performance (comedy)

Combat Gear potion of cure light wounds, potion of invisibility; Other Gear mwk studded leather, mwk rapier, cards^{UE}, clownish makeup, colored handkerchiefs, entertainer props, simple, entertainer's outfit, juggling balls

Continuing the Adventure

Should the PCs fail at saving both the Jester and Aaron, there is always a chance the two will try to escape. The PCs could take pity on the two and pit themselves against the Kingdom in a rescue attempt, be hired to aid them, or even prevent them from fleeing.

Creature Components





Magic Has Evolved...

Types of Love By Andrew and Monica Marlowe, Illustration by Chokotan

True Love brings to mind high romance between two intimate lovers gazing longingly into one another's eyes, but romantic love isn't the only type of true love. True love describes love between consenting partners, or the love between parents and children, fraternal love between siblings or friends who think of one another as siblings, love for one's community, and love for the divine or philosophical paradigm by which one lives.

True love imparts a sense of selflessness, a desire for closeness and intimacy (remember intimacy need not imply romance), and to give more than someone might typically expect from themselves in a non-love situation. It is possible to like a person or agree with a belief system and not feel compelled to be more involved; we can have many companions and friends, but it is a rare person that we feel a deep connection with to the point where we call it true love. Such love can give us strength, deepen our resolve, or it can make us reckless and a danger to ourselves and others.

Adventuring with those you love can be a challenge, in-character and out. Characters can be created with already existing relationships in their backgrounds or relationships can evolve through gameplay. For players looking to play characters with deep emotional relationships, it is important to discuss the relationship. All parties, both players and GM, need to agree before introducing a new relationship into gameplay, especially if you plan to use feats that hardwire strong relationships into your game.

Suggested Role Playing strategies for Intimate PCs

These suggestions are for Romantic Partners, Siblings/Fraternal relationships, and Parent/ Child relationships in general. Not all bits of advice here can or should be applied to each of these relationships; they are just lumped together because they involve PC interactions.

Having an intimate relationship "on screen" 1. can be tricky, depending on the relationship. Decide in which ways your PCs are intimate but be mindful that everyone at the table is there for an adventure RPG - especially for romantically involved PCs, there are some great romantic systems out there if that's what you want. If you're struggling with how to portray your PC relationship, take a look at Clark Kent/Superman and Lois Lane, Rick O'Connell and Evelyn Carnahan from "The Mummy", or even Kaylee Frye and Simon Tam from "Firefly/Serenity" (even though they didn't get together until the very end) for ideas of how to play your romantic relationship both openly at times and low key

at others. When you're adventuring, you're working; there might be time for a quick peck on the cheek before you bash the bad guy's head in, but don't get distracted or you'll both be dead.

- 2. Drop the occasional comment to remind yourselves that your characters are close, such as previous shared experiences from backgrounds, or perhaps they take the same watch or prefer to take alternate watches to keep each other safe while resting, little things that tie the PCs together. For example, Black Widow and Hawkeye share little comments and knowing glances that hint to a deep and well-developed relationship that movie viewers aren't privy to but give a sense of closeness.
- Sitting next to one another at the table can 3. provide the opportunity to coordinate strategies during the game that would mimic the way people who spend a lot of time in close proximity seem to finish each other's thoughts or actions. This kind of behavior can be seen in ensembles, like The Avengers or Buffy's Scooby Gang. Some characters have better relationships than others, but ultimately they all have one another's backs (usually).
- 4. In addition to public displays of affection, sometimes people who are in intimate relationships bicker or fight with one another, especially during stressful situations, and this establishes some flavor. Snappy patter in character can be fun, but too much can bog down gameplay. This applies to any close relationships; even younger children and parents have shared experiences that lead to inside jokes and shared reminisces.
- 5. For parent/child relationships, there may be more friction due to parental protectiveness encountering the child moving toward independence and the need to spread their wings. It is possible to play young PCs in Pathfinder, just take note that the PC may be a child, but childishness may not be the best portrayal at the table; again, everyone is there to play an adventure game, not "Adventures in Babysitting" (though that was a fun movie).

PATHWAYS MAGAZINE



6. Partnering up multiple types of relationships into a PCs background can add interesting layers, but it can also add strange conflicts between PCs. For example, an older parent PC who is adventuring with a younger adult PC and then one or both enter into a romantic relationship with another PC or even an NPC. Depending on all of those relationships, roleplaying may need to have time set aside for the PCs to sit around the campfire or tavern and talk about whatever's on their minds or troubling their hearts. A good example of this are the complex relationships between the members of Team Flash. Particularly, between Joe, Barry, Iris, and Wally. Joe is Iris and Wally's father and a father figure to Barry, all while Barry and Iris are romantically involved.

Roleplaying ideas for love of divinity, community, or philosophy

1. Love for one's deity is purely role playing based since most PCs do not get the opportunity to interact with the deity/deities they follow.

Feats	Prerequisites	Benefits
Companion's Bond	_	Gain a +4 competence bonus to pass covert messages
Caster's Bond	Companion's Bond, caster level 3rd	Your spells have greater effect on your closest allies
Complimentary Aid	Companion's Bond	You may use different skills to aid another
Hold the Line	Companion's Bond, base attack bonus +3	Nearby allies grant a bonus to CMD verses a limited number of maneuvers
Holy Bond	Companion's Bond, channel positive energy 2d6	Minor healing and grant a bonus to hit undead when channeling
Stronger Together	Companion's Bond	You gain a +1 bonus to Will saves for each ally within 15 feet who possesses this feat.
Shield Bond	Companion's Bond, base attack bonus +5	Grant an ally DR 2/magic when you aid another to increase their AC
Loyal Friend	Character level 3rd	You have an ally who will perform favors for you
Noble Sacrifice	_	When you succeed on a reflex save an ally failed, you may exchange places with that ally

Writing down your religious or philosophical paradigm and going over it with your GM is the best way to keep you both on the same page. Alignment decisions will be more sensitive; be aware that you're within the scope of your deity or you may be at risk if you receive feats or class features related to your deity (such as is the case for clerics or paladins).

- 2. A community is a bit like a friend or a philosophy, but only a bit. Identify what community it is your PC belongs to and why that identity is important to them. Similarly, write down how the community impacted your PC's background. Was it a childhood home? Is it a racial component of the PC? Is it both a divinity and community connection, such as a monastery?
- 3. Discuss with the other players how your PCs' philosophical backgrounds might overlap to find opportunities to create a cohesive party for the purposes of other teamwork feats.
- 4. A community can be large or small, even the crew of The Firefly is a community—a very small and specific community, but a community nevertheless. An adventuring party is definitely a tiny community filled with interpersonal dynamics. That is not to say that all the PCs have to have true love for one another or even like each other, but that can make playing easier for players and GM.

New Feats

Below are eight new feats that draw on the concepts of love and relationships. Several have a teamwork feat as a prerequisite but are not themselves teamwork feats. These new feats allow characters to build upon their foundation of camaraderie while expanding their unique talents whether it be with sword or spell.

Caster's Bond

Your spells have greater effect on your closest allies.

Prerequisites: Companion's Bond, caster level 3rd **Benefit:** Spells you cast on allies who possess the Companion's Bond feat are cast as if you were one level higher.

Companion's Bond [Teamwork]

You have a deep abiding connection with an ally (or allies), you understand the way they think and you share a common parlance that allows you to pass subtle messages.

Benefit: When passing covert messages between yourself and allies who also possess this feat, you gain a +4 competence bonus to the Bluff skill check. You also gain a +4 competence bonus on Sense Motive skill checks to decipher messages sent by an ally with this feat even if you are not the intended target.

Complimentary Aid [Teamwork]

Your skills may not coincide with those of your companions but you can still aid your allies with the skills you do possess. You are also familiar enough with your allies' capabilities to adapt your approach making the most of their diverse skills.

Prerequisite: Companion's Bond

Benefit: When aiding an ally who also possesses this feat with a skill check you may substitute a different but related skill to grant the aid bonus.

For example, your ally is attempting to persuade an enemy bandit into giving up the location of their hidden camp. Rather than rolling Diplomacy like your ally, you could aid her by using your Intimidate skill to add quiet threats to the conversation while another ally might aid with Sense Motive watching the bandit's facial features for subtle tells and clues. Alternately, an ally might be trying to swim a difficult stretch of water and you throw him a rope. You could use the Climb skill to haul in the rope aiding his attempt to swim the distance.

Ultimately what skills are allowed and how many characters can aid another is still up to the GM.

Hold the Line [Teamwork]

You trust your allies completely and together you can hold enemies at bay.

Prerequisites: Companion's Bond, base attack bonus +3

Benefit: When adjacent to an ally with this feat you cannot be flanked, and for each adjacent ally who possesses this feat you gain a +2 confidence bonus to CMD against the following combat maneuvers: bull rush, disarm, overrun, reposition, and trip.

Holy Bond

Your channel energy bolsters your closest allies even when you channel to harm undead.

Prerequisites: Companion's Bond, channel positive energy 2d6

Benefit: When you channel energy to harm undead, in addition to its normal effects each ally with the Companion's Bond feat in your channel radius heals 1 point of damage per channel die you possess and gains a +2 divine bonus to hit and damage against any undead in your channel radius.

Loyal Friend

You have a faithful ally you can count on but rarely accompanies you on your adventures. This may be a devoted sibling, best friend, or even a romantic interest such as a spouse.

Prerequisite: Character Level 3rd

Benefit: Treat your loyal friend as a cohort per the Leadership feat except they do not normally adventure with you unless you take the Leadership feat. Between adventures or while adventuring in the same city as your loyal friend you may request a small favor each day or a single large favor each week. Small favors might include an hour or two of skill checks in safe conditions or casting up to half their allotted spells of any level in safe conditions. A large favor might include putting the cohort in harm's way such as investigating a single adventure site within a day's journey of the cohort's home.

What exactly qualifies as a small or large favor is up to the GM. Imposing further on your cohort causes a rift in your friendship reducing your leadership score by 1 for each additional small favor and by 3 for each additional large favor. Should your effective leadership score fall too low to qualify for your cohort then you lose access to this feat until you can make amends, usually be doing favors for the cohort.

Special: If you take the Leadership feat you gain a +2 to your leadership score for calculating the level of your cohort who may now join you on your adventures without tracking favors.

Noble Sacrifice

You can interpose yourself between an ally and danger.

Benefit: When you make a successful Reflex save but an adjacent ally fails the roll you may choose to fail the initial roll and to make a second, DC 10 Reflex save, on behalf of your ally. If the second save is successful they treat it as if they had succeeded on the initial save.

Special: If you have the evasion or improved evasion special abilities you grant your ally those benefits as well so long as they are wearing light armor or no armor.

Stronger Together [Teamwork]

Your mental resolve is strongest when you are in close proximity to your companions.

Prerequisites: Companion's Bond

Benefit: You gain a +1 bonus to Will saves for each ally within 15 feet who possesses this feat.

Shield Bond

Your defensive aid not only makes your closest allies harder to hit but can also reduce the damage a successful attack incurs.

Prerequisites: Companion's Bond, base attack bonus +5

Benefit: When you use the aid another action to increase the AC of an ally who possesses the Companion's Bond feat you also grant that ally DR 2/magic against the next melee attack.

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Reviews

<u>10 Rakshasa Magic Items</u>

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

This little pdf clocks in at 7 pages, 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial, 1 page SRD, 1 page advertisement, leaving us with 3 pages of content, so what is this?

Well, these would be items for the, in my opinion, most awesome "In The Company of..."-installment released so far, the amazing book on playable rakshasa. I assume that you're familiar with it in this review...and if you aren't, be sure to check it out.

So, what do the items do? *Blazing Spectacles* net you *burning gaze* and if the wearer has a predation pool, hungerfire eyes as well – increased in duration, if you already have that predation. The *circlet of crawling consumption* outlines the prey of rarefied taste in silver, allowing for the tracking of the path of sin of a target through a population. Those with addictive feeding can enjoy synergy here. *Leaping Hare* is a powerful club, but alas, sports several glitches – the weapon's not italicized and the write up sports several confusing notes, probably remnants from pricing it: "4.5K, 4K," etc. – those should have been caught.

Links of Binding impose penalties on saves vs. abjurations on those hit and decreases, if present the cost of defense of the hunting grounds. The perfume of courtly nibbling can be nice for more discreet vaksha indulging in rarefied taste - instead of killing the prey, it receives 3 days to shake off the negative level and avoid death...which can also make tracking the predator harder. The Meat Hood of the Frugal Gourmet can indefinitely preserve humanoid corpses and support weight when pressed to a surface. Less utility-based would be the Rajaadharma staff, but in an AMAZING surprise, it not only enhances compulsions versus specific targets and sports some spells, it is also particularly potent in the hands of a vizier – yep, this is actually an item that is more potent in the hands of the amazing Akashic Mysteries-class. Nice!

Ravenous tongue of Meghanada is a powerful urumi (not properly italicized) is a raksaha-only, very hard to use whip-sword that bestows negative levels on those hit, heals its wielder and can even provide nourishment for the wielder...which, generally, is damn cool. Oh, and it can't be kitten'd effectively. Nice job! The expensive *smoking jacket of deceptive light* allows for move action maintenance of illusions as well as, predation pool provided, enforced rerolls of saves...and some spells in a can.

The pdf also includes an item-class, the *broken spirit bag*, which comes in 5 iterations – they are basically grisgris bags that can be used by yaksha with rarefied taste that kill humanoids to not gain sustenance, instead channeling the life-force in the bag, storing predation points, which can then be used to power predation abilities. Cool: They don't necessarily occupy an item slot, but if they do, they're less expensive. See, and that's how you make a mechanically boring item amazing via great fluff and cool tweaks…kudos!

Conclusion

Editing and formatting are generally good on both a formal and rules-level, though the aforementioned glitches could have been avoided. Layout adheres to Rite Publishing's two-column full-color standard and the artwork featured is nice. The pdf has no bookmarks, but at this length doesn't need them.

Wendall Roy delivers here – the items are universally reasonably priced for what they offer and flavor-wise, are FRICKIN' AMAZING. That being said, unlike most installments in the series, we don't get a quasi-artifact legacy weapon this time around, which is a bit of a pity. The series' items also tended to have various iterations in potency that you won't find here – so this is, as far as the series is concerned, more conservative than other installments. At the same time, the content oozes flair and panache and made me grin from ear to ear. While the glitches make it impossible for me to bestow my highest accolades, this still is a great purchase for a more than fair price, which is why my final verdict will clock in at 4.5 stars, rounded up to 5 for the purpose of this platform.



Wrath of the River King Publisher: Kobold Press Reviewer: Endzeitgeist Stars: 5 stars out of 5

This module clocks in at 66 pages, 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial, 1 page backerthanks/introduction, 1 page ToC, 1 page SRD, 1 page back cover, leaving us with

60 pages, so let's take a look!

My review is mainly based on the print version, though I also had access to the electronic version.

This is an adventure-review and as such, it contains SPOILERS. Potential players should jump to the conclusion.

Okay, so before we begin: This is one of the modules that perfectly encapsulates what sets Midgard apart from your run-of-the-mill fantasy setting, for its begin in the small village of Riverbend is steeped in the feudal structures that should be inherent in all fantasy worlds. Let me elaborate: The miller in ancient times doubled as a taxman of sorts and was directly put in charge by the respective lords: There was no free choice of where to go, etc. and you had to pay miler and lord when having your grain processed. It is thus that the stereotype of the greedy miller came into being. An edge of the sinister had always stuck to the profession in a fairy tale-context, one perfectly exemplified by Ottfried Preußler's "Krabat", building on the Wendish legend. Not only does the book perfectly highlight the horrors of love and war and poverty, its use of mystical numbers and general plot have influenced magical traditions in my own games for ages. It is, in short, glorious and if your German is good, I'd strongly recommend the folk-rock cd "Zaubererbruder" by ASP, a poetic and really catchy version of the tale that has some really smashing tunes like "Denn ich bin Dein Meister" ("For I am your master") or a brilliant portrayal of a duel of polymorphing cat and mouse – literally!

I digress, back to Riverbend: The miller here, as often, was the target of not an undue amount f jealousy...and worse, he actually had an elven wife! (Note: In Midgard, elves are VERY rare and considered to be closer to fey than regular mortals, making them feel more mythological.) The elven wife of miller Froderick has vanished, alongside with his millstone and people are pretty sure he has murdered her...after all, someone who consorts with fey is prone to be suspicious, particularly if he's also the miller! The presence of the fantastic is making itself felt in town, with the omnipresent fey (exemplified as bugbears and forest imps) making the area dangerous...oh, and guess what: poor Froderick is facing the gallows if the PCs don't help him. Indeed, investigation of Riverbend may yield the PCs some interesting information: For one, a band of satyrs with a talking bear have taken refuge at the local inn, much to the panic of the local population. Getting them out will require a complex skill-check-interaction...which brings me to one of my favorite parts in the module, at least from a design perspective.

You see, this was originally released for D&D 4th edition and while I loathe that system, its skill challenge mechanic is interesting: Basically, you set a complex task in front of the party and allow the respective PCs to accumulate success and failures based on skill-use. Let me make up an example to illustrate the concept: A tree blocks a trade road. The mage may use Knowledge (engineering) to discern the best way to move it, the fighter uses his Strength (or Profession (Woodman) to cut off some big branches and finally, the ranger or druid use Handle Animal to make the horses draw the tree away. Sure, you could depict that in sequence, but the beauty of complex skill challenges lies in the variety of options and the teamwork aspect inherent in besting them. The system is ridiculously easy to understand and I sometimes wish that particularly deadly traps used such a system more often, instead of relying on one roll. So yeah, the inclusion and proper conversion of these skill challenges is a big plus for me and I can't figure out any drawback to their inclusion.

Beyond the satyrs, there is a flaxen-eyed kid in the mill - who is very nervous and claims that it belongs to him. The PCs don't yet know that...but this boy is Froderick's son. Ellesandra, his missing wife, was pregnant and raised the boy in the Summerlands, where time follows different laws... .a magical place which can, just fyi, be accessed by the mill pond...which also explains the presence of a rather potent sidhe knight and his squire there... and they're not pleasant beings. Speaking of not pleasant: The module makes an excellent display of highlighting the strange and capricious nature of fey, whilestaying true to the myths: If the PCs take a look at the accounts of Froderick, they may well find out that there is something missing...confronted with this discrepancy, the strange coincidences may make suddenly sense, as Froderick confesses to having had an enchanted millstone that he had to grind each day in order to keep his wife's love... oh, and his wife was gifted to him by a fairy lord, to whom he was sending the missing tribute...but he vehemently denies being the shape that was seen attempting to drown his wife. (On an aside: Morally compromised, but well-meaning man, young and gorgeous wife that is only kept entranced with him, courtesy of his toil...you can see some nice social commentary here...yep, the like has even existed back in the times quoted by fairy tales...)

It seems that the PCs will have to dive deeper into the matter at hand and brave the mill pond if they want to get to the bottom of this mystery... literally here, for the tithe collector of the fairy, one nasty hag (who also, coincidentally, knew about the miller skimping on the due amount and who is the culprit of the attempted drowning) has sunk the mill stone in the mill pond...so the PCs will have to dive down...and there, finally, brave a kind of mini-game, if you will, as you're diving into the

river - getting to shore in the lands of the fey will be not an easy task...but once the PCs have managed to reach shore, things turn very much wondrous, as the Summerlands feel, without a doubt, like a realm both wondrous and magickal, as PCs get a chance to encounter eel hounds, witness the dance of moths, deal with frog-riding goblins...and save Elessandra from a fey bandit...and she is willing to fill the PCs in on her marriage being arranged...and thus that the woman has no intention of ever returning to the realms of mortals...but her wedding ring makes for a somber way of hopefully getting the miller off the gallows...but while the GM may elect for this encounter to just happen, it is very much at this point that the linearity you'd expect from a module like this...completely vanishes.

Sure, there are aspects that can be presented in a certain sequence, but, at this point, any remotely capable GM and group can either go in sequence through the specific dressings and NPC/monsterencounters, sure – but the goal itself and how they achieve it will depend in a very nice emphasis of player-choice highly upon the interaction with the mythologically-resonant cast of character: You see, with the miller not delivering the proper tribute, Riverbent is actually bound to become part of the Summerlands unless the deal can be renegotiated and the River King's wrath quelled. Oh, and even if the PCs just want to run...well, they may have access to an incantation that lets them navigate fey roads... but that does not mean they can simply return home!

Thing is: Fey are elitist. And cold. And alien. And they seem to have taken a liking to some of the feudal structures seen among the mortals - thus, the PCs will definitely need to make some allies with powerful entities...and the entities being fey, well, let's just say that strings will be attached, new roleplaying potential generated as the PCs make their impact known among the noble fey. In fact, the PCs may even claim a title, encounter the dragon Tatzel and there would be the Birch Queen's magnificent and unearthly fair to visit. An evil lord of verminous butterflies, scorched treants and similarly wild beings allow for plenty of deadly encounters...or corresponding opportunities for roleplaiyng opportunities with some of the most interesting creatures to interact with in a while.

In order to save Riverbent, the PCs not only have to reach the source of the river and gain access to the court of the river king, they will also need to make a case for the claim of lord Flax on the lands being spurious...and negotiating with a personified force of nature...well, is not an undertaking to be taken lightly or disrespectfully. Fey are capricious, though, and the hag may well demand for a duel... oh, and in order to return to the mortal world, the PCs will have to defend the fairy-realm version of the mill from the forces of Flax in a furious siege... and, much like real-world fairy tales, this ends with a melancholy and bittersweet note, for Flax is Froderick's son, the humble kid the PCs saw before, grown quickly and prematurely, providing a somber tone to contrast with the wondrous and impressive nature of the summerlands.

Conclusion

Editing and formatting are very good. I have noticed a couple of minor hiccups, but nothing grievous. Layout adheres to a gorgeous two-column full-color standard. The pdf sports several unique and beautiful full-color artworks and the pdf version comes fully bookmarked for your convenience. The cartography is glorious full color, though there are no playerfriendly versions included. The print softcover, unlike earlier Kobold Press books, is just as gorgeous and full color as the pdf and definitely well worth getting.

Wolfgang Baur's Wrath of the River King, beautifully and expertly translated to PFRPG by Ben McFarland was for a long time one of the blind spots in my Midgard-collection: While I have all the early Open Designs, I sat this one's funding out back in the day, since I had no interest in 4th edition. That being said, after the glorious conversion of Courts of the Shadow Fey, I was hoping we'd get to see this one as well. When I finally got my hands on this book, I was surprised to see its relative brevity... but don't be fooled: There is a metric TON of gaming to be had from this module. I'd be seriously surprised if any group can finish this book in anything below 6 full-day sessions unless they skip everything: This book not only manages to create an ambiance wondrous and miraculous, it also, much like the excellent "Courts of the Shadow Fey", GETS fey. Where the shadow fey excursion was all about the dark and somber shadow fey, this one very much is all about the wondrous fey that are in tune with nature; this pdf pits the PCs against an alien and intriguing incarnation of the capricious forces of nature. From the small dressing bits to the NPCs and environments, the module oozes flavor from every single word and manages to be extremely concise while doing so.

This belongs in the hall of fame of the precious few modules that truly manage the feat to tap into the wonder and feeling of fairy tales and translate it to the medium of roleplaying games, only being paralleled by the amazing Courts of the Shadow Fey and AAW Games' superb Snow White for PFRPG. This is a true gem that basically demands a place of

honor on your shelf next to these classics. In short: It is not only one gorgeous book that manages to cram an insane amount of crunchy bits in its pagecount, it also manages to perfectly evoke the sense of the fantastic. This should be considered to be one of the modules that need to be experienced by anyone who even halfway enjoys the world of Midgard, a module that I'd consider core-canon and brilliant. Particularly the beauty of the ending and its resonance of classic tropes is genius and an emotional note only few modules manage to hit. This is one superb offering and effortlessly receives a final verdict of 5 stars + seal of approval as well as a nomination as a candidature for my Top Ten of 2016.



Letters from the Flaming Crab: Dinosaur Companions Publisher: Flaming Crab Reviewer: Endzeitgeist

Stars: 5 stars out of 5 This installment of the Letters from the Flaming Crab-series clocks in at 23 pages, 1 page front cover, 1

page editorial, 2.5 pages of SRD, leaving us with 18.5 pages of content, so let's take a look!

We begin this pdf, as always in the series, with the reproduced letter from the planes-hopping vessel UCS Flaming Crab, which has obviously landed, at least for now, in a dinosaur-filled world! More than that, however, the pdf begins with a really handy index that dinosaur aficionados will very much adore: A massive table that lists the dinosaurs released for PFRPG in alphabetical order, with CR, size, environment, whether they make animal companion or familiars...and the ERA! If you're conscious of internal consistency, that is the extra mile and I love that the pdf included this. Oh, and guess what: The table's hyperlinked for your convenience. Yeah, really, really nice.

So, we're off to a good start. The pdf itself can roughly be compartmentalized in two sections after that: Section 1 depicts dinosaurs that would act as potential animal companions, ranged from the humble CR 1 scipionyx, the CR 2 tupandactylus, the CR 3 stygimoloch and neptunidracos all the way up to the CR 15 argentinosaurus. The CR 6 Baryonyx, Tethyshadros and Maiasaura, CR 8 Concavenator and Deinocheirus, CR 5 Corythosaurus and dilophosaurus as well as the CR 4 dracorex and the CR 13 utharaptor can be found here alongside the CR 7 excalibosaurus. All of these dinosaur companions not only come with proper monster statblocks, they also have companion statblocks included for your convenience.

Nice: Most receive their own artworks. From a mechanic point of view, the dinosaur companions are generally situated along the higher echelons of animal companion power and feature the respective dinosaur companion's unique tricks. I don't have serious trepidations regarding the power level of the options contained herein...so yeah, nice array! You will also probably notice that these dinosaurs make use of lesser known species, which constitutes a serious plus. I have not seen stats for these dinos in any iteration of d20, so big plus here as well!

The second part of the pdf covers the dinosaurs that are suitable as familiars. As such, the bonuses they convey are collected in a handy table for you. A total of 10 of these fellows are included, ranging from CR 1/4 to CR 1. These once again represent nice options and, in case you're wondering, the dinosaurs covered here are coelophysis, jinfengopteryx, leaellynasaura, mei, micropachycephalosaurus, microraptor, parvicursor, scansoriopteryx, nyctosaurus and sordes. Speaking of the latter: The pdf actually offers more here and features a cool CR 5 sordes-swarm! Tiny swarm of dinosaurs chewing folks to pieces? Heck yes.

The pdf also has another section, aptly titled prehistoric encounters. These represent encountersketches: 4 of these are for CR 6, one for CR 4 and one CR 1, providing some nice set-ups that include mating season, the corythosaurus' soundshock...or that they have to deal with dinosaurs while scaling a cliff.

Conclusion

Editing and formatting are very good, I noticed no serious glitches. Layout adheres to the 2-column full-color standard of the series and the artworks chosen for the respective dinosaurs are nice. The pdf comes fully bookmarked for your convenience.

Angel "ARMR" Miranda, Kelly Pawlik and Margherita Tramontano deliver a nice, fun installment here: The dinosaurs generally tend to adhere to one generally consistent power-level and there are some seriously nice tricks here: The special abilities always retain the basic sense of plausibility that I expect from animals and dinosaurs in RPGs. So yes, this is a nice installment in the series and a definite must-have for anyone looking for a Lost World-type supplement: The table alone may warrant the fair asking price for some of you out there. This is, as a whole, a well-crafted supplement and certainly justifies receiving a final verdict of 5 stars. Well done! Rite Publishing Presents

10 GEMIE MAGIC ITEMS





By Wendall Roy





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