

Rite Publishing Presents

July 2017 \* Issue 67

# PATHWAYS

JACOB E. BLACKMON



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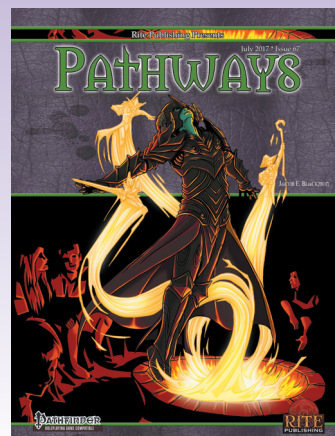
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## Editorial

by Dave Paul

There's nothing I can write for this month's issue. And yet, that's what I must do.

Way back in 2010, Steve and I were chatting about his plans for *Pathways* and I volunteered to edit it. I had no idea at the time what I was committing myself to, and I had no idea that I would bear some responsibility for carrying on someone else's dream. For perhaps the first year, I remained unable to clearly see what Steve saw for the magazine, but he kept working with me and as the issues rolled out, his vision came into focus. One of the things that I loved most about his work philosophy is that Steve was always willing to hear new ideas (and always willing to reject them if they were bad). As *Pathways* gained some success and followers, I pitched a few ideas to him about what we could do with the magazine. He accepted some and rejected others; and I have to say, his judgment about which ideas to embrace and which to discard was spot on.

A few years later I sent Steve an email with an attached file. It was the first draft of what later became the *101 Swamp Spells* product. I had been working on a bunch of spells for the home games that I and my friends had been running, and I wanted to get Steve's feedback. I had done so much editing for Rite Publishing at that point that even though I hadn't done much writing or design, I felt I had been editing the works of such skilled writers and designers that I had great models to use for my own ideas. Steve gave me great advice and then told me he definitely wanted to publish and sell it, and then he told me I'd better get to work on another product. Within a few months, we were including spells from the most recently

published books in every issue of *Pathways* and now that the magazine is specifically focusing on themes, we're including spells from previous books in every issue. Whatever success I have in this industry, regardless of what people tell me about my own talent, is owed in part to Steve. He believed in me, he believed in my work, and whenever he saw how my work could be better, he shared that with me freely.

Many others in this industry have been inspired by Steve; many others have made claims similar to my own that it was his friendly disposition, his incredible talent for spotting quality, and his infectious optimism that urged them onward into the industry. Some of those folks, and some others who were inspired by Steve in yet other ways, have shared their own remembrances in this issue. This issue's theme is remembrance. There are remembrances of Steve in this month's pages, and there are articles (as there always are) that focus on this month's theme.

Last year, at about this time, several of Rite Publishing's contributors got together online to console one another, to share memories of Steve, and to begin thinking about what might become of Rite Publishing and several of Steve's grand plans. Out of that meeting and future meetings, came a dedication to continue his work. So in addition to thanking Steve for his contributions to my life, I want to thank all those who continue his projects. There remains much work to do, and we owe it to ourselves, to one another, and to Steve to carry on.

Until next month...

Happy gaming.





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## Lore Speaker Creature Template

by Owen K.C. Stephens, Illustration by Jacob E. Blackmon

A lore speaker has the power not just to know and tell stories, but to literally bring elements of the stories to life in the form of phantom icons, psychic reflections of the heroes and villains of ancient tales. Many lore speakers use this talent to protect their

homes and educate the young of their community, but others use it to prove their superiority, take command of primitive tribes, and visit terrible punishments from legend upon their enemies.

### Creating a Lore Speaker Creature

“Lore speaker” is a template that can be added to any creature able to speak a language.

**CR:** +2

**Defensive Abilities:** If the lore speaker’s base creature had DR or SR, its value increases by 2.

**Lore (Su):** The lore speaker can tell tales of nearly any culture, and be understood by almost anyone. The lore speaker can make itself understood to any creature that has a language (though this does not allow the lore speaker to understand those creatures), and gains Knowledge (local, history) and Perform (oratory) as class skills, and automatically gains one rank in each skill for every hit die it has (to a maximum of 1 skill rank per HD in each skill).

**Phantom Icon:** A lore speaker can summon phantasmal versions of iconic characters from various stories and anecdotes, bringing physical versions of those stories to life to assist the lore speaker and possibly teach a lesson to others.

This ability works as a spiritualist’s phantom, treating the lore speaker’s CR -2 at the spiritualist level of the summoned phantom, but with the following differences:

- The lore speaker’s phantoms can only be fully manifested in ectoplasmic form. These phantoms do not have an emotional focus (gaining no bonus skill ranks, and all having Will as their good saving throw category). Instead, each phantom gains one of the following spirits from the medium class feature (whichever most closely matches the iconic character of myth and legend the lore speaker is invoking): archmage (which gains spells known and spells per day as bloodrager with a level equal to the phantom’s HD, but selected from the magus spell); champion (which gains any one melee weapons with which is it proficient as a weapon of force, counting as a force effect); guardian (which gains force armor that grants an armor bonus equal to the lore

speaker’s Int, Wis, or Cha bonus – whichever is highest), heirophant (as archmage but spells are selected from the cleric spell list); marshal; or trickster. The phantom icon gains the spirit power appropriate to its HD, but cannot grant points of influence, and ignores any spirit power that is not applicable to a phantom.

- Phantom Icon spells known, feats, and skills are set and remain the same each time they are summoned, though the selections can be changed each time the lore speaker gains a hit die.
- The lore speaker can maintain a number of phantom icons equal to  $1 + \frac{1}{4}$  its CR \*max 6), but cannot have two of the same medium spirit at a time. Summoning a phantom icon takes a full round action, but dismissing one takes only a swift or move action. Phantom icons do not heal between summonings and if destroyed cannot be summoned again for 24 hours. A phantom icon full heals if it goes unsummoned for 24 hours.
- The lore speaker has an etheric tether and bonded sense (as the spiritualist class features) to any summoned phantom icons, but can use it for only one phantom icon at a time. Each time a phantom icon is summoned, it may choose a different taboo from its medium spirit.

**Moral of the Story (Ex):** Rather than take its own actions, as a standard action a phantom icon can play out part of a story relevant to the situation at hand, and by doing so grant a morale bonus to the lore speaker and his allies. These bonuses apply only to creatures within 60 feet of the phantom icon, and only to those that can see and hear the phantom. The morale bonus is equal to +1, and increased by an additional +1 for each 3 HD of the phantom icon. What rolls gain the bonus depends on the spirit of the phantom icon, as outlined below.

*Archmage:* Add bonus to concentration checks and caster level checks.







*Champion:* Add bonus to weapon damage rolls.

*Guardian:* Add bonus to AC against rolls to confirm critical hits and all attacks of opportunity.

*Heirophant:* Add bonus to total of any healing spell of magic healing ability.

*Marshal:* Add bonus to saving throws, and to the save DCs of spells and magic abilities.

*Trickster:* Add bonus to all Bluff, Sleight of Hand, and Stealth checks.

## Voice of Giants

*Clad in beautiful armor, this exotically garbed giant roars the words to ancient sagas, the villains of which come to lie as glowing apparitions around it.*

**Ogre Mage Lore Speaker** **CR 10**

**XP 9,600**

LE Large outsider (giant, native, oni, shapechanger)

**Init** +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Perception +13

### DEFENSE

**AC** 21, touch 12, flat-footed 18 (+4 armor, +3 Dex, +5 natural, -1 size)

**hp** 92 (8d10+48); regeneration 5 (fire or acid)

**Fort** +12, **Ref** +5, **Will** +10

**SR** 21

### OFFENSE

**Speed** 40 ft., fly 60 ft. (good)

**Melee** greatsword +14/+9 (3d6+10)

**Ranged** composite longbow +10 (2d6+7)

**Space** 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.

**Spell-Like Abilities** (CL 9th)

Constant—*fly*

At will—*darkness*, *invisibility*

1/day—*charm monster* (DC 17), *cone of cold* (DC 18), *gaseous form*, *deep slumber* (DC 16)

### STATISTICS

**Str** 24, **Dex** 17, **Con** 23, **Int** 14, **Wis** 14, **Cha** 17

**Base Atk** +8; **CMB** +16; **CMD** 29

**Feats** Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Iron Will

**Skills** Bluff +14, Disguise +14, Fly +5, Intimidate +14, Knowledge (arcana, history, local) +13, Perception +13, Perform (oratory) +11, Sense Motive +13, Spellcraft +13, Use Magic Device +14

**Languages** Common, Giant

**SQ** change shape (Small, Medium, or Large humanoid; *alter self* or *giant form I*), flight. Lore (see above), phantom icons (see above, max 3 at a time)

### ECOLOGY

**Environment** any

**Organization** solitary

**Treasure** double (chain shirt, greatsword, composite longbow [+7 Str] with 20 arrows, other treasure)

The ogre mage lore speaker uses its ability to tell tales of giants and ogres of the distant past to gain control over giant clans, and bend them to its will.

**Phantom Icon (Archmage):** Type Outsider (phantom); Size Medium; Speed 30 ft.; HP 39 (6 HD +6); AC 16 (+4 Dex, +2 natural armor); Attack 2 slams +7 (1d8+1); Fort +3, Ref +6; Will +5 (+9 vs enchantment); Ability Scores Str 12, Dex 18, Con 13, Int 7, Wis 10, Cha 16. Phantom abilities (Darkvision, link, share spells, deliver touch spells 30 ft., magic attacks, devotion). Skills Knowledge (arcana) +4, Spellcraft +4; Feats Combat Casting, Spell Focus (evocation), Spell Specialization (*magic missile*)

**Spells Per Day:** 2

**Caster Level:** 6

**Spells Known:** *magic missile*, *shield*, *true strike*, *vanish*

**Phantom Icon (Champion):** Type Outsider (phantom); Size Medium; Speed 30 ft.; HP 45 (6 HD +12); AC 16 (+4 Dex, +2 natural armor); Attack greatsword +8 (2d6+1 force); Fort +3, Ref +6; Will +5 (+9 vs enchantment); Ability Scores Str 12, Dex 18, Con 13, Int 7, Wis 10, Cha 16. Phantom abilities (Darkvision, link, share spells, deliver touch spells 30 ft., magic attacks, devotion). Skills Climb +7, Perception +6; Feats Power Attack, Toughness, Weapon Focus (greatsword)

**Sudden Attack (Su):** Whenever you take a full-attack action, you gain one additional attack at your highest base attack bonus. This ability stacks with the extra attack from haste, but it doesn't stack with special actions that grant extra attacks, such as flurry of blows or spell combat. Sudden attack works as normal with full-attack options such as twoweapon fighting.

**Phantom Icon (Guardian):** Type Outsider (phantom); Size Medium; Speed 30 ft.; HP 39 (6 HD +6); AC 20 (+3 armor, +4 Dex, +2 natural armor, +1 dodge); Attack 2 slams +7 (1d8+1); Fort +3, Ref +6; Will +5 (+9 vs enchantment); Ability Scores Str 12, Dex 18, Con 13, Int 7, Wis 10, Cha 16. Phantom abilities (Darkvision, link, share spells, deliver touch spells 30 ft., magic attacks, devotion). Skills Acrobatics +10, Perception +6; Feats Bodyguard, Combat Reflexes, Dodge



*Absorb Blow (Su):* DR 3/–, resist acid, cold, electricity, fire, and sonic 3.

**Phantom Icon (Hierophant):** Type Outsider (phantom); Size Medium; Speed 30 ft.; HP 39 (6 HD +6); AC 16 (+4 Dex, +2 natural armor); Attack 2 slams +8 (1d8+1); Fort +3, Ref +6; Will +5 (+9 vs enchantment); Ability Scores Str 12, Dex 18, Con 13, Int 7, Wis 10, Cha 16. Phantom abilities (Darkvision, link, share spells, deliver touch spells 30 ft., magic attacks, devotion). Skills Knowledge (religion) +4, Spellcraft +4; Feats Combat Casting, Selective Channeling, Weapon Focus (slam)

*Energy Font (Su):* You can channel energy (3d6) 4 times per day. Choose whether you channel positive or negative energy each time you contact a hierophant spirit; this choice must match the spirit's faith. If you choose positive energy, add cure spells of each level you can cast from the cleric list to your medium spell list and spells known. Otherwise, add inflict spells in the same way. These spells count as divine, as in the divine surge spirit power.

**Spells Per Day:** 2      **Caster Level:** 6

**Spells Known:** *bless, divine favor, obscuring mist, shield of faith*

**Phantom Icon (Marshal):** Type Outsider (phantom); Size Medium; Speed 30 ft.; HP 39 (6 HD +6); AC 16 (+4 Dex, +2 natural armor); Attack 2 slams +7 (1d8+1); Fort +3, Ref +6; Will +5 (+9 vs enchantment); Ability Scores Str 12, Dex 18, Con 13, Int 7, Wis 10, Cha 16.

Phantom abilities (Darkvision, link, share spells, deliver touch spells 30 ft., magic attacks, devotion). Skills Diplomacy +10, Sense Motive +6; Feats Combat Reflexes, Combat Patrol, Lunge

*Inspiring Call (Su):* As a standard action, you can grant all allies who can see and hear you a +2 competence bonus on either saving throws or attack and damage rolls. You choose which bonus to grant each time you use inspiring call. This ability lasts for 1 round.

**Phantom Icon (Trickster):** Type Outsider (phantom); Size Medium; Speed 30 ft.; HP 39 (6 HD +6); AC 17 (+4 Dex, +2 natural armor, +1 dodge); Attack 2 slams +7 (1d8+1); Fort +3, Ref +6; Will +5 (+9 vs enchantment); Ability Scores Str 12, Dex 18, Con 13, Int 7, Wis 10, Cha 16. Phantom abilities (Darkvision, link, share spells, deliver touch spells 30 ft., magic attacks, devotion). Skills Acrobatics +10, Bluff +12, Sleight of Hand +10, Stealth +10; Feats Accomplished Sneak Attacker, Dodge, Skill Focus (Bluff)

*Surprise Strike (Su):* When you attack an opponent that's denied its Dexterity bonus to AC, you deal 2d6 points of extra precision damage (+3d6 with Accomplished Sneak Attacker). Your target counts as flat-footed against the first attack you make against that target in a day, regardless of abilities like uncanny dodge. After your first attack, that target is immune to being made flat-footed by your surprise strike for 24 hours.







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# Household Magic Catalog

Alex Abel  
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## 10 Things Mysteriously Found in a PC's Pocket

By Creighton Broadhurst

Sometimes the PCs go looking for adventure. Sometimes adventure finds them! Perhaps a thief drops something into a PC's pocket as the watch closes in or a messenger mistakes a PC for someone else.

Finding something mysterious in a PC's pocket can be nothing more than a minor discovery of interest, an irritation, the start of an exciting encounter or the hook for an entire adventure!

Use the table below to determine exactly what surprise objects await discovery in a PC's pocket or pouch.

1. A scrap of parchment with the words, "Tonight at the Reaping Man, after the change of the watch" scrawled in black ink. (The Reaping Man is a seedy tavern on the edge of the slum district renowned for brawls.)
2. The PC is jostled and feels something tucked into his belt. The object is a dagger, its point covered in blood. Moments later, a watch patrol arrives and spies the PC holding a bloody dagger...
3. When the PC next buys something he discovers a worn golden coin of unfamiliar design in his pouch. The coin is wider and fatter than normal. One side is worn almost smooth, while the other has a faint engraving of a bearded, scowling man. Words—in the language of Hell—run around the coin's edge and read, "Eternal and Undying Glory." Almost more strangely, the coin seems to drink in the surrounding light; shadows cling to its surface and it is noticeably colder than other coins.
4. A tightly folded sheaf of parchment has a detailed drawing of a section of sewers. A secret entrance is clearly depicted as being hidden in an inn's wine cellar. Unfortunately, the inn is not named on the map. However, its common room has a distinctive design: the bar occupies a central location and divides the room in two. The stairs to the cellar are shown to be under a trapdoor behind the bar.
5. The PC is jostled and feels something being thrust into his pouch. Investigations reveal a diaphanous black silk hood with no mouth or eye holes. Wrapped in the hood, a note written in purple ink simply says, "Tonight." in beautiful, flowing script. Investigations reveal an additional message written with invisible ink. It reads, "The Black Lion, at dusk. Come alone."
6. The next time the PC gets something out of her pouch, she discovers a strange potion vial. Crafted from a hollowed out finger bone, a perfectly-sized bone plug tops the vial. Carvings on the vial depict a shambling horde of the undead—skeletons, zombies and so on. Investigation reveals the bone to be incredibly hard—much harder than a normal bone; no doubt it was harvested from some strange and exotic creature. What the vial holds is up to the GM. In any event, the vial itself is distinctive enough to serve as the focus of a *locate object* or similar scrying spell.
7. A small patch of black cloth embroiled with the symbol of a reaching hand outstretched as if to grasp something fills the spot in the PC's pouch where he once kept one of his least expensive consumable magic items.
8. A perfectly smooth stone about the size of a halfling's fist now lies in the PC's pouch. The symbol of a lidless, staring eye is painted onto the stone with scarlet paint.
9. The PC discovers a small red candle in his pouch that was not there the last time he used the pouch. The candle is slow-burning and pungent. Additionally, its flame has a fell red hue; is it some kind of signal device or something else entirely?
10. The PC is the victim of a failed pick pocketing attempt. When she next goes to her pouch—perhaps to pay for something—she discovers a tiny double edged knife wedged into its side. It appears someone has tried to slice open the pouch to steal its contents, but they failed. The knife is unadorned except for a maker's mark—a stylised rearing swan—on the pommel. Investigations could lead the PCs to the weaponsmith who crafted the weapon and from there—perhaps—to the dagger's owner.

### 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.





# Creature Components

## Volume 1



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*"There is narrative potential for years in the system presented here and I absolutely love it to bits. This book is stellar and deserves a final verdict of 5 stars + seal of approval, is a candidate for my top ten of 2016 and receives the EZG Essentials-tag". - Endzeitgeist*





## Spell Showcase

By Dave Paul

Over the last several months, we've used this space to offer a couple of free spells from my existing *101 Terrain Spells* series of products and have done our best to connect those spells to the theme of the issue. A recently published issue already dealt with the theme of memory and I think that a remembrance theme and a memory theme are too closely connected for me to aim at that theme. So, for this month, I'm going to deviate just a little. As this issue's theme is remembrance, but it's specifically a remembrance of Steve, I'm going to highlight some of the spells that hold a special connection to Steve for me. The first couple take me back to when I was first getting started; this was a few months after the initial pitch and we were sending drafts back and forth, making changes, offering suggestions, and working collaboratively. I'm also going to throw in something from elsewhere, just because our chat about it was so fun and typical of our collaboration.

~~

Here was my first stab at *accelerated decomposition*:

### Accelerated Decomposition

**School:** Transmutation; **Level:** Druid 2, Sorcerer/Wizard 2, Witch 2

**Casting Time:** 1 standard action

**Components:** V, S, M (a live, short-lived insect)

**Range:** Touch; see text

**Targets:** Non-living objects within a 5-ft./level-radius burst

**Duration:** Instantaneous; see text

**Saving Throw:** Fortitude negates (object); **Spell Resistance:** No

You touch the swamp and send a wave of magical energy through it causing leather, wood, rope, and other similar objects of worked but natural origin to rapidly decompose. Non-magical, unattended items made from natural materials decay immediately and are rendered into swamp sludge and slime. Magical items are unaffected by this spell. Attended, non-magical items take damage only if the individual fails its save with a natural 1 (see the section on magic and item's saving throws in the *Pathfinder® Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook™*).

Here was the revised version, after getting Steve's feedback:

### Accelerated Decomposition

**School:** Transmutation; **Level:** Antipaladin 2, Druid 2, Sorcerer/Wizard 2, Witch 2

**Casting Time:** 1 standard action

**Components:** V, S, M (a live, short-lived insect)

**Range:** Touch; see text

**Targets:** Non-living objects within a 5-ft./level-radius burst

**Duration:** Instantaneous; see text

**Saving Throw:** Fortitude negates (object); **Spell**

**Resistance:** No

You touch the ground and send a wave of magical energy through it causing leather, wood, rope, and other similar objects of worked but natural origin to rapidly decompose. Non-magical, unattended items made from natural materials decay immediately and are rendered into swamp sludge and slime. Magical items are unaffected by this spell. Attended, non-magical items take damage only if the individual fails its save with a natural 1 (see the section on magic and item's saving throws in the *Pathfinder® Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook™*).

If the terrain you touch could be considered a swamp, it affects both magical items and attended items upon a failed save.

You'll note that the difference could be missed. It's a simple thing, really, to add one more sentence. But that sentence changes the spell appreciably. There was much back-and-forth, about maybe 50 spells in the product, before we arrived at this simple change.

~~

Here was my first stab at *bog fire*:

### Bog Fire

**School:** Evocation [fire]; **Level:** Druid 2, Sorcerer/Wizard 2

**Casting Time:** 1 standard action

**Components:** V, S, M

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

**Effect:** Flames erupt randomly within a 20-ft. radius

**Duration:** 1 round/level

**Saving Throw:** Reflex half; **Spell Resistance:** Yes

You ignite the organic gases emerging from the decaying matter in a bog. For several rounds, each square in the area may spontaneously erupt in flame causing 2d6 fire damage to anyone in the square and 1 fire damage to those in adjacent squares. Each round on the caster's turn, 1d4 randomly chosen 10 ft. x 10 ft. regions contain an eruption in one of the squares within that region. If the chosen area of effect contains some areas which could not produce such gas (i.e. solid earth or some regions of water), then if the random selection process selections those regions, that associated eruption simply does not occur. This spell could be made to function in areas other than bog, swamps, marsh terrain and the like; it could produce an effect on, for example, compost piles in a field or within sewers in a city.



Here was the revised version, after getting Steve's feedback:

## Bog Fire

**School:** Evocation [fire]; **Level:** Druid 2, Sorcerer/Wizard 2

**Casting Time:** 1 standard action

**Components:** V, S, M

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

**Effect:** Flames erupt randomly within a 20-ft. radius

**Duration:** 1 round/level

**Saving Throw:** Reflex half; **Spell Resistance:** Yes

You ignite the organic gases emerging from underground. For several rounds, each square in the area may spontaneously erupt in flame. Each round on the caster's turn, 1d4 randomly chosen 10 ft. x 10 ft. regions contain an eruption in one of the squares within that region. An eruption causes 2d6 fire damage to anyone in the square and 1 fire damage to those in adjacent squares. If the chosen area of effect contains some areas which could not produce such gas (some regions of water, though in a bog, the water may indeed harbor flammable gases), that associated eruption simply does not occur.

If the terrain from which you cast this spell could be considered a swamp, it deals an additional 1d6+3 fire damage to those in the affected square and an additional 2 points to those in adjacent squares.

There may yet be changes to the spell if there is a revised edition of *101 Swamp Spells* or if updates are produced for another product. But, again, Steve's suggestions changed the way I thought about approaching the entire product and I ended up with better work because of it. Incidentally, this also speaks to 1) the value of a good editor, and 2) the reality that even an editor needs an editor.

~~

What comes next is a first draft and a final draft of the Osmium Golem from [101 Variant Monsters](#), a product I edited while I was working on *101 Swamp Spells*. In between is the email correspondence between us. If you ever worked with Steve, this will probably sound familiar.

## Osmium Golem (Brass Golem)

**Description** This towering statue of bluish-white metal has been built to resemble a serpent-headed humanoid; it carries a gigantic, curved sword in its metal fists.

**Volatile Toxicity (Su)** An osmium golem deals 1d6 fire and 1d6 acid damage in addition to damage dealt on a successful hit in melee. A creature affected by the volatile toxicity or its death throes ability must also succeed on a Fort save (DC 20) or be permanently blinded and nauseated; a successful save results in the subject being sickened for 1

round instead. This is a poison effect; curing the poison ends the nausea but not the blindness which requires a *remove blindness* type effect. Creatures that hit the osmium golem with non-reach weapons, natural weapons, or unarmed attacks take fire and acid damage as though hit by the monster's volatile toxicity attack and must make a Fort save to avoid being nauseated. The save DC is Constitution-based.

This ability replaces a brass golem's breath weapon special attack.

**Dave:** Osmium weighs about 1500 pounds per cubic foot. Brass weighs about 500 pounds per cubic foot.

If the Osmium golem is a variant on the brass golem, do you want to throw in something extra to the description, based on the remarkable difference in the densities of the metals? (Should the osmium golem be slower? Should it have a higher Str?)

By the way, I'm perfectly happy with "No Dave, this is a fantasy world; it's magic."

**Steve:** My answer is: [Assertion Twelve](#)

**Dave:** That's pretty much what I thought you would say.

**Steve:** If you want to change it to a shell of osmium with a hollow core that's fine with me.

## Osmium Golem (Brass Golem)

**Description** This towering, semi-hollow statue of bluish-white metal has been built to resemble a serpent-headed humanoid; it carries a gigantic, curved sword in its metal fists.

**Volatile Toxicity (Su)** An osmium golem deals 1d6 fire and 1d6 acid damage in addition to damage dealt on a successful hit in melee. A creature affected by the volatile toxicity or its death throes ability must also succeed on a Fort save (DC 20) or be permanently blinded and nauseated; a successful save results in the subject being sickened for 1 round instead. This is a poison effect; curing the poison ends the nausea but not the blindness which requires a *remove blindness* type effect. Creatures that hit the osmium golem with non-reach weapons, natural weapons, or unarmed attacks take fire and acid damage as though hit by the monster's volatile toxicity attack and must make a Fort save to avoid being nauseated. The save DC is Constitution-based.

This ability replaces a brass golem's breath weapon special attack.

~~

I have missed the steady stream of conversation. It was as if email, Facebook, and Google Hangouts were technological necessities to an ongoing telepathic chat that rarely stopped. That channel has been silent for me, except for echoes and memories, for the past year. His voice is still there, in my head, but it's not the same.



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## Plains of Solace

By Ben McFarland, Illustration by Prokhoda

With the great Immortal Emperor Korvak Cynmark's decree 947 years ago, the Plains of Solace became a region free of development from Damnation's Pit to the Shattered Labyrinth where "No plow would turn the earth, no man's herds would graze there, and no freehold would be established." The Emperor claimed the expanse as his contemplative reserve, where historians state he withdrew and recovered his composure in those rare moments of displayed anger. For this reason alone, few willingly trespassed in the Plains, for fear of encountering a furious sorcerering of unimaginable power. And so the Plains of Solace remained a tranquil and undisturbed land, inhabited only by the natural creatures.

Then, at the dying request of one of his Warlords, the Emperor consented to the warrior's burial on the Plains. He refused to see the landscape marred, however, and insisted the tomb look like any other stone, which lay across the grasslands. The law permitted a sealed compartment for the Polemarch's remains, a small plaque to mark the resting place, but nothing more. Even the plaque required one to splash a cup of the Polemarch's favorite wine in remembrance before becoming visible. Other members of the Warlord's officer cadre made similar petitions, and the Emperor finally amended his declaration. Burials which did not alter the landscape, disturb the earth, or erect any structure, were permitted within the Plains of Solace. Those bearing mourning garb and going to such a gravesite traveled with free passage. This led to the proliferation of rocks shaped to contain urn-like spaces, plugged by capstones and marked by small bronze plates concealed by illusions lifted only under the simple conditions known by few and often related to the individual buried. The Astronomer's Plaque is only visible during a lunar eclipse. The Imperial Falconer's Marker appears when crushed raptor shells are blown across its face. For several centuries, this tradition was rather faithfully kept and almost never abused. Punishment for violators meant death, tied with cutting ropes of woven yucca to five of the magical, feral Exemplar mustangs (See *Book of Monster Templates*, p. 52) which roam the Plains of Solace, then cursed to remain conscious and feeling of their pain until the criminal starved, bled out or choked on dust and dirt while being dragged across the raw ground. (See *Savage Rending of the False Mourner*, below.)

Later, groups began to hide the remains of unfortunate foes, sometimes mixing ashes, other times leaving the grave unmarked. Spies began to use the urns as "dead-drops," coming under the guise of mourners or those arriving to pay respects. This subterfuge attracted will-o-wisps which fed on the fear of travelers and miscreants. Some of the stones became open secrets amongst conspirators and failed rebel groups, places to cache weapons, magic, supplies, or information. This changed the perception of the Plains, making them less of a grassy plain of peaceful consideration, and more of a hidden puzzle-box of treasure and secrets where any stone might hold a fortune or conceal a killer waiting for someone to try claiming it.

Those who continued to bury their loved ones there placed magic traps upon the urns, the stones, the markers. Others made the urns into symbolic maps, representing trips across the world by equating one grave to a particular city or location, and then describing their trip through the plains—where they scaled their days to affect greater distances, making one day equal to four days, for instance. In particular, there is the story of the Sorcerer-General Ademas whose captured battleplans used this exact tactic, utilizing the graves of Polemarch and unit officers. Despite having the entire strategy laid before them, the enemy failed to decipher the intent. One version claims the opposing general thought Ademas was ready to surrender, and believed the report described the intended location of Ademas' own tomb. Another says the enemy general realized the intent of the plan, but Ademas purposefully allowed its capture to lure his foes into a trap. Inspired by Ademas' actions, more than one wizard has left potential apprentices directions to their hidden sanctums encoded as a pilgrimage of burial sites. Thieves and brigands have buried treasures abroad, and then used the grave markers to create maps which cannot be stolen and cannot be followed without knowing the scale used.

And still, after all this, the wild mustangs, the small prides of lions and wolf-packs, the antelope herds, the ankheg colonies, even a pair of venerable dragonnes and a distributed tribe of massive baobab treants watch impassively, carrying out the natural cycles of predator and prey. The Emperor's decree leaves the savannah's ecosystem relatively unscathed by the civilization which briefly visits



and often gazes in wonder at the vast monument to life, death, and contemplation that is the Plains of Solace.

**Secret:** The Circle of Heroes has maintained the Emperor's decree regarding the use of the Plains of Solace as a burial ground untouched by development, and for good reason. The Emperor used the landscape and grave markers to bind a legion of wraiths and spectres to countryside, holding them in reserve as both an emergency force and a ready supply of spiritual energy necessary for some of his experiments. It is unclear what conditions might release this army of hungry, maddened incorporeal undead or where the enchantment was anchored, and until the council has discovered the full nature of the binding, it has ordered the Plains remain unaltered beyond their current use.

## Savage Rending of the False Mourner

*Brazen defiance  
comes with a terrible price;  
sundered yet aware.*

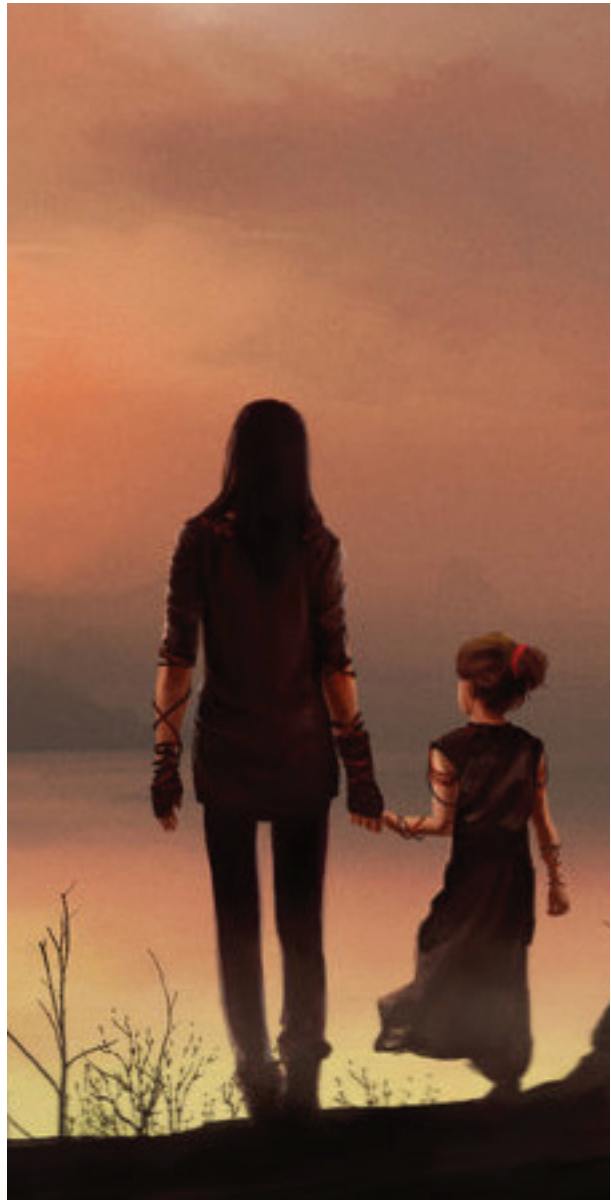
**Type** curse; **Save** Will DC 35

**Background** Created by the Immortal Emperor Cynmark as a punishment for those who violated his decree regarding the Plains of Solace, this curse is known only to a few who managed to gain it through subterfuge and parallel design. A terrible and horrific curse, the Emperor reserved it as a punishment for the most heinous of crimes, and is rumored to have kept several heads in unending agony for decades, diligently feeding and slaking their thirst every other day.

**Effect** Subject cannot benefit from any sort of healing; natural, fast, magical or otherwise—including any spell with the healing subschool, although the subject still suffers damage normally. Once at 0 hit points, the subject gains the staggered condition, but remains alive. This condition, once gained, cannot be removed until the curse is removed. If at negative hit points, the subject suffers a penalty to all physical actions (including spellcasting, which requires a caster level check) equal to its negative hit point total. The subject's body may be dismembered, but the portion still attached to the head remains functional. The subject will not die until the curse is dispelled or the subject suffers their maximum hit points in acid or bleed damage, or deprivation damage from dehydration or starvation. The subject's body may be horribly mangled, burned, or mutilated, but the head continues to feel and suffer pain until death.

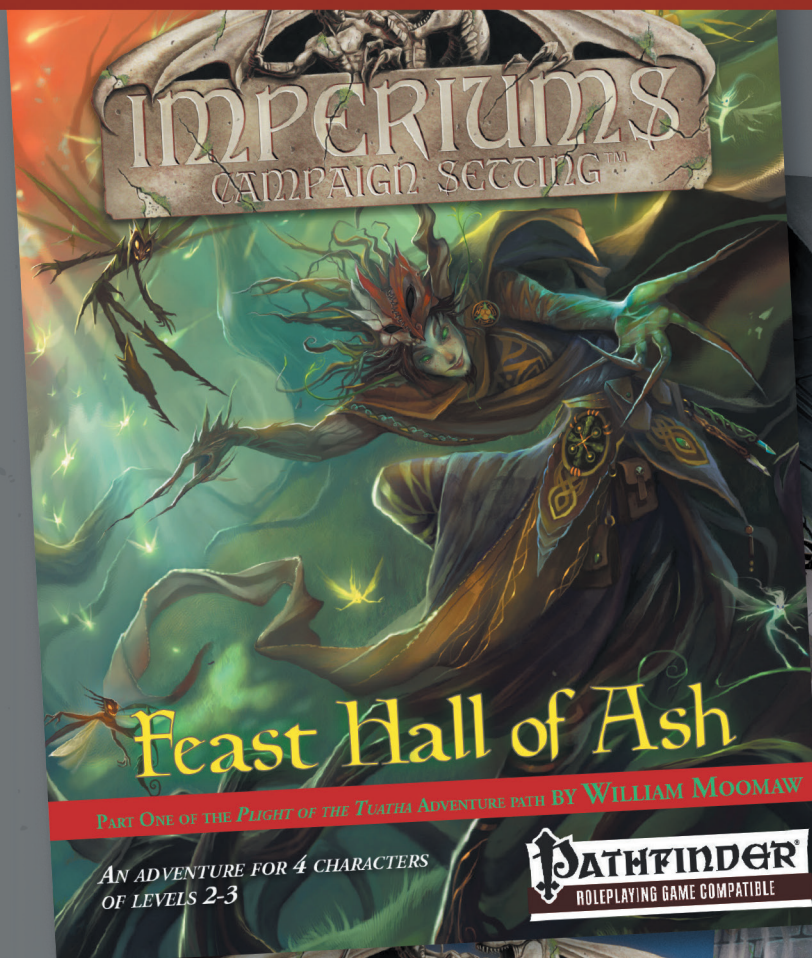
Technically alive, the head remains a valid target for other spells. It retains its Intelligence and Wisdom scores, suffers a -6 penalty to Charisma (minimum 0), and has no Strength, Dexterity, or Constitution scores. Such cursed individuals may still speak (unless maimed in such a way that their ability to speak is prevented), and many succumb to insanity before they finally expire.

**Cure** (DC 30) Subject must eliminate their false burial on the Plains of Solace and perform a pilgrimage to the grave marker of the first Polemarch buried there. Upon completion, the subject gains a +15 to the Will save to remove the effect. Those with negative hit points at the time of curing immediately die.





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## Heroic Legacies

By Wendall Roy, Illustration by Thirteenth Autumn

Heroes do not all get “happily-ever-after” endings, retiring to a life of comfort amid stories of their deeds and world-changing accomplishments. Even in places where powerful magic can overcome death itself, countless adventurers fall to fates both grand and small. These hapless souls are too often forgotten by history, whether cut down by the blades and spells of powerful enemies, succumbing to a clever trap, or just dying ignobly in the dark based on a single poor decision and unlucky moment.

Sometimes, however, the deeds and drive of a hero are strong enough to persist beyond death within the hearts and minds of their companions, their family, or even a new generation of adventurers inspired by tales of the hero’s exploits. This heroic legacy manifests in times of need to enhance those inspired by it and help them carry on the fallen hero’s goals.

Heroic legacies function as supernatural abilities that can be periodically called upon by those who carry the legacy. A heroic legacy to honor a dead character can be gained either by a group or individual through a funerary ritual that takes 1 hour to complete. Any creatures wanting to bond to and carry on the heroic legacy must be found acceptable by the legacy; treat the dead hero as a living target of the ritual who must be willing for this purpose. The funerary ritual to awaken a heroic legacy costs nothing, but GMs should consider the heroic legacy to have a gp value equal to 10% of the recommended wealth by level (see Table: Character Advancement and Level-Dependent Bonuses in *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook*) listed for a bonded character. Only player characters and unique NPCs built with PC ability scores and wealth can bond to a heroic legacy. A creature can only be bound to one heroic legacy at a time, and abandoning one legacy for another counts as betraying the purpose of the original heroic legacy (see below).

The bond to a heroic legacy is permanent, with the following exceptions. If the dead hero is ever brought back to life, the heroic legacy ends for all bonded creatures. If a bonded creature betrays the purpose of the heroic legacy, its bond is destroyed and it can never again bond to that heroic legacy.

Heroic legacies have three vital components: purpose, lament, and legacy power.

### Purpose

Every heroic legacy has a purpose based on the driving principles of the dead hero. The purpose

should be relatively detailed and specific, subject to GM approval. For example, a purpose of “become powerful” or “destroy the undead” would be too general, while a purpose of “hold dominion over the Hinterlands and ascend to divinity as the region’s patron” or “remove all vestiges of the Dread Lich Cynmark’s influence from the world” would be appropriate. When a character activates the legacy power of a heroic legacy in a situation directly supporting the heroic legacy’s purpose, that character gains a +2 bonus to effective level to determine the legacy power’s effect.

The purpose also restricts the actions of characters bound to the heroic legacy. It prevents legacy powers from being activated to support actions that would be detrimental to the heroic legacy’s purpose, and can even destroy the bond if a character directly and willingly betrays the purpose. A character who betrays a bond in this way must make a Will save (DC 10 + 1/2 their character level + their highest ability score modifier) or be cursed and suffer two negative levels. These negative levels cannot be removed until the curse is removed, but there is no chance of them becoming permanent. This curse is treated as a *major curse* spell for purposes of removing it, and has a DC equal to the save DC + 5 to remove it.

### Lament

A heroic legacy also has a lament, which is the sum of all the dead hero’s flaws, regrets and moments of failure, particularly the moment and manner of the hero’s death. The lament is not a weakness of the heroic legacy; on the contrary, it is when the legacy is most passionately driven and can manifest on its own. Like the heroic legacy’s purpose, its lament should be relatively specific. “Killed by undead” is not an appropriate lament, but “fell to dread spectres while trying to save the village of Auburn” or “failed to save her companions from Cynmark’s dread spectres in the ruins beneath Auburn” would be.

In the presence of a challenge or physical threat that recalls the lament, the heroic legacy can immediately activate its legacy power on behalf of all bound characters present. This can be done once per day, and does not count against the normal daily usage restrictions of the legacy power. The triggering conditions for a heroic legacy acting on its lament are up to the GM, but the more precisely





the encounter matches the lament, the greater the likelihood of activation. Using the above lament examples, a heroic legacy bound to an adventuring party would likely activate if the group was attacked by spectres, if the group was attacked by any incorporeal undead while adventuring in a location formerly corrupted by the forces of the Dread Lich Cynmark, or if the group was protecting the village of Auburn from any creatures or threat tied to remnants of that ancient evil's power.

## Legacy Power

The legacy power is a supernatural ability or series of abilities unique to the heroic legacy and that is representative of the dead hero. A legacy power

can be used a number of rounds per day equal to a bonded character's level; these rounds do not need to be consecutive. Each member of a group bonded to a heroic legacy receives their own daily use limit, but only one bonded character can activate the legacy at a time. Each legacy power also has a group benefit that only applies when a group of adventurers bond to a heroic legacy at the same time. This bonus ability is constant for each bonded character.

The following legacy powers are representative of character classes and common heroic personality traits. GMs are encouraged to create additional legacy powers of a similar power level if needed to most accurately fit the theme of a particular heroic legacy.

**Arcane Caster** – Choose one spell of each level from the most appropriate arcane casting class spell list. These spells should either be favorites or representative of the dead hero. A bonded character can cast these spells with effective levels in the casting class equal to his character level and substituting the dead hero's key spellcasting ability score for his own, to determine both whether he is capable of casting the spell and the spell's effect. Activating this ability requires the same action as the spell's casting time and expends a number of rounds of daily legacy power use equal to the spell's level, but the spell's actual duration does not expend rounds.

The group benefit allows all bonded characters to substitute their character level for ranks in the Spellcraft skill.

**Bard** – A bonded character can inspire confidence, similar to the bard class feature, with an effective bard level equal to his character level. If the bonded character is at least 15th level, he can also use this legacy power to inspire heroics, similar to the bard class feature.

The group benefit allows all bonded characters to use the aid another action on each other as a move action.

**Beast-friend** – A bonded character can conjure a spirit animal that represents an animal companion, mount or other animal dear to the dead hero, up to 30 feet away as a standard action. The bonded character treats the spirit animal as an animal companion, with an effective druid level equal to his character level. The spirit animal is treated as a force effect, and affects incorporeal creatures normally. The statistics and abilities such as animal type and feat selection cannot be changed once chosen, as the spirit animal represents a specific animal tied to the dead hero. The spirit animal can be dismissed as a move action before the daily duration of legacy power expires.



The group benefit allows all bonded characters to cast *Speak with Animals* as a spell-like ability once per day, and gain a +1 bonus for every 3 levels (maximum +6 at 18th level) to Diplomacy or wild animal checks made to influence animals. When all group members are present in an encounter and the spirit animal is summoned, it gains a +1 morale bonus on attack rolls and damage rolls for every 3 levels (maximum +6 at 18th level) of the bonded character activating the legacy power.

**Divine Caster** – Choose one spell of each level from the most appropriate divine casting class spell list. These spells should either be favorites or representative of the dead hero. A bonded character can cast these spells with effective levels in the casting class equal to his character level and substituting the dead hero's key spellcasting ability score for his own, to determine both whether he is capable of casting the spell and the spell's effect. Activating this ability requires the same action as the spell's casting time and expends a number of rounds of daily legacy power use equal to the spell's level, but the spell's actual duration does not expend rounds.

The group benefit allows all bonded characters to stabilize any other bonded group member that is dying as a swift action with a range of 30 feet. Once per day, one bonded character of at least 10th level can cast *Breath of Life* on another bonded character as a spell-like ability.

**Furious** – As a swift action, a bonded character can enter a state similar to a barbarian's rage. He gains a +2 bonus on melee attack rolls, melee damage rolls, thrown weapon damage rolls, and Will saving throws. He takes a -2 penalty to AC. He does not lose use of any skill, but suffers a -2 penalty on concentration checks and Charisma-, Dexterity- and Intelligence-based skill checks. A bonded character can end this state as a free action, and is fatigued for 1 minute when it ends.

The group benefit grants all bonded characters a +2 bonus on melee attack rolls and melee damage rolls against any creature that reduces one of their group to less than 0 hit points. This effect lasts until the creature is dead or destroyed, or the encounter ends.

**Hopeful** – A bonded character can create an aura of hope that renders him immune to fear as a standard action. Each ally within 10 feet of him gains a +4 morale bonus on saving throws against fear effects. The bonded character and allies within his aura also gain a +4 morale bonus on saving throws against spells and spell-like abilities with the emotion or pain descriptor.

The group benefit allows a bonded character to roll a saving throw failed by another bonded group member within 30 feet, using his saving throw bonus instead of his companion's. If the bonded character succeeds on the saving throw, both characters are considered to have succeeded. If the bonded character fails, both characters fail. Each bonded character in the group can use this group benefit once per day.

**Rogue** – As a swift action, a bonded character gains extra damage equal to 1/2 his character level (minimum +1) on successful attacks made while flanking a target or against an opponent denied its Dexterity bonus to AC. This extra damage is precision damage. This effect lasts for 1 round.

The group benefit allows a bonded character to gain the skill unlock powers for one class skill. A bonded character can select a different class skill to which this applies after 8 hours of rest or meditation.

**Steadfast** – As an immediate action, a bonded character has a 25% chance to negate the extra damage from a critical hit or sneak attack. He also gains a +2 bonus on saving throws made to resist the dazed, paralyzed or stunned condition until the start of his next turn. At 8th level, a bonded character can spend one additional round of use to increase this to a 50% chance and a +4 bonus. At 16th level, a bonded character can spend two additional rounds of use to increase this to a 75% chance and a +6 bonus. This ability does not stack with similar abilities (such as the *Fortification* armor special quality).

The group benefit allows a bonded character to gain a +5 bonus on Constitution checks to stabilize when dying and add half their character level to their Constitution score when determining the negative hit point total necessary to kill them.

**Tactical** – As a standard action, a bonded character can grant his teamwork feats to all allies within 30 feet who can see and hear him.

The group benefit allows all bonded characters to grant their teamwork feats to each other within 30 feet whenever one of them activates the legacy power.

**Warrior** – As a swift action, a bonded character gains the benefit of a combat feat he doesn't possess. He must meet all the feat's prerequisites. If the bonded character is at least 10th level, he can instead gain the benefit of two combat feats but each feat expends rounds of his daily use limit.

The group benefit allows a bonded character to grant combat feats gained from the legacy power to all other bonded characters within 30 feet.





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## Remembering Steve D. Russell (1974 - 2016)

### In the Company of Publishers: The Hundred and Eleventh Spell

*An homage to Steve Russell*

By William L. Collins, of last known appointment  
the Emeritus Gris

*"What should he write about, master?"*

*"Whatever he damn well wants to write about." -  
Qwillion of Questhaven*

Here are seven bits of talent and lore left from  
the Seeker of Talent, the fabled bard, sage and  
entrepreneur. His circle of friends draws from his  
unmeasured stacks of lore from time to time, in  
celebration. They met recently, and drew out these  
few fragmented recollections of a tremendous body  
of works.

#### Automatic Correction

Cantrip

Level 0 Spell

Reaction

Once per Adventure

At the moment someone casts a spell at you,  
while you are fumbling through your books for a  
solution, consider the very letters of the incantation.  
Rearrange them or exchange one letter for another  
to create a new, disturbing effect. Example: Your  
character is the target of a cone of cold. You turn it  
into the cone of gold. When each bit of frost turns  
to an aurum flake to settle gently over the area,  
everyone marvels how nothing bad happened.  
And you might be rich now.

#### Clankverse

This is not an item or an artifact. This is a situation.  
Your character receives a tiny world that gives off  
strange noises, expostulations and sounds. You  
may venture into it at your peril. Seriously.

*Ioun Stone of the Stoned* - Green with mossy bits: this  
bit of hemp trapped in a polished semi-ovoid grants  
a moment of clarity to its owner every day. Without  
fail. This translates to the GM granting you a reroll.  
*Once per campaign* at that moment where you fail  
a saving throw that would shock your gaming  
table, you may pause and grin. You still fail. You  
pass on your ISotS to another player. Roll up a new  
character and grin again at the GM.

*Monster Template: Rongs* - For each Rite there is  
a Rong. Each Rong is a Boss Monster of almost  
unbelievable proportion. When you face a Rong,  
on the third and later rounds of that fight, it causes  
one player character to die instantly. (Any such  
character may be restored to life through any  
exemplary means such as *raise dead* or *resurrection*  
or a *wish*.)

However, the Rong has one weakness: legacy.  
Any character wielding a weapon with an ancestor's  
backstory, or the power of ancient gods, or the gist  
of a great story, halves all the Rong's defenses.

#### Publishers of Rites and Incantations

Mystery Organization

Who brings forth new volumes? What gives the sages a supply  
of scrolls? Where do ideas become memorial?

Although nobody knows these answers, the  
Publishers are an excellent source of the unexpected.  
They seek talent, give them quill, sword, amor,  
armor, pen and paper (or vellum) and send them  
out. Their protégés bring home glory.

#### Spell One Hundred and Eleven

Transmutation

**Level:** Bard 6, Cleric 9, Wizard 9

**Area:** 1000 feet circle around the caster

**Duration:** One round, Concentration

As the student and master of a thousand and one  
forgotten books of lore, you bring forth a final  
spell at the last moment. (Said moment should  
not be found trivially. It should be dramatic.) The  
Hundred and Eleventh spell converts all damage  
against your friends in the area of effect from  
digital to binary (ignoring letters) and then sums  
the binary results in digital. Or, the DM's 1000D8  
Fireball of Frustrated Story Power becomes the  
following:

Normal:  $5 \times 1000 = 4500$  hit points of damage

Mathy Part: 1b1000110010100

How you work the formula: 1 plus (ignore  
the 'b') 1 plus three zeros plus 1 plus 1 plus two  
zeros plus 1 plus one zero plus 1 plus two zeros =  
 $1+1+1+1+1+1=6$  hp.

#### Talent Finder

Feat

Give praise to an unknown person. Then find them  
work. And give them your backing - if not the shirt off  
their back. You may, once per adventure, tag this notable  
character (player or non-player) with your boon, which



means you upgrade one statistic by +4 when in your presence until the end of the night's gaming session. If they succeed at their next challenge, you, with your charm and skills, make them locally famous. As a benefit to you, once per campaign *you* may call upon *them* to take a roll for you. Which means that they face your enemy with - one hopes - their superior skills.

## Remembrance: The Nicest "Asshole" I've Ever Known

"It's not that I don't want to contribute; it's that every time I try I end up in tears. I don't know what's appropriate to say or how long it should be or if what I would say might be offensive to someone somewhere. I miss Steve so very much, he was always supportive and frequently around at two am to bounce ideas off of or offer support, safety, advice, and the occasional "argument" between friends. The late work hours are eerily quiet without his commentary. He defended me when I needed a champion, offered more than once to send angry emails to people harassing me when I launched my company, and gracefully let me handle it myself when that's what I needed to do. His childlike enthusiasm over certain projects, his guidance when I screwed something up, and his support of my dreams was a blessing to me that will always be deeply missed. To me he was the nicest "asshole" I've ever known, which probably isn't an appropriate thing to say in print. But as proven by Facebook quotes from some of our conversations; it was a source of amusement for him."

—BJ Hensley



Steve-Miranda Russell

June 21, 2016 · 🌐

Rite Publishing Quote of the Day

Industry Professional: "I said you were sweet a few weeks back and the response was the chat equivalent of a blank stare."

Me: "Well thanks for saying so, I guess it's always good to have someone to champion me, not being an asshole."

Industry Professional: "Oh I still think your're an asshole you're just a well meaning nice asshole. Lets not get silly here."



You, Daniel Marshall and 25 others

2 Comments



Haha



Comment



Share



Louis Porter Jr

THAT is true love...

## On The Passing of My Dear Friend Steve

(Originally written July 7, 2016)

By Dave Paul

Long before Steve Russell was the RPG legend that he became, he contacted me through a mutual acquaintance because he'd heard that I was an easy-to-work-with and talented editor. When we began corresponding, he was completely up front with me about his needs and wants. He began by telling me that he'd heard I'd worked on some projects as a volunteer and that free was all he could afford at the time. He did say that he hoped that he'd someday do well enough that his work would make some money and that if he ever turned a profit that he'd pay me as soon as he could afford to pay himself. He said that if I didn't love the game and didn't like doing the work, I shouldn't agree to help. He also said that I'd get copies of everything I worked on and on projects related to those projects. I told him, without hesitation, that I'd be happy to edit for him. I was delighted to get another opportunity to work with folks in the industry producing the games that I loved. He told me "I know I have great ideas, but they don't come out pretty, I need someone to help me make my words pretty." I told him I'd be willing to try.

At the next GenCon, Steve tracked me down to personally hand me a copy of the first printed copy of what we'd worked on together. His huge smile, his vigorous handshake, and the happiness and pride pouring out of him were more than sufficient payment for that product. We sat on the floor at the convention center and talked about what he had planned next. (Over the years, we ended up having quite a few chats on convention center floors, sometimes alone, a couple times with my sons.)

Every GenCon thereafter, Steve and I made room for at least a few hours to hang out together and talk about his inexhaustible supply of ideas. He always offered me a chance to work on anything I wanted to work on. As he became more well-known in the field, he continued offering me my pick of projects. He knew that I wore many different hats, that I was involved in multiple professions, and he didn't want me to take on more than I could handle, both because he didn't want the quality of my Rite Publishing work to suffer because he needed my best work and because he didn't want the quality of my other work to suffer because he knew that it mattered to me.

I have a Rite Publishing Payment History spreadsheet with every payment I ever received from Steve. My first payment from Steve, which came as promised when he could finally afford



to pay himself, was for \$1.93 in February of 2010. That year saw increasingly large payments and in September of that year I received a payment of \$338.15. Our email exchanges were overflowing with electronic high-fives. Even though this represented years of work, it still felt really good.

When he asked me to work on *Coliseum Morpheuon*, I had to pinch myself. I kept thinking that I couldn't be as good as he thought I was. When he asked me to edit the *Anthology of Dreams* to accompany the game setting, I was blown away. Steve had now asked me personally to handle not just making his words pretty, but to assure that the words of others (who were better writers than either Steve or I were) were pretty too.

When he decided to start *Pathways* magazine, he wrote to me with a lengthy description of what he planned to do. I read it and without even thinking about whether I'd have the time for it, I wrote back and volunteered to be the magazine's editor. He replied telling me that he'd hoped I'd say that. This connected me to the wider industry. Over the six years of editing that magazine I've come to read the advice of dozens of folks in the industry through our monthly interviews. These interviews often gave me a chance to get to know people I would otherwise never have met. Through Steve, I have come to have an acquaintance with scores of other incredibly talented people.

One day, rather out of the blue, Steve sent me about a dozen 1st level spell ideas and told me that he was going to publish a book called *101 1st Level Spells*, and that when he was done he was going to write *101 2nd level spells* and that he wasn't going to stop until he'd covered all the levels. He asked me to slide my other Rite Publishing projects to the side just a bit and focus on these if I could. I did. His outpouring of creativity seemed to reach another new height. Every once in a while I'd catch more than a typo; Steve would make some kind of unusual mistake. He'd usually write about this online later, hidden somewhat in his posts pointing out why it was so important to have good editors. I always tried to remain understated about such things, but I was delighted to be recognized by this giant in the field for my contributions. When he sent me his last batch of spells, he included in his email something like "I never want to write another spell again!" He turned out all 1001 of those spells, 10 books of 101 spells and a single hardcover collection, in a year. And he did this while he was working on piles of other projects. His creativity and energy were infectious and I made myself keep up because I didn't want to let him down.

Like so many others who worked with Steve, it wasn't just about the work. When his mom passed, when my mom passed, when either of us had personal crises with our families or friends, we chatted about it. We talked to each other, sometimes on the phone, usually in an online chat or through a rapid string of emails. He always gave me time to catch up on work when I got behind because of things like this. He always told me that family came first. I never felt anything but love and support from Steve and I tried to give him that same love and support. We had a bond of trust that allowed us to be completely honest about the quality (or sometimes lack of quality) in our work and I never had an inkling of worry about it. If Steve told me something of mine wasn't good, I fixed it because I knew that he was right. If I told Steve that something of his wasn't good, I knew that he'd listen and not have me second guess my opinion. I have worked with and for many people; Steve was at the top of the best.

When my own mom was losing her battle with cancer and I was sitting with her at the oncologist's, some part of my own creativity was somehow freed and kindled. I began writing my own spells. For more than a decade, almost everything I had done for Rite Publishing was editing work. Every once in a while I'd write an introduction to another work, or I'd make sure that *Pathways* had enough content for its release. I still don't know where it came from, and I don't know why it happened when it did, but as my mom was fading, my own creativity was surging and I began work on *101 Swamp Spells*. Steve hadn't asked me to work on this. I had been writing them just because they were popping into my head. After I'd gotten to about 50, I thought I'd bounce the idea off of Steve. I sent him a document, which wasn't even in a rough draft form, it was just the compilation of my notes. He sent it back a couple of days later, with a bunch of suggestions for improvement and a request. "When you finish this, what else will you have for me?" As far as I was concerned, this was a one-off. I was just cranking out ideas and wanted his opinion about whether it was any good. I hadn't authored anything of any significance, I'd just edited others' work. He immediately recognized that it was valuable and even though it was entirely outside his normal schedule, he decided to make room for it and publish it. I was alive with excitement! Steve. Steve Russell. *The Steve Russell* wanted *me* to write material and he wanted to publish it! I heeded his advice, made the kinds of changes he'd called for, and wrote enough more spells to complete the book.



When I finished the text, I shared it with a couple of friends who I trusted with proofreading and editing, and then just handed it off to Steve. He had already found a cover and interior art (he didn't tell me any of this). Without much fanfare, he released it through his usual distribution channels and we just sat back and waited. A couple of weeks passed and the numbers were good. He sent me screen captures of his information about sales. I couldn't believe it. People were liking my work. I wrote to Steve to thank him for his suggestions for improvement; I let him know that it was his input that really made it great. He told me that he was just helping me like I had helped him. I had been making his words pretty for years and he was going to help me make my work better too. When that product received a glowing review from the top reviewer in the field, I couldn't believe it. It felt like I had been advised that I was winning a Nobel Prize or something. Steve had sent me a copy of the entire review by email because he knew I didn't spend that much time online; I didn't even know where the reviewers posted their reviews. I read the review over and over. I printed it and read the printed copy over and over. Steve's email contained only two things, a copy of the review, and the word "Congratulations." He knew there was nothing else to say. The next day, though, he wrote and asked "When am I going to get *101 Forest Spells?*" with an email smiley. I told him that I couldn't work to deadlines on this. That with my mom's impending passing, with all my workload in my other fields, with my other work for him, I'd just have to do these at my own pace. Steve didn't flinch. He didn't try to sell me something about how in the RPG industry you have to work to deadlines in order to be successful (even though that's true, and he knew I knew it). He knew. He knew me; he knew how full my schedule was. He also knew that my work was really good, that he was proud to publish it, and that he'd be flexible on this one.

So Steve published six of my books. They have all received amazing reviews; and I know that they're good because I have been reading his work and as a result reading good work, for more than a decade. He has congratulated me every time. He and I had many conversations about what to do next. We had 10 planned, and Rite Publishing was going to publish its second 1001 spells. I was going to be the author of another hardcover. The folders for the remaining four books are on my computer. I've begun work on all of them. The seventh book is about three-quarters complete. I have perhaps a half-dozen email conversations with Steve hanging in suspended animation.

We were going to co-facilitate a workshop at GenCon in a month: Spellcraft 101. We were going to teach others how we do this. We were going to give away our methods. We were planning to share examples of good spells and bad spells. Like so many others in the industry, I have this gaping hole in my life where Steve once was. This sudden loss for me is as nothing compared to what it must be for Miranda and the rest of their families. Steve and I chatted about his family many times. Years ago, I received a beautiful invitation to his wedding -- he knew my work schedule wouldn't permit me to come, but he invited me nonetheless. Steve was my friend. And I'm proud and frankly amazed to know that I was his friend. My life is better for having had Steve in it. I can't find words for what it feels like to know that we won't keep having these conversations, that he won't be pushing me to do this work, that we won't be sharing a burger and a beer at GenCon anymore.

I miss you Steve. Rest in peace.

## A Friend in Mourning

*By Frank Carr*

Ever since I was a kid, I was fascinated with Asian kung-fu movies, wuxia, mythology, and culture. But, even before that, I was a D&D player. I loved roleplaying games and still do. Eventually, I grew to be frustrated with the lack of Asian roleplaying material that was out there, and what little there was never seemed to get the details right. So when a new rules system that bucked a lot of the stuff I disliked about 3rd edition AD&D came out and with the urging of some friends, I eventually began work on a setting that I wanted to publish. That system was what would ultimately be called Arcana Evolved. I got a license from Monte Cook, the creator of that new system, and I eventually found a couple of publishers willing to work with me, but those arrangements fell through in the end because I did not know what I was doing. Then, I met Steve Russell.

We knew of each other through some posts on the Okay Your Turn forums, but never really talked or met in person. However, we met at GenCon where I got to play in an Arcana Evolved game Steve was running along with some mutual friends. He was really interested in what I had been working on and already knew about it because of my posts on the forums. He was intrigued and thought it had potential. He was just starting out with doing some self-publishing with the very adventure we were playing that GenCon. I had, incidentally, just



completed a deal with Wayne Reynolds to do a cover painting for the book and Steve liked what he saw. We got to talking and hit it off. That was when Steve widened my worlds by telling me about patronage projects and crowd-source funding. In the end, after a lot of trials and tribulations, a military deployment, missed deadlines, blood, sweat, and tears, a lot of people collaborated with us to build something that only Steve could have directed to completion... my dream. Steve brought my dream of making my Asian RPG setting come true. We called it Lands of the Jade Oath. It was nominated in 2010 for an ENnie in the category of Best Electronic Book. Steve did that.

Over the years, Steve and I worked together on some more stuff, helping each other wherever possible. He was always gracious, forthright, honest, creative, and caring. I couldn't have asked for a better publisher. But, that wasn't Steven's real value to me. You see, over the years since that project, Steve continued to improve as a creative publisher and well... I don't really know any other way to put it... an RPG ambassador. He learned a lot of lessons in all the time he spent publishing. Many 3rd party publishers did during those years, and many still do, often the hard way, as it was for Steve, too. But, Steve didn't stop with that. He shared what he knew... what he had bled to learn.... He shared that information with anyone who was serious about learning and took the time to ask. He educated not only new publishers and freelance writers like myself, but also the customers. He gave them understanding of how the industry worked in broad strokes. For all he did for the industry, though, I will never forget what he did for me. He helped me to realize my dream and he was my friend.

Steve, you will be missed, but not forgotten. Your influence on the industry and on those creatives whose lives you have touched can still be felt. And we won't let that feeling die. This Jade Mandarin hereby decrees that the Humble Peasant Farmer be elevated to a position of reverence above all other published farmers; be they humble or not, peasant or emperor, because in the end they were not as altruistic or magnanimous as ours.

A friend in mourning,  
Frank C. Carr

## Memory

By Hans Cummings

I remember when Steve and I enjoyed lengthy conversations in the message board and chat app of OK -- Your Turn, a message board community owned by Monte Cook. He had a dream of running

an RPG company of his own and an appreciation for the evocative setting of Monte Cook's Unearthed Arcana/Arcana Evolved. Steve turned that dream into Rite Publishing. He was supportive of and encouraging towards anyone who shared a similar dream and would eagerly offer advice and assistance in any way he could. He helped me find a fantastic cover artist (Jason Rainville) for my first two novels and helped me put my work up on DriveThruRPG. From time to time, he gave me freelance opportunities, as well, opportunities I found both challenging and educational. Other people to whom I've spoken agree that Steve's generosity and encouragement helped them when they were getting started; he truly was an inspiration to many in the industry.

## The Dancer in the Door

A Memory of Steve Russell, by Jason Durall

I expect many others encountered Steve the way I did: online, in a forum. In this case, it was one discussing Erick Wujcik's *Amber Diceless Roleplaying*, a game we shared a great love for. As the only people currently in the game industry to have worked on *Amber* with Wujcik, I am often asked questions about it, and so I'm not particularly surprised when people contact me privately about the game, its behind-the-scenes history, and its status.

Steve and I exchanged a few basic messages, until the usual question came out: "*Do you know who has the rights now? Do you think it's possible to get those rights to do a new version of Amber?*"

I provided the same answer, as always: "*It's complicated... and no.*"

Usually that ends the conversation, but Steve was persistent. He asked, "*If I can get the rights, would you be interested in doing a new edition?*" I had an answer for that one, too, delivered in the tone a parent uses for an excitable child. "*I don't think there's any chance of anyone getting the rights, but if you should be able to... sure... of course I'd be interested.*" I said that with the full belief that it was the last I'd hear from him.

Usually that ends that second round of the conversation, but damned if Steve wasn't persistent. His next question, several days later, was "*If I can't get the rights to Amber, would you be interested in doing an equivalent game, with a new setting, using the same rules?*" I asked to clarify, whether he meant copying Wujcik's work without attribution, or somehow licensing the rights from the current license-holders. He was clear that he was interested in doing something with Wujcik's name on it, a



clear successor to *Amber*. This was the right answer, as far as I was concerned, and so I agreed, thinking this was again a bit of folly.

Usually that means I'll never hear from these would-be publishers again, but (I think you can guess where this is going), Steve was persistent, a veritable small-press version of the Terminator. He came back to me a short while later and said "*Hey, it's all laid out. I have the license to use Erick Wujcik's rules, but not the Amber setting. I'd love if it was compatible with Amber, but it doesn't have to be.*"

I mulled some ideas around, and put together a proposal that was inspired in equal parts by Zelazny's *Amber* books and his novel *Roadmarks*, Escher's "Relativity" illustration, Piranesi's "The Prisons" plates, a bit of Gene Wolfe's *There Are Doors*, the labyrinthine library from *The Name of the Rose*, and no small amount of the movies *Inception*, *The Adjustment Bureau*, and yes, *Monsters Inc.* Magic doors leading to alternate realities, and an infinite stair running backstage throughout all of reality. It was a bit lunatic, a bit unfocussed, but it felt right.

Usually such a screwball idea ends up going nowhere, but (of course) Steve said he loved it, and thus *Lords of Gossamer & Shadow* was born. He financed it through Patreon, and it became one of the fastest-funded roleplaying games using that platform. Anyone who's seen the video of his Snoopy dance of joy upon the game's funding can attest to how happy he was about the project. He showed infinite patience with the development of the manuscript, and even more so when it overran my initial size projections by at least a third. Many publishers would balk at paying more than they'd projected, as well as having to foot the bill for additional artwork and production bandwidth, but he took it all in good spirits and remained enthusiastic throughout the entire campaign, during its release and beyond. He opened the door to an amazing team of artists and editorial staff, and the rare instance when he pushed back was solely in service to the project as a whole... and he was inevitably right.

I only met Steve in person once, at a Gen Con, when he, Miranda, and I sat down for lunch near the convention site. It was a blast, and I realized quickly that he was even more enthusiastic in person, a never-ending fount of energy and positivity. As the game's development continued, he was always around in one fashion or another, through the occasional G+ hangout and regular email and instant message conversations. I'm still not sure when he slept: we were in the same time zone and yet he seemed to be always awake. He'd

ping me on IM with some sort of question as I was going to bed, and I'd often wake up and see that he was already up, with another comment or question. I sleep a lot less than most folks... and he seemed to sleep even less than me.

We talked a lot about life and stuff not relating to gaming, and offered each other support through some rough times, as well as congratulations over the positive developments in our lives. He'd pop at random times on IM with an unobtrusive "ping" to let me know he was around. "*Hello, Steve!*" I'd reply, and we'd generally end up chatting for a while. Over the years of the game's development, we became friends, and I looked forward to hearing from him, even when there was no pressing issue to discuss. I gather that he was that to a lot of people, and I feel blessed to be among their ranks. A few months after release of the game, Steve even contacted me and paid me a nice bonus, extra money above and beyond what we'd agreed upon, as thanks for making it such a successful release. He didn't have to, but that's the kind of guy he was.

I was humbled by Steve's claim that *Lords of Gossamer & Shadow* was the project he was most proud to have ushered into being, and I took that as a mandate to continue my own enthusiasm for the game line beyond its initial release, offering the backers and others a variety of expansion materials. Even now, the game line is flourishing, with its biggest expansion to date, a project he was equally as enthusiastic about as he was the core rulebook. I live on another continent now, in a mostly-different life, and I'm overjoyed to see copies of *Lords of Gossamer & Shadow* on bookshelves of game stores here. I still say to myself: "*Check it out, Steve! We made that!*"

Usually after a game's release the publisher shifts gears and there's less communication, but once again, Steve confounded expectations and was there just as much, promoting the game and the growing line of releases, opening the door to an ever-widening group of collaborators: writers and artists and production people. He handled public relations with ease and humility, and I was amazed to find out that he was like that for all the games he brought out, tirelessly promoting and curating the lines. More so, he had a vast well of advice and support for other newcomers, including those that were technically his rivals.

Even now, four years after its release, when I'm overwhelmed with other professional work, I'm still eager to do more for that game, a momentum born entirely out of Steve's tireless, boundless energy. However, my focus has admittedly shifted



from "I want to do this" to "I think this would have made Steve dance for joy." And that's unusual, but it feels right.

So that's how I will remember Steve. Not as the editor who brought into being the game that was my most personal and rewarding professional experience, nor as the ever-present figure on instant messenger, but as that guy doing that delirious Snoopy dance of joy, standing in the door to some grand adventure.

So, goodbye Steve... and, as always, hello!

## The Man Who Wrote The Sky

By Matt Banach

Draw close and bend the ear to listen well,  
The man who wrote the sky passed by today;  
Like showered shooting stars his wonders fell,  
To light the path and beautify the way.

The scribes of many scripts did owe him due,  
For legion were the sparks he fanned to flame;  
He blazed a trail and brought us with him too,  
By burning for his art he raised the game.

His star now hangs far off in distant sky,  
The dark of fallen night a somber veil;  
Fell fate has took our friend, and we ask why,  
But all that's left to do is tell his tale.

Adventure on, our friend, into the light,  
Go armored with our love, this final rite.

In Memory of

Steven D. Russell

Creator, Gamer, Friend

## Memories and Reflections on Steve

By Dave Paul

What follows are several submissions from folks throughout the RPG industry who were able to send something to *Pathways* for this issue. Many people did not or could not send something—the Rite Family extends empathy and compassion to everyone who wanted to say something but found themselves without a voice. We get it.

These documents are mostly untouched. As editor of *Pathways* I've made a few spelling corrections here, and a couple of minor syntax changes there, but the tone and content remains. I wanted to preserve as much as possible from the contributions as they came in. So, while I was eager in many cases to add an editor's note to something here or there, I refrained from doing so, to let the documents speak for themselves.

## Stubbornness, thy name is Steve

By Perry Grosshans

Steve was stubborn.

I know that stubborn can be a negative term, but when I think of Steve I remember that glimmer in his eye. He was always more than simply determined. When Steve set his mind to something, he made sure to complete that task regardless of the barriers that may have been in his way. Nothing was insurmountable. He would focus on that task until he was satisfied it was complete.

I met Steve online through the EN World forums back in 2004. He was looking for someone to playtest some D&D monsters he had designed in a manuscript he called *The Adversary's Bestiary*. I had never taken part in any official sort of playtesting before and thought this would be a great opportunity to start getting involved in the "professional" game publishing world!

Steve at this point though wasn't a professional publisher but a regular 9 to 5 working Joe, and like most of us he was an enthusiastic gamer with a passion for game design. He did have a fancy fledgling company: 3P, short for Pencil Pushers Publishing. We connected via email, he sent me the bestiary and an NDA that I signed and mailed back to him, and I got to work reading.

Immediately I noticed an enormous number of grammatical errors and spelling mistakes. Obviously, this wasn't the completed manuscript, but I could not just let them go. I started to make notes and corrections, and when I connected with him a few days later and let him know that I was making a few grammatical suggestions, he encouraged me to continue. He promised that if the changes were substantial enough and to his liking, he might even give me a credit! Well, what the heck. I was reading through it anyway, so I just continued.

At the time I was running a weekly D&D game with six friends and decided to insert Steve's menagerie of monsters into the regular game. I wanted this playtest to be substantial because I didn't want to let Steve down! Many of the monsters the party encountered several times, and after every session we would discuss the pros and cons of the monster as a group. I put together quite a detailed playtest report after a couple of months and emailed it off to him. The manuscript itself was heavily marked up in pencil, and at the time I did not have the technology to make the corrections to the pdf, so I had to snail-mail the manuscript back to him.



Life continued, as it does. Steve continued to work on the bestiary with his paid editor (I believe that was Dave Paul) and his illustrator, but he was also very busy with his 9 to 5 job. We emailed a few more times, but weeks turned into a month, then two, then several more.

Then my computer crashed, and the web server I was using for email closed down which forced me to get a new email account. The result was that I lost all my old emails and my tenuous connection with Steve was lost. I got busy, a year and a bit went by. I thought about that bestiary every now and then, but I had stopped visiting EN World months before for a variety of reasons. For all intents and purposes my great foray into the publishing gaming world was over. Or so I thought.

One Saturday out of the blue there was a phone call – from Steve! How? What? I stammered and laughed. He laughed back, explaining that when one worked at a telecommunications company as he did, one had means and ways of tracking people down. And he was stubborn, and was not about to give up on finding me again. I could almost hear him winking on the other end.

He apologized for not reaching out sooner. He loved the playtest report, stating it was the best one he had ever read. And he appreciated my enthusiasm for editing his work so much that he wanted to offer me a real editing job for another project, a D&D sourcebook he was working on for EN Publishing.

From that point onwards, I recall Steve becoming more and more passionate about game publishing. We kept in touch much more regularly, and I still remember the day he told me he was quitting his job to go full-time with publishing. He created a website, a logo, and a new name: Rite Publishing. I was privileged to be one of the first few regular “staff” members on the Rite team.

The first project I worked on with him for Rite was *A Witch's Choice*, part one of the Rituals of Choice adventure path, designed for Monte Cook's Arcana Evolved. We released it on DrivethruRPG in 2009. When I got the printed copy in my hands I couldn't believe my eyes. Here was something I helped create. Here was something Steve had made possible thanks to his passion and his drive. And because he was stubborn and determined to make Rite work.

Because of Steve's stubbornness to connect with me again and track me down, he gave me an opportunity to really work in the gaming industry. Because of Steve's stubbornness, he gave me the opportunity to work with so many great writers over the next bunch of years: Matt Forbeck, Cam Banks, Jason Durall, Rob Donoghue, Matt Banach, and Amber Scott, just to name a few. Because of Steve's stubbornness, he

was able to acquire the Diceless by Design license to produce *Lords of Gossamer & Shadow*, something he told me several times was his proudest achievement as a 3PP (third party publisher, as the lingo goes).

I was fortunate to connect up with him in the flesh twice at GenCon in 2014 and 2015. We hung out several times, went to panels, dinner, and the ENnie awards where he really opened my eyes to the 3PP world. I knew that Steve knew people, but I didn't realize how many of them knew him! I knew that Steve had been working hard as a publisher, but it really came into focus talking to all of these wonderful and creative people just how much of an impact Steve was making with Rite Publishing.

When Steve passed away on July 5, 2016 there was a noticeable reaction in the 3PP and gaming community. So many of us shared stories about how Steve had been instrumental in getting us started in the gaming industry either as a writer, editor, designer, or artist. He connected people together who perhaps would never have had a chance to work together. Steve wanted to share his dream of working in the gaming industry with everyone who was as passionate about games as he was. I can never thank him enough for giving me these opportunities, and for creating such a wonderful and significant 3PP gaming company.

Thanks for being stubborn, Steve.

## Remembrance

*By Rachel Ventura*

Steve was always so supportive of me in the gaming world. We would speak about business practices and marketing often. Many times our conversations started at 1 or 2 am as we both worked long hours. We discussed many kickstarter projects. I would pick





Steve's brain often and we would even sometimes get into healthy debate. When I was selected for Gen Con Industry Insider there were mutual friends who were hurtful, sexist, and/or failed to congratulate me. Steve was not only thrilled and supportive but went out of his way to ensure people knew about my contributions to the gaming world. The industry needs more paladins like Steve. It was always a pleasure palling around with Steve at Gen Con. His wife and daughter should be very proud. He will be missed by many and remembered by even more.

## Remembrance

*By Robert N. Emerson*

Ever forward, never backward. Left foot, right foot.

Same place. Same time. It just never happened, the minutia always got in the way of it. We tried, though. We plotted. We planned. We changed the plots and the plans. Regardless, it was always a gonna be and now it is forever a never.

We talked, though. A lot. On target, and off target. With a reason, with no reason. With a sense of purpose, but also a lot of nonsense of purpose.

Rare was it for someone to wake me up; oddly enough it's been a lot rarer these days. No regrets though. Well, no regrets about our bull sessions.

You were an excellent and complimentary kvetch, we could go on for hours about how this could have been done better, how that should have been done, why we didn't do something, or why we did even though we knew we shouldn't. You let me rant and rave for no damn reason, and you laughed even at the horrible jokes that escaped my lips. Thank you for that, it's a rare space that few have stepped into with me, for me.

I do regret the never has been part, though. I don't allow for many regrets in my life, regrets are of the backward. Reflection upon the unchangeable. But, I'll allow for this one, this once.

The rock has changed, and for the lesser. It is less sure, less steady, and noticeably so. I do not like the change, but that is often the nature of it.

You are missed, my friend. Noticeably so, but we are better for having known you and lesser with you now gone.

I miss you, Steve. Ever forward, never backward. Mostly never.

## In Memoriam

*By Thilo Graf (Endzeitgeist)*

I miss Steven every day. I am not engaging in hyperbole when I'm saying that I wouldn't have started reviewing without him, and that I probably

would have dropped out of the whole roleplaying hobby by now if it hadn't been for him. He was the first publisher to offer me a complimentary copy for a review and it was he who taught me that integrity would be more important than good ratings in such reviews, in his very first e-mail to me, mind you: His argument was that even a single sold copy, at one point, would warrant giving out a copy and that he and his authors as well as all readers would benefit from that more than from any 5-star array. The argument stuck with me in its beautiful simplicity and pragmatism and he did live it; he actually defended me on numerous occasions.

But more so than that, he has enriched my games far beyond what I had heretofore seen - his emphasis on narratives, on atmosphere and high-concept pdfs continues to resound with me to this day; even after all this time, I can flip open his earlier works and marvel at their prose. Steven was a supremely talented man. But there are many talented people out there - what set him apart, at least for me, was his entrepreneur's eye for talent and his ability to coax the best out of authors, including himself. Call it hubris, but to some extent, I hope that he saw how he improved me and smiled, that he noticed his influence. My whole format, my diverging from my early ToC-style reviews, is ultimately the work of Steven - he was, to me, a mentor of sorts, and one that has been always perfectly straight, honest, honorable and kind with me.

Steven, justifiably, was proud of his work, but he took constructive criticism and used it to steadily improve his craft and he extended that to his personal relations: When I was struggling in my personal life, he did lend me his ear, lifted me back up and dusted me off, metaphorically speaking. He helped me; he taught me about the extent of my obligations to my readers, authors and publishers alike. And it may sound strange, but even while we argued, he never confused me, as a person and friend, with my "profession" as a reviewer - he always "got" it.

Don't get me wrong - I am cognizant of the fact that my profession kept us in touch, was a catalyst, if you will, but at the same time, Steven honestly cared. You could feel it, even when he was passionate about something. His slogan, paraphrased to "doing the rite thing," is perhaps the best way I can describe him - he made me not only a better reviewer and author, but a better person. If there is an afterlife, I sincerely hope that he's smiling at seeing all the lives he touched and improved, that he made better with his influence, both as a creative force and as a person.

I raise a toast to you, my friend - your legacy is one of beauty, creativity, joy and lives uplifted. I hope that I can one day look back upon my life and claim to have made even a fraction of your impact. I miss you.



## On Saying Goodbye

By Trevor Gulliver

Even after this time, I do not know how to say goodbye to Steve. The friendships possible because of and mediated through social media are so different.

I never met Steve in real life. He was also a friend. I worked on a number of projects for Rite Publishing and enjoyed his editorial style: honest, respectful, and challenging. He gave me a lot of space to explore my thoughts and gave the support needed to get them out.

When things got hard and I could not write for a while during my divorce, he kept in touch. He probed gently to see if I wanted to write again but offered friendship and support if I did not. I always assumed we would have opportunities to meet face-to-face someday, but I missed those chances.

I don't really know how to say goodbye to Steve.

## Memoriam

By Wendall Roy

This has not been easy to write. So many people knew Steve better and more intimately than I did that every time I try to put words to paper I get paranoid that it will seem too much, too emotional for the level of our relationship. It shook me to my core in ways that I did not expect when Steve was taken from this world in an absurd, stupid moment by someone afflicted with a disease initiated by their own poor life choices.

So I'm going to just state a series of facts, moments of interaction that I had with Steve, and just let them speak for themselves to the measure of this wonderful man. I may swear some, I do that a lot. Dave or any of the other Ritters can just slap [redacted] over any words they want to not print; I won't hold it against them.

**Fact #1** - The first time I interacted with Steve was back in 2012, answering an open call for authors to add to Rite's #30 series. He was one of the first people in the industry to give me a chance, and was just straight-up courteous and professional all the way. It was also my first introduction to Questhaven, the City of Bastards, to Steve's unique take on religion in his in-progress campaign setting, to the 2000-year reign of the Immortal Emperor and Dread Lich Korvak Cynmark, and other nuggets of awesomeness. It's pretty damned cool to discuss world-building with someone else in the industry, especially when you're at a point that you don't really consider yourself in the industry. The fact that Steve wanted other people to add to Questhaven and have this collaborative experience is so exemplary of the caliber of his character.

**Fact #2** - It took Steve like 20 minutes to spot a review or sales metric, especially good ones, and

pat an author on the back. His opportunity for me with #30 Alchemical Gadgets earned my first 5-star from anyone, and as much as I obsessively checked its position and comments on DriveThruRPG, Steve spotted it before me. He'd even forward feedback and commentary from customers.

**Fact #3** - The first time I got a poor review was during the initial playtest for ITC-dragons. I was pretty salty in email about it, because the commentary didn't even make sense relative to the material or help in the playtest at all... no constructive criticism. Steve's emailed response was to just ask for my number. Well shit, I thought, here I went and was a dick in front of my publisher, probably not the best move. Steve calls me, and his first concern was that I wasn't too upset with the review. He then (paraphrasing here but pretty close) said, "Fuck 'em, I'll call someone on their comments if they can't give us anything constructive to work with." That's pretty much the moment I stopped sending out solicitations for open calls and became as close to an in-house writer as you can get, just letting Steve fill my free time with as much work as he could.

**Fact #4** - Steve loved to talk gaming. His knowledge of western classic mythology and the bedrocks of modern fantasy and sci-fi were superb. He'd do tons of little things, for example, like offer, "read Zelazny's Lord of Light," when I was working on concepts for ITC-Rakshasa. Knowing Steve on an intellectual level edified me and made me a better person, not to mention a better writer. I treasure the small conversations we had via email and phone more than I realized at the time. I still think of them in some of moments of silence and can't do anything other than get pissed that I can't have another one.

**Fact #5** - Steve had asked Ritters last year if anyone wanted to sit in on a panel or two at GenCon with him. I wasn't supposed to go, didn't have the time or money to fit it in. It would have been the first time we could hang out in person, share a drink, hobnob, do some gaming... all the awesomeness that conventions bring. I figured I'd catch him at one of the cons in 2017 and we'd finally have that moment. After Steve was taken from us, I found myself dumping out money I didn't have for last-minute plane tickets to Indy, Gen Con registration, and begging for a place to crash. It blew my mind how many people turned out just to pay their respects, how the freshness of the shock and the rawness of the loss were just as apparent for all of us, and precisely how much impact both personal and professional Steve had across the industry.

**Fact #6** - Steve made this industry and all of us better. Period.



Rite Publishing Presents

# IN THE COMPANY OF GENIES



by T.H. Gulliver





## Reviews



### 10 Wight Magic Items

**Publisher:** Rite Publishing

**Reviewer:** Endzeitgeist

**Stars:** 1 star out of 5

This expansion of magic items for the less-than-stellar playable wight-race 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 let's take a look!

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

We begin with the *bone breaker club*, which inflicts +50% damage versus "skeletons and creatures with exoskeletons or brittle construction." Oh boy. This is not starting off well. So a) 50% of WHAT? Str-mod included? Precision damage? Before or after crits? MESSY. Also: "skeletons" are a specific creature – so not to skeletal champions etc.? What the EFF is a "brittle construction" in rules-terms?? It gets better: 5/day, you can break a bone upon successfully dealing damage. Breaking a bone caused short-term penalties. That don't even require healing to get better. Oh, and it lacks the information of what type of action is used to activate this ability.

The *cowl of compassion* nets a +4 bonus to Diplomacy and a 1/day reroll when dealing with living humanoids, but only for undead wearers... at least that's what I surmised. Boring filler. The *crown of the barrow wight king* sounds cool, right? +4 to Diplomacy and Intimidate versus undead and 1/day *control undead*...\*facepalms\* I don't have to explain this one, right? Continuing the array of uninspired filler, the slightly modified spell-in-a-can *cryptwalker's boots* allow you to teleport back to previously visited locations of death and slaughter like crypts, battlefields, etc. – living creatures thus transported are staggered for an hour on a failed save.

THANKFULLY, the next item is something different: The *gray heart* contains a reservoir of hit points equal to the wielder's "charisma score." That should be capitalized. Upon being reduced to zero hit points, the gray heart's hit points act as a buffer before death. Also, undead are not "dying" (that being a condition in PFRPG), but are "destroyed". The hit points in a gray heart can be refilled via draining SPs or spells, healing, etc. – but oddly not via SUs and the like.

Installing such a heart causes 15 hit points of damage (OOOHHH!) and renders the character staggered for 24 hours. This item being slot-less. *Negative charms* absorb up to 30 points of positive energy damage. "The wearer of the charm does not make a Will save for half damage from channeled positive energy." Okay, but \*can\* he? You know, successful save = half damage...and it being slotless...does it allow for one character to have more of them??

*Packmaster's hunting cloak* is a sucky skill-bonus item that lacks the proper bonus type. *Restorative funeral boards* allow undead resting on them to regain hit points and ability score damage as though alive and prevents the living from doing so, while also instilling the fatigued condition. Classic item that has serious ramifications of a world's in-game logic and realities – GMs should carefully consider what this means for the game...

The *thrall pendants* are keyed to master pendants: The master knows where the thralls are, has an empathic link with the thralls at an enhanced range and the master may designate a creature to gain a boost to Strength and temporary hit points "for up to 2 rounds" at the end of round two, the undead creature "dies from overload." Oh, dear d12. Undead don't "die". The pdf lacks the information on how to designate a "master pendent[sic]"; it only costs 2K. How does the destruction work? Does it have a cooldown for the two rounds? Can the master designate less time? If an undead has once benefited from it, does the 2-round timer reset? Why is there no save? Put one on a lich, two rounds later, it goes kablooeey. WTF.

*Vambraces of control* tie into the horribly broken frenzy and urge mechanics. There is no legacy item in this pdf.

### Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are decent on a formal level. On a rules-language level, I am astonished how many issues have crept into these extremely basic items. Layout adheres to a two-column full-color standard and the artwork on the cover is the best thing about this pdf.

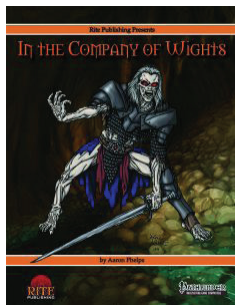
I REALLY hoped that Aaron Phelps' items would fare better than his race. They don't. These items are extremely basic, sport filler galore (which is \*really\* bad at this length and not something we usually see in Rite Publishing's creative item-pdfs!), manage to get rules-terminology wrong in spite of the lack of complexity and universally are lame. The filler items would have been lame back in 2010. 2017, they are inexcusable.



I can try to be relativist here, but the matter of fact remains: There is not a single item herein I'd consider worthwhile. They either are boring, basic, or problematic in some way. The *gray heart* is halfway decent, but that's not enough, not by a long shot. Even for the low price point, this is not a worthy addition to Rite Publishing's canon and I can't find any way to actually recommend this to anyone. Hence, my final verdict will clock in at 1 star.

You can get these items [here on OBS](#).

**Endzeitgeist out.**



## In the Company of Wights

**Publisher:** Rite Publishing

**Reviewer:** Endzeitgeist

**Stars:** 1.5 stars out of 5

This installment of Rite Publishing's "In the Company of..."-series clocks in at 17 pages, 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial, 1 page of SRD, 1 page advertisement, leaving

us with 13 pages of content, so let's take a look!

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

All right, we begin this pdf with a heart-warming dedication to the founder of Rite Publishing, Steven D. Russell, who has left us too soon. After this, though, it is similarly heart-warming to see that the traditions of master Russell live on – we begin with an in-character letter of a member of the race, sent to Qwilion of Questhaven, the scribe that is responsible for collecting these pieces of information in the context of the great meta-narratives that suffuse these books.

Thus, as has become the tradition, the flavor-text presented to us would be written from the point of view of the species "We are the hollowed" – indeed! Intelligent, sentient wights spawned from strong souls, these beings sport a glowing gaze and retain the previous race's racial characteristics like height and they, obviously, stop aging -as such, this time around, we actually don't need an age, height or weight table and the racial traits replace those of the base race, but more on that later. The pdf elaborates on society...or rather, about how to fit in with the living and dead...and there is the Urge – the wights herein do crave the essence of the living and there are those that have succumbed to the Urge, while others resist it – the scenario is, roleplay-wise, not unlike that of the World of Darkness.

Now, regarding racial traits, we begin by acknowledging the first issue -as quasi-undead,

the wights depicted herein (who call themselves the hollowed) have no Constitution, which would render them OP via most character creation methods – hence, ways to use them in a balanced context with point-buy etc. are included. The hollowed get +2 to an ability score of their choice and retain their former humanoid's race influences speed and size – either Small or Medium. As a minor nitpick: Size-categories are capitalized in PFRPG. As modified undead, the hollowed gain darkvision 60 ft., are immune to bleed and death effects, disease, paralysis, poison, sleep and stunning and are immune to Fort-save resisted effects, unless these can affect objects.

They may not be raised from the dead (spell references not italicized) but may be returned to become living beings. They get +1/2 their HD as a racial bonus to resist mind-affecting effects. They are healed by negative energy, harmed by positive energy (this wording is a bit non-standard, but works). Hollowed are also immune to nonlethal damage, ability drain or energy drain and they are immune to damage to physical attributes as well as to exhaustion and fatigue, but are also immediately destroyed upon being reduced to 0 hp. Sooo...this is ALMOST full undead immunities. Beyond that, they gain a +2 racial bonus to Intimidate...so what does the Urge bring to the table, balance-wise? Well, death's stigma imposes a grant total -1 per level to Diplomacy (not properly capitalized) when dealing with the living and a similar penalty to Disguise (also not properly capitalized) when trying to pass as a living creature.

When "violence is enacted in the presence of a hollowed", the hollowed has to succeed a Will-save versus  $15 + 1/2$  current HD (is 1 rounded down? I assume no...) or attack the closest creature. On a successful save, they are immune to the Urge. Succumbing to the Urge allows for rerolls of Perception checks to determine the undead nature of the hollowed. At 1st level, hollowed succumbing to the urge get +2 to hit and damage and HEAL BY THE AMOUNT OF THE DAMAGE CAUSED. Okay, let's play, shall we? What's the range of "violence caused" that may trigger the Urge? Does "attacking closest creature" include spells and abilities? What's the bonus type the Urge is supposed to grant? The wording there is wonky. After the first attack, the hollowed can attempt a fixed DC 15 Will-save to stop, but otherwise, their frenzy continues for 1d3 rounds. The bonuses increase by +2 every six levels. Does that mean  $1 > 7 > 13 > 19$  or  $1 > 6 > 12 > 18$ ? No idea. Wanna hear a joke? If that sounds like a hassle (WHY?? FREE



INFINITE HEALING WITH JUST A KITTEN!!!), you can suppress the urge at the start of a day... and boohoo, you do take devastating -2 to Wisdom-based skill checks. This is a non-entity of a balance-mechanism. It allows for infinite healing "Quick, throw kittens to our half dead undead compadre!", fails to specify crucial ability interactions...and simply is not precise enough.

Beyond that, undead PC races tend to be problematic due to their gazillion immunities – hence why Rite Publishing's own, chassis-wise vastly superior [restless souls](#) tweaked that for even gritty game compatibility. If you're shooting for powerful, but balanced undead races, both Kobold Press' amazing [darakhul](#) and AAW Games' [dodelig](#) do a better job at making the race as a whole not break the game – this race needs a whack with the nerfbat for undead immunities and drawbacks that matter. RAW they only have the undead fragility-thing going for them and that is the least favorite part of playing undead of pretty much every player I know. Similarly, the reassigning of points for characters turned hollowed in play is okay...but imho still pales before the restless souls.

The race gets 3 alternate racial traits: Clung to Life "eliminate the effects of constant decay" – which should refer to the Death's Stigma drawback by name – the hollowed lose the Disguise penalty, but also loses immunity to bleed, death effects, disease, paralysis, poison, sleep and stunning "but instead gains a resistance of 1 + 1/2 their Hit Dice" – WTF is that supposed to mean? A bonus to saves versus such effects? Resistance  $\neq$  save bonuses in PFRPG. That is a non-entity, rules-language-wise. Also, the language mentions one losing the Disguise drawback (but not the Diplomacy) and then mentions replacing the proper drawback by name. Instead of darkvision, these guys can get crypt sense, which works only in crypts or similar places filled with the dead and duplicates low-light vision...which is weird, considering that most such places will be...well. Dark. Oh, and they can detect bodies within 90 ft., even buried underground... and that is an issue. Do bodies need to be whole? Does lead block it? Do body-parts qualify? Animated bodyparts? The body-based immunities can be replaced with positive energy healing and being hurt by negative energy as though living.

The pdf features 5 favored class options – barbarian, bard, cavalier, rogue and true wight. They are okay, though the rogue's bonus is pretty weak: +1/2 to Stealth checks in dim light or darkness? Sign me up. Not.

The pdf also features 3 racial archetypes. The night strider rogue replaces trapfinding with something utterly OP. "When not moving...in dim light and darkness, they gain total concealment. In full light, they gain a +40 on Disguise checks to appear completely dead." Total concealment??? WTF??? KILL IT WITH FIRE. Oh, and the option to "choose to instead do 1d3 points of sneak attack damage and cause their target to become shaken for 1 round." So, is one sneak attack damage die thus reduced? All of them? Is sneak attack total damage reduced to 1d3? This is NON-OPERATIONAL. As a rules-aesthetic aside, the ability should mention that it modifies sneak attack, not just that it replaces trap sense.

The pale rider cavalier gets an undead steed. And instead of banner, he gets an aura of despair, 60 ft., – 2 to saves vs. fear, -1 to attack. At 10th level and every 5 levels thereafter, these penalties increase by -1. This replaces banner. This...generates a dead level at 14th level with greater banner falling by the wayside. It's also...BORING. The definition of a cookie-cutter archetype. I can literally point you to several better undead-rider tropes and heck, full classes. Next.

The final archetype would be the void singers. Bards, in case you haven't figured that out. They replace inspire courage with a song that inflicts -1 to attack and Will-saves, which is not language-dependent. Instead of bardic knowledge, they treat the Knowledge skills for Religion, Planes and Dungeoneering as class skills, get +1/2 level as a bonus and a reroll in these checks. The rules-language requires you to infer that this reroll is only available 1/day, courtesy of the scaling of daily uses. Bad. Instead of 6th level's suggestion, they can instill the Urge within a creature! PFFF... BEST ABILITY EVER? Better buffs that a barb's rage plus infinite healing via damage? Ugh, this whole section needs to die in a fiery blaze.

Okay, after this...let's hope that the racial paragon class holds up at least! The True Wight paragon gets 3/4 BAB-progression, good Ref-saves, d8 HD, 6 + Int skills per level and proficiency with simple weapons and light armor. The class abilities are not provided in sequence, but oh well. True Wights gain the option to use the urge sans external stimulus as a free action 1/day. (The ability should note its level, but you can see that in the table.) Also at first level, the true wight gains a death mastery, + an additional one at 2nd level and every 2 levels thereafter. A total of 13 are provided, which means that there'll be not too much variation here. We have increased speed and this gem: "The true



wight gains a swim speed of 30 feet for 1 minute per level." That's an (Ex), fyi. This is not how things are done in PFRPG and RAW, this does not work. It has a duration, is hence active and thus needs an activation action.

Internal balance is also off here: Locate a corpse of ANYONE they knew for 24 hours or longer? Come again? Wight police state? Oh, and perfect identification of corpses, no matter the state of decay or mutilation? This wrecks so many plots, it's not even funny. Detaching limbs is a cool concept, but the complex rules-language required to make it work is nowhere near represented here. A particular gem regarding two detached limbs is the following: "If both limbs are together, they can perform trip attacks using the true wight's CMB -1." What's "together"? Do they provoke AoOs? What size are they?

Well, you get the idea. 4th level nets a claw attack that does not specify whether it's primary or secondary, does not take true wight size into account and has the wrong dice size. 10th level nets "Damage Reduction 1", which increases by 1 for every two levels thereafter. Spot the extremely obvious style deviation... 10th level and 15th level allow for burst-like control of undead nearby. Rules-language isn't perfect, but functional. At 10th level, creatures they slay can be made into spawn and one such spawn may be controlled at any given time. The creature must be 2 or more levels below the wight...unless a PC, which makes no sense. Why not base this off Leadership? At 3rd level and every 2 levels thereafter, the class gets to choose from its second talent array, the living weapon-subsection of talents.

Here, we have 8 gazes and they fail to mention that the scaling DC should be based on CLASS levels, not levels, and the gaze's effects similarly sport that omission in the duration. These gazes are btw pretty powerful and mention the antagonized condition sans explanation (It does exist and I love it, see [Ultimate Charisma](#) by Everyman Gaming, but considering the glitch-density, I am not sure if that's intended). 5th level lets the wight choose daze for save-or-suck (too soon) and, stupidly, the stunned condition, worse than dazed, does not have a level prerequisite. Also: prerequisite formatting is not done like this "Prerequisite: True wight 8" – it's "A true wight must be at least 8th level to select this living weapon." – but that as an educational, aesthetic aside. Also: Spell-reference not italicized for the level 8 prereq-gaze that causes *insanity*. Compare that to the mesmerist. Yeah... Okay, one saving grace – the gazes behave as hexes

–one save and you're immune for 24 hours against that specific gaze. Oh, and action economy? No idea. Can a wight maintain multiple gazes at once? What's the action?

Alternative abilities in this talent-suite net a bite (not properly codified, but at least the damage-die size is correct- for Medium wights... 1/day, 15th+ level wights may cause death with their natural attacks against creatures with lower HD. Save or suck, does it require a hit? Is it a touch attack? No idea. Ridiculous: "The true wight's natural attack gains the ability to cause 1d6 cold damage. Creatures that take damage roll a Fortitude save, DC 10 + Wis modifier or become staggered for 1d3 rounds." Do I even have to pick that apart? I'll ignore formatting deviations for now. Is this cold damage INSTEAD of the regular damage? Oh, and it provides INFINITE STAGGERLOCKS at 3rd level. That sound? That's my head. And a desk. The same lack of clarity pertains, just fyi, also the talent that adds Str AND Dex damage to attacks...though that at least only can be used 3/day. As a capstone, creatures hit can become spawn, he can break the HD-limit to control weak undead and gets immunity against "mind effect spells and abilities." I'll let that stand here.

We close the pdf with 3 feats: +1 DC for gazes. Whoopdiedoo. The second feat gets rid of the "obviously dead trait" – guess what? THAT RACIAL TRAIT DOES NOT EXIST. It's called "Death's Stigma, for cryin' out loud. There also is a "Team Work Feat"[sic!], improperly formatted, which nets blindsense (sans range! Full strength!) as well as "+1 AC dodge bonus, +1 to hit and damage, +3 to hit when flanking and you cannot be flat-footed" while within 60 feet of another hallowed. Bonus types. Wording. Power. Urgh.

## Conclusion:

Editing and formatting, on a formal level, are good. On a rules-language levels, they're BAD and even inconsistent with themselves. Formatting is all over the place, wording conventions are flaunted left and right and abilities become more opaque than they have any right to be, considering analogue precedence cases. Layout adheres to Rite Publishing's two-column full-color standard and the pdf comes fully bookmarked for your convenience. The pdf sports nice full-color artworks.

Aaron Phelps' pdf started out so well. The prose in the beginning was glorious and the dedication to Steve pulled at my heart's strings. The flavor was



great and when the race started taking character creation into account, I was pretty optimistic.

Yeah, that did not last long. This is gonna be harsh and I apologize to the author for it, but there is no way around it: The race is overpowered, has an utterly broken, defining feature and needs a complete rewrite. There are issues in the nomenclature, even in the internal one. There are copious rules-syntax and rules-semantics violations here. The archetypes are universally boring, cookie-cutter and ill-conceived and would have received a thrashing from me back in 2010; 2017? Just NO. Unfortunately, the racial paragon class is flawed as well, violating finer details of the rules, lacking crucial information for several components and promoting utterly cheesy and bad exploits. Rules-language is all over the place and nowhere near the level of precision required by PFRPG, and I'm not even going to bother explaining how neither balance with other options, nor within the options available, is anywhere near the required standards.

This is not on par with the 3pp-quality standards we have all fought so hard for and needs a complete rewrite of EVERYTHING rules-related. If I had to dev this, I'd scrap it and rewrite it from scratch.

This is in particularly BAFFLING, when gazes have been done by the mesmerist and when there are not one, but THREE vastly superior, excellent undead PC options, my favorite of which, Steven D. Russell's [Restless Souls](#), does btw everything this tries to do better – and it is several years old. And released by Rite publishing as well. And if you really want the hunger aspect, get Ben McFarland's [Darakhul](#). And if you want to play Small undead, get AAW Games' [dødelig](#).

I tried very hard to find anything positive to say about this – and apart from “The lore is cool (but also kinda redundant with Steve's restless souls around...)...” I drew a blank and came up with nothing. If you want to go for the lore, great...but as a reviewer, I can't. Aaron Phelps contributed to the Martial Arts Guidebook back in the day, if I recall correctly, so no idea what happened here. My final verdict cannot exceed 1.5 stars...with the lore making me round up. Barely.

You can check this out [here on OBS](#).

**Endzeitgeist out.**

## [10 Kingdom Seeds: Plains](#)

**Publisher:** Rite Publishing

**Reviewer:** Endzeitgeist

**Stars:** 4.5 stars out of 5



This inexpensive 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!

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

After a brief piece of introductory fluff, we dive right into the nit and grit of this file, namely villages that you can use to craft, bingo, kingdoms from them – each of these settlements comes with a village statblock, but does not end there: Beyond a small summary of the village, we also get one or more sites of interest and 3 different rumors per village to potentially jumpstart adventures from.

So that's the format employed here – but what kind of villages are we talking about? Well, for starters, LG Belpond, is a surprisingly lawful and cozy village of guild-organized structures, where a visit of the local tavern may see your pockets emptied...only to have the goods be returned to you before leaving! Lightley, in contrast, would be a LE thorp of only 13 folks and is known for its bears.

Taking the example of settlements tied to creatures, the hamlet Morlea, situated between these spectra of the alignment axis at LN, actually does not rest – instead, it follows the migration patterns of the mammoths, making for an interesting and rather evocative backdrop. Ornesse would be an interesting, touristy destination with serious population fluxes, for the chariot race tracks always draw plentiful folks to the hamlet during the racing season.

In contrast to this place, the folks of Prydwin are living by their herbs, which are grown in excessive herb gardens that are meticulously maintained by the populace. Have I mentioned the druidess and her pest-devouring chameleon companion? Revale is either white or red – steeped in snow or showcasing its red sandstone beauty – and the theme of color extends to the primary industry, which hinges upon the extraction of color from rare lichen. Unlike its name, the hamlet shadowhurst is actually known to be a rather lively place, famed for its straw-related craftsmanship and corn.

Soulhill sounds foreboding – and indeed, the village, after an uprising and burning of the previous rulers, has taken to a rather selfish and dangerous demeanor. Westerfox is built around



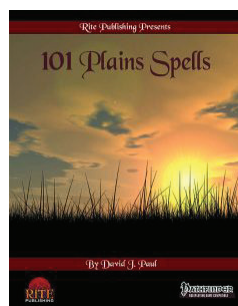
a horseshoe-shaped abbey, with sprawling buildings around, and represents a community that is rather disciplined and tight-knit – formally a meritocracy, but in fact, controlled by a nasty elite. Finally, Woodedge would be a place you don't want to visit: Buried in banks of tall flowers and flanked by beehives, it may seem idyllic enough, but gigantic bees and rather nasty halflings make this place a dangerous prospect for visitors.

## Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are top-notch, I noticed no serious glitches. Layout adheres to Rite Publishing's two-column full-color standard and the pdf comes fully bookmarked for your convenience: While the bookmarks haven't been labeled properly, they are functional. The pdf sports nice full-color artworks.

Liz Smith delivers a nice variety of small settlements to visit and develop. The respective places have sufficiently diverse themes to make this worthwhile and while I wished this had more room for the individual villages, it does provide enough to jumpstart one's imagination. Considering the very fair price point and the writing, which provides a nice array of different concepts this time around, my final verdict will clock in at 4.5 stars – and due to the low price, I'll round up for the purpose of this platform.

You can get this inexpensive pdf [here on OBS!](#)  
**Endzeitgeist out.**



## 101 Plains Spells

**Publisher:** Rite Publishing

**Reviewer:** Endzeitgeist

**Stars:** 5 stars out of 5

This pdf clocks in at a massive 65 pages, 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial, 2 pages of advertisement, 1 page SRD, 1 page back cover, leaving us with an impressive 59 pages

of content, so let's take a look!

There are few environments with such a bad rep as plains – compared to trackless deserts, swamps or mountains, there are next to no good modules or supplements for them out there. In fact, it took Frog God Games' phenomenal "[Fields of Blood](#)" to make them really stand out and finally get their due.

The pdf provides spell-lists for all pre-Occult Adventures spellcasting classes, organized by class first, then by level and then alphabetically.

Oh, one more thing: This review was moved up in my review-queue as a prioritized review at the request of my patrons.

All right, so far these terrain-specific spell-books by David J. Paul have been characterized by pure excellence, but can this pdf retain this impressive streak? Let's see!

Taking a look at the spell-selection provided herein, we begin with a feasible and interesting variant of disease-curing magic: *Alleviate Animal Affliction* mitigates the disease suffered by animals, which makes sense in an environment of vast plains, where a broken leg of one's horse may well spell doom for the weary traveler. This is particularly relevant, considering the effects of spells like *sore horse* or the ability to summon giant drone ants as mounts – come on, that is damn cool!

Once again, the pdf provides a selection of spells that is directly entwined with the terrain: For example, while *ankheg's awareness* is a pretty straight attribute-buff when considered neutrally, those that cast the spell in a plains terrain also gain senses even further extended. In a great and fun interaction with the material component, an ankheg's leg, we also gain additional abilities within the hunting grounds (qualified, area-wise, btw.!) of the ankheg used in the casting of the spell. This is a simple operation and frankly, one that more magic should sort: It rewards players for engaging with the world, nets a GM an easy way to motivate PCs and also explains potentially nasty advantages of spellcasters in their home-turf.

This design-paradigm is btw one that thankfully graces the spells contained herein rather often. These interactions that modify the spellcasting engine per se are not limited to the interaction with the terrain or creatures, though – if one takes a look at the *Assured Diviner* spell, for example, one can see that characters with the knowledge domain, lore mystery or the lore spirit double the duration of the spell. While the base spell is not one I'd consider mind-blowing, it is this thematic connection that rewards character choices that makes this remarkable, at least to me. I am a big proponent of diversification among characters and the more player choices matter, the better – spells often are rather static and linear pieces of crunch and this pdf taking some of that linearity and tweaking it makes sense in all the right ways.

This also extends to the summoning spells contained herein, with e.g. the *atomie gang* that you can call forth being an interesting example – while



GMs may need to exert a bit of caution regarding these group summon spells, it is interesting to note that chaotic clerics with the arcane subdomain may select the aforementioned spell as a substitute domain spell. Also intriguing: Fey bloodline sorcerors and witches with specific hexes generate the maximum number of creatures summoned, tying the base spell mechanics to player choice here as well.

What made me go “AWWW!” when reading it would be *Bevy of Bumblebees* – I love bumblebees. They’re fat, clumsy and the cutest insects you could fathom. (As an aside – research bumblebees and aerodynamics -the folklore that they can’t fly is inaccurate...) While uncontrolled, the giant insects can be held at bay with smoke, allowing for interesting combinations of spells and effects for the savvy players. If there was one prevalent leitmotif to the magic herein, it would most certainly be “choice” – in particular, choice that hinges upon magic feeling less static – it makes sense that those, whose character choices represent the spell thematics can enjoy additional benefits.

Similarly, the terrain-centric and localized benefits make use of the old adage of magic working by appropriating a part for the whole, a maxim most popularly represented in e.g. voodoo dolls. But these do actually, to a degree, entwine. If you takes a look at *black art of the bouda*, you’ll notice the requirement of a bouda’s fetish as a focus, which represents an obvious adventuring angle. The spell does allow for a variety of choices themed around the creature – and the abilities directly interact with the choices of abilities tapped in: The more you utilize the powers, the more the total duration of the spell is reduced. This is rewarding from a game-design perspective, as it emphasizes resource-management once again.

What about growing metallic wings, Archangel-style, including the option to fire them? Oh, and you can actually ruffle them in bright conditions, creating a blinding effect. While we’re at the topic of spells that should put a smile on the faces of superhero fans – *burn on through* hearkens to speedster-like acceleration – including overruns with trails of fire. There would also be an interesting *cleave herd* spell, which can make for a rather intriguing narrative device, allowing you to cause fear among great numbers of animals and magical beasts – either to hunt stragglers or bypass areas that would otherwise be beyond the PC’s abilities to traverse.

Beyond the narrative and design-aesthetic components, we should also mention that tactics are an important component for a lot of spells: *Divine doe’s grace* allows the cast to immediate action move, potentially negating attacks (and yes, the spell-level assigned is appropriate for the power this offers). Better yet, the spell’s wording manages to make the complex concept work – and emphasizes a concept I very much enjoy. As you may have noticed in a couple of my statements, my own game tends to feature a lot of terrain hazards, shifting frontlines and dynamic arenas. I absolutely loathe it when an epic duel boils down to two characters just trading full attacks for rounds on end. It’s boring and non-cinematic to me. However, PFRPG, as a system, rewards exactly this type of melee and every help we can get to render combat more fluctuating, more versatile. The downside of this ambition is, obviously, that it requires some serious consideration on part of the GM and players to make combat this interesting. This pdf does offer quite a few interesting spells that help in this way.

Speaking of tactical options: Remember the tunnels popularized in StarCraft etc. – what about a pathway that modifies spells and allows you to channel spells through the established conduit... and you may reassign its endpoint! So yes, there are some specific spells within this pdf that can radically change the dynamics of combat or make a specific combat unique. Speaking of such scenes that will be kept in mind: Well, there are spells, much like in previous examples of these pdfs, that represent serious ritual-like benefits and generate epic environments – *eclipse the sun*. The effects of this very powerful spell should be rather evident, right?

*Feed from friends*, a life-leeching spell, is an excellent example for a spell that manages to depict the vampiric leeching concept in a way that precludes use of kittens or similar cute critters – by virtue of the rules-language focusing on actual hp transference and allies as viable targets – thus, kittens could only yield pitiful amounts of hit points. Big kudos! I tried poking holes in this one and did not succeed. Generating slashing fields of grass is cool – but it is not as cool as *Fire Bleeder* – this spell launches missiles that cause piercing and bleeding damage – and temporarily adds the fire bleeder Su to the creature hit, which aerosolizes and ignites the blood seeping from bleeding wounds. Alas, as thoroughly amazing as this spell is, I am pretty confident that this ability should not be permanent – the duration reads “instantaneous,



see text”, which makes me believe that this ability should probably be lost after a certain duration has elapsed.

It should be noted that, in particular these volatile fire spells herein, have additional effect for the pyromaniac goblin race, emphasizing racial spellcasting traditions. Another interesting one would be *giant flea leap* – which requires the consumption of a potentially sickening drop of blood, but which also allows for VAST jumps when successfully used...oh, and in a feat of internal consistency, the spell actually is easier for alchemists to use. There would also be a variant of *mage’s magnificent mansion* that generates a run-down, gremlin-haunted abode, a Thinner-curse that renders a target incapable of sustaining nutrients, spells that help hunting down the users of the arcane arts...and a spell, which allows you to *join the swarm*, allowing you to potentially evade a horrid fate AND making for an evocative getaway-strategy. Speaking of swarms – conjuring forth a butterfly swarm (fully statted) at 1st level, a harmless swarm, should provide some interesting options for the adherents of Desna etc.

Relatively accurate *long-range forecasts* (the coldest winter is coming...), mesmerizing foes via *waves of grain* or similar plants make for an interesting array of visuals and narrative possibilities – one exemplified as well by the *plains clan* spell, which generates a kind of mystic union between the participants – and it actually generates a true reason for PCs to strive to become part of a clan; it is a viable benefit provided for belonging. I love this type of design. It also ties in with a low-level spell/cantrip that allows for the easy identification of clan companions.

If you’ve been waiting for the flashy, devastating high-level spell in this discussion so far, fret not: *Prairie Lightning Storm* will indeed result in a highly flexible and devastating environment that will even push high-level PCs to their limits. *Transmute Gnome to Goblin* is an evil polymorph effect that may have significant repercussions on lore. As a minor complaint – *variant volume fireball* obviously is a more controlled, powerful iteration of the classic spell and as such, it is pretty obvious that it inflicts fire damage, RAW, the spell does not “damage” – sans the type. This is me nitpicking for nitpicking’s sake, but I figured it’d be worth mentioning, since the pdf’s flaws are so few I honestly need to strain this much to find anything worthwhile to complain about.

What about a spell that adds poisonous tentacles to a given shield, which may be severed by attackers

failing to hit you, spraying them with poison? In an environment where horrid blazes can eliminate whole communities, *withstand the fire* comes at a horrible cost...but also allows you to weather even death by fire, tying into the purification and rebirth effects...and explaining why NPC xyz survived the encounter with the red dragon, why the mystic could live through the cataclysmic inferno. I adore this spell and its serious drawbacks do mean that constant maintenance is not something PCs will want to do.

## Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are excellent on both a formal and a rules-level. Layout adheres to Rite Publishing’s two-column full-color standard and the pdf comes fully bookmarked with nested bookmarks. Artwork-wise, we’d get quite a bunch of cool full color pieces.

David J. Paul’s series of spells blows me away. If I were to choose a single series of spellbooks to the exclusion of all others for my PFRPG-games, it would be this one. Why? Because the magic is precisely-structured; it taps into evocative concepts, features thoroughly glorious concepts, feels magical and sports rules-innovations. The emphasis on player-choice is glorious, the support for GMs and the roleplaying component of the whole game is extremely rewarding. A lot of the spells featured within this book practically demand being used – their visuals are amazing and more than one can generate a glorious adventure, or at least, scene/encounter. Spellcasting, magic, as featured herein, does feel magical: As a tradition, its shamanistic components, its arcane components – all FIT. All feel real to an extent; all transcend just providing numbers – they are magic in a sense that is often lost on more rules-intense games. Just take a look at the page-count – these are not spells that just palette-swap components and the vast majority of them do something unique and creative in some manner.

In short: This is a phenomenal, inspiring pdf and should be part of the library of any group that looks for well-crafted magic. Very highly recommended as a superb spell-book. My final verdict, in spite of my nitpicks, will clock in at 5 stars + seal of approval. And this is a candidate for my Top Ten of 2017.

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**Endzeitgeist out.**





# PATHWAYS MAGAZINE

THE PATH LESS TRAVELED #35: She Fights for Lurve! By Jacob E. Blackmon



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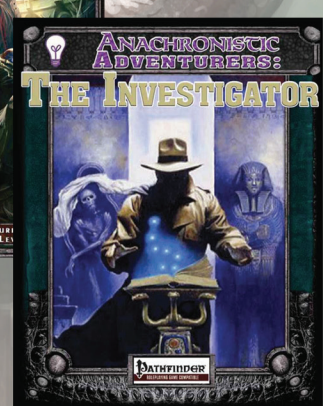
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