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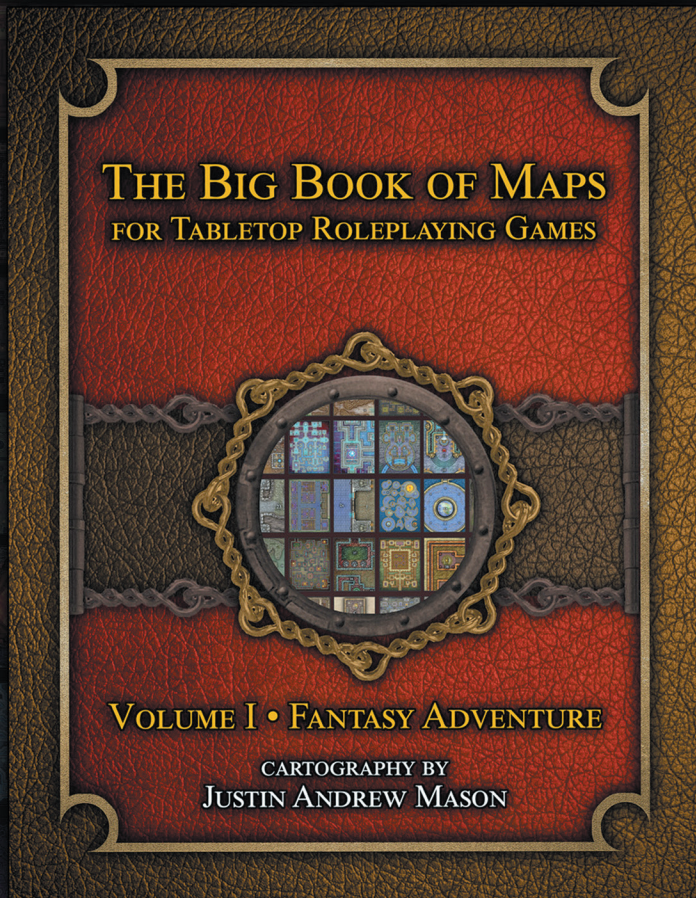
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Editorial

by Dave Paul; Stationery by Fat Goblin Games

As a philosopher, delving into mysteries has been part of my professional and personal life. Personally, I think I've been philosophically inclined since I was able to speak. I remember questioning and analyzing everything my parents told me, subjecting what they said to scrutiny at a level that I later learned caused them consternation. I did this with everything in the classroom as well, often earning me a desk at the back of the room and occasionally trips to the principal's office. As a professional, this tendency to look more deeply into everything has usually served me well, though there too it has occasionally caused me some harm. (At one job I was kindly reminded that I was being paid to sit at a chair and watch a conveyor belt as it conveyed, and that my role was to push a button to stop the belt if I noticed something amiss, and that my recommendations regarding automating that task were unnecessary.)

In her offering this month, Margherita Tramontano begins with a brief analysis of mystery. Her article takes us into the role of an investigator and offers readers of *Pathways* an opportunity to play a puzzle-solving character reminiscent of the stars of some wonderful fiction. I myself have enjoyed running adventures where the characters found themselves spending at least as much time investigating and solving problems with their minds as they did solving problems with their swords, and I think that readers will find her piece inspirational.

There are all kinds of mysteries in the role-playing worlds, including those offered us by the planes of existence just around the corner from what we're used to. This is an area of mystery that gets a little less attention in my profession life, but even there, in

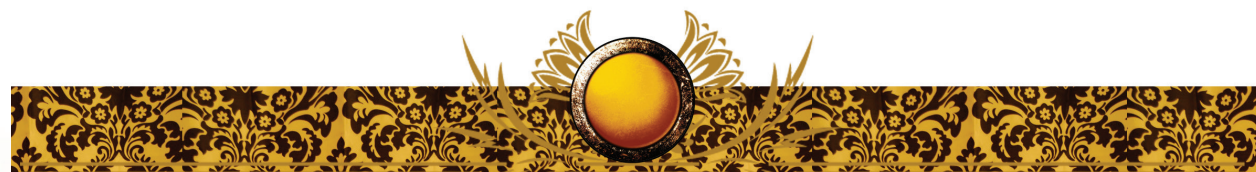
my metaphysics readings, I've enjoyed the mental wanderings into hypotheticals and counterfactuals and I've enjoyed wondering about what life would be like in a world where gods revealed themselves, or where multiple, alternate universes made themselves readily available for traveling, or where visitors from the past and future happened not just in fiction but also in every day life.

In this issue, Carlos Cabrera takes us into some of these places with his article on unstable boundaries. What happens when the planes are areas in them or areas between them become unstable? What effects does this have elsewhere? What effects does this have on others? What kinds of creatures, locked up outside of normal spatiotemporal or multiplanar boundaries might be released when such instabilities occur? What have the wizards and prayerful done to prepare for such contingencies? You'll see when you read his stimulating article.

There are some mysteries I don't mind; others bother me. I'm still not sure what to do with some mathematical mysteries (like the puzzle of the product of the slopes of perpendicular lines being the same for infinitely many such pairs, but not working when the lines themselves are the horizontal and vertical axes, especially when the frame of reference is admittedly arbitrary). I'm not sure what to do with the various mysteries of omnipotence. Heck, I often get stuck trying to figure out how it is that consciousness is conscious of consciousness.

At least we have these games as distractions. I don't know about you, but I'll stick with the in-game mysteries.

Happy gaming.



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Labyrinth Lord Creature Template

by Wendall Roy, Illustration by Júlio Rocha

The deadliest of lairs are those inhabited by creatures known as labyrinth lords. Possessing an uncanny attunement to their domain and capable of manipulating its environment, these labyrinth lords sow fear and misdirection among adventurers. Labyrinth lords delight in splitting up

their prey, causing them to suffer slowly from their lair's hazards before finishing them off one by one. Fighting a labyrinth lord on anyone's terms but its own is a daunting task for adventurers, for the labyrinth lord draws strength from its surroundings even when cornered in the heart of its lair.

Creating a Labyrinth Lord Creature

"Labyrinth Lord" is a template that can be added to any creature.

CR: Same as the base creature +2.

Special Abilities: A labyrinth lord gains the following abilities:

Lair Communion (Su) A labyrinth lord has a sensory bond to its lair, up to a maximum area of 100 ft. radius per HD of the labyrinth lord. As long as it remains within the lair, the labyrinth lord can notice and pinpoint the location of any creature within the lair, even if it does not have line of effect to the creature. This ability does not give the labyrinth lord actual line of effect to the creature. The labyrinth lord also instantly gains knowledge of any damage or destruction to objects and terrain within the lair, or any changes to the general state of the lair's natural setting.

Any ability which foils detection by blindsense also protects against this ability.

Lair's Heart (Su) A labyrinth lord designates one chamber of its lair to be the heart of the lair. This designation cannot be changed unless the labyrinth lord increases its HD. This chamber has a maximum area of 200 sq. ft. per Hit Die of the labyrinth lord. While in the heart of its lair, the labyrinth lord gains fast healing 5 and cannot be flanked.

Magnify Hazard (Su) A labyrinth lord magnifies the danger of any natural hazard or trap within its lair whenever it is within 60 feet and has line of effect to the hazard or trap. Magnified hazards increase the DC of any skill checks related to them by 5, increase the DC of any saving throws related to them by 2, gain a +2 bonus on any attack rolls they make, and increase the die size for any damage they deal by one step.

Wards of Woe (Su) A labyrinth lord's very presence makes its lair difficult for other creatures to explore. Whenever a creature is presented with a choice in direction within the lair – such as a

corridor intersection or side passage – there is a 50% chance the creature believes it is going in the opposite direction from the one it actually chooses. Creatures must also make a Will save when moving through this choice of direction. Any creature that fails its saving throw believes its allies choose the same direction and is unaware of any missing allies for 1 minute. If the creature has any hostile or hazardous encounter during this time, it is allowed another Will save to notice missing allies.

In addition, any creature that casts a teleportation spell, spell-like ability, or effect within the lair must make a Will save or be off target, appearing safely a random distance and direction from the center of the lair. Distance off target is d% of the distance from the center to the edge of the lair. All effects from wards of woe are mind-affecting effects. The DC is Charisma-based.

Spell-like Abilities: A labyrinth lord gains the following spell-like abilities. Caster level equals the creature's HD (or the caster level of the base creature's spell-like abilities, whichever is higher). In addition, the labyrinth lord is considered to have range and line of effect to, and be touching, its entire lair for the purposes of any spell-like abilities gained from this template.

- At will: *arcane lock, dancing lights, silent image*
- 3/day: *dimension door* (within lair only), *fog cloud, web*
- 1/day: *deeper darkness, stinking cloud*

Sample Labyrinth Lord

Labyrinth Lord Yangethe

CR 11

XP 12,800

CE Large aberration

Init +4; **Senses** blindsense 120 ft., darkvision 60 ft.; Perception +19



DEFENSE

AC 23, touch 13, flat-footed 19 (+4 Dex, +10 natural, -1 size)

hp 115 (11d8+66)

Fort +9, **Ref** +9, **Will** +12

DR 10/slashing or piercing; **Immune** cold, fear, mind-affecting effects; **SR** 20

OFFENSE

Speed 40 ft.

Melee 2 claws +14 (1d6+7), 4 tentacles +13 (1d6+3 plus grab)

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

Special Attacks feeding tentacles, psychic blast

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 11th; concentration +14)

Constant – *air walk*

At will – *arcane lock**, *dancing lights**, *darkness*, *silent image**, *telekinesis* (DC 18), *tree shape*

3/day – *dimension door* (within lair only)*, *fog cloud**, *web* (DC 15)*

1/day – *deeper darkness**, *stinking cloud* (DC 16)*

1/year – *interplanetary teleport* (self plus 50 lbs. of objects only)

*not limited by range, line of effect, or touch requirements within lair

Psychic Magic (CL 10th; concentration +13)

20 PE – *control summoned creature* (4 PE, DC 17), *demand* (8 PE, DC 21), *fear* (4 PE, DC 17), *quicken true strike* (1 PE)

STATISTICS

Str 24, **Dex** 18, **Con** 22, **Int** 17, **Wis** 21, **Cha** 17

Base Atk +8; **CMB** +16 (+20 grapple); **CMD** 30 (can't be tripped)

Feats Combat Casting, Combat Expertise, Lightning Reflexes, Multiattack, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*true strike*), Weapon Focus (tentacles)

Skills Knowledge (arcana, geography) +14, Knowledge (engineering) +17, Perception +19, Sense Motive +16, Spellcraft +17, Use Magic Device +14

Languages Aklo; telepathy 60 ft.

SQ lair communion (1100-ft. radius), lair's heart, magnify hazard, no breath, wards of woe

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Feeding Tentacles (Su) As a standard action, a yangethe can use its mouth tentacles to feed on a helpless creature or a creature it is currently grappling. In this case, if the yangethe hits with a melee touch attack, the feeding tentacles wrap around the target's body and riddle it with thousands of tiny filaments that siphon away the victim's emotions. This attack deals 1d4 points of Charisma drain. The yangethe heals 5 points of damage for every point of Charisma it drains in this manner. As long as a creature continues to suffer any of this Charisma drain, each time it attempts to sleep, it is affected by a *nightmare* spell (CL 10th, DC 20) and has terrifying dreams wherein the experience of being fed upon by the yangethe takes on greater and greater levels of horror. All effects from the feeding tentacles are mind-affecting effects.

Psychic Blast (Su) Once per day as a standard action, a yangethe can emit a blast of psychic energy from its mind in a 30-foot-radius burst centered on itself. All creatures in this area take 6d6 points of nonlethal damage from the intense pain and are confused for 1d6 rounds. A successful DC 18 Will save halves the damage and negates the confusion. This is a mind-affecting effect. The save DC is Charisma-based.

ECOLOGY

Environment cold forests or vacuum

Organization solitary, pair, or cluster (3-8)

Treasure standard



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20 Rumours to Hear at the Market

By Creighton Broadhurst; Illustration by Harry Theaker and Algol



Wherever people come together to buy and sell, they also exchange news, rumours and gossip. Thus, marketplaces are a great place for adventurers to learn more about the town, its surrounds and recent events.

Not all the rumours they hear will be relevant to the party's needs or have anything to do with their upcoming adventure. They do, however, enable a GM to create verisimilitude and depth to the party's visit to the marketplace. Use the table below to determine what rumour(s) the party hears.

1. Old Jerad's pies are the sweetest and tastiest in the whole market. They are so good, they must have magic in them!
2. A new fortuneteller has just set up shop in the market. No one knows anything about her, but apparently her predictions are uncannily accurate.
3. The sewers running near to the market are old and prone to blockage (and flood) after heavy rains. When that happens, the marketplace is awash with dirty water and sewerage. It's very bad for business—the mayor should do something about it.
4. A recent rash of pick pocketing has annoyed customers and merchants alike. A thief was almost beaten to death yesterday, in the market.

5. The local lord is reviewing the cost of hiring plots in the marketplace. Everyone expects him to raise prices and the stall holders will inevitably pass this onto their customers.
6. Herac the merchant is boasting of a recent delivery of fine, rare silks. He's planning to personally invite the town's great and good to a showing of his wares, but he has some lesser silks suitable for "ordinary" people.
7. Erinhol Gerst sells wine and ale by the pitcher or cup from his handcart. He wanders the market selling to thirsty shoppers and is an excellent source of rumours. He hears much and charges to pass on his knowledge.
8. Normally, the market is a relatively clean place—the local lord mandates merchants remove their own rubbish. However, more and more people are reporting encounters with large and aggressive rats scavenging among the stalls. It's putting off some visitors.
9. Watch out for Eron Erkle. He is a grocer by trade, but his scales are weighted in his favour and you won't get your money's worth.
10. Berstal the Fabulous is a charlatan. He pretends to be an apothecary, but his remedies never work—in fact, they often make his patient sicker!
11. There was a murder—really a robbery gone wrong—in the market the other day. A mugger picked the wrong victim and got electrocuted to death by a magic spell!
12. Erinhol Gerst (see #7) is really a member of the thieves' guild. He uses his business to spy on potential marks—normally gullible adventuring types!
13. He denies it, of course, but Brastel Enanon is often accused of selling stolen goods. He denies all charges, and nothing has even been proven but if you buy something from him you might be accosted by someone claiming to have once owned your newest possession.
14. Brestia Nimblefingers is a skilled tattoo artist much in demand in the local area. Small even for a halfling, she does exquisite work. Word is that she's been trying to imbue her tattoos with magic for years now, but never gets the process quite right.

15. If you've got a pet (or an animal companion or familiar) you'd do well to keep it close in the market; several visitors have complained their animals have gone missing while they shopped.
16. Two rival clothiers are doing their best to put each other out of business. Both send their apprentices to sabotage the other's stall and to steal their customers. Sometimes, a brawl ensues. The Watch breaks things up, but their patience is rapidly fading.
17. Someone is using false coins in the market. They appear to be silver or gold, but are really painted bronze coins. Several merchants have lost sizeable sums and—even worse—the coins have entered general circulation.
18. A hulking half-orc—a monk named Narfu—has set up a stall of sorts. Really, it's more of an entertainment as he performs amazing acrobatic tricks. He bets the audience that no-one is more skilled than he, and thus far he's been proven right.
19. The local thieves use the marketplace to stalk rich marks. Those with much coin to spend should keep their purses close and their eyes open.

20. One of the stall keepers is really a vindictive evil wizard with a vendetta against the local lord. He sells seemingly mundane items laced with subtle curses designed to make the owner more angry and irritable. Several fights have broken out recently, but the wizard's identity—if indeed he exists—remains a mystery.

Two Final Notes

The rumours above are designed to be relatively generic so they fit into almost any town or city. A GM should modify them as required to fit the flavour of the campaign.


Finally—of course—it is up to the GM if the rumours above are true or false.

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The background of the entire page is a dark, atmospheric illustration of a tomb or dungeon. In the center, a large, cracked stone sphere sits on the floor. To the left, a skeleton is visible in the background, and to the right, another skeleton is partially visible. Two characters are in the foreground. On the left, a character with red hair, wearing a green hat and tunic, is running towards the right, holding a spear. On the right, a character with dark hair and blue eyes, wearing a blue and orange tunic, is running towards the left, holding a sword. A semi-transparent text box is overlaid on the center of the image, containing the following text:

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Spells Showcase: Mystery

By Dave Paul

This spell is most unusual and alters the game in strange and fun ways. I certainly wouldn't recommend it for all players and games, but it adds an element to a caster-friendly campaign that can change the way spellcasting, especially combative spellcasting, works. I'm including this here mostly for the "how did *that* happen" effect that the spell offers. In this regard, *earthen spellpath*, especially if it's not been used before, certainly will make things seem mysterious to those on the receiving end of it.

Earthen Spellpath*

School: Transmutation [earth]; **Level:** Cleric/Oracle 5, Druid 4, Inquisitor 5, Magus 5, Ranger 4, Shaman 5, Sorcerer/Wizard 5, Witch 5

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Components: V, S, M/DF (an ankheg's claw)

Range: Long (400 ft. + 40 ft./level); see text

Effect: One earthen pathway

Duration: Concentration; see text

Saving Throw: None; **Spell Resistance:** No

Earthen spellpath creates a one-way pathway between your space and a 5-ft. space at a specified destination. You don't have to be able to see the destination to identify it, but it must be one you know and could describe clearly, it must be within long range (400 ft. + 40 ft./level), and there must be a contiguous earthen path between your position and the destination (the path need not be straight, but cannot move outside the radius of long range from your starting point). The designation of the destination must be specific and focus on geography rather than targets; it cannot be within a non-natural dwelling (it could be at the site of a deer's nest, but not a home or even a tent). The destination space does not have to be above ground (it could be underground or in the middle of a shallow pond or stream, for instance) but cannot be within solid ground or under an obstacle that takes up the entire 5-ft. space (such as a Large-sized boulder or tree). For example "right between the apple tree and the cabin, over by the river" is a little bit vague but still works, if the caster knows the tree, cabin and river in question, but "right under the ogre's feet" does not work even if the ogre hasn't moved lately and even if you can see the ogre. As a rule of thumb, if a DC 20 Knowledge

(geography) check would identify the spot, it can be chosen, though this does not prevent the caster from identifying a specific site that is well-known to the caster but relatively unknown to others.

After you've created the pathway, you or others may use it as a channel for casting spells. Spells cast in this way must be cast either from the space where you cast the spell or in a space adjacent to that space, and then the magic of *earthen spellpath* moves the energies of that spell through the pathway and to the destination. The more powerful the spell, the longer it takes to arrive at the destination. Cantrips and 1st level spells move through the pathway instantly and take effect immediately. Higher level spells are delayed by 1 round per spell level, minus 1 round (so a 6th level spell takes 5 rounds to take effect at the destination), and take effect on the caster's turn (or its equivalent) on that future round.

The spell cast in this way must be one that could target a creature, object, space or area at the destination; it cannot be a spell with a range of touch or one that requires an attack roll. While both *fireball* and *silence* would work, *acid arrow* and *bull's strength* would not. If the spell affects an area, whether a line, cone, cylinder or otherwise, treat the 5-ft. space at the destination, or any of its adjacent squares or corners, as the origin of the effect.

No more than one spell at any time can be moving through the pathway (casters cannot cast several spells in a row and have them all take effect one after another at the destination). The pathway remains available for use in this way for as long as you maintain concentration to keep it open. A successful use of *dispel magic* or a similar effect, anywhere along the path's route, ends the spell. If you stop concentrating, then *earthen spellpath* ends, and if there had been an undelivered spell in the pathway, its magical energies dissipate harmlessly. If the pathway's contiguous nature is broken (such as by an earthquake or flood), the spell ends.

On your turn as a standard action, so long as there are no spells moving through the pathway, you may designate a new destination point for the pathway so long as the new destination meets all the criteria it would have had to have met if it had been the original destination.

* The *earthen spellpath* spell appears in Rite Publishing's [101 Plains Spells](#) and *insightful riddler* appears in Rite Publishing's [101 Hill & Mountain Spells](#).

If you are a cleric or inquisitor with the earth domain, a druid, an oracle with the nature mystery or a ranger whose favored terrain is the terrain above the entire pathway, then any spell moving through the pathway is treated as though it were one level lower for purposes of determining how long it takes to arrive at the destination. If the spell moving through the pathway has been cast by a cleric or inquisitor with the earth domain, a druid, an oracle with the nature mystery or a ranger whose favored terrain is the terrain above the entire pathway, then the spell is treated as though it were two levels lower for purposes of determining how long it takes to arrive at the destination. If both of these conditions are met, only the more favorable applies.

I like curses. With *insightful riddler* I was going for a sort of viral curse. On the one hand, it's not that bad—anyone subjected to the curse gains some pretty cool abilities. And, insofar as someone might have an inquisitive nature, those cool abilities are actually really good. But, of course, what makes a curse a curse isn't the cool stuff, it's the misery. Being trapped in a life of whiling away hours on puzzles might be fine for some people, but for adventurers will lots to do, it's a horrible fate. Worse, those subjected to this curse pick up nasty attitudes about being taken away from their beloved enigmas. In some respects, this would be a wonderful spell for one NPC to have cast on another, and for that other NPC to be someone the party meets, only to end up clouding the mind of one or more members of the party. In any case, think of this as a flavor enhancer for one of your games or sessions. Maybe a curious fortune teller happens to be affected by *insightful riddler* and knew the party was coming...

Insightful Riddler

School: Enchantment (compulsion) [curse, mind-affecting]; **Level:** Bard 6, Cleric/Oracle 6, Sorcerer/Wizard 6

Casting Time: 1 standard action

Components: V, S, M/DF (a gynosphinx's feather)

Range: Touch

Target: Creature touched

Duration: Permanent

Saving Throw: None; **Spell Resistance:** No

The target of this spell gains several powerful abilities and a burdensome curse. Until the curse is broken, the target gains the following spell-like abilities if the proper conditions are met. The target's caster level is the target's level.

Constant—*comprehend languages*, *detect magic*, *read magic*

3/day—*clairaudience/clairvoyance*

1/day—*locate object*, *legend lore*

The target may not use any of these abilities on any day that it does not spend at least 4 hours reading about, writing, or discussing puzzles, riddles, dilemmas and the like. Those 4 hours cannot also be spent on other tasks (including tasks like preparing spells, praying, and meditating). This devotion to enigmas temporarily improves the target's intellectual gifts such that all Knowledge checks made while affected by this curse are made with a +4 insight bonus.

The compulsion to discover new puzzles or to attempt to solve previously unsolved riddles is so strong that the target can easily become distracted, short-tempered or argumentative. For each day that the target does not spend at least 2 hours reading about, writing, or discussing puzzles, riddles, dilemmas and the like, it suffers a -2 to its Charisma and Wisdom scores. These penalties accumulate though the target's Charisma and Wisdom cannot drop below 6 as a result of this spell. While the target is subject to a Charisma or Wisdom penalty resulting from this spell, the study time necessary to gain the spell-like abilities is doubled. If the target spends sufficient study time to gain the spell-like abilities on three consecutive days, the ability score penalties from this spell are removed.

If *insightful riddler* is cast in a sphinx's territory, then the target also gains the spell-like ability *insightful riddler* which can be used once per week.

The caster may target herself with this spell.

Insightful riddler can be removed by a successful casting of *break enchantment*, *limited wish*, *miracle*, *remove curse*, or *wish*. However, the attempt requires dialoguing with the target. If the attempt to remove the curse requires a check and the check fails, the caster attempting to remove the curse is afflicted with *insightful riddler* as well.

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*Base game plays 4 players with optional rules for a 5th player as the GM. Expansion *Sanity Check* expands play to 5-6 players with a 7th as the GM. Game does not need GM to play and the game can be played solo.

K

ENDS 7-9-18

Unstable Boundaries

By Carlos Cabrera

The great beyond: the domain of deities and demigods, and home to creatures of majesty and grotesquery. In the natural ordering of these realms, the planes of existence themselves have metaphysical boundaries, as do the spaces in-between. Whether touching at coterminous points or overlapping one another in coexistent landscapes, there is a functional model to this grand cosmology.

In some dark and twisted corners of the great beyond this model can begin to unravel. The fabric between two planes can be corrupted, and it can wreak havoc on the body of a creature travelling through it. In the vast multiverse there are places where these barriers naturally run thin, hemorrhaging energy from one plane to the next, or exposing the environment to the substance of the void that accompanied all creation. These areas are called planar instabilities.

Planar Instabilities

A planar instability can be found as an environmental hazard or a magical hazard. They can be created by a magical mishap or high-level spells, can occur naturally where the edges of a plane churn in constant chaos, and can be found where the integrity of a plane has withered over time.

Planar Instability (CR 9)

Any point where the walls between planes have weakened can be a planar instability. The deterioration of planar energies warps the body of any creature attempting to teleport or travel between planes within its borders—regardless of direction—including being subject to the effects of a *dismissal* or *banishment* spell. This change is a kind of mutation and sometimes manifests in the form of the astral scourge template.

A creature can spot an instability with a DC 25 Perception check to notice what appear to be heat emanations on the air and flecks of black flame. This DC increases by 5 in areas of poor visibility or similar environmental conditions.

Astral Scourge

An astral scourge is a creature twisted by the unstable planar fabric of the transitive plane used in teleportation and planar travel. When the travel attempt is made, the body enters the astral plane for just a near moment, instantaneously snapping back to its current location. The cosmic whiplash is enough to tear the planar substrate through the creature's form, causing it to pulse and ooze with the material of the astral with something like the consistency of silvery magma.

This metamorphosis is almost too much for the mind to bear as well, rending the affected creature illiterate and incapable of speech, as well as severing its ability to use any form of spellcasting. The creature still retains all the knowledge it had prior to the mutation, including spells prepared and spells known. This causes the creature's singular goal to become granting the cure to its condition to others; though it must aim at this without the ability to communicate. Only magic such as *greater restoration*, *miracle*, *limited wish*, or *wish* can withdraw the body's connection to the astral and return the creature to its original state.

Creating an Astral Scourge

"Astral Scourge" is an acquired template that can be added to any creature attempting teleportation or planar travel within a planar instability or area of restricted magical access. An astral scourge uses the base creature's statistics and abilities, except as noted here.

CR: Increase dependent on the base creature's size; see below

Type: An astral scourge gains the extraplanar subtype, even while on the base creature's native plane.

Weaknesses: An astral scourge gains the following weakness.

Spell Vulnerability (Ex)

Certain powerful spells have special additional effects against astral scourges.

An astral scourge subjected to a *dismissal* or *banishment* spell is killed and explodes, as per its Rupture ability.

Special Attacks: An astral scourge also gains the following special attacks.

Allocate Cure (Su): An astral scourge is consumed with the desire to return its body back to normal. If the base creature was able to cast *greater restoration*, *miracle*, *limited wish*, or *wish* as a spell or spell-like ability at the time it acquired this template, it attempts to grant that knowledge to another creature with a successful touch attack.

A creature touched in this way is granted one use of the selected spell or spell-like ability, which must be chosen by the astral scourge before the attempt is made. This costs the astral scourge one use of its spells per day or spell-like ability as if it had been used. This use given to the touched creature is in addition to its normal limit of spells known or spells prepared, but not spells per day. The touched creature must have access to spellcasting of the appropriate type to gain the benefit of a spell or the attempt is wasted, but any creature may gain the use of a spell-like ability. A touched creature will retain this information for up to 1 hour for each of the astral scourge's Hit Dice or until expended, whichever comes first.

The fluctuating planar energies also allows the casting of a granted spell even if the spell's caster level is higher than the caster level of a touched creature. The touched creature must make a caster level check (DC = spell's caster level + 1) to cast the spell successfully. If the creature fails this check, it must make a DC 10 Wisdom check to avoid a mishap. A natural roll of 1 on this Wisdom check always fails, regardless of modifiers.

If the base creature did not have the appropriate spell or spell-like ability at the time it acquired this template, then the astral scourge attempts to take that knowledge from a touched creature before allocating it to another (or returning it to its source). This costs the touched creature one use of its spells per day or spell-like ability as if it had been used, and if returned is only granted temporarily as above. The astral scourge will gain this knowledge as a spell first, if both a spell and spell-like ability are available, and only for the same duration or until allocated.

Astral Discharge (Ex): Any creature that comes into physical contact with an astral scourge is dealt 2d6 damage from its silvery magma.

Rupture (Su): If an astral scourge dies, it explodes in a wave of distorted planar energy and astral matter. This eruption deals damage within a radius based on the base creature's size. Additionally, an effect identical to a *banishment* spell is caused in a wider radius (affecting the closest creatures first), and there is a 50% chance of sending a creature within range to a plane other than its own. The astral scourge is considered to be on its home plane for this effect, and the caster level of the rupture is equal to the astral scourge's Hit Dice (maximum 20).

The variables of an astral scourge's rupture increase its challenge rating.

Size	DMG	Damage Radius	Banishment Radius	CR
Medium or smaller	5d6	30 ft.	60 ft.	+2
Large	6d6	40 ft.	70 ft.	+3
Huge	7d6	60 ft.	90 ft.	+4
Gargantuan	8d6	70 ft.	100 ft.	+5
Colossal	10d6	80 ft.	120 ft.	+6

Spellcasting and Spell-like Abilities: An astral scourge loses access to all spellcasting and spell-like abilities it once had. It still retains the knowledge of all its spells known and which spell-like abilities it had at the time this template was acquired.

Languages: An astral scourge loses its ability to read and write and is incapable of speech.

Planar Spells

Typically the purview of outsiders and deities, dedicated spellcasters and students of cosmology may have access to or have researched spells which play with the material of the cosmos itself. These scholars often gain the attention of creatures who call the planar realms their home.

Planar Feedback

School abjuration; **Level** psychic 7, sorcerer/wizard 7, witch 7

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V, S, M (a pool of diseased water), F (a cracked silver mirror once worth 1,750 gp)

Range personal

Target you

Duration 1 hour/level

By corroding the planar fabric around you, you force any creature attempting to scry on you from another plane to make an Intelligence check. If the creature fails this check, the scrying attempt fails and the creature suffers the penalties of the *contact other plane* spell for a duration of 2 weeks. The base DC of this check is 10 + 1/4 of your caster level (rounded down).

Astral Suffocation

School necromancy; **Level** cleric/oracle 9, psychic 9, sorcerer/wizard 9, witch 9

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V, S, M (silver rope worth 1,000 gp)

Range medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)

Target one astrally projected creature

Duration 3 minutes

Saving Throw Reflex partial (see text); **Spell Resistance** yes

Astral suffocation uses the silver cord of an astrally projected creature as a weapon against itself. If the target of this spell fails its Reflex save, the creature becomes stunned and must immediately begin making Constitution checks for suffocation. If the targeted creature succeeds on its Reflex save, it does not suffer the effects of suffocation but still becomes stunned for the duration of the spell.

Astral Tsunami

School abjuration; **Level** cleric/oracle 9, sorcerer/wizard 9, witch 9

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V, S

Range long (400 ft. + 40 ft./level)

Effect 10-ft.-deep wave 10 ft. wide/level and 2 ft. tall/level

Duration 5 rounds

Saving Throw Will partial (see text); **Spell Resistance** no

Causing planar material to violently roil outward from your location, you create a metaphysical wave which travels in a straight line in any direction you choose (which must be perpendicular to its width). Once in motion, the wave cannot change course and travels at a speed of 60 feet per round.

Creatures, objects, and structures struck by an *astral tsunami* take 4d6 points of slashing damage as reality distorts around them. If something is destroyed by this wave, then the remains stay where they are or begin falling, as the gravity of the plane dictates. Hardness does not reduce this damage, nor is it halved as damage dealt to objects normally is.

In addition, creatures struck by this wave are subject to the effects of a *banishment* spell (affecting the closest creatures first). When the maximum number of Hit Dice of creatures have been banished, this effect of the spell ends though the wave continues moving and causing damage. You are considered as being on your home plane for this effect.

Gate Mirage

School illusion (glamer); **Level** psychic 9, sorcerer/wizard 9, witch 9

Casting Time 1 standard action

Components V, S

Range medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level)

Target one active gate

Duration see text (D)

Saving Throw Will negates; **Spell Resistance** no

Casting a *gate mirage* spell has two effects. First, it hijacks the destination of a single active gate and changes it to a location of your choosing. Second, it covers the active gate in a glamer to appear as the original location. As this spell only works on an active gate, if the original gate's caster is no longer concentrating, the original gate is dispelled, or a permanent gate is shut off, this spell ends.

Planar Degradation

School abjuration; **Level** sorcerer/wizard 9, witch 9

Casting Time 1 round

Components V, S, M (a handful of ash)

Range medium (100 ft. + 10 ft./level) or personal

Target one active gate or you

Duration see text (D)

Saving Throw none; **Spell Resistance** no

There are two applications you may choose from when casting a *planar degradation* spell.

First, you may target a single active gate within range to corrupt it and turn it into a planar instability between realms. Any creature who enters the gate gains the astral scourge template as it is shunted to the other side. As this application of the spell only works on an active gate, if the gate's caster is no longer concentrating, the gate is dispelled, or a permanent gate is shut off, this spell ends.

Second, you may create a planar instability in a 20 ft. radius centered on you. The planar instability will move with you, but you are not immune to its effects for the duration of the spell.

Nyrene Bessieres

This raven-haired woman is dressed in dark studded leather armor and a cloak dyed such a deep red that it looks almost black.

NYRENE BESSIERES, HUMAN CLERIC CR 3

800 XP

Initiative +1

Hit Points 25

Speed 30 ft. (20 ft. in armor)

Senses Perception +7

DEFENSE

Armor Class 15, touch 11, flat-footed 14

Fortitude Save +5, **Reflex Save** +2, **Will Save** +7

OFFENSE

Melee mwk silver dagger +5 (1d4-2/19-20)

Special Attacks channel energy 6/day (DC 17, 2d6), hand of the acolyte (6/day)

Domain Spell-Like Abilities (CL 4th; concentration +7) 6/day—touch of evil (2 rounds)

Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 4th; concentration +7) 2nd—*bear's endurance*, *cure moderate wounds*, *hold person* (DC 15), *magic mouth*^D (DC 15)

1st—*bane* (DC 14), *bless*, *cure light wounds*, *protection from good*^D, *shield of faith*

o (at will)—*bleed* (DC 13), *detect magic*, *guidance*, *read magic*

D Domain spell; **Domains** Evil, Magic

STATISTICS

STR -1, **DEX** +1, **CON** +1, **INT** +0, **WIS** +3, **CHA** +3

Base Atk +3; **CMB** +2; **CMD** 13

Feats Alertness, Improved Channel, Weapon Finesse

Skills Acrobatics -2 (-6 to jump), Bluff +7, Diplomacy +8, Knowledge (history) +5, Knowledge (planes) +5, Knowledge (religion) +5, Perception +7, Sense Motive +10

Languages Common, Abyssal

ITEMS

Equipment *potion of cure light wounds* (2), *potion of cure moderate wounds*, *scroll of darkness*, *scroll of lesser restoration*, *scroll of summon monster II*, +1 studded leather, mwk silver dagger, 53 gp

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Channel Energy Six times per day, Nyrene can present her unholy symbol and channel negative energy to deal 2d6 points of damage to all living creatures within 30 feet (DC 17 Will save for half damage) or heal undead by the same amount.

Hand of the Acolyte (6/day) (Su) As a standard action,

up to six times per day, Nyrene can use a melee weapon to attack a foe within 30 feet. She uses her WIS to calculate her attack bonus instead of STR.

Touch of Evil Six times per day, Nyrene can make a melee touch attack, causing the target to become sickened for two rounds. During this time, the target is also treated as good-aligned for the purpose of spells with the [Evil] descriptor.

Nyrene is a fanatical cleric of the demon lord Kaeresh. She believes that the oracle can help her find a relic to strengthen her connection with Kaeresh and make her more powerful. Her companions either support her twisted goals or think they can profit from her success. Nyrene is cruel and focused only on achieving her objective and will sacrifice her followers if it suits her.



Both Sacred and Profane: Holy Mystery Rules

By Margherita "Bardess" Tramontano; Illustration by O6ilker

The word "mystery" has two common meanings. One refers to a story of crime and investigations, where a detective must put clues together to frame the perpetrator. The other summons to mind the great unknown, universal forces, and the meaning of existence, such as can be revealed to the gods' intermediaries.

It is possible to put the two things together! Many stories feature a holy person or arcane dabbler in the detective's role, involved in intricate mazes of clues leading to discover an evildoer's identity or the ultimate answer of the universe.

The inquisitor, investigator and vigilante are the characters who mostly spring to our imagination when thinking about a mystery plot, but the first class we associate to the word "mystery" in Pathfinder is the oracle, and let's not forget that oracular powers can stem from a very great variety of sources! In this article we'll provide new abilities for sacred detectives, and also a set of rules to deal with puzzle-solving in a way similar to library research.

Solve Puzzles & Riddles

There are no specific rules for solving enigmas in Pathfinder, probably because the players are supposed to find solutions on their own, rather than with a lucky dice roll. The few magic items that involve riddles generally just require a Knowledge check. Still, a character might be brighter or more intuitive than her player, and sometimes a skill check could be the only way to exit a deadlock. So, here are some optional rules you may find useful in such situations.

There isn't one relevant skill only to solve puzzles and riddles. Depending on the nature of the enigma, one or more different checks could be required. Perception is important for enigmas where you must note details, like the wrong particular in a picture or the dissonant note in a melody. Linguistics is useful for solving puns, or other riddles based on alphabet letters, translations in other languages, or similar. Spellcraft can help to figure out magic puzzles. If the riddler is physically next to you, even Diplomacy, Bluff, or Intimidate could persuade him to give some other vital hints to the party.

Knowledge and Sense Motive, though, are the skills a consumed enigmist needs most. While the former deals with clues comparing them to the character's notions about reality, the latter tries to understand the riddler's personality and what logic could have guided him. Often, the ability to "think outside the box" can be more useful than a superior education.

Puzzle solving can be handled much as information research in a library, as described in *Ultimate Intrigue*. A GM can assign a CR and difficulty level to a riddle, and a certain number of clue points (cp). The GM also decides which skill or skills are relevant to solve the enigma, and prepares a list of hints to reveal as the PCs successfully reduce its cp amount. (The GM needs not to tell the PCs what skill to use, or, if the riddle's cp drop to 0, give them the flat answer: that would spoil the fun!) Penalties can be devised for characters who fail some checks in a row, or use the wrong skill, etc. Your imagination is the limit.

Some examples of enigmas built using this rules follow.

Take it to the Letter

More than twenty doors radiate in all directions from the circular room. A stone at the center bears the inscription: "We see it once in a year, twice in a week but never in a day."

Take It To The Letter

CR 1

XP 400

Complexity 11 (easy)

Research Check Linguistics, Sense Motive;
Knowledge Bonus +0

cp 3

RESEARCH THRESHOLDS

cp 2 Maybe it would be a good idea to count the doors (there are 26 of them).

cp 0 Each door has a female name inscripted. Each one begins with a different letter.

Lateral Thinking

The halfling rogue smiles while showing you a handful of pebbles-all black save one-and then shoving them into a bag. "Let Fate decide," he says. "If you choose the white stone, your friend lives. If you fail, both your lives are mine."

Lateral Thinking

CR 5

XP 1,600

Complexity 21 (average)

Research Check Intimidate, Knowledge (local), Perception; **Knowledge Bonus** +2

cp 15

RESEARCH THRESHOLDS

cp 10 Hedd Shadowhand is a famous cheater, known for never playing fair.

cp 5 You are certain that the halfling replaced the white stone with a black one.

cp 0 Hedd cannot suffer to be exposed and will do anything to save face.

Four On The Bridge

The undead are closing on you, and there are too many to fight. The bridge is your only hope. It is old and worn though, and you have only one torch. The rogue is the fastest-he can pass to the other side in 1 minute. The fighter, who wears armor, can do it in 2 minutes. The cleric is wounded, and could pass in 8 minutes, while the wizard is too old to run and will employ 10 minutes. You evaluate that the undead will be on you in 17 minutes, and only two people can run on the bridge at the same time.

Four On The Bridge

CR 11

XP 12,800

Complexity 31 (average)

Research Check Knowledge (engineering), Survival; **Knowledge Bonus** +4

cp 33

RESEARCH THRESHOLDS

cp 30 Trying to pass to the other side without using the bridge won't work. The canyon walls are too clammy to climb, and an antimagic field prevents the use of spells.

cp 25 At least one of you should make more than one passage.

cp 15 When two people pass on the bridge together, they go at the slowest one's speed.

cp 5 The two fastest and the two slowest should go together to minimize the time loss.

cp 0 Try to divide the time available into segments to figure the best course of action.

Mystery Characters' Options

Vigilant Judgment

(Alternate Class Ability for Inquisitors)

Any inquisitor can give up her judgment ability in exchange for two vigilante talents. These must be talents available to a vigilante with the class ability to cast divine spells, and the inquisitor cannot select a talent replicating an ability she already possesses. Alternatively, the inquisitor can select one talent only and lose four of her judgements.

Prosecutor (Investigator Archetype)

A prosecutor is the hidden hand of his church. Inquisitive and secret, he wields divine spells and stealth to efficiently reclaim stolen relics, discover the plans of enemy faiths, and capture religious criminals.

Faithful: Like a cleric, a prosecutor must worship a deity, and his alignment must be within one step of his deity's alignment. He is proficient with his deity's favored weapon in addition to his normal weapon and armor proficiencies, and has the same restrictions on spellcasting as other divine casters.

Spells: A prosecutor casts divine spells drawn from the inquisitor spell list. A prosecutor is a spontaneous spellcaster. He knows the same number of spells and receives the same number of spell slots per day as an inquisitor of her investigator level. To learn or cast a spell, a prosecutor must have an Intelligence score equal to at least 10 + the spell's level. The saving throw DC against a prosecutor's spell is equal to 10 + the spell's level + the prosecutor's Intelligence modifier.

This ability replaces alchemy.

Inspired Pursuer (Ex): A prosecutor can use inspiration on any Intimidate, Knowledge, or Sense Motive checks he attempts without expending a use of inspiration, provided he's trained in that skill.

This ability alters inspiration.

Inquisition: At 2nd level, the prosecutor gains access to an inquisition granted by his deity. His inquisitor level is equal to his investigator level -1 for the purpose of gaining his inquisition's granted powers, but equal to his investigator level for the purpose of using them. This ability replaces poison resistance and poison immunity.

Recondite Talents: At 3rd level, and every 4th levels after that, the prosecutor can select a vigilante talent in place of an investigator talent. He can only choose talents that would be available to a vigilante with the class ability to cast divine spells. A prosecutor qualifies for the Vigilante Casting Savant feat (from *Legendary Vigilantes*). This ability modifies investigator talents,

and also replaces poison lore and swift alchemy.

In addition, the prosecutor may select the following new vigilante talent:

Stealthy Judgment (Su): A prosecutor with this talent can pronounce judgment upon his foes as per the inquisitor class feature. He can choose from among the following inquisitor judgments: concealment (from Rogue Genius Games' *Advanced Options: Inquisitors' Judgments*), healing, justice, and protection. For the purpose of determining the bonuses provided by this ability, the prosecutor's level stacks with levels in any other classes that grant judgment or stealthy judgment. The prosecutor can use this ability once per day plus an additional time per day at 4th level and every 3 levels thereafter (up to a maximum of seven times per day at 19th level).

Investigator Talents: The prosecutor cannot select the alchemist discovery or false spellcaster investigator talents. The Iconoclastic Strike and Atheist Inspiration talents only work on holy symbols or divine spells from enemy or opposite faiths. The following investigator talents complement the prosecutor archetype particularly well: favored beat, inspired intimidator, perceptive tracking, relic researcher*, rogue talent, scrying familiarity, signature skill*, underworld inspiration.

* From *Everyman Unchained: Unchained Cunning*

New Investigator Talent

Intrigue Talents: When selecting a rogue talent in place of an investigator talent, add the following to the list of talents that an investigator can choose: follow along, hidden mind, shades of gray, and stalker talent.

Oracle Enigma Mystery

Class Skills: An oracle with the enigma mystery adds all Knowledge skills and Perception to her list of class skills.

Bonus Spells: *pattern recognition* (2nd), *investigative mind* (4th), *Aram Zey's focus* (6th)**, *discern lies* (8th), *unerring tracker* (10th), *greater insect spies* (12th), *greater seeds of influence* (14th), *inveigle monster* (16th), *foresight* (18th)

Revelations: An oracle with the enigma mystery can choose from any of the following revelations.

Duck and Dodge (Ex): You are an expert at taking advantage of any cover, hiding place, or nook to avoid being shot, or at using objects as improvised shields against a hit. You are always



considered to have soft cover. At 8th level, you have normal cover. At 16th level, you have improved cover.

Enquiring Buddy (Ex): You gain the service of a faithful and intelligent animal assistant. You can select from a dire bat, bird, dog, monitor lizard, dire rat, or giant raven. This functions as a druid's animal companion, using your oracle level as your effective druid level. Your animal companion uses one of the following archetypes: ambusher, bodyguard, bully, or tracker.

Face in the Crowd (Ex): You gain a +4 bonus on Stealth checks, and can attempt a Stealth check in a crowd even while being observed.

Favored Community (Ex): You move in your chosen community as if you own it. You gain either the obscurity or renown vigilante social talent (your choice). This community can be an entire settlement or portions of a settlement (such as a particular district or neighborhood) depending on the population, as allowed by the renown social talent. You can also select any of the following social talents as revelations, using your oracle level as your vigilante level for the purposes of meeting prerequisites: gossip collector, great renown, incredible renown, and loyal aid. In addition, if you selected renown, you can choose the celebrity discount and celebrity perks talents; if you selected obscurity, you can choose discreet inquiries and safe house. For the purpose of vigilante social talents, you do not have a vigilante identity and are always considered to be in your social identity.

Follow The Lead (Sp): You are like a hound for rumors and gossip, discovering the truth behind them. You can use the *rumormonger* spell once per day as a spell-like ability, using your oracle level as your caster level, but only to trace a heard rumor back to its source. Each time you do so, it ends the duration of any previous activation. At 11th level, you can use this ability three times per day, and at 15th level, you can use it at will, but regardless, each use still ends the duration of any previous activation.

You must be at least 7th level to select this revelation.

Information Broker (Ex): You gain a +1 bonus on Research checks. At 8th level, you double your threat range on a Research check. At 12th level, your bonus on Research checks increases to +2.

Investigative Intuition (Ex): You gain Street Smarts as a bonus feat. At 5th level, you gain

Sense Relationships, and at 10th level, you gain Measure Fate as a bonus feat.

Shroud of the City (Sp): You can melt into the streets and alleys. You can cast *veil* once per day, but can affect only yourself and one willing ally per oracle level within 30 feet. You can make the targets appear only as typical members of a settlement with which you are familiar, and can't match the appearance of specific creatures. At 7th level and 15th level, you can use this ability one additional time per day.

Tracer Touch (Sp): Once per day, you can touch a creature or object and plant a scrying sensor on it, as if you had cast *vicarious view*. At 15th level, you can use this ability twice per day.

You must be at least 11th level to select this revelation.

Whispered Glimpses (Su): You can add your Charisma modifier instead of your Wisdom bonus on Perception and Sense Motive checks.

Final Revelation: At 20th level, you become a master detective. You gain the Entreaty Critical and Improved Conceal Spell feats, even if you don't meet the prerequisites. In addition, you can apply the Empower Spell feat to all the divination spells you cast without increasing their level or casting time. You do not need to possess the feat to use this ability.

New Vigilante Talents

Arcane Power (Su): The vigilante uses eldritch energies to enhance his combat abilities. This ability functions similarly to the magus' arcane pool ability, but the vigilante's arcane pool is equal to his class level (do not add his Intelligence modifier), and he can never use it to add special qualities to his weapon. Only a vigilante with the ability of casting arcane spells as a vigilante class feature can select this talent.

Magus Arcana (Su): The vigilante gains a single magus arcana of his choice. He can only select a talent requiring an arcane pool if he already has the arcane power talent. Only a vigilante with the ability of casting arcane spells as a vigilante class feature can select this talent.

See Alignment (Sp): At will, the vigilante can use *detect chaos*, *detect evil*, *detect good*, or *detect law*. She can only use one of these at any given time. Only a vigilante with the zealot archetype can select this talent.

** <http://www.pathfindercommunity.net/magic/spells/aram-zey-s-focus>

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D&D 5e: Expanded Background Assets

By Brandes Stoddard; Illustration by Sintel

In D&D 5e, Backgrounds grant a modest assortment of equipment and a pocketful of starting cash. For many campaigns, this is fine and appropriate. You're playing wanderers, sellswords, not to say murderhoboes, and a broader base of social and material assets will *at best* be in a town halfway across the continent. In that case, expanding background assets would be a complete waste, and this post isn't for you. On the other hand, maybe your campaign involves urban investigation, intrigue, or social advancement. Maybe you want to emphasize backgrounds as key pieces of character identity. You grew up in the city that is the main game location, or you have a job that brings you into contact with useful people. You have a permanent address and Ikea furniture. I'm not trying to describe every VIMLE couch and HEMNES bookshelf (you can go play *Skyrim* for that), but I want to give out things that express character, offer new solutions to problems, or suggest stories to explore.

New Assets

The new items, creatures, and so forth offered here are in addition to what you receive from your Background. There is no significant effort to make them equal in monetary value, and your character should not be able to liquidate these possessions and take off for an itinerant life. *Why* they can't do this is left as an exercise to the reader, but if that's what you want to do, this add-on isn't right for you in the first place.

New possessions are presented as packages that include debts and obligations, as more ways to hook characters into the settlement's social structure. Debts are given as per-month commitments, and end when the DM feels you've paid enough (probably not less than 6 months in any case).

Contacts

I'm also introducing named Contacts as people who matter to your character. Your relationships with them might be positive, negative, or ambiguous. Multiple backgrounds connect to the same characters, as a way to strengthen their sense of reality in the setting. I've always

liked how *Apocalypse World* and *Blades in the Dark* playbooks offer named characters, and start to sketch out ways that two PCs might have utterly different outlooks on them.

Some relationships have their starting state determined by a die roll. In some cases, it may make more sense to use the character's **Cha mod -1** to determine the nature of the relationship, or to decide on a result based on how the rest of the story has come together.

- 1-2: Hostile or Distrusting
- 3-4: Neutral or Complicated
- 5-6: Friendly or Obsequious

Acolyte

Choose one of the following packages:

- (a) a cell in a local abbey; Relationship (d6) with the High Priestess Yathia Imbrus; Distrusting Relationship with Master of Novices, Wintan the Scribe; access to the abbey's library
- (b) two-room dwelling on the third floor of a dilapidated tenement building; access to a secret shrine in the basement; three lay worshipers, who have an Obsequious Relationship toward you; a harmless pet snake
- (c) minor religious relic (a trinket or a common, non-consumable magic item); a hut outside the city walls; Hostile Relationship with High Priestess Yathia Imbrus; a donkey with saddle, bit, and bridle
- (d) a bare and chilly room in the Earl of Hollisham's country estate; Relationship (d6) with the High Priest Yathia Imbrus; Neutral Relationship with the Earl of Hollisham; the heir apparent, Marten Hollisham, is Obsequious toward you; two oxen and a cart

Charlatan/Criminal

Choose one of the following packages:

- (a) a room in an unused warehouse, where you are squatting; Relationship (d6) with Guildmaster Nerin Reth; wand with 8 charges of *prestidigitation*, recharges 1d4 charges each day at dawn
- (b) a cell in a local abbey or monastery; Relationship (d6) with High Priestess Yathia

Imbrus; Friendly Relationship with Master of Novices, Wintan the Scribe

- (c) a belowstairs room in a country estate, and a job as a footman; you are Obsequious toward the estate's heir apparent, Marten Hollisham, who is Friendly toward you; horse and high-quality carriage; 50-gp-per-month bribes to Master Thief-taker Hael Gorret
- (d) a two-room "apartment" in the basement of a ruined house, connected to the Thieves' Guild by a secret passage; Relationship (d6) with Guildmaster Nerin Reth; Complicated Relationship with Ward Boss Elenna Foss, who you pay 50 gp per month for the right to work in her Ward
- (e) tiny room that you share with Rollo Benton above a gambling den; Relationship (d6) with Rollo Benton; smuggling skiff that requires a two-person crew

Entertainer

Choose one of the following packages:

- (a) a room above the taproom of The Green Great Dragon Inn; the inn owner Eiris Quickly is Obsequious toward you; obligation to perform three shows per week
- (b) a room in a shabby house you share with six other Entertainers; Hostile Relationship with harpist Pol Kesson; Relationship (d6) with Ward Boss Elenna Foss; large collection of used instruments and sheet music
- (c) a room in the attic over a mask-maker's shop; Friendly Relationship with mask-maker Anita Caplan; large collection of new and outlandish masks

Folk Hero

Choose one of the following packages:

- (a) a room in the attic over a mask-maker's shop; Friendly Relationship with mask-maker Anita Caplan; large collection of new and outlandish masks
- (b) a sleeping space in the common room of The Green Great Dragon Inn; the inn owner Eiris Quickly is Neutral toward you; Relationship (d6) with Master Thief-taker Hael Gorret; a pony with saddle, bit, and bridle
- (c) quarters in the town guard barracks; Relationship (d6) with Guard-Captain Johannes Keenan; Complicated Relationship with criminal Rollo Benton; access to the town guard's stores of weapons and armor; a spirited, one-eared dog

Guild Artisan

Choose one of the following packages:

- (a) a three-story shop with living quarters, which you share with your business partner Elsabet the Red; Relationship (d6) with Elsabet the Red; one spare bedroom; cart and two mules
- (b) cramped sleeping space on the floor of Master Crafter Roger Graeling's shop; Neutral Relationship with Roger Graeling; Friendly Relationship with Ward Boss Elenna Foss; 25-gp-per-month debts to your trade guild
- (c) a luxurious room in the Earl of Hollisham's country estate; Relationship (d6) with Marten Hollisham; Complicated Relationship with your rival Elsabet the Red; a carriage and a four-horse team; infrequent demands on your time that you can't turn down

Hermit

Choose one of the following packages:

- (a) a hut outside the city walls; Relationship (d6) with the sage Kingsley Winters; Friendly Relationship with your nephew; one non-consumable Common magic item
- (b) a secret grove where you can live off the land and sleep in safety; Complicated Relationship with your brother; Friendly Relationship with your nephew; a donkey with saddle, bit, and bridle
- (c) a tumbledown tower in the Earl of Hollisham's country estate; Neutral Relationship with Marten Hollisham; Relationship (d6) with Master Wizard Danika Aurane; a mangy cat

Noble

Choose one of the following packages:

- (a) a large, richly-appointed house in the city, with several spare rooms; Relationship (d6) with the Earl of Hollisham; Complicated Relationship with Marten Hollisham; Relationship (d6) with two other NPCs; a carriage and four-horse team; a sailboat that can hold up to eight people; 500-gp-per-month debts to Guildmaster Nerin Reth
- (b) a cobwebbed old manor three miles from town; Distrusting Relationship with the Earl of Hollisham; Relationship (d6) with Marten Hollisham; Relationship (d6) with two other NPCs; a warhorse, a riding horse, and a pack mule; 50-gp-per-month debts to the Earl of Hollisham

- (c) three rooms on the top floor of Red Rivers, a disreputable wine shop; a Hostile Relationship with your mother; Friendly Relationship with Marten Hollisham; Friendly Relationship with Master Wizard Danika Aurane; Relationship (d6) with two other NPCs; a broken-down nag with saddle, bit, and bridle
- (d) a place to sleep by the Earl of Hollisham's hearth; Friendly Relationship with the Earl of Hollisham; Friendly Relationship with Marten Hollisham; Friendly Relationship with the Countess of Hollisham; Guard-Captain Johannes Keenan is Obsequious toward you; access to the Earl's horses and armorer; obligation to fight on the Earl's behalf against any challenger

Outlander

Choose one of the following packages:

- (a) a hut outside the city walls; Distrusting Relationship with Guard-Captain Johannes Keenan; Neutral Relationship with Ward Boss Elenna Foss; a crow that brings you dead spiders
- (b) a sleeping space in the common room of The Green Great Dragon Inn; the inn owner Eiris Quickly is Distrusting toward you; Friendly

Relationship with the merchant Elsabet the Red; a wolf that follows you everywhere

- (c) a secret grove where you can live off the land and sleep in safety; Relationship (d6) with the criminal Rollo Benton; a pony with saddle, bit, and bridle

Sage

Choose one of the following packages:

- (a) a tumbledown tower in the Earl of Hollisham's country estate; Neutral Relationship with the Earl of Hollisham; Friendly Relationship with Marten Hollisham; Relationship (d6) with Master Wizard Danika Aurane
- (b) a hut in a secret grove, larger on the inside than outside; Relationship (d6) with Kingsley Winters; Relationship (d6) with High Priestess Yathia Imbrus; Complicated Relationship with Master Wizard Danika Aurane; a pony with saddle, bit, and bridle
- (c) a large suite in the Green Great Dragon Inn; the inn owner Eiris Quickly is Distrusting toward you; Distrusting Relationship with Guard-Captain Johannes Keenan; Hostile Relationship with High Priestess Yathia Imbrus; a fast carriage and four goats; 50-gp-per-month debts to Master Wizard Danika Aurane



Sailor

Choose one of the following packages:

- (a) a tiny room that you share with Rollo Benton above a gambling den; Relationship (d6) with Rollo Benton; smuggling skiff that requires a two-person crew
- (b) a berth on the *Sun Dragon*, a carrack that seldom leaves the harbor; Relationship (d6) with Ward Boss Elenna Foss; Friendly Relationship with harpist Pol Kesson; 25-gp-per-month gambling debts
- (c) a sleeping space in the common room of the Green Great Dragon Inn; Relationship (d6) with inn owner Eiris Quickly; Hostile Relationship with Rollo Benton; Neutral Relationship with Master Thief-taker Hael Gorret; a cog (the *Roarer*) and three trusty friends to sail her; 25-gp-per-month payments to keep those friends around

Soldier

Choose one of the following packages:

- (a) a place to sleep by the Earl of Hollisham's hearth; Neutra Relationship with the Earl of Hollisham; Neutral Relationship with Marten Hollisham; Complicated Relationship with Guard-Captain Johannes Keenan; access to the Earl's horses and armorer; obligation to fight on the Earl's behalf against any challenger
- (b) quarters in the town guard barracks; Relationship (d6) with Guard-Captain Johannes Keenan; Hostile Relationship with Ward Boss Elenna Foss; access to the town guard's stores of weapons and armor; riding horse with saddle, bit, and bridle
- (c) a sleeping space in the common room of the Green Great Dragon Inn; Relationship (d6) with inn owner Eiris Quickly; Complicated Relationship with Guildmaster Nerin Reth; a sack of loot from your last mission, worth 75 gp; 50-gp-per-month gambling debts to Rollo Benton

Urchin

Choose one of the following packages:

- (a) a room in an unused warehouse, where you are squatting; Friendly Relationship with Guildmaster Nerin Reth; Neutral Relationship with Ward Boss Elenna Foss; Hostile Relationship with Marten Hollisham; inexplicably loyal cat

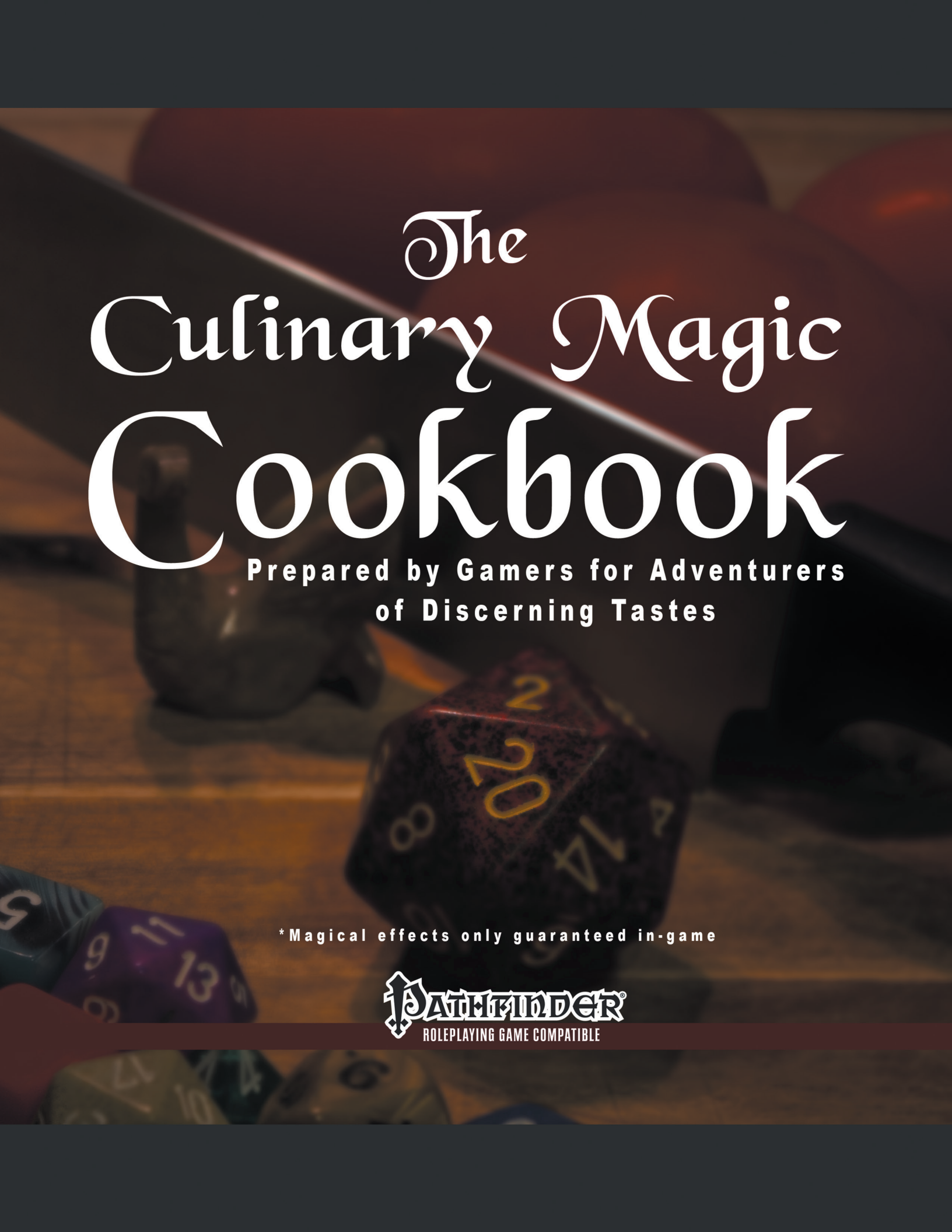
- (b) a two-room "apartment" in the basement of a ruined house, connected to the Thieves' Guild by a secret passage; Relationship (d6) with Guildmaster Nerin Reth; Complicated Relationship with Ward Boss Elenna Foss, who you pay 50 gp per month for the right to work in her Ward; highly intelligent crow
- (c) sleeping space by the hearth of Master Thief-taker Hael Gorret; Friendly Relationship with Master Thief-taker Hael Gorret and his wife; Distrusting Relationship with Master Crafter Roger Graeling; small but vicious dog
- (d) a room in the attic over a mask-maker's shop; Friendly Relationship with mask-maker Anita Caplan; two large rats that follow you everywhere; small collection of new and outlandish masks

Design Notes

As I wrote, this became more and more like *13th Age*-style Icons, writ small. My hope is that players would quickly figure out story justifications for all of their relationships, creating grist for adventures around the city. I had a lot of my own ideas for what it means that a character likes you in one package and dislikes you in another, or likes you in one background and is lukewarm on you in another, but I've tried to leave those unstated for your own group's use. The actual backgrounds that your group chooses determine a lot about what *does* definitely exist in the town, and what might not – the sage Kingsley Winters might not be in the town at all if no one collapses that waveform.

In another sense, then, this is a prefabricated, smallville-style relationship-and-location map. It doesn't offer as many moving parts as a Smallville map, but if you need to pull something together quickly (maybe because you can't spare a whole evening of gaming for map creation), this is an alternative. As to why to do anything like this at all, Colin explains it better than I could in [this Tribality article](#). Something like this could be an interesting way to present a starting town or village in a fantasy setting. It's an especially strong opening for, say, a Sigil-based Planescape campaign, or a Sharn-based Eberron campaign.

Finally, if you do wind up using this – or a variant of it – to kickstart your game, that's not the end of its usefulness. When you need to introduce a new NPC, you can quickly bind them into the story by giving them one of the packages not already taken by a player.

The background of the cover is a photograph of a wooden table. In the foreground, there are several dice: a large black d20 with yellow numbers, a purple d12, and a green d6. In the background, there is a small metal pot or kettle. The lighting is warm and slightly dim, creating a cozy atmosphere.

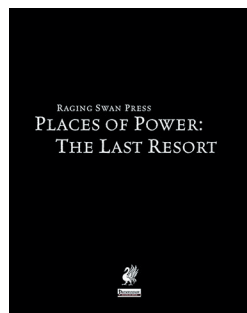
The Culinary Magic Cookbook

Prepared by Gamers for Adventurers
of Discerning Tastes

*Magical effects only guaranteed in-game

D&D
ROLEPLAYING GAME COMPATIBLE

Reviews



Places of Power: The Last Resort

Publisher: Raging Swan

Reviewer: Endzeitgeist

Stars: 5 of 5

This installment of the Places of Power-series clocks in at 13 pages, 1 page front cover, 2 pages of advertisement, 1 page editorial/ToC, 1 page

SRD, 1 page back cover, leaving us with 7 pages of content, so let's take a look!

What is "Last Resort"? Well, picture a clutter of inns, held together by walls – in the middle of nowhere, it represents a collections of truly eclectic inns, a place that is in-between, in a way. Haven represents "a little slice of haven", with soothing music; the preserve, managed by Fenric Vogelsong (Vogel =bird, in German, fyi) sports an impossibly large interior, characterized by flora and fauna present, while the Diablo Inn offers all vices you could ask for. The ostensibly cursed (but hey, FREE!) Bleak House (nice nod to Dickens...), the chaotic Warehouse that is rumored to allow for the finding of lost items...at a cost....you've probably guessed it by now.

In a way, the Last Resort represents a last resort for the desperate, sure, but it also is a purgatory of sorts, a neutral ground where the cosmic ideologies fight for the souls of stragglers, all under the auspice of an exceedingly potent, genderless wizard, Harlan Arbiton XVII – which reminded me of the foundation trilogy, obviously. Anyways the locale does contain Perdition's Rift, a fissure in the planar fabric that has potent creatures emerge from it (great way to introduce odd beings!) – and 6 sample events are associated with this rift.

The 12 keyed locales all get brief lines of flavor text associated with them, and, as always, PCs that do their legwork can unearth rumors and lore pertaining the place. Notes on the surrounding area and the eclectic habits of the even more eclectic customers complement the write-up, and 6 whispers and rumors are provided. I was particularly smitten with the massive selection of 20 dressing entries for events regarding the place, which, thanks to the planar nature of the locale, are very diverse.

Speaking of diverse: This pdf follows the expanded formula of the newer Raging Swan Press offerings, meaning that we get tailor-made adventure-hooks for a wide variety of the different locations. What about a quest to get a lily straight from the abyss or a murder investigation, which certainly should be interesting in this place? With the chiefs of the inns being high-level beings, magic is pretty dominant, and the place actually does represent that in a few details, which can offer tangible benefits. Kudos for making this, also mechanically, a place of power!

Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are top-notch, I noticed no issues on a formal or rules-language level. Layout adheres to Raging Swan Press' elegant two-column b/w-standard and the pdf sports really nice b/w-artworks and cartography. The pdf comes in two versions, one optimized for the printer and one optimized for screen-use. Kudos! Both pdfs are fully bookmarked for your convenience.

Mike Welham's Last Resort is a pdf that, once I had realized what it was, made me groan a bit. The "microcosm of macrocosm" regarding alignment trope has been done before, and in a way, this collection of inns did feel a bit like Planescape-lite to me, at least in its theme. That being said, the actual execution of the trope is handled once more with the panache, subtle allusions and captivating prose that Mr. Welham always brings to the table. Moreover, the eye towards immediate usefulness at the table does make the Last Resort stand out – unlike similar solutions, it does not require a change of scenery, a big meta-setting or the like. This place could easily and seamlessly be slotted into just about any setting and environment, with the rift as an obvious way for the GM to eliminate it once more as soon as it has served its task. The captivating prose, eclectic and eccentric characters and the focus on making this as simple to use as possible, are what sets this apart. The fact that it also is slightly meatier than the often purely fluff-centric Places of Power adds to the appeal of this supplement.

So yeah, all in all, I heartily recommend this if you need an unobtrusive minor planar hub/means to get the PCs somewhere/way of introducing strange critters. My final verdict will clock in at 5 stars.

You can get this pdf [here on OBS!](#)

You can directly support Raging Swan Press [here on patreon!](#)

Endzeitgeist out.



Battle Star: Trek Wars (OSR)

Publisher: Kort'thalis Publishing

Reviewer: Endzeitgeist

Stars: 5 of 5

This massive Alpha Blue-book clocks in at 76 pages, 1 page front cover, 1 page reserved for notes, 1

page kort'thalis glyph, 1 page back cover, 1 page editorial, 2 pages of ToC, leaving us with 70 pages of content, so let's take a look!

This book is an expansion for Venger As'Nas Satanis' sleazy scifi-RPG Alpha Blue, which is inspired by 70s and early 80s porn-parodies. If exposed boobs and nudity offend you, if you can't chuckle over what may be deemed to be puerile humor, then this may not be for you. To give you an example: One b/w-artwork has a guy standing in line at the space unemployment agency, asking the clerk to tell him more about "those outer rim jobs." That being said, at the same time, there are not artworks depicting intercourse or the like – pin-up-style nudity is as raunchy as this one gets.

Then again, at this point I've reviewed so many Alpha Blue supplements you probably already know whether the tone is to your liking, so since we have the disclaimer out of the way, let's take a look at the material herein!

We begin this supplement with a massive piece of well-written prose to set the stage thematically, "Cold as Ice," before the pdf begins with a nomenclature-change that was overdue – The official term for the GM in Alpha Blue now is the BDSM – Bold Dungeon Space Master. The abbreviation was so obvious, I kinda hoped it would catch on. The pdf then provides a seven words/phrases means of character generation that works well with the very rules-lite approach Alpha Blue takes – what does the character do professionally, how does the character look like, who is the character as a person,, what is the character good at, likes/dislikes, special equipment/vessels and stand out traits – there, character generation in a few quick steps. If you honestly dislike rolling dice and want an even bigger step of being almost-0-rules, there is an alternative that gets rid of rolling for damage; the brief table makes you pool up attack dice pool and that's it. Nice: The BDSM gets default stats for stock character NPCs next to some further DMing advice, which champions sticking to briefer scenes. Shutting lengthy combats down and rough

guidelines for the number of rounds acceptable, can be helpful – as the header notes "remember the cantina" – it's brevity is what makes the scene work. A d12 table to end combats that have stretched on for too long The sleaze once more enters the frame via the rather funny table that provides mechanically-relevant effects that accompany an alien's orgasm. The pdf also provides a d12 table to determine random underwear worn, a d4 table to determine the condition, and a d6 table for the couture of the vaginal area. If you happen to be a fan of Alpha Blue who prefers males, you won't get any tables for male underpants or genital area.

The section also introduces the dread Cheetosian slut-bots, a sex robot so potent it has a 1 in 3 chance of killing you. Losers of high-stakes games sometimes have to take the bet and introduce fingers etc. in the bot – those that survive end up with permanent cheeto fingers/genitalia, coated in orange dust. A fate that's rather...disgusting. 12 quick hooks to begin an Alpha Blue adventure, 20 things that folks may want in return for assistance and 30 weapons are next. The latter include assassin blades hidden in clown shoes, crotch cannons, bowel disruptors, etc. 6 weapons, hilariously, were left over and get their own brief table.

The next idea is pretty funny: Snadq'ua is a game, where you have to trick someone to look at your dick/balls. Depending on the move, the loser may have to pay MeowMeowBeenz, and the pdf mentions how this could be used in metagame – the victor can take the loser's "Steal the Spotlight" for the session. It should be obvious that the latter metagame requires sane and mature adults, but, as a suggestion, it's very much possible to make this based on boobs as well. Gamifying NOT staring at cleavage may actually do some socially slightly challenged folks some good...

30 detailed random transmissions to pick up (assassin guilds celebrating their 110th kill, Purple Prism, now with aphrodisiac, etc.) and a brief d6-die drop table to determine stability in a region are next, and then we get a MASSIVE, 100-entry strong table of odd NPCs to add to the game – from space dwarves to armed slugs to really weird folks, this table is really useful and breathes Venger's creativity in the best of ways. While we're on the subject of the die-drop component: The pdf comes with a MASSIVE, high-res -jpg hex-map of the Ta'andor galaxy, noting the spheres of influence of factions from "Abhorrent Entities of Eldritch Alignment" to the "Church of Arthos" or "Ta'andorian Pleasure Seekers."

There is also a 100-entry strong loot table, which includes a detachable penis, parking tickets, a handheld sonic douching machine, vials LS3-D... pretty fun and diverse table. 10 reasons why you don't get to pick someone up are also provided, which had me think of a weird combination: Space Quest meets Leisure Suit Larry. I can kinda see that work as a campaign idea! This also ties in with a table that determines the degree of being pussy-whipped (extra points for running Steel Panther's song when rolling on it...) and one that randomly lets you determine how long it takes for a male to be able to go again.

MeowMeowBeenz are concisely defined, btw. – it's crypto currency that has become popular after the finance markets crashed. Its value is partially contingent on how ostensibly awesome you manage to sell yourself. Here's the kicker: The system also rates the users on a scale of 1 to 5, not akin to the social rating dystopia shown in the third season of Black Mirror. MeowMeowBeenz thus feel pretty... sinister to me. The fluctuating value and fluid economy is, of course, pretty much carte blanche for the BDSM, so some further explanations give you some guidelines. I really enjoyed this section – the easy come, easy go randomness is appealing and fits the themes of Alpha Blue.

All right, as before in the Alpha Blue supplements released so far, we move on towards the adventure/scenario section next. As before, read aloud text is usually reduced to a bare minimum, namely setting the stage for the adventure; there is no plot-synopsis given, and you definitely should read the entire respective scenario prior to running it. Big plus: We actually get stats where relevant.

All right, since we're now taking a look at the adventures themselves, consider this to be the SPOILER-warning for players. If you want to play these yourself, you should skip ahead to the conclusion.

All right, only BDSM's around? Great! So, the first scenario "I Wear My Heart On My Sleaze" begins with at the favorite dive bar, where a Dallas Space Cowboy Cheerleader is waiting for the bathroom to become free, proceeding then to peeing herself when she can't hold it any more. This being Alpha Blue, the aftermath can result is sex. As the PCs happen upon a flyer noting a libertarian party going on, they also get a note that none Ta'andorian citizens will have to have intercourse in the next 3 hours or die horribly. The consequence is simple: Get laid at the party or die trying is the name of the game, and when a humanoid carrot advertizes the symbiotic jellyfish condoms that can actually form ridges etc.,

we're definitely in full-blown Alpha Blue territory. While playing strip-sabacc, the PCs may run afoul of a pick-pocket, and there are 12 reasons for some dude wanting the PCs dead. A super smart inventor is thinking about selling a short-range teleportation device to score; a lady may be saved from a scintillating bastard of an alien from a Zonga-line... and then fungoid spacers (alas, sans stats) kidnap a princess...which may make for another interesting adventure. All in all, a delightfully goofy extended encounter/downtime scenario.

The second adventure would be "Emergency Escape Sequence Delta Green," which begins with a table of 6 different flashbacks as the PCs emerge on the moon A'atu, only to pick up a Romulyn battle cruiser on their scanners, Shasta, which hails the PCs and provides an ultimatum – scam or be pulverized. The moon seems to be suffering from a blockade, courtesy of a change in Federation tax codes. The remainder of the module deals with a free-form approach towards the situation: Do the PCs attempt to save the moon? Will they join the Federation or attempt to brave all odds and eliminate the superior forces of the Federation? In order to defeat a battle cruiser, the PCs will probably have to infiltrate it, and stats for standard troopers and an Admiral are provided alongside a brief d6 table of different welcoming committees. And that's about it. A solid digression/diversion.

Thirdly, we get the "Outer Rim Jobs of Ta'andor" begins with 6 easy-come-easy-go reasons for the PCs to be broke. Facing their dwindling resources, they are likely to say yes to the job awaiting on Avon 7, where a scouring winds ravage the land and a bald, Tibetan-looking monk awaits. A group of fully statted rival spacers will attempt to take out the PCs as they take the job, taking turquoise teleportation bracelets...only to me dread Xa'ax, the mind-raping orange (nice callback to Kort'thalis early works! And yes, it's fully statted!). The potent fruit asks the PCs to represent it at a singing contest. And yes, the orange can be killed – wearing its peel can net you the potent powers of the entity for a brief time. The contest itself features glory holes in the rest rooms and the rules to resolve the contest are painless and nice. The judges (fluff-only) include a hip-hop-apotamus...and David Hasselhoff. Thing is, the orange is a bastard – it actually wants to kill everyone associated with the contest. How they get rid of the nuke they were duped into carrying before the 5 minutes elapse, is all up to the players. Some suggestions would have been nice. Killing Xa'ax will be tough – he has caught the famous space cops Tango and Cash, and beyond the

orange, a deadly Zith lord, the Crimson Chaos, will need to be defeated. The aforementioned Tibetan monk can make for a NPC-aid or replacement PC and as such, comes with stats. All in all, a hilarious, amazing and outré little module – easily one of my favorites in all of Alpha Blue’s canon.

The final scenario would be “Panty Raid on Papyrus 5” – you see, Papyrus is a cluster of 5 university planets, with #5 being the one focused on culture, language and the liberal arts. As such, there are a lot of ladies there. The module itself is basically a free-form scenario: The motivation of the PCs can oscillate, and the module accounts for that, by providing the tools to generate such a scenario: There is a brief table of reactions to stealing panties, and patrol ships are noted. Campus security gets stats, as do rival raiders. If you desire a straight narrative, there is a specific lady whose panties are particularly treasured by a gross insect thing... good money in it. There is a planet with economy based on worn panties, and it is here that PCs may end up recalling past lives after being exposed to a strange crystal. 8 Sample previous identities and 6 reasons for memory implants quote the total recall angle, but how that develops is ultimately up to players and BDSM.

Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are very good on a formal and rules-language level. Layout adheres to a nice two-column full-color standard, with original artworks that range from amazing to solid, and the map noted before is a nice bonus. The pdf comes fully bookmarked with very detailed, nested bookmarks for your convenience, and the pdf comes with a second, more printer-friendly version. On a layout-perspective, I loved how e.g. “Purple Prizm” is always printed in purple, with its own custom font – it’s a small thing, but I liked that decision. On another note, the per se great layout and artwork clash slightly in a few instances, but that remains an aesthetic nitpick.

Venger As’Nas Satanis “Battle Star – Trek Wars” is a great expansion for the Alpha Blue game; from the serious to the utterly ridiculous, the adventures should offer something for all folks that enjoy his take on the raunchy scifi-parody genre. Particularly the 3rd adventure is absolutely hilarious in its outrageous concepts. The random tables also easily count among the best in Alpha Blue’s history so far – much like “Universal Exploits”, this book provides quite a few very helpful components that flesh out the implicit setting without feeling overly restrictive, with particularly the MeowMeowBeenz-economy

being a great way to explain fluctuating fortunes. Now, while the adventure components don’t engage in much handholding, they do show that the author has learned from past adventures: The environments are more relevant, stats are provided where they make sense, and as a whole, this elevates the encounters and modules from sketches to material you can run without requiring much preparation beyond reading the respective components.

In short: If you enjoyed Alpha Blue or just like gonzo space opera with a dash of sleaze strewn in, then this book is a no-brainer. It is one of the best books in the product line, on par with the quality of Universal Exploits. As always for Alpha Blue-expansions, this will not change your mind if unapologetically puerile, self-referential humor that very much recognizes what it does, if the parody angle, does not work for you. If it does, then this is a gem and well worth 5 stars + seal of approval.

You can get this cool supplement [here on OBS!](#)

Do you like Alpha Blue? Well, there’s a kickstarter going on for the game! “No One Warps for Free” is fully funded, and has 4 days to go to crush stretch-goals! You can find the [kickstarter here!](#)

Endzeitgeist out.



Everyman Unchained: Bards

Publisher: Everyman Games

Reviewer: Endzeitgeist

Stars: 5 of 5

The unchained bard clocks in at 27 pages, 1 page of front cover, 1 page editorial, 1 page SRD, 1 page

advertisement, leaving us with 23 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.

So, the first page, beyond having a brief ToC, summarizes the design-paradigm of this class, and frankly, what’s here sounds feasible – the central focus lies on making the bard more interesting and versatile without requiring archetypes and other modifications, so let’s see how this fellow holds up!

The unchained bard gets d8 HD as well as 6 + Intelligence modifier skills per level – here, it should be noted that the skills are presented in a tidy table, as opposed to the usually cluttered skill-block. I really like this, as it makes looking class skills up quicker. Proficiency-wise, we cover light

armor, shields (except tower shields) and simple weapons plus longsword, rapier, saps, shortswords, shortbows and whips. Once more, we have a nice presentation-innovation, as the proficiency-list has a subheader for armor- and weapon-proficiencies. Once more, that represents an improvement in my book. We still have $\frac{3}{4}$ BAB-progression, good Ref- and Will-saves. The unchained bard retains spellcasting of up to 6th level, and every bard spell has a verbal component, with Charisma as governing attribute and spontaneous spellcasting.

And this is pretty much where the similarities end. On first level, the bard chooses a Muse, gaining skill ranks in that muse's associated Performance skill for free at each class level. These muses also determine associated skills and denoted the performance components (A for audible, and V for visual; these and the limitations they entail are clearly noted in the bardic masterpiece entry) in their respective brackets, making presentation here once more truly streamlined. 12 muses are presented and range from classics à la strings to keyboard, stage magic, legerdemain, etc., covering even more obscure Perform variants like juggling. What do the associated skills do? Well, starting at 3rd level, a bard can use his total ranks in the muse's key Perform skill instead for the associated skills; ranks previously assigned to associated skills are refunded. These skills are treated as on the class skill list and also may be treated as though they were governed by Charisma, analogue to the Perform skill, instead.

Bardic performance has been rewired: It now starts a bardic masterpiece, and its effects last 1 round, but the effects may be maintained as a free action, unless otherwise noted in the respective action entry. The decision to maintain a performance must be made at the start of the round, and duration caps at 1 minute per bard level, unless otherwise noted. Performances immediately end upon becoming paralyzed, etc. and performances may be started Charisma-modifier +1/2 class level times per day. Notice something? Yep, the maintenance of performances no longer expends rounds! This means that low level bards won't run out of juice as fast, and the different ability improvement and metrics mean that high-level bards won't drown in rounds they can't employ properly.

Now, I already mentioned bardic masterpieces – these are different from the often maligned, yet intriguing feature of the same name that was originally tacked on to grant the bard more unique

tricks. The unchained bard begins play with one masterpiece known and gains an additional one at 3rd level and every 4 levels thereafter. Save DC calculation is interesting: $10 + \frac{1}{2}$ the ranks in the muse's key performance skill + Charisma modifier. If the masterpiece requires that an opponent makes a skill check, the DC is $10 + 1.5$ times the bard's skill ranks in the key Perform skill associated with the muse + the bard's Charisma modifier. A bard also begins play with a so-called performance bonus, which begins at +1 and increases by a further +1 at 5th level and every 6 levels thereafter. The bonus type depends on to what the bardic masterpiece applies it: Attack and damage rolls gain a competence bonus, saving throws a morale bonus and otherwise, we have an insight bonus. This makes sense to be, both from a design and logic perspective. Starting at 7th level, the action economy of starting bardic masterpieces improves, and masterpieces that required a standard action may be used as a move action, with 1th level allowing optionally to start performances that need a standard or move action to be initiated as a swift action. Presentation-wise, it should be noted that all these aspects are grouped under the same ability-header, with distinct subheaders to set them apart. This presentation-sequence makes sense and renders grasping the mechanics easier. Kudos!

Also at first level, the bard picks a so-called repertoire from a list of 7. Each repertoire covers 4 different skills, and the bard gains a bonus on skill checks associated with them equal to $\frac{1}{2}$ class level, minimum 1. Trained only skills may be used untrained. Starting at 9th level, the bard may take 10 in these skills, even while distracted or in danger, and he may expend a bardic performance use to take 20 instead, in spite of the circumstances, and taking the regular amount of time, not the usual, extended one.

Now, as noted before bardic masterpieces are crucial component to the engine, and the class unlocks new available selections at 3rd, 7th, 11th and 15th level. Muses determine the type of masterpieces you can learn, and area, range, effects etc. are part of the masterpiece's block. Each performance also comes with a bit of flavor-text, which is nice. Now, the pdf does something really clever: The header of each masterpiece sports one or multiple, self-explanatory glyphs that are explained in a sidebar, though personally, I considered their meaning to be self-evident: The glyphs denote basically descriptor types. See a comic-style text-bubble? Language-

dependent. Caduceus? Healing. Skull and bones? Death. Brain? Mind-affecting. It's simple, but it helps render the rules-language less monstrous, while at the same time retaining the complexity demanded.

These melodies, *fyi*, accomplish a ton of different things, and some of them provide massive changes to party dynamics. We have to look no further than Ameliorating melody, the very first of these masterpieces. All allies in a 60 ft. emanation heal 1 hit point per performance bonus, and one ally heals 1d8 per performance bonus. Doesn't sound like much? Well, remember that it lasts 1 minute per bard level – that's a lot of healing, even at first level! While this sounds like much, and it pretty much is, the design-paradigm is clear here: This is slower, less bursty healing than what the cleric offers – but this masterpiece alone provides, mathematically, sufficient healing to classify the unchained bard as a primary healer. While the sheer amount of healing this offers is pretty massive, it should be taken into account that the bard lacks the spell-healing capabilities. Depending on how gritty you like your games to be and your personal aesthetics, you may or may not like this – personally, I'm not the biggest fan of burst-y instant-healing that returns characters constantly from the brink of death. We've all been there: The roly-poly syndrome of PCs falling, dying, being healed and getting back up, falling again...the more spread out healing *can* be sensible for grittier games that prefer to avoid this. Or, well, there's also a chance that the sheer amount of healing is something you don't like in your games. The bard's healing array will be hard to whittle down via attrition tactics. Personally, I very much enjoy how this makes a group sans healing-cleric more viable, particularly in games that sport a darker aesthetic. The one thing that should be monitored here by the GM is, that a combination of a good healer-cleric AND a bard with this option can be really, really brutal and may be something that can, depending on your campaign's goal and themes, prove to be very strong.

Soooo, basically the very first masterpiece already provides a rather pronounced paradigm change. Now, it should be noted that masterpieces differentiate between effects that begin when starting a performance, and then maintained; others reduplicate their initial effects time and again, as they're maintained. Summoning critters, for example is an effect that is tied to the start of a performance, with the maintenance of the summoning via maintenance of the performance.

The scaling of this one, *btw.*, is based on half class level. Rendering targets prone via laughing, the classic fascinate and inspire competence, courage, etc. can be found, and raging song is also codified as such – and yes, there is a spellsteal option here as well! At 3rd level, gathering of crowds, condition alleviation, mocking debuffs, sonic strikes (that cannot be cheesed regarding action economy). Minor nitpick: there's a typo here "work" should refer to "word"; this is cosmetic, though. 7th level includes the options, among others, to antagonize targets (see Ultimate Charisma; the pdf has a few abilities referring to the amazing Psychology DC and antagonize-rules from that book), provide resistances, *reincarnate* targets (takes time and a lot of daily uses)...At 11th level, we have the dance of the dead, untyped damage based on type/subtype or *wandering star motes* become available. Finally, we get a discordant confusion effect (that interacts correctly with conclusion), pried piping and raising the dead (at massive cost of resources), all added to the list to choose from at 15th level. The capstone provides the inspire legends bardic masterpiece that combines two others into one.

Now, this is not the end – at 2nd level, the unchained bard gets a performance flourish, with another one gained every 2 levels thereafter. These behave somewhat like talents and are grouped in three categories: The first bunch becomes available for the choosing at 2nd level, with 8th and 16th level unlocking a new array. If a flourish allows for a save, or prompts a skill check from an opponent, the DCs are calculated in the same way as for masterpieces. There is an option to gain an additional masterpiece, which can be taken up to three times, with 10th and 18th level as subsequent minimum levels and applicable level-restrictions. A couple of them are passive, and allow, for example, for 2d4 minutes of time invested to make armor worn to behave as *glamered*. HOWEVER, there is more to this ability-class. You see, there also are a couple of them that sport an asterisk. These flourishes apply to a bardic masterpiece, and are chosen upon starting or maintaining a masterpiece, allowing for reassigning etc.. Only one such effect can be applied at any given time and this section includes the classic distraction, countersong, etc., as well as escapist's jig etc. – in short, what previously were helpful, but for the bard-character, potentially boring actions, now are customizations for the heroic, active stuff he does. Poaching among psychic, oracle or sorcerer tricks, being famous,

affecting plants, making allies believing in the same deity count as brandishing holy symbols – we basically have tweaks and more active agenda here. Gone are the times when the bard was required to perform away his rounds to maintain support for allies. Tricking targets into spilling the beans has a hex-caveat to limit the at-will availability. There is another balancing component here, as, beyond the masterpiece ability trees, there are some flourishes restricted to certain masterpieces. Increased ranges and numerical boosts, spell kennings and the like – your heart's desires and classic tricks may be found here. Among the higher level tricks, we have mass expansions for previous flourishes or the means to absorb and return spells with suitable mechanics, building on spellsteal. We thus have a wide array of significantly expanded player agenda during building as well as at the table.

The engine becomes more complex: At 5th level, the class gets accompaniment: When maintaining a bardic masterpiece, he can start a second masterpiece as a standard action, counting the new performance against the total daily uses as usual. The second one must be one that can be started as a standard action or less, regarding of modifying class features that decrease action economy, and its maintenance is a move action. This second one can only be maintained after the primary masterpiece has been maintained. 17th level further upgrades that to allow for the retaining of a third masterpiece. The maintenance action of the third one, however, is locked to a standard action.

Starting at 2nd level, a bard gets a +4 insight bonus versus figments, patterns, language-dependent effects, sonic effects and other bardic performances – minor nitpick here: While the text and table place this one at 2nd level, the header reads 3rd, which is incorrect.

Now, this is not everything: At 7th level, and once more every 4 levels thereafter, the unchained bard gets a versatility talent. These apply the key Perform skill to a variety of different tasks and circumstances: Here, we can once more learn masterpieces, muses, repertoires or increase the starting attitude of animals, with the added option to use bardic performance uses to duplicate *speak with animals*. Gaining muse key skill ranks as BAB for the purpose of a combat maneuver, expanding the associated skills of a muse, slandering targets, evasion, becoming harder to antagonize, feint, etc., teamwork feats, etc.

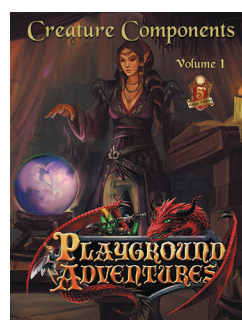
Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are very good; apart from minor typo-level glitches and the aforementioned minor level snafu, I noticed no significant issues. Layout adheres to Everyman Gaming's new, two-column standard and the pdf sports several, original, gorgeous full-color artworks. The pdf comes fully bookmarked for your convenience.

I love Alexander Augunas' unchained bard. The class has evolved beyond its linear and oftentimes, somewhat bland beginnings. The massive amount of customization available for the class means that players finally have all the agenda they want. The unchained bard manages to not only enhance the choices of the PCs, it also succeeds in making the playing experience as meaningful as it should be. The bard remains a jack of all trades, versatile and unique, but now, the active abilities have been retweaked, have become stronger and no longer require that you need to spend your rounds doing boring stuff. In short, this is the definite bard. The fact that it can make for a good healer is another huge boon, particularly for groups that lack a ton of players or that are bored by clerics. In short, this is a resounding success of its attempted design goals. My final verdict will clock in at 5 stars + seal of approval.

You can get this inspired take on the bard [here on OBS!](#)

Endzeitgeist out.



Creature Components Vol. 1 (5e)

Publisher: Playground Adventures

Reviewer: Endzeitgeist

Stars: 5 of 5

The 5e-version of the massive Creature Components tome clocks in at 60 pages, 1 page front cover, 1 page inside of front cover, 1 page editorial, 3 pages of ToC, 1 page advertisement, 1 page SRD, 1 page back cover, leaving us with 51 pages of content, so let's take a look!

This review was requested as a prioritized review and has been moved up in my reviewing queue accordingly.

There is a further disclaimer to note here: While Playground Adventures generally focuses on child-friendly supplements, this one is aimed at a slightly more mature audience. The idea of this book is to use parts of vanquished creatures for magic,

taking a cue from pretty much all real life mystical traditions and those depicted in fiction. While e.g. spell components already feature this theme, I figured it'd be worth mentioning. If young ones are really young and/or super-sensitive, this may not be for them. That being said, this is, as far as I'm concerned, really harmless. If you're like me and have grown up in the country, or if you're raising your family there, you should have no issues.

The first thing you'll notice upon opening this book, is that it is GORGEOUS. I mean it. With runes on the border and an elegant full-color presentation, the tome looks amazing. Furthermore, the books' aesthetics are wholly in service to the conceit this presents: Basically, we begin with an in-character framing narrative, and then move on through the tome, with copious amounts of artworks in pencil-drawn style, lavishly-created by Jocelyn Sarvida, generating a sense of holistic integrity, and illusion of flipping through the pages of a xenobiologist's field journal. In-character parchment addendums add to this visually concise presentation. I love this.

Now, as noted before, the basic idea of these components is tied to the innovation of power components: Basically, we're talking about optional spell components that can alter the ways in which spells behave, harvested from defeated creatures. This simple idea is amazing, and frankly makes sense on so many levels. It is a nice reason to start adventuring; it allows the GM to reward the PCs for defeating certain foes, and it makes magic feel...well, more magical. I'm a huge fan of the concept. The harvesting process is btw. as simple as we want from 5e: You basically check Intelligence (Arcana) or (Religion), determining what parts of a creature can be used, with the DC ranging from 15 to 30. While this base DC is relatively high for a bottom DC, it makes sense – not everyone should be able to harvest these components, and it should not be too reliable. The DCs are btw. based on creature frequency – the rarer in a setting the creatures are, the harder harvesting gets, as a baseline. It makes sense: Knowledge and exposure on how to deal with a hunter/gatherer-resource generate a more broadly-spread knowledge regarding how to prepare the materials. I mean, many folks can prepare fish, but fugu? Beyond difficulty, it's a rare craft there – I'd have no idea on how to prepare that properly.

The harvesting process employs the Survival and Medicine skills, and similarly ranges in skill DCs ranging from DC 15 to higher; a harvesting attempt takes 1d6 x 10 minutes, and the check may be retried

on a failure, but only if it wasn't botched by 5 or more. The character gains a single component on a success, with another component gained for every 5 points by which he exceeds the DC. It is important to note that the pdf explicitly states that anatomical limitations cap this – a creature with two eyes can't yield three doses from eyes, for example. On the other hand, some components can definitely yield more uses: Powdered claws, for example.

A general guideline of challenge, ability DC and suggested market value is presented, and the book also provides precisely-codified rules for attempting to, at the GM's discretion harvest components sans killing a creature. While nominally, even a successful attempt deals necrotic damage, this damage can by no means be mitigated, which is important regarding undead. Furthermore, the damage this inflicted reduces maximum hit points, not unlike a vampire's blood drain, representing the significant potential damage. While this can be regained by a long rest, organs removed are gone and remain so. Now, if this aspect strikes you as a bit problematic, fret not, for the book explicitly denotes this as optional. The idea here is, for example, to allow a noble unicorn to sacrifice her horn to save a king, for a stalwart griffon to help the rider – you get the idea. (That aside, if you're playing in a mature group, you can play this up as gory as you'd like – the presentation here is very much PG 13, but the content and mechanics here can easily be tweaked to account for a variety of tastes.) Similarly, thematic appropriateness of the use of a component remains, as a whole, firmly where it belongs, in the hands of the GM, and the pdf provides a rather helpful section that provides guidance when implementing this system.

But what about e.g. ghosts and air elementals of different beings that lack a physical body? Well, the pdf introduces the *essence vial*, an uncommon magic item that allows the character to collect the essences of such beings. The pdf smartly discusses the consequences of introducing these components regarding gold value and risk and reward. Particularly in 5e, with pretty low spell-durations, it should come as no surprise that harvesting, due to its duration, can be a pretty strenuous activity regarding PC resources. Still, for GMs favoring grittier games, the pdf alternatively suggests subtracting the value of these from the rewards otherwise granted. Since 5e is less contingent on WBL-assumptions than PFRPG, this should generally not yield issues, and the solutions suggested are solid.

Now, how does the enhancing of spells work? Well, only a single creature component can be used in conjunction with a given spell; however, and this is very important, maintaining such a spell becomes tougher due to the magic unleashed from the components. Constitution saving throws made to maintain the spell are increased by 5. Additionally, the pdf does not just provide means for the GM to use the components herein; instead, we get concise guidelines to determine effects for creature components, as they're grouped in three categories: Lesser, moderate and greater. These categories are assigned effects, some of which are rather intriguing, for example featuring the extension of a spell's effects for 1 round after concentration ceases. Limited damage type changes, slightly increased spell save DCs – the modifications to the spell-chassis are solid and take the peculiarities of 5e's spellcasting engine into account. Nice: The supplement also discusses potential downsides for particularly potent components.

Such creature components, obviously, also make sense for use in conjunction with magic items, with a table by rarity denoting DCs; the book also discusses the use of such components in conjunction with item creation for non-charge-based and permanent items, providing a brief array of rules for formula research – considering 5e's barebones means for item creation, I enjoyed this brief section, even though it remains, by design, rather basic. Cost reduction in such a context is also noted, just fyi. It should also be noted that the pdf similarly codifies the means to make magic permanent, though, once more, the means to do so remain in line with the rather easy to grasp 5e-mechanics.

Now, I've delayed this long enough, so how do these components work? A component is presented with an easy to read statblock of sorts: The entries list the most commonly-used components, and some creatures may yield multiple, different components. The entries also list their potency (lesser, moderate, greater) and then proceeds to note the spells that can be affected. Important: When a spell can be enhanced, so can its derivatives: If you can, for example, enhance *restoration*, then you can also use it to enhance *greater restoration*. Beyond those aspects, we have costs and descriptions noted.

It should also be noted that sub-species are taken into account: You can, for example, harvest devil's blood from all types of devils, but obviously, you can only harvest barbed devil barbs from, well, a barbed devil. Speaking of which: These illustrate rather well the power and coolness of these options:

Said barbs can be used to enhance any spell that enhances AC, and when used thus, creatures within 5 ft. of the caster successfully hitting with a melee or spell attack take 1d8 piercing damage per 2 spell levels above 1st. Vrock spores enhance spells that inflict the poisoned condition and add minor poison damage to the effect...and before you think about abuse, even if the poisoned condition does not allow for a save to end it, the ongoing poison damage bestowed by the component does explicitly allow for a save to end it.

Cool: Dragon turtle glands transform fire-damage causing effects into steam, making the spells functional underwater, and mitigating resistance gained due to immersion in water, but ONLY this resistance. Adding a gibbering moulder's saliva to an acid-based spell can make it blind foes on a failed save...and here, just fyi, a default save for save-less effects is noted. The potency of components also hinges on the power of the spell they supplement, which is a clever trick: Gorgon horns, for example, partially can calcify victims of spells resisted with a Dexterity save. While nominally, this effect causes necrotic damage, it scales with spell potency, and when used in conjunction with 7th level and higher spells, it can petrify targets! It should also be noted, that, while classified as necrotic, the special damage inflicted does affect undead and instead is ignored by beings immune to petrification. Also interesting: The damage thus inflicted does only heal by magical means. A Hippogriff's feathers can increase the speed of a *fly* spell to 80 ft., highlighting another component I very much enjoyed here: Instead of competing/superseding the enhancements available via 5e's spellcasting options at higher levels, the pdf instead focuses on alternate augmentations, adding another level of resource-bound flexibility to the spellcasting engine.

I mean, come on, how cool is it to have your sorcerer draw forth that lycanthrope's blood, powering *enhance ability*...but also risking lycanthropy? Wait, what? Yeah, not all of the components herein are safe to use: PCs that don't exert the right amount of care may, for example, find themselves with a dangerous addiction to nalfeshnee vertebral fluid. (Ew!) Harsh? Maybe. But, you know, using a greater demon's brain juice? Yeah, that SHOULD carry a risk! Depending on creature scarcity, there are some rather potent tricks here: When using, for example, an oni's horn in conjunction with *alter self*, you also get a whopping +4 to Strength and Constitution and a size-increase to Large! Adding a stirge proboscis to

a spell imposes a penalty on death saving throws when reduced by one to 0 hit points. Nice, btw.: The book takes care to account for some of the more subtle distinctions of 5e: While in PFRPG, a succubus is a demon, 5e assumes them to be their own type of fiend, and as such, the listing of the creature component also mirrors this decision in 5e – this is relevant due to the general components like demon’s blood, which can, correctly, I might add, not be harvested from succubi.

I should also mention that specific components have different effects: Skeleton dust can, for example, be used to enhance *animate dead*...or it can be laced into a *magic circle* versus the undead. The book covers a ton of well-crafted components, though it should be noted that closed IP-creatures could not be tackled. This is no fault of the supplement, but the consequence of how IP works. Beyond the massive array of components, we have 6 new feats. 4 of these represent having angel, demon, infernal or dragon blood in your veins, enhancing an ability score, helping harvesting, and the options to safely harvest certain types of blood. Beyond these 4, we have Component Caster, which increases a mental ability score of your choice by 1 and eliminates the concentration DC-increase for incorporating components. Component Crafter enhances harvesting and, surprise, crafting. All of these feats, power-wise, are in line with 5e’s aesthetics.

The final section of the pdf provides 12 magic items: 2 of these would be improved variants of the aforementioned *essence vial*, and elixirs that help control specific creatures can also be found. There is a very rare cloak made from blue dragon hide and the means to create a legendary *remorhaz forge*! A quill that seals objects with a riddle, a super aerodynamic *manticore spike* dagger, a powerful armor made of the wrappings of a vanquished mummy lord –pretty damn cool selection here! The pdf closes with 4 variant magic items and ends with a nice piece of in-character prose.

Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are top-notch on a rules-language level and a formal level. Layout is absolutely gorgeous and adheres, as noted, to a beautiful two-column full-color standard. The artworks, similarly, are mind-blowing, with one single exception: A chapter-introduction artwork depicts, oddly, a solid

CGI-type artwork that deviates in style from the others and sticks out like a sore thumb; that being said, the only reason I mentioned this, is that the pdf otherwise adheres to a uniform and tremendously beautiful style. The pdf comes with detailed, nested bookmarks that render navigation of the file comfortable and smooth, sporting bookmarks for the individual creatures.

Now, if you’ve been following my reviews for a while, you’ll have noticed that I loved the original PFRPG-version of Creature Components Vol. 1 – it is a phenomenal book, and made my Top Ten of its release-year in 2016. It should come as no surprise, then, that I did somewhat dread this conversion. The systems are different in many key components, and I really hoped that Daniel Marshall’s inspired book would properly survive the transition to 5e. It is my utmost pleasure to note that the 5e-version does not lose the magic and inspired aspects of the original. Indeed, supporting authors/devs Dan Dillon and Stephen Rowe, two authors that are often synonymous with being fantastic authors, have done an excellent job here. To the point where I’d hesitate calling this a conversion – this is a redesign from the ground up, made lovingly to account for 5e’s needs. All imperfections I found ultimately boil down to be truly minor and can’t, in any way, compromise how awesome this supplement is.

Creature Components render magic more magical; they add to the immersion into the fantastic world. Beyond adding tactical depth and a rewarding component to resource management, beyond making previous victories of the PCs matter more, the book succeeds in improving further differentiating the impact of the creatures themselves on a fantasy setting. While, having already qualified in one of its previous iterations as a Top Ten candidate, this supplement is thus disqualified from qualifying again, I consider this to be a truly excellent and highly recommended supplement for your 5e-games, and as such, my final verdict will clock in at 5 stars + seal of approval. This should be considered to be on par with a Top Ten-winner, and a must-own offering for 5e, earning this my EZG Essentials-tag, a must have, inspiring, game-enhancing supplement.

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Endzeitgeist out.



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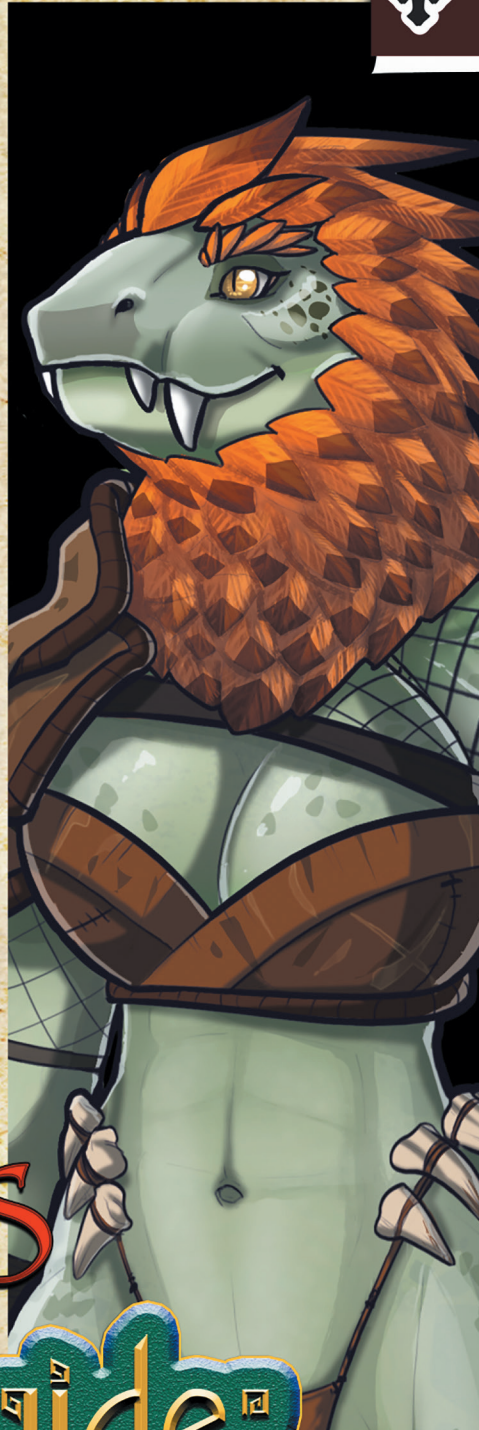


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