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**JON BRAZER
ENTERPRISES**

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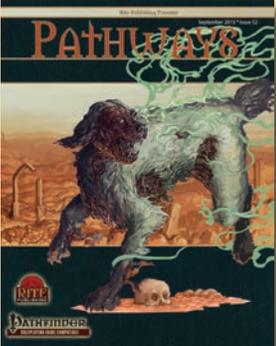
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Live The Adventure

To Claw The Surface

by Michael Allen

PATHFINDER
ROLEPLAYING GAME COMPATIBLE

Editorial

by

Dave Paul

Illustrated by Marc Ruac

Last month we tackled the issues of plagues, diseases and similar horrors. This month we address poisons and toxins. There are many options for players and GMs when it comes to poisons. From plants to monsters, from spells to magic items, there are poisons all throughout the Pathfinder world. Some poisons tend to make nervous players turn sessions into tedium. If there's a player in the group who is convinced that every glass of wine, every mug of ale, and every tureen of soup is laced with something, then tavern encounters can quickly bore the others at the table. That's a separate topic: player and GM trust; perhaps we'll explore it in some future issue. But, this doesn't stop me from enjoying the thrill of having an NPC rogue toss a tainted apple into a character's backpack to see how the player will respond.

When I was working on both *101 Swamp Spells* and *101 Subterranean Spells* I was interested in the poisons of those environments and the creatures within them. The more I looked, the more I found poisons everywhere.

Poisonous creatures about in forests, swamps, mountains, sewers, plains, deserts, oceans, intertidal zones—everywhere. When I settle down and do the research, I'm sure I'll find them in the arctic.

For the next few dozen pages, you don't have to go looking for material on poisons, we're bringing them to you. In this month's issue we have a creature that's so poisonous the very ground it walks upon is ruined, a wonderful sample of potentially toxic vermin, a really nice twist for player options (which also gives GMs all kinds of fun ways to tweak critters), and some wonderful new ways to deal with all of this madness.

Like usual, there are other hidden gems in here, including another piece to help round out some of the aquatic options for Rite Publishing's default setting.

Happy Gaming!



How to Instantly Improve Your Game Mastering

FREE BOOK: 7 Ways to Pop More Energy Into Your Sessions

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Once upon a time oh so not long ago I ran a stinker of a session. Afterward, upset and embarrassed, I wondered what went wrong. You know how sometimes you think you did poorly, like when taking a test, only it turns out you did awesome? This wasn't one of those times. The game truly sucked.

So I said to myself, "Johnny boy, what the hell happened back there? Why was that session like a pinpricked balloon farting all over the place and then landing in a limp lump on the floor?"

Then I got an idea. And another. And another. I started writing. And I diagnosed where I had failed as a GM. After combining and tweaking a few items, I pared it down to a short list:

- * No enthusiasm - I failed to inject energy for players to feed off of
- * Boring game table atmosphere - I failed to inspire
- * Repetitive ho hum grinding encounters - I did not make gameplay interesting
- * Dull villain - He was just another stat block
- * Boring roleplaying - my NPCs were cardboard

I have one advantage to fixing things you might not: my Roleplaying Tips Weekly Newsletter. I put a callout for tips from game masters around the world. I do this quite often and then share the tips out to all subscribers. I call it the GM Tip Exchange.

Technique I: Improve Your Voice	
<p>Your voice has more influence during sessions than any other game element.</p> <p>Think about that for a moment. This is a major GMing trait we're talking about here that has power over whether your game is fun.</p> <p>For example, consider these things that need your good, strong timbre at the game table:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Describing people, places and things, plus the action.Roleplaying NPCsDiscussing the rules and making judgments.Directing the gameOffering praise and feedbackManaging combat <p>And that's only a partial list!</p> <p>But those voice-based items make up a huge portion of your game's content and its quality.</p> <p>If you have poor voice and speech skills, your sessions will suffer for it.</p> <p>How to Develop a Strong Voice</p> <p>A rich voice gives you confidence. It's a bootstrap thing. When you speak, people listen. That attention gives you influence.</p>	<p>At the game table, this takes the form of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Players paying attention and listening to youPlayers respecting you moreBetter NPC roleplayingBetter game direction and managementMore GMing confidence <p>Speak From the Diaphragm</p> <p>Your diaphragm is located right beneath your lungs. When we speak from our lungs, instead of our diaphragm, our voice rises in pitch and gets tinny.</p> <p>Learn how to use your diaphragm to speak with more power, timbre and effect.</p> <p>Step 1. Practice Deep Breaths</p> <p>Our first goal is to figure out where the diaphragm is and how to fill it with air.</p> <p>Once you know how it feels through breathing exercises, you'll know when you're doing it right when GMing.</p> <p>Take several, slow, deep breaths. Breathe in deeply through your nose and push out your stomach/abdomen-section as you inhale.</p> <p>Don't stick your upper chest out as you intake air. That's not your diaphragm. And don't stick your tummy out either.</p> <p>The diaphragm cavity lies between your stomach and lungs and that's what should "take in the air."</p> <p>Here's a four minute video I found on YouTube that demonstrates this:</p> <p>http://www.roleplayingtips.com/tips/46diaphragmspeaking/</p>

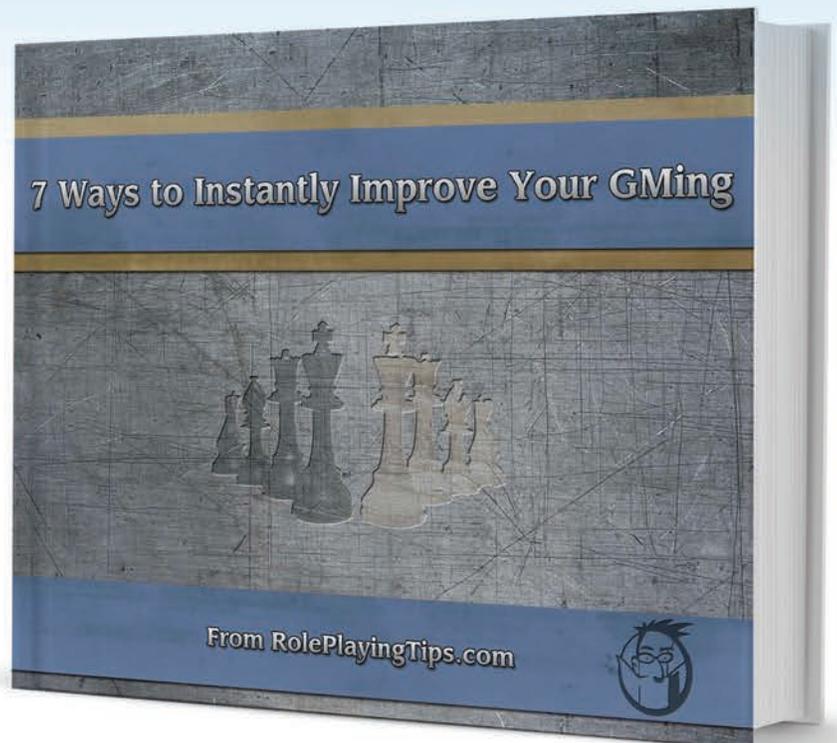
Tips came pouring in. I collated, edited, and picked the best of them. And I published them in the newsletter. Then I turned them into articles and compiled them into a book as a bonus for subscribers.

Which brings me to today. If you're reading this, you have some of the same problems I had. And nothing feels worse than GMing a boring session and letting your players down. So, I'd like to give you the book I made to help you rock next session for free.

The book is called 7 Ways To Instantly Improve Your GMing. Download it now, at no charge. I hope it helps. I'll also send you weekly GMing tips via Roleplaying Tips Weekly, including the GM Tip Exchange. You and I both love RPG, so it's on us to be the best GMs we can so everyone has more fun at every game. That's my point of view, at least.

I hope you enjoy the book and my weekly GMing tips. Drop me a note to say hi or talk GMing anytime!

Cheers,
Johnn, roleplayingtips.com
August 2015



Download Your Free Book at:
roleplayingtips.com/gm-hacks

Walking Wasteland Creature Template

By Steven D. Russell, Illustrations by Jethro Lentle

Sometimes the deities of poison and destruction take special delight in cursing the mortal forms of the innocent so that wherever they go, people and things tend to wither and die, or fall to rust and ruin. Sometimes it's not a curse, but the result of flawed magic, though the result is the same that many still feel as if they have been cursed by some malefic force. As it passes by, plants curl up and turn black, wine sours, liquids spoil, wood rots away, metal rusts, mirrors shatter, animals run screaming and, in time, mere mortals perish.

This toxic nature almost always affects a creature's appearance making it sometimes appear like an undead creature though it is very much alive. Sometimes it looks perfectly normal, which can be even more frightening as it walks forward despoiling all around it.

Creating a Walking Wasteland Creature

"Walking Wasteland" is an acquired template that can be added to any creature.

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

CR: +2.

Defensive Abilities: ferocity, poisonous blood (poison cloud); **Immune** ability damage, ability drain, bleed, death effects, disease, exhaustion, fatigue, paralysis, mind-affecting, poison, nonlethal damage, sleep, stun; **Resist** cold, fire 10

Special Abilities: A walking wasteland creature retains all the special abilities of the base creature, plus the special abilities as described below:

Degeneration Aura (Su): Any living creature within 10 ft. per HD of a walking wasteland creature must make a successful Fortitude save (DC 10 +1/2 the walking wasteland creature's HD, + its Con modifier) or their regeneration and fast healing special abilities are suppressed for 24 hours. Anyone attempting to use spells, spell-like abilities or magical items with a healing effect within the area of effect must make a successful caster level check (same DC) or the healing spell fails.

In addition, any creature that failed its save suffers 1 point of negative energy damage per round within the area of effect; a walking wasteland creature heals an amount equal to the damage dealt.

A plant that isn't a creature doesn't receive a save and immediately withers and dies, though the walking wasteland creature does not heal any hit points.

Putrefying Aura (Su): This effect spoils and poisons food and liquids within the radius of the walking wasteland's degeneration and makes them unsuitable for consumption (it can only affect up to 1 cubic foot of food or drink per HD within its aura, so it could not despoil an ocean). A creature consuming such food or drink must succeed on a Fortitude save (DC 10 +1/2 the walking wasteland creature's HD, + its Con modifier) or take 1 point of Constitution damage each round for 2 rounds.

Holy water and similar food and drink is spoiled as are magic potions. Water weighs about 8 pounds per gallon. One cubic foot of water contains roughly 8 gallons and weighs about 60 pounds. *Purify food and drink* can counter this effect through it requires a caster level check (same DC).

Poisonous Cloud (Su): A walking wasteland creature is constantly surrounded by an invisible cloud of poisonous gas. The inhaled poison affects any creature that breathes the air or water within 10 feet of the walking wasteland creature.

Poison Cloud— *type* inhaled; *save* Fortitude (DC 10 +1/2 the walking wasteland creature's HD + its Con modifier); *frequency* 1/round for 6 rounds; *effect* 1d3 Str plus sickened for 1 hour; *cure* 2 saves.

Ruin (Su): A walking wasteland creature's natural attacks cause any object it touches to swiftly rust, decay or corrode. The object touched takes half its maximum hp in damage and gains the broken condition—a second hit ruins the item. A walking wasteland creature never provokes attacks of opportunity by attempting to strike an object or weapon with its natural attacks. Against creatures made of non-living material (such as a construct or undead creature), a walking wasteland creature's natural attacks deal 1d6 points of damage plus the base creature's HD, an additional 1d6 points of damage is added for every two HD the base creature possesses. An attended object, any magic object, or any non-living creature can attempt a Reflex save (DC 10 +1/2 the walking wasteland creature's HD + its Con modifier) to negate this effect.

Creatures that hit a walking wasteland creature with manufactured weapons or non-living creatures that use natural attacks suffer effects as though hit by the walking wasteland creature's natural attacks and must make a Reflex save to avoid the ruin effect.

This even affects the ground a walking wasteland travels upon and as such it is almost always on the move.

Shattering Aura (Su): Within the area of the walking wasteland's degeneration aura, non-magical objects of crystal, glass, ceramic, or porcelain are ruined. All such unattended objects are smashed into dozens of pieces by this effect. Objects weighing more than 1 pound per HD of the walking wasteland creature are not affected, but all other objects of the appropriate composition are shattered.

Ability Scores: Con +8 (+4 hp per HD, +4 to Fortitude saves, and any of the base creature's Constitution-based DCs).



The Warped One CR 4 XP 1,200

Walking wasteland blink dog
LG Medium magical beast
Init +2; Senses darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision, scent;
Perception +7
Aura degeneration (30 ft., DC 17), poisonous cloud (10 ft.
DC 17), putrefying 30 ft. (DC 17), shattering (30 ft.)

Defense

AC 14, touch 12, flat-footed 12 (+2 Dex, +2 natural)
hp 34 (3d10+18)
Fort +9, **Ref** +5, **Will** +4

Defensive Abilities: ferocity, poisonous blood (poison cloud) **Immune** ability damage, ability drain, bleed, death effects, disease, exhaustion, fatigue, paralysis, mind-affecting, poison, nonlethal damage, sleep, stun
Resist cold, fire 10;

Offensive

Speed 40 ft.
Melee bite +4 (1d6+1 plus ruin DC 17)
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 7th; concentration +7)
Constant—*blink*

At will—quicken *dimension door* (self only)

Tactics

Before Combat The Warped One often tries to flee rather than engage in combat as it wants to avoid harming anyone, and often yells at them in Sylvan to stay away. However, this often leads to the destruction of many a creature's habitat as the blink dog moves around, avoiding the quick death most other walking wasteland's find.

During Combat If forced into combat, The Warped One uses its ruin ability to destroy weapons and magic items that can harm it.

Morale: The Warped One always attempts to flee as its first action avoiding combat as much as possible

Statistics

Str 12, **Dex** 15, **Con** 22, **Int** 10, **Wis** 13, **Cha** 11

Base Atk +3; **CMB** +4; **CMD** 16 (20 vs. trip)

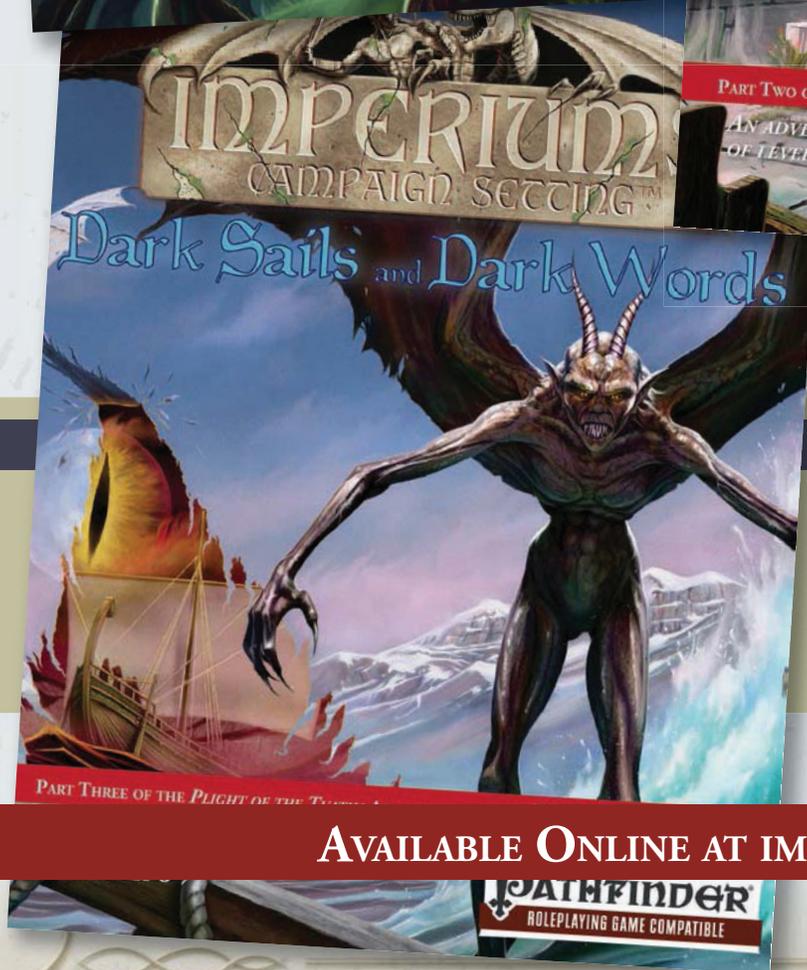
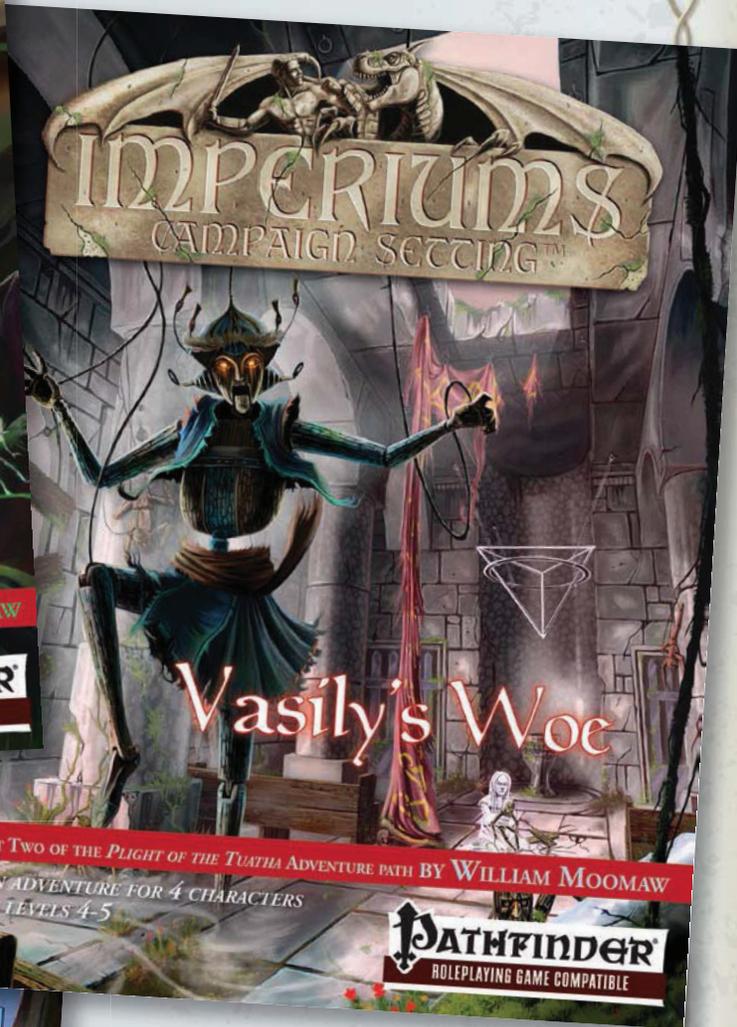
Feats Combat Reflexes, Iron Will

Skills Perception +7, Stealth +7, Survival +2 (+6 scent tracking)

Languages Sylvan



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Purgatives, Liniments, and Cure-Alls

Miraculous alchemical items for the *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game*,
by Mike Welham,

Illustrated by Rick Hershey and Anthony Cournoyer

A covered wagon, almost blinding in the early morning sun in its garishness, driven by a gnome with equally gaudy attire, pulled into the village square. No sooner than the wagon, painted on both sides with "Dr. Quarx Miracle Cures" had stopped, the gnome jumped from his perch, ran to the back of the wagon, and, with a flourish, threw back the canvas flap on the back of the wagon, revealing a number of vials, jars, and tubes. A riot of minty and pungent odors bludgeoned those who dared get close to the display.

"Step right up, folks," the gnome cheerily greeted wary onlookers. "I've got everything you need to fix what ails you!"

At times, an adventuring party has to do without a healer. Perhaps a party lost its healer to an untimely death or capture, or maybe the party never had a healer. Sometimes magical devices to remove afflictions are more expensive than the party can manage or the prohibitive nature of such items means they're not available. Thus, inventive geniuses, or those looking for a quick handful of gold coins, craft marvelous items using their (sometimes-dubious) skills at alchemy. A character with ranks in Craft (alchemy) can create the following items, and each item lists its price, weight, and Craft DC along with its description.

Blight Be-Gone

Price 150 gp; **Weight** 1 lb.; **Craft DC** 30

This red liquid burns as it goes down and causes your body temperature to increase to destroy pathogens within your body. You receive an immediate Fortitude save against any diseases afflicting you, and you use your undamaged Constitution modifier (in the case where the disease has inflicted Con damage). This counts as 1 save for purposes when a disease requires multiple consecutive saves. For 12 hours after drinking this concoction, you are sickened. If another effect causes you to be sickened (for example, drinking another vial of Blight Be-Gone), you are instead nauseated for the duration of the new effect.

Cauterizing Ointment

Price 10 gp; **Weight** 1.5 lbs.; **Craft DC** 20

By applying this searing-hot ointment to a creature's wound as a move action, you reduce any bleed damage it is taking by 1. The tube containing the ointment contains enough doses for 6 applications.

Freedom Oil

Price 100 gp; **Weight** 3 lbs.; **Craft DC** 25

You can drink this large flask of greasy, brown oil as a full-round action, but it works just as well by dumping it on a creature as a move action. When ingested or applied, it removes paralysis from the affected creature.

Additionally, it also removes the staggered condition from the creature. If applied, the oily coating grants a +2 alchemical bonus to CMD against grapple attempts, but it also inflicts a -4 penalty on Acrobatics checks and a -2 penalty on all other Dex-based skill checks.



Heroic Measure

Price 1 gp; **Weight** 1 lb.; **Craft DC** 20

When you drink this metallic-flecked, sweet liquid, you gain a modicum of protection from injury. When an attack brings you below 0 hit points, Heroic Measure automatically stabilizes you. This protection lasts for 8 hours or until the first time you stabilize, whichever is sooner. Alternatively, you can pour this down an unconscious creature's throat to stabilize it.

Ice Veins

Price 5 gp; **Weight** 2 lbs.; **Craft DC** 20

A blue, sludgy fluid, ice veins stays cool to the touch in even the hottest temperatures, while it freezes solid in extreme cold. For 24 hours after you drink it, the chilled liquid protects you from extreme heat, allowing you to pass Fortitude saves against extreme heat effects automatically. However, in cold temperatures, you are affected as if the severity of the cold had increased by 1 step.

Ipecac

Price 50 gp; **Weight** 0.5 lb.; **Craft DC** 30

As a move action, you can drink this bitter, yellowish purgative, and you immediately vomit out the contents of your stomach. This removes any ingested poison from your system. However, you are nauseated for 1d4 rounds, as your body continues reflexively attempting to expel the liquid. You cannot use this item preemptively to help

with poison, but you may use it as a weapon of sorts to induce vomiting in an opponent (provided you can force the liquid down its throat).

Light Refractor Unguent

Price 25 gp; **Weight** 2 lbs.; **Craft DC** 25

When you look through this clear, viscous material, you cannot see objects directly through it. Instead, you see things a couple of feet in a random direction. By rubbing this ointment over your skin, clothes, and armor, as a full-round action, you benefit from the light-refracting properties of the material. For 10 minutes after application, you force a 20% miss chance on all attacks that target you. Additionally, you gain a +10 alchemical bonus on Stealth checks against creatures relying on sight to notice you.

Liquid Air

Price 15 gp; **Weight** 0.5 lb.; **Craft DC** 20

Drinking this fluid, which looks like ordinary water, causes your lungs to fill with the fluid and makes you cough it up while you breathe air. While in an air-rich environment, you gain the nauseated condition. However, in water, your lungs convert the water to breathable air, allowing you to breathe underwater with no chance of drowning. Liquid air, which provides its benefits for 1 hour, does not give you any ability to swim. A variant, known as airy water, allows an aquatic creature to breathe air without difficulty.

Liquid Warmth

Price 5 gp; **Weight** 2 lbs.; **Craft DC** 20

This amber liquid feels warm in even the coldest temperatures, while it begins to boil in extreme heat. For 24 hours after you drink it, the toasty liquid protects you from extreme cold, allowing you to pass Fortitude saves against extreme cold effects automatically. However, in hot temperatures, you are affected as if the severity of the heat had increased by 1 step.

The Miracle Pill

Price 1,000 gp; **Weight** 1 lb.; **Craft DC** 40

This large pill, when swallowed, heals 5d6 points of damage to the creature ingesting it. If applied to a dead creature within an hour of its death, the healed damage brings the creature to the living side of the threshold of death; the creature is alive but staggered for 1d4 hours afterward. The pill does not remove any conditions suffered by the creature. Only the most gifted of alchemists can create such a powerful cure, and they usually candy coat the impossible-to-swallow pill to help it go down.

Paste-All

Price 5 gp; **Weight** 1 lb.; **Craft DC** 15

This tube of strange, gray, gritty paste only works when applied to objects. Immediately after application, it changes to become the material of the object to which it is applied. Paste-all restores 1d4 points of damage. If the object has the broken condition, the paste removes that condition if it restores the object to at least half its original hit points. The tube has enough material for 5 applications.

Quelled Anger

Price 20 gp; **Weight** 0.5 lb.; **Craft DC** 20

This thick syrup tastes like honey and is usually added to tea or other warm beverage for full effect. When you drink quelled anger, it immediately ends your rage and reduces the fatigued duration by 1 round. Creatures benefitting or suffering from a magical effect (such as from *confusion* or *rage*) that drink it, or are forced to drink it, must succeed at a DC 13 Will save (*confused* creatures cannot choose to fail this save), or the liquid suppresses the effect for 1 minute.

Scent Remover

Price 8 gp; **Weight** 1 lb.; **Craft DC** 25

Contrary to its intended use, this green paste has an overpowering, pungent odor. When applied to your skin as a full-round action, however, you no longer give off an odor, rendering creatures with the scent ability unable to detect you. Scent remover lasts for 4 hours, but you can wash it off sooner with a gallon of water.

Spirit Purgative

Price 400 gp; **Weight** 0.5 lb.; **Craft DC** 20

This oozy, foul-smelling substance created from ectoplasm induces vomiting when ingested, causing the nauseated condition for 1d4 rounds. However, it also purges spirits and outside influence from the drinker's body and mind. A creature in possession of the drinker's body (such as through a ghost's malevolence ability or *magic jar*) must succeed at a DC 18 Fortitude save, even if the creature is normally immune to effects requiring a Fortitude save, or be expelled. If the drinker is under the influence of a spell or effect that exercises mental control over it (*charm person*, *dominate person*, *suggestion*, etc.), spirit purgative suppresses the effect for 1 minute.

Stone Softening Paste

Price 400 gp; **Weight** 4 lbs.; **Craft DC** 35

After applying this heavy, gritty, gray paste to a creature that has been petrified, which requires a full-round action, the stone softens such that the creature is no longer petrified but becomes *slowed*, as per the spell. *Remove paralysis*, freedom oil, or similar spells or items can remove the *slowed* effect.

Alternatively, you can apply the paste to a 5-foot square area of stone or earth, which affects the area as though with *soften earth and stone*.

Toxin Extractor

Price 150 gp; **Weight** 0.5 lb.; **Craft DC** 30

As a move action, when you apply this white unguent to a poisoned wound or skin exposed to contact poison, it immediately draws out the poison, rendering it inert. The nettling sensation you experience while the unguent neutralizes the poison is unnerving, giving you the shaken condition for 1 minute.

Truth Serum

Price 500 gp; **Weight** 0.5 lb.; **Craft DC** 25

Unlike the other items in this list, which may have incidental effects against opponents, truth serum's purpose specifically targets your foes. After administering the bittersweet, blue liquid to a creature, it must succeed at a Will save each minute (DC 12, +1 per minute) to be able to tell lies for the duration. Even if the affected creature is capable of lying, it incurs a -4 penalty on Bluff checks to tell its lies convincingly. The serum's effects persist for 15 minutes.

Whole Body/Whole Mind

Price 75 gp; **Weight** 1 lb.; **Craft DC** 25

Offered as a warm, salty broth, this refreshing liquid restores 1 point of ability damage of your choice when you drink it. Alternatively, you can remove the sickened condition or reduce the nauseated condition to sickened

by drinking this broth.

Unmiraculous Side Effects

Just before the gnome drove his wagon out of the city, his coffers full of coins from those desperate to cure diseases or mend broken bones, his boisterous patter turned soft, such that no one could really hear him. "Now, you may notice some strange side effects, but don't you worry. That's how you know your panacea is working." He then cheerily waved to his clients and drove off to the next village.

Sometimes, the above miracle cures have unintended side effects due to turning to alchemical formulas in place of magic. This optional set of rules applies to the above items, but a GM can also use them for alchemical items from other sources.

An item has a percent chance equal to twice the Craft DC to inflict a side effect. If the item has a side effect, use the appropriate table below to determine the effect. Additionally, a character can reduce the price of an item, increasing the chance for a side effect by 1% per 1% in cost reduction. Note that it is possible to poison a character attempting to use ipecac to remove poison with these rules; such is the unpredictable nature of these nigh-magical creations.



Ingstible Side Effects

d% Roll	Symptom	Effect
01-15	Nausea	Gain the sickened condition for 1d6 rounds (DC 13 Fortitude negates).
16-25	Belching	Uncontrollable belching inflicts a -4 penalty on Stealth checks (DC 14 Fortitude negates).
26-35	Vomiting	Gain the nauseated condition for 1 round, and the sickened condition for 1d6 minutes (DC 14 Fortitude reduces to sickened for 1d6 rounds).
36-45	Acid Indigestion	The liquid causes a buildup of acid in the stomach, creating discomfort for the night, potentially disrupting sleep. If the drinker fails a DC 16 Fortitude save, it is fatigued the next day.
46-55	Paralyzed Vocal Cords	The material numbs the imbiber's vocal cords to the point where they no longer work. For 1 hour after drinking the liquid, the creature cannot speak or cast spells requiring a vocal component (DC 16 Fortitude negates reduces the duration to 10 minutes).
56-65	Deafness	The ingested liquid seems to gain a life of its own and fills the drinker's inner ears, causing temporary deafness that persists for 2 hours (DC 16 Fortitude half).
66-75	Dehydration	The liquid absorbs all other liquids in the creature's body. It must succeed at a Constitution check as if it suffered from thirst. A creature already suffering from thirst must make a check as if 3 days had passed (adding +3 to the DC).
76-85	Intoxicant	The material induces a form of inebriation, causing the imbiber to become confused for 1 minute (DC 17 Fortitude negates).
86-95	Poison	The substance is actually a mild, debilitating poison (save Fortitude DC 18; frequency 1/round for 6 rounds; effect 1d3 Str damage; cure 2 consecutive saves).
96-100	Multiple Effects	Roll twice on this table (ignoring this result). If the same result occurs twice, increase the effect's save DC by 2.

Application Side Effects

d% Roll	Symptom	Effect
01-15	Blisters	The applied material raises painful blisters on the affected creature. It incurs a -2 penalty on attack rolls, and all Strength- and Dexterity-based skill and ability checks. The effects last until the creature receives magical healing or a successful DC 15 Heal check.
16-25	Hair Loss	The affected creature cannot stand the touch of clothes or armor on its skin. It doubles any existing armor check penalty from armor and takes a -1 armor check penalty from clothing. A DC 14 Fortitude save negates this effect.
26-35	Rash	
36-45	Discoloration	The material changes the creature's skin color to a bizarre hue or patchwork of mismatched colors. While this has no direct effect on the creature, it inflicts a -4 penalty on Charisma-based skill checks (this may become a bonus, depending on how an opposing creature responds to the strange coloration).
46-55	Itching	Each minute for 10 minutes, the affected creature must succeed at a DC 16 Fortitude save or become distracted by intense itching. If the creature fails, it incurs a -2 penalty on all attack rolls, skill checks, and ability checks for the minute duration.
56-65	Numbness	The affected creature's nerve endings stop working for 1 hour. Its base movement decreases by 10 ft., and it takes a temporary -6 penalty to Dexterity. A DC 16 Fortitude save reduces the duration to 10 minutes.
66-75	Calcification	The material seeps into the creature's bones and partially solidifies them. It becomes staggered for 2 hours (DC 18 Fortitude save negates).
76-85	Blindness	Vapor or direct contact with the eyes causes blindness for 24 hours (DC 18 Fortitude save reduces this to the dazzled condition).
86-95	Rusting Sweat	The material causes the affected creature to exude oxidizing sweat. It deals 1d6 points of damage to a metal weapon (bypassing hardness) each round it holds the weapon, and reduces 1 point of AC from worn metal armor. A DC 20 Fortitude save negates this effect.
96-100	Multiple Effects	Roll twice on this table (ignoring this result). If the same result occurs twice, increase the effect's save DC by 2.

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20 Treasure Chests

By Creighton Broadhurst,
illustration by LeskaArt and Jacob E. Blackmon

Adventurers like nothing more than to find a treasure chest, but often the chest itself doesn't even get a description.

Use the table below to describe the treasure chests your PCs are lucky enough to stumble across. Some of them may be trapped—and no doubt paranoid adventurers will immediately be on their guard given the chest actually has a description!

1. One end of this wooden chest is scorched and burnt and the metal bands are slightly deformed. Opening the lid is consequently difficult and makes a loud screeching sound, unless the hinges and deformed metal bands are oiled beforehand.
2. Three thick padlocks attached to iron bands linking the lid to the front face of the chest wards access to whatever lies inside.
3. The front panel of the chest is decorated with the intricate carving of a slumbering dragon. Some details of the carving—the dragon's eyes, teeth and claws—are subtly picked out with expertly applied paint.
4. This wooden chest has beaten copper panels affixed to its sides; the copper catches any light in the vicinity and gives the chest a subtle green glow.
5. The lid of this chest is battered as if someone or something has tried to break in.
6. One corner of this chest is darker than the others, as if the wood is wet. A slight smell of mould hangs in the air.
7. This substantial wrought iron chest has carry handles at both ends. The chest itself weighs over 400 lbs. Although old, the chest is obviously well made and well maintained.
8. This oak chest is sealed with thick red wax. An ornate seal—depicting a rearing swan—completely covers the lock.
9. Several panels of this chest have obviously recently been replaced; the wood is lighter than that of the surroundings and is not stained whereas the chest has previously endured rough use.
10. Intricate carvings of leaping flames and figures writhing within the fire cover this robust stone chest.
11. The body of this wooden chest has been stained a lurid red colour while the lid is bright blue. The paint on the lid is flecking and obviously old, while the red paint seems to have been redone recently.
12. This chest stands in the middle of the room and is secured with four chains, each of which passes through two iron rings set into the floor before being secured with a large padlock. The chest is also secured by a padlock.
13. The lid of this chest is covered in blobs and streaks of dried wax of various colours and the stubs of several candles stuck in the wax are visible on the lid's apex.

14. Woodworms have vigorously attacked this chest at some point in the past and their small holes pockmark every surface. The chest is old and rickety; it is consequently easier to break into than normal.

15. A nondescript woolen blanket has been thrown over this chest. Small bells are attached to the blanket between the chest and the wall. They jangle if the blanket is removed.

16. This chest is narrow—only two feet wide—but four feet high and appears to be more of a storage bin than a chest. The lid is in two halves and opens to the sides.

17. The lid of this chest is flat and carved with an idyllic woodland scene. The carving is worn, but still beautiful. Pressing the face of a dryad reclining in her tree disengages the chest's hidden lock.

18. A row of tiny holes just below its lid perforate the chest's front, back and sides. (Varily, these could be air holes for whatever is stored within, a false trap to deter thieves, or an actual trap.)

19. The smell of a heady mix of herbs and spices hangs in the air around this small chest.

20. This chest has been whitewashed (badly) atop which have been daubed a number of mythical or magical symbols of protection. At the GM's discretion, these may be nothing more than decoration or the basis of some form of warding trap.



GM'S MISCELLANY:
DUNGEON DRESSING

If you enjoy the table above and like dungeon dressing, check out *GM's Miscellany: Dungeon Dressing* from Raging Swan Press—Endzeitgeist's choice as the number one book of 2014! Crammed with over 300 pages of information and charts designed to bring your dungeon alive, *GM's Miscellany: Dungeon Dressing* is an essential part of any GM's arsenal.



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GM'S MISCELLANY:
DUNGEON DRESSING



20 Things to Find in a Vermin-Infested Dungeon

By Creighton Broadhurst, Illustrator unknown

It seems adventurers are always poking their noses into vermin-infested dungeons. Whether it is an old, abandoned keep on the edge of the borderlands or a small network of tunnels intersecting with a sewer, in such locales vermin are an ever-present threat.

Vermin can live almost anywhere, and are always seeking food. Really only a threat to low-level or badly injured adventurers, they are a vital part of most dungeon's ecosystems. Use the following table to determine what minor feature the PCs discover during their adventure.

1. Small droppings cover the floor. Some are obviously new while others are dry and hard.
2. Several narrow cracks pierce one of the walls at floor level. Small droppings cover the floor, in front of the cracks.
3. The area smells of wet fur and feces.
4. Half a rat corpse—the head and shoulders—lies on the floor. Of the rest of the body, there is no sign.
5. Spider webs fill the corners of this area where the walls meet the ceiling. Small bundles—flies and other insects—are visible within. A few yet struggle pitifully, but most are long dead.
6. A wide crack pierces the ceiling. Directly below it, a pile of guano, waist high to a human, towers over the floor.
7. Rotten wood lies in a corner of the room. Perceptive PCs hear the sounds of tiny creatures scurrying about within.
8. Cobwebs cover the ceiling and entrance to this area; dozens of small spiders lurk within.
9. A mouldering spider leg—easily as long as a human's leg—lies on the floor. The spider from whence it came must have been the size of a horse!
10. In this spider-web filled chamber the half-eaten corpse of a large spider lies on the floor. Although clearly dead—much of its head is missing—the corpse seems to move and shudder. A closer examination reveals dozens of large rats gnawing on the corpse from the inside out. If disturbed, they viciously defend their meal.
11. Trails of tiny tracks in this dusty room betray the presence of a small colony of mice or rats.
12. A pile of sodden wood and moist earth harbour a colony of centipedes that lurk among a small stand of dark-hued mushrooms.
13. A network of fine cracks pierces the floor, and from these cracks grows a carpet of moulds and fungi. Many of these growths show signs of being gnawed by tiny teeth.
14. Cobwebs—heavy with dust—droop down from the ceiling. They have clearly been here for some time and, just as clearly, are no longer used by the spider that made them.
15. The stench of decay hangs heavily in the air.
16. The sounds of scrabbling from behind the walls, floor or ceiling reaches the ears of perceptive PCs.
17. As the PCs enter the area, a large rat darts into a hole in the floor. Droppings surround the hole.
18. Dried vomit is splattered all over one wall. It has dripped down the wall and pooled on the floor. Several dozen centipedes cluster around the vomit, eating greedily.
19. The sound of squeaking comes from ahead of the party, but the source of the sound never reveals itself.
20. A bone pile fills one corner of the chamber. Investigation reveals the bones likely came from one humanoid and that they have been clearly gnawed by hundreds—if not thousands—of tiny teeth.

GM'S MISCELLANY: DUNGEON DRESSING

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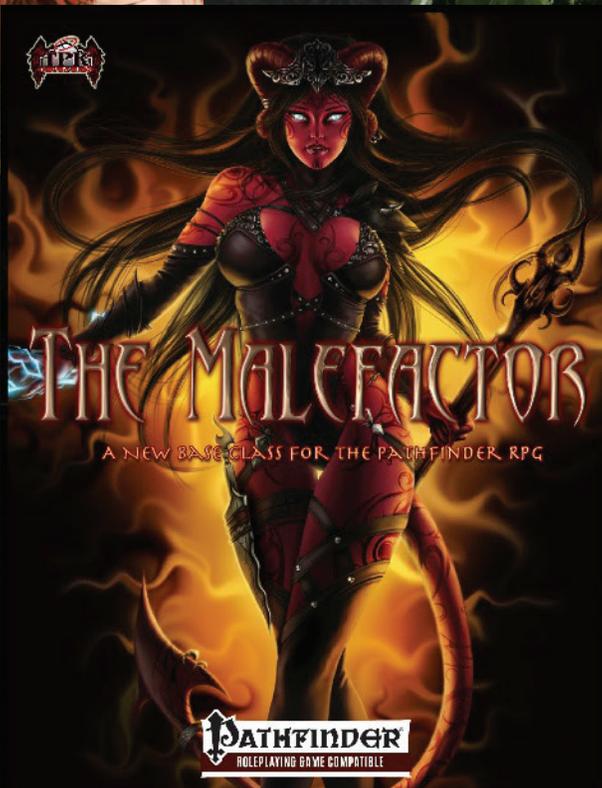
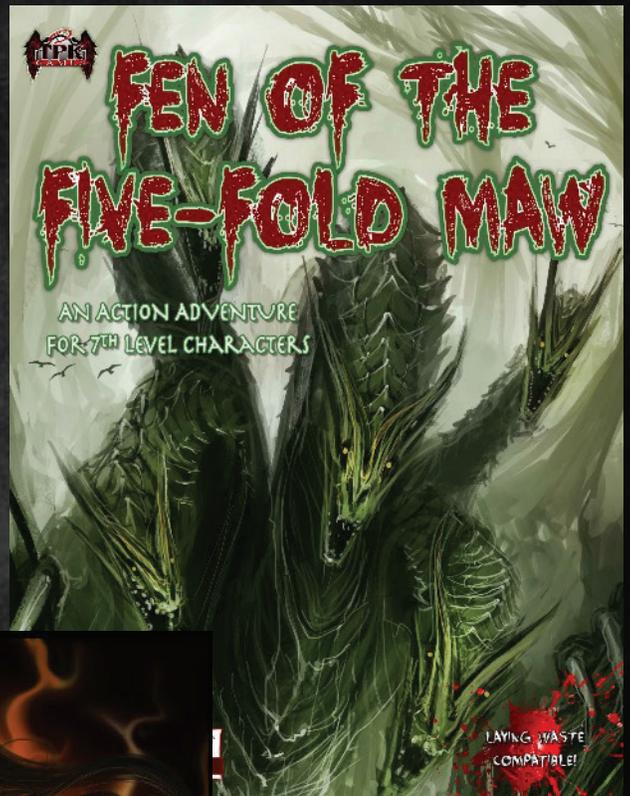
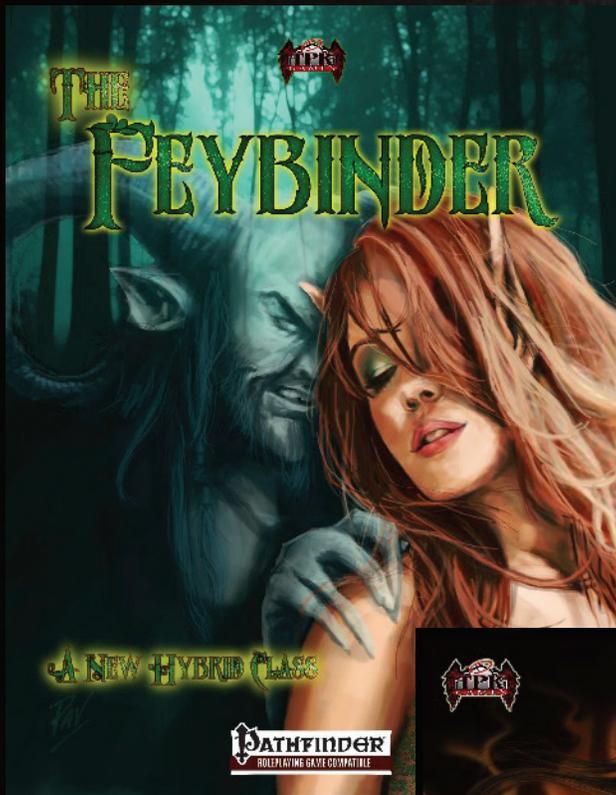






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Touched by Poison

by Jonathan McAnulty

Illustrated by Rick Hershey. And Juan Diego Dianderes

PC traits are a simple way to give the back-story of each newly created character some mechanical relevance, further distinguishing one character from another. While each PC is typically entitled to two initial Traits, this number can be further increased via a feat, aptly named Additional Traits, or through taking a character drawback, which then allows for one more feat.

The following quirks provide another alternative, and can be taken in addition to a character's traits at character creation. In addition to providing additional material for a character's background story and a mechanical advantage, these quirks also contain a mechanical detriment, akin to the aforementioned drawbacks, with which to balance out the advantage. A single character should not take more than one such quirk, and selecting a quirk does not affect the regular traits available to a character, as per the standard trait rules. As with all optional rules, ask your GM before choosing to use these, especially as some of them provide abilities which are better than a feat or trait.

Each of the following ten quirks share a common, venomous theme.

Abyssal Affinity

You were once poisoned with a demonic poison which nearly killed you. Though you survived, the unholy toxin has forever changed and marked you.

Benefit As a standard action, at will, you can detect demons within 60 ft. This ability functions as *detect undead*, except that it detects creatures with the demon subtype rather than the undead type.

Penalty No matter your alignment, you will always detect as at least faintly evil (as per a 1 HD evil outsider) to a *detect evil* spell, though if you should register as being more greatly evil because of an actual evil alignment, you do. This effect does not prevent you from also detecting as your actual alignment, so a paladin suffering from this effect will detect as lawful, as good, and as faintly evil, depending on the spell cast. Additionally, effects which are triggered by an evil alignment will be triggered by you and your presence.

Alchemically Tainted Blood

When you were quite young, you were the subject of an insane alchemist's mad experiments. He infused your blood with strange reagents and dubious chemicals. Though you were rescued from his clutches, your blood continues to be strange, such that many toxins and venoms simply do not affect you, while others affect you strangely, or more strongly than they should.

Benefit You gain a +2 bonus to all saves made against poison and poisonous effects, including alcohol. When a

poison does affect you, the effect of the poison is random each round, doing 1d3-1 points of damage against a randomly selected ability (1d6: 1 – Strength, 2 – Dexterity, 3 – Constitution, 4 – Intelligence, 5 – Wisdom, 6 – Charisma).

Penalty When a poison affects you, the duration of the poison is increased by 3 rounds and should you fail the first save, you must always make at least two saves to overcome the poison, though, unless the poison description says otherwise, they need not be consecutive.



Developed Immunity

A nautical mentor instructed you in a secret method of developing immunity to a particular poison, but the effect requires constant small doses of the stuff.

Benefit Choose a single poison. You are completely immune to the effects of that poison. You may not, at a later date, change which poison to be immune to.

Penalty You must take regular doses of the poison to which you are immune, mixing it with select other ingredients. Each month you must pay the price of a single dose of the poison. If you fail to do this, you lose the immunity. Reacquiring the immunity costs twenty times the cost of a single dose, and takes one year.

Entomophobia

For as long as you can remember, you have been terrified of biting insects, spiders, and other poisonous creepy-crawlers. As a consequence, when in their presence, you can act with incredible speed - so long as you are not overcome with fright.

Benefit When combating insects and arachnids, you gain a +4 bonus to initiative and a +1 dodge bonus. You also cause an additional +2 points of damage when you hit such opponents.

Penalty When you first encounter an insect or arachnid, regardless of its size, you must succeed at a Will save or be panicked for 1d4 rounds. The DC of the save is equal to 10 + 1/2 the creature's HD. If you succeed at the save, you cannot be panicked by the same creature for 24 hours. Additionally, regardless of the outcome of your Will save, you always suffer a -1 penalty to hit insects or arachnids. (Note that seeing a pile of ants devouring a crumb doesn't require hundreds of saves. Reasonable adjudication applies.)

Ophiophilist

Though you do not know why, you have always had a strong attraction to snakes, and, even more strangely, they often, though not always, seem to return the affection. As you have grown older, the serpentine bond you feel has only grown stronger, so much so that you can even, at times, understand what snakes have to tell you.

Benefit You can use Diplomacy on snakes, and have a +4 bonus to all Diplomacy checks made on snakes. Furthermore, once per day you may communicate with a single snake as if using *Speak with animal*.

Penalty You may not attack a snake unless you succeed at a Will save equal to 10 + 1/2 the HD of the snake. You must make this check each round you attempt to attack a snake. Likewise, if exposed to the dead body of a snake, regardless of the cause of death, you must succeed at a DC 16 Fortitude save or become nauseated for 1d6 rounds, if you succeed at the save, you are instead sickened for 1d4 rounds.

Poisonous Relations

One of your close relatives was a well-known and highly successful dealer in exotic poisons. Their career came to an abrupt and violent end when they were caught knowingly supplying poison with which to assassinate a royal personage. The stain of that relationship still affects how others view you.

Benefit You gain a +2 to any Craft (alchemy) skill check made to identify or manufacture a poison and Craft (alchemy) is always a class skill for you. You also begin play with an extra 500 gp. You may not take both the Poisonous Relations quirk and the Rich Parents social talent.

Penalty Whenever you encounter a new individual, there is a 20% chance they recognize your relationship to your relative and begin with a hostile attitude towards you. This chance is lowered to 10% outside of your country of origin.

Poison Sniffer

Your family has long produced talented poison-sniffers. From an early age, your natural talents have been cultivated and trained so that your ability to sense and identify poison by smell alone is almost preternatural. Of course, sometimes having such a strong sense of smell can affect you adversely.

Benefit At will, as a swift action, you can *detect poison*, though you rely on your natural olfactory abilities rather than magic for this effect.

Penalty Anytime you acquire the sickened or nauseated condition, the length of the effect is doubled.

Venomologist

Poison and poisonous creatures have always fascinated you. As a result you have single-mindedly devoted yourself to the study of poisons and their effects on the body. You have learned how to create poisons and how

to better treat those who have been poisoned.

Benefit You gain a +2 bonus to all skill checks made to create, identify or treat poisons. Heal and Craft (alchemy) are both class skills for you. You also gain a +2 bonus to Knowledge (nature) checks made to identify a venomous creature and can make such checks untrained.

Penalty You suffer a -2 penalty to all Heal and Craft (alchemy) checks not related to creating, identifying or treating poisons.

Venomous Heritage

There is serpentfolk blood in your family tree, and you have inherited some minor serpentine traits. While these traits sometimes are a blessing, you have a harder time getting others to trust you, as your presence often makes others uncomfortable, though they may not understand why.

Benefit You gain a +2 racial bonus to saves made against poisons, and a +2 racial bonus to Perception.

Penalty You suffer a -2 racial penalty to all saves made against cold effects, and a -2 penalty to all Diplomacy checks.

Venomous Enmity

You were once poisoned by a venomous animal and never fully recovered, leaving you more vulnerable to all toxins. Because of this experience, you have come to loathe poison and those creatures which use it. You have made it your mission to eradicate such creatures from the world.

Benefit When fighting a venomous creature, or any opponent visibly using poison, you gain a +2 morale bonus to all attack and damage rolls made against that creature. You also gain a +2 bonus to Knowledge (nature) skill checks made to identify a venomous creature, and you can make such checks untrained.

Penalty You suffer a -2 penalty on all saves against poisons and poison effects.





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Questhaven: The Leviathan Archipelago

Part 2: The Isle of Tranquility

by Elton Robb, Illustrators unknown

Dear Quillion,

I have some news on which I would like to report on the Leviathan Archipelago when we explored it. Inside this document is the reports on each of the large islands we visited. Including the penal colony of Gone. The first, Saanata, is the largest island and the most populated. It's also an island with high volcanoes. One of its volcanoes is regularly erupting with lava. I have a full report on each of the islands, with the isle of Saanata, or Tranquility, first.

Yours,

Captain Andrew of Shadowshire

This article deals with the first isle, the Isle of Tranquility (in the native dialect, it is known as Saanata). It also deals with the gillmen race and their merfolk allies and sahuagin enemies. While the gillman race is treated with a classical culture in the *Advanced Race Guide*, this article divorces the gillmen from classical culture and associates the gillmen with that other great thalassocracy—Polynesia.

The reasons are simple: classical culture for gillmen is covered in several game books dedicated to classical Greece and Rome, and I suggest you pick up GURPS *Atlantis* and GURPS *Greece* to give your gillmen a classic culture.

A Polynesian theme fits the gillmen in two important ways. First, Polynesia is a civilization based on highly sophisticated navigation techniques without the use of a compass, sextant, or time keeping piece. Second, the Polynesians took what they needed from the sea.

Article Outline

The Isle of Saanata is about as big as the Island of Hawai'i. This provides enough space for the Polynesian analog culture of gillmen to thrive. There are a number of human settlements on the big island, as well as a merfolk village and a sahuagin village on opposite sides of the island.

This article's aim is to provide only the minimum details of a Polynesian-themed culture. In particular, worship, styles of dress, diet, and navigation are covered, along with a number of villages.

Finally, the gillmen are given buoyancy and depth tolerance statistics along with their other racial characteristics as well as a slightly expanded racial description. This is to help them fit in the setting presented by the *Cerulean Seas Campaign Setting* published by Alluria Publishing. Merfolk and sahuagin don't need these statistics.



The Isle of Saanata

The Isle of Saanata is part of the Leviathan Archipelago, an island chain of about five major islands: Saanata, Gone, Weia, Lani, and Karnak. Ten smaller, habitable islands and about five atolls make up the rest of the chain. Humans, gillmen, and two anthropomorphic races inhabit the island chain: the froglike grippli and mogogols, the lockgelly selkies, and the crocodile-like sebekes. The section of sea between the islands is home to sea dragons, sea races of every description, and an abundance of sea life. In the center of the circular island chain is a city under the sea that has been taken over by the nommos, the pisceans, and, in the deepest parts, a race of undersea drow and a race of deep-sea-dwelling dwarves. Dominating the archipelago is the monster that gave the island chain its name: the leviathan.

The five atolls have been colonized by benthic naga under the surface, but only two atolls have human and gillmen life. A race of aquatic elves inhabits three of the smaller islands. Merfolk and sahuagin dominate the rest.

Unlike most of Polynesia in the real world, this island chain is on the same latitude as San Francisco, which is about the 38th Parallel. Because of this, a surface arctic current affects the northernmost island, Lani, but a subtropical current affects the southernmost island, Saanata. The two currents combine violently to create a temperate body of water. Aside from the currents, the entire chain has a benign climate for humans, much like Hawai'i's.

Saanata itself has two active volcanoes. The first, Loa, hardly erupts. The second, Waialakaniella, erupts more regularly. Since both volcanoes are shield type volcanoes, the eruptions are relatively quiet compared to other volcanoes in other lands.

In spite of both Loa and Pele, the island is inhabited by an abundance of subtropical life. Palms and other trees dot the islands, while there are many wildflowers and plants that make life pleasant here.

Animal Life of Saanata

Animals, including monsters, inhabit the islands. The animals that live here include several types of tropical birds, lizards, and insects. Monsters include a self-sustaining population of giant iguanas, leaf rays in the most remote sections, the occasional phoenix, dire rats, treants, a small population of stirges, giant toads, and venomous snakes.

A bronze dragon named Cordath inhabits a sea cave on the southern shore. He regularly takes human form and is courting an "ugly" human girl named Mahona. So far, nothing is happening, although her family is suspicious of the handsome man she meets on the beach.

Sea Life around Saanata

The sea around the island is teeming with life. Ocean fish of every kind inhabit the sea, from the tiger and mako sharks that infest the western waters, to the mighty humpback whales, ichthyosaurs, and dolphins that frequent the islands. Dangerous sea life include: the barracuda, the tiger and mako sharks, and the squid that frequent the waters here. Saanata's sea monsters include: viridian algoids, cryptoclidus, three choral dragons, one thunder dragon, a herd of hippocampi, and giant lobsters (see: *Cerulean Seas*). Brain corals (*Cerulean Seas: Waves of Thought*) and giant clams have also been reported.

Human(oid) Life of Saanata

Saanata is inhabited by both humans and gillmen. With the exception of a Questhaven settlement named Tranquility, the humans and gillmen share a common thalassocratic culture. Both humans and gillmen are brown-skinned, although the inhabitants of Tranquility are actually white. These gillmen and humans, calling themselves the Saanata maoli (*people of Saanata*), actually have a sophisticated culture despite their barbaric or savage appearance. Their cultures are different thanks to the way they wear clothes, how they worship, how they navigate the sea, how they govern themselves, and how they eat.

A Race of Seafarers

The people of Saanata originated from the southeast parts of the ocean and navigated their way to the lands of the Leviathan Archipelago.

The people of Saanata journeyed from a land far to the southeast. They would populate many islands across the ocean before they arrived at the Leviathan Archipelago. They consisted of two groups, the strange gillmen and the humans. In time, the gillmen and the humans would interbreed and both soon shared the same basic traits including a more pentagonal skull from the back and a jawbone that was slightly curved and rocked.

The seafarer race has a sophisticated method of navigation. They used the waves, the pattern of sea birds flying in the wind, the shape of clouds, the stars, and other factors to get from one island to another. When they reached the Leviathan Archipelago, they found the gillmen and incorporated the gillmen into their culture.

Navigators start with their training typically at infancy. Navigators would start the prospective navigator by allowing him to play in tide pools and become accustomed to the sights and sounds of the sea. Training gets serious when the young one begins to talk. They are



taught the other aspects of navigation, allowing them to become competent navigators at about eighteen years of age. Since the secrets of navigating without a compass, sextant, or time keeping piece are not written down in this culture, the education is totally in the oral tradition.

Saanata Food

The people of Saanata depend on the sweet potato, sugar cane, various island fruits (such as coconuts, pineapples, and starfruit), breadfruit, and taro. Meat protein from land-animals sometimes supplements the diet; the people of Saanata use chickens, pigs, and dogs for this purpose. They also fish, gaining the bounty of the sea, for their protein.

Pigs are commonly allowed to wander free amongst the islands. Wild pigs live on mountain apples, kuku nuts, and fern roots. Swine that are herded are fed cooked taro and sweet potatoes, bananas, and breadfruit. Pigs are eaten by the common people on occasion, and given to the chief as part of their taxes. Pigs used as food usually are permitted to grow to around 250 to 300 pounds before being killed. Pigs are cooked in an underground oven.

Beef is considered to be a rich man's food. Owning a kine is expensive and having a large herd is a sign of wealth. Cows are usually demanded as part of the bride price. Wives who are paid with larger number of cows usually have status over those paid with a lower number of cows.

Saanata Clothing

Since the climate of Saanata is mild and benign, clothing is minimal. With the exception of the White Man settlement of Harmony, most everyone wears the bare minimum. These include the malo, or loincloth, for men; the pa'u, or skirt, for women; and a kihei, or shawl, for both. When the sailors from Questhaven first arrived they marveled and were astonished at the modicum of clothing the natives wore.

Determined to convert the natives, the first missionaries from Questhaven brought with them cotton cloths and silks. Colorful dresses and tunics with tropical flower designs embroidered into the clothes soon became common. While the people still wear the minimal clothing required for work, the clothes that covered more of the body soon became formal fashion for the natives.

Saanata Worship

Worship is complicated on Saanata. The Questhaven Missionaries have had some success converting a few people to their gospels, but the majority still worship the gods of their ancestors. From Pele the fire goddess to Kane the creator god, there is a multitude of gods and goddesses called the *akua*. The pantheon, for this article, is considered a tight pantheon. The Saanata clerics and witch doctors gain access to the following domains: Air, Animal, Chaos, Charm, Community, Destruction,

Fire, Good, Healing, Knowledge, Law, Nobility, Rune, Strength, Travel, Void, War, and Water. Typically the subdomains chosen include: Cloud, Exploration, Oceans, and Stars.

Of course there are people who want power above all else, and have gone after strange gods. These gods include Cthuthlu, Yog-Sothoth, and Shub-Niggurath. Considered to be evil and mad priests, these clerics are in the minority and so are their cultists. Cthulhu typically grants Chaos, Evil, Madness, and Void to his followers.

Self Government

Capable of governing themselves, the people of Saanata are ruled in chiefdoms by the chiefs. This extends to all islands except the islands of Karnak and Gone, which are under different domains. The power of the chiefs is centralized in a high chief or king. The chiefs typically have power over their domains, paying only symbolic reverence to their kings in times of peace. When war threatens all of the islands, however, the powers to lead the entire fighting force resides in the king and he has the power to decide whether or not to go to war.

The current king of the people is a young king not more than seventeen. He is called Maka Koa Noa Ali'ikai (LN m gillman magus 3), and is a savvy ruler. In the last year his reign has been tested with the outbreak of strange disease. There was an outbreak of cackle fever, the devil chills, and the shakes on the islands. So far, the majority of the population is healthy, but the diseases are starting to ravage through most of the human and gillman population. So far the epidemic has not gotten so bad that he has had to turn to the governor of Harmony for help.

Undersea Humanoid Settlements

There are two major undersea settlements, one along the southeastern coral reef, and the second along the northwestern deeps. The first is peopled by merfolk, the second by sahuagin. The first, called the city of fish people by the natives, is not a true city at all, it's a village where the merfolk are dark-skinned from the waist up.

Like the gillmen, these people are survivors of the city that had sunk underneath the waves. Rather than turn to the aboleths for help, the people solved the problem by turning themselves into something that is literally half-man, half-fish. These dark-skinned folk have the upper bodies of dark skinned natives and the lower bodies of blue-finned tuna.

Their king recognizes the gillmen to be their kin, and have made a pact of non-aggression with the gillmen of Saanata. The two races continue to live in peace as both take from the bounty of the sea. The other three races of the city, the kai-lo, the cindarians, and the nommo, look very different from one another. The kai-lo are a race of hippocampi centaurs that have white faces. The cindarians are gnome-sized merfolk with the tails of lionfish and white faces. The nommo, however, look more like a full fish than a human with a fish tail. Of all four, the

nommo live in deeper waters and have their own society. (See the *Cerulean Seas Campaign Setting* page 37, and your *Pathfinder Bestiary* for more information.)

The last undersea settlement is Malakai, the village of the sahuagin. Located in deeper waters (about 300 feet to 900 feet), the sahuagin who live here worship the shark deity Kamohaoli'i. The shark men represent the worst of the sea, and every once in a while they raid the eastern sea coast looking for booty. The predatory shark men are sometimes beaten back and sometimes they overrun the coast. With the settlement of Harmony, however, the shark men have learned that they have a new nemesis.

Malakai is currently ruled by a four-armed sahuagin king (NE male sahuagin noble aristocrat 9), while the society is led by a priestess of Kamohaoli'i. The king is crazy, and has so far ruled with fear and intimidation. The sahuagin king is a sociopath and is attracted to the worship of Ukupanipo, a more violent shark deity. His constant strife with the people of Harmony is driving him to the edge of ordering an extinction of the people of Harmony.

Article Appendix: The Gillmen

Gillmen are the remnants of a race of surface-dwelling humanoids whose homeland was drowned in a great cataclysm at the hands of the aboleth. The aboleths rescued a few survivors, warping them into an amphibious race to serve as emissaries to the surface world. Modern gillmen remain reclusive and suspicious, scarred by both the loss of their ancient heritage and the sure knowledge that aboleths do nothing without expecting to profit from it. Physically, the gillmen of the Leviathan Archipelago have expressive brows, dark skin, dark hair, and bright purple eyes. Three slim gills mark each side of their necks, near the shoulder, but they are otherwise close enough in appearance to humans that they can pass as such (for a time) without fear of detection. Humans and gillmen may mate, but only a male human and gillwoman pairing can produce offspring that are gillmen.

Gillman Racial Traits

- **+2 Constitution, +2 Charisma, -2 Wisdom:** Gillmen are vigorous and beautiful, but their domination by the aboleths has made them weak-willed.
- **Racial Buoyancy:** -60^B, **Depth Tolerance:** 150 ft.
- **Medium:** Gillmen are Medium creatures and have no bonuses or penalties due to their size.
- **Aquatic:** Gillmen are humanoids with the aquatic subtype.
- **Normal Speed:** Gillmen have a base speed of 30 feet on land. As aquatic creatures, they also have a swim speed of 30 feet, can move in water without making Swim checks, and always treat Swim as a class skill.
- **Amphibious:** Gillmen have the aquatic subtype, but can breathe both water and air.

- **Enchantment Resistance:** Gillmen gain a +2 racial saving throw bonus against non-aboleth enchantment spells and effects, but take a -2 penalty on such saving throws against aboleth sources.

- **Water Dependent:** A gillman's body requires constant submersion in fresh or salt water. Gillmen who spend more than 1 day without fully submerging themselves in water risk internal organ failure, painful cracking of the skin, and death within 4d6 hours.

- **Languages:** Gillmen begin play speaking Common and Aboleth. Gillmen with high Intelligence scores can choose from the following: Aklo, Aquan, Draconic, and Elven.



TATTOOED HAWAIIAN CHIEF, DRAWN BY JACQUES ARAGO, ARTIST WITH FREYCINET.

Rite Publishing Presents

September 2015

Issue #7

ADVENTURE QUARTERLY



**Bret Boyd, Mike Welham,
and Nicholas Milasich**

D&D
PATHFINDER
ROLEPLAYING GAME COMPATIBLE

RITE
PUBLISHING

Twenty Questions with Jacob Blackmon

by Steven D. Russell,

Illustrations by Jacob E. Blackmon

1. Could you tell us a little about yourself?

I've been drawing as long as I can remember, but I took a strong liking to it about the time I was 7 years old. This was when television shows like GI Joe and Transformers – especially Transformers – first premiered. The cartoons captured my imagination, and I knew that I wanted to be involved in animation. Unfortunately, those dreams never came to fruition (I still have no idea how to animate anything), but I still love to draw!

My friends introduced me to gaming with 1st-edition AD&D in my junior high school days. It was something I had to hide from my parents, as I was raised in a religious household. Dungeons and Dragons was not allowed. Luckily, I discovered that other RPGs existed other than D&D, so when I went off to play with my friends, I would give my parents the name of another game. I thought I was so clever! Of course, my parents knew what I was doing; but they also knew I was a good kid. I kept my grades up (thanks, D&D math skills!) and I didn't do drugs, so my parents never confronted me about playing "that satanic game."

A lot of my success is owed to my parents. They both encouraged my artistic skills while I grew up. I know there are plenty of artistic kids whose parents did not feel the same.

Around 2012, Owen Stephens needs some art done... like immediately! His artist had dropped the ball and he needed a dozen pieces in only a couple of days. Luckily, I was able to help. Soon, Owen came to me regularly. He told others of my art skill and speed, and soon I was working for dozens of different third-party RPG companies.

2. What is your home game like?

My home game includes my roommates and a few select friends. Back in my home town, our group was very insular, and did not cycle through other players. This was unusual for the area. Typically, everyone gamed with everyone else at some point. But this never really happened with us. As such, our group picked up the nickname of "The Game Cult." This is a name we've embraced.

The Game Cult likes to roleplay! We really get into our characters and the story of the game. Sometimes a good hack-and-slash is nice, but above everything else, we like telling cooperative stories with each other. We treat our games as if they are long running television shows (with unlimited casting and special effect budgets!). We even go so far as to cast every character – PC and NPC – after a celebrity. And yes, we have to do the voices too!

We like to rotate our games. Everyone in our group – with rare exception – both plays and GMs. The current game I am GMing is a mythic Pathfinder campaign



based on my Path Less Traveled comic. As a player I am involved in a 5th edition D&D campaign, and a Pathfinder campaign set in the World of Warcraft.

3. What is your favorite Paizo product?

Without a doubt, Mythic Adventures. While normal Pathfinder fantasy games are fun, I like the options that Mythic Adventures has opened up. Even in a game that is not geared towards being mythic, I would still use it to create noteworthy villains and challenges. I often find that my major villains are too easily defeated by the PCs. I think if I made my villains mythic, that would alter how the battles work, making a single villain a true threat against an entire party of adventurers without having to be so high level that the villain could wipe out the PCs with their access to better feats or spells.

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

My favorite project was working on the revised Rise of the Drow by Adventureaweek.com. This is a massive adventure that starts on the surface world. The PCs get involved in helping out a dwarven community and having to delve into the underworld to fight off a cult of undead. As the adventure progresses, it is discovered that a drow clan is responsible and has ever greater machinations that the PCs must overcome.

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

Without a doubt, my favorite part of working on Rise of the Drow was interacting with layout artist Joshua Gullion (may he rest in peace). Joshua was a thrill to chat with. He was always so happy to ask to see some new piece of art or show off some of what he was designing.

Joshua was also instrumental in my meeting others in the 3rd party industry. At the time, Owen seemed to be keeping me as his little secret (he wasn't; it was just that I wasn't well-known yet). Joshua, on the other hand, wanted me to meet and work with EVERYONE! I had to learn a lot of names, games, and faces at a break-neck pace!

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

The mini games! I can't think of any other adventure I had read previously that had mini-games. Rise of the Drow has a couple of points where the PCs need to do little side quests to move the story along. While side-quests are not particularly note-worthy, these side-quests took the form of cute and fun games.

The one that sticks in my head is the mushroom collecting game. The PCs have to jump from one mushroom to another, collecting certain fungi while avoiding dangers and hazards. They also need to collect the fungi in a certain time limit, as the 'shrooms need to be specially harvested and treated. I'm not sure I'm describing it correctly, but it's a fun game.

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

While illustrating *Rise of the Drow*, I had to learn to step up my own style. Previous to this product, I had only drawn individual characters or creatures. All of the art I had done for previous products had been for bestiaries or character folios. Now, I was being asked to draw interactive scenes! With, like, *backgrounds* and stuff! Previously, my own works had very basic backgrounds; perhaps a few lines to represent a wall or floor. But that would not do here. These had to be fully-detailed illustrations with both characters and backgrounds having as much detail as their other.

8. Did you learn anything while working on it?

I learned the names of a lot of movers and shakers in the third-party community. Joshua was constantly throwing names and products at me.

"Do you know XX?" Joshua would ask.

"No," I'd say.

It quickly became apparent that I needed to know the folks who made the games and what kind of games they made. If there is anything I can pass on to others who want to break into the industry, it is the lesson to *learn the names!* It also helps to find out what kind of art they like and what gems they produce, so one can tailor their style to attract a particular client.

9. Could you tell us a little bit about the web comic you are doing for *Pathways*?

The Path Less Traveled came about when I was approached by Steve Russell. He was wanting Pathways to have a similar feel to the classic Dragon Magazine. While Pathways had plenty of articles about game mechanics and interviews with people in the industry, it did not have one crucial element: a comic.



So Steve came to me and asked if I was willing to produce a comic for his monthly e-zine. At first, I was very apprehensive about the project. But once I started thinking about it, the character and stories just rolled right out of my head and into the pages.

Most of the stories from the Path Less Traveled are based on funny events that have happened during my own roleplaying experience or stories I have heard about in other people's campaigns. I was initially planning on doing a series of completely unrelated strips featuring the same characters. But as I thought more about the world and the characters, a long-term story began to develop.

So, while each page of PLT is (usually) funny on its own, I highly recommend people go through the backlog of Pathways and start the comic from the beginning to enjoy it from the start.

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

In my opinion, the "In the Company of X" series of products by Rite Publishing is some of my favorite Pathfinder RPG compatible products. I first discovered the series when RiP released "In the Company of Medusa." Upon reading it, I immediately went to DriveThruRPG and purchased the rest of the series. I was particularly happy with "In the Company of Gargoyles," given how much of a fan I am of the Disney Gargoyles television show. However, if I had to choose just one, in the entire series, to be the best... I would have to go with In the Company of Dragons. I mean seriously... who doesn't want to play a freakin' dragon!?

In the Company of Angels comes very close as a second favorite.

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

Not breaking the existing Pathfinder RPG rules is one of my big “must haves” for a third-party product. I remember back when the OGL first went out for 3rd edition D&D, and the madhouse of compatible products that were released. Very little effort was made for balance in those days. However, I find that is not the case with the majority of the Pathfinder RPG compatible products. The major third-party publishers have done a top-notch job in maintaining the balance of the game while producing work that is not available in Paizo’s products.

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

I hate to sound biased, but my favorite designer has to be Owen KC Stephens. I know that may make me sound like a butt-kisser, given that Owen was responsible for most of my success, but I truly feel his products qualify as some of the best Pathfinder compatible products in the industry. Rogue Genius Games continues to produce high quality products, even with Owen having started officially working for the big names at Paizo.

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

Learn the names of the people in the industry. You need to know the people for whom you will be working and the products they produce.

Develop multiple styles. You never know when you will be blocked from doing a product because your regular style is incompatible with what a company likes to produce. I cannot currently work for a number of different companies right now because my style is far too “comic book” for their tastes.

Put your ego aside. You are selling your art for money. If the company wants changes to your art, but you are not willing to make changes because you think the art is perfect as-is, you will quickly find yourself no longer working as a freelancer.

MEET YOUR DEADLINES! If you cannot get a project done in time, do not wait until the last minute to tell the commissioner. They *hate* that! The reason people keep coming to me is because other artists failed to meet their deadlines. I will *gladly* take the money that might have been yours!

And finally... If what you draw doesn’t look wrong, then it’s right! Do not feel that what you are drawing has to be PERFECT! Perfection is the enemy of “done.” The point of a project is to get it *done*.

14. Who is your favorite tabletop RPG illustrator?

Larry Elmore. Need I say more?

15. Which other RPG artists have had a strong influence on you?

My art style did not evolve from tabletop RPGs. Rather, I developed my style based on comic book art and artists. I

love the powerful and highly-detailed style of manga artist Shirow Masamune. For American artists, I love the styles of Jim Lee, Art Adams, and Chuck Austin.

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

Given that I seem to work with most of my fans (other game designers), I have a ton of feedback when I reveal the art from various projects I work on. There is, as always, the “that looks great!” or “I love this piece!” responses. But I think one of my biggest fans is Mike Myler. Every time we work together, he is just going on and on about how much he loves what I am drawing and how excited he is about what we are developing.

This all culminated in our first actual meeting in 2014 at the Diana Jones Awards. Upon seeing me in the crowd, Mike – who was very inebriated, I should add – shouted my name, ran over to me, wrapped me in a massive hug and lifted me off the ground... spinning me around a couple of times while saying how much he loved me. It is important to note that Mike Myler is built like a twig, while I happen to weigh over 300 pounds! That meeting is going to stick in my head forever.

Other than that, what I find interesting is how people I don’t know recognize me. I was donating blood, and when I gave my name to the nurse, the guy in the bed next to mine knew me by reputation. This last Gen Con, I was stopped at least three times, while walking down the halls, by people who just wanted to say “hi” and shake my hand. It really feels cool when things like that happen.

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

Four words: Nine Hells Coloring Book!

I was in the middle of drawing the very last illustration for the book, when I was contacted about this interview.

Besides that, I am continuing to work on Super Powered Legends. This is a series of products compatible with the 3rd edition Mutants and Masterminds game by Green Ronin. In the SPL series, I develop a hero or villain as an homage to an existing comic book character. Not only do I draw the character, but I also write their history and create their game statistics. So yeah... I’m a game writer too!

Super Powered Legends has been remarkably popular! I was unprepared for how well it would be accepted by the M&M community. People loved the SPL characters so much, they started to ask for them to be converted into other popular superhero roleplaying games. Rogue Genius Games has an agreement with Mike Lafferty of Fainting Goat Games to convert the SPL characters into the ICONS game mechanics; called “Iconic Legends.”



18. Do you have any goals that you have yet to obtain or overcome?

Let's see here...

Draw for a comic... check.

I would like to learn to do online animation. I think I would kill at it.

Also, I want to learn to do cartography. I see the works produced by masters like Christopher West and Alyssa Faden and envy their talent. Hopefully, I can develop some cartography skills in the next year. I plan on making it my New Year's resolution.

The only thing that really keeps me from exploring these alternative venues for art is my usual workload of art commissions. I am often too busy with other people's projects – or projects that I have created for myself – to work on doing something new and different. I am hopeful that as my Patreon campaign becomes more successful, that will change.

As for any lofty or “unreachable” goals... I'd like to woo Jenny Poussin. She's not just a beautiful model, she's also a gamer!

19. We're almost done here. Is there a question I haven't asked that you'd wish I'd asked?

I usually get asked about my artistic background or education. For the record, I've had almost none. I took some drawing and painting classes in high school. But otherwise, everything else I've done is self-taught. Now, I think I would benefit from some formal art schooling, but given how expensive colleges are these days, I find attendance at one of these prestigious facilities to be unlikely in my future.

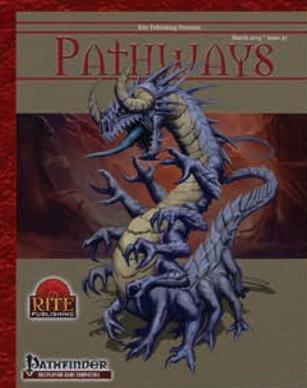
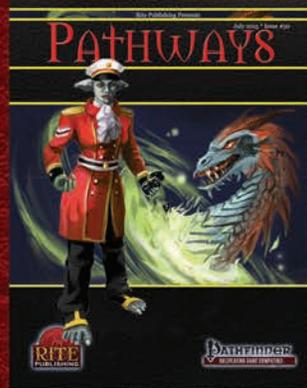
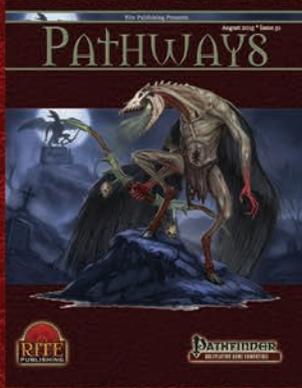
20. Is there anything else that folks should know about you and/or your work?

I really don't know what else to say. Besides the Path Less Traveled, I have another comic that I produce for Adventureaweek.com called “Tales from the Tabletop.” That's a lot of fun.

Otherwise, my commission rates are reasonable and my turn-around times are usually fast, so please feel free to contact me if you want a piece of art. The only limits are based on your imagination!



PATHWAYS



Welcome to the Pathways Patreon!

Pathways is a FREE electronic magazine release in PDF format that Rite Publishing has been producing since 2011. As of July 2015, we have released 50 issues, and we plan to continue so. However, we would like to make it even better. We want to add additional articles and eventually hope to make the magazine available in print so we are asking you to join us a patreon backer today. Regardless we will continue to make this product available for free, so if you have never heard of Pathways before, go pick up all 50 issues for free.

Our Patreon campaign is like a monthly Kickstarter project with special rewards and updates every month for our patreon backers. Based on your contribution you can help us select who we will be interviewing, what monster we will chose to apply our monster template to, help us chose monthly themes, and our Patreon backer mail to us will appear in the magazine.

I hope you will consider joining us so we can bring you a better and more adventurous Pathways e-zine.



Reviews

Illustrations by DrDjr, Earl Geier, Zoltan Toth

Mythic Mini: Dwarf Feats

Publisher: Legendary Games

Reviewer: Thilo Graf

Stars: 5 stars out of 5



All right, you know the deal—3 pages: 1 page front cover, 1 page SRD, 1 page content...let's go!

-Brewmaster: Increase bonus to +2. Use a surge to increase the DC of ingested poisons and alcoholic beverages by 1/2 die's result.

-Cleave Through: When you hit a target of your Cleave, add a free trip attempt with +1/2 tier bonus.

-Cloven Helm: AC bonus vs. crit confirmation increases to +2. You can use this feat on any hit; if the hit is critical and your helmet is destroyed, expend one use of mythic power to make a Fort save vs. remaining damage dealt to you, halving it and rendering it nonlethal on a success. If you're immune to nonlethal damage, it's lethal instead—no gaming of this ability.

-Dented Helm: AC bonus vs. crit confirmation increases to +2. You can use this feat as a free action rather than as an immediate action and add tier to your helm's hardness before applying damage. You do not become staggered unless your helmet is destroyed and may use the feat with broken helmets and even attacks that ignore AC bonuses.

-Giant Killer: +1 threat range on additional attacks versus giants and add Crippling Critical to your attacks against them. Usable 1/round when Cleave/Great Cleaving giants, you can execute a free trip versus the giant without fear of repercussions.

-Goblin Cleaver: +1 threat range on additional attacks versus goblins and add Bull Rush Strike to the additional attacks. Usable 1/round when Cleave/Great Cleaving goblins, you can execute a free overrun versus the goblin without fear of repercussions, moving into its space. The feat has a cut-copy-paste error and refers to giants in the text; not a bad glitch, mind you.

-Hard-Headed: +1 shield bonus to AC when wearing a helmet. Attack even helmet-less with your head as though your head were a light shield used in a shield bash; as a heavy shield when wearing a helmet, treating your head as a light weapon. For one mythic power, treat your head as having the bashing property and gain Bull Rush Strike's benefits on any critical hit you perform with your head for mythic tier rounds. Fun!

-Ledge Walker: +tier Acrobatics to maintain balance and to Climb to catch yourself and others. You do not risk falling when taking damage while climbing, nor do you take Acrobatics penalties on sloped or severely sloped inclines. You negate high ground bonuses of foes and increase them for you. Finally, when adjacent to a cliff or wall, you can use mythic power to feather fall mythic tier

rounds. Versatile, powerful, interesting; two thumbs up!

-Orc Hewer: +1 threat range on additional attacks versus orcs and add Sundering Strike to the additional attacks. Usable 1/round when Cleave/Great Cleaving orcs, you can execute a free sunder versus the orc without fear of repercussions.

-Shatterspell: +tier to BAB to determine the number of times you can use the feat and use it in place of any melee attack, not only as a standard action. Against non-mythic spells, add mythic tier to CMB to sunder it.

There's one more feat on the SRD-page:

-Toxic Recovery: When succeeding a save versus poison, heal 1 point of ability drain or ability damage equal to your tier, treating penalties such as fatigue, exhaustion, etc. as ability damage for the purpose of recovery.

Conclusion

Editing and formatting are very good; I noticed no rules-impeding glitches. Layout adheres to Legendary Games' 2-column full color standard and the PDF has no bookmarks, but needs none at this length.

Jason Nelson and Jeff Lee deliver a nice array of dwarven feats; the helm-themed feats resound with some of the rules nostalgia of previous editions. While I'm personally not a big fan of the nemesis feats, over all, we have a rather inspired collection here, one worth 5 stars.

Endzeitgeist out.

Deadly Gardens Volume I:

Phoenix Lily

Publisher: Rusted Iron Games

Reviewer: Thilo Graf

Stars: 5 out of 5

The first supplement released by Rusted Iron Games clocks in at 5 pages: 1 page front cover, 1/2 page of SRD, leaving us with 3.5 pages of content, so let's take a look!

The Deadly Gardens series obviously depicts uncommon plant creatures at an affordable price. This offering gives us the Phoenix Lily. Before we dive into that one, however, I want to mention the two magic items provided in the beginning, the first of which elicited a "D'OH, why didn't I think of it?" reaction. Namely, the Specimen Jar: it allows you to collect a sample, which then remains fresh, whether it's volatile, fast decaying material of the foes you research, seeds of odd plants, or something different. Nice one! The second item, the Fecund Totem, greatly increases plant growth and even enhances plant creatures; the presence of such an item may provide an interesting tactical component to a given fight or can act as a quest item to combat a particularly nasty blight.

The Phoenix Lily clocks in at CR 4 and is generally



interesting. The plants can emit devastating *scorching rays* and have an inherent resistance to fire, one which, when surpassed, may result in the plant exploding. The creature is nice, fun, and comes with a gorgeous b/w pencil-drawn artwork I did not expect from such an inexpensive, short PDF.

The supplement does not end here, though. Instead, we get a short primer on harvesting natural items, including the phoenix lily's volatile blossoms, fire beetle glands, basilisk blood, and shambler wafers. I thoroughly enjoy this take on harvesting monsters, etc. I've been basing my main campaign's whole crafting system around "harvesting," so, yeah...awesome. Even cooler, the PDF takes basilisk's blood and phoenix blossoms and codifies them as power components, with different effects for various spells whether used as a focus or a material component. A phoenix blossom used with *burning hands*, for example, renders the spell's area of effect into a 20-foot line. This is intriguing and supplements the notion of the magical world well – kudos!

Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are top-notch; I noticed no glitches. Layout adheres to a nice, printer-friendly color-standard and the PDF has no bookmarks, but needs none at this length. The PDF's artwork is gorgeous and deserving of praise, especially considering the low price point.

Russ Brown's first offering is a pretty impressive one; this small PDF provides an interesting adversary, some nice botany-themed options, and goes a step beyond, rooting a creature within the world by tying it into items, magic, etc. For the low asking price, this is a fun, neat supplement that makes me look forward to the next supplements. My final verdict will clock in at 5 stars + seal of approval.

Endzeitgeist out.

released back in the day by Necromancer Games for 3.X. In case you weren't around back then, the premise was simple: provide old-school modules that are HARD. Not regular Frog God Games-level hard, but...well, nasty. Diabolical. Obviously, I was all for this and coincidentally, "Demons & Devils" was one of the first three books by Necromancer Games I purchased back in the day at my local FLGS.

The others were "Tomb of Abythor" and "Crucible of Freya," but I've reminisced about them in my review of their re-release/expansion, [Stoneheart Valley](#). The series never was as popular as the more prominent Necromancer Games offerings and thus, only those two installments were made, much to my chagrin. They were eye-openers for me. While the other books I purchased were great and have become legends in my group, there are few modules my players talk about more than those contained in these humble pages, due to a variety of factors. For one, they are pretty logical, as far as old-school gaming is concerned. Beyond that, they are challenging and dare to ask for brains; whether it's puzzles or simply traps that cannot be easily disarmed by a roll of the bones, their philosophy was different and simply FUN. (Well, I may have made them even more deadly for my main campaign, yes, but that's another story...)

I was at the same time exhilarated and dreading the arrival of this book. I knew that there were more modules planned that never saw the light of day, but would they live up to the legend of their predecessors? Would the new versions work?

Before I present the modules, let me share some observations with you: For one, fans of Frog God Games's Lost Lands will cherish suggestions of where to place the modules in the context of the campaign world. Beyond that, the modules sport copious new artworks of rather neat quality, so there's that. At the same time, I think one can pretty easily discern the modules that hearken back to the Necromancer Games era. I may, obviously, be mistaken and only goaded on by some minor relics that refer to Necromancer Games instead of Frog God Games, but I believe that a certain sense of growth can be seen by quite some authors herein. The conversion work, generally, is pretty good; one can see that more than the bare minimum was done. At the same time, there were some instances where the conversion could have been done a little better, but let's talk about this when rears its head.

The modules are grouped by threes, with each segment having a certain creature theme. It should also be noted that the modules sport less hand-holding than many contemporary modules; experienced GMs are definitely going to have an easier time here, with some modules being more challenging (but also more rewarding) than others.

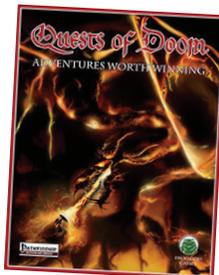
Well, let's not dilly-dally any longer and take a look!

This being a review of a massive adventure compilation, the following contains SPOILERS. Potential players should jump to the conclusion.

...
..

Quests of Doom - Adventures

Worth Winning



Publisher: Necromancer Games

Reviewer: Thilo Graf

Stars: 5 out of 5

This massive book clocks in at 312 pages, not including the covers. Of these pages, 1 is reserved for notes, 1 for the editorial, 1 for the ToC and two for the SRD, leaving us with no less than 307 pages of content, so let's take a look!

But before we dive into the matter at hand, let us first define what this book actually is, a kind of celebration of a series that was nicked in its bloom due to various reasons. I'm of course talking about "Demons & Devils" and "Vampires & Liches," the two module compilations

All right, still here? Great!

The first module is J. Collura's "Noble Rot," intended for levels 5–8. In this module, the PCs explore the dilapidated, decayed, wine-making operation of the Gluant family, hoping to loot some of their exquisite wines. From a significant array of rumors, one can already piece together some intriguing notes about the family; indeed, the exploration of their dread grounds proves to be a most exciting task. Between the roaming undead and a pervasive sense of decay, one quickly gleans that not all is well: the family has fallen to the power-struggle of two dread demon lords associated with fungi and slime and thus, the exploration proves to be somewhat icky. Highlights of this module include: the author's detailed research that makes the place feel organic and realistic; the new wine slime; wine-making themed hazards (which benefit from a bit of quick research on the GM's part); and two particularly challenging encounters. Both the penultimate and final battles are nasty and reward smart players from drawing the correct conclusions, much like one sees in *Call of Cthulhu*-style pulp modules rather than in fantasy. It should also be noted that the titular Noble Rot, based on the real world fungus *Boytrix Cinerea*, can be contracted as a symbiotic fungus that actually acts as a bonus and which allows the GM to help in case of abysmal PC luck. While I believe this is better suited at 5th level than 8th, this module is a strong opener that definitely deserves accolades for the consistent and tight atmosphere it evokes.

"Of Ants and Men," for PCs level 4–8, is written by Bill Webb. Do I really need to say more? All right, the short version is that the master of Frog God Games delivers—in spades—one of the most simple, yet unique and challenging crawls I've read in quite some time. The premise is simple: Get Giant Ant eggs out of the hive. Easy, right? WRONG. For one, as the dead adventurers attest, there are more issues looming...and the hive is interesting. Instead of devising a convoluted mechanic to depict the hive, we instead get different alarm-statuses for the hive and an easy means of determining initiated aggression upon intruders; essentially, PCs can be sprayed with pheromones by engaging in combat—this results in "aggroing" the hive. Conversely, smart groups that infiltrate the place and steer clear of the warriors may actually make their way to the intelligent queen of the hive, where they may conduct negotiations via pantomime with the mistress of the place. Following the notion of a Gygaxian simulation world, incursions into the hive by other creatures provide opportunities for the PCs to be sprayed with "friendly" pheromones, facilitating their infiltration. Oh, and area-of-effect effects can crumble the tunnels. Cave-ins are NOT fun, so your PCs better be smart. As a nice twist that a GM may include—or not—the hive has burrowed into an antediluvian complex filled with extremely deadly traps and containing a mundane blade made from magic-nulling material. Obviously, escaping with this nasty, priceless weapon can be rather tough...and may lead to very intriguing further capers. I LOVED this module; it's

unconventional, fun, rewards clever players, and could be played as a war of attrition, an infiltration, or just a hack-n-slay-type of module. Glorious!

Speaking of which – what's better than a module by Bill Webb? What about one where Matt Finch co-authors the thing? "Hidden Oasis & Temple of Thoth," intended for levels 7–9, is ridiculously awesome. When a mysterious stranger—a djinn in disguise—offers knowledge in exchange for a task and produces a strange papyrus scroll with symbols, we kick things into high gear. The PCs leave their bodies for the plane of shadows, where the equivalent of a Star Gate can be activated with the runes handed to them, bringing them to a kind of odd demi-plane-ish Oasis. Here, an exploration of the ruins and surroundings shows that something has befallen the mysterious planar nexus that is the temple of Thoth. Clever research may also help here, for indeed, the sealed temple that can be accessed via another gate has been infected with the Waxen plague, a dread affliction that either kills those subjected or turns them into gelatinous cubes. Thankfully the high-priest is still around, holding the fort. Surely, the PCs can help him...oh wait.

The spiteful djinn may have forgotten to mention that the high-priest is a huge, intelligent transparent slug with a humanoid brain in his torso. Yep, that's the good guy. Oh, and he can control the priests-turned-cubes, in case you're wondering. Exploring the temple can net the PCs access to some portals, but that's not the problem. The temple is about to be compromised by a dread force of Plane hoppers. What are these guys? Pretty deadly, locust-like conquerors that seek a waypoint into the PC's world! Worse, they are about to come full force and the synergy effects of their castes render them formidable foes. In fact, their builds are significantly more interesting than I've come to expect from Frog God Games. They are deadly and use some very advanced tricks I really like; with lethal psychic shock waves preceding the invasion, the PCs do not have much time. There is one ace in the hole: The Scorpion of Sekhmet. If the PCs have been smart, they'll have found some mysterious power-sources, which they can use to power a gigantic SCORPION-MECH, Power Rangers-style. Multiple PCs have to pilot this bad boy; actions eat at the power source, movement and turning adheres to concise and easily understood rules. Oh, yeah.... Tail-laser. This is absolutely awesome in so many ways; can you remember when you last fought alongside a giant transparent slug-priest and his gelatinous cube henchmen in a giant scorpion-mech against massive, deadly, and evil insectoid invaders hell-bent on subjugating your world? Thought so! This is one of the best modules in the collection and it's absolutely glorious!

The "Demons and Devils" set is next, penned by the legendary duo of Clark Peterson and Bill Webb. The "Sorcerer's Citadel" (suggested level: 9) is pretty much a straight-forward dungeon-crawl into the abode of a wizard named Crane, known for his mastery of a sphere of annihilation and subsequently eliminated in battle against foes most vile. Infiltrating the place is challenging; the use of magic in particular, with clever illusions and so

forth, renders this a classic challenge.

“Ra’s Evil Grin,” so named due to the puzzle required to enter the meat of the module, also provides a quest for an artifact; this time, for the Globe of Arden. To reach it, the PCs will have to brave a dungeon that has one of the nastiest traps in Frog God Games history (Yes, on par with the legendary entry to Rappan Athuk) and yes, the maze and foes are intriguing. If you’re looking for something different, I ran this as a solo module back in my old campaign (only suggested if you’re *really* sadistic and your players know that death awaits) and made the whole dungeon timed, making the mummy priest an immortal, regenerating badass that hunted the poor PC through the dungeon. And yes, my PC solo’d the demon at the end in an extremely close encounter, but still.... That being said, most GROUPS probably will have a VERY hard time surviving this beauty. It’s one of the classics and so sweet indeed; I just wish the web-enhancement of the journey to the island had been included and updated herein.

The third module herein would be my least favorite among the old modules from “Demons & Devils.” It is essentially a two-parter, with the first one centering on a paladin getting a holy avenger. Thereafter the deceit of the demons becomes apparent, as the blade corrupts the champion; the true blade still lies hidden and, in the end, one has to be chosen. I’m not a fan of alignment and even less of a fan of forced alignment changes, so while not bad or necessarily problematic, I always considered plots like this to be something of a cheap shot. Rules for lesser versions of the classic demons have been included in the deal here.

Okay, the next triumvirate would be “Giants & Dragons,” which kicks off with Michael Curtis’ “The Dead from Above,” intended for levels 10–13. And oh boy, does it kick off! SPLINTER!!! CRASH! FIRE!!! DEATH!!! Undead giants fall on the town and lurch to life, while a skeletal dragon swoops through the air and a gigantic building fashioned from titanic bones hangs in the sky. After defeating the initial onslaught, PCs can actually RIDE the skeletal dragon up to the fortress and bring the fight to the nasty giants, who have fused one of their kind with the flying fortress, dooming the pilot to a body-horror-level nasty existence. Taking down the giant’s flying fortress and crashing its soul-consuming engines is absolutely AWESOME. This is unrepentant in its glorious ideas, with truly deadly adversaries and a set-up that will leave any metal-head (or boy...or gamer, really...) squeeing. Come on. You ride a skeletal dragon to a fortress in the sky to do battle with necromancer giants. This does everything right that “Curse of the Riven Sky” did wrong: it embraces its over-the-top, OMG-what-is-happening premise, has glorious terrain and even means for social manipulation...oh, and, of course a reason why the PCs (probably) shouldn’t keep the fortress. AWESOME!

Where the above module was pretty much straight action, James M. Ward’s “Dead Dragon” temple, for PCs level 6–8, instead opts for portraying the majestic. At the side of one of the most difficult to scale mountains I’ve ever seen represented in a module, lies a dragon-shaped

temple, wherein the spirits of dead dragons roam as haunts, while hostile adventurers and lizardfolk cater to their whims. Fulfilling the desires of the reptiles can lead to different rewards and sidetrek, should you so choose, and the temple does contain



a unique, good white dragon as well as a means to defeating a truly deadly menace: the PCs venture inside to become dragons to stop an ancient blue dragon from destroying more settlements. The final draconic dogfight is a joy, but only if your GM-prowess is at expert level. Handling a group of dragons in the air is difficult and I’d strongly suggest getting the legendary “[Companions of the Firmament](#)” supplement for the rules on 3-D combats—with them, this is a huge blast. Without them, you’ll have to be pretty adept.

The third module is penned by industry-legend Ed Greenwood and it does show: “Emeralds of Highfang,” suggested for 15th–17th level, is a difficult module, themed, obviously, around giants and dragons. While the hooks are somewhat lame, exploring the complex—where giants mine at the behest of a deadly dragon, who uncharacteristically is more of an underground merchant—can actually be rather exciting. On the plus side, Ed Greenwood’s attention to detail is superb and the respective areas do feel alive and intriguing. At the same time, I do feel that this module does fall a bit short of its premise, which supposedly is to provide enough for rogues to do and for smart groups to do via stealth. At the suggested levels, the PCs—at least mine—will curb-stomp the hell out of all the opposition but the final dragon. On a nitpicky note, a rather cool trap unleashes 240 stirges...which are utterly impotent against PCs of this level. Why not utilize the troop subtype (or a variant swarm) and make this a challenging encounter, instead of an annoying one? Generally, a solid module, but short of the previous ones.

“Lycanthropes and Elementals” would be up next, starting with Steve Winter’s “Bad Moon Rising” for PCs level 6–8. If the title was not ample clue, being set in the Barony of Loup-Montagne, with superstitious locals, wolves in the woods, and similar set-ups, all make one thing clear: we’re in gothic horror country here—this module could have been run in Ravenloft with only minor changes. The plotline—which includes sufficient red herrings, a bid for succession, and a potentially doomed family—hits all the classic notes, for better and for worse. The module itself is pretty sandboxy and thus, it requires a GM with some chops, though admittedly, not too many.

In spite of the various red herrings, my PCs saw the twist coming, perhaps due to years of Ravenloft experience. It's a solid version of a classic story: not more, not less. I got the most mileage out of this by combining it with Raging Swan Press' Wolfsbane Hollow, combining both plot lines into something less obvious, while retaining thematic integrity.

Skip William's "Death in Dyrgalas" is a pretty straightforward dungeon exploration of a ruined pavilion, which does not specify its intended level. From the CRs, I'd suggest something along the lines of level 5-8, depending on your PC's power. The exploration will pit the PCs against wererats and weretigers; one highlight is the interaction with a medusa. The module's appeal mostly stems from the interesting surroundings; other than that, this is solid, if somewhat unremarkable.

Michael Curtis' next module is "The Darkening of Namjan Forest" for PCs level 6-8. Said forest is slowly, but surely, becoming coterminous with the Plane of Shadows and to stop this, the PCs have to find and disable a dangerous artifact within the depths of this forest. The hexed map of the forest allows for easy tracking of the darkening's progress; the darkening's draining effect serves as an intriguing backdrop with rules-relevant repercussions. The PCs may get themselves an edge against the draining creatures by using a special quartz; there are A LOT of shadows and similar creatures in this module, so depending on your PC's preparation and classes, the difficulty of this module may fluctuate somewhat. I really enjoyed the general premise and set-up of this one, the impending doom and the way the encroaching darkness keeps the clock ticking. Unfortunately there are some issues among the details: sensory deprivation tanks and similar magical apparatuses grant some unique benefits, but their rules language is horribly opaque, rendering them VERY over-powered. I strongly urge a GM to take care before allowing the PCs to utilize these. In fact, I think they should be nerfed and/or replaced. This, though, is the most negative thing about this module; the new creatures and the adversary are interesting and, in the hands of a GM willing to sand off the rough edges, this definitely is a very fun experience.

The next three modules have the theme of "Men & Monstrosities," with James M. Ward's "Deep in the Vale" as a 1st-level module being the first. The set-up is interesting in a way: the PCs are plain folks of the Vale, everyday people, and the module begins promising, with the Thor-ordained sporty trek around the vale that inevitably results in trouble. The module, obviously, tries to chronicle the step from everyday Joe/Jane to hero and the tidbits on culture provided are intriguing. But this, as much as I'm loathe to say it, is one of the worst modules Frog God Games has ever released. If I didn't know any better, I wouldn't think it was Mr. Ward's pen at work here. Let me elaborate: the premise is unique and hasn't been done much recently, but it suffers from this being an adventure; to properly invest the players in the setting, a gazetteer, nomenclature, suggested roles, and origins for casting talent should all have been covered. They're not. Worse, everything here is (a) clichéd and (b) a non-threat

in the greater picture.

You see, there are essentially two catchers: a DM-PC (the horribly-named elf, "Smaragdus") and if things get too heated, there's a wizard who can *fireball* everything to smithereens. In other words, the PCs and all their struggles essentially boil down to this: two pricks either not getting the job done or being lazy. It's the old issue of the Forgotten Realms, where some areas just had too many high-level NPCs for the PCs to matter. "Elminster is not available, please call later." But worse, this wizard does not have Elminster's Realms spanning responsibilities, so he has no reason not to get his stuff together and totter with the PCs to the woods. The adversaries are also horribly trite: wolves, goblins, orcs, and giant spiders. And yes, the orcs come with an ogre. Only the shadow is missing from the clichés of boring low-level foes. We have a kidnapped damsel that is so obvious I expected the "Timmy" character to show up next. Beyond that, the module falls prey to hackneyed logic, such as why prodding the giant spider nets does not endanger the folk outside?

Shouldn't heroes NOT endanger commoners? Why do the responses of the goblins (which look like they're taken from a choose-your-adventure novel) make no concise sense from the goblin's perspective? Why does the non-read-aloud text AND the read-aloud text TELL the players what exactly they're doing if they choose "(A)"? This is railroad, inconsistent, mechanically-boring, and the only positive thing I can say about it is that the few cultural tidbits are halfway decent. This looks like a "First module you run, ever, as a DM"-type of module, but for that, it's too opaque and does not do a good enough job challenging all players and making them feel important. Only the strongest PC, the Blacksmith, truly has any connection. Fun fact: Strength has, counter-intuitively, NOTHING to do with being a blacksmith in rules; Craft would be the skill, so strong PCs without the skill make NO SENSE for that role. This module is a weak spot in the whole anthology: it does not fit the premise and fails as gazetteer, a module, AND an introduction for novice GMs. It's horrible and drags the whole book down a small notch and I can't fathom how it got included herein.

Thankfully, Casey W. Christofferson and Scott Greene's "Irteps Dish," for characters level 6-8, is a return to full-blown, awesome form—and I mean AWESOME, as in, glorious. Situated in a city (Bard's Gate in the Lost Lands), this begins with an investigation of an eccentric wizard gone missing; a wizard who was not only smart, he also had a gambling issue; a horrible curse is being subtly and cleverly used to cause the wizard's downfall. In an interesting blend of fantasy and noir tropes, investigating his former lover, colleagues, and creditors quickly reveals that there are a good number of people looking for the man...and not all have honest intentions. Through their investigation—which brings the PCs to the city's largest casino (fully mapped)—the PCs can get the pieces together to investigate the out-of-bounds wizard's tower. If they can get past the guards and past the logical, fun, and deadly puzzle in the beginning, that is. This is only the beginning of the fun, though. The wizard has retreated,

by use of an artifact, into a petri dish-like environment and the PCs need to shrink down to microscopic size to battle protozoan orbs, flesh-eating fungi, and nematodes to finally release the wizard and convince him to return and to get his affairs in order. This section is bizarre and fun. (Side note: if the PCs enjoy their trip into the realms of the microscopic, consider picking up Everyman Gaming's superb "[Microsized Adventures](#)" and keep the options for size-alterations.) Oh, and yes, this module is pure awesomeness!

As if to apologize for the first module in this set, Matt Finch's "Perils of Ghostwood Pass," for PCs level 5-7, also hits an absolutely stellar tone in a completely different way. Able to fit into any cold region, the Ghostwood Pass is a storied environment: legendary twins only recently defeated a powerful and nasty fey of the Winter Court, thus restricting the hyper-cold ghostwind to only a few instances per year. As the PCs begin this module, a timer is running until the ghostwind strikes. Something is thoroughly amiss and the hastily erected Abbey of Saint Kathelyn may provide shelter, as may the local druid, though they do not deal well with one another. The two factions also provide unique benefits for the PCs as they try to defeat the dreaded mountain queen and unearth the truth behind the mysteries of the Ghostwind Pass. There is opportunity for wilderness survival, hexploration in the hostile pass, and random encounters, all alongside a cleverly entrenched mystery astute PCs can unearth. This module is SUPERB and would fit really well in the context of Northlands with some minor re-skinning. Oh, and the adversary build ranks among the more challenging and well-crafted herein, which coincidentally provides a lead-in to the last triumvirate of modules.

This would be the updates of "Vampires and Liches," with Casey W. Christofferson and Bill Webb's "Sewers of the Underguild" for 11th-level characters being the first. The premise is pretty simple: in a rather deadly sewer under ruins or a metropolis lies the hiding place of a guild of vampires. Now, exterminate them. This sounds simple, when it is in fact anything but simple; the underguild are formidable foes, with numerous class levels, deadly traps, and the like. Alas, here the conversion fails somewhat. With vampires being rather nerfed in PFRPG, and the increased options available for characters via classes and combinations, it's just not the same as the original version; essentially, the adversaries are a tad bit squishier and the module has lost some of its threat. Mind you, this still is a challenging module, but it does not live up to its previous iteration's level of lethality. If you don't know the original, you probably won't mind.

The next module, penned by the same duo, is "The Pyramid of Amra," for 12th-level characters. This pits the PCs against a monastery in the hands of lethal adversaries and finally against a vampire-monk. The exploration of the areas herein is thoroughly compelling and lends itself well to the insertion of powerful adversaries and intriguing puzzles. Indeed, the final adversary *is* deadly; however, I still found myself wishing the builds provided had been changed in a slightly more pronounced manner.

The final adventure, "Isle of Eliphaz," intended for characters of at least 14th-level, is still LETHAL. When I ran the module, I made the whole place a selectively null magic and psionics zone, thus rendering it even worse; the base module is exceedingly brutal as written. This iteration, in fact, maintains the level of deadly challenge I enjoy from this series, including, for example, an intellect devourer with class levels and the ancient, elemental evil's Pathfinder iteration.

Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are good, though not perfect. In some of the older modules, references here and there remain and some of the previously unreleased, older modules feel a tad bit less refined than others, with unique benefits particularly not always perfectly syncing up with rules language. Layout adheres to a printer-friendly two-column b/w-standard with copious, original & glorious b/w artworks. The maps generally are well-drawn, though I wished the book had a player-friendly appendix of unkeyed maps for particularly the hexcrawl sections.

Scott Greene, J. Collura, Matt Finch, Clark Peterson, Bill Webb, Michael Curtis, Skip Williams, James M. Ward, Ed Greenwood, Casey W. Cristofferson, Steven Winter—these names should ring a bell and indeed, Quests of Doom, as a whole, manages to achieve the goal to create challenging, unique modules. While a couple of the modules did fall a bit short, and while some do require a bit of GM fiddling, this book contains several modules that simply blow me away: the whole "Bugs & Blobs" chapter is pure gold, and, with the exception of "Deep in the Vale," "Men & Monstrosities" provides two of the most awesome modules in the book. "Lycanthropes & Elementals" falls short of the average quality of the book, ranking as "only" a good, solid chapter. Still, that leaves a total of 6 modules herein, 9 if you include the conversions, that would receive my seal of approval without a single inch of hesitation.

Indeed, I maintain that the stellar modules herein outweigh both the minor rough edges AND the modules that do not reach the apex of quality and imagination. "Of Ants & Men," "Hidden Oasis & Temple of Thoth," "The Dead From Above," "Irtep's Dish," and "Perils of Ghostwind Pass" alone are worth the asking price of this module, and these are the exceptional, NEW modules herein. The rest average out to good to very good, with only "Deep in the Vale" being what I'd consider a bad module. To put that in perspective, that's only 13 pages. You still get so many awesome modules herein, that I cannot, in good faith, rate this lower than 5 stars, especially since the exceptional modules listed above absolutely deserve this rating and nothing below.

Endzeitgeist out.

The Sword of Air

Publisher: Frog God Games

Reviewer: Thilo Graf

Stars: 5 out of 5 stars



The massive mega-adventure clocks in at 522 pages: 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial, 1 page ToC, 1 page SRD, 3 pages of obituary slots (this is Frog God Games we're talking about) and 1 page back cover, leaving us with 514 pages of content, so let's dive in...

...but wait, before we do, let me reiterate something: This is not simply a massive module, this is a linchpin, a relic finally realized. For as long as I've been reading Necromancer Games (and later, Frog God Games modules), I've seen those tantalizing hints, time and again, supplemented by this nasty, trademark "Coming Soon." Anticipation continued to build up—for years. When Frog God Games was created, published SluFormbering Tsar, vastly improved Rappan Athuk, and then proceeded to release great book after great book—even saving Razor Coast from oblivion—that's when I hoped. When the Kickstarter hit, I scrounged together all the bucks I could, bought two weeks' worth of ramen and pledged. And when the Kickstarter was finished, I sat there...and honestly started dreading the arrival of this book.

Why? Because I have the most insane of expectations for this mega-adventure. Years upon years of expectations and improved qualities of previous books; since the days of Necromancer Games, the world has turned. It is my belief that the average of Frog God Games's oeuvre—quality-wise—significantly exceeds that of Necromancer Games. Necromancer Games was the trailblazer; Frog God Games has, at this point, surpassed its predecessor. So has Sword of Air changed with it? Is it up to date, or a relic of Necromancer Games's days in design aesthetic? All of this did not bode well; usually, when I have high expectations, I tend to end up disappointed. So far for my own mindset going into this.

Genre-wise, Sword of Air is a huge sandbox adventure that deviates from the player-driven Slumbering Tsar in one key aspect: it has a metaplot beyond exploration. In fact, this mega-adventure, while providing enough sandboxing, does have a significantly more pronounced plot, and is, dare I say, brainier than most modules of this size. It should also be noted that the module's vast array of maps, all in gorgeous full-color, come with player-friendly versions and my dead-tree copy featured a high-quality, gorgeous hex-map of the areas covered herein.

Indeed, the Gulf of Akados region as depicted herein, with hex upon hex of things, settlements, and dungeons is ridiculously detailed and provides more storylines than I can hope to cover in a review. There is so much material here you will NOT be wanting for simple material to put your PCs through. Indeed, much like the most detailed settings of old, you can just put this book down as a kind of massive world-guide, push your PCs in and there you go. Even ignoring the plotline in gameplay, this probably has enough gaming material to last you at least a year. So yes, you can wide-open sandbox this beast...but you don't have to.

All right, enough procrastination; this being an adventure-review, from here on out reign the SPOILERS. Potential players should jump to the conclusion.

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If you're a player, jump ahead...or Tsathogga AND Orcus may well descend on you and consume your soul!

All right, only GMs left? Great! First of all: This mega-adventure has one of the most surprising primary antagonists you'll ever see; unless your players are exceedingly paranoid, to the point they even exceed the paranoia of mine, they will NOT see the revelation of the true mastermind coming. A lot hangs in the balance here. This book is an epic quest that spans multiple artifacts, with, obviously, the Sword of Air taking a central role. The PCs are drawn into this epic via the feud of two archwizards, Kayden and Sorten, who face an issue of mutually-assured destruction—a theme that has an intriguing resonance in the subtext of the module that sets Sword of Air, intentionally or not, apart—and yes, I used the word "epic" in the truly intended context with all the ramifications of this word. Sword of Air puts A LOT at stake, and all in the player's hands, with a distinct chance that the PCs and players may unwittingly unleash doom upon all of the Lost Lands. The stakes, though it may seem otherwise, are apocalyptic indeed.

While the general notion is that the PCs are recruited by the...let's say, less-than-nice wizard, Kayden, to get him the Shagaspondium, a legendary item and the first trail towards the Sword of Air, this mega-adventure very much has more for you to do than you can ever want. Strange ruins dot the landscape. Dragon families with funny names engage in an ancient family feud. Vampire princesses lie entombed in small dungeons. A lycanthropic gnoll-lord rules over their people in a massive mountain fortress. All of these events come fully mapped and yes, certain forests contain dark secrets at their center. The domains of the two arch-wizards, with their excessive details, also should be considered intriguing. The production-values have to be mentioned here; this book has A LOT of artwork and cartography, — many of them stunning. The full-color renditions, especially of mechanisms and areas (although less so for characters) are absolutely awesome and help immersion immensely. The level of detail includes handy lists of food consumption and areas containing a lot of NPCs; you'll enjoy the schedules that depicts when character xyz is here and when not. It should also be noted that the NPC builds are a tad more creative and versatile than in most Frog God Games books, with plenty of multiclassing and archotyping.

But, beyond all of this, you should also be aware that, by infiltration or alliance, sooner or later the PCs will need to actually enter the Plane of Shadow. In this wasteland,



titanic shadow giants loom and the exploration of the wasteland is one step above the challenge of the basic range and of what one would expect; within the depths of this desolation, umbral dragons roam, deadly woods are home to life-draining monsters and a mad apprentice has the key to the tomb of Aka Bakar. Curious PCs may just as well try to foil the deadly Night Queen. Or what about traveling the shadow sea? Need something more epic? There is a chance that the artifacts of the deadly shadow giant deity Knew Koth is resurrected; his dread stats are provided....

Speaking of Aka Bakar's tomb, the dungeon is deadly, but you knew that much, right? Fact is, it's also, much like the basic plotline, a place where brains are just as required as brawn. The numerous puzzles provided within this massive complex provide a great change of pace from the deadly adversaries, unique foes and lethal traps. Rest assured that there are some traps herein that will TPK foolish groups; much like Rappan Athuk and similarly challenging modules, this is NOT playing around. In my opinion, the whole complex adheres to an amazing internal consistency; the complex not only felt thoroughly unique and alive, it simply is awesome and feels organic, logical.

But what to do with the Sword of Air should the PCs recover it? One thing is clear: this sword in the stone has brought untold suffering and needs to be taken care of...but how to destroy it? Well, this is where the massive book essentially splits its direction, unless

you direct things otherwise, of course. Researching the means of destruction, unlike with most artifacts, can yield two options, but that may not be apparent for the PCs. The most rewarding option may be to send them in the direction of method (A) and then have them realize that something is amiss. If only because missing out on even a bit of the Wasteland of Tsen would be a crime in my book. Do you recall my incessant gushing about Slumbering Tsar's Desolation back in the day? Well, at this point, the Wasteland of Tsen, horribly irradiated and providing tables upon tables of mutations, constitutes perhaps one of my favorite areas ever depicted in a fantasy roleplaying game. Utterly unique and strange, filled with deadly creatures, this desolate place with its delightfully tentacled squirrel-swarms and unique hazards and creatures hides more than the remnants of a fantastical fallout. From the temple hidden beneath the dead lake to the massive, ruined city, this gigantic, impressively detailed exploration takes the former awesome components and one-ups them in imagery and iconic themes. Below all this lie the lead mines of Tsen, where maddened clerics of Arden defend the Heart of their dead god, and with it one of the options to destroy the doom-bringing Sword of Air once and for all.

The other option, of course, involves researching the existence of a legendary, immortal beast of Tarrasque-like proportions (and a CR of 27). No, this is not the highest level CR the PCs can stumble into; one endgame scenario can be summed as literally "The world is doomed." No

matter how you play this gigantic beast, no matter how things turn out, getting through this in any way is a feat—a true achievement.

I will wager that this will surpass Rappan Athuk in its legend. Why? Because its storyline is compelling and because it engages the brains and all of the problem-solving skills of a group beyond what most modules dare to do. From opposite-battles to research and schemes within schemes to the ridiculously awesome locations, this book is stunning. I can't really properly convey that... so, let me point out that this book contains almost 100 pages of maps. No, I am NOT kidding. Each and every little halfway feasible locale is mapped. This is beyond concise and extensive. And yes, as always, we get copious monsters and magic items and so on, and so on.

I will remain opaque here: you should get this and read it yourself. I can't properly convey this book's impact.

Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are top-notch. For a book of this size to have this level of cohesion is more than just remarkable—it is a feat in itself. Layout...oh boy. This book is gorgeous full color, glossy paper and sports absolutely stunning, video-game art-book-level beautiful illustrations, and a lot of them. Contrasted with this level of realism and beauty are callbacks to old-school artworks, mainly represented in the character-artworks that depict those guys; personally, I didn't like the comic-style employed in some of them, but that is a matter of taste. I just wish they had adhered to the style depicted in the landscape-shots, because the book and the artwork conspire to evoke a unique atmosphere. The PDF comes fully bookmarked with nested bookmarks and my hardcover is gorgeously stitch-bound with the level of quality I've come to expect from Frog God Games.

All right. When I first began this review, I used an approach similar to that of Quests of Doom: short run-downs of the storylines, then moving on. This does not work here. There is simply too much potential contained within these pages. In fact, my previous review of this was bloated beyond recognition, at a point where no one would have read it. Why? A line from Antimatte comes to mind "If you look at me from your own century, I must seem like strange archaeology."

This is, in my opinion, all that is great about old-school gaming. Much like games such as Demon's Souls or Dark Souls, this plunges you into a world where wonder, death, and danger lurk at every corner—where strange things abound. Much like Slumbering Tsar, this evokes a sense of an ancient world that has moved on. It feels like a massive and storied place that has always existed, where each hill may hide new questions and new answers. Indeed, for the first time since Tsar, I felt reminded of why I truly adored this gritty style. The comparison that comes to mind is the honorable Wilderness of High Fantasy from Judge's Guild.

Frankly, this is what only a book of this size could conceivably offer: a simulation. A massive simulation of a huge region that is organic, filled to the brim with

awesome adventure, weirdness, Easter-eggs...all without delving into the ridiculous. Yes, you may find a purple demon-cow...but you may also unearth some strange ruins, find truly unique creatures, or even test your mettle against a god long thought dead.

Sword of Air is hard, but not because it's unfair. Yes, you will need to run and yes, sometimes, the characters will die, but the true accomplishment of this book is that it sports a central narrative for the GM to use to get things on track. Essentially, this could be considered a synthesis of the massive strengths of Slumbering Tsar, coupled with a central plot-line that is more consistent than its brethren. What brethren am I talking about? Well, obviously the classic sagas that revolved around a certain axe that lords of the stout folk used to wield and, more fittingly, perhaps – the Rod of the Seven Parts. Sword of Air mops the floor with them and takes their lunch-money, while beating Rappan Athuk up with its free hand.

This gigantic masterpiece is more evocative than all of those, is challenging and clever; it dares to demand smart and attentive players. It dabbles in the weird and uncommon. It presents an utterly unique adversary, sports some of the most iconic locales available in this generation of modules, and does all of that while maintaining its focus, its leitmotif, and putting literally all choice where it ultimately belongs: within the hands of the experienced GM.

Don't get me wrong: I love Adventure Paths and their tight stories, but this is something different; this is a way of forging your own story, with options galore to insert whatever modules you're itching to run. Unlike a regular Adventure Path, this is pretty much a world-immersion-experience in a sense one only rarely sees, because it is extremely hard to pull off. In the hands of an "only good" writer, cohesion is lost and the settlement of amazons feels out of place, everything dissolves. Well, Bill Webb is anything but "only good"—this Magnum Opus is perhaps the ultimate proof of his vast imaginative potential.

Sword of Air is an absolute masterpiece and even among Bill Webb's extensive canon of superb modules, it stands out one step beyond, further enhanced by the Frog God Games crew going the extra mile regarding the sheer number of foes and the increased optimization of builds of foes. Add to that the vast amount of art and cartography and we have, quite frankly, a book for the ages.

There is something very wrong with the world if this does not become a truly legendary book, a milestone. Sword of Air is quite frankly a book that only happens every couple of years, one that is so good, so fun, so unique, I'm fast running out of superlatives. If a new generation of gamers wants to know why those grognard's eyes glaze over when the classics are mentioned, when you never really got what is supposed to be great about something like Rappan Athuk, then this book is for you. Because more so than Rappan Athuk, it represents what is best about this type of gaming. It challenges the mind, it inspires, it is unbound, wild and free, and epic beyond what a lesser tome could hope to achieve.

In case my gushing was not ample clue, the only book in the current generation of modules that comes close to this in scope and quality of atmosphere would be Slumbering Tsar; personally, I actually like Sword of Air a bit more, if only because it is a tad bit more focused and has the benefit of the narrative being there to guide the PCs back on track if they get lost in the sandboxing. I firmly believe that this book is a must-own book that belongs into the library of any DM looking for a challenge, looking to understand what a truly free, and yet intelligent and focused sandbox can be.

Sword of Air is a masterpiece, gets 5 stars + seal of approval and is, obviously, a candidate for the number 1 slot of my Top Ten of 2015. This mega-adventure does everything right. Get it and never let go; this will be a classic in the generations to come; to me, it already is one.

Endzeitgeist out.



In the Company of Gelatinous Cubes

Publisher: Rite Publishing

Reviewer: Thilo Graf

Rating: 5 stars out of 5

This installment of the “In the Company of...” series clocks in at 10 pages, 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial, 1 page SRD, leaving us with 7 pages of content, so let’s take

a look!*

We begin this PDF in the tradition of Rite Publishing—with an expertly-written piece of in-character prose: “Glub.” The sheer brilliance of this reduction of the *conditio pituitae* in a manner of linguistic atomization should be considered the ultimate piece of flavor—nowhere else has the sheer courage to express the fundamental truth of an existence been so brilliantly crafted in such a concise way. When the physical descriptions and society/religious stances of gelatinous cubes are elaborated upon in a repetition of said sequence of letters, duplicated and then, disintegrated beyond guttural sounds, one cannot help but notice the very limitations our own fragile language imposes on communication, rendering moot the feeble attempts to convey an existence’s experiences. Within the absolute reduction executed here, truth of cosmic proportions can be found—all the way to the cutting off of humanoid screams, for in those sounds life lies and the death awaiting at the end, beyond the veil, ultimately comes for us all, while the ooze’s eternal truth remains, transcending the bounds of mortality and subjectivity, a zen of slime, a slimy nirvana of the ooze is all that remains.

I hesitate to descend back into the nit and grit, the profane simplicity of language, but for the purpose of providing a guidance for all of us unenlightened accumulations of cells, I will...thus, the conventionalizing

racial stats provided would be +4 Con, -2 Int, Wis and Cha—obviously a nod towards the mental capacities ultimately ending up as detriments to one’s own enlightenment and the eternal perpetuation of one’s genetic make-up. The same can obviously be said about fast movement; 15 ft. and a slow, but steady movement towards one’s foes is more than sufficient, since an undue hastening can be considered ultimately an acceleration BEYOND the ability to grasp the intricacies of the moment, of the fleeting “now” that is eternally transformed into the past. Since sight and similar senses are the purview of lesser creatures, blindsight is not a surprise here, either; the senses do convey an individual Rorschach-test of reality, after all. The perfection of a cube’s essential form allows them to literally carry us feeble humanoids within their very frames, though obviously, mortals may be endangered by the stripping of primitive components of their physiology—like skin. “Classes” are beneath them, being paragons of evolution and form, and yes, they are transparent, for there is nothing in substance and substance in nothing.

The blasphemous notion of a limited existence and the weight of these creatures has been provided alongside the obvious benefits to be gained from following the paragon path to transcendence. Being beyond the concern of paltry saves, gelatinous cubes thus do not progress much in this category. At 3/4 BAB-progression, d8 and 2+Int skills per level, there is not much to be done except reducing all those distracting choices to a minimum. At the same time, these glorious zen-masters of enlightenment may deem to adopt an adventuring ally among the less blessed races and at 2nd level and every 2 levels thereafter, the cube may select special ooze abilities, which include BAB-based attacks that negate incoming assaults (“All is nothing, nothing is all,” remember!), compress forms (“Size is an illusion!”) or corrode things (“All is vain!”). Ultimately, there is a lot of wisdom and different truths to be unearthed here. Now once your existential anxiety reaches its peak, around 5th level, you’ll be happy to know that the cube’s anesthetically potent properties may literally take your pain away and free you from the chores of all those annoying choices – potentially permanently. Of course, if you get past this stage, you’ll experience growth alongside your cube’s literal ascendancy to a more significant bodily representation, usually around 7th and 15th level.

Particularly adept cubes may elect to choose one of three unique feats to help the few mortals beyond their grasp more clearly see the truth they represent.

Conclusion:

Editing and formatting bespeak the superiority of the cubical masters. Layout adheres to a two-column full-color standard and each page is rendered as a square, the basis of a cube! If you take the content-bearing pages, you can make a full cube +/- an extra page, representing your task, nay, calling, to complete what these pages set up right before you. The PDF comes fully bookmarked.

Wendall Roy's Gelatinous Cubes are a milestone for humanity; beyond the game, this PDF contains literally all essential truths of mankind—all our history and striving and promise, condensed to a few pages. What a brilliant PDF! Have I mentioned the low donation required to partake in this glory cosmic of less than 2 bucks? My final verdict will clock in at 5 stars + seal of approval.*

Endzeitgeist out.

*This is an April's Fool-product and it's hilarious. My review reflects this and I sincerely hope my little exegesis made you smile. Furthermore, while the tone of my review may be humorous, the verdict indeed describes what I think about this funny, nice book. While not a good option for a PC, it makes for compelling NPCs and remains an excellent offer at a low price.

Mini-Dungeon: Sepulchre of the Witching Hour's Sage



Publisher: AAW Games
Reviewer: Thilo Graf
Rating: 5 stars out of 5

This PDF clocks in at 2 pages and is a mini-dungeon. This means we get 2 pages content, including a solid map (alas, not a player-friendly version) and all item/monster stats hyperlinked to d2opfsrd.com's shop and thus absent from the PDF, with only deviations from the statblocks being noted for the GM.

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

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

Still here?
 All right!

Sometimes, the PCs need answers at any cost. Thus, they enter a two-way portal in a cemetery near the ruins of an ancient civilization and enter the sepulcher, where they will soon notice that entering specific rooms may deal small amounts of negative energy damage on saves. Indeed, shadowy books and numerous undead continue to perpetuate this theme, while an illusion-supplemented trap is both (a) interesting and (b) devious. The little

dungeon also sports minor item-scavenging and a terrible final revelation of a horrid price to pay for the information and a unique, interesting showdown.

Conclusion:

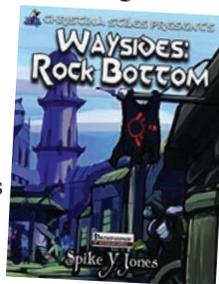
Editing and formatting are very good, I noticed no significant glitches. Layout adheres to a beautiful 2-column full-color standard and the PDF comes sans bookmarks, but needs none at this length. Cartography is full color and surprisingly good for such an inexpensive PDF, but there is no key-less version of the map to print out and hand to your players. The PDF does sport one nice piece of original full-color art – kudos!

Stefanos Patelis delivers an excellent mini-dungeon here. We receive a glorious dungeon with diverse challenges, unique fluff, cool adversaries, and quite frankly more roleplaying potential and a more evocative set-up than what one can see in many longer modules. This is a great mini-dungeon that manages to provide a fun, memorable experience in spite of its brevity: well worth 5 stars + seal of approval.

Endzeitgeist out.

Christina Stiles Presents: Waysides - Rock Bottom

Publisher: Rogue Genius Games
Reviewer: Thilo Graf
Rating: 5 Stars out of 5



This installment of Rogue Genius Games series depicting taverns clocks in at 14 pages, 1 page front cover, 1 page editorial, 2 pages of SRD, 1 page advertisement, leaving us with 9 pages of content, so let's take a look...

...or rather, let me go on a slight tangent: We all know the place, or at least, anyone who has lived in a town of a certain size does: There always is this one bar that, by any rights, should no longer exist. You always see the same failed existences shambling in and out of it and it exudes a palpable aura of desperation, sadness and tears. And if you're like me, sooner or later when all other bars are closed, you find yourself stumbling into the place, only to regret it almost immediately.

That is, unsurprisingly, the type of place Rock Bottom is: a tavern where those down on their luck, the lost souls, meet. This notion of decrepitude is further enhanced by several factors; the read-aloud text and details enhance just this type of atmosphere. The barkeep—a war-veteran turned beggar—walled off two alley-entries and thus, Rock Bottom was born. Since its inception the roof has been added and slightly improved, but Rock Bottom is still a place where the lowest of the low meet and the prices for the watered beer and soup/stew with tainted

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meat reflect that, never reaching farther than 6 cp. The war-veteran barkeep and his mentally-challenged half-elven employee are fully statted, as is a typical patron.

Beyond the less than scrupulous lowlife and small-time criminals, some of which are statted, some patrons actually are agents in disguise, keeping a track on the desperate and destitute and if the set-up does not immediately make you come up with some ideas, you'll be happy to know that quite a few adventure hooks are provided.

The establishment does come with a solid, functional map in color, though I wished we got a player-friendly version sans secret door.

Conclusion:

Editing and formatting are top-notch, I didn't notice any glitches. Layout adheres to RGG's printer-friendly

two-column full-color standard. The PDF has no artwork, but needs none and the PDF comes fully bookmarked for your convenience. The cartography, as mentioned, is okay for the low price.

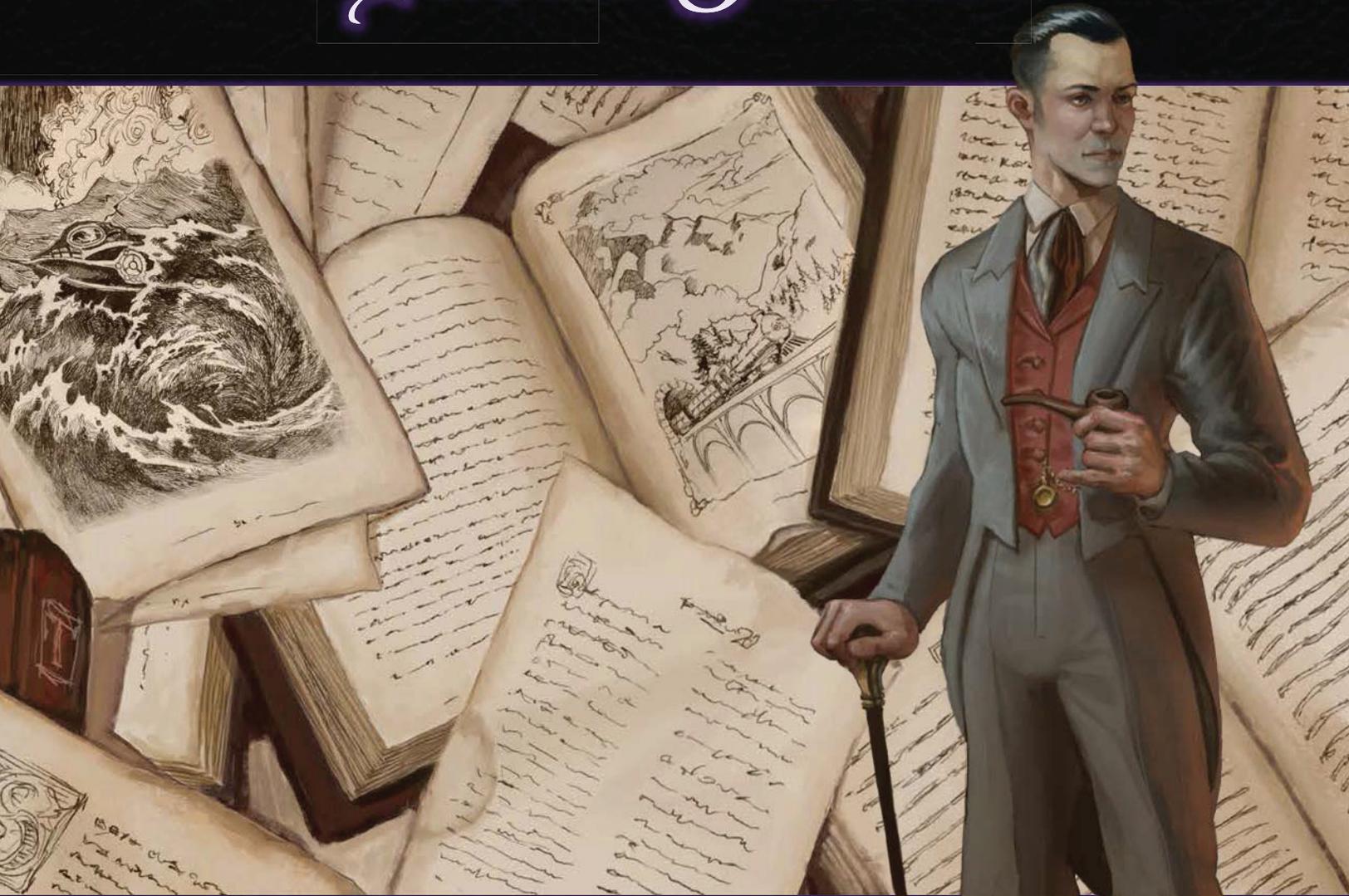
Spike Y Jones is not only a capable editor, this PDF also shows once again his prowess as an author. Rock Bottom is the incarnation of a classic trope and develops it to its logical extreme; if you're playing a rags-to-riches story, this is where to begin. If the PCs are victims of a systematic campaign of slandering and deconstruction, this is the low point. Rock Bottom is a window into what it means to be truly poor in a world where the average PC walks around with magic items of the worth of a whole life's worth of work for a farmer or lowly worker, a look at a facet of fantasy that is not often explored. The wayside reads as a compelling supplement and were it not for the lack of a player-friendly map, it would be truly stellar. As provided, it remains a very good supplement and receives 5 stars, though I omit my seal of approval.



Lords of Gossamer & Shadow

Gossamer Worlds:

Planet Fiction



Powered by



by H.M. 'Dain' Lybarger

THE PATH LESS TRAVELED #18: Pater Familias

By Jacob E. Blackmon



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Forests



By Liz Smith

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