

RAGING SWAN PRESS

20 THINGS #42:
ARCHIVES & LIBRARIES



SYSTEM
NEUTRAL



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20 THINGS #42: ARCHIVES & LIBRARIES

Are you a busy GM? Does session prep take too long? Do you never have time to work on the cool little details that can bring your session to life? Well fear not! That's where the 20 Things line comes in. This supplement gives you, the time-crunched GM, the tools to effortlessly add verisimilitude and detail to your adventure. Use the material herein either before or during play and bask in your players' adulation.

This instalment comprises five pages of flavoursome material compatible with virtually any fantasy roleplaying game and is designed to help you to flesh out and bring to life the archives and libraries in your campaign.

CREDITS

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FOREWORD

Welcome to this Raging Swan Press System Neutral Edition supplement. Herein you'll find evocative, inspiring text designed to help you—the busy GM—run better, quicker and easier games.

This book is compatible with most fantasy roleplaying games. It's impossible to create a truly system neutral book, though, and some generic game terms—wizard, fighter, human, elf and so on—lurk within. These generic terms are easily modified to the GM's system of choice.

One special note about the NPCs in this supplement. While some are magic-users, fighters, clerics and so on, others are simply normal folk. Because different game systems handle normal folk differently we've made no attempt to note their "class" leaving them simply as "female human" and so on.

USING THIS BOOK

You can use these tables either during session prep or "on the fly" during the actual session. Roll on the desired table and describe the result. Remember:

- Some players may assume because you describe something it is important. This may slow down the party's progress through the adventure. This isn't necessarily a bad thing.
- Modify any result so it fit with your game.
- Ignore or re-roll inappropriate results.
- Have fun!

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I: BOOKS IN THE COMMON COLLECTION

A library is nothing without books. Some libraries hold but a few dozen tomes while others hold thousands. No matter the size of the library it no doubt has books on a variety of subjects.

Use the table below, to generate the details of books the library keeps available for the general public.

HISTORY BOOKS

1. **The Bloodstained Prince:** This small leather tome is a recounting of the (doomed) attempt of Crown Prince Ilassual Nenonen to seize the throne of Ashlar from his sister, Aelliah Nenonen. The book ends with a chapter speculating on the Bloodstained Prince's unknown fate.
2. **Five Ships:** This book recounts the story of the legendary Lost Treasure Fleet of the Five Sisters. It tells how the five sisters—refer to both as freebooters and pirates—sailed to a far off land and discovered a vast treasure. On their voyage home, the sisters fell to arguing before a savage storm blew up from the west. The tempest sunk all five ships and only a few sailors survived the tragedy to return to their home ports with wild tales of islands rising from the deep and many-tentacled beasts that slew their shipmates.
3. **Doom Among the Gray Spires:** Almost two centuries ago, an adventuring party—the Company of the Blue Shields—penetrated deep into the Forest of Gray Spires. This book is the story of their expedition. It tells of encounters with demon-worshipping elves, the discovery of stone statues depicting a race of one-eyed giants and other strange events and discoveries.
4. **Vilimzair Aralivar—His Amazing Life:** This oft-read book tells the incredible story of Vilimzair Aralivar. Vilimzair rose from humble origins to become both a fearsome pirate captain and the greatest bard the world has ever known (according to the book). Strangely, the book is graffitied as if the readers had grown angry at Vilimzair's incredible escapades.

RELIGIOUS BOOKS

1. **I Walked the Earth:** This small dog-eared, singed book is an autobiography of Juhana Ehtaro the so-called "Walking Priest".



Juhana was a devout half-elven follower of Behron reputed to have seen more lands and strange places than any other traveller. The book contains interesting descriptions of many far-off, hidden or mythical places of potential interest to adventurers.

2. **The Book of Tides:** The Book of Tides is the sacred text of the Storm Mistress. It not only teaches of the timeless beauty of the ocean but also records details of tides, storms and other nautical phenomena stretching back centuries. It records shipwrecks, the faithful's strange sighting at sea, details of the many monsters dwelling in the sea's depths and more. Every copy is slightly different as individual worshippers add to the store of information therein.
3. **Cults and their Doings:** This short pamphlet features sensationalised stories and a series of lurid pictures depicting foul cultists in the midst of their blasphemous rites. Much of the pamphlet's contents are clearly rubbish and are based on public misconceptions of various evil religions. However, one section detailing the Fellowship of the Onyx Trapezohedron is accurate and depicts be-robed worshippers slowly crushing their victims under a gigantic trapezohedron suspended from huge chains.
4. **Scripture of Law:** This vast tome contains teaching, stories and lessons by some of Darlen's (LG greater god of law, order, justice and the sun) early, prominent followers. It is the faith's most important book and a bedrock of the church.

GENERAL INTEREST BOOKS

1. **On the Road (An Accounting of the Many Journeys and Hardships of Hilppa Jutikka):** Hilppa Jutikka was a merchant dogged by bad luck, happenstance and ill-fated events. To read his book is to marvel he survived long enough to write it. A careful reading of the book, however, reveals, Hilppa was simply inept.
2. **The Beauty of Numbers:** This book deals with mathematics and its application in a wide range of situations. As well as providing practical instruction in numeration, the book includes a rambling appendix dealing with the study of probabilities, numerical patterns and the like that apparently shapes the world and everything in it.
3. **Beyond the Horizon:** This small book contains the sea diary of Jegor Kalamies, and details his many journeys. He describes terrible storms, desperate battles against pirates and more. Jegor also included some rough sketch maps of various locales that might be of interest to adventurers planning a sea voyage.
4. **The Deeds of Power:** This slightly treasonous book relates—in breathless detail—the alleged deeds and doings of the Nenonen family. Much of the book may—or may not—be true, but some interesting nuggets, particularly of Arndul Nenonen's exploration of Gloamhold, appear within. Other scandals—hints of illegitimate children and a dark, unrecorded secret—also appear in the book.

2: BOOKS IN THE SPECIAL COLLECTION

The vast majority of books in a library are nothing more than tomes of mundane knowledge, travelogues, diaries and other normal writings. A few books, however, are different. A few books—either because of the foul things they reveal, the power they hold or their monetary value—are kept away from the public in the library's special collection.

Use the table below, to generate the details of the books the library keeps in its special collection.

1. **Encyclopaedia Geographia:** This massive leather-bound book weighs almost 20 pounds. Each page is almost two-foot wide by three-foot long. The book presents maps, discourses and studies of the terrain for hundreds of miles in every direction. Some of the maps are copies of ancient maps from now fallen elder or lost civilisations and peoples; these maps may depict features or locations omitted from more recent maps that could be of interest to adventurers.
2. **On the Art:** Originally written by Dorotea Laso, *On the Art* is a treatise on the fundamentals of wizardly magic. Written in the language of dragons it has formed the basis of magical instruction since it was first copied and shared centuries ago. For a book on magic it is a common tome and its inclusion in the special collection is surprising. Investigation, however, reveals this book to be the original! A profession of marginalia reveals Dorotea's evolving thoughts and musing on the nature of magic.
3. **The Morankan Manuscript:** Written wholly in a strange language—Aboleth—and heavily fire damaged, the pages of this book are made from some kind of specially prepared seaweed. The book is a tract railing against the so-called "new gods" and their upstart ways. The text talks about many alien concepts and predicts an inescapable flood will soon wipe away humanity's stain upon the world.
4. **Art & Power:** A treatise on the use of magic to gain temporal power this tract is wholly lacking any moral content and simply deals with the matter at hand. Only a few copies of this book survive to the present day; most are held by amoral folk or those who use them as evidence of the dangers of magic in the wrong hands.
5. **Lexicon of Shadows:** Compiled from many sources, the *Lexicon of Shadows* deals with the subject of those hated and reviled creatures that can live among human society undetected. The treatise deals with doppelgängers, lycanthropes and the like and warns of the perils of failing to be ever-vigilant against the threat such creatures pose.
6. **Unnamed Manuscript:** This mass of water-damaged, burnt papers fill a dusty, string-bound leather folder which has fallen down the back of one of the shelves. It is the remains of a copy of an ancient manuscript dealing with the elder demon Amon-Pyr. So hateful and maddening are the text fragments they can snap an unprepared or weak mind.
7. **The Final Word:** This deranged series of apocalyptic prophecies describes in lurid—and insane—detail the end of the world. The text goes into great detail about the warning signs of impending doom and the events leading up to the world's destruction. Some people suspect the end has already begun and scour the book for information on how to survive the impending apocalypse.
8. **Esteri's Workbook:** A work by a minor mage, this thin book presents Esteri's early research into several new spells. One is entitled *Esteri's Scorching Burst* while another is intriguingly called *Esteri's Many Faces*. The book is a scrappy, disorganised affair, but beautiful doodles artfully depict what each spell was meant to achieve.
9. **Wondrous Worlds of Infinity:** This treatise describes, in beautiful flowing Elven text, the multiverse of planes stretching away from the Prime Material. While no plane is detailed in great depth, this book is an excellent primer. The book closes with a list of places in the world at which the barriers between the planes are particularly weak.
10. **The Crown of Flame and Ash (and Other Wondrous and Legendary Objects):** Written in a bizarre mix of Dwarven and Elven this book lists in exhaustive detail various artifacts and other objects of legend. The text relates each item's history, assumed powers and known possessors.
11. **The Chronicles of the Folk of the Goat-Headed Demon:** Centuries ago, a bizarre cult which worshipped a goat-headed demon rose up among the city states perched upon the edge of an arid desert. The cult tried to weld the various states into an empire, but internecine intrigues doomed the attempt to failure. In the aftermath, a small band of particularly devout adherents to the nameless goat-headed demon disappeared into the desert's arid wastes carrying with them a golden statue said to contain the demon's soul.
12. **The Shimmering Horror in the Night:** When the stars are right, certain horrible, otherworldly creatures are said to slip into the world from elsewhere. This book details the so-called Shimmering Horror—a creature composed of nothing but strange colours and supernatural cold. The book contains a powerful spell designed to call and bind the Shimmering Horror; mercifully, the spell requires certain hard-to-find components which means it has not been cast in centuries.



3: EVENTS AMONG THE STACKS

Although libraries are places of scholarly learning, they aren't necessarily boring places.

Use the table below, to generate details of minor events the characters witness or experience as they explore the library.

1. A scholarly, middle-aged man pushes a small trolley laden with books through the stacks. Every now and then he stops to take a book from the trolley and return it to its rightful spot on the shelf.
2. Quiet whispering comes from behind the stack the character is perusing. A sharp-eared, nosy character interested in what is going on could eavesdrop on the conversation. The whispering could be furtive—perhaps two plotters are meeting in the library—or amorous—a courting couple have met at the library to find some peace and quiet.
3. A gentle breeze enters the library through an open window or door. Dust—dislodged from the covers of several books that have lain undisturbed for years—rains down on the characters.
4. As #3, but instead of being nothing nothing more than a coincidence the breeze is the result of some unseen force or power attempting to get the characters interested in a certain book. Alternatively, the dust could land on the floor in a particular pattern such as an arrow pointing in one direction, a holy symbol or the like.
5. Two scholarly folk are arguing over who gets to read a particular book first. Both of them have urgent business with the book and both are impatient fellows full of their own importance. Both also have a hand on the book's cover and, as the argument escalates, they start trying to yank the tome out of the other's hands. Eventually, one of the scholars wins and the other staggers back into a bookshelf.
6. A precariously placed, teetering pile of books covers a small side table butted up against a bookcase. Careless characters moving passed the table may dislodge the books which tumble to the floor with a loud series of thumps. Moments later, an irate member of staff appears and demands to know what has happened.
7. Perceptive characters notice a dark shadow creeping across the top of a bookshelf seemingly intent on something unseen. The shadow is in fact a black cat given the run of the library to keep vermin—mainly rats and mice—at bay. It is friendly and happy to be stroked and petted.
8. A fat middle-aged man sits at a desk muttering to himself as he copies out something from a large book set on the table in front of him. The man—Isto Mielikki—is researching the history of the surrounding settlement and is searching for early maps of the place. (He works for a client who has elected to remain nameless.) If the characters strike up a conversation with Isto he asks them if they know anything about the settlement's early years. Two days after completing his research, Isto is brutally murdered. If the characters hear of this death, they might wonder what he found in the course of his studies...
9. A robe-clad man (Ilja Mietti [N old male human]) works among the stacks sweeping the floor, straightening the shelves and generally making sure the library is clean and tidy. He keeps himself to himself, but misses little that happens in the library. He is chatty, but crafty, and happily tells what he has seen—in return for a small contribution to his retirement fund.
10. A scribe (Aamu Neuvo [LN female human]) bustles passed the party laden down with books she is collecting for her patron (Inka Seppo [NG middle-aged female human]) who desires copies of certain land records and histories of the surrounding settlement. Inka is a wealthy widow intent on proving her claim over a piece of nearby land; several of her husband's old rivals are disputing her ownership of the land.
11. A burst of muffled laughter, followed by muttered cursing comes from nearby. Investigations, reveal two bearded middle-aged men moving swiftly toward the library's exit with several books in hand.
12. A sudden stiff breeze blows through the library; pages on open books flutter and several readers curse as a result of losing their place in the works they were consulting. Moments later, the silence of the library is shattered by a man shouting, "Thief! Stop Thief!"
13. The library's roof is aged and leaking. Shelves under the leaks have been emptied of books while in other places iron buckets are placed to catch the drips from above.
14. A trio of obvious adventurers—rough men clad in travel-stained leathers and cloaks—stand around a table on which they have unrolled a map of the local area. They are engaged in a quiet, tense conversation.
15. An intense, obviously nervous man stops the party and ask them if anyone knows how to get into the Special Collection. He is exceedingly vague as to his reasons for wishing to peruse the Special Collection and flees the library if challenged.
16. The pungent smell of mould and rot fills the air around a bookshelf. Investigations reveal the smell emanates from a singular, worm-riddled book of obvious ancient provenance that has been misfiled here.
17. A small, lithe man clutching a wide leather belt in one hand bursts into the library. He is out of breath and has clearly been running. He dashes away from the door. Moments later a woman, wearing wizard's garb, bursts into the room, spots the man and gives chase.
18. Two children have snuck into the library with the express purpose of causing mischief. They creep about rearranging books, moving furniture into bizarre arrangements and so on. Their occasionally sniggering can be heard among the stacks.
19. A book suddenly flies off a shelf and hits a character in the back of the head. Is the library haunted or is a mischievous prankster at work?
20. A shout of, "Fire!", shatters the library's quiet. Smoke billows from a haversack leant next to a bookshelf. Panic ensues.

4: FOLK AMONG THE STACKS

The characters will not be the only people in the library; many folk come to consult the books and scroll kept therein.

Use the NPCs below, to portray the folk the characters meet as they explore the library.

1: KUURA PUUKKO

CN middle-aged male human wizard 2

Corpulent and half-crippled this middle-aged man wears ill-fitting red robes.

Chronically unwell and unfit Kuura blames most of his failures on his various ailments. Kuura works as a scribe and researcher for hire, although he styles himself a sage.

Personality: Easily distracted by wine, women or the latest fad, Kuura will never amount to much. In his heart of hearts he knows this, and it makes him bitter. For all that, he has a keen intellect and could become a puissant wizard if he applied himself to the task.

Mannerisms: Kuura has a gamy left leg and walks with a pronounced limp.

Hook: Perpetually in need of coin—his expenses far outweigh his income—Kuura introduces himself to the characters and offers his services.

2: EUFROSIINA TORIO

LG old female human

Stooped and round-shouldered this hunched old woman carries a large bag in one hand and has a look of geniality on her face.

Eufrosiina is a well-to-do member of the local community. Her husband is long dead and the library is now an important part of her life.

Personality: Fascinated by history, and a little bit infatuated with one of the library's staff, Eufrosiina is often among the stacks. She is genial and well-off and keen to natter about almost anything. She is particularly knowledgeable about local history, and happily shares her knowledge.

Mannerisms: Eufrosiina is tactile and often gently touches those with whom she is speaking (particularly when she has had a drink or two).

Hook: A character spots Eufrosiina lurking among the stacks and may grow suspicious as to her behaviour. In truth, she is merely waiting to snatch a few minutes of conversation with the object of her infatuation.

3: BRUSI TALVIKKI

NG male human fighter 3

Youthful, broad-shouldered and vigorous, this well-dressed young man looks out of place in the library. A longsword, its hilt worn, hangs from his left hip.

Brusi is an adventurer just making a name for himself as a brave—if a little foolhardy—companion.

Personality: Brusi is surprisingly cerebral for a warrior and loves to read. History is his passion and he could happily spend days among the stacks reading anything historical he can get his hands on. He particularly loves reading about battles and wars and is more knowledgeable than most sages on such subjects.

Mannerisms: When thinking deeply or just nervous, Brusi cocks his head to one side. He is also proud of his physique and often stands in a way designed to show off his muscles.

Hook: Brusi has just learnt something interesting about an old battlefield and is desperate to show-off his knowledge—that after the battle a hidden tomb was dug for one of the heroes who fell during the carnage. Brusi wonders if the barrow—and its treasures are still there!

4: AUKU TAPIO

N middle-aged male human cleric [Morden] 4

Intricate tattoos cover this bald, but bearded, man's face and arms.

Auku follows Morden the god of magic and is at the library to gain access to the Special Collection. Thus far, he has been stymied, and he is growing increasingly frustrated.

Personality: Full of the belief in his own importance, Auku looks down on those of lesser intellect or achievement. A devout follower of his god, he seeks to increase his knowledge of the mysteries of magic.

Mannerisms: Auku has a deep booming voice and makes expansive hand gestures when making an important point.

Hook: Auku accosts a character and begins to rant about the library and its staff. If he discovers the party have gained access to the Special Collection he loudly demands to know how they managed such a seemingly impossible feat.

5: INKERI VAITO

LN middle-aged female human

Brown pigtailed frame this stout, plain-looking woman's face. She wears simple, floor-length robes.

Inkeri works at the library and brooks no abuse of its books or its rules. In her own mind, the library is her domain and she defends it zealously.

Personality: Unimaginative, but dogged, Inkeri works hard to maintain the library and its collections. She craves order and hates chaos and confusion. She also dislikes loud noises and surprises.

Mannerisms: Inkeri speaks slowly and clearly, and hates to repeat herself.

Hook: If Inkeri comes to believe the characters are guilty of transgressing the library's rules she dogs their every move, and actively looks for a reason to throw them out.

5: THINGS AMONG THE STACKS

Although a library is obviously full of books, there are other things of note in such a place.

Use the table below, to generate details of minor objects of interest the characters discover as they explore the library.

1. As if dropped, a single book lies open, cover up, on the floor. A perceptive character notices specks of fresh blood on the cover. A smear of blood mars the open pages. Characters searching around in the vicinity of the dropped book discover a bloody handprint on one shelf and might even discover a faint trail of blood drops leading off deeper into the library.
2. Perceptive characters notice a small section of books jut out slightly further than the surrounding tomes from the wall. Investigating behind the books discovered a small scroll sealed with wax. Only by breaking the seal can the party discover what message the scroll holds. Perhaps a spy has left a message here for their contact or the scroll is a love note between illicit lovers.
3. The worn and dusty statuette of a curled-up cat serves as a bookend to a short section of books. Under the dust, the cat's onyx eyes glimmer like pools of black fire. The statuette could be nothing more than bookend or it could be an atypical type of *figurine of wondrous power* accidentally placed here years ago and promptly forgotten.
4. A small wooden desk fills a niche set between two bookshelves. Open books lie scattered across the desk. A cursory glance suggests the person using the desk is researching evil cults. However, of the reader there is no sign (although a small satchel under the desk may contain clues to the owner's identity).
5. An iron torch sconce juts from the end of one bookcase. The sconce is wrought in the shape of an ornate scroll tube with a fan of papers emerging from one end. A torch wreathed in magical flame pokes out from among the papers.
6. Dusty windows high up in one wall—or perhaps the ceiling—let in a faint light from outside. The dust on the windows is thicker in places than others which creates an interesting pattern on the floor below.
7. As #6 above, except the windows are of stained glass and have been wrought to glorify Morden the god of knowledge and magic. The faint light filtering through the glass creates a multi-hued pattern on the floor. Once a year, on the night most sacred to the god the multi-hued light comes to rest on a certain flagstone now partially obscured by a bookshelf. A secret niche under the flagstone holds a spellbook filled with unique or rare spells.
8. Faded, dusty tapestries hang from the library's walls. Some depict maps of the surrounding area while one presents a stylised view of the entire continent.
9. Graffiti carved into the wood of a bookshelf reads, "For the ultimate knowledge, seek the rose."

10. Wet footsteps mar the library's floor. Strangely, they start at one bookshelf and end in a nearby study niche.
11. A tall statue of a winged warrior woman stands on a plinth, overlooking the library. The statue is clearly old; the woman is missing the tip of her nose and her sword is shattered low down near its hilt. The statue has stood here for years, and no one knows for certainty who or what it represents.
12. Several portraits of stern, well-to-do folk hang from the walls. All were clearly wealthy or important in some way. Intermingled with portraits are three pictures of legendary places as imagined by a wild, macabre artist. Each—a lava-spewing mountain, a ruin-topped island emerging from a raging sea and a great rift disappearing into shadow-filled depths—have an air of malignant threat about them.



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