

Tarondor's 2025 Guide to Pathfinder Adventure Paths

Version 2.0
January, 2025



The comment forum for this guide can be found [HERE](#).

Introduction

Of the many guides I've written, the one that people most often ask me to update is this guide.

To date, Paizo has produced 45 adventure paths. Some were originally for Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition, some were for Pathfinder 1st Edition and some were for Pathfinder 2nd Edition. My aim is to rate them all to help you decide which ones you'd like to play.

What an Adventure Path Is (and what it ain't)

Adventure Paths are entire role-playing campaigns covering many character levels and containing multiple adventures tied together by a common theme, plot or villain. As a product, they're ready-made stories for you to play, with most (not all!) of the work already done for you. Maps, NPC's, plots, story points, all laid out for the GM.

What an Adventure Path is **not** is a complete script you should just open and play. Even the best, most complete Adventure Path demands customization for your players and for their player characters. Publishers can't think of everything your players might like or might do. That's what you, the GM, are for. Don't regard an Adventure Path as a straitjacket. Regard it instead as a particularly good set of notes from which you derive your own story. If you pretend it's supposed to be a complete package that requires no alterations or prep work and your game will be flat and lifeless, no matter how good the writing.

This is best summarized by a quote from Reddit user Illythar, who said "*APs should be looked at as rough drafts that do the dirty background work for you, and leave the details and subsystems to the DM. I'm trying to think of any subsystem I've run into in an AP that I left alone... and I honestly can't think of a single one.* "

If you read the comments on Reddit and the Paizo boards, you will see that for every single AP, one or more commenters will tell you that an AP is great if you take the time to work with the tools it gives you, but middling to poor if you just play it as is.

All Adventure Paths Need Work

There Are No Terrible Adventure Paths

I know this will be ignored by nearly everyone but I'm going to say it anyway. Every single one of Paizo's Adventure Paths has merit. Every single one has the potential to be the best campaign you ever played. I mean that. Some will take more work to get there, but the skeleton of a great story is present in every AP, even if it must be teased out of some story elements that just didn't work.

Take, for example, *Second Darkness*, the Adventure Path that pretty universally gets the lowest ratings. It's a story of ancient elvish secrets, a hidden war that's been waged for millennia, secretive powers below the surface of Golarion and a super-weapon that could bring about a new age of darkness for the entire planet. That is some seriously cool stuff! The outline of an awesome story is there, along with professionally made maps and artwork, NPC stat blocks and thematic magic items. I'm 100% sure that many of the great GM's reading this guide could take those elements, strip out the parts that didn't work and rebuild that into a great campaign, like a mechanic lovingly restoring an old rusted automobile to look better than it ever did.

The problem is, that kind of loving restoration takes time, experience and a desire to do so. Most GM's will simply pick up an Adventure Path that requires less work.

There Are No Perfect Adventure Paths

Even the best, most highly-rated hot-shot Adventure Paths are still no more than toolkits. GM's need to read and understand the story, the mechanics and the NPCs in order to bring them to life. Perhaps a map has mistakes on

the key. Perhaps motivation for a side quest is lacking. Perhaps the major villain isn't well foreshadowed. Or perhaps an otherwise awesome scene isn't going to appeal to your specific players for some reason known only to you and them. All these things require that the GM carefully read ahead and comprehend potential trouble spots. That's why it's so important to read comments on the Reddit and Paizo forums, not just grab a highly-rated AP and start playing.

A Word on Subsystems

Every time I read "this AP has too many subsystems", I find myself gritting my teeth just a little bit. Look, the subsystems are *training wheels*. They're there to help inexperienced GMs to make their way through encounters in a balanced and understandable way. No one, particularly not the authors from Paizo, thinks that subsystems are supposed to be a replacement for the judgment of an experienced GM.

If you're new to GMing, use those subsystems! Roll the chase rules, use the infiltration points. You'll do fine. But one day you'll realize you can run those scenes just fine without tracking so much math. You'll just wing it and the players either won't notice at all or will actually have more fun.

If you're an experienced GM, the existence of a subsystem should alert you to the author's intent that you should direct your attention to adjudicating a particular goal (influencing the countess, say, or researching a new ritual.) With that in mind, just role-play and ignore the subsystem and its math.

Which is **NOT** to say that "good" GM's don't use subsystems. I use them. But sparingly, and especially if I haven't had all the prep time I'd like. You do you; fun is the only goal.¹

¹ Whenever I talk to my players about games we played 20, 30 or 40 years ago, the ones they always bring up with fondness were the ones where I felt least certain as a GM, where I simply forgot about the rules and even the planned scenario and just let them be their chaotic selves. That's when I got some of the best role-playing out of a group of otherwise inveterate murder-hobos. The lesson is two-fold: 1) follow where your players lead and 2) know when to throw out the planned scenario and go where the fun leads. There's always time to kick the train back onto the tracks later.

The Poll

I asked people on two Reddit Pathfinder boards as well as people on the Paizo forums to rate all 44 finished Adventure Paths, asking them to list how enjoyable each AP was on a scale of 1-10. 1 represents "An Unplayable Mess" and 10 represents "The Gold Standard of Adventure Paths." The 2021 poll had 147 voters. This 2025 poll had **892 voters**.

The Poll's Meaning

I asked the poll-takers to rate the Adventure Paths based on **enjoyability** and no other metric. That means in theory they weren't rating how much effort it would take for the GM to render the story into top-notch material or to convert it from an older edition to a newer one.

Readers should take care to note that while older AP's like those that appeared in *Dungeon* magazine two decades ago or any of the early Adventure Paths may be very enjoyable, they still require a fair amount of conversion and work if they are to be played with a more modern system like Pathfinder 2e.

My Methods

My opinions are subjective of course. I'm quite well aware that no matter what I say about any of these adventure paths, many people will disagree, sometimes quite strongly. That's okay! Diversity of thought is a good thing.

However, I did several things to make my opinions as well-informed as I could. First of all, I read each of these adventure paths in detail when they were first published. Second, I carefully re-read each adventure path when writing this series of reviews. Third, I have personally GMed several adventure paths and played several more. Fourth, I collected the opinions of hundreds of gamers through the use of polls. Fifth, and most importantly, I scoured the internet for reviews and opinions on half a dozen forums so that I could be as informed as reasonably possible on the views of other gamers.

To Spoil or Not to Spoil

This document contains minimal spoilers, but by its nature does necessarily spoil a few things. I've tended to put those spoilers in "Inviso-Text", meaning I wrote them in white letters on a white background so that you can read them if you highlight them.

The Color Code

Remember that there are no "bad" adventure paths. They all contain a lot of great and fun elements. The color codes indicate how much work they'll take to become fun and playable.

RED - These are going to require some work to enjoy.

ORANGE - Some solid stuff here, but not my favorites.

GREEN - Fun and rewarding. Do not hesitate to play or GM these AP's.

BLUE - Best of the best. Go out of your way to experience these AP's.

A Word on the Rankings

The meaning of the color codes is a little different between my ratings and those of the poll. The poll doesn't give nuance or emotion, only numbers. So those are simply colored by quartiles, 11 APs in each quartile.

The system for coloring my own ratings was a little more complex. I tried to use the color system to convey how much work I believe would be necessary to bring each AP up to its best possible play experience.

A Word on the Comments

For every AP, I have linked to a discussion of the AP on Reddit and a separate discussion on the Paizo forums. You'll find tons of interesting and useful information and suggestions there. I highly recommend reading through the comments related to any AP you're thinking about running.

BUT! Beware those comments at the same time. The general run of comments on every AP are significantly more negative than the ratings expressed by the hundreds of people who took the poll. I think perhaps people with negative feelings about an AP are more inclined to write them up

while people with positive feelings are more inclined to simply give a good rating and leave it at that.

One example of this that I've just been reading are the comments on the Second Edition AP *Blood Lords*. The comments include "*total disaster*", "*insult to intelligence*", "*pure filler*", "*second-worst AP*" and my favorite: "*pure ass.*" But when I look at the poll results, more voters gave the AP a rating of 7, 8 and 9 than any other number. So take the comments with a grain of salt.

Not to take away anything from those who despised a given AP, but do remember that nearly 900 people voted in the polls and their opinions should also be considered when you make your choices among the APs.

Primacy and Recency

Any trial attorney knows the power of Primacy (going first) and Recency (going last). Primacy and recency effects are crucial in litigation because they demonstrate that people tend to remember information presented first (primacy effect) and last (recency effect) most vividly. It's no accident that in criminal trials, the government gets to go both first and last. Well, there's something similar going on in Adventure Path poll ratings. The earliest AP's often poll higher than objectively better AP's published later on, while the latest APs tend to rate either very well or very poorly, with time eventually tempering those views.

Two examples of this may be seen in my 2021 poll. Then, *Rise of the Runelords* (the first true Paizo AP) and *Abomination Vaults* (then one of the newest AP's) were rated #1 and #2 respectively. In 2025's poll, they're #7 and #19. My point here is that rankings for the oldest and newest AP's are probably less accurate than for those of middling years.

But It's A Railroad!

Oh, stick a sock in it, already. The "railroad versus sandbox" argument has been done to death. If you don't like railroad adventures, don't play published adventures.

By their nature, published adventures will have to make some assumptions about the plot of the story. Some adventure paths will be more sandboxy than others, but all contain the railroad (otherwise known as the plot) at their heart. I tell my players that part of the buy-in with an adventure path is that there is a plot. They're free to depart the plot at any time and we'll go off in search of adventure elsewhere. But if they stay on the railroad, I promise the train will pull into Awesometown on a regular basis.

Even in a published adventure there are (or should be, in a good one) plenty of opportunities to do things the player's way. Which NPCs do they ally with? Which do they love or hate? In which order do they follow the clues? Do they try to redeem the villains? Capture them for trial? A good adventure path can allow for all that.

Finally, if an adventure path feels like a straitjacket, [you're doing it wrong](#). Adventure paths, like any other role-playing game, are just ingredients and signposts along the way. GM's *should* be deviating from the published modules. Skipping some stuff, inserting other stuff and making the storyline their own. Believe me, my game of *Kingmaker* is different from yours.

The AP's Ranked

Tarondor's Rankings

- 44 - Second Darkness
- 43 - Serpent's Skull
- 42 - Council of Thieves
- 41 - Hell's Vengeance
- 40 - Giantslayer
- 39 - Jade Regent
- 38 - Extinction Curse
- 37 - Outlaws of Alkenstar
- 36 - Ruins of Azlant
- 35 - Blood Lords
- 34 - Shackled City
- 33 - Gatewalkers
- 32 - Agents of Edgewatch
- 31 - Wardens of Wildwood
- 30 - Age of Worms
- 29 - Savage Tide
- 28 - Stolen Fate
- 27 - Legacy of Fire
- 26 - Reign of Winter
- 25 - Skull and Shackles
- 24 - Sky King's Tomb
- 23 - Mummy's Mask
- 22 - Carrion Crown
- 21 - Rise of the Runelords
- 20 - Quest for the Frozen Flame
- 19 - Triumph of the Tusk
- 18 - Strange Aeons
- 17 - Shattered Star
- 16 - Abomination Vaults
- 15 - Return of the Runelords
- 14 - Ironfang Invasion
- 13 - Curtain Call
- 12 - Strength of Thousands
- 11 - Wrath of the Righteous
- 10 - Tyrant's Grasp
- 9 - Age of Ashes
- 8 - Fists of the Ruby Phoenix
- 7 - Iron Gods
- 6 - War for the Crown
- 5 - Kingmaker
- 4 - Seven Dooms for Sandpoint
- 3 - Hell's Rebels
- 2 - Curse of the Crimson Throne
- 1 - Season of Ghosts

Poll Rankings

- 44 - Second Darkness
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Shackled City

Tarondor's Ranking: 34th

Poll Rating and Rank: (6.9) 19th

Dungeon Magazine (March 2003 – November 2004)

Authors: Christopher Perkins, James Jacobs, David Noonan, Tito Leati, Jesse Decker, Chris Thomasson

Level Range: 1-20

Original System: Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition (later, 3.5e)

Primary Type of Adventure: Dungeon Crawl

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [RPG Genius Shackled City Page](#) (particularly the [Demonskar Ball](#).)
- ❖ [PF2e Conversion of Shackled City](#) by TheWamp.
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Shackled City](#)



This is the **ORIGINAL** Adventure Path, published when Paizo was just getting started, having previously been the TSR Periodicals Department.

There is a great deal to love in this campaign. It is a tale of politics and hidden powers meddling in the safety and survival of a city nestled inside a dormant volcano. In fact it was so good that the expanded hardcover edition won three [ENnie](#) awards at the 2006 [Gen Con](#) game fair, taking home the gold award for "Best Adventure" and "Best Campaign Setting/Supplement", as well as the silver award for "Best Cartography." However, the format was new and experimental. The developers were still feeling out how this Adventure Path thing should work and that lack of experience shows. Much longer than the later, more traditional Adventure Paths, *Shackled City* can sometimes feel bloated and too long.

The hardcover edition frequently sells on Amazon or Ebay for several hundred dollars, and sadly the PDFs are no longer available from Paizo.

Highlights:

- ❖ Having the city of Cauldron be the central point of the story means that the player characters get a chance to be invested in the city's personalities, factions and stories.
- ❖ The GM is given so many colorful NPCs that it is easy to bring the city to life and make the players care about the fate of the city.
- ❖ There is a huge amount of community support available for this well-loved Adventure Path.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ Google *Shackled City* and the most common phrase you'll read is "meat grinder." The campaign has a reputation for being a long series of deadly combats. You *will* lose characters and you will probably have more than one TPK.
- ❖ The story is also very long, spanning twelve chapters.
- ❖ This campaign also comes from a time when GMs wanted adventures they could slot into their home games, so while the GM gets a lot of background and characters, it's still going to be work to flesh it out to the point that it's ready to go.
- ❖ The campaign begins with a fair amount of role-playing as you navigate the many factions and personalities in the city of Cauldron, but the balance shifts sharply towards combat as the campaign reaches its middle.

GM TIPS:

- ❖ Reddit User TheWamp says:
 - "My conversion has some other (optional) changes and the one that I think pays off the most is getting rid of the Vanishing and replacing it with a spreading insanity (madness of Adimarchus leaking through) that forced the gnomes to abandon Jzadirune. The Vanishing is a cool idea, but a) it's totally unrelated to the plot and b) in Golarion it's a little bit redundant with the Bleaching. Instead, using this section to introduce the madness of Adimarchus really introduces some of the important themes of the AP early, when the AP is otherwise lacking cohesiveness."
 - "Rename
[Hidden with invisio-text] That first name as written is just too obvious. Lots of reports of players guessing that twist just based on the name."
- ❖ Reddit User Adontis says: "Google 'Shackled City player aids' to find things like the newspaper to hand to players, there are lists of villains to cut, and which and how to foreshadow better. With those resources you'll really love this setting."

Age of Worms

Tarondor's Ranking: 30th

Poll Rating and Rank: (7.7) 6th

Dungeon Magazine Issues 124 to 135 (July 2005 - June 2006)

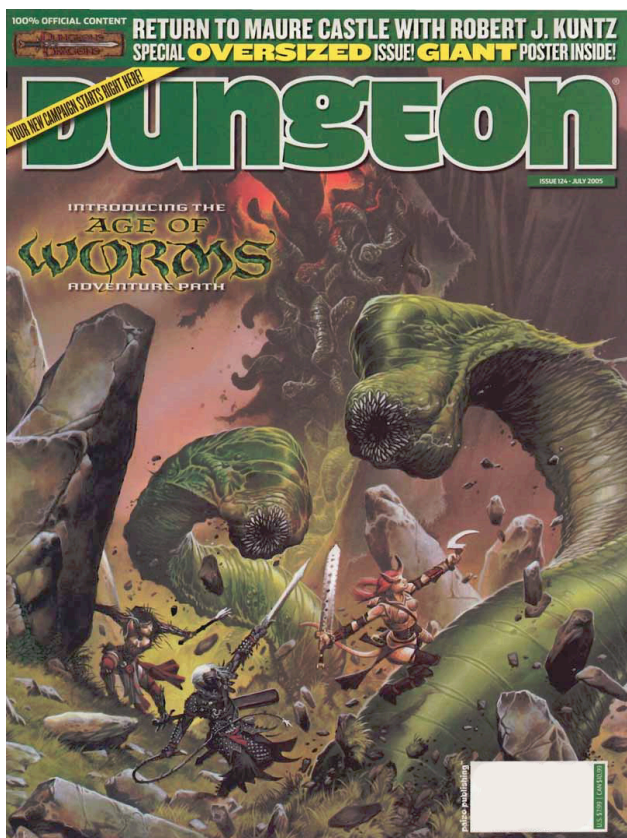
Authors: Erik Mona, Mike Mearls, Sean K. Reynolds, Jason Buhlman, Tito Leati, Richard Pett, Wolfgang Bauer, Jesse Decker, Nicolas Logue, Greg A. Vaughan, James Jacobs

Level Range: 1-20

Original System: Dungeons & Dragons 3.5 Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [Age of Worms statblocks converted to Pathfinder 1e](#)
- ❖ [Reddit discussion of Age of Worms](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums discussion of Age of Worms](#)



With *Age of Worms*, the *Dungeon* magazine era of Adventure Paths really hit its stride. *Age of Worms* is still a classic, filled with weird cults, hideous gods and ancient prophecies. What adventurer worth their salt wouldn't want to

tangle with the likes of Vecna and Kyuss? *Age of Worms* was awarded an Honorable Mention in the "Best Adventure" category of the 2007 [ENnie Awards](#). Sadly, like the other Dungeon Magazine Adventure Paths, *Age of Worms* is out of print.

I particularly liked the first installment, Eric Mona's *The Whispering Cairn*, which has a lovely balance of combat, puzzles, role-playing and side quests. *The Whispering Cairn* could easily be run all by itself as a stand-alone adventure.

Throughout the campaign you will explore deeper levels of an age-old plot to bring on the destructive Age of Worms, which will bring you into conflict with the undead, dragons, undead dragons and evil gods. A truly epic game.

Highlights:

- ❖ Diamond Lake, the home base for the setting, is well fleshed out in accompanying Dungeon magazine articles. It's an entire mini-campaign area in itself. However, after Book 2, you'll never return there again.
- ❖ Some of the dungeons in *Age of Worms* are among the most creative and memorable in any Adventure Paths.
- ❖ The ratio of role-playing to combat is very good and remains excellent throughout.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ The GM must do some work to get this story rolling. For a modern gamer used to having adventures serve up background, context and multiple plot hooks, this Adventure Path, like *Shackled City*, can feel as though it is missing these things. GMs are expected to provide context and hooks on their own and to flesh out the NPCs in a way that will be interesting to their players.
- ❖ Several commentators mentioned that the initial start at Diamond Lake feels quite disconnected from the rest of the story.
- ❖ As with *Shackled City*, although each chapter is interesting, the whole is so very long that you and your players risk story fatigue as it often feels as though you're not getting any closer to the end.
- ❖ *Age of Worms* is deadly. If your players get attached to their characters, this may not be the Adventure Path for them. Some of the

fights hit very hard and TPKs are often just waiting to jump out and get your characters.

GM Tips:

- ❖ Reddit User AQL_the_Lesser says:
 - Read through the 12 parts to better foreshadow events: have bar patrons tell tall tales of Dragotha, have the militia commander remember the dark times of Ilthane and foreshadow the Champion's game in the first session.
 - I had Auric boast about becoming the first 3 times Champion in the first scene at the inn. My players hoped they could make it to the games, making their participation all the more sweeter.
 - Another thing is to try to weave 1 and done villains into your players backstory: Bozal, Teldrick, the Faceless One, Darl Quenthos, Prince Zeech. You have the gift of knowing the endgame, plant those seeds. If a lower level villain is a hit with your table, switch a later one with that one to make it more connected.

Note: You might well be asking how I could rate this 30th when the poll rated it 6th. I asked the poll-takers to rate the AP's for **enjoyability**, not on whether it had modern plot structure or ease of conversion. I suspect they're indicating that *Age of Worms* is really good. And it is. I just think the more modern 3-and-6 volume AP's are better for most players and GM's.

Savage Tide

Tarondor's Ranking: 29th

Poll Rating and Rank: (7.5) 9th

Dungeon Magazine Issues 139 to 150 (October 2006 to December 2007)

Authors: James Jacobs, Nicolas Logue, Richard Pett, Jason Buhlman,
F. Wesley Schneider, James L. Sutter, Tito Leati, Robert J. Schwalb
Eric L. Boyd, Wolfgang Bauer, Greg A. Vaughan

Level Range: 1-20

Original System: Dungeons & Dragons 3.5 Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [The Hobbled Goblin Savage Tide actual play](#)
- ❖ Reddit user RuzzaWuzza began a [Conversion of the Savage Tide AP to Pathfinder Second Edition](#)
- ❖ [Video Discussion of Savage Tide with James Jacobs & Eric Mona](#)
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Savage Tide](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Savage Tide](#)



Set in the World of Greyhawk, *Savage Tide* is a water-borne adventure filled with pirates, undead, demons and undead demon pirates will take to

locations like a dinosaur-filled wilderness, a city of cutthroat pirates and ultimately to the Abyss itself, where you must negotiate demonic politics, free an imprisoned goddess and face off against a demon lord!

Savage Tide can be thought of as comprising three distinct stories linked together by the eponymous Savage Tide. Low level adventures surround the city of Sasserine. Mid-level adventures occur on the Isle of Dread and Scuttlecove. High-level adventures take you plane-hopping.

Of the three Dungeon magazine adventure paths, *Savage Tide* is clearly the most polished, in terms of both storyline and editing. For those of you who weren't around at the time, I want you to picture that the biggest RPG of them all had two print publications (*Dragon* and *Dungeon*) and for over a year both of them were focused on this adventure path. It was the final distillation of the form, likely never to be repeated. Issue #150 of *Dungeon* was not only the final episode of *Savage Tide*, it was the last issue of that great magazine, as the digital age was upon us.

It is also possibly the most gonzo, high-powered, over-the-top adventure out there until you reach the mythic rules. In fact, GMs for *Wrath of the Righteous* who don't like the mythic rules might want to take a gander at *Savage Tide*, if you can find a copy.

Highlights:

- ❖ *Savage Tide* takes you to some great iconic locations in Greyhawk like the Isle of Dread and Tamoachan.
- ❖ The settings are superb and evocative
- ❖ The villains are AMAZING. *Savage Tide* has both a great recurring villain and perhaps the best end boss of any adventure path.
- ❖ Highlight invisio-text to read a super-cool, can't-believe-I'm-not screaming-it-from-the-rooftops spoiler:

Drawbacks:

- ❖ Like all the Dungeon magazine adventure paths, *Savage Tide* is just too damn -long-.

- ❖ It takes you back to the same or similar locations too often. A careful GM could probably excise a few chapters of this story without losing anything but bloat.
- ❖ The starting city of Sasserine is an excellent, interesting location, but you soon leave it and head for the Isle of Dread and never return. Some players report that the switch felt like a jarring letdown in tone.
- ❖ *Savage Tide* is probably the **most deadly of all the adventure paths**. The odds of your 1st level characters making it to 20th is quite low.

Final Thought: Despite its flaws, I really enjoyed GMing *Savage Tide*. Its flaws are mostly a result of its length and how early this was in the history of adventure paths. But the story, the set-pieces, the characters and the role-playing opportunities are all terrific. For a GM willing to work with it, this can be an adventure path well worth running. Were I to run it again, I would boil the story down a lot and trim the fat, then use the major story beats in a leaner, faster tale. It would still be one of the meatiest adventure paths ever written.

Rise of the Runelords

Tarondor's Ranking: 21st

Poll Rating and Rank: (7.6) 7th

Date: August 2007-January 2008 (Anniversary Edition: July 2012)

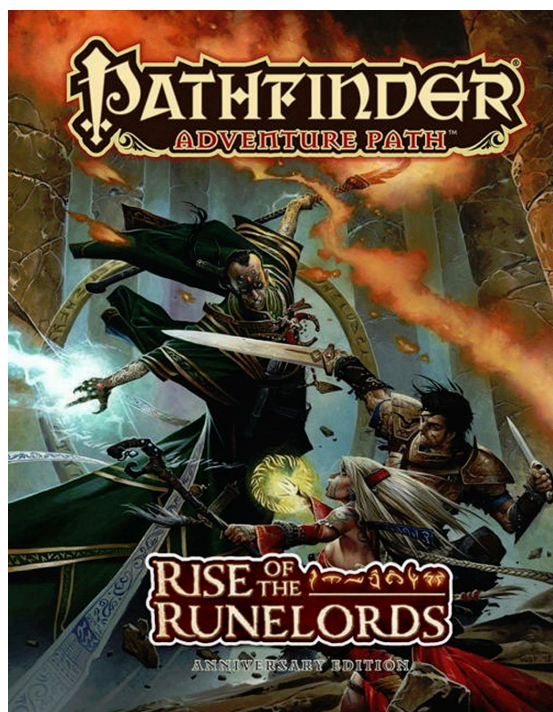
Authors: James Jacobs, Richard Pett, Nicolas Logue, Wolfgang Bauer, Stephen S. Greer, Greg A. Vaughan

Level Range: 1-18

Original System: Dungeons & Dragons 3.5 Edition
(Anniversary Edition: Pathfinder First Edition)

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [PF2e Conversion of Rise of the Runelords](#) by multiple authors
- ❖ [Fan-Made Materials on the Paizo Forum](#)
- ❖ [Fan-Made Maps for Rise of the Runelords](#)
- ❖ [Tools for running RotR in Pathfinder Second Edition](#)
- ❖ [Rise of the Runelords Audiobook](#)
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Rise of the Runelords](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Rise of the Runelords](#)



When I created my original guide to the Pathfinder Adventure Paths in 2021, this was the Big Kahuna, clearly the most popular and most played AP of all

time. It took the #1 spot in both overall rankings and number of players. Four years later, while still very popular, it is no longer #1 in either metric.

On a personal note, I've never been very fond of this Adventure Path. It was better than what came before it, having condensed the long Dungeon magazine Adventure Paths down into six acts, but it still feels like too much combat and not enough plot or roleplaying for me. The latter half of this adventure is a long slog against ogres and giants. However, I'm clearly in the minority there. I think a lot of the love for *Rise of the Runelords* stems not from innate greatness but for how ground-breaking it was and how many people have played it. I honestly don't think it's held up as well as some other early adventures.

There's an anniversary edition, audiobooks, pawns, miniatures, plush dolls, maps, card games and a vast array of fan-made support materials. There is even a Deluxe Collector's Edition covered in faux leather and fancy hardware. *Rise of the Runelords* is the quintessential adventure path.

Rise of the Runelords was originally written as a stand-alone campaign, but it was eventually perceived as the first part of a trilogy of adventure paths sometimes known as the Varisian Trilogy or the Varisia Arc: *Rise of the Runelords*, *Shattered Star* and *Return of the Runelords*.

When Dungeon Magazine was at an end, Paizo Publishing gave subscribers (like me) a choice: get back a prorated portion of your subscription fees or take a chance on the new Adventure Path publications. Like many others, I took the chance and I'm glad I did. Not only did I get the very good *Rise of the Runelords* and eventually many other great adventures, it led me a few years later to try out the playtest for a new game: Pathfinder.

I own the original six books (and the Deluxe Collector's Edition), but I am going to base this review on the collected Anniversary Edition, which is the edition I recommend to anyone looking into *Rise of the Runelords*. The beautiful art and loving details make it rise above even its well-done original. Also, everything was converted from D&D3.5e to a Pathfinder 1st edition format. You can find it [on Amazon](#) or (as a PDF) at the [Paizo webstore](#).

Highlights:

- ❖ This is, without doubt, the most heavily-supported adventure path of them all.
- ❖ *Rise of the Runelords* contains a detailed home base, Sandpoint, with plenty of excellent NPCs and lore. Sandpoint is also the home base for other Paizo adventures and Adventure Paths.
- ❖ It reintroduces goblins as a more interesting and fire-obsessed species.
- ❖ Many GMs and players praise the AP's spooky atmosphere.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ Some of the horror elements are intense... and gross. Caution is advised, especially if any of the players are children. This is true of Book 2: *The Skinsaw Murders* and doubly so of Book 3: *Hook Mountain Massacre*. This is the reason I've never played or GM'ed this adventure.
- ❖ The game starts off with plenty of role-playing and exploration, but ends up with little role-playing in the last three volumes.
- ❖ Book 4: *Fortress of the Stone Giants* is often cited as being too repetitive. Too many, y'know, stone giants.
- ❖ As seems to be the case for several of the best-loved Paizo adventure paths, the final villain seems to come out of nowhere. The GM knows they're behind all the badness, but the player characters don't and it can feel sudden and disconnected to the rest of the plot. GM's should work to leaven the earlier books in the series with references to the final villain so that it is less of a surprise. Imagine if Frodo and Gandalf had never heard of Sauron before arriving in Mordor..

GM TIPS:

- ❖ Make sure the presence of the BBEG (Big Bad Evil Guy) is apparent much earlier in the campaign. This can be done with letters the PC's find, or villains that refer to the BBEG and with books that reveal some of the history of Thassilon. Nothing is lost this way and much is gained.
- ❖ Look through the many, many Pathfinder monsters available and replace a lot of the giants in books 3 and 4. Fighting endless hordes of giants (or any one sort of foe) is just boring.
- ❖ Reddit User Tabgap suggests having Karzoug actually show up *much* earlier for mock fights with the PCs at lower levels. "Have him

transmute out of rocks to taunt the players. This will make beating him in the end more impactful. Use NPCs from Sandpoint as story reasons for why it was beneficial to kill him."

- ❖ Tabgap also says "Don't just use the sin point system as a point aggregator. If the PCs do something sinful, record the actions in notes and do a flashback to their deeds when they enter the associated sin area in book 6."
- ❖ **SPOILERS!** Highlight the invisio-text to read:

Curse of the Crimson Throne

Tarondor's Ranking: 2nd

Poll Rating and Rank: (8.1) 2nd

Date: 2008-August 2008; Hardcover Edition October 2016

Authors: Nicolas Logue, F. Wesley Schneider, Richard Pett, Michael Kortess, Greg A. Vaughan, and Tito Leati

Level Range: 1-16

Original System: Dungeons & Dragons 3.5 Edition
(Hardcover Edition: Pathfinder 1st Edition)

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [Curse of the Crimson Throne 2e Conversion Guide](#)
- ❖ [Full \(mostly\) Conversion to Pathfinder Second Edition](#)
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Curse of the Crimson Throne](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Curse of the Crimson Throne](#)



In my opinion, despite being one of the oldest adventure paths, this is among the best because of its excellent plot and its mix of exciting locations and wonderful villains.

I own the original six books, but I am going to base this review on the hardback edition, which updated everything to pathfinder 1st Edition. The art is new and the layout is gorgeous! You can find it [on Amazon](#) or (as a PDF) at the [Paizo webstore](#).

Curse of the Crimson Throne is a masterpiece. The NPCs and the setting are carefully crafted, especially in the first half of the game, which all takes place in the same setting. The second half is also very good, but doesn't dwell in one place and so the PCs are bound to feel less connected to the people and places. What sets *Curse of the Crimson Throne* apart from other campaigns and adventure paths that also feature excellent settings is the way the PCs are woven into the life of the city. Your PCs will almost certainly *care* about the city and its fate, which is critical to making the adventure feel personal.

The first half of *Curse of the Crimson Throne* takes place in the city of Korvosa, where the new queen has implemented draconian laws that oppress the people and are soon exacerbated by a terrible plague. Books 4 and 5 take you into the wilderness of Varisia and then in Book 6 the adventure returns to where it began, in Korvosa. This makes *Curse of the Crimson Throne* an excellent adventure path to try out all those urban options you might otherwise avoid.

I'm going to let Reddit User beastieboyz have the last word on this one: "*In all, I think this one earns its place as a top-tier AP. I'd put it at the very top, and I'd tell a group that if they had to pick one AP to run, pick this one.*"

Highlights:

- ❖ Great story
- ❖ Good balance of role-playing, exploration and combat.
- ❖ Plenty of scope for inserting your own city-based organizations or side quests.

- ❖ Plenty of scope for the players to become invested in the city and make it their own.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ Some people have commented that they wish the campaign had not left the city, and regard Books 4 and 5 as extraneous, especially Book 4, *A History of Ashes*.
- ❖ Book 2: *Seven Days to the Grave*, can be very free-form and requires the GM to juggle the player character's activities with events in the city to form a coherent narrative. In other words, GM's can't expect to stick to a script here.
- ❖ Book 5, *Skeletons of Scarwall* is a lot for beginner GM's to handle.

GM Tips:

- ❖ Make sure you read Book 5 carefully and understand how it all works before you begin!
- ❖ Make sure your players know the game is not about vigilante justice, because the Player's Guide implies that it is.
- ❖ If you're using a VTT, check out [u/lazyferretmaps](https://www.reddit.com/r/pathfinder/comments/3qz8qz/u_lazyferretmaps/) to make your life easier.
- ❖ GM's may wish to have the following resources:
 - [Pathfinder Chronicles: Guide to Korvosa](#)
 - [Pathfinder Chronicles: City of Strangers](#)
 - [Pathfinder Module: Academy of Secrets](#)
 - [A Harrow Deck](#)

Second Darkness

Tarondor's Ranking: 44th

Poll Rating and Rank: (4.4) 44th

Date: August 2008-January 2009

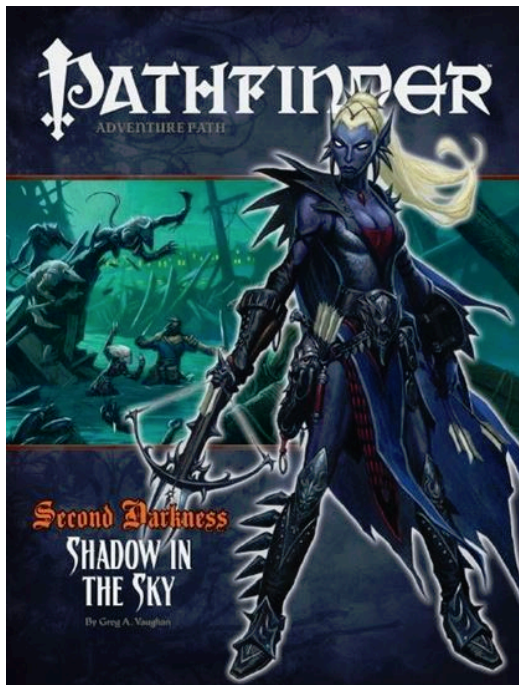
Authors: Greg A. Vaughan, Mike McArtor, Jason Buhlman, F. Wesley Schneider, JD Wiker, Brian Cortijo

Level Range: 1-16

Original System: Dungeons & Dragons 3.5 Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Second Darkness](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Second Darkness](#)



Widely viewed as the worst of the adventure paths, *Second Darkness* is rarely given a chance to shine these days, and understandably so. At first glance, this adventure path has everything going for it: ancient secrets the elves are willing to die to protect, a secret war going for thousands of years, infiltrating a noble house in a drow city, a secret drow superweapon that could devastate Golarion. What more could you want from a campaign? Handled more deftly, all the ingredients are there for a classic that would have continued the momentum of *Rise of the Runelords* and *Curse of the Crimson Throne*. So what went wrong?

WARNING! MILD SPOILERS AHEAD!

The complaints about this adventure path fall into three categories: 1) the first volume strongly encourages player characters to be focused on making money and discourages ethical characters, then much of the rest of the campaign assumes that the player characters will make ethical and selfless choices; 2) that the tonal shift from volumes 1 and 2 to volumes 3 through 6 is so strong as to be difficult to overcome; and 3) that the people you are supposed to help and sacrifice for are just complete jerks from start to finish (“jerks” isn’t the word reviewers actually used most often...)

Highlights:

- ❖ A cool backstory, which with work could be made to really shine.
- ❖ A good balance of role-playing and combat. Unfortunately, you’re uniformly role-playing with asshats.
- ❖ Ancient secrets and lots of them!
- ❖ Hideously powerful drow weapon about to recreate Earthfall!
- ❖ Infiltrating a drow noble house.
- ❖ Volume 6: *Descent into Midnight* is a tense and moody foray into the Darklands.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ Poor expectation management. Players are told to make characters interested primarily in making money and surviving the mean streets of Riddleport. They invest in a business and a city and then in volume 2 they leave those behind and never return.
- ❖ Wearing drow corpses as disguises. It’s disgusting and really only there for low-brow shock value. Ordinary disguises or illusions would have done just fine.
- ❖ The PCs are betrayed by their allies several times. Once is more than enough in a single story and players are going to be really sick of it.
- ❖ The drow are portrayed as lethal and terrifying until you meet them, but then they’re mostly lower-level fodder.
- ❖ The transition into Volume 3 and later can feel as though you’ve been drafted to fight in someone else’s war, a war which *appears* to be just blind race hatred.

Suggestions to Improve *Second Darkness*

- ❖ Require all player characters to be elves or half-elves.
- ❖ Rewrite many or most NPC elves to be more likable and interesting, so as to give the PCs a reason or desire to help them.
- ❖ Rewrite at least the first half of Volume 5: *A Memory of Darkness* so that the PC's aren't betrayed again.
- ❖ Have the Winter Council at least *seem* to take the PCs' evidence seriously.

Legacy of Fire

Tarondor's Ranking: 27th

Poll Rating and Rank: (5.5) 38th

Date: March 2009 to July 2009

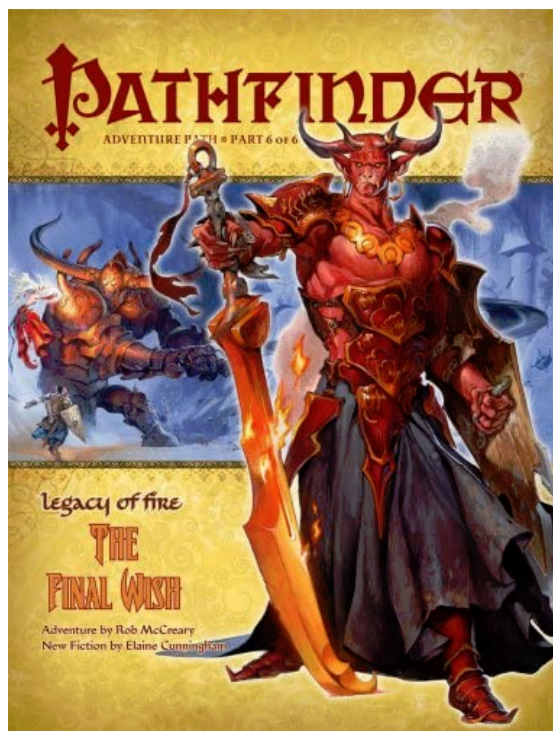
Authors: Eric Mona, Tim Hitchcock, Darrin Drader, Jason Nelson,
Greg A. Vaughan, Rob McCreary

Level Range: 1-15

Original System: Dungeons & Dragons 3.5 Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [Jason Nelson's original notes for Kakishon](#)
- ❖ [The Ruined Undercrypt of Kelmarane](#)
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Legacy of Fire](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Legacy of Fire](#)



This is the first adventure path I ever GMed and I have very fond memories of it. With just a few exceptions, my team had an absolute blast with the whole "Arabian Nights" and "[Ray Harryhausen's Sinbad/Jason and the Argonauts](#)" feel of the campaign.

The story is really a trilogy, rising steadily from the dusty and mundane to the highest of fantasy. The first part takes place in and around a small village where the heroes establish themselves as protectors in the best *Seven Samurai* tradition. From there they go on to face the fearsome Carrion King. In the second part, they deal with Sinbad-like voyages of discovery and in the third, turn their attention to the politics of the inner planes and an unlikely plot to use genie wishes to bring about an apocalypse in the name of love.

Unfortunately, the fun comes to a screeching halt in the third volume: *The Jackal's Price*. There, the usual railroading of any adventure path moves from having to follow where the story leads (okay railroading) to having to make the choices the author dictates (very not okay railroading). Knowing my players would not enjoy or stand for being dictated to, I instead threw out this volume and inserted a Sinbad-like tale of shipwrecks and improbably magical islands that my players enjoyed quite a bit and used that as the connective sinew between volumes 2 and 4.

Volume 4: *The End of Eternity* is sometimes mentioned online as not working well (a few reviewers really hated it), but I have to tell you that it was the single most memorable part of this entire adventure path for my group and **still one of the best times I've had GMing in more than four decades**. The mixture of role-playing and exploration was a lot of fun and my players enjoyed the politics going on between the proteans and the shaitans. This was helped in no small part by availing myself of Jason Nelson's extensive notes on the plane of Kakishon (see link above). There were parts of Kakishon we only touched on that could have been whole mini-campaigns in and of themselves. Without Jason's notes I think this volume of the adventure would have been more cut-and-dried and not really memorable at all. If you're going to play this adventure, get those notes! I also suggest setting up some sort of market visited by the various genies and elementals so that the PCs have some place to buy and sell before heading into volume 5.

In volume 5: *The Impossible Eye*, you travel to the City of Brass and encounter an enjoyable dungeon crawl (that my players still talk about a decade later). The second part, in the City of Brass, was a bit of a letdown as it wasn't fleshed out much. This part will shine with some effort on the

GM's part and a willingness to follow the PCs lead. They've just spent one and a half volumes unable to buy or sell anything and now they're in the most famous market in the multiverse! GMs would be well advised to prepare some fabulous objects for sale and even some short side quests in the city to make it feel grander.

Volume 6: *The Final Wish* suffers from the same problem that plagues so many Paizo adventure paths - the final villain seems to come out of nowhere from the player's perspective. The GM knows he's behind all the stuff going on in the adventure and that *Legacy of Fire* is at its heart a tale of hopeless love, but the PCs only learn this at the end, and that's a shame. If I ran it again, I'd be sure to foreshadow the final villain and his quest for love from the start. I might even use a framing device like Scheherazade's tale in *Arabian Nights*.

Highlights:

- ❖ Perfectly captures the feel of *The Arabian Nights* and old Ray Harryhausen films like "[The Golden Voyage of Sinbad](#)" and "[Jason and the Argonauts](#)."
- ❖ Defending a village as in *The Seven Samurai* or *The Magnificent Seven*.
- ❖ Gnolls. Lots of gnolls.
- ❖ The City of Brass, baby!
- ❖ The demiplane of Kakishon and the rivalry between creation and destruction are great fun and good role-playing fodder.
- ❖ A great mix of combat and exploration.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ The third volume utterly removes player agency in an important decision.
- ❖ With a few exceptions, there is much less diplomacy, role-playing and negotiation in this adventure path than in others. This is much more of a "kick in the door" type of story. Characters hoping for lots of intrigue and diplomacy might feel disappointed.
- ❖ The story is less polished than *Rise of the Runelords* or *Curse of the Crimson Throne*. Several commenters noted that it feels "rushed."
- ❖ The driving forces behind the scenes are mostly unknown to the PCs for the first 85% of the story.

- ❖ The PCs spend all of volume 4 and most of volume 5 without any way to purchase or sell gear.
- ❖ The overwhelming number of fire creatures can get monotonous. It wasn't a problem for my group because we bought into the title from the beginning, but it might wear on some groups.

Note: In this reviewer's opinion, *Legacy of Fire* isn't in the top tier of adventure paths because it needs some work to breathe life into it. However, it requires a lot less work than some others and the result is a lot of fun. This one really is a diamond in the rough.

GM's Tips:

- ❖ Find ways to tell the legend of Jhavul and his wishes to the PCs early and remind them of it often.
- ❖ If you're playing Pathfinder 1e, limit the "Finding Haleen" trait to **either** +1 hp **or** +1 skill point per level, not both.
- ❖ Get Jason Nelson's notes on Kakishon.
- ❖ Consider rewriting Volume 3 altogether or look for ways to make player agency more relevant (or at least to *seem* more relevant) in the Pactmasters' offer.
- ❖ Be prepared to expand on the City of Brass. Have lots of interesting places ready to buy and sell gear. This is the #1 thing I wish I had done.

Council of Thieves

Tarondor's Ranking: 42nd

Poll Rating and Rank: (5.2) 40th

Date: August 2009 - February 2010

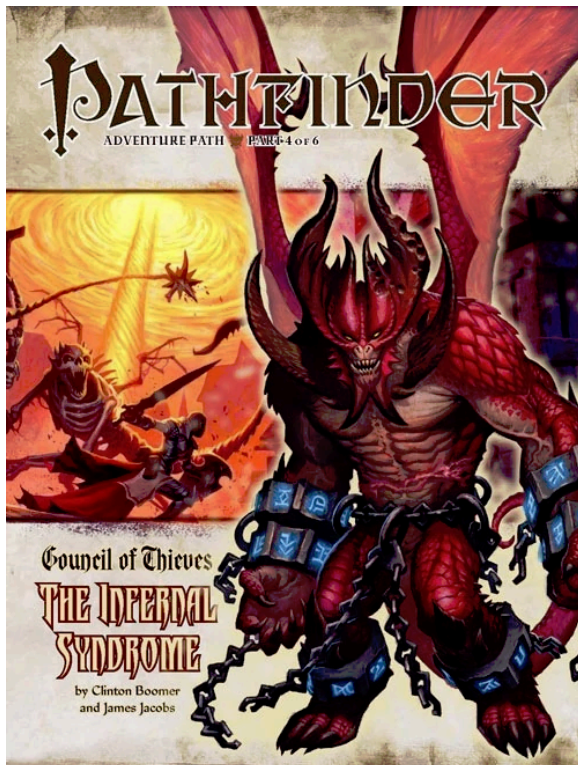
Authors: Sean K. Reynolds, Richard Pett, Michael Kortes, Clinton Boomer, James Jacobs, Greg A. Vaughan, Brian Cortijo

Level Range: 1-13

Original System: Pathfinder 1st Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Council of Thieves](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Council of Thieves](#)



This was the first adventure path ever written specifically for the then-new Pathfinder role-playing game (what we now call First Edition). Sadly, that is one of its few claims to greatness. *Council of Thieves* is the role-playing equivalent of dropping your ice cream cone on your shoes - it's not a disaster, but it's not so much fun, either. I think it vies with *Serpent's Skull* as the most forgettable adventure path

Council of Thieves shares its worst sin with *Second Darkness*: poor expectation management. The campaign is billed as being “revolution in Cheliax”, where you get to play freedom fighters against an oppressive regime, an epic tale of guerilla warfare. Instead, you fight hordes of devils, are almost never involved in any sort of freedom fighting and basically wind up in a squabble between spoiled tiefling kids. It’s a hard let-down. **Note:** If you’re looking for “revolution in Cheliax”, get a copy of *Hell’s Rebels*.

Volume 2: *The Sixfold Trial* seems to have a polarizing effect on players. They either hate it or love it. It involves reading lines from an actual scripted play and getting your thespian on.

Once again, I’m going to let Reddit User beastieboyz have the last word on this AP: “*It's not bad, but there are like a dozen APs I'd suggest running over this one. It's just there.*”

Highlights:

- ❖ Interesting dungeon crawls.
- ❖ Lots of opportunities for roleplaying.
- ❖ Some people really love volume 2: *The Sixfold Trial* quite a bit. Y’know, not me, but some people. :-)

Drawbacks:

- ❖ You’re not the revolutionaries you were told you would be
- ❖ The whole adventure path is just bland.
- ❖ The pacing is slow
- ❖ The final villains are a pair of whiny kids.

Kingmaker

Tarondor's Ranking: 5th

Poll Rating and Rank: (6.7) 23rd

Date: March 2010 - July 2010

Authors: Tim Hitchcock, Rob McCreary, Greg A. Vaughan, Neil Spicer, Jason Nelson, Richard Pett.

Level Range: 1-17 (1-20 in the 2e version)

Original System: Pathfinder 1st Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [Dudemeister's Kingmaker ideas](#)
- ❖ [Nevarre's Kingmaker ideas](#)
- ❖ [Legendary Games's "Ultimate Rulership"](#)
- ❖ [Rethrisse's Homebrew Kingdom Rules](#)
- ❖ [Vance and Kerenshara's Comprehensive Pathfinder 2e Kingdom Building Rule Changes](#)
- ❖ [Sugar-Fueled Gamers' Kingmaker Podcast](#)
- ❖ Reddit Forums:
 - [Reddit Discussion of Kingmaker 1e](#)
 - [Reddit Discussion of Kingmaker 2e](#)
- ❖ Paizo Forums:
 - [Paizo Forums Discussion of Kingmaker for D&D & Pathfinder 1e](#)
 - [Paizo Forums Discussion of Kingmaker for Pathfinder 2e](#)



Kingmaker is my favorite Adventure Path! It is a different sort of campaign. It is by far the most sandboxy of the adventure paths and this provides both its best and worst features, depending on your point of view. It has some of the best writing and story of an adventure path and should be on nearly every gamer's "must play" list.

Kingmaker itself was published as six adventure path booklets in 2010. It was made into the [Pathfinder:Kingmaker computer game](#) by Owlcat games in 2018. And it was [remade as a hardcover for the Pathfinder Second Edition](#) rules in September of 2022. Paizo even sells a *Kingmaker* bestiary for D&D 5th Edition.

In *Kingmaker*, you get to clear a wilderness of dangers, establish your own kingdom and decide your own relationships with the wilderness, civilization, barbarian neighbors, indigenous fey and neighboring realms. Decisions you make early on can send the story in many different directions if you have a skilful GM willing to regard the adventure path as a framework instead of a straitjacket. Exploration is important early on, while war, treachery, diplomacy, knightly tournaments all abound.

More than any other adventure path, this one is driven largely by the choices the PCs make. It has a leisurely pace if they want it to, with months or years passing between volumes of the adventure path. Perfect for players who want to build that wizard's tower and get to work crafting wands or whatnot.

Then too, there is a lot of space between adventures to bring in other side quests and stories. A common choice is to insert Neil Spicer's [Realm of the Fellnight Queen](#). Others will include fey-related adventures such as [Conquest of the Bloodsworn Vale](#), [The Harrowing](#) or [Carnival of Tears](#).

This very flexibility can also work against the adventure path, however, if the GM doesn't get the players to buy into some firm background rules about runaway economies and too many magical items. The Kingdom-building rules found in Volume 2: *Rivers Run Red* are very clunky and easily broken if you look at them as a game to be won rather than a set of guidelines for fun. There are many revised kingdom-building systems out there, but

they're still easy to abuse if that's what you're going for. I made my PCs agree not to use the kingdom's treasure for their own and we generally ignored the magic item production rules and found the whole thing worked very well from there on.

It's often said that *Kingmaker* requires a great deal of bookkeeping. This is only true if you're interested in building a custom kingdom, which I strongly recommend. If you want to, you can use the "Kingdom in the Background" option and simply play the adventure path without focusing on the details of the kingdom's growth. Most *Kingmaker* campaigns pursue hexploration and kingdom-building for the first half of the adventure path or so, then choose the Kingdom in the Background option and concentrate on warfare and the building story after that.

One complaint some reviewers have is "there's no roleplaying in *Kingmaker!*". This is just plain untrue. Because this is a sandbox, there is no expectation that most encounters will end in a fight (many will anyway, of course). Many or most encounters can and should begin and maybe end in roleplaying. A foe or faction one group fights could become another group's loyal allies. Or fractious troublemakers, or whatever the GM decides.

Finally, let's talk about the final villain. Many final villains in Paizo adventure paths seem to come out of the blue, but none is more surprising and apparently unrelated to the events of the first five books than the villain of *Kingmaker*. So GMs are well advised to make sure the PCs have heard of this villain (even if they don't know what she wants or why) much earlier. See [Nevarre's Kingmaker Ideas](#) for ways this can be done.

The computer game *Pathfinder:Kingmaker* did a lot to foreshadow the final villain much earlier in the game, and the update of the Kingmaker AP to Pathfinder 2nd Edition did a good job incorporating many of those additions to make this a much less glaring problem.

Overall I recommend the version for 2e even if you're playing 1e and have to convert it back. The story beats and extra material is just that much better than in the original (which, let's be clear, I also loved).

Highlights:

- ❖ Easily the most sandboxy and least railroading of any adventure path.
- ❖ One of the most interesting stories of any adventure path.
- ❖ The player characters aren't always reacting to the story. Usually it's the story reacting to the player characters.
- ❖ The level of role-playing is entirely up to the players and GM. It could be nothing but a series of kick-in-the-door fights or you could go several sessions without swinging a sword if you decide that diplomacy and nation-building are the way you want to go.
- ❖ The huge amount of territory permits the GM to insert terrain, towns, even cities as they please.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ In the original 1e version, there is little overarching story until the final chapter. Before that, there are merely a series of events (very fun and interesting events) that don't appear to be connected.
- ❖ Because combat encounters rarely occur more than once per day, combat is sometimes trivial (honestly, I don't see this as a problem, but some commenters do).
- ❖ **This is *not* an adventure path for a beginner GM.** Because the characters can make their own choices about direction and priorities, a GM can't simply prepare the next scene and must be experienced enough to pivot when the PCs want to do something unexpected.
- ❖ According to the poll, for every three players who love this AP, there appears to be one that loathes it. The data shows that most votes are clustered at 8 and above, but there is a significant minority who voted 4 and below. Read the Reddit comments to find out why. I don't agree with them, but I want you to know their opinions if you're thinking of running this AP.

GM Tips:

- ❖ Just because you start off using the Kingdom-building rules doesn't mean you have to do so forever. Do it until it's no longer fun. My group enjoyed it until they didn't and we gave it up in Book 4. This makes sense to me. When you're in charge of a couple of settlements, you probably do get involved in the day-to-day decisions of which structures to build and where to put the docks and so forth. But when

you're in charge of a huge duchy or kingdom, you've got lesser nobles and knights to deal with that.

- ❖ Do yourself a favor and look at the link to [Dudemeister's Kingmaker ideas](#). Especially "[Hargulka's Monster Kingdom](#)." I used that and loved it.
- ❖ Check out the two alternate kingdom-building rule sets I linked to above. Some great ideas there.
- ❖ Reddit User Illythar recommends substituting the board game [Command and Colors](#) (presumably the medieval variant) for Kingmaker's mass combat system. I haven't tried it, but it sounds like an interesting idea.
- ❖ Consider involving the Brevoyn civil war in your story more. After all, that's what starts the whole settlement of the Stolen Lands in the first place. Book 4: *War of the River Kings* is a great place to do that. The Tiger Lords could be pawns or allies of Issia and the Surtovas.
- ❖ Be aware that when you look up this AP online, most of the discussions you'll see are for *Pathfinder: Kingmaker*. That's the computer game. You'll want to google "Kingmaker Adventure Path" instead. Or perhaps you'll find my old friend, Avalon Hill's [Kingmaker board game](#), which has nothing whatsoever to do with this AP.

Serpent's Skull

Tarondor's Ranking: 43rd

Poll Rating and Rank: (5.4) 39th

Date: August 2010 - February 2011

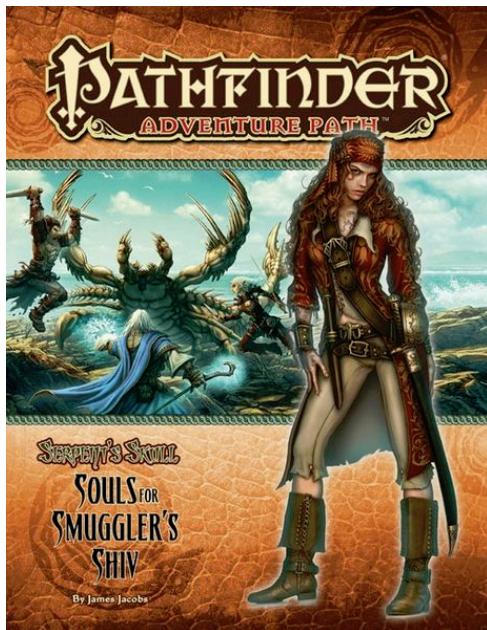
Authors: James Jacobs, Tim Hitchcock, Kevin Kulp, Greg Vaughan,
Graeme Davis, Neil Spicer

Level Range: 1-16

Original System: Pathfinder 1st Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Serpent's Skull](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Serpent's Skull](#)



The usual line about *Serpent's Skull* is that it is an amazing first book followed by five forgettable books. In part, that's true. Volume I: *Souls for Smuggler's Shiv* is a textbook example of how to run a survival game in Pathfinder. The PCs are castaways who must survive the dangerous environs of a jungle island and escape. As a stand-alone adventure, I can't recommend *Souls for Smuggler's Shiv* highly enough. But the rest of the idea, that the other five volumes are terrible, isn't accurate. There is so much potential here for a GM ready and willing to make some changes. More about that later. Mostly, the story of *Serpent's Skull* is a story of wasted potential.

Serpent's Skull is very much a pulp setting in the vein of Indiana Jones, Doc Savage and Alan Quatermain. Exploring a lost city in the jungle, dealing with villainous foes and allies of questionable loyalty, uncovering secrets from before the dawn of man. This is good stuff! But the story simply lacks some of the connective tissue to drive this story.

One of the most common complaints is that for much of the story, the player characters lack motivation to be doing the things they've been requested to do by the Pathfinder Society and meanwhile more capable Pathfinders abound who sit around and don't do these things themselves. Also, the final volume is more or less a series of battles with very little role playing or story.

Another element Pathfinder players may want to consider is the potential for hard feelings about the postcolonial nature of outsiders fighting monkey-like natives for control of a jungle city. For those concerned about racist overtones, I think this could be deftly handled by introducing material from the recent *Mwangi Expanse* and making the power groups involved be Mwangi natives rather than outsiders from Avistan.

Highlights:

- Volume I: *Souls for Smuggler's Shiv* is a ton of fun, even if it feels like it doesn't belong in this story. So what? Fun rules.
- You can't play this without hearing the Indiana Jones soundtrack in your head.
- Great *idea* for an adventure path: Mwangi expanse, lost Azlanti City, Serpentfolk cults!

Drawbacks:

- The PCs aren't given a reason to drive the story forward other than because someone else wants them to.
- Most of Volumes 2-5 share a dreadful sameness (wade through mooks, kill bosses, "conquer" territory).
- Fewer chances for role playing than most adventure paths.
- Yet another AP where the final villains seem to come out of nowhere.

How I would rescue *Serpent's Skull*

The ideas of *Serpent's Skull* deserve to be played out. If I were to GM this, I'd re-write the whole thing by using the ideas and story beats and NPCs but recasting them in a more concise form with more motivation.

First and foremost, I'd make it much, much shorter. This should have been a 3-volume story, and I believe that were it made today, that's how Paizo would address it. The success of 3-volume arcs like *Fists of the Ruby Phoenix* and *Abomination Vaults* shows that the 3-act structure still has tremendous narrative power. I'd map out the major story beats, set them to 3 acts: 1) Jungle; 2) Saventh-Yhi; 3) Ilmurea.

Second, I'd let the explorers and interested parties be from (or mostly from) Garund. I can see factions from Mzali or Magaambya or even Katapesh and Osirion taking an interest.

Third, give the PCs strong and personal motives to explore Saventh-Yhi. If they're Pathfinders, they have a chance to make history, to become Venture Captains. If they're from the Magaambyan Academy, they could be searching for secrets lost since the time of Old Mage Jatembe. Whatever. Let the players pick the faction, then give them a reason to want to explore.

Fourth, drop the whole "conquer parts of the city" idea and instead interact with the various factions and neighborhoods through quests, diplomacy and yes, sometimes combat. Let them choose their own path like a more contained version of *Kingmaker's* sandbox.

Fifth, I'd make sure that the serpentfolk were heavily foreshadowed. The PCs could run across teams of serpentfolk in and around the city and wonder why they're there. They could learn about Ydersius and his cult much earlier.

Carrion Crown

Tarondor's Ranking: 22nd

Poll Rating and Rank: (6.4) 30th

Date: March 2011 - July 2011

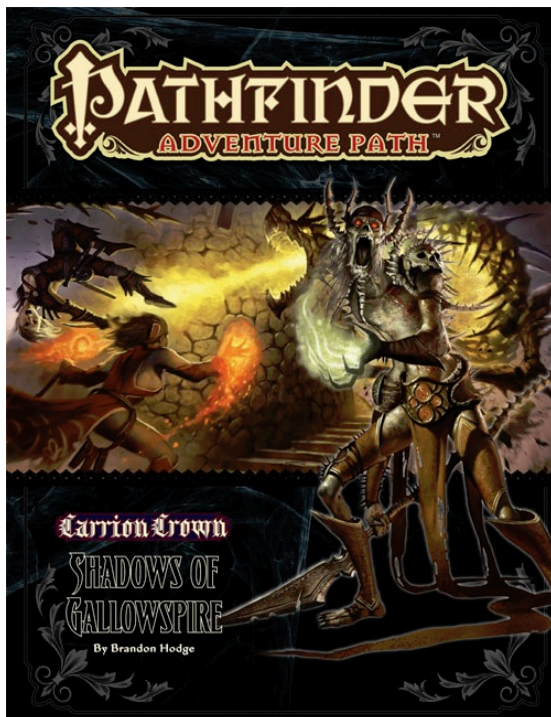
Authors: Michael Kortes, Richard Pett, Tim Hitchcock, Greg A. Vaughan, Neil Spicer, Brandon Hodge

Level Range: 1-15

Original System: Pathfinder 1st Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [Adrissant noble family history?](#) - Useful Reddit post
- ❖ [Rakshaka's Campaign Notes](#) - Recommended reading
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Carrion Crown](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Carrion Crown](#)



Carrion Crown revisits the themes of all the great old horror movies of the 1930's, 1940's and 1950's. This is *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, *The Wolfman*, *The Mummy* and *Creature from the Black Lagoon*. Done right, it's a glorious mixture. And for the most part, it really is done right in this Adventure Path. For old Ravenloft players like myself, this was like a stroll down memory lane. Another apt comparison might be "Tales from the Crypt."

Carrion Crown is surprisingly strong on role-playing, with plenty of chances for social characters to shine. In fact, I'd say that at least one social character is required for survival and you may want to give kick-in-the-doors characters a strong talking-to. They're going to get you killed. Also, trapfinding. Make sure you have someone who's good with traps. Just sayin'.

In the introduction to Book 6: *Shadows of Gallowspire* (p. 5), editor F. Wesley Schneider points out that the major villain should have been introduced much earlier and advocates a cat-and-mouse (or, as Schneider puts it, "Lecter and Starling") with the villain taunting the player characters. That's a great idea. And it's not just the final villain who's introduced too late. The PCs should encounter mention of the Esoteric Order of the Palatine Eye much sooner and actually interact with the Order much earlier.

Highlights:

- ❖ A really good amount of role playing.
- ❖ A fun variety of classic B-movie monster foes.
- ❖ A love-letter to old horror movies.
- ❖ A well-written adventure.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ A fairly simple (and therefore linear) plot.
- ❖ The Trust Point system is unpopular.
- ❖ Many foes have mental resistances or immunities, so players should avoid classes/builds that rely too much on mind-affecting spells and abilities. A common comment is that Witch PCs will be unhappy.
- ❖ Once again, the final villain practically comes out of nowhere. GM's need to start referencing him much earlier to avoid dissonance and dissatisfaction. I'd introduce him as early in the first book as possible.

GM's Tips:

- ❖ The final villain, as written, is going to get steamrolled by a team of competent adventurers. He **NEEDS** to be beefed up and given a stronger team around him. [Here are some ways to do that.](#)
- ❖ Consider adding content from Ustalav-based publications [Rule of Fear](#) and [Carrion Hill](#).
- ❖ The [Rival Guide](#) includes a party from the Whispering Way.

Jade Regent

Tarondor's Ranking: 39th

Poll Rating and Rank: (5.8) 36th

Date: March 2011 - July 2011

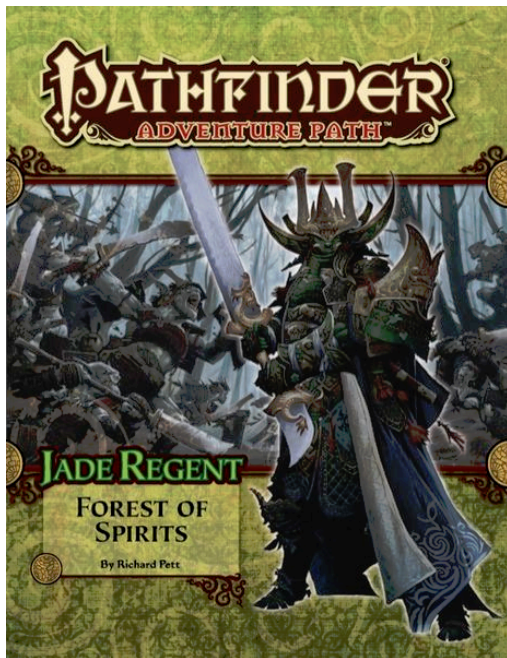
Authors: James Jacobs, Greg A. Vaughan, Jason Nelson, Richard Pett, Tito Leati, Neil Spicer

Level Range: 1-15

Original System: Pathfinder 1st Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Jade Regent](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Jade Regent](#)



What was marketed as the Asian-themed adventure path really wasn't. It was more like Marco Polo's journey, including a goblin story, a viking story and a polar journey, only arriving in Tian Xia halfway through the campaign.

You'll have to wait another ten years for *Fists of the Ruby Phoenix* to really get your samurai on. Even then, Tien culture isn't the focus. I'm still waiting for a samurai-and-daimyo, *47 Ronin* style adventure!

I had to force myself to read *Jade Regent* both times I read it. It just felt disjointed and dull. It's definitely not one of my favorites. This is the sort of adventure path I think about when I think of "too much railroading". One of the most common comments goes something like this: "As written, I give this AP a rating of 3 (or 1 or 4 or whatever), but with some GM work, I'd give it an 8 or 9 out of ten." That, of course, could be said of any Adventure Path. I said something similar about *Legacy of Fire*, but there you go. Lots of people think this is a great AP if you fix a few problems.

The caravan system and caravan combat are just unplayable. They're terrible systems that are best forgotten if you run this AP.

Highlights:

- ❖ A variety of themes, so there's something for everyone.
- ❖ An epic, world-spanning journey
- ❖ Lots of role playing is available with the NPCs who accompany you on this pole-spanning journey.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ The Caravan and Caravan Combat rules just don't work. I suggest you ignore them.
- ❖ The NPC relationship system is pointless. Ignore it too. This is what role playing is for.
- ❖ The NPC Ameiko is the focus of the adventure, not the player characters. That's not to say that the PCs aren't the stars of the show, just that they need to have a really good reason to want to help Ameiko out. I'd strongly suggest having a few sessions that outline the PCs reasons for being so dedicated to this NPC.

Skull and Shackles

Tarondor's Ranking: 25th

Poll Rating and Rank: (6.6) 25th

Date: February 2012 - July 2012

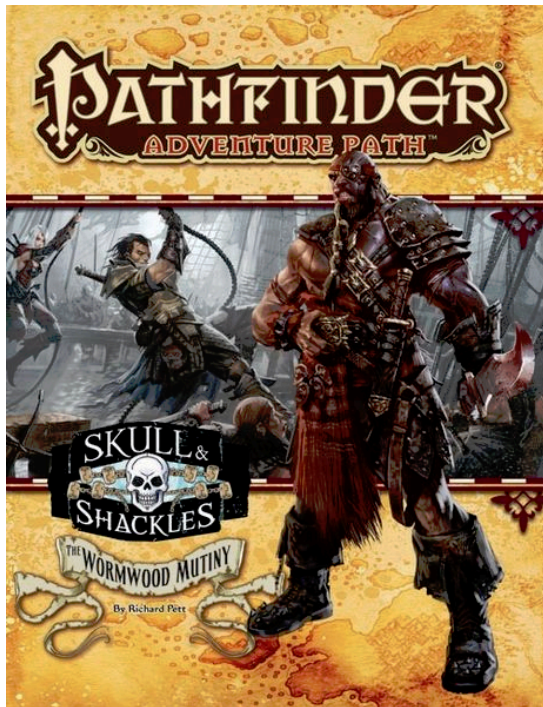
Authors: Richard Pett, Greg A. Vaughan, Matthew Goodall, Neil Spicer
Tim Hitchcock, Jason Nelson

Level Range: 1-15

Original System: Pathfinder 1st Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [PF2e Conversion of Skull and Shackles](#) by VaranSL
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Skull and Shackles](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Skull and Shackles](#)



The pirate adventure path. In addition to all the swashbuckling you can handle, *Skull and Shackles* is also a kingdom-building (fiefdom-building?) adventure and like the *Kingmaker* AP, it has less of an overriding narrative and more of a sandboxy feel.

This adventure path has everything you'd want from a pirate-themed adventure: surviving brutal shipboard discipline, raiding merchant vessels,

digging up buried treasure, naval combat, racing through a hurricane, grog-soaked feasts and backstabbing pirate politics. It's very important that the GM set the player's expectations from the start. You are *pirates*. Good characters will quite simply ruin the fun for everyone. Paladins need not apply.

If I had a nickel for every review I read that said that with some GM work, this could be rated 9 , but as written was only a 4 out of ten, well, I'd have at least six nickels. S'anyway, there's lots to love but GMs have their work cut out for them.

Highlights:

- ❖ Pirates! Yo ho ho! Walk the Plank! Pieces of Eight!
- ❖ You can be evil guilt-free.
- ❖ A great sandbox adventure
- ❖ Tons of opportunities for role-playing.
- ❖ A great setting for guns. And cannons. And hand cannons!
- ❖ Exploration in Volume 4: *Island of Empty Eyes* is fun.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ Volume 1: *The Wormwood Mutiny* is often said to be awful. People point particularly to the **[Hidden with inviso-text:]**
- ❖ Neither the naval combat rules nor the fleet combat system work as intended.
- ❖ The opponents lack variety - they're mostly humanoids.
- ❖ Not a great fit for an inexperienced GM.

GM Tips:

- ❖ Make sure your party buys into the bad-guy pirates theme. Don't let them bring paladins or other high-minded PCs.
- ❖ Prepare to replace the naval combat and fleet combat rules with roleplaying and description, because they just flat-out don't work.
- ❖ Go through the adventure and earmark at least a quarter of the encounters for a change - replace the humanoids with things more exotic...and more aquatic, even if you just reskin the foes as something that *looks* different.

Shattered Star

Tarondor's Ranking: 17th

Poll Rating and Rank: (6.4) 31st

Date: August 2012 - January 2013

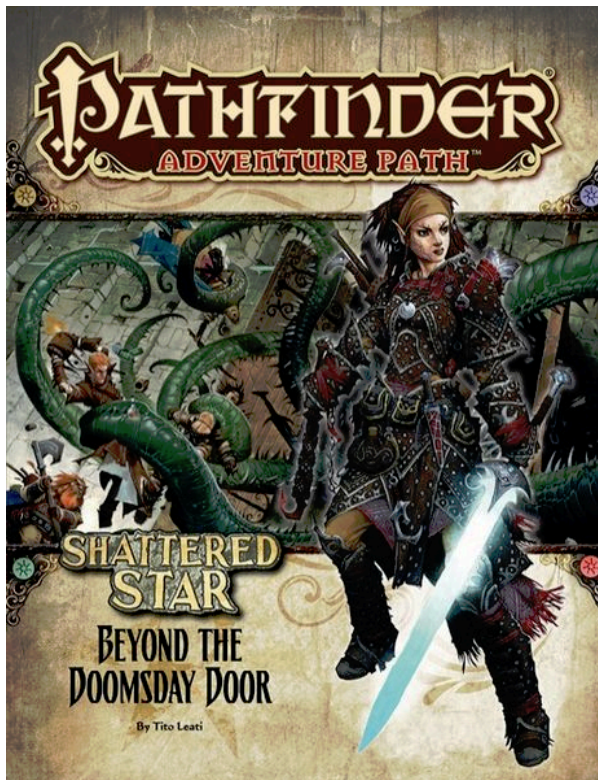
Authors: Greg A. Vaughan, Mike Shel, James L. Sutter, Tito Leati,
Richard Pett, Brandon Hodges

Level Range: 1-17

Original System: Pathfinder 1st Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Shattered Star](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Shattered Star](#)



The single most underrated adventure path ever produced, in my not at all humble and entirely correct opinion! I have to wonder if those who voted in the poll have actually played it, because it rocks! It's far better than many AP's the poll rated more highly.

Shattered Star has three main themes running through it. First, the team must assemble an ancient Azlanti artifact to save the world from an army of ancient clockworks led by a mad undead emperor. This part of the story is very much like that staple of early D&D, *The Rod of Seven Parts*, where each part added to the artifact makes it stronger but brings its own dangers.

The second main theme running through *Shattered Star* is a series of callbacks to earlier adventure paths, bringing in themes and characters from *Rise of the Runelords*, *Curse of the Crimson Throne*, *Second Darkness* and others. The third main theme is dungeon crawling. How do you run a vast megadungeon without making it boring? Break it up into six merely large dungeons and intersperse them with wilderness and city interludes.

There is a *lot* of dungeon crawling. But if you love dungeons like I love dungeons, have I got some dungeons for you! Seriously, *Shattered Star* has some of the most interesting dungeon crawls ever published.

Can you tell that I loved GMing *Shattered Star*? 'Cause **I freakin' loved GMing *Shattered Star*!**

Along with *Rise of the Runelords* and *Return of the Runelords*, this is often considered Part 2 of the Varisia Trilogy.

There are some very tough fights very early on which nearly TPK'ed my group, and there is a fight against **[Spoiler hidden with Inviso-Text:]** in Volume 2: *Curse of the Lady's Light* that my players were wholly unprepared for and only survived by running away and leaving some of their friends behind.

But my players had a lot of fun with the Sihedron (the artifact) and the surprising amount of roleplaying interaction for a dungeon crawl. And there is one trap ("*That Trap*") in *Curse of the Lady's Light* that everyone talks about. You'll know it when you see it. My advice? Make absolutely sure one of your PCs falls victim to *That Trap*. It's more fun that way.

I really think that the first five volumes of *Shattered Star* were a blast. But Volume Six: *The Dead Heart of Xin* was more of a slog. It had some interesting ideas but much of the adventure felt like filler. I think it would be

fine to cut down the combats in this one by half and let the PCs get on with the final big villains!

So NOT a Spoiler: After so many adventure paths where the final villain of book 6 comes out of nowhere, this villain (the Azlanti Emperor Xin) is no surprise! You've known from very early on that you'll be trying to stop Xin and his unstoppable army of constructs. So, kudos to Paizo for finally getting the villain out there early!

Highlights:

- Fun dungeons, each with a unique twist.
- An artifact that gets stronger as you go.
- Callbacks to earlier adventure paths.
- Great locales.
- Plenty of time in urban areas for downtime and shopping.
- Fair balance of role playing and combat through the first five volumes.
- The PCs know exactly why they're doing what they're doing.

Drawbacks:

- The sixth adventure needs paring down
- If you don't like dungeons, you won't like this one.
- "That Trap"; it just ain't for everyone. Think carefully.

Reign of Winter

Tarondor's Ranking: 26th

Poll Rating and Rank: (6.8) 22nd

Date: February 2013 - July 2013

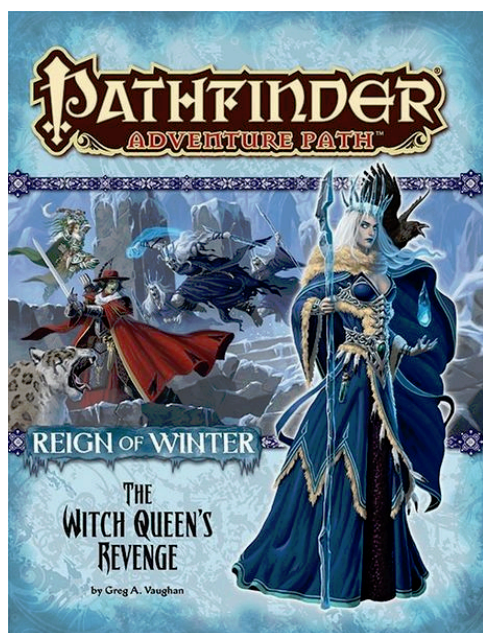
Authors: Neil Spicer, Jim Groves, Tim Hitchcock, Matt Goodall,
Brandon Hodge, Greg A. Vaughan

Level Range: 1-17

Original System: Pathfinder 1st Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [PF2e Conversion of Reign of Winter](#) by Brian Rude
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Reign of Winter](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Reign of Winter](#)



Reign of Winter is very much a Russian fairy tale, complete with Baba Yaga and her dancing hut and many other staples of Slavic folklore. It takes your characters across Golarion, then to other planets and eventually other planes and finally to **[Spoiler hidden with Inviso-Text:]**:

You'll be acting as the agents of an evil witch-queen, even if you are trying to prevent an apocalypse, so this is a bad one for paladins and other

characters with a strong moral code. I don't have a strong feeling for this adventure path one way or the other. It's undeniably well written and yet I can't help feeling that it's missing the spark of greatness. It's just comfortably okay in my opinion.

Highlights:

- ❖ You get to visit a wide variety of locales.
- ❖ Feels like an old-school adventure.
- ❖ You get to gad about in Baba Yaga's dancing hut (no, there is no aircraft carrier).²

Drawbacks:

- ❖ The motivation to be part of this adventure is *terrible*. You're forced to serve the witch Baba Yaga. You may be saving Golarion, but frankly I had more sympathy for the BBEG than my own patron in this thing. I wished I *could* just let Elvanna win. What Baba Yaga did to her and all her predecessors is horrific and being forced to be complicit really sucked. The AP would be 1000% better if you got to stop Elvanna and then square off with Baba Yaga at the end.
- ❖ You won't have much opportunity to settle down and make relationships. Or craft. Or buy and sell. Or really build a relationship with anyone. No NPC stays in the story for very long.
- ❖ It feels campy a lot.
- ❖ Volume 3: *Maiden, Mother, Crone* is a long slog without much development of the story.
- ❖ Volume 5: *Rasputin Must Die!* Introduces modern firearms into the game. If you don't want tanks and repeating rifles in your Pathfinder, beware.

GM's Tips:

- ❖ As with so many Adventure Path villains, make Elvanna more involved with the PCs much earlier. Give the PC's a personal stake in wanting her defeated. And no, saving the world isn't personal enough.

² In an old edition of *Dungeon* magazine, the Dancing Hut had a complete aircraft carrier inside. Seriously.

Wrath of the Righteous

Tarondor's Ranking: 11th

Poll Rating and Rank: (6.9) 21st

Date: August 2013 - February 2014

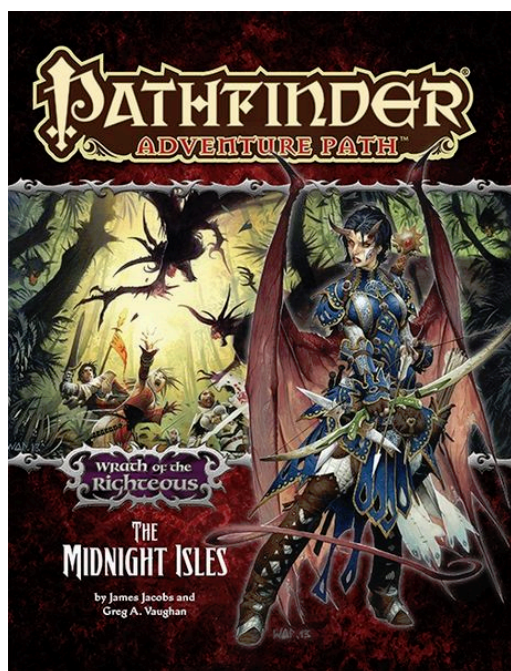
Authors: Amber E. Scott, Neil Spicer, Jim Groves, Greg A. Vaughan,
James Jacobs, Wolfgang Bauer, Richard Pett

Level Range: 1-20 (+10th mythic tier)

Original System: Pathfinder 1st Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [KingTreyIII's PF2e conversion of Wrath of the Righteous](#)
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Wrath of the Righteous](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Wrath of the Righteous](#)



Wrath of the Righteous received a lot of attention because of the Owlcat Games computer game: [Pathfinder: Wrath of the Righteous](#) based on it. Although I've played the computer game, this will solely be a review of the published tabletop adventure path.

First of all, the premise of the game is amazing. You are the chosen ones fighting a horde of demons to save the world and close a path to the Abyss. In *Wrath of the Righteous*, you must fight back against armies of demons

pouring through the Worldwound from the Abyss, retake the fallen city of Drezen, fight the fiendish devotees of Baphomet, Noctacula and Deskari, venture into the Abyss itself and finally, take on the monstrous demon lords themselves. Along the way, you slowly gain divine power yourselves as you ascend towards the status of demigods.

One of the things I love about this adventure path is its dueling themes of vengeance and redemption. What does it mean to be an angel? What does it mean to be a demon? Can an angel fall? Can a demon rise? And what about you, the mortals in between? Will you help either one? Or reject both?

If you know anything at all about the *Wrath of the Righteous* adventure path, you'll know that it uses the Mythic System to let the player characters begin to take on mythic traits. You probably also know those are not well regarded by those who've used them. The usual complaint is that mythic tiers make you so powerful that later fights in the campaign become trivially easy, leading to boredom. Look around Paizo's adventure path forums for a variety of opinions on how to solve that.

The villains are colorful and have goals beyond mustache-twirling evil. The NPCs you meet aren't the focus of the adventure, but do have goals and quests of their own. *This* is the right way to do companions on a quest.

The best part of the whole campaign is a trip to the Abyss. So different from what I've ever done before.

Another claim to fame for *Wrath of the Righteous* is that its first volume: *The Worldwound Incursion*, was the first ever adventure path volume to be written by a woman: Amber E. Scott. I don't know why it took that long, but I'm glad it happened. Congratulations on brushing aside that particular glass ceiling, Amber!

Highlights:

- ❖ Mythic levels of play!
- ❖ As epic a quest as you're ever going to get!
- ❖ A great story.
- ❖ Nuanced NPCs and villains.
- ❖ Lots of fodder for role playing

- ❖ Redemption
- ❖ Corruption
- ❖ Sacrifice

Drawbacks:

- ❖ The Mythic rules are not well-balanced. Perhaps more importantly, they slow down combat considerably.
- ❖ The Mythic rules also dramatically increase the GM's workload and that's never a good thing.
- ❖ TPK's early on, untouchable PCs later. Needs to be fixed.

GM's Tips:

- ❖ While most commentators think you should fix the Mythic rules, either by re-doing them or capping them at Tier 6, a large minority just wants you to lean into the power shift. My personal solution would be to just skip the Mythic rules altogether, for both PCs and their opponents. I do think the PF2e Mythic rules from *War of the Immortals* are better, but I haven't personally tried them out.
- ❖ Take your time with Arushalae. It's no exaggeration to say that she alone is as important as the rest of the AP. Her redemption, or lack of it, is one of the strongest B-stories in all of Pathfinder. Don't let your players turn her into a sexy joke - they have the power to aid a miracle. If they aren't interested in that, they should be playing a different AP.

Mummy's Mask

Tarondor's Ranking: 23rd

Poll Rating and Rank: (6.8) 20th

Date: March 2014 - July 2014

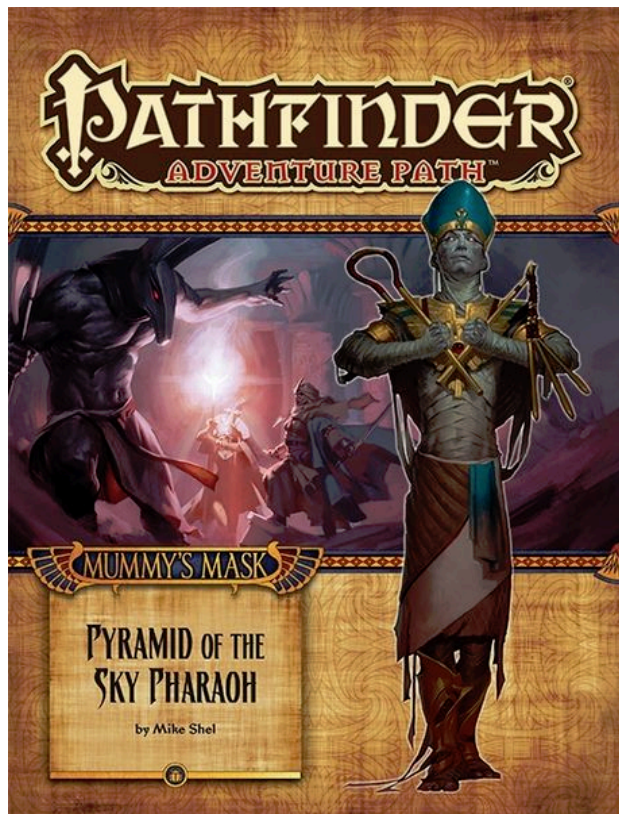
Authors: Crystal Frazier, Richard Pett, Amber Scott, Michael Kortes,
Mike Shel

Level Range: 1-17

Original System: Pathfinder 1st Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [PF2e Conversion for Mummy's Mask](#) by Stephen Bandstra
- ❖ [PF2e Conversion for Mummy's Mask](#) by Trey Bryner
- ❖ [The Mithril Tabletop](#), A Mummy's Mask actual play podcast
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Mummy's Mask](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Mummy's Mask](#)



Mummy's Mask is a straightforward "B Movie" of an adventure path. You explore trap-filled tombs, fight sphinxes and cultists riding out of the desert sun and vast numbers of undead and constructs. What's not to love?

Mummy's Mask is also notable for what's not there: This is the first adventure path since *Shackled City* that doesn't include an author credit for Greg Vaughan, who by this time was in medical school. That's an author credit on 15 straight adventure paths, which is amazing.

Highlights:

- ❖ Great ancient Egyptian flavor
- ❖ Lots of interesting traps
- ❖ Good balance between adventure, combat, roleplay, puzzles, traps, haunts, and research.
- ❖ Simple plot

Drawbacks:

- ❖ The many traps mean that without a trap-finder (and probably a cleric), you will be hurting.
- ❖ Many reviewers mentioned that Book 4 contained hexploration in the desert which they found boring. One group addressed this with a staff that had *teleportation* so they could get back to the capital quickly to sell their stuff.
- ❖ There is a type of bomb-throwing cultist that shows up way too often and feels repetitive.
- ❖ Simple plot
- ❖ If you're not up for tons of undead, constructs and traps, move along!

GM's Tips:

- ❖ Vary the human cultists. Make them occasionally be wizards or archers or magi.

Iron Gods

Tarondor's Ranking: 7th

Poll Rating and Rank: (7.2) 12th

Date: August 2014 - January 2015

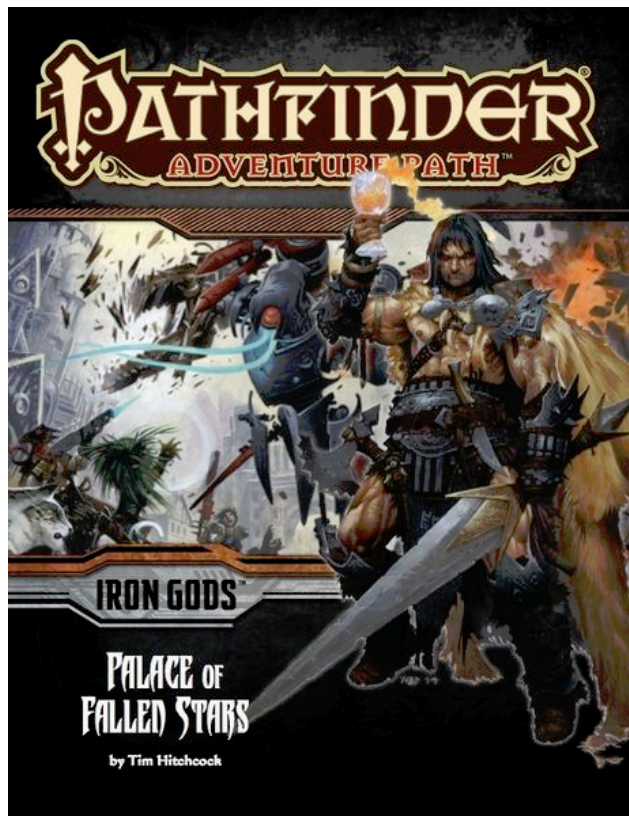
Authors: Neil Spicer, Nicolas Logue, Ron Lundeen, Mike Shel,
Tim Hitchcock, Crystal Frasier

Level Range: 1-17

Original System: Pathfinder 1st Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [Iron Gods Actual Play by Pod Against the Machine](#)
- ❖ [Iron Gods Actual Play by Dungeon Musings](#)
- ❖ [PF2e Conversion of Iron Gods \(Books 1-3\)](#) by multiple authors
- ❖ [PF2e Conversion of Iron Gods \(Books 4-6\)\)](#) by Darbee
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Iron Gods](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Iron Gods](#)



Iron Gods is a departure from previous adventure paths in that it makes significant use of the Technology Guide. A full-throated homage to 1980's [Expedition to the Barrier Peaks](#), this is a tale about fantasy heroes in a

science fantasy setting, complete with lasers, spaceships, teleporters and robots! It takes me back to the obscure comics of my youth [*Magnus: Robot Fighter*](#) and [*Kamandi: The Last Boy on Earth*](#).

Volume 1: *Fires of Creation* looks at what happens to a small Numerian town when it loses the technology that runs its daily life and introduces the first of the Iron Gods, a computer AI exhibiting god-like powers. Volume 2: *Lords of Rust* is a look at the bottom rung of scavenging among the ruins of a greater civilization in a town reminiscent of Bartertown from [*Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome*](#). Volume 3: *The Choking Tower* pits the PCs against a mad scientist experimenting with technology beyond his control. Volume 4: *Valley of the Brain Collectors* involves the heroes in a cold war between two terrifying alien powers. It is here that they meet the second Iron God. Volume 5: *Palace of the Fallen Stars* takes our heroes to the capital of Silver Mount and involves them in a power struggle between the drug-addled barbarian king of Numeria and the backstabbing wizards of the Technic League. Volume 6: *The Divinity Drive* takes the heroes inside the crashed alien ship and sees them confront the awesome power of the greatest of the Iron Gods.

If you don't love the swords-and-lasers genre, feel free to skip this one, but for my money it has one of the best storylines and most interesting NPCs in the whole of the Pathfinder game. Then too, the freshness of fighting robots and lasers is part of the charm of the game and its high rating. If you've been playing a lot of Starfinder, you would probably find it less charming and fresh.

I have three complaints to make about *Iron Gods*: First, it lacks a strong reason for the player characters to move from Book 2 to 3. The motivation to move from 3 to 4 and from 4 to 5 is there, but depends on bonding with (or at least believing) a particular NPC. My second complaint is rocket launchers: They're hilariously bad at damaging, well, anything.

Third and most serious, the final boss is wildly overpowered. Despite having fun for the previous 5 and a ½ books, the complete murderous shellacking given to my veteran players convinced them to swear off coming back to try again with new characters. The creature's offensive and defensive abilities ensured it would kill at least one of them per round. Admittedly, none of

them were min-maxed, but neither were they poorly built. The BBEG is just an absolute beast that might need to be toned down.

Here's a fun bit from my *Iron Gods* campaign: One of my players played an android druid he called "The Technician." The Technician's animal companion was "The Companion." I ruled that when the Technician cast the *reincarnate* spell, the subjects always came back as androids, and represented this as the Technician downloading their mental engrams into android bodies in an android factory he'd discovered in Volume 3.

Highlights:

- ❖ Swords & Sorcery & Robots
- ❖ Wonderful NPCs
- ❖ A great mix of interesting role-playing and interesting combat.
- ❖ The coolest backstory for any villain in Golarion. How the Iron Gods became gods is just *fun*.
- ❖ The town of Scrapwall was so much fun! Working to win over various factions and unite the underdogs really felt like watching a Mad Max movie.
- ❖ Old-style D&D with a modern sensibility.
- ❖ If you're updating this to 2e, this is a perfect place for androids, automatons and gunslingers.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ If you don't want technology (or gunslingers) in your Pathfinder, then hit the eject button right away.
- ❖ The Technology Guide is large and involves a lot of new rules. Nanites, lasers, integrated weaponry, technomancy. It's not for the inexperienced GM
- ❖ Did I mention how overpowering the final boss is? I mean, he's a *god*.

GM TIPS:

- ❖ Tell your players: It's fun to play barbarians in this one, but don't be suckered into playing technology-hating barbarians, because all the coolest toys are technological. You will swiftly wish that -you- had that chainsword!

- ❖ If I were to GM this again, I would get the Technic League involved earlier and establish them as hated villains early.
- ❖ The best thing I did was to give a PC a reason to hate the Smoke Wizard Furkas Xoud - it gave the party a motivation to move between adventures 2 & 3. And Volume 3: *The Choking Tower* is awesome!
- ❖ In Volume 5: *Palace of the Fallen Stars*, once the party gets into the intrigue within the palace and between the palace and the Technic League, it's time to ignore the adventure as written and let the PCs really drive the story. I'm glad I did. It -was- like holding on to the tiger's tail, but they made the story far more interesting than if I'd made them follow a script. Plus, after that, they were ready for the long (and excellent) dungeon crawl that is Book 6.
- ❖ Probably the best piece of advice I've read is that the GM should make sure each PC gets at least one piece of thematically appropriate tech, which can be upgraded to be level appropriate as well.

Giantslayer

Tarondor's Ranking: 40th

Poll Rating and Rank: (5.9) 34th

Date: February 2015 - July 2015

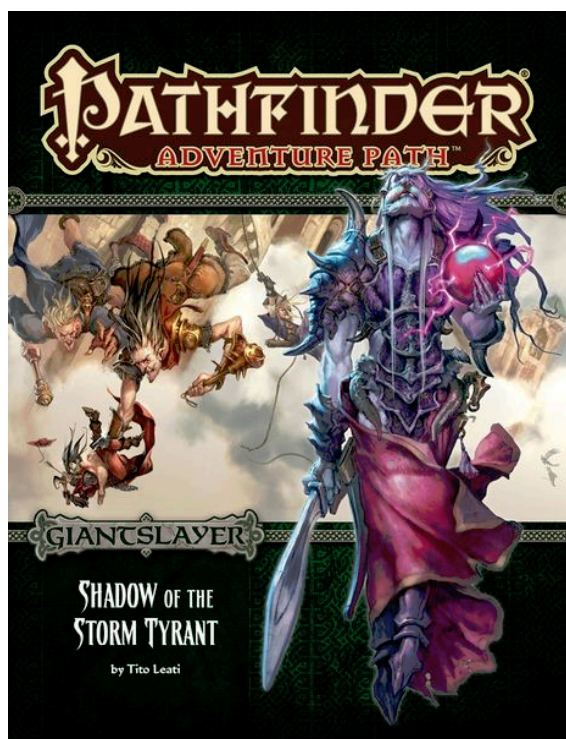
Authors: Patrick Renie, Larry Wilhelm, Tim Hitchcock, Jim Groves,
Sean K. Reynolds, Tito Leati

Level Range: 1-17

Original System: Pathfinder 1st Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [The Glass Cannon Podcast](#) started with a Giantslayer actual play
- ❖ [Order of the Amber Die Giantslayer Marathon](#)
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Giantslayer](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Giantslayer](#)



An homage to the very first series of adventures (1978's [Against the Giants](#)), *Giantslayer* is exactly what it says it is - a huge series of fights against giants. After the exotic adventures of *Wrath of the Righteous* and *Iron Gods*, Paizo was ready for a return to the classics and the result was this tale of stopping a giant army before it gets rolling.

Generally considered one of the weakest adventure paths, *Giantslayer* is often criticized for being boring. It can feel like a never-ending series of giant fights. Because it's a never-ending series of giant fights.

A commonly-expressed opinion is that books 1 and 2 (and sometimes 3) are excellent, whereas Books 4 & 5 are boring. However, many have noted that Book 1 is very dangerous and should be toned down for beginning players. Others view Book 4 as enjoyable because it requires clever guerilla tactics. Personally, I agree with the latter view - Book 4 is "sandboxy" and rewards clever play more than "kick in the door" styles of play. Books 5 and 6 are back to back dungeons without much time between them.

Finally, it's impossible to talk about *Giantslayer* without mentioning the awesome Glass Cannon podcast (link above). A very fun podcast I've listened to for years, that shows *Giantslayer* at its best. I strongly recommend giving it a listen.

The Good

- ❖ Classic Feel
- ❖ Giants are fun to fight.
- ❖ Book 4: *Ice Tomb of the Giant Queen* is a fun free-form adventure where the PCs engage in guerilla tactics to weaken the giant army's morale and cohesion.
- ❖ Glass Cannon Podcast!

Drawbacks:

- ❖ Very little downtime to shop or craft.
- ❖ Can feel monotonous after awhile
- ❖ Deadly for beginners
- ❖ Book 5: *Anvil of Fire* is really a very long series of fire giant fights. However many fire giants you're picturing, it's more than that.
- ❖ Good roleplaying at the start, but very little towards the end.

Hell's Rebels

Tarondor's Ranking: 3rd

Poll Rating and Rank: (7.9) 3rd

Date: September 2015 - January 2016

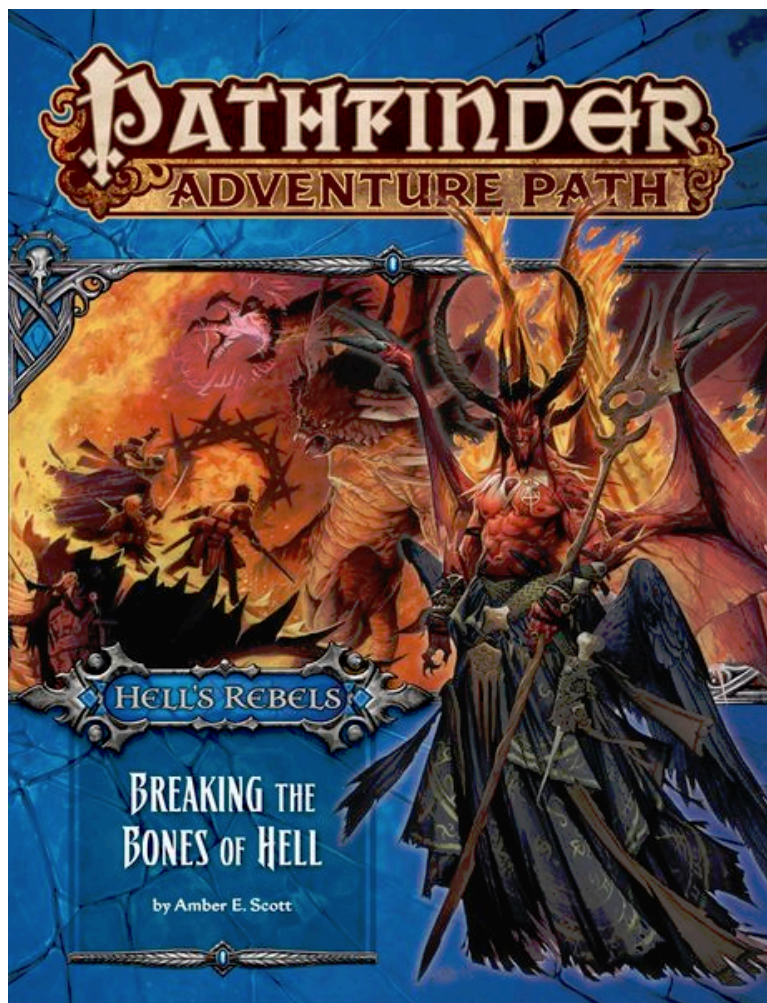
Authors: Crystal Frazier, Mike Shel, Richard Pett, James Jacobs,
Jim Groves, Amber Scott

Level Range: 1-17

Original System: Pathfinder 1st Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [PF2e Conversion of Hell's Rebels](#) by B. Romero
- ❖ [PF2e Conversion of Hell's Rebels](#) by Trey Bryner
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Hell's Rebels](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Hell's Rebels](#)



Hell's Rebels is the story of a guerilla / spy campaign to overthrow a despotic regime in part of devil-haunted Cheliah. If that sounds familiar, it's because it was also the premise of *Council of Thieves*, written five years earlier. But *Hell's Rebels* gets it right. There's no bait-and-switch. You are full-fledged rebels, spies and freedom fighters.

Hell's Rebels is one of the best written adventure paths ever, with engaging situations, interesting role-playing and fun combats. However, some parts of the plot require a willful suspension of disbelief. The rebellion is more or less open and notorious and works from a known location, yet the authorities don't simply show up with thirty hellknights and wipe you out. If your players can't swallow that much, then they may have a problem with this adventure path.

Happening primarily in and around the Chelish city of Kintargo (with plenty of travel elsewhere), *Hell's Rebels* is a great opportunity to use the urban feat options you've been eyeing. The adventure path manages to make Kintargo into an interesting home base that the PCs will care about and want to save.

More than almost any other adventure path, *Hell's Rebels* rewards good role playing and subtlety. Pure kick-in-the-door players will be unhappy with this one. Likewise, a successful party will have at least one player character capable of subtle actions and deception, as well as at least one player character with a heavy emphasis on skills.

One thing GM's might want to mention to players before the game starts, especially new players, is that many of the foes they will be fighting will be devils and to keep in mind standard devil resistances and weaknesses.

Highlights:

- ❖ The adventure path supplies good motivation for the player characters
- ❖ A strong narrative arc
- ❖ A good balance of role playing and combat
- ❖ Is a much better "rebels against devils" story than *Council of Thieves*
- ❖ Combat is challenging without being deadly (with just a few exceptions).
- ❖ Strong, well-written villain leading to a strong story climax.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ The rebellion is open and known rather than secret and underground. That may seem foolish to players not willing to suspend their disbelief.
- ❖ The rules for adjudicating the rebellion feel out of place.
- ❖ A frequent point of complaint about *Hell's Rebels* is the inclusion of the bard Shensen, whom several reviewers felt was an annoying "[Mary Sue](#)" character. The good news is that she's almost always mentioned as the exception to how cool the other NPCs are.

GM's Tip:

- ❖ Ditch the rebellion mini-game. Just let the GM adjudicate what's happening.
- ❖ Require your PCs to have strong connections to Kintargo and to specific people in Kintargo.

Hell's Vengeance

Tarondor's Ranking: 41st

Poll Rating and Rank: (5.6) 37th

Date: February 2016 - August 2016

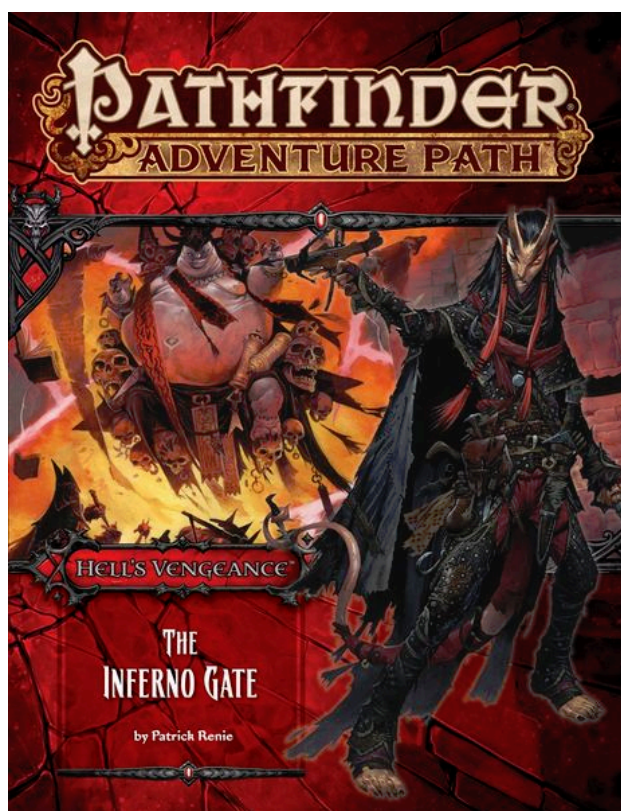
Authors: F. Wesley Schneider, Thurston Hillman, Patrick Renie
Stephen Radney-McFarland, Larry Wilhelm, Ron Lundeen

Level Range: 1-17

Original System: Pathfinder 1st Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Hell's Vengeance](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Hell's Vengeance](#)



Hell's Vengeance is the first and so far only adventure path where the player characters are just straight-up evil (*Skull and Shackles* plays just as well if you're neutral). I'll admit my bias against evil adventures - it feels like childish wish fulfillment to me.

That said, *Hell's Vengeance* is an interesting read because you're seeing the events of the Glorious Reclamation from the villain's point of view. Also, I

applaud Paizo for trying out a new format - it's certainly something that certain players had been clamoring for for years. And like always, the *presentation* of the adventure path carries Paizo's signature high quality - excellent art, articles, layout and new material, all good.

The story starts off a bit slowly, with the player characters as low-level flunkies in the evil hierarchy of Cheliaz whose main motivation is to rise in power. Good backgrounds tying the PC into the House of Thrune or the hellknights would go a long way towards propelling the story.

A good, experienced GM is required for this adventure path to keep the player characters in line. Cheliaz may support evil, but it frowns strongly on chaos. Player characters in *Hell's Vengeance* will need to be just as subtle, just as clever as player characters in *Hell's Rebels* or they're going to get their teeth kicked in by paladins and angels. Strategic and intelligent player characters can thrive, but murderhobos will have a very difficult time as agents of this strongly-aligned lawful nation. Political Intrigue is a big element of the adventure. You're more like SPECTRE than you are the Joker.

Finally, I STRONGLY recommend against GMing or running this adventure path if you are not experienced with the game. It's tough!

Highlights:

- ❖ Well-written
- ❖ A good balance of role playing and combat
- ❖ Lots of spy stuff
- ❖ You get to be evil. You don't have to make your bed or brush your teeth.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ You get to be evil. We have enough of it in the real world.
- ❖ If you thought being evil meant more latitude for your actions, guess again. You're agents of a very controlling lawful power.

Strange Aeons

Tarondor's Ranking: 18th

Poll Rating and Rank: (7.0) 15th

Date: August 2016 - February 2017

Authors: F. Wesley Schneider, Tito Leati, Mike Shel, Richard Pett,
John Compton, Jim Groves

Level Range: 1-17

Original System: Pathfinder 1st Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [The Strange Aeons Experiment](#) with the Order of the Amber Die
- ❖ [Strange Aeons Backstory Items](#) by Darwin3.
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Strange Aeons](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Strange Aeons](#)



Strange Aeons is an amazing Adventure Path if you're willing to put more than usual effort into it *and* if your players are all up for a good round of cosmic horror. Players who want to swing big swords and punch evil in the face (probably without wanting to know too much about said evil) are going to hate this one. The fun to be had is in role-playing people who are afraid of the reality-bending horrors around them.

The main difference between *Strange Aeons* and the average game of *Call of Cthulhu* is that you might just survive *Strange Aeons*. Many (if not most) of Paizo's adventure paths involve some level of Lovecraftian horror, but in *Strange Aeons*, sanity-blasting revelations are aimed at your PC from the very first. That said, not everything Lovecraft wrote was about cosmic horror, and there's a nod to the more whimsical *Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath* in Volume 3: *Dreams of the Yellow King*.

In general, *Strange Aeons* does an excellent job of blending Lovecraftian elements into Pathfinder, but make no mistake - this is Pathfinder with Lovecraftian elements, not *Call of Cthulhu* shoehorned into the Pathfinder rules. You're a big damn hero, not an overworked researcher or spunky reporter. If you are a regular CoC player, this will feel like "Lovecraft-Lite", which is, in my opinion, more or less exactly what I'd want out of this adventure path.

The plot does an excellent job of involving the player characters in the story and driving the story forward. Although your characters will be far more resilient than a *Call of Cthulhu* character, there are enough difficult situations to make you feel as though you barely survived.

Highlights:

- ❖ You get to experience a who's who of Lovecraftian baddies.
- ❖ Book 3: *Dreams of the Yellow King* is highly regarded by many reviewers as among the most interesting and fun volumes in any adventure path.
- ❖ A lot of excellent and atmospheric role-playing here.
- ❖ A decent balance of role-playing and combat, but beware of low-level foes like ghouls, which can tear up a low-level party.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ Book 1: *In Search of Sanity*, is essentially a large dungeon and many of the encounters feel repetitive, patently there only to grant you experience points.

- ❖ “Kick-in-the-door” players will be frustrated. There is plenty of combat, but some of it requires strategy. Caution and intelligent play are rewarded.
- ❖ The game is deadly, but the story is driven by what the main villain did to the PCs, so including new PC’s is somewhat tricky.

GM's Tips:

- ❖ Feel free to cut out many of the combat encounters in Book 1 and simply allow the PC’s to level up when narratively appropriate.
- ❖ Several reviewers mention that they (or their players) didn’t feel well motivated to pursue the main villain (which is what drives much of the story). So GM’s would be well advised to make the stakes more apparent to the PCs and players as well. In short, if your players don’t hate the BBEG enough, you won’t have a good time.
- ❖ More than many AP’s, player character death is a real problem here, interfering with some of the latter narrative points of the story. [Here are some ideas on how to handle that.](#)

Ironfang Invasion

Tarondor's Ranking: 14th

Poll Rating and Rank: (7.0) 17th

Date: March 2017 - July 2017

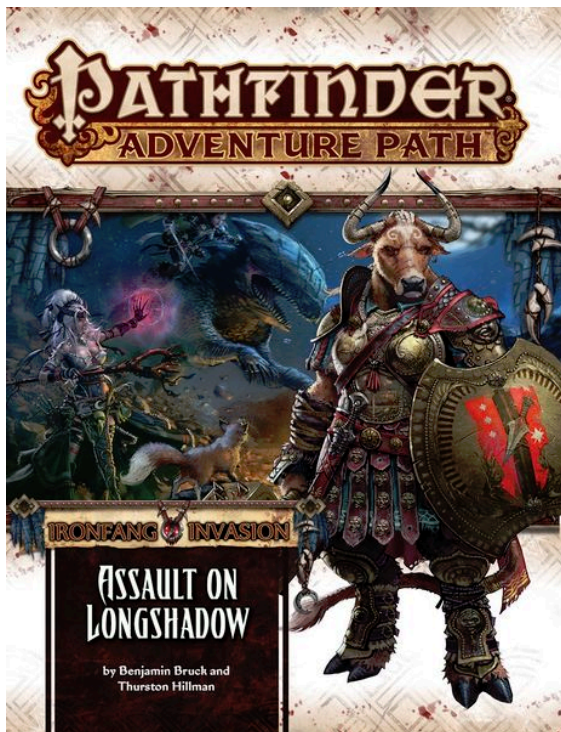
Authors: Amber Scott, Ron Lundeen, Benjamin Bruck, Thurston Hillman,
Amanda Hamon Kunz, Larry Wilhem

Level Range: 1-18

Original System: Pathfinder 1st Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [Ironfang Invasion Actual Play](#) by Miami Dice Podcast
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Ironfang Invasion](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Ironfang Invasion](#)



A good adventure, with a few flaws. At its best, *Ironfang Invasion* feels like you're in charge of a dynamic military machine and your choices matter. The story is excellent at making you feel the weight of fighting against impossible-seeming odds.

The large-scale battles in *Ironfang Invasion* are large, and generally better done than in *Kingmaker*. In fact, *Kingmaker* GM's could do worse than to

have a look at Volumes 2 and 3 of *Ironfang Invasion* for ways to better the combat in their *Kingmaker* campaigns.

Volume 4: *Siege of Stone* is probably the AP's weakest point, despite having some very nice highlights. It feels out of place and more like a railroad than the other five volumes. Volume 5: *Prisoners of the Blight* also feels out of place in the story, but is so cool that you and your players just won't care. The story, the villain, the unique creatures you encounter all make for a fun and memorable adventure. Volume 6: *Vault of the Onyx Citadel* returns you to the main story (fighting hobgoblins) and gives you some remarkable role-playing opportunities in forging alliances, then pits your heroes against the forces of the Vault.

Highlights:

- ❖ Old-School feel, like Robin Hood meets *The Lord of the Rings*.
- ❖ *Ironfang Invasion* is really good at making the PCs feel as though they're fighting overwhelming odds.
- ❖ Good mixture of sandbox and railroad.
- ❖ Interesting final villain and lesser villains.
- ❖ Great adventure for those wanting to use mounts and animal companions or other wilderness abilities.
- ❖ Awesome initial scene. One of the best in any AP.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ Once again, the BBEG is completely obscured from the PCs for the first 5 books, a failing shared by many Paizo AP's.
- ❖ The militia system is widely regarded as difficult or unnecessary.
- ❖ The survival mechanics in Book 1 slow down the game and require a lot of bookkeeping. That said, some reviewers disliked them while others saw them as helping set the desperate tone.
- ❖ Volumes 4 & 5 are a departure from prosecuting the war and some players find that to be a drawback. *Personally*, I think those volumes are a lot of fun, so don't care at all that they're diversions.

GM Tips:

- ❖ Foreshadow General Azaersi as early and as often as possible. Let the PC's see her in the distance in Volume 1 and again halfway through the story, perhaps reviewing her troops.

- ❖ Make sure your players know what they've signed up for. They'll be **forced** to retreat or die in the first volume. Make sure they create characters who won't stupidly stand firm and die. Similarly, make sure they know the survival aspect of the first few volumes is intense and will put pressure on them to be clever.
- ❖ This AP relies on the GM tailoring content to the PC's strengths, especially early on. Let characters with Crafting and Survival skills shine.
- ❖ Several reviewers mentioned that attacking a particular lair of troglodytes (now Xulgath) felt unwarranted, so make sure you let them know earlier how despicable the troglodytes are. Play up their evil ways.

Ruins of Azlant

Tarondor's Ranking: 36th

Poll Rating and Rank: (6.2) 33rd

Date: August 2017 - January 2018

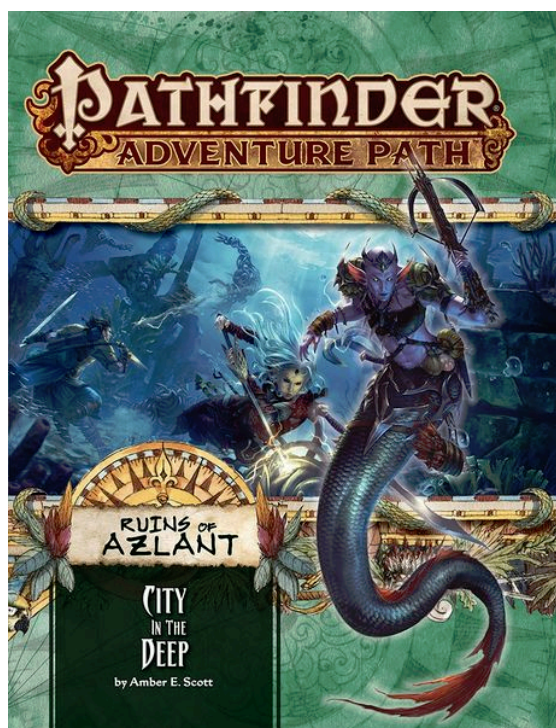
Authors: Jim Groves, Robert Brooks, Mikko Kallio, Amber Scott,
Ron Lundeen, Thurston Hillman

Level Range: 1-17

Original System: Pathfinder 1st Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [The Azlant Odyssey](#) with the Order of the Amber Die
- ❖ [PF2e Conversion of Ruins of Azlant](#) by Trey Bryner
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Ruins of Azlant](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Ruins of Azlant](#)



What begins as a tense mystery about a Roanoke-like lost colony ends up as a history lesson about the Azlanti empire. The first half is interesting and challenging; the second half feels aimless and unsatisfying.

GM's, make sure your players understand that this is *not* a maritime adventure. It is an aquatic adventure. This is not *Skull and Shackles*. You will be underwater a great deal of the time. The Underwater Combat rules are

not just an interesting feature; they are a constant fact of life. Underwater combat begins at first level, so be ready for that or be ready for a TPK.

Highlights:

- If you like Azlanti history, have I got the adventure path for you... to read.
- The lost colony mystery is interesting and can keep your players guessing.
- Volume 4: *City in the Deep* is a lot of fun with some good role-playing.

Drawbacks:

- Underwater Combat rules are a pain in the behind.
- There is a lot more combat in *Ruins of Azlant* than roleplaying.
- The story loses focus and becomes less interesting as it progresses.

War for the Crown

Tarondor's Ranking: 6th

Poll Rating and Rank: (7.3) 10th

Date: February 2018 to July 2018

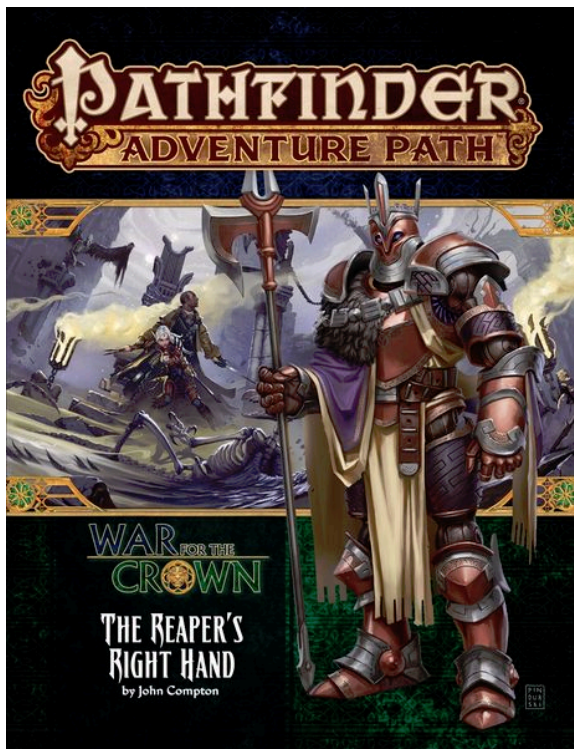
Authors: Thurston Hillman, Richard Pett, Ron Lundeen, Mikko Kaillio
John Compton, Amber Scott

Level Range: 1-18

Original System: Pathfinder 1st Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [PF2e Conversion of War for the Crown](#) by Ediwir
- ❖ [War for the Crown Adventure Recap](#) by Mythkeeper
- ❖ [War for the Crown actual play in 2e](#) by the Side Quest Inn
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of War for the Crown](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of War for the Crown](#)



In *War for the Crown*, the player characters are agents of the Crown Princess of Taldor in her bid for the throne. They act as spies, trouble-shooters, enforcers, investigators and diplomats. It's possible that *War for the Crown* is the most role-playing intensive of all the adventure paths.

Non-Player Characters have agendas and personalities and very often encounters can be (and often should be) handled through non-violent means. While *War for the Crown* does have a plot, it is much less linear than most. Player characters are often free to resolve individual tasks and assignments in whatever manner seems best to them, which means solid roleplaying and clever planning can avoid many fights or build the right coalition to weaken your enemies.

Right off the bat, you're supposed to support Princess Eutropia, and she *is* a great candidate for the throne, but in truth she's not the only one and I could see supporting some of the other candidates (usurpers? Pretenders to the throne?) if the adventure path permitted that, but it doesn't. However it's that lack of clarity that also makes this situation ripe for roleplaying and makes it feel more realistic.

Those who liked *War for the Crown* -really- liked it. Here are some quotes from around the Internet:

"The benchmark by which APs should be judged. Everything about this one is superlative. A+!"

"As a GM who hates long fights and dumb, unnecessary dungeons, it is a blast."

"War for the Crown is a phenomenal experience. Easily the best AP. 10/10."

"It's truly been an experience like no other."

Highlights:

- ❖ Lots of fun.
- ❖ Sandboxy, with a through-line of plot.
- ❖ Tons of role-playing.
- ❖ Tight writing with little filler.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ The Social subsystem is probably best ignored, or replaced with the system from *Ultimate Intrigue*.
- ❖ This ain't *Kingmaker*. You can't pick your own ruler (without a lot of

re-writing and improvising by the GM). You're stuck with the ruler *War for the Crown* wants you to support.

- ❖ So many NPC names to remember. Start taking notes!
- ❖ This is *NOT* the adventure path for kick-in-the-door style players.
- ❖ Because it's so sandboxy and the PCs can resolve things in so many ways, this one involves a lot more GM preparation and flexibility than many AP's.
- ❖ It's probably not ideal for a beginner GM.

GM Tips:

- ❖ Discourage your players from worshipping Norgorber. The Player's Guide says it's okay, but it turns out...not so much.

Return of the Runelords

Tarondor's Ranking: 15th

Poll Rating and Rank: (7.0) 16th

Date: August 2018 - January 2019

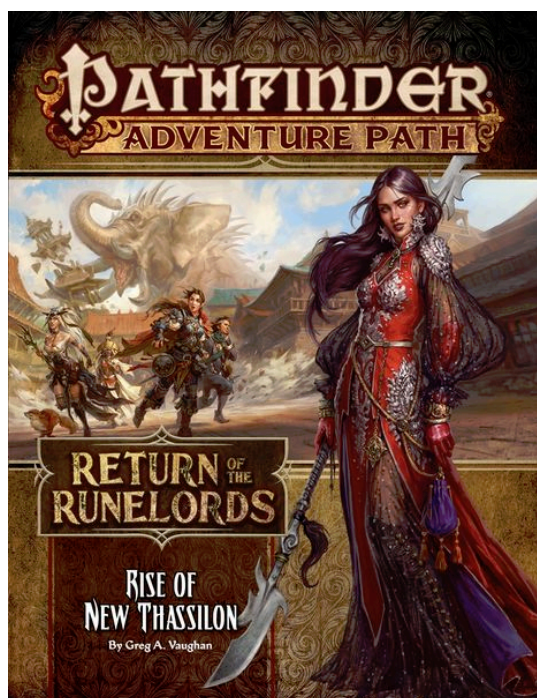
Authors: Adam Daigle, Mike Shel, Richard Pett, Jason Keeley,
Amanda Hamon Kunz, Greg A. Vaughan

Level Range: 1-20

Original System: Pathfinder 1st Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [PF2e Conversion of Return of the Runelords](#) by Trey Bryner
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Return of the Runelords](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Return of the Runelords](#)



With *Rise of the Runelords* and *Shattered Star*, this is the third and last part of the informal Varisia Arc. It is a satisfying conclusion to that arc with many callbacks to the earlier two adventure paths and several surprising reveals of earlier-discovered mysteries. It's unnecessary to have played either of the other two adventure paths to appreciate this one, but there are some fun moments enhanced by prior knowledge.

This is an epic campaign that sees the heroes face off with threats from the forgotten mists of time. Although there will be one more 1e adventure path after this, *Return of the Runelords* serves as a swansong for many elements of Golarion, bringing many old threads to a satisfying conclusion and updating others for the new era to come.

One of the interesting elements of the game are the “Sihedron Heroes”, a group of high-level adventurers meant to represent your PCs from previous campaigns (such as *Rise of the Runelords* and *Shattered Star*). They’ll help or interact with your new heroes from time to time, perhaps giving your old PCs a chance for a brief cameo once again.

The villains are one of the main draws of *Return of the Runelords*. As you probably have guessed, they’re runelords. Lots of them. And luckily they’re far more of a danger to each other than you are. It’s in this interplay between ancient titans that your game takes place as you make your way through the byzantine network of alliances, grudges, hatreds and, well, more hatred that the runelords have for each other. The villains are well-described individuals and are some of the most fun villains in Pathfinder.

I suppose the one thing GM’s ought to know going in is that *Return of the Runelords* is a **[Spoilers Hidden With Inviso-Text:]** . If you don’t like that sort of story, feel free to skip this one.

Again along with *Shattered Star*, I think this is one of the most underrated gems among the adventure paths and well worth checking out.

Highlights:

- ❖ Fantastic villains
- ❖ Great opportunities for role-playing
- ❖ Interesting and varied locales
- ❖ All the Golarion lore that you can handle. Many long-standing mysteries are solved.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ Runelords. Plural. Incautious parties will die. A lot.
- ❖ I got nothing else. I really liked this one.

Tyrant's Grasp

Tarondor's Ranking: 10th

Poll Rating and Rank: (7.1) 14th

Date: February 2019 - August 2019

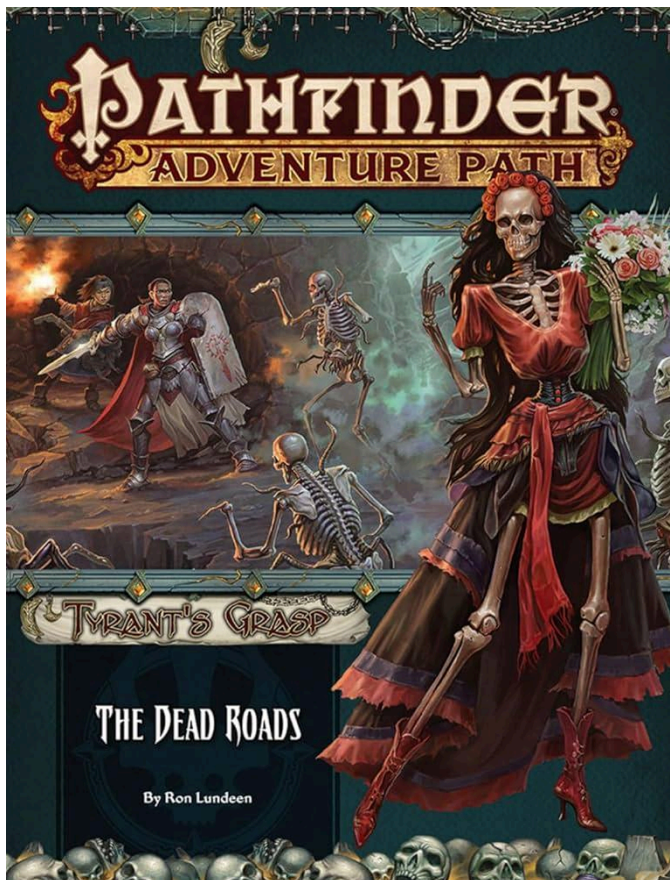
Authors: Ron Lundeen, Jason Keeley, Larry Wilhelm, Crystal Frazier
Luis Loza, John Compton

Level Range: 1-18

Original System: Pathfinder 1st Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [PF2e Conversion of Tyrant's Grasp](#) by Trey Bryner
- ❖ [Arazni the Undying](#), a Tyrant's Grasp actual play by Inspired Incompetence.
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Tyrant's Grasp](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Tyrant's Grasp](#)



I'm sure I'm going to make some people unhappy by coloring this one **BLUE**. Just as time has taken the bloom off of some Adventure Paths (e.g., *Abomination Vaults*), so too the perspective of time has increased people's regard for some AP's previously held in low esteem. Back in 2021, I rated this AP 13th and the poll rated it 24th. Now I've rated it 10th and the new 2025 poll rates it at 14th. Perspective changes with time and experience.

This was the big adventure to end 1st Edition and set the stage for new happenings in 2nd Edition. To say the ending was unpopular is an understatement. It was **very** unpopular. But with the benefit of hindsight, I think those criticisms were, if not *unfair* exactly, then overblown.

Let's set the ending aside for a moment and discuss the rest of the adventure path. First of all, the first volume, *The Dead Roads* is **fantastic**. Full of interesting situations and unusual role-playing. The middle four books (2-5) of the adventure are very solid with travel to great locations and a real sense of epic accomplishment dealing with one of the most tragic characters in Pathfinder lore and the ultimate questions of redemption and when redemption is even needed, as well as what victory looks like in a no-win situation. And that's a question that's about to become very important to the PCs.

If you've heard anything about Book 6: *Midwives to Death*, it's probably that a lot of people are very upset about the ending. So let me start by saying that I was one of them until I had a chance to think it through. Now I see this as a quest of heroic proportions with echoes of *The Lord of the Rings* or the story of the heroic Greek resistance at Thermopylae. Or the Star Wars movie *Rogue One*. Now I really do wish I had a chance to play or GM this.

[Spoilers Hidden with Inviso-text:]

For my money, a lot of what's wrong with the ending of *Tyrant's Grasp* is fixed with just a few words by Paizo Forums member Cole Deschain [HERE](#).

In case you don't have access to the Paizo Boards, here's Cole's suggestion
[Spoilers Hidden with Inviso-text:]

Having said all that, I still think that *Tyrant's Grasp* is so good and so different that I still look forward to running it some day... with the right group.

So, *Tyrant's Grasp* isn't for everyone. It takes players with a mature view of storytelling and a willingness to enjoy a different kind of victory in the end. But it is a journey well worth taking with the right sort of players and GM.

Highlights:

- ❖ You get to explore the afterlife. How cool is that?
- ❖ Huge, epic feel, like some of your favorite tales.
- ❖ Travel to amazing locations
- ❖ Meet some of the most famous people in Golarion
- ❖ A really good mix of role-playing and combat.
- ❖ Face off with the biggest and baddest of all of Golarion's BBEG's.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ Well, that ending is a huge bummer if you can't wrap your head around it.
- ❖ There is a point in the game where you're not the focus of attention. But it's only one and it's important.
- ❖ Some reviewers complain about an encounter in Volume 5 that feels like a certain TPK.

GM's Tips:

- ❖ More than any other Adventure Path, this is not one you should just pick up and play without having a serious talk with your prospective players first. Players need to know that this is an AP where they're going to be caught between titanic powers and they'll often feel helpless. Even more importantly, warn them that the ending is going to be quite stark and final. If your Players are still up for the challenge, encourage them to make characters who would be willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for the good of the world. If they're not okay with that idea, then this isn't the AP for them. Go play a different one!
- ❖ At the end, you **need** to make clear to the players just what their PC's have won for the world. **[Spoilers Hidden with Inviso-text:]**

Age of Ashes

Tarondor's Ranking: 9th

Poll Rating and Rank: (6.5) 28th

Date: August 2019 - December 2019

Authors: Amanda Hamon, Eleanor Ferron, Ron Lundeen, Linda Zayas-Palmer, John Compton, Luis Loza

Level Range: 1-20

Original System: Pathfinder 2nd Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [Should you GM Age of Ashes?](#) By How It's Played
- ❖ [Kalnix's Guide to Fixing Age of Ashes](#)
- ❖ [RussischerZar's Reimagined Age of Ashes Stronghold Rules](#)
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Age of Ashes](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Age of Ashes](#)



The player characters explore a mysterious network of teleportation portals from the dawn of time and battle dark forces interested in controlling that network and its central hub - the PCs home. Meanwhile in the background lurks the threat of an apocalypse somehow related to a vanished dragon

god. In the end, all the PCs' hopes and expectations may hang on upon a series of broken promises. Sounds pretty good, right?

Age of Ashes is the first adventure path written for Pathfinder Second Edition. Reviewers often point to this (or blame 2e itself) to explain a few deadly encounters in Books 1 and 2, ignoring the several dozen previous adventure paths which also had lethal encounters at low levels. Turns out that being low level is just dangerous. That said, my own PCs suffered near TPK's in both Books 1 and 2, so... yeah. Watch out.

In Book 1: *Hellknight Hill*, the PCs will explore an abandoned hellknight citadel, rescue innocents, fight off an invasion by a secret cult and discover the secret ring of gates below the citadel. In Book 2: *Cult of Cinders*, they will continue their war against the Cinderclaw cult by traveling through the portals to the Mwangi Expanse where they will also become aware of a larger threat and a new enemy. In Book 3: *Tomorrow Must Burn*, they root out a secret band of slavers from a city dedicated to freedom and learn more about their enemy. In Book 4: *Fires of the Haunted City*, they deal with the tragic history of a fallen dwarven city in the Darklands and bring the fight to the enemy. In Book 5: *Against the Scarlet Triad*, they finally confront the evil slavers in their headquarters and learn the true scope of the danger to Golarion. In Book 6: *Broken Promises*, the apocalypse begins and the heroes must race to confront a great hero of Golarion.

Each of the volumes of *Age of Ashes* is themed around one of the major races of Pathfinder: goblins, elves, halflings, dwarves, gnomes and finally humans. Along the way you get to customize the hellknight citadel you've claimed as your own. Want a library? A wizard's tower? An infirmary? You can do it. My players added a kennel for their pet wargs.

This adventure path has it all. Before I read it, I expected it to be a simple, maybe boring story designed to ease new GM's into Pathfinder 2e. Instead, I found that it has an amazing depth of experience. It has dungeon crawls, hexploration, infiltration, water battles, aerial battles, chances to influence important NPCs and acquire allies both public and secret. It has role-playing, debates, investigation and straight-up desperate battles for the fate of the world. What else could you possibly want?

Highlights:

- ❖ A great variety of locations and enemies. Almost a “world tour” of the Inner Sea region. Not really, but it has that flavor.
- ❖ A great variety of game styles, including exploration, base-building, role-playing, dungeon crawls, urban adventure and more.
- ❖ A great balance of combat, exploration and role-playing.
- ❖ The most present villain or set of villains was the Scarlet Triad, and because their presence is felt strongly in books 2, 3 and 4, my players loathed them by the time they were able to come to grips with them in book 5.
- ❖ I particularly liked how the PCs could take on various quests to strengthen their ties with powerful groups in Books 4 and 5.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ New players are going to struggle with certain very tough fights in the first two volumes. My very experienced players certainly did. Remind them that PF2e is a game of teamwork. Lots of individual effort isn’t as effective as setting each other up for success.
- ❖ Once again the final antagonist isn’t revealed until quite late in the adventure path, but at least the groundwork for that antagonist has been laid since day one, so it makes sense later.

GM Tips:

- ❖ Periodically remind the players of the legend of Breachhill’s founding and its founder, Lamond Breachton. Maybe have townsfolk compare the PC’s to the enigmatic founder.
- ❖ Make sure the relationship between the Cinderclaws and the Scarlet Triad is well understood in Book 2. The Scarlet Triad is the real opposition prior to book 6, so make sure your PC’s learn about and despise them.
- ❖ Read designer [Luis Loza’s thoughts on the psychology of the final antagonist](#). The Batman metaphor was absolutely a Rosetta Stone for me in GMing this character’s complex psychology and reasoning.
- ❖ The **[Hidden with invisio-text:]** in Book 2 is particularly dangerous and has TPKed several parties (very nearly including mine). Some suggest its Counteract level should be 5, not 10.

Extinction Curse

Tarondor's Ranking: 38th

Poll Rating and Rank: (4.8) 41st

Date: January 2020 - June 2020

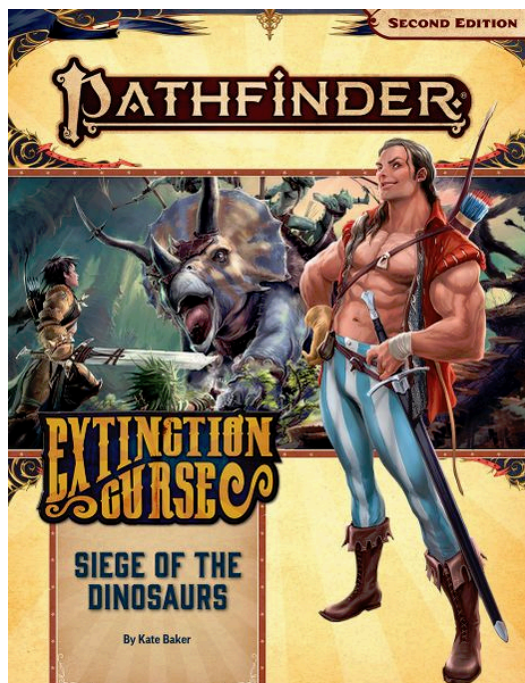
Authors: Jason Tondro, Jenny Jarzabski, Greg Vaughan, Kate Baker,
Mikko Kallio, Lyz Liddel

Level Range: 1-20

Original System: Pathfinder 2nd Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [Roll for Combat Actual Play of Extinction Curse](#)
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Extinction Curse](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Extinction Curse](#)



A race to stop the destruction of the City at the Heart of the World caused by the mistakes of a dead god.

Dinosaur-riding, demon-worshipping troglodytes from the depths of the earth.

Clowns.

<sings> "[One of these things is not like the others...](#)" </sings>

Okay, right off the bat, I am as biased as I can be. I detest circuses and clowns so I was never going to be objective on this one.

That said, after the first two books the circus itself fades into the background, becoming a simple framing device for getting the PCs to various adventure locations. The basic idea of saving the Isle of Kortos from dinosaur-riding, demon-worshipping troglodytes from the depths of the earth isn't so bad. And in later books you get to learn a lot about the dead god Aroden and find some of his powerful relics (no, we still don't learn how he died).

The problem with *Extinction Curse* is that it's trying to serve two different tales and not doing a great job at it. The circus story feels incomplete as it fades into the background and the troglodyte (xulgath)/Aroden story feels like it could have used more attention.

Highlights:

- ❖ Cool villains
- ❖ Lots of Aroden lore and relics
- ❖ The actual main story is pretty interesting and delves into the cost of choices made by the dead god Aroden.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ Like most subsystems in the adventure paths, the Circus mechanics don't work well and feel clunky. For some details on this, see [Kalnix's comments](#) in the Reddit thread linked above.
- ❖ Lots of roleplaying early fades away by the middle of the story.
- ❖ No part of the adventure takes place in Absalom, the City at the Center of the World!
- ❖ Once again the final villain is unexpected.
- ❖ You know...clowns.

Agents of Edgewatch

Tarondor's Ranking: 32nd

Poll Rating and Rank: (5.8) 35th

Date: July 2020 - December 2020

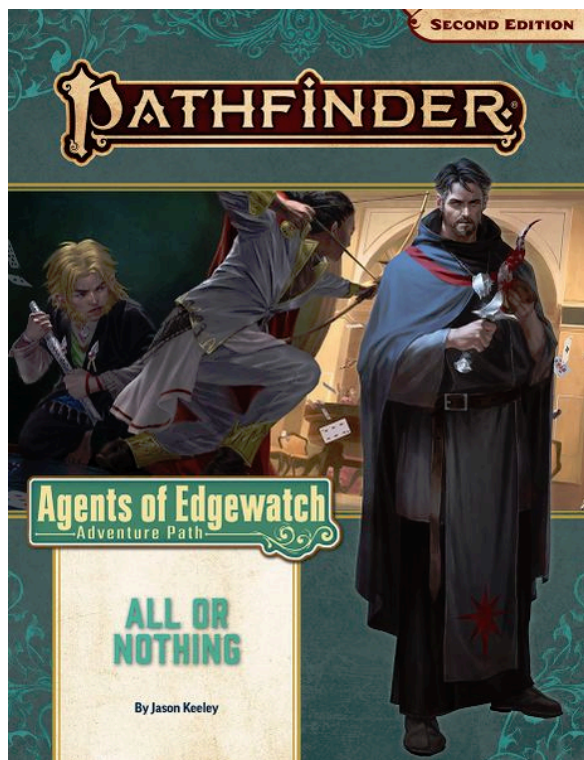
Authors: James L. Sutter, Michael Sayre, Jason Keeley, Ron Lundeen, Cole Kronewitter, Amber Stewart

Level Range: 1-20

Original System: Pathfinder 2nd Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [Roll for Combat Actual Play of Agents of Edgewatch](#)
- ❖ [Naurgul's Detailed Notes on Agents of Edgewatch](#)
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Agents of Edgewatch](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Agents of Edgewatch](#)



You play members of the city watch of Absalom, the largest city in the Inner Sea region. You deal with criminals, psychopaths, corruption and interplanar invasions.

I particularly like Book 1: *Devil at the Dreaming Palace*, which is an homage to the book [Devil in the White City](#), which is about the 1893 Chicago World's Fair and **[SPOILER:]**

I also enjoyed Book 4: *Assault on Hunting Lodge Seven*, an homage to the movie [Assault on Precinct 13](#).

Agents of Edgewatch is at its best when it permits the PCs to investigate crimes and follow up on their investigations at their pace. It's at its worst when the Chief is giving them orders as those orders often make no sense in the context of the story. Many people point to Books 1, 2 and 5 as the best parts of the story, and those are the ones with the most investigatory freedom. At least two reviewers suggested ending the campaign after Book 5 and skipping Book 6 entirely.

Highlights:

- ❖ Well written.
- ❖ A good amount of role-playing at first, but more and more fighting over time.
- ❖ The first adventure path set in Absalom!
- ❖ You get to really know a single location and its inhabitants.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ As the introduction to Book 6 notes, it's a complete shift in tone and type. So much that you are encouraged to retrain your characters and sell your gear to be ready for the completely different challenge ahead. That feels like a red flag. That chapter is a long series of fights in various dungeon environments without much real opportunity for role-playing or changing the course of events.

Abomination Vaults

Tarondor's Ranking: 16th

Poll Rating and Rank: (6.7) 23rd

Date: January 2021 - March 2021

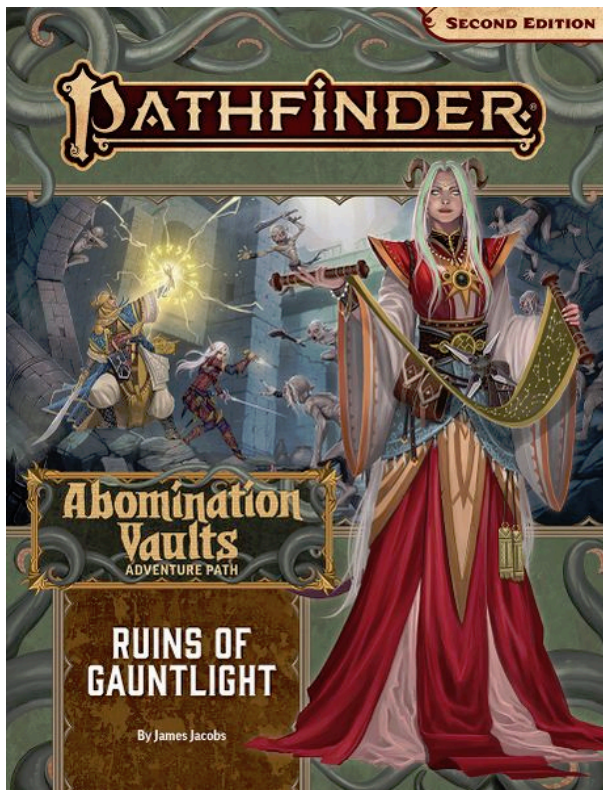
Authors: James Jacobs, Vanessa Hoskins, Stephen Radney-McFarland

Level Range: 1-10

Original System: Pathfinder 2nd Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [Abomination Vaults GM Overview](#) by How It's Played
- ❖ [The Abomination Vaults Expanded - a Resource for GM's](#)
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Abomination Vaults](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Abomination Vaults](#)



The first Pathfinder adventure path to be only three volumes long, *Abomination Vaults* is a great success that will likely mean many more 3-volume adventure paths in the future. I think we can all agree that while some AP's need six volumes to wrap up, many others could have benefitted from a shorter run.

Abomination Vaults is a dungeon crawl and nothing but a dungeon crawl, but one with an excellent story. It takes the game back to its roots while remaining very much a modern game. There are a good variety of foes and hazards both mechanical and magical. It links easily with the Beginner Box and the adventure *Troubles in Otari*.

Abomination Vaults' plot gives the player characters motivation to explore, giving them a sense of purpose and urgency. The story is filled with sub-quests tied to the different factions both in the dungeon and back in town. The story isn't just hack-and-slash. There are a number of interesting NPCs and role-playing opportunities (though you must be sure your party includes someone who speaks a variety of languages). There is a mystery to be solved as well as monsters to be vanquished.

When it was first released, just before my 2021 guide to Adventure Paths, this was extremely highly regarded and often recommended as a great introduction to the Pathfinder system. Over time, that perception has faded. *Abomination Vaults* went from the community's #2 favorite of all time to well back in the pack. Most of the criticisms leveled today at this AP come in three forms: 1) The rooms are too small; 2) It's not logical that all these powerful creatures would simply be hanging out a few doors down from each other; and 3) there isn't much incentive to roleplay.

Now personally, I don't agree with the third complaint. If you're not engaging in at least some roleplaying and social interaction, that's on you and your GM. But be sure to check out Taylor Hodgkiss's [The Abomination Vaults Expanded](#) for lots of role-playing opportunities.

However, even as a modern game, I think *Abomination Vaults* works very well as what it is: a dungeon crawl. If you're looking for high drama, you don't belong in the dungeon. There are dozens of other AP's to choose from. I asked people to rate these AP's on *enjoyability*, and on the enjoyability scale, *Abomination Vaults* delivers.

The rooms *are* small, but sometimes you need to adjust your tactics to the situation, not the other way around. Crafty adventurers will find a way to use this to their advantage.

Look, *Abomination Vaults* has its faults, like any AP, but it delivers the old-school feel in spades. This is not, in my estimation, a good choice for novice GM's or players, especially those used to the forgiving play of D&D 5e. If you approach *Abomination Vaults* like a beer-and-pretzels game that doesn't require much thought, you're going to get eaten alive (or at least your PCs will). But if you use considered teamwork tactics (including diplomacy and judicious retreat), this can be a rewarding experience.

Highlights:

- ❖ A well-written dungeon crawl.
- ❖ A more compact adventure.
- ❖ Good mix of role-playing and combat (though combat predominates).
- ❖ An interesting story.
- ❖ The Foundry map module is widely acclaimed.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ A very common complaint is that many of the rooms in the dungeon are quite unreasonably small.
- ❖ At lower levels, some of the fights are just too overpowered. GM's beware.

GM Tips:

- ❖ Read through [The Abomination Vaults Expanded](#).
- ❖ In order to make the players care about the Vaults, the -PC's- must care about the town of Otari. Require the following buy-ins from your players:
 - Otari is their PC's home town and they must care about what happens to it.
 - Each PC must choose two Otari NPCs they have a close relationship with.
- ❖ Ignore the "attack on sight" instructions for many creatures. Have the creatures attack only if logical. Intelligent creatures tend to avoid risk and may seek conversation, even if only to intimidate the PC's.
- ❖ **Consider starting your PCs at level 2** to let them deal with a lot of the powerful early encounters.
- ❖ Players should *definitely* have at least one tanky frontliner character. A barbarian, champion, warpriest or fighter would be great.

Fists of the Ruby Phoenix

Tarondor's Ranking: 8th

Poll Rating and Rank: (7.8) 5th

Date: July 2021 (all three volumes were released in July)

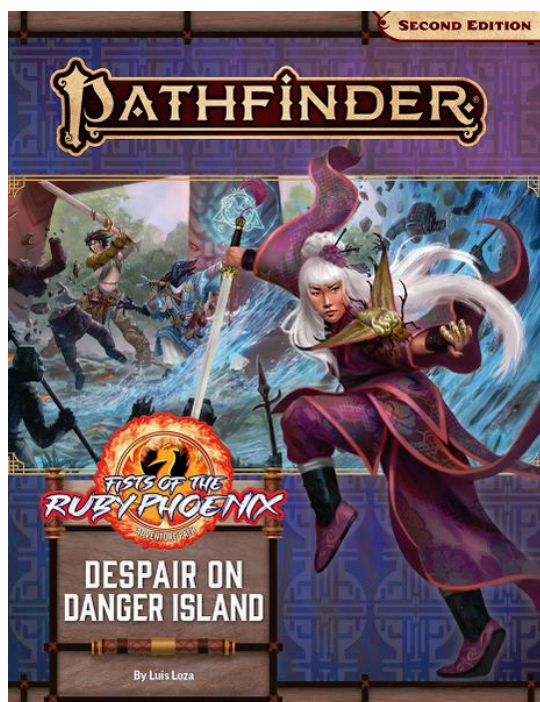
Authors: Luis Loza, David N. Ross, James Case

Level Range: 11-20

Original System: Pathfinder 2nd Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [Fists of the Ruby Phoenix GM Overview](#) by How It's Played
- ❖ Kalnix's [Fists of the Ruby Phoenix Map Remake Module](#) for Foundry
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Fists of the Ruby Phoenix](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Fists of the Ruby Phoenix](#)



This is Pathfinder's ode to *Enter the Dragon*, *Mortal Kombat* and *The Karate Kid*. With a dash of *Godzilla* thrown in. The Ruby Phoenix Tournament pits Tian Xia's greatest martial artists against each other every ten years. Enter your team and fight!

You may be thinking that sounds like a long and boring series of fights, but you'd be wrong. There's a story here that emerges as the competition

advances. The competition itself doesn't begin until the second book and the first book contains a smaller story about the temple your team trains in.

Fists of the Ruby Phoenix has combat against a good variety of opponents, but the battlefields are surprisingly lacking in personality, being mostly wide sandy arenas of one sort or another without cover, concealment or hazards. Of course, you're 14th level by the time the competition begins, so flight and teleportation are a regular part of the fighting.

Speaking of maps, the main complaint against *Fists of the Ruby Phoenix* is that it lacks a lot of maps. GM's would be well advised to find or invent their own to avoid that sameness. If you're using the Foundry VTT, Kalnix has solved that problem for you with his [Fists of the Ruby Phoenix Map Remake Module](#).

What *Fists of the Ruby Phoenix* lacks in narrative complexity it more than makes up for in atmosphere and interesting Non-Player Characters. Since you're not trying to kill most of your foes, there is a chance to gain recurring rivals and friends among the competition as well as with patrons and fans of the tournament.

If you're looking for a deep narrative or an epic tale, this isn't the right adventure path for you. But if you're looking for a fun, fast-paced story with plenty of style, atmosphere and intrigue, then *Fists of the Ruby Phoenix* may be just the thing! I had a blast with it!

Highlights:

- ❖ *Enter the Dragon* feel. Get your Bruce Lee on!
- ❖ Flavorful atmosphere of Tian Xia.
- ❖ Travels to the city of Goka.
- ❖ You get to start at 10th level, so you don't need to wait forever to implement those cool feat combos you've been thinking about.
- ❖ Fun, varied encounters with lots of different opponents.
- ❖ Chances to have fun rivalries rather than just kill all your foes
- ❖ Compelling Story
- ❖ Some cool set pieces. Many reviewers mention the battle that is essentially a 2D sidescroller.
- ❖ You get to fight a **[SPOILER:]**

Drawbacks:

- ❖ Needs more maps.
- ❖ A few reviewers say the fights are too easy. I did not experience that.
- ❖ The plot isn't that complex.

Strength of Thousands

Tarondor's Ranking: 12th

Poll Rating and Rank: (7.6) 8th

Date: July 2021 - December 2021

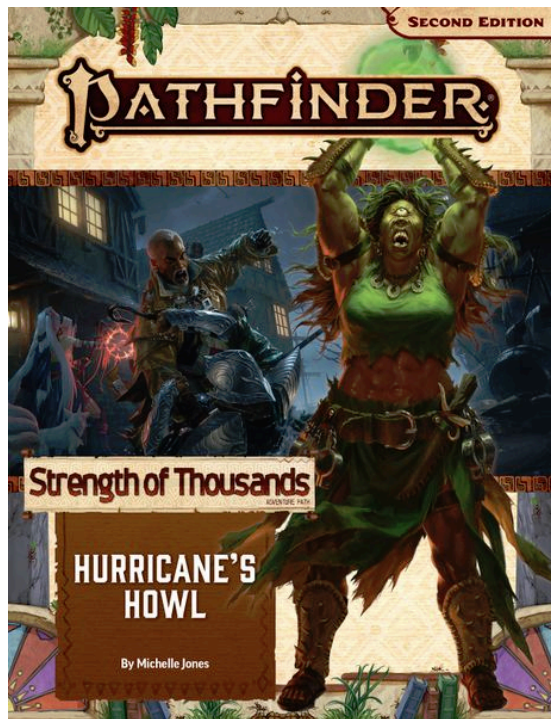
Authors: Eleanor Ferron, Alexandria Bustion, Quinn Murphy,
Michelle Jones, Luis Loza, Michael Sayre, Saif Ansari

Level Range: 1-20

Original System: Pathfinder 2nd Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [We Play in a Society's notes on Strength of Thousands](#)
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Strength of Thousands](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Strength of Thousands](#)



The “magical school” adventure path. *Strength of Thousands* is a lot of fun. For those who grew up with Harry Potter and Hogwarts, the attraction is obvious, but for us older gamers there is still a lot to love here.

Strength of Thousands begins in the famous Magaambya Academy and the player characters are students performing small tasks (and later, more important ones) for the benefit of the school and later for the benefit of the

city outside the school. In later volumes they act as emissaries of the school to the dangerous city of Mzali and discover a hidden city in the depths of the jungle. Finally, they encounter legends from the ancient past and travel among the planets.

What sets this adventure path apart is that, as representatives from the school, the player characters are very strongly discouraged from using violence and when they must use violence, from killing. Also, as the students progress to teachers and eventually heroes of the Academy, they continue their academic research. It's a novel approach and an interesting variation on the traditional adventure story that will be hard to assess without having played it out, but it seems like a lot of fun.

A lot of gamers want the traditional style of high adventure seen in works like Conan, Elric or *The Lord of the Rings*, but others have been clamoring for something more peaceable and focused on strong relationships and *Strength of Thousands* delivers. While it certainly has lots of things to fight, it also has a lot of ways to avoid many of those fights and the player characters are actively urged to seek them out where possible. This adventure path rivals *War for the Crown* in its breadth of role-playing.

Strength of Thousands is composed of three basic arcs: 1) Students of a Magical School, 2) Professors of a Magical School, and 3) Magic Warriors dealing with ancient legends.

In many other adventure paths, the final villain has little foreshadowing and appears to loom out of nowhere in the 5th or 6th volume. In *Strength of Thousands*, the final villain is foreshadowed from the earliest pages. On the other hand the final villain has little to do with most of what happens in the first four books of the story, only becoming central in the last two books. I don't know that I'd call it a criticism of *Strength of Thousands*, because unlike so many other stories, the villain isn't the point. Being a student, teacher, researcher and hero of the Magaambyan Academy is the point of this adventure path, and the climax of that journey is simply in facing off against a powerful threat to the Academy and what it stands for.

A Note: I think the adventure path might be just slightly more interesting if at least one player character is an anadi (spider-person).

Highlights:

- ❖ A very different take on high fantasy.
- ❖ Good use of the excellent *Mwangi Expanse* book.
- ❖ Lots of representation for African-themed cultures and mythology.
- ❖ Everyone gets to be a spellcaster, even if you're not.
- ❖ Well-detailed characters and lots of roleplaying.
- ❖ Really well tied in to the lore of the Mwangi Expanse.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ The rails of this particular railroad aren't camouflaged at all. Sometimes you get to choose the order in which you accomplish tasks, but that's about it. Otherwise, the train goes from station to station and you have to hope the next station is somewhere good, because there's no getting off.
- ❖ There is no strong narrative pushing the story forward or any urgent clock until near the end. Instead, the clock is the academic year and the mountain of tasks needing to be done. Some players need or want more direction than that.
- ❖ There's a spot in Volume 5 where a major NPC tells you that you have to handle the villain without them and it feels a bit strange that they're not helping. It's obviously done because the narrative needs the PCs to be heroes, not because it makes a lot of sense.

GM Tips:

- ❖ GM's should read the whole AP before beginning. There is a big reveal at the end of Book 4 you'll want to foreshadow from the beginning.

Quest for the Frozen Flame

Tarondor's Ranking: 20th

Poll Rating and Rank: (6.9) 18th

Date: January 2022 - March 2022

Authors: Ron Lundeen, Stephanie Lundeen, Jessica Catalan, Jason Tondro

Level Range: 1-10

Original System: Pathfinder 2nd Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Quest for the Frozen Flame](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Quest for the Frozen Flame](#)



An entire Adventure Path set in the Realm of the Mammoth Lords. Primitive tribesfolk struggle to escape the ire of a larger and warlike tribe. Eventually, they discover the truth of an ancient heirloom of their tribe and seek to take it back and break the curse on it, struggling all the while to collect allies and protect their tribe. It's a pretty solid story that includes hexploration, role-playing, combat and unraveling mysteries.

Highlights:

- ❖ Great lore to discover
- ❖ Lots of fun NPCs to interact with
- ❖ Interesting locations. I particularly liked the Tar Forest in Book 3: *Burning Tundra*.
- ❖ Plenty of room to expand with your own side quests if you desire
- ❖ Cool new monsters and animal companions.
- ❖ All the various bosses and BBEG's are well foreshadowed. Huzzah!

Drawbacks:

- ❖ As written, the adventure doesn't pass out enough loot
- ❖ As written, there are few possibilities for the PCs to buy or sell loot, leaving them underpowered at higher levels.
- ❖ Nearly everyone mentions problems with the hexploration in Book 2: *Lost Mammoth Valley*, but the actual complaints vary. Read the Reddit discussion for more.

GM's Tips:

- ❖ Due to the scarcity of loot, particularly runes, GM's are strongly encouraged to use the [Automatic Bonus Progress \(ABP\)](#) optional rules for the this Adventure Path.
- ❖ There is a strong chance of a TPK with the **[Hidden with Inviso-text:]** in Book 2. GM's are encouraged to have it flee when reduced to 25% hit points.

Outlaws of Alkenstar

Tarondor's Ranking: 37th

Poll Rating and Rank: (6.5) 27th

Date: April 2022-June 2022

Authors: Vanessa Hoskins, Andrew Mullen, Scott D. Young, Cole Kronewitter

Level Range: 1-10

Original System: Pathfinder 2nd Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [Should You GM Outlaws of Alkenstar?](#) By How It's Played
- ❖ [Gustavo Iglesias's Ideas for Outlaws of Alkenstar](#)
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Outlaws of Alkenstar](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Outlaws of Alkenstar](#)



Outlaws of Alkenstar is a Weird West setting replete with gunslingers, inventors, heists, airships and explosions. Almost everyone who has reviewed the Adventure Path has noted that it was good fun overall, with thematic villains and interesting locations. So far, so good.

The downfall of *Outlaws of Alkenstar*, in my opinion, is that old scourge of Paizo Adventure Paths: expectation management. Put another way, *Outlaws*

of *Alkenstar* is a bait-and-switch in at least two ways. First, the players are sold on the idea that they get to be actual [Butch-and-Sundance](#) type outlaws. But then the AP makes them into much more typical and manageable agents of the law, which can be a major disappointment.

Second, the Player's Guide strongly encourages everyone to be thematic, taking classes like gunslinger, inventor, investigator and rogue. But then the party quite quickly finds out that they'll be regularly fighting foes with damage resistance or which would otherwise be much easier to fight with a more typical party that included spellcasters and fighters.

There is general praise for the themes and feel of Book 1: *Punks in a Powder Keg*, which sees the low-level "outlaws" on the mean streets of the city. There is general (but not universal) admiration for Book 3: *The Smoking Gun*. But almost every single reviewer complained about Book 2: *Cradle of Quartz*. Not that they disliked the themes or atmosphere, but the fact that the whole story felt very unconnected to the ongoing plot of the Adventure Path and that the end result of victory didn't stop one of the main antagonists from doing exactly what he already planned to do.

Highlights:

- ❖ Cool gunslinging theme.
- ❖ Interesting fights with diverse opponents.
- ❖ Lots of good roleplaying opportunities.
- ❖ High Society intrigue -and- dusty street brawls.
- ❖ Interesting creatures.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ The title is a bait-and-switch. You're not actually outlaws at all.
- ❖ The entirety of Book 2 is a sidequest that has zero impact on the overall plot of the story and feels like distracting filler.
- ❖ One particular creature, the Claws of Time in Book 2, is very deadly and several parties have noted that it caused a TPK.

GM TIPS:

- ❖ Read through [Gustavo Iglesias's Ideas for Outlaws of Alkenstar](#) for some ideas on how to add the "outlaw" back into the AP.

- ❖ Tell your players it's okay for some party members to buck the theme. Your players will be happier with a party member or two that uses magic. One idea might be to permit everyone in the party to take a [Free Archetype](#).
- ❖ Nerf the Claws of Time. One suggestion is to lower its aura to 3d6 damage.
- ❖ GM's are also urged to carefully consider the dangers posed by the **[HIDDEN BY INVISIO-TEXT:]**
- ❖ Be sure to hint to the players that it'd be useful if someone in the party had access to electrical attacks. There are a *lot* of constructs early on which are highly resistant to physical damage.
- ❖ Make sure someone in the party has the Medicine skill. The Player's Guide is straight up lying about that not being a recommended skill.³

³ As one reviewer put it, "*I think the Player's Guide was written by a villain who wanted the PC's killed.*"

Blood Lords

Tarondor's Ranking: 35th

Poll Rating and Rank: (6.3) 32nd

Date: July 2022 - December 2022

Authors: Mike Kimmel, Jason Tondro, Jenny Jarzabski, Leo Glass, James Jacobs, Brian Duckwitz, Jessica Catalan

Level Range: 1-20

Original System: Pathfinder 2nd Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [Lunatic Dice's video discussion of Blood Lords](#)
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Blood Lords](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Blood Lords](#)



The *Blood Lords* Adventure Path is for evil player characters. It chronicles their rise from low-level investigators unraveling a plot to poison crops exported from the nation of Geb to the great nobility of that undead nation, the Blood Lords. Along the way, they will uncover a plot that threatens not

only Geb and the plans of its undead king, but also the lives of many in all the surrounding nations.

Along with *Skull and Shackles* and *Hell's Vengeance*, *Blood Lords* is the third Paizo adventure path written specifically for evil PCs. The nation of Geb is creepy and atmospheric. GM's have a lot to work with in order to establish the feel of a nation where the living and the undead work side by side.

Many players praise books 1 and 2 (*Zombie Feast* and *Graveclaw*), but feel the next four need significant GM labor to make the premise of the story work.

Highlights:

- ❖ Great atmosphere and concept. Geb is creepy and fun.
- ❖ Lots of flavorful NPCs, many of them friendly to your PCs.
- ❖ You get to be evil. Very lawful, but evil nonetheless.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ You're told to curry favor with factions, but they don't actually matter much.
- ❖ Your PCs are either going to start off as undead or are quite likely to be undead by the end of the AP. But the AP uses a lot of Void damage, to which undead are immune.
- ❖ Once again, the BBEG isn't obvious for a long time.

GM Tips:

- ❖ Many enemies will use Void damage and your PCs are highly likely to be immune to void damage. Change it to Spirit damage. Also consider changing many enemies' *harm* spells for something that can actually affect your PCs.
- ❖ Foreshadow the BBEG as early as possible
- ❖ Change the BBEG's spell list!
- ❖ Homebrew some more faction rewards to make the PC's efforts count for more.

Gatewalkers

Tarondor's Ranking: 33rd

Poll Rating and Rank: (4.4) 43rd

Date: January 2023 - March 2023

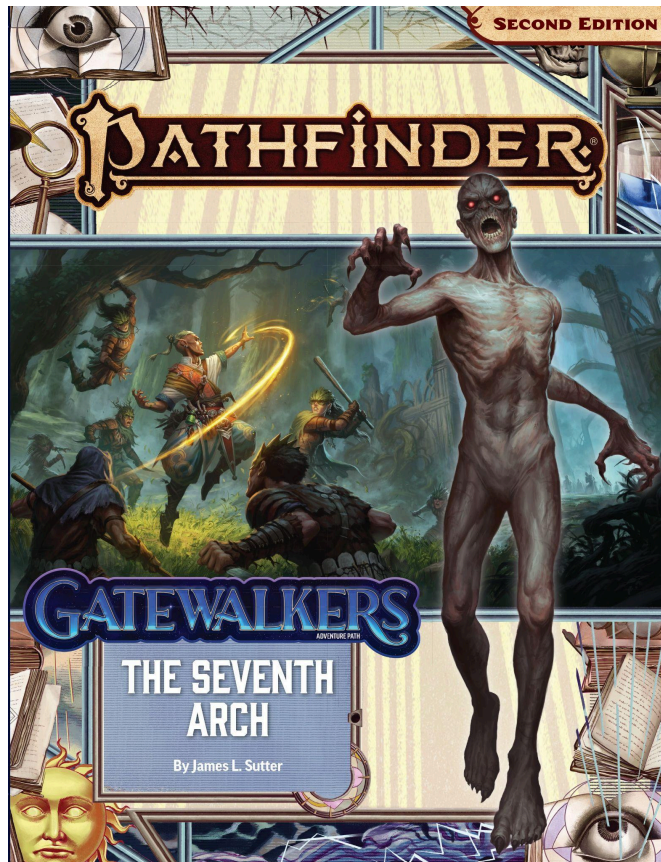
Authors: James Sutter, Jason Keeley, James Jacobs

Level Range: 1-10

Original System: Pathfinder 2nd Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [Gatewalkers GM's Overview](#) by How It's Played
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Gatewalkers](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Gatewalkers](#)



Mysterious magical portals. Superpowers. Missing memories. Quests to demon-haunted wastelands and beyond Golarion itself. Ancient mysteries to unravel and a threat to all life on Golarion! On paper this sounds like an

awesome adventure path. Yet our poll shows it is one of the lowest-rated AP's of all time. Let's delve into why without too many spoilers.

Here's a few illuminating quotes:

- ❖ *"Played in it because the premise was intriguing. Quit because the encounter design was awful and the story felt like complete nonsense."*
- ❖ *"I hate this Adventure Path."*
- ❖ *"[I]t's a nonstop disappointment that doesn't get better."*
- ❖ *"It's a terrible adventure whose only saving grace is some cool set pieces."*
- ❖ *"[K]now that the advertising for this AP is misleading. You will not be pleasantly surprised by the shakeup."*
- ❖ *"[O]h god, does it feel bad. It feels like the books betray you,"*

Okay, but there are also these:

- ❖ *"I'm gonna stand out from the crowd here: I'm running Gatewalkers, and I and my group are having a great time with it."*
- ❖ *"Overall, this one of the most intriguing, well-written, and experimental APs that I've ever had the chance of playing in and GMing."*

So, y'know, take your pick. Personally, I feel that *Gatewalker* really does have a cool premise, but it remains a bit unfocused. It just felt rushed, as though it could have used another editing pass to pull together its disparate but individually cool elements. This one is rougher than most of the modern AP's but if viewed as a GM toolbox - a collection of interesting ideas from which interested GMs could piece together a cool adventure, then there is a lot to love here. Sadly, if you run it as written, it's a bit of a mess.

Honestly, if you want an AP based around gates and a hidden threat to the world, try *Age of Ashes* instead.

Highlights:

- ❖ Cool background
- ❖ Great start as paranormal investigators
- ❖ Travelling to many different locations.

- ❖ Interesting locations, including **[Hidden with invisio-text:]**
- ❖ The *idea* of deviant powers is interesting.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ The Player's Guide is a bait-and-switch, selling you on being paranormal investigators and then solving the only mystery halfway into the first book
- ❖ The traps in Book 1: *The Seventh Arch* are really deadly.
- ❖ Book 2: *They Watched the Stars* is a glorified escort quest where you, the PCs are not the main characters.
- ❖ Book 3: *Dreamers of the Nameless Spires* is a 68-day journey where you're supposed to make skill checks every day for each PC. Ugh!
- ❖ Throughout the AP, many combats are simply irrelevant to the story, included merely to award the necessary XP.

GM's Tips:

- ❖ Make Sakauchi a child. That makes you, the PCs back into the main characters for Book 2: *They Watched the Stars*.
- ❖ Remove any fight that doesn't seem related to the plot. That's going to be almost 50% of the fights, though, so make sure you use Milestone leveling, not XP.
- ❖ Reddit user Neurgas had this intriguing idea for GM's who really want to run *Gatewalkers*, but fix its problems: **[Hidden with Invisio-Text:]**

Stolen Fate

Tarondor's Ranking: 28th

Poll Rating and Rank: (6.5) 29th

Date: April 2023 - June 2023

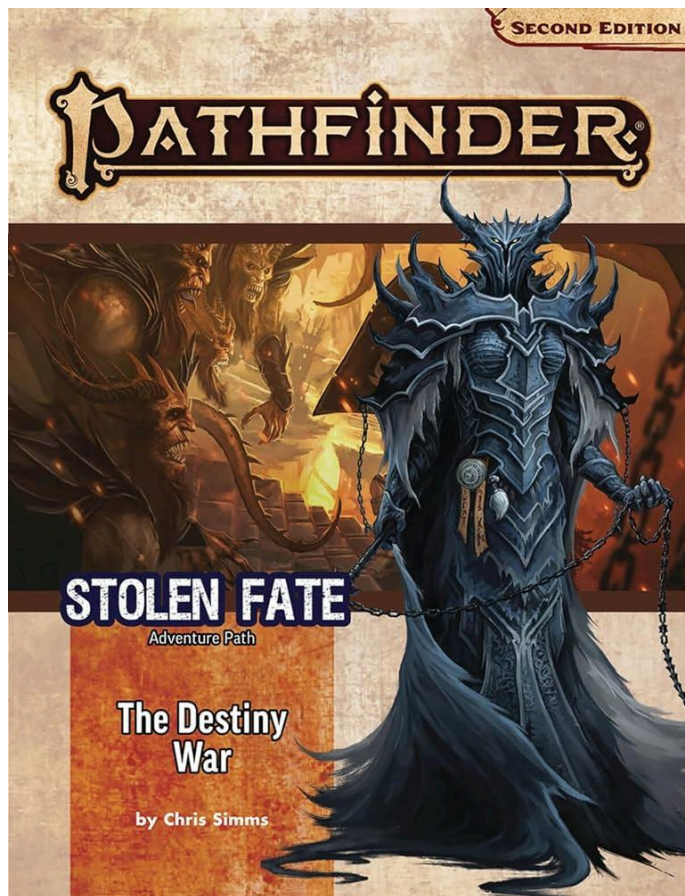
Authors: Ron Lundeen, Chris Sims, Luis Loza

Level Range: 11-20

Original System: Pathfinder 2nd Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [Stolen Fate Overview for GM's](#) by How It's Played
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Stolen Fate](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Stolen Fate](#)



A world-spanning adventure, *Stolen Fate* sees the PC's deal with a powerful deck of cards that, once assembled, could affect the future of all reality. Ultimately, it's a fantasy take on the debate between Determinism and Free Will. That's a fun premise that with work could be a great story. Of the three

volumes, I found Book 2: *The Destiny War* to be the most engaging, with plenty of call-backs to the great Pathfinder 1e adventure *The Harrowing*.

Highlights:

- ❖ The PC's feel high level and involved with something epic and important.
- ❖ Collecting the Harrow cards is fun and they're fun to use.
- ❖ Book 2: *The Destiny War*'s finale is fun and epic, as is its main villain.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ Not enough maps
- ❖ Most regions are pretty bare-bones, without much detail or exposition.
- ❖ There aren't really any major NPCs to interact with, so role-playing opportunities are limited.
- ❖ Much of the story lacks a solid reason for the PC's to engage with it, particularly in Book 3: *Worst of All Possible Worlds*.

Sky King's Tomb

Tarondor's Ranking: 24th

Poll Rating and Rank: (6.6) 26th

Date: August 2023 - September 2023

Authors: John Compton, Scott D. Young, Jessica Catalan

Level Range: 1-10

Original System: Pathfinder 2nd Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [Sky King's Tomb GM's Overview](#) by How It's Played
- ❖ [The Ransacked Relic](#), an introductory adventure for Sky King's Tomb
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Sky King's Tomb](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Sky King's Tomb](#)



An Adventure Path about dwarves, dwarven history and the consequences of whitewashing a culture's past. I love the setting and dwarven feel of this Adventure Path, but would honestly have enjoyed something that didn't feel like a lecture about modern real-world politics and history.

The story takes you to many interesting places, including a dwarven city and the Darklands as you pursue a mystery that leads you back along the path of the legendary Quest for the Sky. Something I think this AP does particularly well is give the players multiple options for solving various problems. Role-playing, diplomacy and subterfuge all work as well or better than conflict and combat in many cases.

What it doesn't do well is make clear its own mechanics. The AP involves many (perhaps too many) subsystems and trying to figure each of them out involves a lot of page flipping and head-scratching. Also, it's difficult for the players to see how the various quests in Book 1: *Mantle of Gold* are connected to the overall story. This will take some GM work to connect the dots.

Finally, the BBEG suffers from the usual problem with Paizo BBEG's - the player characters never even hear of the BBEG until late in the adventure and in this case they aren't really given a strong or personal reason to oppose him.

There's a lot of great information here from which a GM can construct a solid adventure, but it's not tied together such that a novice GM could easily just sit down and play. The GM needs to read all three volumes and decide how to breathe life into the villain's story and tie that story into the PC's own motivations.

Highlights:

- ❖ Strong dwarven theme.
- ❖ Good variety of locations.
- ❖ The theme - the consequences of dwarven history - is interesting.
- ❖ A great AP for role-players since many situations can be resolved without combat, while still giving you plenty of combat.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ The AP *really* needs more maps.
- ❖ The AP never really gives you strong reasons to feel the ancient dwarves might have been wrong. **[Hidden with invisio-text:]**

- ❖ Many reviewers feel that the BBEG's motivation isn't easily understood and their story never feels personal for the PC's.
- ❖ Many minor editing problems that can make the many subsystems in use confusing or contradictory.

GM's Tips:

- ❖ Your PCs need to be dwarves. Lots of folks will say they should "include at least one dwarf" or "be invested in dwarves." Poppycock, I say! Be dwarves!
- ❖ GM's will want to find extra battle maps of dwarf ruins and the Underdark (yes, I said the Underdark. Google doesn't know what the Darklands are).
- ❖ Find a way to introduce the BBEG earlier. Otherwise, they feel disconnected from the overall story as the PCs experience it.
- ❖ GM's will get a lot of use out of [Lost Omens: Highhelm](#). Not least for the map of Highhelm!
- ❖ While this is true of every AP, I strongly suggest prospective GM's read the comments on the Reddit and Paizo discussions linked above before starting play.

Season of Ghosts

Tarondor's Ranking: 1st

Poll Rating and Rank: (8.9) 1st

Date: October 2023 - January 2024

Authors: Sen H.H.S., Joan Hong, Dan Cascone, Eleanor Ferron, Liane Merciel

Level Range: 1-13

Original System: Pathfinder 2nd Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [Should You GM Season of Ghosts](#) by How It's Played
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Season of Ghosts](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Season of Ghosts](#)



Season of Ghosts is far and away the most popular Paizo Adventure Path of all time, according to the poll. More than 50% of reviewers gave it 10 stars.

90% gave it a rating of 8 stars or better. Nothing else came even remotely close to that level of acclamation.

Other than to say “it’s really good”, it becomes difficult to say much about *Season of Ghosts* because it’s so easy to ruin the experience by knowing too much about it. The mystery of what’s happening is easy to spoil and RPG players are good at ferreting out what’s happening with only a few clues, so even more than most, I’m going to say as little as I can about the story in this review.

The story is set in Tian Xia, in the nation of Shinmen. Tian Xia is Paizo’s analog of Asia. The AP is the first to be four volumes long rather than the usual three or six. That’s about all I’m going to say about the story!

A common problem with many Adventure Paths is that because each volume is written by a different author, things that seem critical to one volume (a reputation system for instance, or the importance of a particular NPC) can be completely ignored by all the others. One of the reasons that *Season of Ghosts* is well-loved is that it doesn’t seem to have this problem.

The town of Willowshore is well-crafted with many engaging NPCs. Players will enjoy interacting with the setting and the people.

WARNING! If you think there’s any chance you might play in *Season of Ghosts*, don’t read anything about the AP. Go in cold and you’ll be rewarded.

Highlights:

- ❖ The setting is wonderful and really well fleshed out.
- ❖ The AP showcases Asian-themed stories and monsters well.
- ❖ The story is extremely well-done. It feels well-planned and the characters have numerous opportunities for growth and change.
- ❖ There is plenty of room for downtime activities throughout the story.
- ❖ An excellent choice for new players as well as old.
- ❖ The story, though tightly written, makes it easy to slot in new material you might wish to use or to swap out one encounter with another.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ Many people point out that the combats are too easy. Paizo Creative Director James Jacobs has said that this was a deliberate choice to make the story take center stage. Honestly, if you find that the combats are too easy, this is one of the simplest problems to fix. Story problems are hard, but throwing in an extra bad guy is easy!
- ❖ If your players aren't into mysteries and social interaction, this might not be the AP for them because in addition to combat, there is a lot of social interaction required to make this AP really sparkle. It ain't no dungeon crawl.

GM Tips:

- ❖ Make absolutely certain that each player character has a strong tie to the town of Willowshore. I recommend that each PC be required to have a bond with at least two citizens of the town. Loners and wanderers with little or no connection to the town will lessen the story.
- ❖ Let your players read the [Pathfinder Lost Omens Tian Xia Character Guide](#). It will help make your game much more flavorful.
- ❖ More than many other adventures or adventure paths, *Season of Ghosts* rewards the effort a GM makes in integrating character backstories into the ongoing mystery.
- ❖ Read the whole story carefully and take lots of notes about the various NPCs and their motivations so you don't have to flip through the books when you're playing.

Seven Dooms for Sandpoint

Tarondor's Ranking: 4th

Poll Rating and Rank: (7.8) 4th

Date: March 2024

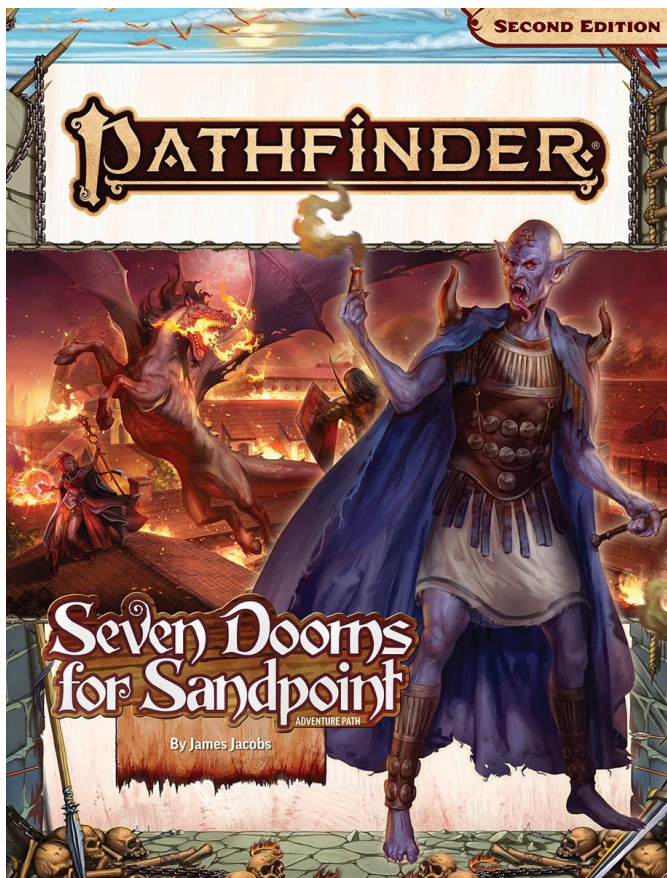
Authors: James Jacobs

Level Range: 4-12

Original System: Pathfinder 2nd Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [Should You GM Seven Dooms for Sandpoint?](#) By How It's Played
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Seven Dooms for Sandpoint](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Seven Dooms for Sandpoint](#)



For the 200th Adventure Path Volume, Paizo put an entire Adventure Path in a single volume. The entire Seven Dooms for Sandpoint was authored by Paizo's Creative Director James Jacobs. This relatively new AP is already a highly-rated fan favorite.

Seven Dooms for Sandpoint is a huge dungeon crawl punctuated by trips to the iconic town of Sandpoint and some adventuring in the wilderness of the Lost Coast. Although the AP stands on its own, it is clearly intended as a love letter to Pathfinder's early history, particularly to the events of *Rise of the Runelords*. Players who have previously experienced *Rise of the Runelords* will enjoy seeing some of their old allies and enemies resurface.

Seven Dooms for Sandpoint does an admirable job mixing dungeon delving with urban and wilderness encounters, leaving plenty of scope for a mix of play styles, from old school kick-in-the-door to complex role-playing. The AP serves as a toolkit for whichever play style the GM wants to support, with a variety of fun combats and a variety of NPCs to interact with. Plus, the ending **[Hidden with invisio-text:]**

Given that *Seven Dooms for Sandpoint* starts at 4th level and occurs in the same general part of the world as *Rusthenge*, which covers levels 1-3, *Rusthenge* is a natural choice for GM's to run prior to this AP.

Highlights:

- ❖ A megadungeon done right. The dungeon itself is fun and has a great variety of encounters.
- ❖ There are plenty of reasons to head back to town and lots to do when you get there, including interesting NPCs and a long-term research project.
- ❖ Great callbacks to *Rise of the Runelords*.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ There isn't a lot of room for downtime.
- ❖ Despite the presence of mysteries, PCs with the Investigator class aren't really going to be that useful, as most of the answers are in the dungeon.

GM's Tips:

- ❖ If they haven't already, GM's should read through *Rise of the Runelords* to understand some of the background on various characters.
- ❖ GM's will appreciate having [Sandpoint: Light of the Lost Coast](#) to read through for details and ideas.

Wardens of Wildwood

Tarondor's Ranking: 31st

Poll Rating and Rank: (4.6) 42nd

Date: April 2024 - June 2024

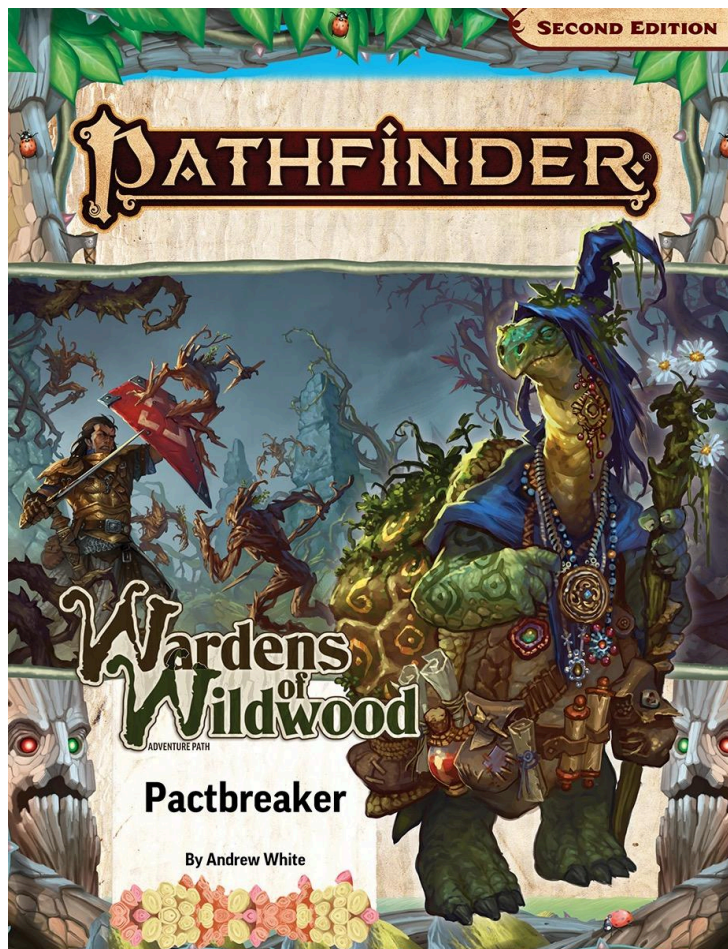
Authors: Andrew White, Jessica Catalan, Mike Kimmel

Level Range: 5-14

Original System: Pathfinder 2nd Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [Should You GM Wardens of Wildwood?](#) By How It's Played
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Wardens of Wildwood](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Wardens of Wildwood](#)



Wardens of Wildwood doesn't deserve the hate it gets. It doesn't deserve to be rated with the likes of *Second Darkness* and *Council of Thieves*, but here it is, among the lowest-rated Adventure Paths in our poll. Most of the

criticism isn't of the AP itself but for its advertising. Most reviewers cited their disappointment that the story wasn't about them being the bomb-throwing eco-terrorists they thought they were promised. Whether that's a reasonable thing to want out of your entertainment is beyond the scope of this guide.

Regardless of the promise of its advertising, *Wardens of Wildwood* is actually a pretty good story about the conflict between two visions of the balance between Nature and Civilization, with the PCs on the side of cooperation between the two. You're not the eco-terrorists; you're the other guys.

The setting, the Verduran forest that dominates much of Andoran, is pretty cool, as are many of the set piece combats. And it's really nice to see an AP that focuses on Nature themes. In theory, this is a perfect AP for druids and other nature-focused characters.

On the other hand, *Wardens of Wildwood* is plagued with poor organization as well as missing or hard-to-find information that makes it difficult for a GM to run without more prep work than is usual. The story doesn't *flow*. It trips and stumbles over missing information, plot points that go nowhere and a confusing lack of clarity. In most AP's the story is clearly laid out in summary at the start of the work, but here the GM must hunt for it, as though the authors were trying to make it a mystery.

As I said, *Wardens of Wildwood* isn't the total mess represented by some of the other worst-rated AP's. With prep work and careful reading, the GM has a good tale, solid NPCs and a fantastic setting to work with, but it will require more work than an AP should.

All in all, I have a positive feeling about *Wardens of Wildwood*. I think a lot of the negative reviews are overblown. I would play or GM this AP, but it wouldn't be my first choice because all the extra work it would require to ferret out the plot and streamline the story is what I'm paying the publisher to do for me.

Highlights:

- ❖ Lots of cool locations.
- ❖ Fun combats with a surprising variety of creatures.

- ❖ A fairly solid story.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ The *Player's Guide* gives you wildly inaccurate expectations of what the story is actually about.
- ❖ Poor organization requiring extra prep work by the GM. Finding basic information on what the plot is supposed to be can be difficult even for the GM because the GM's summary doesn't actually tell you much about what's happening and who's who.
- ❖ Some plot lines go nowhere, suggesting a lack of proper coordination between the various authors.

GM's Tips:

- ❖ Tell your players to ignore the *Player's Guide*, which suggests you're going to be anti-civilization eco-terrorists. You're not. It's a case of mis-managed expectations.

Curtain Call

Tarondor's Ranking: 13th

Poll Rating and Rank: (7.1) 13th

Date: August 2024 - September 2024

Authors: Richard Pett, Kendra Leigh Speedling, Sen H.H.S.

Level Range: 11-20

Original System: Pathfinder 2nd Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [Should You GM Curtain Call?](#) by How It's Played
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Curtain Call](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Curtain Call](#)



Curtain Call is a good Adventure Path, bordering on greatness. For the right group (one that prioritizes roleplaying), it may be one of the *greatest* Adventure Paths. This AP starts off with the idea “what if the PCs were involved in creating a great opera about their own adventures?”, which

sounds like an inconsequential romp. And indeed, that part of the story is fun and light-hearted as you schmooze, wine and dine and cajole the powers-that-be in the theater world to support what promises to be a great work of art. But that's just part of the story. Because another, greater story is unfolding in the background that will soon engulf the PC's in one of the most consequential events of any Adventure Path.

Unlike the earlier *Extinction Curse* Adventure Path, where the framing device of the circus was mostly forgotten early on, *Curtain Call* keeps up its opera through all three books and the themes of Secrets, War and Art are woven throughout the tale from start to finish.

Curtain Call breaks new ground by referring heavily to your earlier adventures without determining for you what those adventures were. So you can have previously played any AP that ends at Level 10 and be ready to roll right into *Curtain Call*. For those who don't know, a curtain call is a theater term for bringing back the actors for one more bow. And in this case, it's not just your PCs that return! It's a clever device and I admire how well it is used.

James Jacobs has pointed out that although the AP was written assuming your PCs begin at Level 11, it's quite easy to use 13th level characters that have just finished *Seven Dooms for Sandpoint* by skipping Chapter 1 of Book 1, which serves as a prologue for *Curtain Call*. I applaud Paizo for continuing to stretch the boundaries of what an Adventure Path can be.

Curtain Call takes place primarily in the city of Kintargo (previously the setting for *Hell's Rebels*). The nearby city of Vyre is also an important location. Between them, there is a lot of urban activity in this AP, making it great for certain city-based feats and character options.

What else can I say without some spoilers? Well, I'll spoil only this much: *Curtain Call* is about much more than an opera. Your little production becomes the focus of much larger powers, their cults and the future of Golarion. Volume 3 gets quite cosmic.

One of the best aspects of *Curtain Call* is the significant amount of roleplaying that is possible. Some challenges can only be overcome by

roleplaying and some very difficult combats *may* be solved by roleplaying. So at the very least you're going to want at least one PC with a high Charisma and some amount of Diplomacy. Make no mistake, though, *Curtain Call* also has plenty of combat and even some dungeon delving. Your combat-loving players won't be disappointed so long as they're also open to role-playing.

Some reviewers have complained about the number of subsystems in use in this AP. I don't see it that way. I think the subsystems serve as a guide for new GM's, helping them figure out the complex interactions of NPCs in large social settings, or for tracking the success of an important infiltration. The point of these subsystems is that they're training wheels. Experienced GM's can ignore them and just role-play or adjudicate the situations on their own, while beginners may appreciate having mechanics to fall back on where they might otherwise feel they're in over their heads.

So, how to summarize? I had zero interest in what I initially perceived as the AP for Theater Kids⁴. But having read the AP carefully, I now think it would be a blast to GM or play in. It's hard to convey exactly why without spoiling some of the AP's best secrets.

And some secrets are so very dangerous to spoil. Right? 😊

Highlights:

- ❖ Great opportunities for role-playing.
- ❖ More opportunities for hamming it up and overacting than any other AP. *"No! That's not how it happened? It was my spell that killed the villain!"*
- ❖ The Opera theme does not fade away.
- ❖ The PCs become involved in some of the highest stakes of all.
- ❖ Cool monsters and very cool encounter locations.

Drawbacks:

- ❖ The three volumes of *Curtain Call* each have a very distinct flavor and the tonal shift can feel disorienting. Volume I has a few dungeon crawls, Volume II is a lot of role-playing and investigation and I'm not

⁴ And this is coming from a former Theater Kid. Hey, my MacBeth was pretty darned good!

going to say what Volume III is all about, just that it's also quite different.

- ❖ The plot, though very interesting and coherent, is convoluted. Figuring out what's happening is a major element of the story, so players who don't want to figure things out for themselves will be bored.
- ❖ There are a *lot* of subsystems in this AP. As I mentioned above, that need not be a detriment, but to a literalist, or someone who doesn't want to do the prep work, this could be a flaw.

GM's Tips:

- ❖ More than any other Adventure Path, *Curtain Call* cries out for the GM to personalize the experience. You'll really bring out the best in this AP if you spend the prep time to bring in NPCs from the previous AP and even from other AP's the players may have been in. This AP is over the top in tone, so embrace that.
- ❖ Don't make the mistake of playing this one with new PC's. *Curtain Call* relies for much of its fun on being integrated into the previous campaign you played.
- ❖ If you know you're going to run *Curtain Call* before after your current AP, it might be fun to have the final villain of the current AP swear vengeance on the PCs right before they defeat him, her or it.
- ❖ It's not necessary that Chapter One occurs in Osirion. Set it anywhere that seems logical to you, based on the previous AP.
- ❖ Don't run this one if your players are not into at least some amount of role-playing. Kick-in-the-door groups should just keep right on walking.

Triumph of the Tusk

Tarondor's Ranking: 19th

Poll Rating and Rank: (7.3) 11th

Date: October 2024 - December 2024

Authors: Brian Duckwitz, David Schwartz, Shay Snow, Kendra Leigh Speedling

Level Range: 3-11

Original System: Pathfinder 2nd Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ [Is Triumph of the Tusk Really That Good?](#) By Lunatic Dice
- ❖ [Triumph of the Tusk Actual Play](#) by Orcs & Dorks
- ❖ [Reddit Discussion of Triumph of the Tusk](#)
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Triumph of the Tusk](#)



Triumph of the Tusk is a good adventure path, but suffers from some editing issues and map problems. In this AP, the players take on the role of diplomats who rise to become heroes of a collection of orc tribes that wish to

unify Belkzen but are beset by treachery, undead, invasion and the threat of civil war.

Let's start with the obvious. This is an orc campaign. The AP and Player's Guide give the usual lip service to other ancestries, but honestly if you don't want to play an orc, don't play *Triumph of the Tusk*. You'll be missing out on most of the fun. GM's, if your players don't want to play orcs, look for another AP!

Okay, with that out of the way, let's dig into this. The greatest strength of *Triumph of the Tusk* is that you get to play orcs! In addition to that, there are some awesome set piece battles, lots of opportunities for role-playing and some very interesting opponents. The final combat is one of the more memorable in any AP.

That said, this AP also comes with a number of issues. There aren't enough maps and what maps there are often quite small or in one case contains a stairway to nowhere. The end of Volume 1 has the main NPC Ardax the White in two different places at once. There is also the now-traditional issue of a final villain that comes out of nowhere in Volume 3.

A further issue is that the PC's patron and main quest giver is the orc chieftain Ardax the White. But we know almost nothing about Ardax, his origins, personality or true goals. If the GM isn't careful, Ardax can seem very shady and they'll spend the AP wondering if they can trust him.

But the biggest issue besetting *Triumph of the Tusk* is how little information we have on the politics of the orcs or the geopolitical situation in Belkzen. It's difficult to understand what's happening with the various factions in Belkzen, and that's a shame because there is plenty of backmatter in these volumes, but none of it is directly relevant to who these people are, what they want or why they're fighting.

Triumph of the Tusk begins with the PCs attending a diplomatic event called by a major national figure to deal with the fallout of recent events... almost exactly like *Wardens of Wildwood* and *Spore War*. Combine that with some hints at the end of *Curtain Call* and it's eerily like Paizo is telling us to prepare for a major war that will rage across Avistan. Maybe one that will

eventually close out the 2e era the way *Tyrant's Grasp* closed out 1e? Anyway... just as with those other APs, you don't remain diplomats for long and soon get embroiled in Ardax's plans to unify Belkzen and defy the Whispering Tyrant. Along the way you will deal with the fallout of the events of *War of Immortals*. 'Nuff said.

Highlights:

- ❖ Good Combination of roleplaying and combat
- ❖ Interesting set piece encounters

Drawbacks:

- ❖ Editing issues including confusing references to where Ardax ends up at the end of Volume I.
- ❖ Map issues - not enough and not always clear and concise
- ❖ Not enough information about the main NPC, Ardax the White (hardly any, really).
- ❖ Not enough backmatter about orcish politics or the setting of Belkzen to make the politics in the AP readily comprehensible
- ❖ Lots of subsystems, especially chase scenes.

GM Tips:

- ❖ Require your PCs to be orcs or dromaars.
- ❖ This is a good AP for beginner GMs and players
- ❖ I like that the AP adds "Belkzen Operations", side quests you can put into play wherever you like. However, I strongly recommend you **don't** have the players make side characters for this. Let their main PC's enjoy the side quests.

Spore War

Tarondor's Ranking: n/a

Poll Rating and Rank: n/a

Date: January 2025 - March 2025

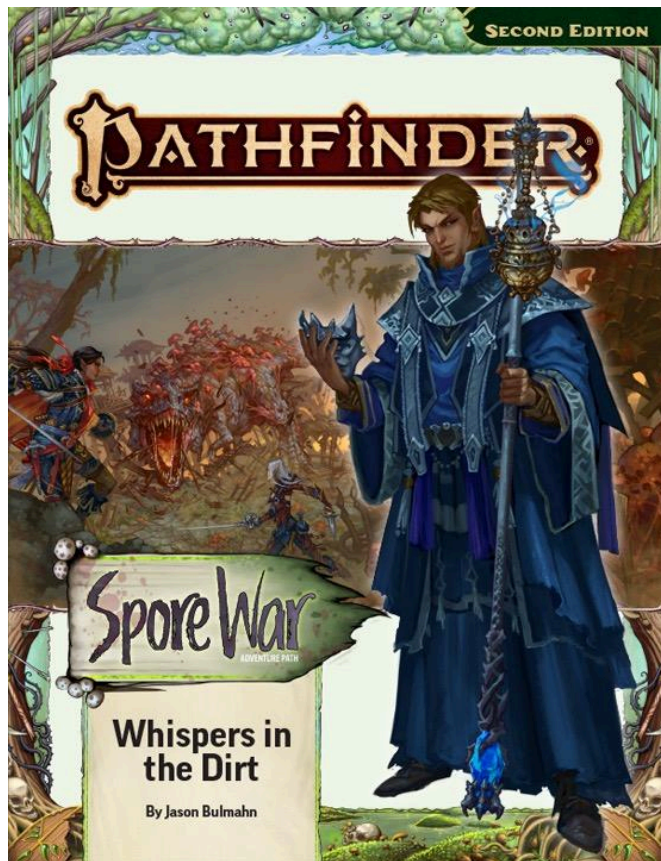
Authors: Jason Buhlman, James Jacobs, Rigby Bendele

Level Range: 11-20

Original System: Pathfinder 2nd Edition

Links to Resources:

- ❖ Reddit Discussion of Spore War
- ❖ [Paizo Forums Discussion of Spore War](#)



I'm not going to attempt to rate *Spore War*, because as of this writing, only Volume 1: *Whispers in the Dirt* has shipped. What I will say is that I'm pretty excited for it. *Spore War* is about a war between the elves of Kyonin and the nascent demon-lord of Tanglebriar, Treerazer⁵. Treerazer, of course, is one of

⁵ Not at all a spoiler. It says so right on the back of the first volume.

the biggest threats in all of Golarion, so it promises to be a high-powered romp.

Volume I sees the PC's working to gather together allies from all around Lake Encarthan to oppose not Treerazer, but the Whispering Tyrant, Tar-Baphon. After an early attack, they pursue a cult into Razmiran before returning to Kyonin with their findings. That's all I'll say about the plot.

This volume provides a great mix of interesting role-playing, investigation and combat. As I said, I'm excited to see where the AP goes!

Numbers for Nerds

"Mean" is what's normally called the average. "Median" is the middle point. "Mode" is the most common value (there can be more than one).

TITLE	Number of Responses	MEAN	MEDIAN	MODE	Tarondor's Rating
Shackled City	35	6.9	7	7	34th
Age of Worms	46	7.7	8	7, 9 & 10	30th
Savage Tide	23	7.5	8	8	29th
Rise of the Runelords	305	7.6	8	8	21st
Curse of the Crimson Throne	214	8.1	8	8	2nd
Second Darkness	62	4.4	5	5 & 6	44th
Legacy of Fire	47	5.5	6	7	27th
Council of Thieves	45	5.2	5.5	7	42nd
Kingmaker	306	6.7⁶	8	8	5th
Serpent's Skull	69	5.4	5	5	43rd
Carrion Crown	109	6.4	7	8	22nd
Jade Regent	70	5.8	6	6	39th

⁶ [Boo!](#) If you gave this a low vote, we cannot be friends.

Skull and Shackles	127	6.6	7	7	25th
Shattered Star	79	6.4	7	7	17th
Reign of Winter	108	6.8	7	7,8 & 9	26th
Wrath of the Righteous	151	6.9	8	8	11th
Mummy's Mask	84	6.8	7	8	23rd
Iron Gods	110	7.2	8	8	7th
Giantslayer	88	5.9	6	6	40th
Hell's Rebels	118	7.9	8	9	3rd
Hell's Vengeance	51	5.6	7	8	41st
Strange Aeons	101	7.0	7	7	18th
Ironfang Invasion	52	7.0	7	6	14th
Ruins of Azlant	57	6.2	6	6	36th
War for the Crown	60	7.3	8	7	6th
Return of the Runelords	65	7.0	8	8	15th
Tyrant's Grasp	66	7.1	8	8	10th
Age of Ashes	210	6.5	7	8	9th

Extinction Curse	154	4.8	5	5	38th
Agents of Edgewatch	133	5.8	6	6	32nd
Abomination Vaults	400	6.7	7	7	16th
Fists of the Ruby Phoenix	120	7.8	8	9	8th
Strength of Thousands	190	7.6	8	8	12th
Quest for the Frozen Flame	97	6.9	7	8	20th
Outlaws of Alkenstar	163	6.5	7	7	37th
Blood Lords	142	6.3	7	7 & 8	35th
Gatewalkers	155	4.4	4	4	33rd
Stolen Fate	91	6.5	6	6	28th
Sky King's Tomb	80	6.6	7	8	24th
Season of Ghosts	169	8.9	10	10	1st
Seven Dooms for Sandpoint	72	7.8	8	8	4th
Wardens of Wildwood	47	4.6	5	2	31st
Curtain Call	28	7.1	7	9	13th
Triumph of the Tusk	26	7.3	8	8	19th

Other AP Reviews

- ❖ [willseamons Guide to Every Pathfinder Adventure Path](#)
- ❖ [ToModera's Updated Review of Pathfinder AP's](#)
- ❖ [Top 10 Pathfinder 2e Adventure Paths](#) by Lunatic Dice

Every 2e Conversion of a 1e Adventure Path

Prolific Redditor TheWamp has compiled a recent and seemingly very complete list of PF2e conversions of PF1e Adventure Paths. It's well worth checking out.

[Every Conversion of an Adventure Path or Module to 2e \(December 2024\)](#)

Every Pathfinder Adventure Path Actual Play

I've listed some actual plays above, almost at random, it seems. But the folks at [whatdoyoudopods](#) have compiled a much more complete list of Actual Plays to listen to. Check it out!

[Paizo Adventure Path Podcasts and Streams](#)

Other Pathfinder Stuff I've Done

Pathfinder, 2nd Edition

[Tarondor's Guide to the Pathfinder Second Edition \(Remastered\) Bard](#)
[Tarondor's Guide to the Pathfinder Second Edition \(Remastered\) Cleric](#)
[Tarondor's Guide to the Pathfinder Second Edition \(Remastered\) Fighter](#)
[Tarondor's Guide to the Pathfinder Second Edition \(Remastered\) Guardian](#)
[Tarondor's Guide to the Pathfinder Second Edition \(Remastered\) Monk](#)
[Tarondor's Guide to the Pathfinder Second Edition \(Remastered\) Ranger](#)

[Tarondor's Guide to the Pathfinder Second Edition \(Remastered\) Rogue](#)
[Tarondor's Guide to the Pathfinder Second Edition \(Remastered\) Wizard](#)
[Tarondor's Pathfinder 2e Conversion of The Emerald Spire Superdungeon](#)
[Tarondor's Pathfinder 2e Conversion of Monte Cook's The Banewarrens and Night of Dissolution](#)
[Tarondor's Troop Compendium](#)
[Tarondor's 2025 Guide to Pathfinder Adventure Paths](#)

Pathfinder, 1st Edition

[Tarondor's Guide to the Pathfinder First Edition Transmuter Wizard](#)
[Red Hand of Doom Conversion](#)

About the Author

Tarondor began playing D&D in 1977 and has been GMing a regular game roughly every two weeks ever since (though the game system has changed from time to time). He is still starry-eyed from meeting [Gary Gygax](#), [Brian Blume](#), [Dave Trampier](#) and [Tom Wham](#) at [GenCon XIII](#) in 1980. Tarondor has GMed every edition of [Dungeons & Dragons](#), every edition of [Pathfinder](#), every edition of [Traveller](#) and many others, including [Call of Cthulhu](#), [The One Ring](#) and the [Amber Diceless RPG](#). He considers "[Breakout:Normandy](#)" to be his favorite board game.

He is also a husband, father, attorney and businessman.