

VANISHING TOWER PRESS

Strategic Business Plan

Prepared for Jay Murphy, Publisher
Aspen, Colorado • May 2026

"Fantasy is the Playground of the Inappropriate"

1. Executive Summary

OPPORTUNITY

Vanishing Tower Press occupies an underserved niche: high-quality, author-driven, rules-lite RPGs at accessible price points. The OSR and indie RPG market has grown significantly since 2020, and VTP is well-positioned to expand its reach with targeted distribution improvements, a cohesive visual brand refresh, and a modest expansion of the product line.

This plan addresses three strategic priorities:

- Expand POD distribution to maximize print product reach and revenue
- Redesign cover visuals to achieve shelf-competitive brand identity
- Develop a 12-month product roadmap to deepen the USR ecosystem

2. Company Overview

2.1 Mission & Vision

Mission: To publish inexpensive, odd, and uncommonly well-crafted pencil-and-paper roleplaying games that celebrate pulp fiction, old-school adventure, and genre diversity.

Vision: To become the premier destination for rules-lite RPG products that respect the player's time and imagination, distributed globally through print-on-demand and digital channels.

2.2 Current Product Line

VTP's catalog as of 2026 includes the following titles:

Product	Format	Price (PDF)	Price (Print)	Channel
USR Sword & Sorcery Deluxe Book One	A5 Softcover / PDF	\$—	\$12.25	DriveThruRPG
USR Sword & Sorcery Deluxe Book Two	A5 Softcover / PDF	\$—	\$12.06	DriveThruRPG
The Black Book of Sorcery	Paperback / PDF	\$6.66	\$16.66	DriveThru / Lulu
AA03: Purging Woth Nrlld Oekwyn's Muddy Hole	Softcover / PDF	\$3.99	\$11.47	DriveThruRPG
Anthropomorphic USR	Softcover / PDF	\$3.95	\$9.91	DriveThruRPG
Western USR 3rd Edition (Full Color)	A5 Hardcover / PDF	\$5.96	Pending	DriveThruRPG
Old School Fantasy Adventure Journal	Hardcover Journal	—	\$24.89	DriveThruRPG
Santapocalypse!	PDF / Print & Play	\$2.50	—	DriveThruRPG

2.3 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
• Unique rules-lite USR engine with loyal following • Strong, authentic author voice • Positive critical reception (Ten Foot Pole) • Low overhead / POD-native model • Active blog and podcast	• Inconsistent cover visual identity • Limited distribution (2 platforms) • No dedicated website (blog-only) • Sparse social media footprint • No

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
presence • Genre breadth (fantasy, western, anthro, horror)	newsletter / direct audience list • Products spread across Lulu and DTRPG

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
• OSR/indie RPG market growing YoY • Backerkit/Kickstarter for USR core book • Itch.io for PDF discovery • Amazon KDP for broader print reach • Bundling products for higher AOV • Convention presence (Gen Con, Gary Con) • Licensing USR to other publishers	• Large publishers (MCDM, Kobold Press) crowding rules-lite space • AI art saturation lowering perceived quality • DTRPG algorithm changes affecting discovery • Lulu.com pricing/shipping increases • Small market for niche genres (anthro, western)

3. Market Analysis

3.1 Target Audience

VTP's primary customers are:

- OSR enthusiasts (ages 30–55) who value old-school adventure design and rules simplicity
- Indie RPG collectors who support small press and creator-owned games
- New players seeking low-barrier-to-entry systems for quick-start campaigns
- Genre fans of sword & sorcery (Howard, Leiber, Moorcock), westerns, and pulp sci-fi

3.2 Competitive Landscape

VTP competes in the 'rules-lite indie RPG' segment alongside publishers such as:

Publisher	Key Product	Positioning	Price Point
Cairn / Yochai Gal	Cairn 2e	Free / PWYW PDF, POD	\$0–\$20
Knave / Ben Milton	Knave 2e	OSR lite, Kickstarter-backed	\$10–\$25
Mörk Borg	Mörk Borg	Art-forward, premium design	\$20–\$40
Osprey Games	Jackdaw, Scarlet Heroes	Genre-diverse, professional art	\$15–\$30
Vanishing Tower Press	USR line	Author-driven, very affordable	\$3–\$25

COMPETITIVE INSIGHT

VTP's price point is a genuine competitive advantage — but only if product presentation matches the quality of the writing. Buyers browsing DTRPG make split-second cover decisions. Closing the visual gap is the single highest-leverage improvement available.

3.3 Market Trends

- The global tabletop RPG market is projected to exceed \$3.5B by 2028, with indie/OSR growing fastest
- Print-on-demand has become the default for small publishers; physical books carry prestige and higher margins
- Itch.io has emerged as a major discovery channel for indie RPGs alongside DriveThruRPG
- Bundling (e.g., Bundle of Holding, Itch bundles) drives significant revenue spikes for small publishers

- AI-generated art is increasingly common but controversial — commissioning even one striking piece of original art per release signals quality commitment

4. Print-on-Demand Platform Recommendations

VTP currently uses DriveThruRPG and Lulu.com. Below is a full analysis of recommended platforms, including two that VTP should add immediately.

4.1 Platform Comparison

Platform	Audience	Royalty / Margin	Best For	Priority
DriveThruRPG (current)	RPG enthusiasts worldwide	65–70% PDF; ~30% POD	Core RPG discovery & digital sales	★★★★★
Lulu.com (current)	General / author	~80% at list price	High-quality hardcovers, journals	★★★★☆
Itch.io (ADD NOW)	Indie game fans	Up to 100% (you set fee)	PDF bundles, PWYW, visibility	★★★★★
Amazon KDP (ADD NOW)	General consumers	~60% royalty (paperback)	Mainstream discovery, gifting	★★★★☆
Backerkit / Kickstarter	Crowdfunding backers	Varies (keep most)	Deluxe / hardcover editions	★★★★☆
Indie Press Revolution	FLGS & hobby shops	~50% wholesale	Retail & convention presence	★★★★☆

4.2 Itch.io — Immediate Priority

Itch.io has become the second-largest RPG PDF marketplace and is especially strong for indie, zine-format, and rules-lite products. Key advantages for VTP:

- Zero listing fees; you choose your own revenue split (can be 100%)
- Strong community of exactly VTP's target buyer — OSR, indie, experimental RPG fans
- Itch Bundles (Bundle for Racial Justice raised \$8M+; Bundle of Holding operates similarly) create massive spikes
- "Pay What You Want" pricing works well for driving volume on older titles
- Simple file hosting — upload PDFs directly with no approval queue

ACTION ITEM

Recommended action: List all existing PDFs on Itch.io within 30 days. Set PWYW minimums at current DTRPG prices. Link from the blog sidebar and Facebook page. This costs nothing and adds a significant discovery channel.

4.3 Amazon KDP — Short-Term Priority

Amazon Kindle Direct Publishing offers paperback and hardcover POD with global fulfillment through Amazon's network. For VTP this means:

- Products appear in Amazon search alongside mainstream hobby books — reaching buyers who never visit DTRPG
- Prime shipping dramatically increases conversion for casual buyers
- Royalties are ~60% of list price minus printing cost (typically \$3–6 per digest book)
- Digest / A5 format files from DTRPG can be reformatted for KDP's 5.5" × 8.5" trim with minimal rework
- Author copies available at print cost for convention sales

ACTION ITEM

Recommended action: Upload USR Sword & Sorcery Deluxe Book One and Western USR 3rd Edition to KDP as the first two titles. These are the strongest entry points for non-RPG-specialist buyers who search 'tabletop RPG western' or 'sword and sorcery rules.'

4.4 Indie Press Revolution — Convention Play

IPR is a distributor focused on independent and story-game publishers, providing access to independent hobby shops (FLGS) and convention vendor halls. Wholesale terms are typically 50/50, but the brand-building value of physical shelf presence is significant. Recommended once VTP has a standardized cover look across the product line.

5. Cover Design Audit & Recommendations

5.1 Current Visual Brand Assessment

After reviewing VTP's existing cover designs, the following patterns emerge:

Title	Current Look	Strengths	Weaknesses
USR S&S Deluxe Bk 1 & 2	Commissioned B&W illustration, digest format	Pulp-appropriate art style; atmospheric	Small format limits impact; typography is generic; no unified logo treatment
The Black Book of Sorcery	Dark cover, illustrated	Strong thematic color (black/dark)	Title treatment buried; no series branding visible
AA03: Muddy Hole	Green-tinted cover, OSR illustration style	Evocative old-school feel	Green color inconsistent with rest of line; small font; no VTP logo
Anthropomorphic USR	Animated/comics style cover	Captures the 90s nostalgia tone perfectly	Completely different visual language from S&S line; no shared brand DNA
Western USR 3rd Ed.	Full color, AI-assisted art	First full-color entry; more modern	AI art quality inconsistency; type placement needs refinement
Adventure Journal	Functional/utilitarian layout	Clear functional purpose	Looks like a planner, not a game product; missed brand opportunity

5.2 Core Problems

- No unified visual identity: Each product looks like it comes from a different publisher
- No consistent VTP logo or imprint mark: Brand awareness cannot build without a visible mark
- Typography is inconsistent: Font choices vary widely with no series logic
- Color language is incoherent: Green, black, brown, full-color, and B&W all appear without system
- Spine and back cover treatments are underdeveloped for POD products

DESIGN PRIORITY

The single most impactful investment VTP can make is a professional logo and a cover template system. This does not require commissioning all-new art — it requires a designer who can apply a consistent frame, typography, and imprint mark to existing and future covers.

5.3 Recommended Cover Design System

Logo & Imprint Mark

Commission a VTP tower/sigil logo (a stylized vanishing tower or arcane mark) that appears consistently on every cover, spine, and product page thumbnail. Budget: \$150–300 from a freelance logo designer (99designs, Dribbble, or OSR community artists).

Series Badge System

Each product line gets a distinct color-coded series badge while sharing the same overall frame and logo:

Series	Color	Feel
USR Sword & Sorcery	Deep crimson + aged parchment	Pulp fantasy, Howard-era heroism
Western USR	Burnt sienna + dusty gold	Frontier grit, dime-novel energy
Anthropomorphic USR	Forest green + warm tan	Action-cartoon nostalgia, vibrant
OSR Adventures (AA series)	Deep forest green + black	Old-school dungeon dread
Standalone / Supplements	Midnight navy + silver	Universal, clean

Typography Recommendation

Primary display font: A period-appropriate serif with a hand-crafted quality. Suggested options include IM Fell English (free/Google), Cinzel Decorative (free/Google), or licensed Essonnes. Body/subtitle font: A clean humanist sans such as Lato or Source Sans Pro. ALL CAPS with letter-spacing for author byline and series name.

Cover Layout Template

- Top third: Title in large display serif, series badge in upper corner
- Middle: Full-bleed illustration (commission one strong hero image per product; use AI tools only for backgrounds/textures)

- Lower strip: Author name in small caps, VTP logo, and tagline or system badge ("A USR Game")
- Back cover: 3–4 sentence hook, system requirements, barcode, VTP logo, web address

Art Strategy

VTP has begun using AI-generated art. The recommendation is a hybrid approach: commission one original, human-created hero illustration per major release (budget \$100–250 per piece from OSR/fantasy freelancers on ArtStation, DeviantArt, or the OSR Discord art channels). Use AI tools for backgrounds, textures, borders, and supplementary interior illustrations. This gives covers a professional anchor while keeping costs manageable.

Quick Wins — Retroactive Cover Updates

- Apply the new VTP logo to all existing covers as a minimum update
- Re-release Western USR 3rd Ed. with updated cover as its official POD launch
- Create a unified product page banner for DTRPG and Itch.io using the new design language

6. Product Line Expansion Recommendations

6.1 Immediate Releases (0–6 months)

- USR Sword & Sorcery Deluxe Book Three: Worlds of Adventure — Complete the announced trilogy. This is overdue and anticipated by existing customers. Priority #1.
- Western USR 3rd Edition POD Launch — Files are in approval queue; push this across the finish line and list simultaneously on DTRPG, Lulu, and KDP.
- USR Core Rules Standalone Booklet — A single 24-page digest that presents USR mechanics cleanly for new players, usable with any genre supplement. Drives top-of-funnel discovery.

6.2 Medium-Term Releases (6–12 months)

- Horror USR — The horror/Cthulhu-adjacent RPG space is enormous and rules-lite horror games (Liminal Horror, Mörk Borg) are among the fastest-growing indie categories. VTP's voice is suited for this.
- AA04 OSR Adventure Module — A follow-up to the well-reviewed Muddy Hole. Keep the gonzo-OSR tone that earned the Ten Foot Pole placement.
- USR Zine / Annual — A 24–48 page annual collecting tables, micro-settings, one-page adventures, and rules supplements. Easy to crowdfund via Kickstarter or Zinequest.

6.3 Long-Term Opportunities (12–24 months)

- USR Core Hardcover Kickstarter — A deluxe, illustrated hardcover edition of the complete USR system across all genres. This is the flagship crowdfunding opportunity.
- Licensing USR to Guest Authors — Open the system for community content (similar to MCDM's Arcadia or DMs Guild). A VTP community content program on DTRPG generates passive royalties.
- Con Presence — Author copies from KDP enable a small convention table. Gary Con, OSRCon, or local Colorado events are natural fits.

7. Financial Overview & Projections

These projections are conservative estimates based on typical indie RPG small-press performance at VTP's catalog size and audience level.

7.1 Current Revenue Estimate

Stream	Est. Monthly Units	Avg. Revenue/Unit	Est. Monthly Revenue
PDF sales (DTRPG)	15–25	\$3.50	\$52–\$87
POD sales (DTRPG + Lulu)	5–10	\$4.00	\$20–\$40
Total Current Est.	—	—	\$72–\$127/mo

7.2 12-Month Revenue Target (with plan implemented)

Stream	Target Monthly Units	Avg. Revenue/Unit	Target Monthly Revenue
PDF sales (DTRPG + Itch.io)	40–60	\$3.75	\$150–\$225
POD sales (DTRPG + Lulu + KDP)	15–25	\$4.50	\$67–\$112
New release launch spikes (avg.)	—	—	\$80–\$200/mo avg
Total 12-Month Target	—	—	\$300–\$540/mo

FINANCIAL NOTE

Even at the conservative end, implementing the distribution expansion and releasing 2–3 new titles in the next 12 months projects a 3–4x revenue increase with minimal capital outlay. The OSR market rewards consistency and catalog depth.

7.3 Investment Budget Recommendation

Investment	Est. Cost	Priority
VTP Logo & Brand Mark design	\$150–\$300	Immediate
Cover template system (1 designer, 4–6 templates)	\$300–\$600	Immediate
Hero illustration for 2 new releases	\$200–\$500	Short-term

Investment	Est. Cost	Priority
Itch.io setup (all existing titles)	\$0	Immediate
Amazon KDP setup (2 titles)	\$0	Short-term
USR Book Three manuscript completion	Author time only	Immediate
Total Estimated Investment	\$650–\$1,400	Year 1

8. 12-Month Action Roadmap

Timeframe	Action Item	Owner	Platform/Channel
Month 1	Set up Itch.io storefront; list all existing PDFs	Jay	Itch.io
Month 1	Commission VTP logo & brand mark	Jay + Designer	Freelance
Month 1–2	Complete Western USR POD file approval; launch on DTRPG + KDP	Jay	DTRPG / KDP
Month 2	Design cover template system for USR S&S series	Designer	Internal
Month 2–3	Complete USR Sword & Sorcery Deluxe Book Three manuscript	Jay	Internal
Month 3	Launch USR S&S Book Three on DTRPG + Itch.io with new cover template	Jay	DTRPG / Itch
Month 3–4	Upload USR S&S Books 1–3 to Amazon KDP	Jay	KDP
Month 4–5	Create USR Core Rules standalone booklet	Jay	All channels
Month 5–6	Apply unified cover branding retroactively to existing titles	Jay + Designer	All channels
Month 6	Mid-year review: sales data, platform performance, next titles	Jay	Internal
Month 7–8	Begin Horror USR manuscript; commission cover art	Jay	Internal
Month 8–9	AA04 OSR Adventure Module release	Jay	DTRPG / Itch / KDP
Month 10–11	Horror USR launch; Itch.io featured game push	Jay	All channels
Month 12	Plan USR Zine / Annual for following year; evaluate Kickstarter	Jay	Backerkit/KS

9. Conclusion

Vanishing Tower Press has something rare in the indie RPG market: a genuine and consistent creative voice, a functional rules engine that players enjoy, and a decade-plus track record of publishing. Jay Murphy's instinct for pulp-fiction adventure and old-school game design is evident across the entire catalog.

The gap between where VTP is and where it could be is not one of talent or product quality — it is one of presentation and distribution reach. The recommendations in this plan require modest financial investment but significant focused effort. The payoff is a publisher with a recognizable brand, products available wherever RPG buyers shop, and a growing catalog that builds on itself.

FINAL THOUGHT

The OSR and indie RPG community actively supports small publishers who show up consistently and treat their customers well. Vanishing Tower Press already does both. The next step is making sure the world can find — and recognize — the products.

For questions about this plan, contact:

Jay Murphy, Publisher — Vanishing Tower Press

jay@vanishingtowerpress.com

vanishingtower.blogspot.com