

# PATHFINDER CHRONICLES

CLASSIC  
TREASURES  
REVISITED

Todd Stewart, Michael Kortes,  
and Jonathan H. Keith

# CLASSIC TREASURES

DECK OF MANY THINGS

FIGURINE OF  
WONDROUS POWER

CUBE OF FORCE

SPHERE OF ANNIHILATION

HELM OF  
BRILLIANCE

WELL OF  
MANY WORLDS

HORN OF  
VALHALLA

VORPAL SWORD

STAFF OF THE MAGI

BAG OF HOLDING



# CLASSIC TREASURES REVISITED

A *Pathfinder Chronicles* Supplement

This *Pathfinder Chronicles* book works best with the *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook* and the *Pathfinder Bestiary*. Although it is suitable for play in any fantasy world, it is optimized for use in the *Pathfinder Chronicles* campaign setting.



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# MYTHIC TREASURES

**M**y friend Benagosius was a master craftsman, capable of working wood, ivory, stone, or metal into beautiful and useful shapes. He became so good at it that the art of creating became routine for him, and he lost the spark of inspiration; his eyes lost their light, his hair dulled from its crimson hue to the wiry gray of an old man. Fortunately, before the Bleaching killed him, Benagosius found the Wonderseekers—a strange alliance of gnomes determined to rescue their at-risk brethren from the mortal dangers of his racial curse. The Wonderseekers showed him maps of strange places, spun illusions of wondrous creatures, and sang songs of mysterious artifacts untouched by living hands for generations. Ben was entranced by these things and decided that he would seek out the magic items of the world and touch every single one

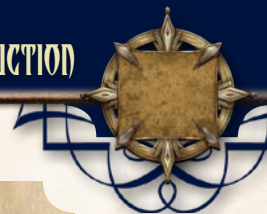
of them. It was a foolish idea, for he knew some things would be forever denied his grasp, but he joked that given enough inspiration a gnome could live forever, and that's plenty of time for the world to change and send the greatest artifacts of history tumbling into his careworn hands.

“And so he traveled in the company of adventurers, only asking for a brief touch of each of their items, from the lowliest potion carried by a novice thief to the sword of an arrogant Hellknight. If a traveling companion refused, Ben performed his ritual surreptitiously in the middle of the night, apologizing profusely whenever caught. He developed a bit of a reputation among travelers and nobles with magical heirlooms—annoying but harmless, and perhaps even a bit of a good luck charm, for during his travels none of his companions ever died. Soon, young adventurers were seeking him out, wanting him to accompany them on their strange quests to recover lost magic, sparking his interest and straightening his spine.

“The most remarkable thing about Ben’s mission was the notes he kept. Every item he touched, no matter how great or small, he wrote at least a sentence about. And somehow he remembered every single item, memorizing the nicks in a frost longsword, the exact shade of a sun-priestess’s teleporting cloak, and the loose threads in a well-traveled pair of elven boots. He knew whether he had seen an item before and if so, where his notes held its description. For a time, he worked with the Pathfinders, cataloguing various items to earn some coin, but he grew tired of the routine and went back to his ‘field work.’ For ten years he lived like this, and his notes filled up an entire backpack—which he eventually replaced with a much roomier bottomless bag. The Wonderseekers sent him other gnomes in need of saving, those for whom simple exploration would stave off the early stages of the Bleaching.

“Ben’s quest made him young again, but his life’s work is what consumed him. He insisted on seeking out stranger and more incredible items to touch, believing that pursuing common scrolls and blades would eventually lead him down the same pale path that nearly killed him a decade before. His catalogue of successful touches grew long—a berserker’s horn, a staff of great power, an obsidian destrier, even one of the deadly guillotines of Galt—and a publisher in Andoran purchased the rights to his notes, giving him plenty of money to fund greater and more dangerous explorations. When one of his contacts told him a team of mercenary adventurers discovered a hole in the world, hidden in a long-dead lich’s lair, Ben recognized it by its description and insisted on going to see it. Confronted by its ultimate blackness and subtle horror, his mind recoiled from its absolute emptiness, yet he realized the inherent contradiction in





his plan—to turn away from the sphere was to abandon the quest that had kept him alive (and made him famous) for a decade, but to touch the sphere was certain death. In the end, his curiosity and fear of what-might-have-been won out over caution, and he leaped forward to touch the void—and vanished.

“That was the last I or anyone else ever saw of him, but I like to think that the gods smiled upon his efforts and spared him from oblivion. Perhaps for just a moment, that sphere was a doorway to a greater adventure on some remote plane where a curious, grabby gnome might find immortality in the pursuit of wonder.”

—Sajan Gadadvara

## MAGIC ITEMS IN THIS BOOK

Below are all of the item variants with complete statistics presented in this book. Roll on the table below as a random treasure generator, or use it as a handy index.

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10–14	<i>Bag of Holding, Minor</i>	8
15–17	<i>Corpse-Ferrying Bag</i>	8
18	<i>Cube of Nex</i>	15
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## ICONS OF GAMING

Since the birth of fantasy roleplaying, a handful of mythic treasures have lurked in the hoards of tens of thousands of campaigns.

**Bag of Holding:** Jacob Burgess tackles the many uses of this item. Speculation and legend color tangible data about the origin of the bags, as well as about variant bags for paranoid adventurers, decaying corpses, and a network of bags pored over by a curious lich.

**Cube of Force:** Jonathan Keith measures and quantifies this wondrous item's many uses in and out of combat (such as containing a fleeing enemy or surviving an avalanche) and describes the nine legendary cubes.

**Deck of Many Things:** Veteran Paizo author Michael Kortez describes this minor artifact, including the powers of several variant decks and variant cards, and tells of the Dire Gamblers club, an exclusive group of brave or foolhardy folk who drew from the deck and survived.

**Figurines of Wondrous Power:** Jeff Quick presents a treatise on these varied and useful items, including lore of many nations' variant figurines, a new spell to retrieve a lost figurine, and a new feat allowing character to select one as an animal companion or familiar.

**Helm of Brilliance:** Jonathan Keith addresses this gaudiest of magic items, explaining its advantages, its drawbacks, and a way to exploit its weakness for an explosive conclusion.

**Horn of Valhalla:** Russ Taylor writes about this item, describing its many variants and quirks as well as a new feat for bards using magical instruments, and gives sample stat blocks for all four kinds of barbarians summoned by the standard types of horn.

**Sphere of Annihilation:** Todd Stewart divides fact from rumor about this mysterious quasi-item that strikes fear into the heart of powerful mortals and even the mightiest outsiders. Todd explains the sphere's nature and throws in a unique spell that allows scrying through a sphere—if the caster has lost flesh to it.

**Staff of the Magi:** Amber Scott reveals all the details about this artifact with a built-in self-destruct system. She also describes several variant artifact-level staves, the infamous *staff of power*, and the legendary *staff of elemental castigation*.

**Vorpal Sword:** Brian Cortijo delves into the poetry of decapitation, the legality and reputation of *vorpal* weapons in various countries, and reasons why *vorpal* weapons other than swords are rare.

**Well of Many Worlds:** Todd Stewart relies on his planar expertise to weave a tapestry of information about this portal-creating item, including world-specific variants and a cursed variety that sends its users into unknown locations.





Chapter One

# BAG OF HOLDING

"SO THERE WE ARE, SIX OF US, TRAPPED IN THIS GODFORSAKEN TOMB, ONLY WAY OUT BLOCKED BY THE MOTHER OF ALL ROCKFALLS. THE ONE THING WE CAN SEE IS THIS TINY OPENING IN THE SLIDE, ABOUT BIG ENOUGH FOR A CAT. WE CHECK IT AND IT LOOKS TO BE A STRAIGHT SHOT TO THE OTHER END, BUT NO WAY WE CAN FIT THROUGH. AND THAT'S WHEN OUR BARD REMEMBERS THE MAGIC BAG HE KEEPS WITH HIM—I CALL IT HIS TINY MAGIC PURSE, AND HE'S ALWAYS FISHING AROUND IN THERE FOR GOODIES TOO BIG TO FIT IN THE SACK WITHOUT MAGIC. ANYWAY, WHAT HE DOES IS TUCKS HIMSELF INTO IT UP TO HIS PITS AND GETS US TO LIFT HIM INTO THE HOLE, PULLING HIMSELF ALONG WITH HIS HANDS UNTIL HE REACHES THE OTHER SIDE, THEN POPS BACK OUT AND GOES FOR HELP. SAVES THE WHOLE DAMN PARTY. I AIN'T NEVER MADE FUN OF HIS MAGIC PURSE AGAIN."

—PATHFINDER BROGAN HALDROP



A *bag of holding* is one of those items every treasure-crazed adventurer craves, for what is usually a large, nondescript sack is in fact one of the most useful items in any world. These legendary bags open into pocket dimensions and always weigh the same no matter what is contained within, offering room for all manner of storage and solving one of the most significant problems an adventuring party can face: transporting the loot.

*Bags of holding* are much sought after for their utility, and few wizards capable of creating such items don't try making at least one for personal use. Most who study such things believe that every *bag of holding*, upon its creation, takes a small piece of a random demiplane and wraps it into a small pocket, leaving the mouth of the *bag of holding* as the only entrance. Once it is closed tightly, the inside of the bag becomes perfectly smooth and seamless, its boundaries sometimes resembling the material from which the bag is made.

The method for creating a standard *bag of holding* is very specific, and as such each bag must always be of a certain size and shape. The reasons for this are purely practical, as except in cases of extremely powerful or creative magic, any other sizes or shapes tend to make the item unstable, with sometimes disastrous results. A bag must be made of flexible material, preferably sturdy cloth. Great care is used when selecting the material for a *bag of holding*, as it must be sound structurally and yet generally nondescript (the better to protect the owner's assets). Rarely is a *bag of holding* adorned with jewels or richly embroidered. For most adventurers, it is less a treasure than a tool, a means by which they can expand their operations and transport more goods and supplies. Yet for the inventive adventurer, it can be much more.

## BASE ITEM

Below are the statistics for standard *bags of holding*, as presented in the *Pathfinder RPG Core Rulebook*.

### BAG OF HOLDING

**Aura** moderate conjuration; **CL** 9th

**Slot** none; **Price** see below; **Weight** see below

#### DESCRIPTION

This appears to be a common cloth sack about 2 feet by 4 feet in size. The *bag of holding* opens into a nondimensional space: its inside is larger than its outside dimensions. Regardless of what is put into the bag, it weighs a fixed amount. This weight, and the limits in weight and volume of the bag's contents, depend on the bag's type, as shown on the table below.

Bag	Bag Weight	Contents Limit	Volume Limit	Market Price
Type I	15 lbs.	250 lbs.	30 cubic ft.	2,500 gp
Type II	25 lbs.	500 lbs.	70 cubic ft.	5,000 gp
Type III	35 lbs.	1,000 lbs.	150 cubic ft.	7,400 gp
Type IV	60 lbs.	1,500 lbs.	250 cubic ft.	10,000 gp

If a *bag of holding* is overloaded, or if sharp objects pierce it (from inside or outside), the bag immediately ruptures and is ruined, and all contents are lost forever. If a *bag of holding* is turned inside out, all of its contents spill out unharmed, but the bag must be put right before it can be used again. If living creatures are placed within the bag, they can survive for up to 10 minutes, after which time they suffocate. Retrieving a specific item from a *bag of holding* is a move action, unless the bag contains more than an ordinary backpack would hold, in which case retrieving a specific item is a full-round action. Magic items placed inside the bag do not offer any benefit to the character carrying the bag.

If a *bag of holding* is placed within a *portable hole*, a rift to the Astral Plane is torn in the space: bag and hole alike are sucked into the void and forever lost. If a *portable hole* is placed within a *bag of holding*, it opens a gate to the Astral Plane: the hole, the bag, and any creatures within a 10-foot radius are drawn there, destroying the *portable hole* and *bag of holding* in the process.

#### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *secret chest*; **Cost** 1,250 gp (type I), 2,500 gp (type II), 3,700 gp (type III), 5,000 gp (type IV)

## UTILITY

A *bag of holding's* usefulness and primary function are summarized perfectly in its name: it is a bag, and it holds things. But it is also so much more: It can be a place to keep reinforcements. It can be an escape plan. In certain cases, it can even be a weapon.

Some curious adventurers have discovered interesting properties of their *bags of holding*. For instance, the temperature inside a closed *bag of holding* doesn't seem to fluctuate, always remaining cool. Many a traveler has saved herself in the high peaks or scorching desert by placing herself inside her bag (though countless others have attempted the same trick, only to forget to leave the mouth of the bag open and quickly suffocate in the bag's airtight gullet).

Some have used the bag to fit into small crawlspaces by climbing halfway into the bag and cinching it around their arms—a favored trick of thieves and assassins. Of course, this carries risks as well, for an antimagic field or a simple *dispel magic* leaves such clever tricksters cut in half when their lower bodies are shunted into a suddenly inaccessible pocket dimension.

A cheaper *bag of holding* has a lower holding capacity but also weighs less. A more powerful *bag of holding* weighs more, regardless of what's in it. This additional weight is part of the magic involved, but may actually carry some benefit. In a pinch, for instance, wrapping the weighty cloth around one's hand before punching makes the punch deal lethal damage while still counting as an unarmed attack, just as if the user were wearing a gauntlet.



Other combat uses for a *bag of holding* include the ability to suddenly produce reinforcements, surprising the enemy. When one turns a *bag of holding* inside out, the contents appear instantly on the floor where it was opened; the bag must be put right before it can be used again. Some owners have placed Small and Medium golems in their bags, allowing them to tote around a small army in their backpacks. Some evil priests and necromancers have done the same with zombies or other easily controllable undead. Keep in mind that any beings produced from the bag in this manner are all in the same space when they appear, and may be considered squeezed until they can act. Along with this tactic, some adventurers might keep gallons of water within the bag for an explosive, localized flood to put out a fire or sweep enemies off their feet (water weighs 8.35 pounds per gallon, so a type I bag can hold 29 gallons, a type II bag 59 gallons, a type III 119 gallons, and a type IV 179 gallons). Conversely, a *bag of holding* might be used to delay a water trap designed to completely fill a room, though even the type IV bag's capacity of 179 gallons is only 24 cubic feet—enough to reduce the water level in a 5-foot-by-5-foot pit by 1 foot of height, with anything beyond that exceeding the bag's weight limit and destroying the bag.

Outside of combat, a *bag of holding* can be combined with other magical items to make it a convenient means of transportation or smuggling. Placing someone inside the *bag of holding* with a *bottle of air* or *necklace of adaptation*, for instance, offers a convenient way to transport prisoners without any danger of escape, an easy way to smuggle allies past guards in a daring jailbreak, or a chance to circumvent the limitations on certain transportation spells. For example, a wizard of insufficient level to successfully *teleport* the whole party could instruct them to climb into the bag and then simply *teleport* himself, withdrawing them again at their destination. And of course, for those wizards who don't want to risk their familiar being injured in battle, a *bag of holding* plus a *necklace of adaptation* allows such cherished and vulnerable companions to be stashed away without fear of harm (though doing so does not count as having the familiar within 1 mile for the purposes of determining special ability bonuses).

Note that in most cases, a character is more likely to reach the weight limit of a *bag of holding* before they hit the volume limit. With 50 coins to a pound, a type I bag safely holds 12,500 coins, even though by volume it could hold over 36,000 coins. Even the type IV bag can only hold 75,000

coins, so would-be dragonslayers hoping to bring home cartloads of gold can't simply shove the dragon's hoard into a *bag of holding* and jog home unencumbered. Ambitious adventurers who like to carry enough spare gear to equip a frontier fort should keep in mind that the type I bag can only hold 5 or 6 suits of metal armor, and even the type IV bag can only hold armor for about 30 men.

## RELATED ITEMS

In the world of magical items, the *bag of holding* has many cousins. The *handy haversack* is one such item. As a *bag of holding* in backpack form, with two smaller *bags of holding* strapped to its sides, it is a much sought-after treasure, especially because its bearer can retrieve anything placed within it with only a thought, thus saving valuable seconds in combat, during which the owner of a *bag of holding* would still be digging blindly through random loot.

The *portable hole* is another member of the family. A *portable hole* is a black disk that, when placed on any surface, creates a 10-foot-deep extradimensional space that is 6 feet in diameter. The magical energies that power both *portable holes* and *bags of holding* do not mix—or rather, they mix too well, potentially creating a catastrophic feedback loop. When

a *bag of holding* is placed into a *portable hole*, both wink out of existence, along with anything inside them, and in the process tear open a rift to the Astral Plane. When a *portable hole* is placed in a *bag of holding*, both items are still destroyed, but instead of tearing open a rift in reality, the magical energy forms a gate that draws any creatures within a 10-foot radius into the Astral Plane. Inventive and wealthy adventurers have on occasion used this reaction to rid themselves of sections of walls, opponents, or exceedingly dangerous artifacts, though just as many have forgotten the legends' warnings and found themselves accidental planar travelers as a result.

Another related item, the most outwardly similar to a *bag of holding*, is the *bag of devouring*. Otherwise behaving like a *bag of holding*, this cursed item is actually the maw of a strange extradimensional predator. Like a pitcher plant or funnel web spider crouched in its lair, the *bag of devouring* waits for organic material, sentient or otherwise, to be placed within the bag and then attempts to draw it completely inside for digestion. Thus far, no one has succeeded in recording exactly what happens to such creatures, only that even powerful spells like *wish*, *true resurrection*, and *miracle* have difficulty recalling its victims to life; most victims are lost forever, perhaps consumed or spit out on some impossibly distant plane. Some assassins' guilds actually seek out *bags of devouring* as convenient and final ways to dispose of



victims. While these bags are generally classified as cursed items rather than monsters, scholastic debate continues to rage as to whether *bags of devouring* are independent creatures that have evolved to take advantage of a unique evolutionary niche, predators created or summoned and then bound by botched spells intended to create a *bag of holding*, or a single strange and alien intelligence that's learned to magically pervert existing *bags of holding* into feeding orifices all across the planes.

While technically not items, the spells *mage's magnificent mansion*, *rope trick*, and *secret chest* all create extradimensional spaces, and bags of holding do not function within them (as described in the *Pathfinder RPG Core Rulebook*, page 501), sometimes making life difficult for adventurers.

## CAMPAIGN ROLE

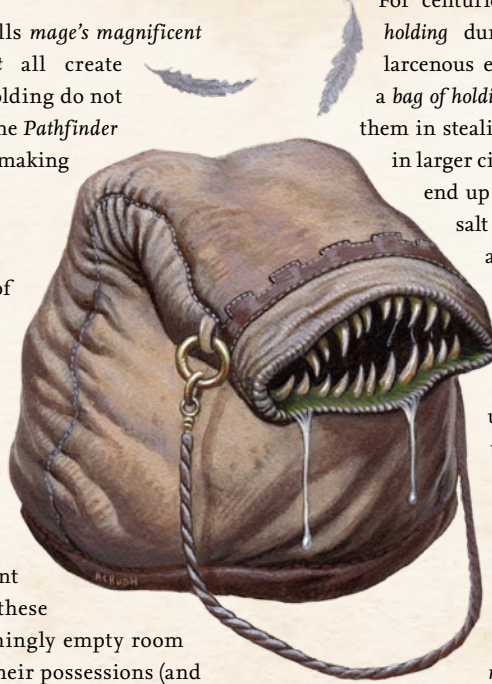
A *bag of holding* can play a number of roles in a campaign, and allows a GM to set up unique puzzles that only a party with a bag can solve. Such an item is convenient when the plot calls for carrying large quantities of supplies, or for weaker and lower-level characters unable to shoulder much of a burden on their own. Consider also that one such bag can hold a vast amount of treasure, and tucking away one of these bags full of gold and gems into a seemingly empty room is a great way to help NPCs safeguard their possessions (and reward diligent characters). Including some dark humor in the discovery of one of these items can also shake things up and help warn the PCs as to the dangers of their new toy. Perhaps the PCs discover a party that took shelter in a bag and forgot that the air inside is limited. Maybe the bag contains nothing but a severed leg. Such discoveries can be even more threatening than they first appear, for if a strange item inside the bag turns out to be a lich's phylactery, the players might find the villain reformed and waiting to attack, with all of the PCs' gear to use against them—or to teleport away with it as soon as the bag is opened.

A *bag of holding* itself and the demiplane it's connected to offer a rich treasure trove of exploration as well. Upon its creation, the material of the *bag of holding* is mystically wrapped around a portion of a random demiplane, like a piece of taffy stretched away from a larger chunk. Should any significant damage come to the bag from within or without, the pocket is broken and the space returns to its natural state as part of the demiplane, taking all contents with it. Such items—and creatures—are traditionally viewed as lost forever, though whether this means they're truly destroyed, subject to predation by an alien presence like those in *bags of devouring*, or simply deposited in some dusty corner of a

forgotten plane is anybody's guess. On occasion, powerful wizards in search of lost artifacts have tried to trace objects spirited away in this manner, and have even sent parties of adventurers out to track down specific extraplanar leads, but if any such searches have come to fruition, the secrets of their success have remained well guarded.

## VARIANTS

For centuries, lucky thieves have used *bags of holding* during daring burglaries and other larcenous escapades. Yet many have found that a *bag of holding's* fixed opening does little to help them in stealing larger, more valuable items. Also, in larger cities—where all the good loot tends to end up eventually—any law office worth its salt has a way to detect magical items such as *bags of holding*, making it difficult to plead innocence or stash goods. In response to these problems, various thieves and adventurers over the years (and more than one unscrupulous wizard) have pooled their resources and research to create a series of very specific *bags of holding* designed to aid them in their nocturnal pursuits. The fruits of their labors are the *bag of concealment*, the practical *corpse-ferrying bag*, and the more pedestrian *minor bag of holding*.



### BAG OF CONCEALMENT

**Aura** moderate conjuration; **CL** 9th

**Slot** none; **Price** 5,000 gp (type I), 10,000 gp (type II), 14,800 gp (type III), 20,000 gp (type IV); **Weight** 15 lbs. (type I), 25 lbs. (type II), 35 lbs. (type III), 60 lbs. (type IV)

#### DESCRIPTION

A *bag of concealment* appears to be a common leather sack with a shoulder strap, about 2 feet by 4 feet in size. The bag behaves as a *bag of holding*, with all the same carrying capacities according to size, except for a few key points. Each *bag of concealment* is keyed to a specific owner upon creation (and can only be keyed to one person at a time)—should the bag's owner be killed, it becomes keyed to the next person to open it (the currently keyed person can also relinquish this status as a standard action, allowing another creature to become keyed to the bag by opening it). Only the person a *bag of concealment* is keyed to may access its contents. Any others who look in the bag see only the inside of an empty sack, with dimensions matching the bag's outside measurements, as the true contents are kept separate and undetectable in the bag's magical pocket dimension. Should anything be placed in the empty bag by someone other than the owner, the goods

that have been shunted to the pocket dimension cannot be accessed unless the new item is removed.

A *bag of concealment* registers as nonmagical unless successfully identified, as per a permanent version of the spell *magic aura*. The mouth of a *bag of concealment* can be stretched to up to four times its normal width, so larger goods may be hidden inside.

#### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *fabricate*, *magic aura*, *secret chest*; **Cost** 2,500 gp (type I), 5,000 gp (type II), 7,400 gp (type III), 10,000 gp (type IV)

#### BAG OF HOLDING, MINOR

**Aura** moderate conjuration; **CL** 9th  
**Slot** none; **Price** 1,000 gp; **Weight** 3 lbs.

#### DESCRIPTION

This more economical version of the *bag of holding* functions in the same manner, but its internal measurements are smaller than those of a regular *bag of holding*. It measures 2 feet by 4 feet and can carry up to 50 pounds or 6 cubic feet of material.

#### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *secret chest*; **Cost** 500 gp



#### CORPSE-FERRYING BAG

**Aura** moderate conjuration and necromancy; **CL** 9th  
**Slot** none; **Price** 4,000 gp; **Weight** 3 lbs.

#### DESCRIPTION

This large black leather bag has a wide mouth and laces to help keep it shut. It weighs 20 pounds and can carry up to 300 pounds or 10 cubic feet of material (easily able to hold a single Medium corpse or two Small corpses, including their gear). Anything within the bag is protected by a *gentle repose* spell.

#### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *gentle repose*, *secret chest*; **Cost** 2,000 gp

## BAGS OF HOLDING ON GOLARION

As relatively common magical items, *bags of holding* can be found all across Golarion. Most bags follow the same basic recipe and principles in terms of their creation (for example, almost all measure 2 feet in width by 4 feet in height); while it is sometimes possible to create variation in terms of shape and outward size, such bags are generally less stable and more likely to self-destruct or deposit their items (or bearers) somewhere in the far reaches of the planes. Altering the magic too greatly also runs the risk of inadvertently creating

a *bag of devouring*, a prospect even powerful wizards don't take lightly.

As varied as the nations of Golarion are, so too are the *bags of holding* of such nations, and the stories of how such items came to be. For example, in the Empire of Cheliox, some *bags of holding* are made from the tanned skin of convicts or those who have failed the House of Thrune and are then given as rewards to those servants who remain faithful and competent as a constant reminder of the price of negligence. Some whisper that the first *bag of holding* is owned by Asmodeus himself and contains a collection of hand-picked souls. This legend is the source of folktales (more often told in foreign nations) about three children who outsmarted the Archfiend and stole the sack from him, trapping him within for ages within his own bag. These tales, of course, are rarely spoken loudly within Cheliox proper, and even those who lend credence to the tales are forced to admit that the *bag of holding* seems more fitting for Abadar and his Vault than the Prince of Hell.

In the elven kingdom of Kyonin, *bags of holding* are often woven from the finest silk and decorated with various runes detailing the achievements of the bearer. Many elves subscribe to their own creation story for the bags, calling them "lythiara," which roughly translates to "load-bearer." The story goes that in the distant past, a rare disease struck an elven village, leaving only the druidic matron untouched. Old and feeble though she was, she still went forth to retrieve the necessary herbs to fight the plague—twig by twig, if she had to. Desna, passing by, saw her plight and gave her a small pouch with no limit as to what it could hold, allowing her to carry her burden. From this first *bag of holding*, the old woman learned to craft similar bags for her people, in case such an event should happen again. Some covetous folk whisper that the elves hold this original, all-encompassing pouch still, secreted away deep below Iadara.

In the Mwangi Expanse, *bags of holding* are sometimes given to warriors and hunters to aid in transporting meat for the village and collecting trophies from raids and battlefields. Some tribes refer to them as "spider bags," after the legend that attributes the first *bag of holding* to Grandmother Spider, a notorious hoarder who granted the item to a young hunter in exchange for the promise to gather up all the animals in the jungle in the sack and bring them back to her web as payment. The young man, of course, promptly absconded with the treasure, which is one of the reasons why the hunting spiders of the jungle remain so dangerous to humans today.

In the nation of Geb, it's not unknown for military patrols to carry *bags of holding* filled with skeleton or zombie troops,

the better to offer instant reinforcements where necessary (and to collect the bodies of slain enemies for the creation of yet more minions).

While not a nation in their own right, the adventurers of the Pathfinder Society probably hold the single largest collection of *bags of holding*, as nearly every member covets these items for their ability to transport great stores of treasure or historical relics. While most *bags of holding* are privately owned, Pathfinders of sufficient renown and accomplishment can often temporarily requisition them from a well-stocked lodge, provided the venture-captain judges the need to be great enough. Other times, *bags of holding* are presented as rewards for jobs well done or are traded for particularly valuable relics that the Society seeks to obtain. Regardless of the means by which the bags are distributed, many wizards in or near the Grand Lodge of Absalom make a tidy profit producing such items on a regular basis.

In addition to adventurers, merchant are also quick to see the utility of *bags of holding*, especially those whose trade routes are long and arduous. A *bag of holding* can help reduce the weight of goods for a merchant traveling fast and light, or disguise the most valuable goods by storing the bag containing them in a pile of empty sacks used for transporting foodstuffs. Experienced desert caravans sometimes fill large *bags of holding* with fresh water in order to make sure that the men and beasts don't perish in the harsh desert heat.

## THE BAG OF WONDERS

While most *bags of holding* have precise sizes and shapes, there are many legends of greater versions without such restrictions. One such bag is rumored to lie far to the icy north, in a grand castle ruled by a powerful lich. It's said that this old wizard seized immortality for one reason alone: to continue his investigation of the artifact known as the *bag of wonders*. Unlike a normal *bag of holding*, this bag's value stems not from what's placed within it, but from what comes out.

Made from the skin of an ancient gold dragon and adorned with strange, alien runes, this bag is rumored to connect directly to every pocket dimension employed by a *bag of holding* anywhere in the multiverse. Each time the bearer reaches inside, he withdraws a totally new and seemingly random item, many of them worth great sums for their power or strangeness. Whether these are stolen directly from other *bags of holding*, plucked from those missing treasure hordes lost when a *bag of holding* is destroyed, or conjured up in some other fashion is unknown. But what is known is that every day, the lich who owns the *bag of wonders* reaches inside and withdraws one item, studying it intensely for a day before discarding it and moving on to the next item, leaving his castle littered with magical baubles and devices worth a king's ransom. Exactly what the lich is searching for is anybody's guess—perhaps it's merely

## A TALE OF TWO WIZARDS

In Taldor, a popular fairy tale offers its own suggestion as to the *bag of holding's* origin.

Once upon a time, there were two wizard brothers who lived in two towers. All their lives they quarreled, but as old men they decided to prove once and for all who was superior. Contests of words and magical duels both came out draws, and physical combat was out of the question because of their advanced years. In the end, they decided to settle their dispute through a contest of craftsmanship. But who could arbitrate such a contest? They sought out the wisewoman of the nearest village.

"I will judge this contest," she said. "But there shall be no more magic involved than is needed in the crafting. If you wish to be judged by us, you must sweat like us."

The brothers agreed, and a festival was held. But as the brothers met on the field, ready to summon their equipment from their towers, the old woman glared and reminded them of their promise: the equipment must be carried down by hand.

Being feeble and, above all, lazy old men, the brothers spent the day thinking about how to carry all of their items down. A bag, they decided, would be simplest—a bag whose inside was larger than the outside and never weighed more than they could carry. The villagers used bags—surely the old lady wouldn't argue. For another day the brothers worked together, and then the bag was completed and put to work. The brothers brought their equipment down and began to create marvels for the villagers' delight: flaming butterflies that lived for a day, spoons that made the meanest food sumptuous, clockwork birds that cavorted in the air.

The old woman saw all that the brothers made and scoffed. Then she looked upon the discarded bag they'd fashioned; upon reaching inside and finding it vast, she declared it the best and most useful of their creations.

"But we both worked to make that bag!" the brothers cried. "Who is the winner?"

"If you worked in equal measure, then you are both the winner," the woman responded.

"But we can't both be the winner!" they cried.

"Very well", said the old woman with a smile, "then you are both the loser." And she walked away with her new magic bag.

curiosity that keeps him going—but if there's any truth to the legend, scholars suggest that he may be sifting through in search for the key to unlocking the bag's construction, a gateway to all those other bags, or a chance to speak with the unknowable entity (or entities) behind a *bag of devouring*. Given his immortality, it's only a matter of time until he finds what he seeks.





Chapter  Two

## CUBE OF FORCE

IT WAS THE LANTERN-BEARER WHO TRIGGERED THE TRAP, OF COURSE. EVERYONE ELSE KNEW BETTER. A JEWELLED IDOL LEFT UNDISGUISED AND UNGUARDED IS ALWAYS A TRAP. ALWAYS.

I FIGURED THAT WAS THE END OF US—THE WATER RUSHING TOWARD US WAS GOING TO FILL UP THE ENTIRE PASSAGEWAY AND WE WERE GOING TO DROWN. NO SPELLS LEFT WORTH A NEWT'S FOOT. I WAS PRAYING TO THE GODS, BUT ARCTURO, HE HAD A DIFFERENT IDEA. HE WHIPPED OUT THIS LITTLE BONE CUBE AND SQUEEZED IT LIKE SO. FIVE FEET IN FRONT OF US, THE WATER JUST STOPPED!

OF COURSE, THE WATER FOLLOWED US ALL THE WAY DOWN THE PASSAGE TILL THE CUBE GAVE OUT. ARCTURO ALWAYS KEPT TWO AROUND AFTER THAT.

—DYSO VADRASETHI, *JOURNEYS ON A FLOATING DISK*



It's the perfect barrier, and the ultimate contingency plan: an invisible cube of protective force capable of keeping even the mightiest dragon at bay. Within such a sanctuary, the fragile wizard can take his time plotting his next move, the rogue can walk without fear of hidden traps, and the cleric can heal his fallen comrade while the battle rages and swirls around them.

A *cube of force* is an elegant item, seamless and precise in its angles, its faces smooth though often inscribed with a simple descriptive rune on each side. When activated, the cube enables its master to create six individual *walls of force* in a cubic formation around his person, each 10 feet on a side. The cubic screen of force moves with the cube, and since the cube only functions while held, it effectively moves with the bearer. Depending on which side of the cube is pressed, the walls of force are impervious to winds and gases, living matter, nonliving matter, magic, or all of these things at once.

## BASE ITEM

Below are the statistics for a standard *cube of force*, as presented in the *Pathfinder RPG Core Rulebook*.

### CUBE OF FORCE

**Aura** moderate evocation; **CL** 10th

**Slot** none; **Price** 62,000 gp; **Weight** 1/2 lb.

#### DESCRIPTION

This device is just under an inch across and can be made of ivory, bone, or any hard mineral. Typically, each of the cube's faces are polished smooth, but sometimes they are etched with runes. The device enables its possessor to put up a special cube made up of 6 individual *wall of force* spells, 10 feet on a side around her person. This cubic screen moves with the character and is impervious to the attack forms mentioned on the table below. The cube has 36 charges when fully charged—charges used are automatically renewed each day. The possessor presses one face of the cube to activate a particular type of screen or to deactivate the device. Each effect costs a certain number of charges to maintain for every minute (or portion of a minute) it is in operation. Also, when an effect is active, the possessor's speed is limited to the maximum value given on the table.

When the *cube of force* is active, attacks dealing more than 30 points of damage drain 1 charge for every 10 points of damage beyond 30 that they deal. The charge cost to maintain each of the cube's six walls is summarized below.

Cube Face	Charge Cost		Max. Speed	Effect
	Per Minute	Max.		
1	1	30 ft.	Keeps out gases, wind, etc.	
2	2	20 ft.	Keeps out nonliving matter	
3	3	15 ft.	Keeps out living matter	
4	4	10 ft.	Keeps out magic	
5	6	10 ft.	Keeps out all things	
6	0	As normal	Deactivates	

Spells that affect the integrity of the screen also drain extra charges. These spells cannot be cast into or out of the cube.

Attack Form	Extra Charges
<i>Disintegrate</i>	6
<i>Horn of blasting</i>	6
<i>Passwall</i>	3
<i>Phase door</i>	5
<i>Prismatic spray</i>	7
<i>Wall of fire</i>	2

#### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *wall of force*; **Cost** 31,000 gp

## UTILITY

The *cube of force* is generally used as a defensive item. Its most potent screen functions like a *wall of force* surrounding the possessor on all sides, but it can also be tuned to lesser settings to preserve charges when dealing with weaker or more specific threats. If the possessor knows she's dealing with a rockslide, for instance, there's no need to set it to block living matter. In addition to the obvious defensive capabilities, there are countless other, more creative ways to use a *cube of force*, of which the following are merely a few suggestions.

A *cube of force* set to keep out nonliving matter will keep water from coming in, but the result is that the air inside provides buoyancy. Assuming that most of the screen is filled with air, rather than people or objects, a *cube of force* can function as a passable short-term floatation device; the trapped air keeps it afloat despite the weight of its contents (the same principle of displacement that allows incredibly heavy battleships to remain afloat). Envision a situation where the bearer is at the bottom of a well or pit trap with a rising water level. Rather than trying to swim to keep up with the water, she could activate her *cube of force* and let the water push it up to the top, presuming the flooding takes less than 18 minutes. Similarly, though a force-cube raft is difficult to direct (as only limbs can be used when it's keeping out nonliving matter), those caught in a flash flood or desperate to cross a river might risk casting themselves adrift, hoping to wind up against the opposite shore.

A *cube of force* can be used as a makeshift avalanche shelter in the same way, providing 18 minutes of security from ice or stones. Furthermore, if living matter can pass through the screen, the bearer and his companions can spend those 18 minutes tunneling out or shoring up the surrounding material so that when the screen finally gives way, the open space doesn't immediately collapse.

A fighter can make good use of a *cube of force* in combat situations as a way to keep his enemies from escaping. If the fighter activates the cube after closing with an enemy spellcaster, for instance, he can hold the caster's allies at a distance while taking his time with the trapped spellcaster. Or if a creature with sufficient faith in its own combat abilities possesses a *cube of force*, it can use the cube to keep a





private duel from becoming a battle royal or to trap an enemy champion with the foes most likely to dispatch him, while outside his lesser allies are picked off one by one.

While the *cube of force* is incredibly versatile, it still bears the limitation of forcing the possessor to remain on the inside rather than the outside, a sometimes-dangerous prospect. Even so, the *cube of force* continues to remain a legendary and captivating tool, one that rewards logic and quick thinking and whose full potential and utility may yet lie undiscovered.

## RELATED ITEMS AND SPELLS

Several items and spells have effects similar to a *cube of force*. Of particular note for its similarity of form and theory is the *cube of frost resistance*. That cube warms a 1,000 cubic foot, cube-shaped volume, regardless of the temperature of the outside, and absorbs cold-based attacks. Like a *cube of force*, it can be affected by a powerful attack—in this case cold damage, enough of which will shut down the field or even destroy the cube permanently. Absent such an attack, the cube functions indefinitely. Unlike the *cube of force*, a *cube of frost resistance* remains in effect after being set down.

Another legendary cube is the *cubic gate*, for which each side of the cube represents a different plane of existence. Using a *cubic gate*, the owner can open a standing *gate* to the Material Plane or to one of five other planes, depending on which side is pressed, and can even immediately transport a group to a random point on one of those planes. A *cubic gate*, a small block made of solid carnelian, is often quite similar in appearance to a *cube of force*. More than one unwary magic-user has found herself confronted by a denizen of the outer planes when she merely meant to protect herself with a convenient *wall of force*.

An inactive *instant fortress* is also a cube and provides much the same benefit as the *cube of force*: immediate and total protection. The *instant fortress* takes up much more space and is immobile but doesn't require the user stay within it, thus making it more conventional and both more and less useful than the *cube of force*—those uninterested in experimentation who seek solely to protect themselves and their allies might be better served by an *instant fortress*.

A *resilient sphere* spell is generally opposite in function to a *cube of force*. While the primary purpose of a *cube of force* is to keep dangers out, the purpose of a *resilient sphere* is generally to trap someone within. A *resilient sphere* cannot be moved and is essentially a temporary prison, allowing for some of the same utility as a *cube of force* when cast around a fighter and his prey.

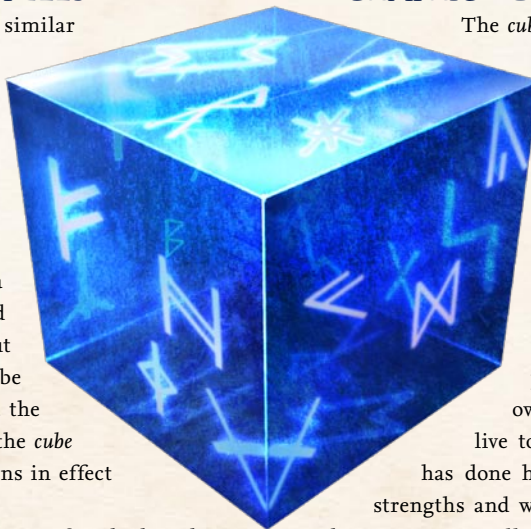
Of course, the closest relative to a *cube of force* is the *wall of force* spell itself. The *cube of force* is simultaneously less powerful (as it covers significantly less area and can be burned out by taking damage) and more versatile. It can be moved, while a *wall of force* is static, and can be set to allow some things through and not others. Generally, a *wall of force* spell is better for situations like larger set-piece confrontations, while *cubes of force* are better tools for emergencies and chaotic situations where the tactical strategy is unclear.

## CAMPAIGN ROLE

The *cube of force* is a powerful, potentially tide-changing item in the hands of the villain or the PCs. Its small size and unobtrusive appearance mean that it often comes as a surprise to whichever side doesn't possess it, and its versatility allows it to be used in unanticipated ways.

A villain who uses a *cube of force* intelligently is in the perfect position to fight the PCs on his own terms or to escape and thus live to fight another day. If the villain has done his homework, he knows the PCs' strengths and weaknesses and acts accordingly. If the PCs are especially reliant on magic attacks (especially attacks that don't deal damage), the villain can set the cube to block magic while pummeling the PCs with ranged attacks or fighting their melee combatants. If the PCs rely more on ranged or melee combat, he can set the cube to nonliving or living matter, respectively, and use his magic from the safety of the inside. If he has an animal companion or minions who rely solely on natural attacks, he can even set the cube to block nonliving matter, protecting himself from the PCs' swords and arrows while his beasts dart out to savage the PCs, retreating to the safety of the cube with impunity.

A hidden *cube of force* also allows the villain a perfect means of escape. A defeated villain can activate the *cube of force* and slowly back out through the doorway (make sure the door is wide and tall enough!) or can give the cube to an underling to cover his retreat. The maximum speed limitations mean he needs to have a better plan than just running away, but it seems reasonable to presume that a villain fighting on his home turf would have that figured out. A *cube of force* also makes seemingly suicidal gambits work. If the party believes the villain won't throw the lever because he'd die in the resultant explosion or volcanic eruption as surely as everyone else, they may call his bluff or hesitate before acting. A *cube of force* can make such doomsday scenarios viable rather than a mere bluff, protecting the villain from the negative effects of his actions while the PCs take the brunt.





In the hands of the PCs, the *cube of force* can be a font of unpredictability and innovation. In addition to all the same tricks and techniques addressed for the NPCs above, its most straightforward uses make it perfect for surviving deadly traps and combat. Used defensively, the cube can soak up a lot of damage before it runs out of charges, but it only protects PCs who bunch up and stay largely immobile inside it. Much more dangerous are PCs who use the cube as a way to trap enemies or important NPCs, or as shields against hordes of strictly biological monsters while firing arrow after arrow into the fray. With no save allowed to avoid being trapped in the cube, an unwary villain can also find himself sequestered at the mercy of the party in short order.

PCs who use the cube for utility purposes are able to bypass or mitigate many kinds of traps by activating the right kind of screen at the right time. For example, the bearer could use the nonliving matter setting to cross a 5-foot-wide chasm (part of the cube will still be supported and thus holds the bearer up while she walks across the gap) or a huge pit filled with spikes (provided the spikes are strong enough and close enough together to support the cube's weight. In both of these instances, the bearer's companions would also be protected, so long as they are shod (shoes, as nonliving matter, prevent their wearers from falling through the cube). And of course, no arrow trap or hidden blade trap has a chance against a forewarned cube-bearer. Since most of these effects can be accomplished with specific barrier types, thus using fewer charges, the party can use the cube over and over again. Canny villains—or GMs—who know about the *cube of force* ahead of time might specifically set traps with direct damage components or that the cube seems perfectly designed to circumvent, the better to use up charges before the final confrontation.

Sometimes, a party can come to rely on tricks with a *cube of force* to the point where such tactics become stale. In such cases, GMs might design encounters in harsh environments where nonliving matter, living matter, and magic are all dangers, burning out the high-powered screens quickly. Villains with access to magic that specifically drains the cube (such as *disintegrate* and *prismatic spray*) can also get the cube out of the way early, and of course, there's always the cube's natural enemy: passages smaller than 10 feet by 10 feet.

## VARIANTS

There are a sizeable number of variant *cubes of force* in existence. Any wizard with an advanced knowledge of force effects and access to *wall of force* can, given enough time, effort, and inventiveness, create *cubes of force* with slightly different properties. Most of these cube variants are quite rare.

### CUBE OF VARIED FORCE WALLS

**Aura** moderate evocation; **CL** 10th

**Slot** none; **Price** 56,000 gp; **Weight** 1/2 lb.

#### DESCRIPTION

This cube functions exactly like a *cube of force* except that each wall of the cube can be activated independently and can even have different effects. For example, one wall can block living matter, another wall can block magic, and a third can keep out gases, while the other sides are open without any protection. Activating each wall costs the price

of activating that effect for an entire standard *cube of force*—for instance, one wall against magic and one wall against living matter cost a total of 7 charges per minute.

#### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *wall of force*; **Cost** 28,000 gp

### DISCRIMINATING CUBE

**Aura** moderate evocation; **CL** 10th

**Slot** none; **Price** 40,000 gp;

**Weight** 1/2 lb.

#### DESCRIPTION

This *cube of force* only creates one type of screen, which excludes living matter. Each of the five active faces sets the screen to exclude a different type of living matter (using the same categories as the *bane weapon* special ability).

#### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *summon monster I*, *wall of force*; **Cost** 20,000 gp

### INDEPENDENT CUBE OF FORCE

**Aura** moderate evocation; **CL** 10th

**Slot** none; **Price** 70,000 gp; **Weight** 1/2 lb.

#### DESCRIPTION

The *independent cube of force* functions exactly like a *cube of force* except that it remains activated when dropped or set down. Anyone can pick up and deactivate the item or change the active type of wall; otherwise it shuts off when it runs out of charges.

#### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *wall of force*; **Cost** 35,000 gp

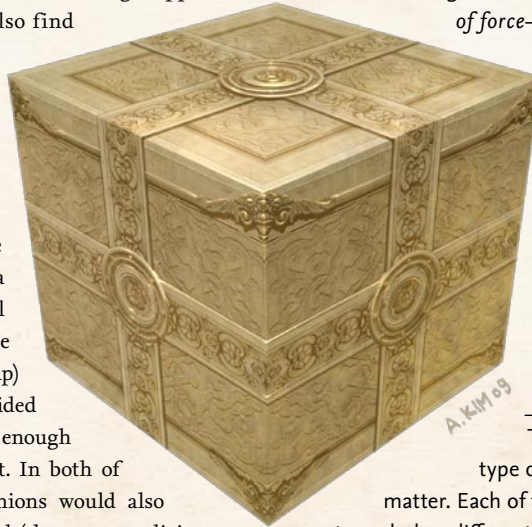
### RECHARGEABLE CUBE OF FORCE

**Aura** moderate evocation; **CL** 10th

**Slot** none; **Price** 70,000 gp; **Weight** 1/2 lb.

#### DESCRIPTION

This cube functions like a *cube of force* except that it can be recharged by casting a *wall of force* spell into it. Each spell cast in this manner adds 2 charges to the cube. The cube cannot hold more than 36 charges.





## CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *wall of force*; **Cost** 35,000 gp

## REMOTE ACTIVATION CUBE

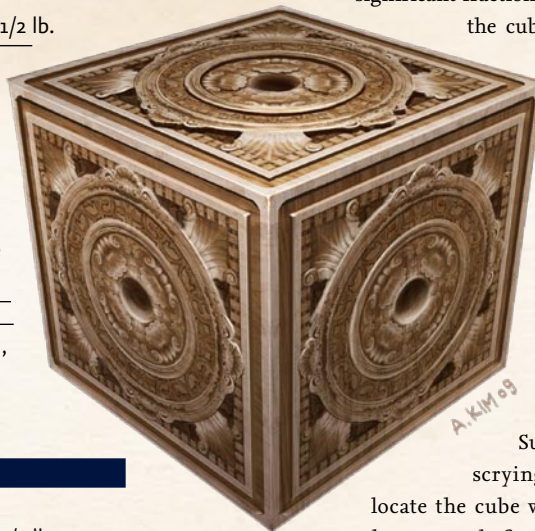
**Aura** moderate evocation; **CL** 10th  
**Slot** none; **Price** 70,000 gp; **Weight** 1/2 lb.

## DESCRIPTION

This cube can be activated or deactivated from a distance via use of the spell *mage hand* or the hand of the apprentice ability. The antimagic wall and the wall that keeps out all things prevent remote deactivation in this manner.

## CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *mage hand*, *wall of force*; **Cost** 35,000 gp



## TWINNED CUBES OF FORCE

**Aura** moderate evocation; **CL** 10th  
**Slot** none; **Price** 66,000 gp; **Weight** 1/2 lb.

## DESCRIPTION

These cubes function as two *cubes of force*, except that when a face on one cube is pressed, its counterpart creates the appropriate wall instead as long as the distance between the cubes does not exceed 100 feet. Both cubes can remain active even after being set down on the ground and abandoned.

## CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *wall of force*; **Cost** 33,000 gp

## CUBES OF FORCE ON GOLARION

Many legends (especially those within Nex) state that the first *cubes of force* were created by the archmage Nex during his endless wars with Geb. He created nine cubes, kept one for himself, and gave one to each of his eight most loyal lieutenants. These first cubes had all of the abilities of the modern *cubes of force*, with one addition: each of the eight cubes thwarted spells from one of the eight schools of magic, even when not activated. The lieutenants Nex gifted these cubes to were specialist wizards, and the cubes were all designed to block one of their opposition schools so as not to interfere with their spellcasting. The powers of the cube that Nex kept for himself were a closely guarded secret, but rumor has it that with his cube, Nex could block incoming magic at will while still casting spells outward. While modern magical scholars believe this effect to be impossible, much of the magic of Nex is shrouded in the seemingly impossible.

The *Cube of Nex* vanished with Nex and has not been seen since. Of the remaining eight cubes, some have stayed in Nex,

coming into the possession of the Council of Three and Nine, and some remain abroad. The evocation, necromancy, and transmutation cubes still reside in the Bandeshar in Quantum, personal possessions of the Three. The Three have taken a more active interest in the other five cubes in recent years, engaging a significant fraction of their magical resources in tracing the cubes to their current locations. While the Council claims that all eight cubes belong in Nex, they do not seem to have made serious efforts to wrest the wayward cubes from their owners or resting places.

The powerful divinations of the Three and Nine are currently keeping tabs on all but two of the cubes. The abjuration cube is currently in the possession of Dominicus Rell, the secretive master of the Lion Blades of Taldor. Such is Rell's personal resistance to scrying that while the Council managed to locate the cube within a decade of searching, it was another 2 years before they could discover who was carrying it around, and then only by direct physical observation. The Council believes that Rell uses the cube for intimidating and assassinating powerful spellcasters, dispelling their defenses as he goes in for the kill.

The conjuration cube rests in a cave high in the Menador Mountains of northern Chelixa. The entire mountain is patrolled by a large contingent of devils. None of the devils can enter the cave to retrieve the cube, but they are not so trusting that they want to allow it to fall into anyone else's hands.

The enchantment cube resides in the magic item collection of the Pathfinder Society's Grand Lodge in Absalom. It primarily gathers dust, as it is far too valuable to be lent out for field missions, though some suspect that the one in the Vaults is merely a clever forgery, and that the actual cube lies with one of the Decemvirate.

Of the divination and illusion cubes there is no sign. Despite intensive divinatory efforts and even *commune* sessions with high-powered clerics, the Three and Nine have been unable to unearth any information about the whereabouts of the cubes. In the case of the divination cube, this is unsurprising, as it merely means that the magic of the cube is stronger than the divination spells that have been brought to bear. The inability to detect the illusion cube is baffling, however, and there is currently a whole team of investigators in the Bandeshar devoted to determining its location or proposing theories for why it might be undetectable. Currently popular theories are that the cube has been destroyed, that it somehow followed Nex into the Refuge, or that it is sitting within 5 feet of the divination cube and therefore shares in its immunity to detection.



Almost immediately after the creation of the first nine cubes of force, the secrets of their creation spread, first to lower-level wizards in Nex's employ and then to other wizards, until their creation process couldn't really be called a secret at all. While none of the later cubes had the special powers of the original nine, they are widespread in Avistan and beyond. Some of Golarion's most powerful wizards carry cubes with them. If they aren't expecting combat, the cube gives them the defensive abilities to deal with unexpected attacks without having to use precious spell slots on defensive spells. Among such powerful magic users, *cubes of force* are sometimes viewed as indispensable insurance policies against sudden, unprovoked attacks.

## A PRECURSOR CUBE?

A few hundred years ago, an expedition to the ruins of old Azlant found a cube in a long-buried chamber. This cube looked like a *cube of force* and was identified as such by the expedition's magic users. However, the runes on its surface were constantly changing shape, sometimes seeming to slither from one side of the cube to another. Experimentation with the cube resulted in tragedy for the expedition, with a few injudicious activations executing powerful and dangerous effects. The remaining members of the expedition brought the cube back to Avistan. The harried and close-lipped survivors sold it in Absalom, where it changed hands in the relic circuits numerous times before finally disappearing altogether. All the learned scholars who came in contact with the artifact claimed that it was obviously a *cube of force*, but nobody could explain the shifting runes (a mix of Azlanti and Thassilonian) and unpredictable functions. Furthermore, the so-called *Azlanti Cube* was obviously created prior to Nex's invention of the *cube of force*, yet they operated on the same principles. Was it simply a case of convergent invention, or did Nex have some connection to the ancient Azlanti relic? Before the questions could be answered, the *Azlanti Cube* disappeared from the relic scene. Some suspect that the Three and Nine acquired the object to investigate the possible Nex connection or to keep others from doing the same.

## THE EIGHT CUBES OF NEX

Each of the *cubes of force* that Nex created for his chief lieutenants has the power to thwart one school of magic, but each does so in a different way. These effects function automatically while the cube is held or carried, but the wielder can deactivate or reactivate them as a standard action. All effects function at caster level 20th unless otherwise stated.

The abjuration cube has the ability to negate abjuration magic in its vicinity. Any abjuration magic within 30 feet is automatically dispelled.

The conjuration cube banishes summoned creatures, extraplanar creatures, and conjured creations within 20 feet.

## THE AZLANTI CUBE

The *Azlanti Cube* is essentially a *cube of force* in that each face creates a different effect when pressed, all of which serve as defensive screens. Unlike other *cubes of force*, the *Azlanti Cube's* faces are variable. The runes on the faces of the cube are constantly morphing one into another or moving between faces. Each of these runes represents a different type of screen; the catalogue of different runes and their effects is incomplete thus far. The runes appear to be a bastardized mix between Azlanti and Thassilonian, only partially decipherable even by scholars of both languages. Some of the effects already catalogued (and their dubiously translated runes) are as follows.

**Sun and Moon:** The screen excludes all solid matter, but the outside of the screen functions as "down" for a new gravity well that extends for 100 feet. Essentially everything within 100 feet falls toward the cube, blocked 5 feet away from the bearer by the solid screen.

**The Eye:** The screen blocks gases and wind and is transparent, but from the outside it is a cube of blinding white light, equivalent to a continuous *sunburst* spell. While the Eye is activated, the cube cannot be moved.

**Trickster Wall:** The screen blocks all magic, and any magic that touches the screen is transferred to a random creature or area outside the screen, generally the closest one to the point at which the magic strikes the cube.

**Unfortunate Fire:** The screen excludes living matter. The outside of the screen forms a *gate* to one of the lower planes at random, and any living being that touches the screen from the outside is sucked through into that plane.

The runes morph and move around the cube with such speed that even if a rune is appropriately deciphered, there is a chance that it will have changed by the time it is pressed (DC 20 Reflex save to press the desired rune). This irritating feature leads cube scholars to speculate that perhaps the *Azlanti Cube* has suffered damage over the years.

The divination cube makes everything within 5 feet of the cube completely undetectable to divination spells.

The enchantment cube renders the possessor completely immune to enchantments.

The evocation cube acts as a 10-foot-square *antimagic field* for the purposes of evocation spells.

The illusion cube allows the possessor to see things as if using *true seeing*. All illusions within 40 feet are automatically dispelled if their caster level is lower than that of the bearer.

The necromancy cube causes all mindless undead to crumble to dust if they come within 30 feet, and affects sentient undead as an *undead to death* spell once per round of the possessor's caster level.

The transmutation cube automatically dispels any transmutation effects within 20 feet.



Chapter  Three

## DECK OF MANY THINGS

THE OLD MAN STEPPED BACK AND RAISED HIS HANDS. THE WARRIOR'S SWORD DIDN'T WAVER, AND THE MAN THEY CALLED PRINCE VARTHREM SIGHED.

"DON'T DO IT, SON. WHATEVER THEY'VE PROMISED YOU, THE DECK ISN'T WORTH IT. I KNOW."

THE YOUNG MAN SNORTED, AND BEHIND THE BLUSTER VARTHREM SAW THE WELLING OF TEARS. THE SWORDSMAN CLUTCHED THE STOLEN DECK.

"IT DOESN'T MATTER. I'VE ALREADY LOST EVERYTHING!"

SEVERAL HEADS AROUND THE ROOM SHOOK SADLY, KNOWINGLY.

"NO YOU HAVEN'T," VARTHREM SAID. "IT ONLY FEELS THAT WAY RIGHT NOW. BUT BELIEVE ME, YOU STILL HAVE MORE TO LOSE. MUCH MORE."

—FINAL EXCHANGE BETWEEN  
ROTEGRO LAROND AND PRINCE VARTHREM OF THE DIRE GAMBLER'S CLUB



Once a person draws from the *deck of many things*, her life is changed irrevocably, for better or worse. Composed of 22 distinctive cards, the *deck of many things* is no ordinary collection of playing cards. Instead, each card instantaneously delivers a life-altering consequence ranging from an increase in an ability score to the disappearance of all her possessions, the granting of a small kingdom to the loss of her soul itself.

The deck has three simple but immutable rules that define its game: One, the bearer must announce how many cards she will draw before she begins; two, the bearer must draw all cards (including any additional cards resulting from the Fool, Idiot, or Jester) within an hour of one another; and three, after that draw is completed, the bearer can never again draw from that particular deck. The cards impart an instant understanding of these rules to anyone who holds the deck.

## BASE ITEM

Presented below are the statistics for a standard *deck of many things*, as presented in the *Pathfinder RPG Core Rulebook*.

### DECK OF MANY THINGS

**Aura** strong (all schools); **CL** 20th

**Slot** none; **Weight** —

#### DESCRIPTION

A *deck of many things* is usually found in a box or leather pouch. Each deck contains a number of cards or plaques made of ivory or vellum. Each is engraved with glyphs, characters, and sigils. As soon as one of these cards is drawn from the pack, its magic is bestowed upon the person who drew it, for better or worse.

The character with a *deck of many things* who wishes to draw a card must announce how many cards she will draw before she begins. Cards must be drawn within 1 hour of each other, and a character can never draw from this deck any more cards than she has announced. If the character does not willingly draw her allotted number (or if she is somehow prevented from doing so), the cards flip out of the deck on their own. If the Idiot or Jester is drawn, the possessor of the deck may elect to draw additional cards.

Each time a card is taken from the deck, it is replaced (making it possible to draw the same card twice) unless the draw is the Jester or the Fool, in which case the card is discarded from the pack. A *deck of many things* contains 22 cards, the effects of which are summarized in the adjacent table. For further rules for each effect and advice on simulating a deck with tarot or playing cards, see the *Pathfinder RPG Core Rulebook*.

#### DESTRUCTION

A *deck of many things* can be destroyed by losing it in a wager with a deity of law. The deity must be unaware of the nature of the deck.

## THE CARDS OF THE DECK

While different decks have manifested different cards over the course of centuries, these are the classic cards that have entranced and horrified adventures since time immemorial.

Card	Summary of Effect
Balance	Change alignment instantly.
Comet	Defeat the next monster you meet in solo combat to gain one level.
Donjon	You are imprisoned (as per the spell).
Euryale	-1 penalty on all saving throws henceforth.
The Fates	Avoid any situation you choose, once.
Flames	Enmity arises between you and an outsider.
Fool	Lose 10,000 XP; you must draw again.
Gem	Gain gems or jewelry worth 50,000 gp in total.
Idiot	Lose Intelligence (permanent drain); you may draw again.
Jester	Gain 10,000 XP or two more draws from the deck.
Key	Gain a major magic weapon.
Knight	Gain the service of a 4th-level fighter.
Moon	You are granted 1d4 wishes.
Rogue	One of your friends turns against you.
Ruin	Immediately lose all wealth and property save for magic items.
Skull	Defeat a dread wraith or be destroyed forever.
Star	Immediately gain a +2 inherent bonus to one ability score.
Sun	Gain one beneficial medium wondrous item and 50,000 XP.
Talons	All magic items you possess disappear permanently.
Throne	Gain a +6 bonus on Diplomacy checks plus a small keep.
Vizier	Know the answer to your next dilemma.
Void	Your body functions, but your soul is trapped elsewhere.

## UTILITY

Most PCs who dare to draw from the *deck of many things* do so as a once-in-a-lifetime chance to randomly change their fate. Indeed, the *deck of many things* is the ultimate game-changer. It raises monarchs and lays them low. For a GM, it has the potential to suddenly and catastrophically alter the adventure's plot or the balance of power within a party. Any given gambling session has the potential to push one PC suddenly ahead of her peers in experience points or wealth, while another PC might suddenly exit the game in a horrific turn of events. While the *deck of many things* can be a proverbial monkey wrench for a well-oiled campaign, that same unpredictability can provide an instant shot in the arm for a stagnating adventure. Few players forget the first card

they ever draw from a *deck of many things*. It takes guts to pull a card, and the stress players experience as their favorite PC's hand quivers over the deck of legend is very real.

Even if the PCs are conservative enough to keep away from the deck, a *deck of many things* can still provide fresh angles for a campaign if discovered by the right NPC, be it on or off the campaign stage. For example, perhaps the PCs have an old foe they have long since surpassed in ability; cards such as the Key and the Throne can quickly restore this opponent's relevance, equipping him with a powerful new magic item or a castle. Drawing the Vizier might enable an old foe to discover the party's weaknesses, while drawing The Fates provides him with the ultimate getaway. Similarly, the Rogue and Flame cards are so potent they can drastically affect the PCs' game world, causing old alliances to be redrawn, even if the PCs themselves have never seen a *deck of many things*.

## RELATED ITEMS

The classic *deck of many things* is but one variation on the ancient distributor of miracles and misfortunes. For example, the *Harrow deck of many things*, detailed in *Pathfinder Adventure Path* #12, is a 52-card variant unique to Golarion. Other decks with other abilities find their way across the land, most notably the *Mother Deck*, sometimes said to be the first of its kind (see page 20).

Aside from variant decks, however, no other item comes close to simulating the raw randomness of the *deck of many things*. Certainly not the *deck of illusions*, a comparatively minor magic item that empowers its bearer to choose from 34 *major images*. And while a standard Harrow deck may provide portents of the future, the *deck of many things* can change the future itself.

A *phylactery of faithfulness* is notable for its special interaction with the *deck of many things*. The Balance card inside the *deck of many things* instantly reverses the drawer's alignment, but the phylactery always warns its bearer of acts that could adversely affect his alignment. As such, at the GM's discretion, a PC wearing a *phylactery of faithfulness* might be warned away from the deck entirely or else given the option to redraw if he's about to choose the Balance card, simulating the PC receiving an instantaneous warning that allows him to suddenly shift his hand to another card at the last instant.

## CAMPAIGN ROLE

Because each PC can only have one drawing session per deck, the *deck of many things* is closer to a one-shot item than a magic

item a PC will use over and over. Most players lucky enough to acquire such a deck save it for a moment of true desperation. Be forewarned, though: clever players are likely to devise means of reusing the deck indirectly, and often from a position of safety. For example, the PCs might summon monsters and command them to draw cards, a charmed ally (or foe!) could be persuaded to take the risk, or countless numbers of mindless undead could be forced to make draws using the Command Undead feat—all in the hopes of the PCs obtaining the treasures of the Gem, Key, and Sun cards without risk to themselves. Whether these tactics are successful



or the magic of the deck still directs cards' effects to the players commanding the draws is ultimately up to the GM. Even if the GM allows it, such methods can still be a risky business, largely because of the Flames card, which generates instant enmity between the drawer and an outsider from across the planes.

Most outsiders are intelligent enough to understand that they should not spontaneously feel a deep-seated hatred toward a random skeleton or Small earth elemental; they will eventually investigate and discover that a puppet master is behind the spontaneous creation of its sudden nemesis. The extraplanar foe will then either focus its attention on eliminating the offending PC or devise a stratagem to get the deck out of the offending PC's hands before he abuses the cards any further. In short, it is the mind that directs a deck, and the deck's power may bypass charmed, commanded, or enslaved intermediaries between itself and the acting PC. If players insist on trying to game the deck, remind them that any trick they can use, their enemies can use as well—prompting an immortal lich to endlessly sacrifice his minions to take advantage of the deck is probably not such a good idea.

Because of its weighty repercussions, a *deck of many things* is in many ways more like an encounter than an item. This can be literally true as well: Perhaps during their dungeon exploration, the PCs encounter a giant, spinning wheel and discern that each of the wheel's notches contains a single card from the *deck of many things*. Anyone who spins the *wheel of chance* draws the card that comes up. In this way, PCs can take a chance on the deck or let the opportunity pass, but because the PCs cannot actually remove the cards from the wheel, once the PCs leave the chamber, the deck no longer haunts the party or the GM's campaign.

A simpler variation is for the deck to be in the possession of a powerful NPC ally—or even an enemy hoping to exploit the deck as explained above—who is prepared to grant the PCs the one-time chance to attempt a number of draws. This



way the PCs can play with the deck if they choose, but cannot continue to use it in an ongoing fashion.

## VARIANTS

Not all *decks of many things* are the same. Below are a few variant decks that have been documented by adventurers.

### THE ELDER DECKS

**Aura** strong (all schools); **CL** 20th

**Slot** none; **Weight** —

#### DESCRIPTION

These ancient artifacts function as *decks of many things*, save that they have only 13 cards: Euryale, Flames, Jester, Key, Knight, Moon, Rogue, Ruin, Skull, Star, Sun, Throne, and The Void.

#### DESTRUCTION

An *elder deck* can be destroyed by losing it in a wager with a deity of law. The deity must be unaware of the nature of the deck.

### HAYKALI'S HOUSE OF CARDS

**Aura** strong (all schools); **CL** 20th

**Slot** none; **Weight** —

#### DESCRIPTION

This item operates as a standard 22-card *deck of many things*, save that if its wielder takes 5 minutes to build a card house out of its deck (a DC 20 Sleight of Hand check), he and any creatures touching him are instantly transported to a pocket dimension constructed to resemble a massive, fully furnished mansion made out of cards. Within its ever-shifting corridors, the PCs must defeat personifications of the negative cards or be immediately shunted back to the Material Plane and suffer the effects of the card that conquered them. If the PCs successfully reach the heart of the mansion, they find the positive result cards floating there. Each PC may choose one, whereupon he returns to the Material Plane and receives its effects. A creature may enter the House of Cards only once. Designing and mapping the adventure that results from characters entering the House of Cards is left up to the GM; such preparations should take place before introducing this artifact.

#### DESTRUCTION

*Haykali's House of Cards* can be destroyed only by surmounting its challenges and then using the Moon card to wish for the deck's destruction.

## VARIANT CARDS

Several *decks of many things* have also spawned unique cards over the ages, a subtle way in which the decks keep one of the world's oldest games continually fresh.

**Amnesiac:** This card washes away all memory of your identity. No force less than direct divine intervention can restore the lost memories. (Replaces the Ruin card.)

**Bones:** You permanently gain the type, alignment, Armor Class, defensive abilities, ability score modifiers, and feats of the skeletal champion template, even if you do not otherwise qualify. (Replaces the Skull card.)

**Girdle:** Your current gender permanently changes. (Replaces the Balance card.)

**Lover:** Choose a person of your race that knows you personally. That person is affected as though he or she had drunk an *elixir of love*, with you as the object of his or her obsession. The effect is permanent. (Replaces the Knight card.)

**Madness:** Once per day you suffer from *confusion* for 10 consecutive rounds, triggered at a time of the GM's choosing but typically at the least opportune of moments. (Replaces the Rogue card.)

**Mastery:** Instantly gain any one feat of your choice that you qualify for. (Replaces the Star card.)



## DECKS OF MANY THINGS ON GOLARION

Despite its rarity, the *deck of many things* has made its mark on the many nations, cultures, and organizations of Golarion. Followers of the goddess Desna in particular possess a strong fascination with the deck. Many followers of the Song of the Spheres hold that the original deck descended from Cynosure, the dwelling place of their goddess in the northern night sky. They warn that those lucky enough to encounter the deck should beware, however, as numerous distorted replicas have since infiltrated the world. Others say that the first deck rose from a twisted shard of power that fell to the world during a clash between Desna and Rovagug as part of the battle that ended in the imprisonment of the Rough Beast. As such, they argue, the chaos of each deck is as every bit as tainted with evil as it is favored with a capacity for good.

In Cheliax, possession of a *deck of many things* is prohibited by law, and this prohibition is rigorously enforced. Rumors hold that the Infernal Majestrix herself decreed the ban after a minor noble's encounter with the Flames card caused a temporary redrawing of alliances between parts of Hell and House Thrune. The Hellknight Order of the Pyre in particular is exceedingly vigilant in hunting down those who dare to possess such an artifact.

Among profiteers such as the Aspis Consortium and the Pathfinders, the *deck of many things* has given rise to a more

recent obsession not so much with what the deck is capable of doing but with what it has already done. The fascination began when the famed Pathfinder Donatalus Bisby uncovered a lost treatise entitled “The Field of Endless Hues,” penned by the deceased loremaster Forthas Tuchinault. In his text, the loremaster noted that three separate cards of the *deck of many things* were capable of irrevocably stripping an adventurer of his gear: the Donjon, Ruin, and Talons cards. The sage theorized that these disappearing treasures were not lost, but instead transported to an unknown location so they could be recycled when summoned by another card from the deck, such as the Key, Sun, or Moon cards. Unveiling the results of a series of divination spells, each cross-referenced with a collection of lost lore, Tuchinault purported to triangulate the site of a hidden hoard of magic treasure. He projected the location of a massive, naturally occurring vault deep in the Darklands, one with no known physical entrance or exit. According to Tuchinault, inside the vault’s blackness must lie a field of near-endless treasure.

Ever since the first publication of Tuchinault’s text, adventuring parties have set out to find a route to Tuchinault’s mythical Field of Endless Hues. Thus far, none have succeeded, and many now claim that the Field of Endless Hues is no more than a campfire tale. Others note that in a final footnote to his chapter text, Tuchinault himself mused that the only way to definitively reach the Field of Endless Hues would be to obtain a *deck of many things* and draw the Vizier to secure the vault’s exact location. One must then draw two Moon cards to safely transport oneself there and back. “Though the odds of that,” Tuchinault concluded, “are not encouraging.”

Along with the number of legends and ghost stories that surround the *deck of many things*, the deck has left several tangible monuments as reminders that both its existence and power are very real. One such monument is Castle Everstand. When Lastwall’s Hordeline crumbled in 4515 AR and the orcs of Belkzen forced Lastwall’s defenders into retreat, three desperate patriots of Lastwall held an urgent meeting in secrecy. The first, Sergeant Strom, had secured a *deck of many things* from his Taldan cousin to the south, a foppish merchant who lived off the gems gained from a lucky pull in his youth. The three soldiers agreed to each make two draws from the deck, hoping to obtain the Throne card to build an instant keep for Lastwall’s army

to rally behind. They further swore that as soon as they had their fortress they would stop the draws and never speak of how the keep came to be.

As promised, Strom himself drew first. Luck was with him that day, and he drew the Moon card, securing a single *wish* spell. He expended his *wish* wisely, asking that his second and final draw be the Throne card. His *wish* came to pass, and moments later Castle Everstand was founded, a bristling bulwark of defense designed as the ideal bastion to fend off the orcs. Strom was able to rally some of Lastwall’s battered forces to Castle Everstand and help redraw Lastwall’s borderline, holding firm against the orcs. Castle Everstand remains to this day, maintained by Strom’s great grandson, and although Lastwall’s engineers have expanded the castle three times in its history, adding additional wings and outer walls, the initial core created by the *deck of many things* remains intact.



## THE DIRE GAMBLER'S CLUB

This elite club of partygoers is restricted to those who can demonstrate that they have dared and survived at least one pull from a *deck of many things*. Of course, the club contains quite a few pretenders who, despite the stories they recount, have never actually touched a genuine *deck of many things*.

Banned from virtually every casino and gambling house in central Avistan, the Dire Gambler’s Club is famous for its wild parties, which invariably sow chaos whenever a true new member joins. Although the club insists it has no leader, its *de facto* head is currently **Lord Embury** (male human aristocrat 3/rogue 2), as he alone remains in possession of a genuine deck.

While most members of the Dire Gambler’s Club simply attend reunions to drink, gamble, and share tales, their inner circle is secretly devoted to the discovery and acquisition of new decks. As the rules of the item prevent the members from drawing again from decks they have already used, they cannot have their next dance with destiny until they find another.

## THE MOTHER DECK

Supposedly Golarion’s first *deck of many things*, *Shelana the Mother Deck* is a unique, intelligent artifact. Gifted with sentience, her sultry voice has lulled many a desperate gambler into taking a chance on her honeyed promises. But when the chaos caused by a draw of her Rogue card inadvertently triggered the War of Keeps in –5933 AR, Shelana recognized it was time to hedge her own bets and take steps to ensure her



survival. Using her ego to manipulate and control a series of weak-minded players, Shelana experimented with the benefits of having her bearers draw certain combinations of cards from herself. Although the price to her players was often catastrophic, she eventually discovered that once a player randomly drew both the Sun (a gift of a magic item) and the Moon card (*wishes*) she could use mind control to force her bearer to use the combination of outcomes to replicate her form, creating new *decks of many things*. For the next few decades, Shelana slowly created her children and scattered them across the globe until a unnamed bearer mustered the will to lock her away.

Now housed in a puzzle box of sculpted adamantine originally built to house a lich's phylactery, Shelana has been all but forgotten by historians. Even so, her power remains potent—all of her cards' numerical benefits and penalties are doubled (see the description below). Although her powerful ego enables her to force her possessor into making draws, she much prefers her players to draw as a result of their own folly or desperation. She especially delights in the chance to tempt those who should possess the self-control to know better.

#### SHELANA THE MOTHER DECK

**Aura** strong (all schools); **CL** 20th

**Slot** none; **Weight** —

**AL** CN; speech, telepathy, senses (30 ft.)

**Int** 19, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 20; **Ego** 21.

##### DESCRIPTION

*Shelana the Mother Deck* operates as an intelligent deck of many things, save that all her benefits and penalties are doubled (for example, the Star card grants a +4 bonus to ability stats instead of +2, the Skull card summons two dread wraiths at a time, and so on). Shelana can cast *teleport* once per day, transporting herself and her puzzle box only.

##### DESTRUCTION

*Shelana* can only be destroyed by using her own Moon card to wish for her destruction.

## FATE DUELING

A popular pastime of the Dire Gambler's Club is fate dueling, a two-player game played using a simulated, nonmagical *deck of many things*. The game consists of each player designing her own deck while simultaneously modifying the deck of her opponent. Once complete, the players must draw from their decks and compare the results. The player who fares best overall is the winner. While the victor is normally straightforward, determining the winner can be a matter of subjective debate. After a close game, philosophers and moralists are left discussing their view of the outcome deep into the night.

To begin play, the players spread out the 22 cards (or some other agreed-upon combination of cards) on the table. The first player selects a card for her opponent's deck. The second

## CRUNCHING THE NUMBERS

Considering a draw from the *deck of many things* yourself? Here's some math to mull over.

If you draw a single card from a 22-card deck, the odds of your body or soul being imprisoned (Donjon or The Void) is just over 9%. To put this in perspective, that's slightly better than your chance of drawing an ace with a single pull from a standard deck of cards (7.7%). If you draw as many as five cards, however, the odds of your body or soul being imprisoned increases to 37.9%, over a third—a terrible prospect. Remember, if Donjon or The Void comes up, you may not continue with your remaining draws and effectively lose the benefit of all preceding draws. On the other hand, 11 of the 22 cards are clearly beneficial. That's the same odds as a straight coin toss—still better than house odds for roulette, which has a 47.37% chance of winning at most.

Although still subjective at best, for high-level PCs, the deck becomes slightly safer to draw from. Of the 11 possible negative outcomes, five are in theory easier to address or recover from at high-level play (Balance, Flames, Fool, Rogue, and Skull). That leaves, with a single pull, only a 27.27% chance of a serious negative outcome compared to a 50% chance of a benefit. Realistically though, the chance of substantially benefiting drops to 36.36% because three of the positive cards (Gem, Jester, and Knight) no longer offer a reward significant enough to justify the risk. Nevertheless, that still leaves a high-level PC more than 9% more likely to obtain a significant positive outcome than a significant negative outcome. Those odds are far better than any a modern casino would offer. If only the risks of failure were not so final...

player then chooses a card for his own deck and a second card for that of his opponent. Next, the first player chooses a card for her own deck so that the players now have two cards apiece. From that point forward, the players take turns, adding a card to either their own deck or that of their opponent, until the 22 cards are gone. Note that the resulting two decks need not have an equal number of cards.

After the selections are complete, there is a brief phase of negotiation in which the players may choose to trade with one another, further customizing their decks. Any combination of trades is possible as long as both players can come to an agreement. For example, one player might trade her opponent three cards (two helpful and one horrible) for no cards at all, reducing the risk of her own deck. Once all offered trades have been accepted or declined, each player treats her deck like a real *deck of many things*, declaring how many cards she chooses to draw. The players then take turns drawing and, depending on the game, winning or losing funds or perhaps gaining or suffering symbolic versions of the cards' effects.



Chapter  Four

## FIGURINE OF WONDROUS POWER

"HERE, HOLD THIS. THINK IT'S JUST A LITTLE CARVING OF A GRIFFON? WELL, IT IS! BUT IF YOU KNEW THE SECRET WORD, IT WOULD GROW TO HUNDREDS OF TIMES ITS SIZE—AND GOBBLE ME WHOLE IF YOU TOLD IT TO! HA!

"EVERY NATION IN THE WORLD HAS A STORY OF THESE THINGS—LITTLE CARVINGS AND IDOLS THAT SPRING TO LIFE, DEFEND THE HELPLESS, AND CARRY HEROES TO SAFETY. THEY'RE THE STUFF OF LEGEND, AND NO ADVENTURER ANYWHERE SHOULD BE WITHOUT ONE. WITH ONE OF THESE, YOU'VE GOT A CONSTANT COMPANION AND THE POWER TO CHANGE ANY SITUATION WITH A SINGLE WORD.

"BUT THE SECRET OF THAT WORD—AH, THAT'S GOING TO COST YOU."

—ENKPURULK WANDERFARTHER,  
PROPRIETOR OF ENKPURULK'S EMPORIUM



The *figurine of wondrous power* isn't one single item, but rather a brilliant idea applied to a slew of related magic items. That idea is for a tiny statuette to manifest as a powerful creature to do the owner's bidding.

*Figurines of wondrous power* are found in countless stories and hoards, with no single creator or origin, suggesting that the concept underlying figurines is simple enough to arise independently wherever magical study is advanced enough to support it. Likely, there's no overarching mystery as to the motives for their creation—animals are used for work everywhere, and a guardian or mount which stores easily is a universally good idea.

Nine types of figurines are commonly known, but many more exist. Each is an idiosyncratic expression of its maker, and representative of the creature that manifests.

*Figurines of wondrous power* are usually made from a precious or at least uncommon mineral or metal. They tend to be small, only an inch at their longest measurement, and negligible in weight, except for the *marble elephant*, which is as large as a human's hand. Since they must be thrown down in order to manifest, the carvings are often carried in sleeve pockets or serve as charms on bracelets for easy access.

The animals that manifest are not as predictable. While always related to the shape of their figurine, the animals range in size and temperament from a normal-sized and docile riding griffon to an enormous goat that tramples all who dare oppose its master. The purpose and powers of the animals reflect the creator and his culture.

The consistent feature of *figurines of wondrous power* is their function, but within those boundaries is the potential for near-limitless variety. Some turn into normal creatures of their type. Some are unusually intelligent. Some have abilities outside a natural creature's purview or grow to enormous size. Some are reusable, while others have a limited number of charges.

In all cases, the magic is transmutation, not conjuration, a point arcane scholars use to indicate that the statuettes are not summoned creatures but rather are stone or metal transformed and given life.

## BASE ITEM

Below is an overview of the standard *figurines of wondrous power*. For further rules and information, such as durations and damage values, see the *Pathfinder RPG Core Rulebook*.

### FIGURINES OF WONDROUS POWER

**Aura** varies; **CL** varies

**Slot** none; **Price** 10,000 gp (*bronze griffon*), 10,000 gp (*ebony fly*), 16,500 gp (*golden lions*), 21,000 gp (*ivory goats*), 17,000 gp (*marble elephant*), 28,500 gp (*obsidian steed*), 15,500 gp (*onyx dog*), 9,100 gp (*serpentine owl*), 3,800 gp (*silver raven*); **Weight** 1 lb.

#### DESCRIPTION

Each of the several kinds of *figurines of wondrous power*

appears to be a miniature statuette of a creature an inch or so high (with one exception). When the figurine is tossed down and the correct command word spoken, it becomes a living creature of normal size (except where noted below). The creature obeys and serves its owner. Unless stated otherwise, the creature understands Common but does not speak.

If a figurine of wondrous power is broken or destroyed in its statuette form, it is forever ruined. All magic is lost, and its power departs. If slain in animal form, the figurine simply reverts to a statuette that can be used again at a later time.

**Bronze Griffon:** This statuette becomes a normal griffon.

**Ebony Fly:** This becomes a black fly the size of a pony with all the statistics of a pegasus, save that it cannot make attacks.

**Golden Lions:** These figurines come in pairs; they become normal adult male lions.

**Ivory Goats:** Each goat of this trio looks slightly different from the others and has a different function.

*The Goat of Traveling:* This goat is a speedy and enduring mount equivalent to a heavy horse in every way except appearance.

*The Goat of Travail:* This enormous goat is larger than a bull; it has the statistics of a nightmare except for the addition of a pair of horns of exceptional size.

*The Goat of Terror:* This mount has the statistics of a light horse, but its rider can employ the goat's horns as weapons. When ridden in an attack against an opponent, the goat of terror radiates *fear* (as per the spell) in a 30-foot radius.

**Marble Elephant:** The largest of the standard figurines, it becomes a full-grown elephant.

**Obsidian Steed:** This figurine appears to be a small, vaguely quadrupedal lump of black stone. On command, it becomes a fantastic mount with the ability to fly, plane shift, and use *ethereal jaunt*. It can carry its rider with it to other planes, but if the rider is of good alignment, there's a 10% chance that the steed travels to the lower planes and returns to statuette form.

**Onyx Dog:** This riding dog is endowed with an Intelligence of 8, exceptional sensory abilities, and the ability to communicate in Common.

**Serpentine Owl:** This figurine becomes either a normal-sized horned owl or a giant owl, depending on the command word used, and communicates telepathically with its owner. After three transformations into its giant owl form, the statuette loses all its magical properties.

**Silver Raven:** This figurine turns into a raven but retains its metallic consistency, giving it hardness 10. It has no special powers but can bear messages.

#### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *animate objects*, additional spells (see *Pathfinder RPG Core Rulebook*); **Cost** 5,000 gp (*bronze griffon*), 5,000 gp (*ebony fly*), 8,250 gp (*golden lions*), 10,500 gp (*ivory goats*), 8,500 gp (*marble elephant*), 14,250 gp (*obsidian steed*), 7,750 gp (*onyx dog*), 4,550 gp (*serpentine owl*), 1,900 gp (*silver raven*)

## UTILITY

Figurines have a variety of uses, depending on the creature manifested and the intent of the creator. The most common uses are combat and transportation, though some have specialized purposes, such as the *silver raven's animal messenger* ability and the *goat of terror's fear* effect. Even specialized figurines can serve other ends, however.

In this way, figurines are among the most versatile magic items. Minor magic items usually have a single purpose, but many *figurines of wondrous power* have sufficient intelligence to understand and obey a master's orders, which essentially makes them more expendable than an animal companion, longer lasting than a summoned creature, and more cost effective than a golem. In addition, they require no food, no sleep, and no upkeep.

In legends, combat is naturally the most common use for figurines. In addition to fighting on command (except for the *ebony fly*, which cannot attack), most manifestations can be used as flankers. Nearly all of them can block openings or provide cover for spellcasters and archers, and even the *ebony fly* can bull rush or overrun. An elephant is a Huge (and frequently underestimated) combatant, while *ivory goats* make capable warriors with their fearsome horns. The infrequency with which they can be used means *figurines of wondrous power* must be saved for special occasions, but this is only a minor limitation for the clever adventurer.

Transportation is another major use of the figurines. Most can carry a Medium humanoid—and indeed, several are designed for just that purpose—though the *onyx dog* can only carry a Small rider. While manifested creatures can suffer from fatigue and exhaustion, the only serious limitation for using one as a mount is its duration. Characters with ranks in the Ride skill can fearlessly use the spur mount ability to ride them long past the point at which a normal mount would founder.

But the overlooked joys of *figurines of wondrous power* are the infinite ways they can be used outside a fight. They can be used to trigger traps or test uncertain areas. Large creatures are generally as strong or stronger than the average adventurer; their strength and size can be used to batter down obstacles. Many have the scent ability, darkvision, or low-light vision and can alert their owners to dangers invisible to the standard 10-foot pole.

Even minimally intelligent creatures can do simple scouting, and every standard flying figurine can do aerial reconnaissance. Even those without the ability to communicate directly with their owners can understand



Common and can generally be induced to answer yes or no questions, communicate numbers, or growl in case of danger. In the worst cases, the creatures can be sent blindly into unknown areas. Those killed after being sent down a dark corridor simply revert to their figurine form, retrievable once the danger is clear.

Furthermore, the creatures that manifest are persistent. Unlike many conjured creatures, a figurine manifests as the same creature every time. A figurine creature may only manifest for a few hours a week, but it can hold information all the time, making it a safe messenger, even when carried by uncertain couriers.

Regardless of a figurine's capabilities, sensitive souls may worry that the creatures feel pain and have their own opinions about being sent to their doom. The reality is more complex that. Although figurine creatures act and are affected by the world like real, living creatures, and though they may have personalities, they are still fundamentally different from their normal counterparts. Some do care about being "killed," but most understand their existence better than people do: they are intelligent objects transformed temporarily into living creatures. Like all intelligent beings, they prefer not to be destroyed. But "killing" a manifested figurine only forces it to revert to its statuette form—a far gentler fate than killing a normal creature. An owner may be callous or kind about exhausting a figurine of all its hit points, but it is not the same as killing it.

## RELATED ITEMS

Curiously, *animate objects*—the central spell required to make a *figurine of wondrous power*—is not on the spell list for wizards and sorcerers, but rather for bards and clerics. This reveals a bit about the idiosyncratic, almost hodgepodge natures of the diverse figurines that nonetheless seem to operate as a class.

Most religious connotations of the figurines are lost on the public, but the fact that the gods themselves may have had a hand in their making helps explain the varied origins and limitations of the figurines. The few clerics powerful enough to create both figurines and golems suggest a similarity in their creation, though most clerics powerful enough to create golems are well past their days of creating *figurines of wondrous power* as anything more than trinkets for apprentices.

Because they seem to create creatures out of nothing, the transmutational figurines are often confused with conjuration items and spells. For instance, animals produced from a *bag of tricks* are conjured. Owners may use this confusion to their advantage, as a figurine's manifestation is unaffected by

*dismissal* or *banishment* spells, *dimensional shackles*, protective circles, or any similar spell or item designed to affect summoned or extraplanar creatures.

Unlike other intelligent magic items, figurines are always neutral in alignment. No known figurines have an ego score, and they never attempt to usurp or sabotage their owners (although an obsidian steed can do serious harm to a good-aligned owner).

Finally, the little-known *effigy of the favored servant*, created in ancient Thassilon, is likely one of several varieties of figurine created by the slothful priests of Haruka. This figurine is unusual in that it manifests as a giant instead of an animal or magical beast. The religious fervor of the ancient Harukans combined with their cultural penchant for letting others do their work suggests that they might have made frequent use of figurines for work and protection. Several unknown kinds of figurines might still lie lost and scattered across Varisia. (For more information on the *effigy of the favored servant*, see the free *Magic of Thassilon Web Supplement* on [paizo.com](http://paizo.com).)

## CAMPAIGN ROLE

*Figurines of wondrous power* aren't the most revered entries in the magic item catalogue, but they have a deceptive simplicity. For villains, figurines are superb clutch items. A villain can activate an ebony fly to make a shockingly quick getaway (flying 120 feet with a single move action), while *ivory goats* can entirely upend a foregone battle for a spellcaster running low on minions. The figurines' main limit, duration, is rarely an issue for NPCs, since their main challenge in a day is typically to fight the PCs. While giving PCs or a villain a figurine can make a single encounter suddenly asymmetrical, it is unlikely to unbalance an entire campaign, as its limited duration generally keeps PCs from becoming over-reliant on it.

Figurines can change hands in the course of a battle, as figurine creatures who run out of hit points or hit their maximum duration in the middle of melee revert to statuette form right at the enemy's feet. Of course, using a figurine still requires its command word. Determining the command word takes time, but a quick charm spell can usually pull the command word out of a party member easily enough.

Finally, in a broader campaign, figurines can serve lots of purposes. Several figurines are intelligent—and that intelligence doesn't end when the creature reverts to statuette form. Since figurines are functionally immortal, they might have had very interesting lives before falling into PC hands. A figurine's howl or roar might be the password to open certain long-locked doors. A tuft of fur or silvered feather might be a sign of favor to bypass ancient guardians. At the GM's discretion, they might even have memories stretching back centuries before the PCs were born.

Figurines can serve as tantalizingly incomplete sources of information about things they saw or heard when active; they can also be used to deliver information from a patron.

## VARIANTS

In addition to the nine most common types of figurines, there are cosmetic variants of each type. In Absalom and Osirion, a *bronze sphinx* is nearly as common as a *bronze griffon*, both having identical powers and abilities. In recent decades, a wealthy diabolist may own a *brimstone fly* rather than an *ebony fly*, and a Calistrian priestess may fly upon a *banded agate wasp* that has the powers of an *ebony fly*. In Rahadoum, Thuvia, and Osirion, pairs of flightless *golden manticores* are more prestigious than the common *golden lions*. Andorens prefer the *serpentine eagle* to the equivalent *serpentine owl*, much as the witches of Irrisen favor *moonstone hens* or *ebony ravens* over *silver ravens*. While the Ulfen of the Lands of the Linnorm Kings like the traditional *ivory goats*, at least one set of *ivory elk* finds use in an Erastil-worshiping village. The Mammoth Lord nomads of course prefer the rare *amber mastodon* to a *marble elephant*, while the Sargavan elite may own *ivory elephants* made of actual elephant ivory. In Nidal, the *hematite stallion* is favored by the Umbral Court but has the same powers as an *obsidian steed*. The people of Kyonin and Nirmathas favor *emerald owls* over *silver ravens* because they blend better with the natural forest.

## COMPANION FIGURINE

You've developed an especially close bond with the creature summoned by your figurine of wondrous power.

**Prerequisite:** Animal Handling 1 rank, own a *figurine of wondrous power*.

**Benefit:** You may select the creature summoned by your *figurine of wondrous power* as an animal companion or familiar, or as appropriate. The figurine has the standard abilities of a familiar or animal companion of its type, plus additional abilities related to its figurine type (see below). The main advantage of this is that if your familiar or companion is killed in creature form, it merely reverts to statue form and can be used again later. The following standard figurines are available as animal companions (C) or familiars (F).

**Ebony Fly (C):** You must have the Vermin Heart feat (see page 219 of the *Pathfinder Chronicles Campaign Setting*) to select this creature as an animal companion. It is treated as a horse animal companion, and at 8th level it gains a fly speed of 120 feet (average maneuverability).



**Golden Lions (C):** When you select a *golden lion* as an animal companion, one of the pair becomes your companion and the other retains its standard figurine abilities.

**Ivory Goats (C):** When selecting an *ivory goat* as an animal companion, you select one of the three goats in the set (*traveling*, *travail*, or *terror*) as your companion; the others remain standard figurines. All three goats are treated as horse companions. The goat of *traveling* never suffers from fatigue or exhaustion from extended travel. The goat of *travail* has 2 horn attacks (1d8 + Str bonus) in addition to a horse's normal attacks. The goat of *terror* has the fear aura and magical weapon horns as described in its figurine entry.

**Marble Elephant (C):** The elephant is treated as an elephant companion (see page 128 of the *Pathfinder RPG Bestiary*).

**Serpentine Owl (C, F):** The owl is treated as a bird animal companion or an owl familiar, but only in its Small horned owl form. In its giant owl form, it is merely a creature, not an animal companion or familiar. After three uses of its giant owl form, the figurine loses that transformation ability forever but still functions normally in its horned owl form as an animal companion or familiar.

**Silver Raven (C, F):** The raven is treated as a bird animal companion or a raven familiar. It retains its metallic appearance and *animal messenger* ability (though this is redundant for an intelligent familiar) but not its hardness when in animal form.

While the figurine is active, you and the active figurine gain all the normal benefits of having a companion creature; for example, a wizard with a *silver raven* familiar gains a +3 bonus on Appraise checks, the raven can speak one language, and so on. While the figure is inactive, you gain none of these benefits but are not otherwise hampered by its inert state (as

if the creature were out of range but not dead). The usable duration of the companion figurine doubles; for example, an *ebony fly* is normally usable up to three times per week for up to 12 hours per use, but as a companion creature you may use it up to six times per week for up to 12 hours per use. The figurine is still a magic item and is subject to effects like *antimagic field* and *dispel magic* that affect magic items; it uses its caster level or your own, whichever is greater.

## FIGURINES ON GOLARION

*Figurines of wondrous power* are suspected to be among the oldest-known magic items on Golarion, reminiscent of the totem magic inherent in many primitive civilizations. Figurines have been found in tombs and vaults undisturbed since the Age of Anguish, dating back before the Jistka Imperium. Ancient Thassilonian figurines have been found, and scholars agree it's very likely that ancient Azlanti figurines existed as well (some may even be in use today, unbeknownst to their bearers). The concept is so old that a few respected sages believe the first figurines were not even created by mortal magic, but rather were bestowed by gods, or in some cases were spontaneously manifested (although this last theory meets with some derision).

As evidence, defenders of these assertions point to the fact that most arcane spellcasters don't have access to *animate objects*, the primary spell used to create *figurines of wondrous power*. This spell is only available to clerics and bards. Additionally, many figurines bear religious connotations across Golarion, and are associated with various gods, for reasons formal theology cannot easily explain.

Furthermore, these items are hard to destroy. They can be killed in creature form, but this only causes them to revert to an easily overlooked statuette. The danger to most figurines is not destruction, but rather loss. They don't look especially magical to the untrained eye, and they can easily slip through careless fingers into nooks and crannies where they remain lost for centuries. The creatures that manifest do not age, and some are already thousands of years old.

As yet further evidence, the durations of figurines are bizarre compared to what civilized minds would create. Most modern spellcasters are more likely to create an item usable for a short time each day rather than one usable for several hours twice a week. This suggests either an alien intelligence behind the origin of figurines or a creator with a different sense of time.

A handful of gnome sages, however, posit that the manifestations have a First World quality to them, an unearthly wildness that reeks of primal magic. Yet the figurines are in the school of transmutation, not conjuration. These manifested creatures are not summoned, but they are also seemingly not of this world. Perhaps, these gnomes suggest, the items simply evolved into being from raw magic, alongside living creatures.



Regardless of the figurines' origin, every great culture on Golarion has learned to produce *figurines of wondrous power* seemingly independently, but with its own distinctive regional mark. Figurines made by Mwangi witch doctors look like crude or elaborate fetishes, while the *silver raven* of the Ulfen features stylized lines and a shape more typical of a tiny relief than of a statuette. Ancient Thassilonian figurines are timeworn but still boast sharp lines and classical features, while modern figurines fresh off the boat from Nex are often barely recognizable stylizations rather than representational carvings. All of these cultures claim to have originated the idea, and all have very old examples to back up their claims. Perhaps the oldest ones remain hidden to modern eyes.

The known figurines of Ancient Thassilon (chiefly the *effigy of the favored servant*) come entirely from the Haruka region and are strongly associated with Lissala, ancient goddess of runes, fate, and the rewards of service. Ruins still punctuate the landscape, and figurines are as hardy as any other stone block. More than one figurine may have made its way into other lands, particularly into those of the orcs of Belkzen who constantly scavenge in Varisian territory.

Despite the arcane difficulties, wizards in Nex have learned to create *figurines of wondrous power*; they turn them out regularly, sometimes on commission. The figurines are sold in the Katapeshi markets, and specimens occasionally make it up to Absalom. While the transmutation is sound as any, these figurines are often barely recognizable, the workmanship of the carving being crude at best; luckily most adventuring buyers don't particularly care about the aesthetics of a 1-inch statuette.

Over the years, rumors have surfaced that an owner with sufficiently strong ties to a figurine's manifested animal, such as those that come from a figurine that's been in a family for several generations, can call upon the figurine above and beyond its normal limits. For instance, a Taldan ranger in the Verduran Woods claims that he can regularly coax an extra hour out of his grandfather's *golden lions* when the need is great.

Finally, although the nine types described here are the best-known types of figurines, the list is hardly exhaustive. A traveler from Tian Xia famously turned down an offer of 10,000 platinum for a *jade monkey* in the markets of Katapesh. A *topaz couatl* was brought back from Arcadia and now rests in the private collection of a Druman merchant. Even a *copper donkey rat* has been sighted in Varisia. Any animal strongly associated with a particular culture on Golarion (such as the scarab of Osirion, the mantis of Mediogalti, or the titular mammoth of the Realm of the Mammoth Lords) has likely been carved into a small chunk of semi-precious stone and transformed into a creature ready to do its owner's bidding.

## THE FAITHFUL HOUND

The legendary bard Michiku Bootstealer wandered all over Golarion looking for new stories. She was a compulsive

## BRING THEM HOME

The easy part of using a *figurine of wondrous power* is sending it off to do a job. The hard part is getting it back once it runs into trouble and reverts to statuette form at the bottom of a pit.

This spell was originally created by the bard Michiku Bootstealer to help her retrieve her *onyx dog* when he suffered an untimely reversion out of her sight. Since then, the spell has found its way into the sorcerer/wizard arsenal as well. *Retrieve item* is a less potent version of *instant summons* created especially for use with *figurines of wondrous power*. However, the conjuration effect is broad enough to be used for any other tiny, light object such as a ring, amulet, lens, or coin.

### RETRIEVE ITEM

**School** conjuration (calling); **Level** bard 2, sorcerer/wizard 2

**Casting Time** 1 full round

**Components** V, S

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

**Target** an unattended object weighing 1 lb. or less whose longest dimension is 6 inches or less

**Duration** permanent until discharged

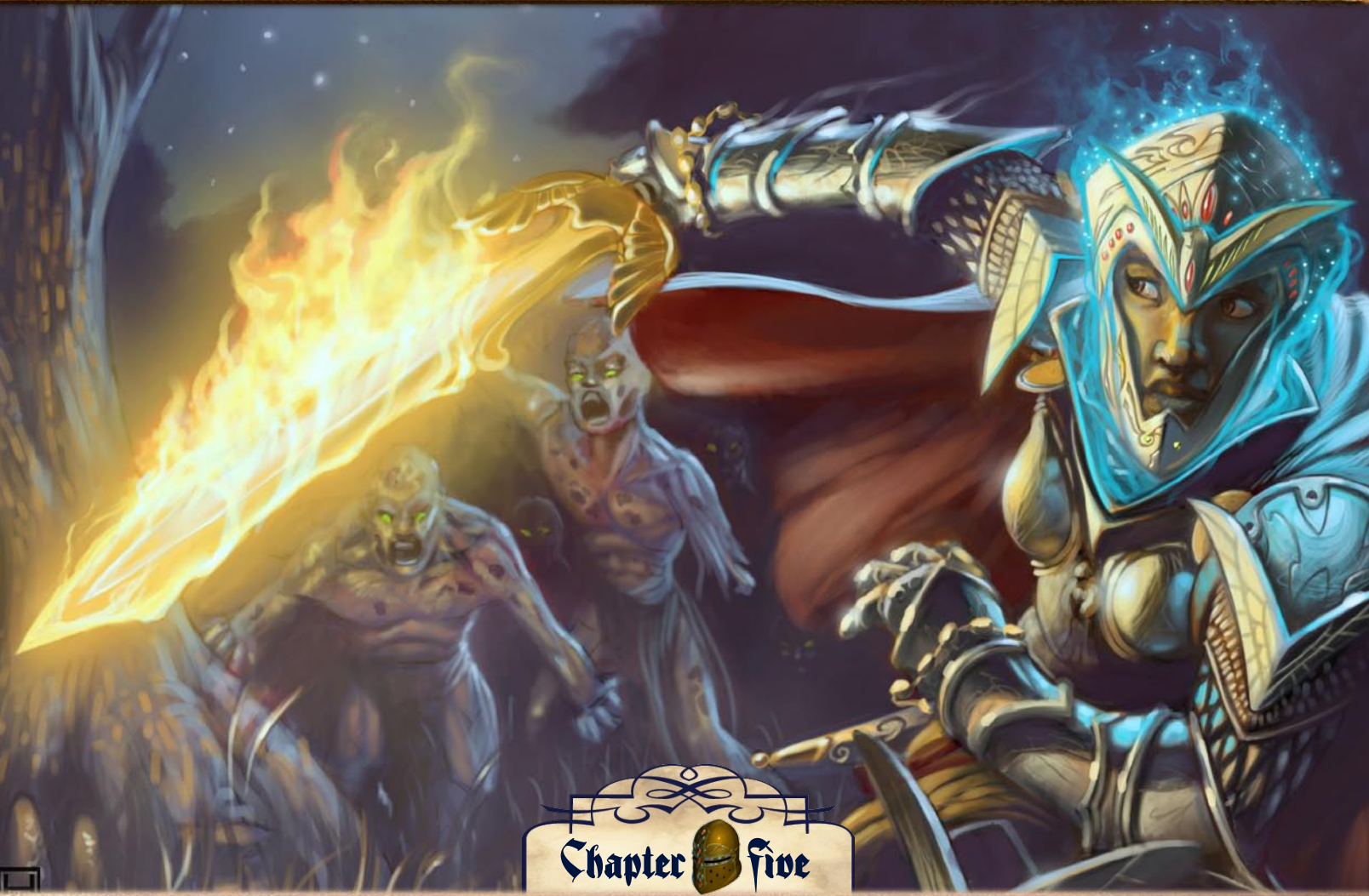
**Saving Throw** none; **Spell Resistance** no

You call a specific nonliving item directly to your hand from a nearby location. First, you must cast the spell on the item while holding it. Thereafter, you can summon the item by speaking a special word (set by you when the spell is cast) and snapping your fingers. The item appears instantly in your hand.

If the item is in the possession of another creature, the spell fails.

storyteller, but a terrible fear of attachment harrowed her, causing her to seek out crowds, but never friends. Her life changed forever when she found an *onyx dog* figurine. The dog would appear and leave at her command, listen attentively, and was neither smart nor demanding—her perfect traveling companion.

Michiku named the dog Sounder for his eagerness to listen, and he became her favorite audience. Through Sounder's companionship, Michiku slowly learned to trust. In her middle years, she married and settled down in Varisia near Korvosa. On her deathbed, she gave Sounder to her daughter. Her daughter's name is lost, but it's said that she lived an undistinguished life as a fisherman's wife. Presumably, Sounder was passed down through the family, but the figurine's current whereabouts are unknown; perhaps he was packed away in some trunk or sold to a peddler. Wherever he currently lies, Sounder's onyx head is likely still full of stories and legends unheard for decades.



Chapter  Five

## HELM OF BRILLIANCE

I REMEMBER WELL OUR FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH THE HELM OF BRILLIANCE. WE WERE ON A RESEARCH EXPEDITION DEEP INSIDE THE LOST TOMB OF THE OSIRIAN PHARAOH TENED-HEP, CATALOGUING SOME OF ITS UNIQUE GLYPHS, WHEN QUITE BY ACCIDENT WE STUMBLED INTO THE CRYPT'S TREASURE CHAMBER. IT WAS EMPTY, AS SUCH TOMBS USUALLY ARE, SAVE FOR A RUSTY OLD HELMET RESTING ON THE CENTRAL PILLAR. AS A JAPE, DYSO TRIED ON THE HELM, WHICH INSTANTLY CHANGED BEFORE OUR EYES AND ACQUIRED A PHARAONIC, MANY-JEWELLED SPLENDOR. WE WERE BOTH ASTONISHED—HERE WAS A KING'S RANSOM, INDEED! AND THE LOOTERS HAD MISSED IT!

BUT IT WAS THEN THAT THE HELM BEGAN TO GLOW AN EERIE BLUE, AND WE HEARD THE RUSTLING SHAMBLES OF THE DEAD BEHIND US.

—ARCTURO MANUS, *MEMOIRS*



The legendary headwear of kings and magi, a *helm of brilliance* appears as an unexceptional helmet until its wearer calls upon its magic, at which point it transforms instantly to reveal itself in all its radiant glory. Though different helms exhibit different styles, most *helms of brilliance* are set with magical diamonds, rubies, opals, and fire opals, along with a bevy of other purely decorative gems. Traditional helms are made of steel and silver, with silvery spikes in a crown-like corona, but styles vary widely, identifiable only by their power and majesty.

Each of the helm's magical jewels can cast a powerful spell, though the gem is sacrificed in the process. Yet even those users prudent enough to reserve their gems are magnificent sights, as the wearer of a *helm of brilliance* can sheathe his weapons in purifying flame, and walk through an inferno untouched. Undead quail before the wearer of such a helm, and the item shines with a bluish glow in their presence.

But the *helm of brilliance* has a hidden flaw that has sent more than one hero to an early grave: should the wearer ever suffer more fire damage than the helm can absorb, its remaining gems detonate in a tremendous explosion of spells that target nearby creatures, immolate the wearer, and destroy the helm.

## BASE ITEM

Below are the statistics for a standard *helm of brilliance*, as presented in the *Pathfinder RPG Core Rulebook*.

### HELM OF BRILLIANCE

**Aura** strong varied; **CL** 13th

**Slot** head; **Price** 125,000 gp; **Weight** 3 lbs.

#### DESCRIPTION

This normal-looking helm takes its true form and manifests its powers when the user dons it and speaks the command word. A newly created helm is set with large magic gems: 10 diamonds, 20 rubies, 30 fire opals, and 40 opals. When struck by bright light, the helm scintillates and sends forth reflective rays in all directions. The jewels' functions are as follows:

- Diamond: *Prismatic spray* (save DC 20)
- Ruby: *Wall of fire*
- Fire opal: *Fireball* (10d6, Reflex DC 20 half)
- Opal: *Daylight*

The helm may be used once per round, but each gem can perform its spell-like power just once. Until all its jewels are depleted, a *helm of brilliance* also has the following magical properties when activated.

- It emanates a bluish light when undead are within 30 feet. This light causes 1d6 points of damage per round to all such creatures within that range.
- The wearer may command any weapon he wields to become a *flaming weapon*. This is in addition to whatever abilities the weapon may already have (unless the weapon is already a *flaming weapon*). The command takes 1 round to take effect.

- The helm provides fire resistance 30. This protection does not stack with similar protection from other sources.

Once all its jewels have lost their magic, the helm loses its powers and the gems turn to worthless powder. Removing a jewel destroys it.

If a creature wearing the helm is damaged by magical fire (after the fire protection is taken into account) and fails an additional DC 15 Will save, the remaining gems on the helm overload and detonate. Remaining diamonds become *prismatic sprays* that each randomly target a creature within range (possibly the wearer), rubies become straight-line *walls of fire* extending outward in a random direction from the helm wearer, and fire opals become *fireballs* centered on the helm wearer. The opals and the helm itself are destroyed.

#### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *detect undead*, *fireball*, *flame blade*, *daylight*, *prismatic spray*, *protection from energy*, *wall of fire*; **Cost** 62,500 gp

## UTILITY

The *helm of brilliance* is primarily an offensive weapon, and a powerful one at that. Against most creatures, the helm's *prismatic spray* effect is extremely effective, though this is mitigated by its limited number of uses and the random nature of the spell itself. Nevertheless, the *prismatic spray* can be used against fire-resistant creatures, or other foes with multiple resistances. While a given ray might occasionally have no effect on a highly resistant creature, the odds are that one of the rays will get through, be it acid, electricity, *flesh to stone*, or even sending that creature to another plane.

A *helm of brilliance* truly shines against creatures that are vulnerable to fire. Beyond the helm's *flaming weapon* ability, *walls of fire* are useful as battlefield control spells, and the helm's high-level *fireball* spells provide excellent artillery. While the helm's fire resistance is not enough to always protect the wearer should he detonate one of his own *fireballs* on himself, it does provide enough protection to ignore the helm's *wall of fire*. Using feats such as Spring Attack to jump through a *wall of fire*, attack an enemy on the other side, and retreat back through the wall is an effective tactic.

Under advantageous conditions, the same tactic might be used to exterminate mindless undead. Upon encountering the undead, the helm immediately begins to drain their hit points, while simultaneously alerting the wearer and making surprise ambushes far harder. The wearer can then cast *wall of fire* to form a barrier between himself and the undead, and his fire resistance lets him freely move or attack through the walls, while every time the undead do so they take additional damage. By keeping on the move, the helm's wearer can destroy a multitude of mindless undead just by moving in the right pattern.

The helm is also effective against intelligent undead, particularly those with many resistances, such as vampires.



A *helm of brilliance*, coupled with a magic weapon and a vial of *silversheen*, provides a vampire hunter with all the tools he needs. While resistant to cold and electricity, vampires have no fire resistance, and the helm's *flaming weapon* ability adds additional damage to overcome the vampire's damage reduction and fast healing. In addition, the vampire's channel resistance offers no protection against the helm's undead-harming light. Finally, if the wearer of the helm can track a wounded vampire to its coffin, the continuous damage from the glowing helm should be enough to keep the vampire's fast healing from returning the creature to life, at least until a more permanent method of destroying the vampire can be brought to bear.

Even one of the helm's lesser powers, *daylight*, has its own unique utility. Besides providing illumination underground or in darkened areas, it also dispels magical darkness, such as that cast by *derro*, *drow*, *tieflings*, and *fiendish creatures*. The helm's *daylight* also proves effective against creatures with light blindness or light sensitivity, such as *drow*, *duergar*, and *morlocks*. Outside of combat, bright light such as *daylight* (either from the helm itself or another source) triggers the helm's scintillating crown of light, which can be used as a signal that would be clearly visible for miles.

The helm's final power is normally only used as a last resort—much like a *staff of power's* retributive strike. In times of great need or desperation, perhaps when surrounded by an overwhelming number of foes, the wearer of a *helm of brilliance* can target one of the helm's *fireballs* on himself, hoping to overcome the helm's fire resistance and overload the helm, detonating its gems in a final explosion. This is an expensive tactic, as the power of the detonation is directly tied to the number of unused gems it contains, not to mention the added cost of raising or resurrecting the brave soul who sacrificed himself.

Finally, a helm's gems cannot be replaced once they are expended, so ordinary *helms of brilliance* can only be used to cast a set number of spells. The unlimited nature of the undead detection and *flaming weapon* abilities means that canny users are sure to keep at least a few gems unused, even if those are the helm's weakest and most numerous *daylight* opals.

## RELATED ITEMS

The wondrous item most closely related to the *helm of brilliance* is the *necklace of fireballs*, with the primary links between them being both their use and similar weaknesses in their construction. As with a *helm of brilliance*, a *necklace of fireballs* is subject to premature detonation when exposed to magical fire. In the case of the necklace, the wearer need only fail her saving throw against the hostile magic to have the *fireballs* detonate (if

the necklace fails its save as well). Thus the necklace is a much riskier proposition than the helm—the only way to mitigate the risk is to increase the wearer's spell resistance or saving throw bonuses, an expensive upgrade. While the *necklace of fireballs* is cheaper than the *helm of brilliance*, it lacks most of the abilities of a *helm of brilliance*, and its *fireballs* tend to be fewer, less powerful, or both. A brand-new *helm of brilliance* has 300d6 points of potential *fireball* damage. Buying enough necklaces to do that much damage would cost roughly 45,000 gp—almost a third the price of the helm—and wouldn't include the helm's other powers.

Some magic items work well in tandem with a *helm of brilliance*, mostly in terms of mitigating the dangers of detonation. A *mantle of spell resistance* is a good way to make sure that a detonation doesn't have a chance to affect the wearer, essentially giving the wearer two lines of defense against each fire spell. While even a *ring of greater fire resistance* can't improve on fire resistance granted by the helm, a *ring of evasion* can help limit the damage of the helm's detonation by letting the wearer take half damage on a successful save. Making more saves successful by wearing a high-level *cloak of resistance* or another item that increases the wearer's Will save can make a detonation quite survivable, especially for a character wearing all three items.



## CAMPAIGN ROLE

The *helm of brilliance* has the potential to play a flashy central role in a mid-level campaign, especially as a favorite tool of the villain. In the hands of a villain, the helm gives a huge advantage: *prismatic spray* is a terrifyingly random attack that can result in petrification, death, or planar banishment (possibly resulting in sidetrack adventures to go recover a lost ally or restore a petrified comrade to life). Add a *wall of fire*, with its ability to divide the party, and dozens of *fireball* spells, and you have a villain who is likely able to stand up against the PCs time and again, especially if he has allies to keep the PCs busy while he pelts them with spells from afar. Of course, PCs who know that the villain has a *helm of brilliance* are likely to stock up on fire resistance spells and items, negating or mitigating the effects of the *wall of fire* and *fireball* effects, as well as direct-damage fire spells potentially able to detonate the helm. At that point, the *helm of brilliance* may become more of a liability, and a clever villain is likely to stop using it without having certain precautions in place. As a shining, magnificent piece of headwear, the *helm of brilliance* is ideal for a villain obsessed with his own majesty (whether real or imagined).

For the villain who continues using the helm to the bitter end, the detonation ability of the *helm of brilliance* is the



ultimate example of using the villain's own tools against him. A reasonable villain may have taken some of the outlined steps to protect himself, but a concerted party effort may still result in a detonated helm. One way to make that strategy more difficult or dangerous is to place the villain in an area that the PCs can't affect without coming into range of the detonation themselves. PCs who want to detonate the helm as a quick win thus have to consider the consequences to themselves and their allies. A particularly fiendish or canny villain might make sure that a lot of innocent and low-level NPCs are around to die in the detonation, knowing that most parties won't cold-bloodedly consign those people to death, and hence requiring the party to go without fire attacks entirely.

In the hands of the PCs, the *helm of brilliance* can become a key focus for strategy, both theirs and their enemies', provided they know of the helm's weakness. Because of the likelihood of death if the helm detonates, the PCs are liable to spend a lot of party resources warding the wearer of the helm against fire effects, and enemies are equally liable to pour on the fire attacks in the hope of getting past the defenses just once. Further, the power of the helm is such that any creatures vulnerable to fire will be easy to defeat. In a campaign against a flexible enemy, the PCs are likely to find themselves facing many creatures that are immune to fire and which do fire damage themselves.

Clever PCs are likely to avoid being constantly ambushed by fire effects by carrying the helm around with them and only wearing it when it would be useful. This diminishes its utility somewhat, but at least means that the party doesn't need to be looking over its shoulder constantly for fire-based threats. Because of this strategy, a *helm of brilliance* in the hands of a cautious party may be less interesting than a helm in the hands of a villain who plays it to the hilt.

## VARIANTS

Since its genesis, many variants of the *helm of brilliance* have surfaced around the world, whether of a different energy type, optimized for a specific function, or simply cut-rate knock-offs. Below are just a few of the different types of *helms of brilliance* that have been produced throughout Golarion.

### HELM OF ELECTRIC RADIANCE

**Aura** strong varied; **CL** 13th

**Slot** head; **Price** 125,000 gp; **Weight** 3 lbs.

#### DESCRIPTION

The *helm of electric radiance* uses electricity as its basic damage type, rather than fire. Other aspects of the helm, such as

undead detection and damage, remain unchanged. The helm has 10 sapphires that allow *chain lightning*, 20 pieces of amber that allow *lightning bolt*, 30 pieces of petrified wood that allow *shocking sphere* (as *flaming sphere* but does electricity damage) and 40 opals that allow *daylight*. In addition, the wearer gains resistance to electricity and his weapons become *shocking weapons* instead of *flaming weapons*.

#### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *chain lightning*, *daylight*, *detect undead*, *flaming sphere*, *lightning bolt*, *protection from energy*, *shocking grasp*; **Cost** 62,500 gp

### LESSER HELM OF BRILLIANCE

**Aura** moderate varied; **CL** 5th

**Slot** head; **Price** 36,000 gp; **Weight** 3 lbs.

#### DESCRIPTION

This helm functions like a *helm of brilliance* but is lower-powered. Instead of the standard helm's allotment of gems, the lesser helm has 10 diamonds (*fireball*, 10d6 damage, DC 20 Reflex half), 20 corals (*flaming sphere*), 30 garnets (*scorching ray*), and 40 agates (*light*). It still glows near and harms undead, has the flaming weapon ability, and provides fire resistance (though only 20 instead of 30). Just like the standard helm, the wearer risks detonation; diamonds become *fireballs* centered on the wearer, corals become *flaming spheres* in and adjacent to the wearer's space, garnets become *scorching rays* that fire randomly at creatures in range, and the agates and helm are destroyed.

#### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *detect undead*, *fireball*, *flame blade*, *flaming sphere*, *light*, *protection from energy*, *scorching ray*; **Cost** 18,000 gp

### HELM OF RECLAMATION

**Aura** strong varied; **CL** 15th

**Slot** head; **Price** 80,000 gp; **Weight** 3 lbs.

#### DESCRIPTION

The *helm of reclamation* is designed to destroy large groups of undead or powerful individual undead creatures, and is often used by undead-hating clerics with a flair for the dramatic. The gems of this helm produce *sunburst* (10 yellow diamonds), *searing light* (30 bloodstones), and *daylight* (40 opals). Like a standard *helm of brilliance*, it glows near and harms undead, and has the *flaming weapon* ability, but does not protect against fire or risk detonation.

#### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *daylight*, *detect undead*, *flame blade*, *searing light*, *sunburst*; **Cost** 40,000 gp





## DEPLETED HELMS OF BRILLIANCE

*Helms of brilliance* that have some of their gems expended are worth correspondingly less than a complete *helm of brilliance*—2,275 gp per diamond, 1,300 gp per ruby, 375 gp per fire opal, and 187 per opal. This means that a *helm of brilliance* with but a single opal is worth only 57,688 gp. Given the utility of a helm with only one opal and the lack of utility of one without, very few helms have actually been fully exhausted.

*Helms of brilliance* tend to either disappear with plenty of gems on them, or else stay around forever with an opal or two—one *daylight* spell is never worth forgoing unlimited *flaming* weapons, undead detection, and fire resistance 30.

## HELMS OF BRILLIANCE ON GOLARION

Folklore suggests that the first *helms of brilliance* were created by An-Hepsu XI, the Incorruptible Pharaoh. He created several helms and gave them to his most headstrong nobles and advisors. Like most of An-Hepsu's actions, this had several purposes. One of these was that the princely gift was calculated to inspire greater personal loyalty while simultaneously allowing the lieutenants to protect themselves from lesser powers striving to climb to the top of the pyramid. The lieutenants would realize that they owed their exalted position at least in part to the continued patronage of their pharaoh.

As additional insurance, An-Hepsu designed the helms with a hidden flaw (now common knowledge among historians and arcane scholars) that he could exploit if one or more of the nobles rose against him. Known to only a few of their designers, who were quickly killed upon the completion of the helms, the flaw made the helms unstable and caused them to detonate with disastrous results if damaged by fire. In the event of betrayal, An-Hepsu planned to detonate the helms. As a bonus, the apparent power of the helms might cause a noble to move on him prematurely, allowing him to remove a threat previously hidden by timidity.

Another purpose behind the gift of the helms was to forestall rumors that the pharaoh had extended his life through necromancy. He had succeeded in doing this—using mummification techniques on his still-living flesh—but he knew that to reveal this to his people would lead to sedition or even rebellion. The *helms of brilliance* allowed the wearer to detect undead, and since the nobles were frequently in close proximity to the pharaoh, the fact that

the helms didn't glow quickly quashed the rumors about the pharaoh's transformation. All part of the plan—the original helms were designed specifically to exclude the pharaoh from their detection ability.

The *helms of brilliance* served their purpose—one of the nobles attempted to rebel and was detonated for his trouble. The other nobles and advisors fell into line and frantically attempted to prove their loyalty by supporting the pharaoh in all things, and the presence of the helms in proximity to the pharaoh effectively ended the rumors of his undead nature, until years later when his condition was revealed by other means.

Upon the death of An-Hepsu XI, his former supporters rushed to distance themselves from his legacy, and many of the original helms were destroyed. Some were sold abroad, however, and the helms have since caught the imagination of many a crafter of magic items. In deference to their origin, most *helms of brilliance* are still constructed in the Osirian style, but the splendor of the helms is also suited to Azlanti designs, so much so that Azlanti helms are a close second in number to Osirian.

*Helms of brilliance* exist all across Golarion, most often as museum pieces, parts of treasure hoards, or on bodyguards of the very influential or extremely rich. The potential for detonation means that the more intelligent class of patrician keeps such bodyguards well away from his actual body. The last mass production of *helms of brilliance* was commenced by Khemet II to outfit his palace guard. Five helms were produced before the Crocodile King lost interest in the project, and two remain with Khemet III's bodyguards, the other three having slipped away at Khemet II's death and the Ruby Prince's ascension to the throne.

## THE HELM IN ACTION

Several of Golarion's legends include *helms of brilliance* within their narrative. Some are apocryphal, others are well documented, and still others are mere rumors.

In "A Fable of Five Brothers," Brother Cedric uses a *helm of brilliance*, along with his Pharasmin gifts, to successfully fight a rearguard action against an entire army of the walking dead while his four companions evacuate Starcross.

In "Lucky Farouq and the Pharaoh's Helm," Lucky Farouq, the impresario of Katapesh, trades a nearly spent *helm of brilliance* for the hand of an Osirian princess, using up the last charges of the helm over the course of the negotiations.

The *Helm of Tened-Hep* makes several appearances in *Journeys on a Floating Disk*, an exhaustive travelogue that covers most





of the Inner Sea region. The *Helm of Tened-Hep* is currently on display at the Sothis Exhibitory, and the number of expended gems seems to corroborate the narrative in *Journeys*.

During the Thuvian Affair, a diplomatic imbroglio that almost resulted in war, a *helm of brilliance* was detonated inside the Qadiran embassy by a junior clerk, burning down the building and all of the documents therein.

## LAST KNOWN LOCATIONS

Ordinary *helms of brilliance* exist all across Golarion. A few exhibit unique properties or have gained particular reputations. While some, like the *Helm of Tened-Hep*, rest in museums or other well-known locations, most of them have disappeared over time.

The *helm of unmitigated brilliance*, said to have gems augmented with the Empower Spell ability, is among the most powerful helms on Golarion. The helm was last owned by Prince Yangrit, a dwarf lord of the Five King Mountains, before he lost his life in a dragon attack on one of his caravans. The attack left no survivors, but rumor has it that the dragon in question was Daralathyl, the so-called Sixth King of the Five King Mountains. Anyone foolish enough to face the wyrm in his lair might find the *helm of unmitigated brilliance* lying on top of his hoard.

The *helm of great cost* is a *helm of brilliance* with a powerful curse on it—if given the opportunity, it drives its wearer to commit suicide by detonating the helm, not merely in a heroic act of self-sacrifice but in such a way as to hurt her loved ones. The *helm of great cost* can separate mother from father and brother from brother, causing the wearer to believe that everyone she loves has betrayed her. Only one such helm is recorded, and that helm disappeared after attaching itself to a hero too weak to destroy the helm but too strong to succumb to it. Derrek Lenerian decided that his only option was to sequester himself and the helm away from the world and wait to die. His tomb, located in the Menador Mountains, is a veritable fortress, riddled with traps dedicated to keeping the *helm of great cost* from finding its way back into living hands.

## THE HELM OF SUBLIME SPLENDOR

The ability to create *helms of brilliance* has long since traveled to the far ends of Golarion, and the best-known *helm of brilliance* was actually created deep in the heart of Casmaron by the servants of the Padishah Emperor of Kelesh. Called the *helm of sublime splendor*, this helm is in the Keleshite style, fashioned in gold and silver with bejeweled skirts covering the wearer's neck down to the shoulder. Unlike most *helms of brilliance*, the helm is designed as much for display as for use, and looks the same whether worn or not. Further, the *helm of sublime splendor* can have gems reattached to it, and accepts gems of almost any sort. The designers incorporated many precious gems available at the time of creation, and the completed helm had numerous

### GEMS OF THE HELM OF SUBLIME SPLENDOR

The *helm of sublime splendor* was created with many different gems attached to it. The helm was designed to allow new gems, even of different sorts, to be attached in the place of expended gems. Though other gems might have since been attached, the following are the gems last seen on the helm, listed with their effects.

**Amber:** lightning bolt (10d6, DC 18)

**Amethyst:** tongues

**Aquamarine:** phantasmal killer (DC 19)

**Bloodstone:** undeath to death (DC 21)

**Carnelian:** fire shield

**Citrine:** telekinesis (DC 20)

**Emerald:** hold monster (DC 20)

**Garnet:** scorching ray (three rays)

**Jade:** bull's strength

**Jasper:** elemental body I

**Lapis:** cone of cold (DC 20)

**Moonstone:** wall of ice (DC 19)

**Onyx:** wall of stone (DC 20)

**Sapphire:** chain lightning (DC 21)

**Sardonyx:** repulsion (DC 11)

**Star Opal:** rainbow pattern (DC 19)

**Topaz:** shout (DC 19)

**Tourmaline:** levitate

**Turquoise:** bear's endurance

different types of gems represented. The helm, like all *helms of brilliance*, favors flashy crowd-pleasing effects over more subtle spells. It is rumored that the designers of the helm allowed for unforeseen gem types to be attached to the helm later, with some internal magical program of the helm determining what effect they produce.

After the helm's creation, the Padishah Emperor ordered the helm to be sent on a grand circuit around the empire as an example of the wealth and might that could be gained in his service. As the helm procession was passing through Qadira, its circuit nearly complete, the helm suddenly stopped working. A careful study of the helm identified it as a clever forgery, a mundane helm nevertheless worth a fortune in its flawless imitation of the original. The disappearance of the helm, clearly the work of a well-connected and organized group, caused a wave of accusations, recriminations, and executions that spread outward from the procession. To this day, the *helm of sublime splendor* has not been found. Any clues to its location remain lost with the lives of those who guarded it so inadequately. Since the disappearance of the helm, many have sought its final resting place. It is no secret that most believe the helm came to rest somewhere in Qadira, but given the porous nature of the Qadiran borders, the helm could theoretically be anywhere.



Chapter Six

# HORN OF VALHALLA

"THE LAST OF OUR BAND DREW BACK AGAINST THE RUINED PILLAR. THE BOGGARDS CLOSED IN, GURGLING THEIR ODD CROAKING CHANT, THEIR BLOATED PRIEST-KING URGING THEM ON FROM A SAFE DISTANCE. CRUELLY BARBED JAVELINS RAINED DOWN UPON US. WITH BLOODSTAINED HANDS AND WHAT FELT LIKE MY FINAL BREATH, I SOUNDED THE TRUSTY HORN OF MY FATHER. AS I CRUMPLED TO MY KNEES, I SAW BEFORE ME THE MISTY SHAPES OF WARRIORS OF THE OLD CLANS, FORMED UP IN RANKS, AND I WOULD SWEAR MY FATHER WAS AMONG THEM. WITH A BESTIAL ROAR, THE BERSERKERS LEFT INTO THE FRAY, THE CRAVEN BOGGARDS SCATTERING BEFORE THEM.

"THEY SAVED US ALL, CHILD. AND WE LIVE IN HONOR, THAT ONE DAY WE MAY JOIN THEM."

—TOLI LASTSINGER, SKALD OF JOL



Since the first warrior picked up sword and shield, the horn has been the traditional herald of his coming. Whether sounding the hunt or rallying soldiers in the thick of battle, the horn holds a special place in heroic epics, and no horn is more legendary than the *horn of Valhalla*.

A *horn of Valhalla* can be wood or metal, but is most commonly a hollowed-out animal horn banded in metal. The more powerful the horn, the stronger the bands must be to survive its sounding. When the horn is sounded, it summons a band of fierce barbarians. Blowing the horn is not without risk, as the berserkers immediately turn upon any owner deemed unworthy of their service. But should the owner's mettle meet their test, the barbarians set upon his foes, fighting to the last.

Most *horns of Valhalla* are named for great warriors, mighty lords, and sites of epic battles. Usually this is done posthumously, though occasionally a horn is crafted in honor of a still-living hero or ruler. A typical horn summons a band of human barbarians outfitted with Viking-style arms and speaking Common, though variants from numerous other cultures exist. The warriors may be of either gender, though some horns summon all men or all women. The barbarians are constructs—magical creations that perfectly resemble humans, but not literally dead warriors pulled from their reward in Valhalla; in almost all respects they appear quite alive, and may resemble specific historical warriors from the region of the horn's origin. In such cases, a summoned warrior might recognize an old shield-brother, but memories from the warrior's past life remain hazy and unreliable. The warriors of a *horn of Valhalla* do not dwell on the past, instead speaking of the glories and eternal rewards of warriors who dive into the thick of battle and live forever in the feasthalls of Valhalla.

A typical *horn of Valhalla* is 18 inches long and carved from a hollowed-out bull's horn. Two broad metal bands encircle it, one near the bell and one at the mouthpiece. They may be crafted from any horn of 9 inches or longer, including those from rams, dragons, and even fiends. Some *horns of Valhalla*, particularly the bronze and iron varieties, have between 3 and 5 finger-holes and play a wider range of notes. Most are blown from the narrow end, but the largest are played from a hole cut into the side. Horns are often decorated with carvings or inlay depicting the deeds and name of a great hero, and almost never painted.

## BASE ITEM

Below are the statistics for a standard *horn of Valhalla*, as presented in the *Pathfinder RPG Core Rulebook*.

### HORN OF VALHALLA

**Aura** strong conjuration; **CL** 13th

**Slot** —; **Price** 50,000 gp; **Weight** 2 lbs.

#### DESCRIPTION

This magic instrument comes in four varieties. Each appears to be normal until someone speaks its command word and

blows the horn. Then the horn summons a number of human barbarians to fight for the character who summoned them. Each horn can be blown just once every 7 days. Roll d% and refer to the table below to see what type of horn is found. The horn's type determines what barbarians are summoned and what prerequisite is needed to use the horn. Any character who uses a *horn of Valhalla* but doesn't have the prerequisite is attacked by the barbarians she herself summoned. Bronze and iron horns require proficiency in all martial weapons or the bardic performance ability.

Summoned barbarians are constructs, not actual people (though they seem to be). They attack anyone the possessor of the horn commands them to fight until they or their opponents are slain or until 1 hour has elapsed, whichever comes first.

d%	Type of Horn	Barbarians Summoned	Prerequisite
01–40	Silver	2d4+2, 2nd-level	None
41–75	Brass	2d4+1, 3rd-level	Spellcaster level 1st
76–90	Bronze	2d4, 4th-level	Proficiency/bard
91–100	Iron	1d4+1, 5th-level	Proficiency/bard

#### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *summon monster VI*; **Cost** 25,000 gp

## UTILITY

Sounding the *horn of Valhalla* brings forth warriors to fight on the sounder's behalf, and unlike summoned monsters, they aren't willing to perform simple labor or any task not related to battle or destruction. A clever adventurer can direct the berserkers against nearly any creature or object she wants destroyed, declaring a doorway or even an earthen dam to be her enemy. Fearless as only magical constructs can be, the horn's minions obey even the most suicidal of orders with savage abandon.

As constructs, the servants of the horn lack many of the frailties of living creatures. They are fearless and not subject to mental control, and are immune to ability damage, disease, energy drain, paralysis, and stunning. As such, they are quite effective against foes that rely on these abilities, protecting their owner while at the same time denying her enemies use of their most effective powers. Further, the constructs do not eat, sleep, breathe, or tire. Since the minions of the horn arrive whole and fully equipped each time the owner summons them, they are also ideally suited for engaging oozes, rust monsters, remorhazes, and other metal- and flesh-destroying creatures, for any loss to limb or property suffered by a barbarian is only a temporary inconvenience.

Given the price of the *horn of Valhalla*, it is most appropriate for campaigns in the mid-level range. At these levels, even the 5th-level barbarians of the iron horn are no match for most foes. Even so, the barbarians can assist with flanking and



deal considerable damage, particularly against low-AC foes, and their rage lets them take a significant beating. Group buffing spells like *haste* offer very good returns with the *horn of Valhalla*, as they often benefit the caster's party along with the barbarians of the horn.

As constructs, the horn's barbarians are immune to mind-affecting spells, meaning that bardic performance does not affect them. Bards desiring to best utilize the *horn of Valhalla*—a natural fit for their class—can take the Instrumental feat (see page 38), granting the barbarians the full benefit of any bardic performances made with the horn.

Many adventuring parties find themselves saddled with extra equipment, awaiting sale at the next town. As barbarians are proficient in all simple and martial weapons, they can make good use of any masterwork or magical weapons the party has acquired (dropping the items when the horn's duration expires). The barbarians and their equipment also make good targets for emanation-based spells like *darkness*, *daylight*, and especially *silence*. Such spells do little to impede the berserkers, but can be quite effective against certain foes.

## RELATED ITEMS

The *horn of Valhalla* falls into the broad group of wondrous items that summon creatures, among them the various *bags of tricks*, *robes of bones*, and the single-use *elemental gems* and *beads of summons* (the latter a part of the *greater strands of prayer beads*). Of these, only the *bag of tricks* is similarly unlimited in use, though it summons but a single ally at a time.

In the real world, Greek legend tells of a dragon slain by Cadmus, whose teeth were sown in the ground and grew into fully armed warriors known as the spartoi, so eager to do battle that they fought among themselves until only five remained. The fierce spartoi closely resemble the battle-ready barbarians called forth by the horn, and rules for the spartoi and the teeth that summon them can be found in *Pathfinder Adventure Path* #28.

*Drums of panic* can be used quite effectively in conjunction with the *horn of Valhalla*. First, the servants of the horn are called forth, and set upon the foes. Then the drums are sounded, giving the barbarians attacks of opportunity against any foes sent into flight. As constructs, the barbarians are themselves immune to the terrifying effect of the drums.

## CAMPAIGN ROLE

In the hands of a cunning villain, a *horn of Valhalla* means timely reinforcements are only a clarion call away. Indeed, the horn can serve as a general alarm as well, alerting guards to intruders even as it summons fierce barbarians to delay troublesome intruders. The horn is notable for providing a source of warriors ready and willing to die, so morale is

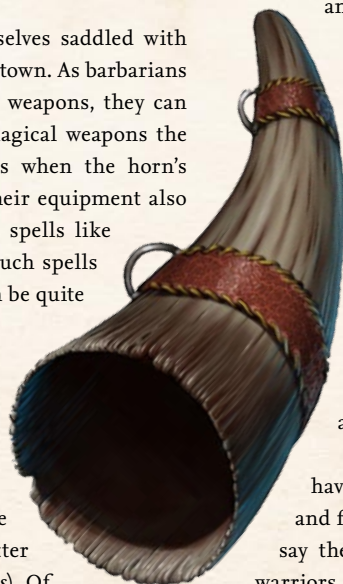
never a concern. In fact, the minions can be relied on to take risks (and perform atrocities) that would make most henchmen blanch.

A gladiatorial arena with a *horn of Valhalla* and a *bag of tricks* has ready-made foes for its games, without troubling with training and recruitment. Even better, there's no worry about the barbarians rebelling or demanding their freedom. Captured PCs might well find themselves facing off against foes that suffer no real risk of dying, perhaps outfitted by the arena master with masterwork weapons, heavier armor, and an assortment of magic items.

Any class may make use of the silver *horn of Valhalla*, while the powers of the bronze and iron horns are reserved for bards and those classes with a martial bent, such as barbarians, fighters, paladins, and rangers. Bards, of course, can make use of all varieties of the horn. Fighters and barbarians are restricted from using the brass horn, singular in its affinity for the spellcasting classes. Care must be taken when sounding an unfamiliar horn, as the barbarians appear even if the owner is incapable of commanding them—an event that inevitably results in the owner being attacked by his would-be reinforcements.

Despite being constructs, the horn's barbarians have the semblance of life. They look human, smell and feel human, and think and talk like humans. Some say the horn calls upon the world's memories of past warriors, others that it calls souls from the afterlife and clothes them in earthly flesh, and still others that it merely crafts cunning magical constructs. Not all horns summon viking warriors like the Ulfen. Some call forth jungle tribesmen, dervishes clad in the garb of religious fanatics, or woad-painted highlanders. For a GM, the blowing of a *horn of Valhalla* gives an opportunity to immerse the players in the world and describe its iconic fighting men. Depending on the horn, the reinforcements summoned might not even reflect the horn's origin, and could change with successive soundings of the horn—perhaps a different sort of barbarian with each use, or each time drawing warriors from the tribal culture nearest the PCs. The horn's minions may even speak a different language from the owner, requiring the use of magic or non-verbal communication for any interaction beyond simple combat. In any case, keep in mind that the barbarians can speak, not just listen, and spice up their battle with fierce barbarian oaths and taunts.

For an added touch of the macabre, consider just who it is that the *horn of Valhalla* calls upon. The summoning of a past acquaintance, loved one, or even hated foe fits the horn's role as the caller of those slain in battle. Such revenants may even arrive bearing evidence of the wounds that slew them. Whether they are truly drawn from the halls of Valhalla (or the campaign world's nearest equivalent) or not, the barbarians





retain little or no memory of their past lives and deeds beyond basic language. One old superstition holds that anyone who uses a *horn of Valhalla* and dies in battle must return again and again as an unwilling servant of the horn's future owners.

## VARIANTS

The following is the most common variant horn known to exist.

### ALIGNED HORN OF VALHALLA

**Aura** strong conjuration; **CL** 13th

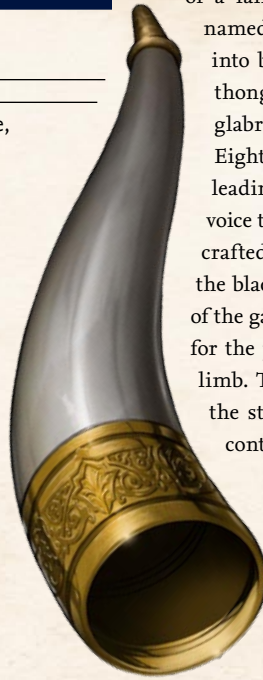
**Slot** none; **Price** 45,000 gp; **Weight** 2 lbs.

#### DESCRIPTION

This *horn of Valhalla* is crafted for service to a cause, whether lofty or profane. Though not intelligent, it has an alignment as determined by the Intelligent Item Alignment table on page 533 of the *Pathfinder RPG Core Rulebook*, and summons barbarians of that alignment. A character who sounds the horn but is more than one step away from the horn's alignment is attacked by the summoned barbarians. The horn's minions also turn against an owner who gives them an order in strong opposition to their ethos, such as ordering lawful good barbarians to attack helpless villagers.

#### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *summon monster VI*; **Cost** 25,000 gp (alignment restriction affects the item's market price, but not the cost to create the item)



## HORNS OF VALHALLA ON GOLARION

The *horns of Valenhall* or *horns of the Linnorm Kings*, as they are sometimes also known on Golarion, are most common among the Ulfen tribes. Here, it is tradition to honor truly legendary Ulfen heroes with specially crafted horns, first sounded at a hero's grave to summon an honor guard as their escort into the next life. The newly crafted horn is bestowed with great ceremony upon the hero's heir or widow, or a champion of the tribe. Such a horn nearly always bears the name of the fallen hero or the epic battle that claimed his life.

It is said in some regions that the *horn of Valhalla* calls back the spirits from eternal battle on Gorum's blood-soaked battlefields. It is a reward given to those of great valor and accomplishment in Gorum's service, an opportunity to once again be cloaked in a seeming of flesh, however briefly, upon the Material Plane. If this is true, none of the returned dead speak overlong of the afterlife during their brief return, though many who have witnessed the sounding of a horn claim to recognize reborn heroes of old.

The Ulfen frown upon sounding a *horn of the Linnorm Kings* for trivial or selfish purposes. The horns are to be used in great battle, either when all seems lost or to bring back the fallen to share in the glory of victory. Calling the shades of the

dead for insignificant battles is seen as an insult to the horn's clan of origin, likely answered in blood if word reaches them. More than one adventurer has obtained a horn from some ancient trove, only to be sought out months or years later by the horn's clan, demanding the return of their ancestral relic (or proof that the new owner is worthy of bearing it).

One of the most famous horns of the north, the *iron horn of Olag Foesplitter*, was lost in a great linnorm's lair, the legacy of a failed attempt to claim a throne. The bronze horn named for Argined the Tall was carried by her grandson into battle in the Worldwound, where it now hangs by a thong flayed from his flesh around the neck of a fierce glabrezu general. The brass horn proudly owned by Opir Eightfingers of Jol has not been seen in many months, leading to nagging rumors of its theft, though none dare voice them to their temperamental king. And the iron horn crafted in honor of dead King Storjon fell into the hands of the black trolls, who once a month sound it within earshot of the gates of Trollheim. There, the trolls battle one another for the privilege of rending the horn's minions limb from limb. The Blackravens have fallen just short of retrieving the stolen horn on more than one occasion, a source of continued embarrassment to the warriors.

Inspired by the legendary horns of the north, the faithful of Cayden Cailean have embraced the magic of the horn in their own unique fashion. Eschewing musical instruments, they instead enchant drinking horns such that when the horns are hoisted high and toasted to the glory of battle, a band of brave and drunken warriors is summoned forth. These *horns of courage* are said to never run dry, and produce wine or ale of a quality matching the deeds of their owner.

Along the western coast of Garund, and the islands beyond, tribal shamans and swarthy pirate wizards enchant the largest and most beautiful conches into sounding shells capable of summoning barbarians on land or in water. More than one slaving expedition has heard the distant blowing of a horn, only to be overwhelmed moments later by tattooed merfolk swarming up the sides of their craft.

While *horns of Valhalla* are most associated with humankind, not all horns summon humans. The dwarven smiths of the north craft metallic horns that summon dwarven berserkers armed with razor-sharp axes (and indeed, the name "Valhalla" is believed by some scholars to be a dwarven corruption of the Ulfen name "Valenhall"). Hidden within Glimmerhold is rumored to be a single horn of blackened adamantine that summons a host of doomguides, the all-female order of dwarven warriors (see the Pathfinder Module *Clash of the Kingslayers*). Unlike other minions of the horn, these fearsome warriors appear in midair mounted upon their fearsome flying rams. Shells like those used along the coasts of Garund have also been seen in the hands of lizardfolk raiders in the



Sodden Lands, and even in the trackless swamps of Avistan, their deep tones reverberating moments before the sudden arrival of crazed reptilian reinforcements.

The most adept chroniclers of the Pathfinder Society have learned to tap into the spirit of legend without the use of a horn. They can call upon barbarians similar in all respects of those of the horn merely by recounting the great deeds of old. Particularly skilled chroniclers take this a step further, summoning spectral heroes of terrifying aspect.

## THE LINNORM'S LAMENT

When King Brunjulf Giantsbane announced he would soon depart for distant Valenhall, a great horn was crafted in his honor. The master smiths of Kalsgard hollowed the left horn of the linnorm by which Brunjulf had claimed his throne, then wrapped it in four bands forged of meteoric iron recovered from a glacier's heart. Artisans decorated the polished horn with fine carvings depicting the life and accomplishments of their king. Each scene was dyed in blood-red ink, and the horn itself threaded on a strap of linnorm-hide leather. The enchanting of the horn was completed on the eve of King Brunjulf's voyage, whereupon he dubbed it *Linnorm's Lament*. The next day, the king himself blew the first note from the completed horn, summoning a dozen stalwart warriors. Leaning their backs to the oars, this honor guard rowed Brunjulf's ship from the harbor, never again to be seen in the lands of Avistan.

No man or woman has sounded the *Linnorm's Lament* more than thrice. Superstition among the Ulfen holds that blowing it a third time seals the owner's fate, ensuring his death by the next day's dawn. Unlike other horns, *Linnorm's Lament* can be blown more than once in the same week or even day. Each time an owner brings forth its voice, more warriors are summoned. The horn was last seen in the possession of the ill-fated warrior Kleppir Redbeard, who sounded *Linnorm's Lament* with his dying breath in battle below Ice Spire. Neither Redbeard's body nor the horn was ever recovered. The survivors of his warband swear that all the past bearers of *Linnorm's Lament* answered its final call, and that to this day they remain in silent vigil over their lord's icy tomb.

### LINNORM'S LAMENT

**Aura** strong conjuration; **CL** 20th

**Slot** none; **Weight** 2 lbs.

#### DESCRIPTION

This horn operates as a normal *horn of Valhalla*, save that it can be blown more than once per day, with the warriors from previous soundings remaining until their 1 hour has passed. When the wielder blows the horn for the third time, he becomes destined to die before the next dawn, with chance-based events turning against him in more and more improbable ways until he's slain. The manner of this curse and any potential methods of defeating it are left to the GM.

#### DESTRUCTION

*Linnorm's Lament* shatters if someone blows it a third time and survives for 1 year afterward.

## NEW FEAT: INSTRUMENTAL

You can deliver a breathtaking bardic performance while activating the powers of a magical instrument, or utilize your bardic prowess to enhance the instrument's power.

**Prerequisite:** Bardic Performance class feature, Perform (any instrument) 3 ranks.

**Benefit:** When activating a magical instrument as a full-round or standard action, you may begin a bardic performance as a free action. Your performance must use a Perform skill appropriate to the instrument.

Alternatively, you may expand 2 rounds of bardic performance to add +2 to any save DCs associated with the use of the instrument's powers.

If your instrument summons allies, such as *pipes of the sewers* or the *horn of Valhalla*, your bardic performances with that instrument affect those allies even if they normally would not.

## CURSED AND INTELLIGENT ITEMS

Like most other magic items, *horns of Valhalla* are occasionally burdened by curses. Some of the known curses include:

- The summoned barbarians immediately attack the owner.
- The horn can only be used if the owner owes fealty to the clan who crafted the horn.
- The owner loses the ability to speak for 1 hour after sounding the horn.
- After each sounding, the clan associated with the horn must be honored in a great feast accompanied by testimonials and praise. Failure to host a sufficiently impressive feast results in the barbarians attacking the owner the next time the horn is sounded.

An intelligent *horn of Valhalla* nearly always reflects the personality and goals of its namesake clan or hero, and may in fact hold the namesake's soul. An intelligent horn insists on being used in glorious battle, ideally against the traditional foes of the departed. Intelligent horns often demand their return to the care of surviving members of their namesake's family.

Presented here is a cursed horn, usable for other types of cursed instruments as well.

**Horn of Mayhem:** When sounded, this horn emits an ear-splitting shriek that drives man and beast mad. Each creature within 60 feet capable of hearing the horn must make a DC 20 Fortitude save or be permanently deafened, as well as a DC 20 Will save or be affected by the spells *rage* and *confusion* for 4d4 rounds. No creature can sound the same *horn of mayhem* more than once—it remains silent if blown a second time by the same person. Items whose botched creation can result in a *horn of mayhem* include the *greater horn of blasting*, *horn of blasting*, *horn of courage*, *horn of fog*, *horn of goodness/evil*, and *horn of Valhalla*.



## BARBARIAN STAT BLOCKS

The following are sample barbarians appropriate for the *horn of Valhalla*. Barbarians summoned by a horn created from a non-viking culture may have different weapons and abilities.

### SILVER HORN BARBARIAN

Human barbarian 2

N Medium construct

**Init** +6; **Senses** Perception +6

#### DEFENSE

**AC** 13, touch 10, flat-footed 11 (+3 armor, +2 Dex, -2 rage)

**hp** 21 (2d12+8)

**Fort** +6, **Ref** +2, **Will** +3

**Defensive Abilities** uncanny dodge; **Immune** construct traits

#### OFFENSE

**Speed** 45 ft.

**Melee** greataxe +8 (1d12+7/x3)

**Special Attacks** rage (7 rounds/day), rage powers (swift foot)

**Base Statistics** When not raging, the barbarian's statistics are:

**Speed** 40 ft., **AC** 15, touch 12, flat-footed 13; **hp** 17; **Melee** greataxe +6 (1d12+4/x3); **Str** 17, **Con** 13; **CMB** +5, **CMD** 15; **Climb** +7, **Swim** +7

#### STATISTICS

**Str** 21, **Dex** 14, **Con** 17, **Int** 8, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 10

**Base Atk** +2; **CMB** +7; **CMD** 17

**Feats** Improved Initiative, Weapon Focus (greataxe)

**Skills** Acrobatics +6 (+10 jump), **Climb** +9, **Perception** +6, **Swim** +9

**Other Gear** studded leather, greataxe

### BRASS HORN BARBARIAN

Human barbarian 3

N Medium construct

**Init** +6; **Senses** Perception +7

#### DEFENSE

**AC** 13, touch 10, flat-footed 11 (+3 armor, +2 Dex, -2 rage)

**hp** 34 (3d12+15)

**Fort** +6, **Ref** +3, **Will** +4

**Defensive Abilities** uncanny dodge, trap sense +1; **Immune** construct traits

#### OFFENSE

**Speed** 45 ft.

**Melee** mwk greataxe +10 (1d12+7/x3)

**Special Attacks** rage (9 rounds/day), rage powers (swift foot)

**Base Statistics** When not raging, the barbarian's statistics are:

**Speed** 40 ft., **AC** 15, touch 12, flat-footed 13; **hp** 28; **Melee** mwk greataxe +8 (1d12+4/x3); **Str** 17, **Con** 13; **CMB** +6, **CMD** 16; **Climb** +9, **Swim** +9

#### STATISTICS

**Str** 21, **Dex** 14, **Con** 17, **Int** 8, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 10

**Base Atk** +3; **CMB** +8; **CMD** 18

**Feats** Improved Initiative, Toughness, Weapon Focus (greataxe)

**Skills** Acrobatics +8 (+12 jump), **Climb** +11, **Perception** +7, **Swim** +11

**Other Gear** masterwork studded leather, mwk greataxe

### BRONZE HORN BARBARIAN

Human barbarian 4

N Medium construct

**Init** +6; **Senses** Perception +8

#### DEFENSE

**AC** 13, touch 10, flat-footed 11 (+3 armor, +2 Dex, -2 rage)

**hp** 46 (4d12+20)

**Fort** +7, **Ref** +3, **Will** +4

**Defensive Abilities** uncanny dodge, trap sense +1; **Immune** construct traits

#### OFFENSE

**Speed** 45 ft.

**Melee** mwk greataxe +12 (1d12+9/x3),

**Special Attacks** rage (11 rounds/day), rage powers (raging leaper, swift foot)

**Base Statistics** When not raging, the barbarian's statistics are:

**Speed** 40 ft., **AC** 15, touch 12, flat-footed 13; **hp** 38; **Melee** mwk greataxe +10 (1d12+6/x3); **Str** 18, **Con** 13; **CMB** +8, **CMD** 18; **Acrobatics** +9 (+13 jump), **Climb** +11, **Swim** +11

#### STATISTICS

**Str** 22, **Dex** 14, **Con** 17, **Int** 8, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 10

**Base Atk** +4; **CMB** +10; **CMD** 20

**Feats** Improved Initiative, Toughness, Weapon Focus (greataxe)

**Skills** Acrobatics +9 (+17 jump), **Climb** +13, **Perception** +8, **Swim** +13

**Other Gear** masterwork studded leather, mwk greataxe

### IRON HORN BARBARIAN

Human barbarian 5

N Medium construct

**Init** +6; **Senses** Perception +9

#### DEFENSE

**AC** 13, touch 10, flat-footed 11 (+3 armor, +2 Dex, -2 rage)

**hp** 57 (5d12+25)

**Fort** +7, **Ref** +3, **Will** +4

**Defensive Abilities** improved uncanny dodge, trap sense +1; **Immune** construct traits

#### OFFENSE

**Speed** 45 ft.

**Melee** mwk greataxe +13 (1d12+9/x3)

**Special Attacks** rage (13 rounds/day), rage powers (raging leaper, swift foot)

**Base Statistics** When not raging, the barbarian's statistics are:

**Speed** 40 ft., **AC** 15, touch 12, flat-footed 13; **hp** 47; **Melee** mwk greataxe +11 (1d12+6/x3); **Str** 18, **Con** 13; **CMB** +9, **CMD** 19; **Acrobatics** +10 (+14 jump), **Climb** +12, **Swim** +12

#### STATISTICS

**Str** 22, **Dex** 14, **Con** 17, **Int** 8, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 10

**Base Atk** +5; **CMB** +11; **CMD** 21

**Feats** Improved Initiative, Step Up, Toughness, Weapon Focus (greataxe)

**Skills** Acrobatics +10 (+19 jump), **Climb** +14, **Perception** +9, **Swim** +14

**Other Gear** masterwork studded leather, masterwork greataxe



## Chapter Seven

# SPHERE OF ANNIHILATION

"SOME THINGS JUST SHOULDN'T EXIST. SOME ARE BEST LEFT UNTOUCHED. SPHERES OF ANNIHILATION QUALIFY FOR BOTH STATEMENTS, MY FRIEND. THEY'RE MANIFEST HOLES IN REALITY—EVER-HUNGRY BLOTS OF NOTHINGNESS DARKER THAN THE BLOOD OF A DYING ARCHFIEND. I'VE SEEN A SPHERE GO THROUGH A CITY LIKE THE VENGEFUL FINGER OF A GOD, PUNCHING THROUGH FORTRESS AND FLESH WITH EQUAL EASE, AS THE PROTEANS RESPONSIBLE FOLLOWED IN ITS WAKE AND SCREAMED WITH LAUGHTER.

PERSONALLY, I SUSPECT THE SPHERES ARE THE SCEADUINAR'S BITTER, POISONED GIFT TO THE REST OF THE MULTIVERSE. TRUST ME, THEY'RE ONE GIFT YOU DON'T WANT TO UNWRAP, LET ALONE SHAKE THE BOX TO SEE WHAT'S INSIDE."

—MARA YTRELLIAN, RIFTWARDEN OF GALISEMNI,  
CITY OF THE CELESTIAL AND THE DAMNED



The *sphere of annihilation*—a globe of perfect darkness, cold, and quiet, a hole in the fabric of reality that represents blind, endless consumption. Its destruction is so complete that even the most powerful spells fail to restore those consumed. *Raise dead*, *resurrection*, and even a druid's *reincarnate*—all fall before the *sphere of annihilation's* terrible void. Only the direct intervention of the gods can bring its victims back to life.

Thankfully, despite its horrific powers, a *sphere of annihilation* cannot move of its own volition—it requires a controlling influence. To establish control, any potential user must focus and will the sphere to move in an act of supreme mental effort. The user's control is often tenuous and cultivating it requires prodigious intellect, yet this control can also be contested by others, and what is already a fiendishly difficult task can easily become fatal, as any failed attempt to ensnare the sphere makes the user an immediate target for its consumption, like a ball of iron is drawn to a magnet.

Despite the seemingly unstoppable force that the sphere represents, especially in the hands of a powerful, intelligent foe, two methods for its destruction exist, though both carry considerable risks.

Fortunately, as full-blown artifacts of the highest order, *spheres of annihilation* are rare and PCs cannot create them; rather, they must find the spheres on their own or receive them from powerful patrons such as evil gods. Given the spheres' rarity, scholars have questioned who could create a *sphere of annihilation*, and why they would bother in the first place. Whether the spheres are mistakes of cosmic magnitude, genocidal weapons created by godlike planar entities, or the extraplanar eggs of beings wholly antithetical to mortal life, their destructive potential inevitably overshadows any such scholarly questions regarding their purpose and origin.

## BASE ITEM

Below are the statistics for a standard *sphere of annihilation*, as presented in the *Pathfinder RPG Core Rulebook*.

SPHERE OF ANNIHILATION
<b>Aura</b> strong transmutation; <b>CL</b> 20th
<b>Slot</b> none; <b>Weight</b> —
<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
A <i>sphere of annihilation</i> is a globe of absolute blackness 2 feet in diameter. Any matter that comes in contact with a sphere is instantly sucked into the void and utterly destroyed. Only the direct intervention of a deity can restore an annihilated character.
A <i>sphere of annihilation</i> is static, resting in some spot as if it were a normal hole. It can be caused to move, however, by mental effort (think of this as a mundane form of telekinesis, too weak to move actual objects but a force to which the sphere, being weightless, is sensitive). A character's ability to gain control of a sphere (or to keep controlling one) is based on the result of a control check against DC 30 (a move action). A

control check is 1d20 + character level + character Int modifier. If the check succeeds, the character can move the sphere (perhaps to bring it into contact with an enemy) as a free action.

Control of a sphere can be established from as far away as 40 feet (the character need not approach too closely). Once control is established, it must be maintained by continuing to make control checks (all DC 30) each round. For as long as a character maintains control (does not fail a check) in subsequent rounds, he can control the sphere from a distance of 40 feet + 10 feet per character level. The sphere's speed in a round is 10 feet + 5 feet for every 5 points by which the character's control check result in that round exceeded 30.

If a control check fails, the sphere slides 10 feet in the direction of the character attempting to move it. If two or more creatures vie for control of a *sphere of annihilation*, the rolls are opposed. If none are successful, the sphere slips toward the one who rolled lowest.

### DESTRUCTION

Should a *gate* spell be cast upon a *sphere of annihilation*, there is a 50% chance (01–50 on d%) that the spell destroys it, a 35% chance (51–85) that the spell does nothing, and a 15% chance (86–100) that a gap is torn in the spatial fabric, catapulting everything within a 180-foot radius into another plane. If a *rod of cancellation* touches a *sphere of annihilation*, they negate each other in a tremendous explosion. Everything within a 60-foot radius takes 2d6 × 10 points of damage. *Dispel magic* and *mage's disjunction* have no effect on a sphere.

## UTILITY

The obvious utility of a *sphere of annihilation* can be described in one word: consumption. Anything that touches the sphere is irrevocably destroyed, regardless of armor or defensive spells—obliterated with such finality that only the direct intervention of a god can undo its destruction.

Yet the sphere's insatiable, blind hunger can be utilized in less obvious ways than simply directing the sphere to contact and consume one's enemies. With no natural substance capable of stopping the sphere, it provides an unparalleled means of excavation and tunneling (assuming you don't care about anything that might cross its path, such as buried objects or mineral veins).

Conversely, a sphere can make for a unique barrier to hold back approaching enemies. Imagine a tunnel plugged with a sphere just past a sharp bend, with an incoming horde of demons or a raging dragon careening around the corner, ignorant of the sphere till it might be too late to avoid its fatal touch. This tactic isn't limited to living opponents, either—the sphere-as-impromptu-barrier tactic could be used to block an onrushing underground flash flood or the seething, rising magma in a volcano, and a flooding room trap loses all menace when its water drains instantly into the sphere.

The presence of a static *sphere of annihilation* can disturb the surrounding landscape, slowly consuming the surrounding



rock over geologic time and forming a massive, inexplicable depression or sinkhole. A sphere deposited within a lake or volcanic chamber would, in short order, form a massive whirlpool before finally draining the water or molten rock away like a vampire bleeding its victim dry, leaving only an alluvial crater or empty basalt hollow behind. Lodged in the depths of a sea, it might drain that as well, given enough time, but from its first immersion it would certainly form a whirlpool, even altering ocean currents if given enough time. In an enclosed room or cavern, a sphere left alone long enough might create a dangerous vacuum around itself, devouring each individual air molecule as it brushes against it.

On an even grander scale, a sphere plunged into the heart of a star might slowly devour it, influencing the pattern of stellar evolution in aberrant ways, or if the star's core truly contains a portal to the positive energy plane, as some scholars suggest, the sphere and portal might nullify one another and cause the star to immediately go supernova.

Given the spectacular methods by which a *sphere of annihilation* is destroyed, it can serve a purpose in death as in life. Much like a *portable hole* imposed upon a *bag of holding*, a *gate* spell targeted at the sphere has a 15% chance of opening a planar rift to a random plane (though whether that destination is truly random or secretly the next location in the campaign is something only the GM knows). Alternatively, the intentional combination of a *sphere* and a *rod of cancellation* can be used as a spectacular dead-man's switch—the classic “take one more step, and we all die!” approach. This last method is doubly effective if the situation occurs at a place of especial merit or danger, such as a religion's most holy shrine, the base of a dam, or a weak point in a glacier.

## RELATED ITEMS

Unique objects of great utility and greater danger, *spheres of annihilation* may have no direct relatives or descendants. Yet over the ages, enterprising and desperate spellcasters have created two items to harness or combat the spheres: the *talisman of the sphere* and the *rod of cancellation*.

An artifact in its own right, the *talisman of the sphere* enables arcane spellcasters (and only arcane spellcasters) to influence and control a *sphere of annihilation*. Because a talisman is valuable but otherwise useless in the absence of a sphere, PCs might be tempted to sell or exchange *talismans of the sphere* if they happen across one early in a campaign. Of course, they

would regret the sale later when they face an enemy using a sphere against them, and PCs who ironically run up against a villain using the same talisman later on might even find themselves branded as accomplices for lack of appropriate foresight.

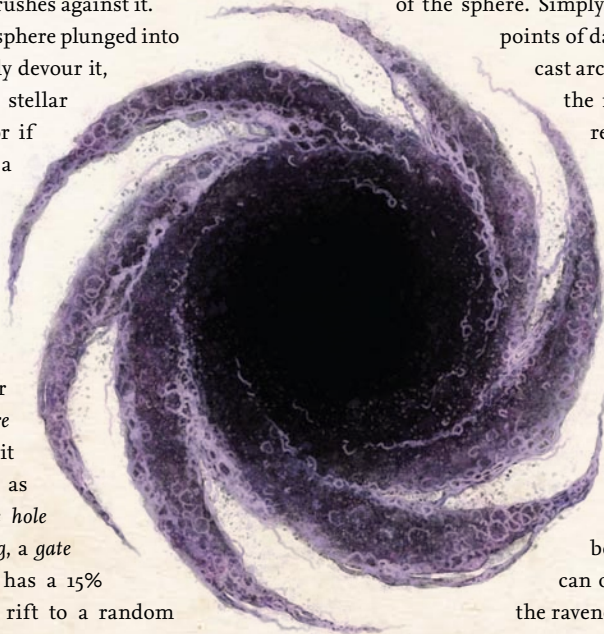
In game terms, the *talisman of the sphere* doubles an arcane spellcaster's Intelligence bonus and character level for the purposes of establishing and maintaining control of a sphere. Additionally, its user only needs to check for control every other round, taking a move action on those turns that otherwise would have been expended on maintaining control of the sphere. Simply touching the talisman causes 5d6 points of damage to those characters unable to cast arcane spells, though whether this was the maker's intent or simply a strange result of the overwhelming energies involved remains unclear.

While the talisman's ability to control the *sphere of annihilation* makes it incredibly powerful when paired with a sphere, it still has a significant weakness. Although a *sphere of annihilation* is immune to most spells and magical cancellation effects, the talisman is not, meaning that it's much more effective to attack the talisman than the sphere itself. As befits its nature, a *talisman of the sphere* can only be destroyed by hurling it into the ravenous maw of a *sphere of annihilation*.

Unlike the talisman, which has no purpose beyond its interaction with a sphere, *rods of cancellation* might well have been created for other, more general purposes, with their influence upon a sphere being entirely coincidental. Be that as it may, a *rod of cancellation* is the antithesis of a *sphere of annihilation*, and the bane of its user. Should a rod touch the sphere, having been either incidentally or purposefully hurled into the sphere's devouring maw, it triggers a titanic, spherical blast that destroys both objects instantly and deals 2d6 × 10 points of damage to everything within a 60-foot radius.

## CAMPAIGN ROLE

GMs should introduce *spheres of annihilation* with extreme caution, for all the reasons listed above. But even more importantly, they should avoid making a sphere mundane. *Spheres of annihilation* are true artifacts and make the most impact when treated as such—objects of legend feared even by heroes. There's an old gag about an epic-level group of PCs using a *sphere of annihilation* as a garbage disposal in their castle basement, sort of like the traditional sewer-dwelling ottyugh taken to the extreme. It's good for a joke perhaps, but





such irreverent uses take away from the mystery and blind destructive potential inherent in the artifact.

Playing off of the atmosphere of danger that swirls around the spheres like the accretion disk of a black hole, campaign villains can be terrors if they possess such a weapon. PCs risk true death beyond hope of any resurrection magic, and this often forces them to think instead of rushing headlong into direct confrontation. Beyond its direct uses, antagonists can use the sphere as a threat, a hedge against the involvement of other powerful NPCs within a campaign world (and hence an explanation of lower-level PCs' involvement, for the villain might make it known that if Abrizinox the Golden or any of his kindred move against him, he can and will bring the sphere into play). For unconventional uses, imagine the looks on players' faces when, just as they are on the verge of defeating a longtime villain, their foe manages to trigger a risky planar rift through the sphere in order to escape.

And what if the PCs find themselves in possession of a sphere? A *sphere of annihilation* can provoke great ingenuity from parties eager to use their new toy. Depending on the group in question, the best-case scenario might be to use the object sparingly and judiciously. Players may utilize the sphere to destroy an artifact, devour a lich's phylactery, or some other justified, serious application which opens up plot hooks to later exploit and explore. In the worst-case scenario, whole plotlines and story arcs can be nullified through clever use of the sphere. For example, the players could circumvent half an adventure by using the sphere to devour the bedrock below the main villain's castle, causing it to collapse in the subsequent earthquake. In such cases, it's important not to punish the players responsible—after all, they found a creative use for a legitimately acquired item and used their heroic intellects to resolve a problem in a more efficient manner. But situations like this illustrate why GMs should exercise caution when introducing a sphere into the game.

Going beyond these immediate applications, there are other notions to consider. What if, rather than solitary points of obliteration, each sphere is actually part of a much larger, disconnected whole? If the spheres literally are holes in the fabric of reality, or if they empty into another reality, GMs could have some or even all spheres linked, similar to the way *bags of devouring* can act as disparate mouths of a single, extraplanar beast, feeding into its vast gut. Cults might form around spheres in that event, worshiping them as hungry, silent demigods or as avatars of gods of destruction. They might even be one-way doors to somewhere else, and for some, the hope that whatever is on the other side is better than their lives now might tempt them to take the risk of plunging headlong through, thus starting a brand new campaign.

## VARIANTS

Horrific as it is to consider, not only do multiple *spheres of annihilation* exist, but variant versions do as well, some more

limited, but some even more frightening. These lost relics exist in unmoving stasis in the laboratories of mad wizards, in the treasure troves of archfiends, or on the edges of distant planes, unrestrained and consuming anything that blunders across them. The following examples are but three such variations GMs might utilize in their campaign.

### SPHERE OF BLEEDING SNOWFLAKES

**Aura** strong transmutation; **CL** 20th

**Slot** none; **Weight** —

#### DESCRIPTION

This sphere originates within the Negative Energy Plane as either a naturally occurring phenomenon or a normal *sphere of annihilation* empowered or even damaged by beings there. The *sphere of bleeding snowflakes* radiates a cold, dense fog of black energy extending 60 feet into its surrounding area, infusing the region with negative energy, and dealing 4d6 negative energy damage (as a cleric's channeled energy) and 1 permanent negative level per round to everything within 60 feet. While spells such as *death ward* may negate the energy's ill effects, any who die as a result of these effects, or who die by other means within the sphere's affected radius, cannot be returned to life by anything short of *true resurrection*, *wish*, or *miracle*.

#### DESTRUCTION

The *sphere of bleeding snowflakes* can be destroyed by sending it through one of the portals on the Positive Energy Plane leading into the heart of a star.

### TWIN SPHERES

**Aura** strong transmutation; **CL** 20th

**Slot** none; **Weight** —

#### DESCRIPTION

Rumored to have once been a single, normal sphere split in two through a failed attempt to destroy it, these dual *spheres of annihilation* are linked, such that objects devoured by one



may be disgorged from the other. Anything devoured by one of the *twin spheres* must make a Fortitude save (DC 25) or be utterly consumed as by a normal sphere; anything that makes the save take 10d6 points of damage in transit and is hurled, smoking and partially disintegrated, from the maw of the other sphere. Anyone currently in mental control of one sphere may freely pass through it to the location of its twin.

**DESTRUCTION**

The *twin spheres* can be destroyed by directing one sphere through the other, causing an explosion that deals 20d6 damage to everything within 100 feet.

**RIFT-BORN SPHERE**

**Aura** strong transmutation; **CL** 20th

**Slot** none; **Weight** —

**DESCRIPTION**

This sphere acts as a normal *sphere of annihilation* in all respects, save that any use of a *gate* spell to destroy it results in an automatic planar rift to a plane of the GM's choosing. The sphere remains behind at its original location, intact and unaffected.

**DESTRUCTION**

A *rift-born sphere* can only be destroyed by using a *rod of cancellation* or fusion with another, normal sphere (which destroys both spheres in a 180-foot blast dealing 5d6 x 10 points of damage).

**SPHERES OF ANNIHILATION ON GOLARION**

Although mundane *spheres of annihilation* originate within the void of the Negative Energy Plane, and the unique sphere known as the *Ghost of Departed Quantities* was the creation of a godlike planar being, Golarion and its Material Plane inhabitants have felt the spheres' touch throughout history. As rare as they are, *spheres of annihilation* that exist on Golarion invariably appear and reappear over a string of historical incidents, since unless destroyed, they remain dormant and motionless, immune to decay or wear.

All-consuming and seemingly impervious to all normal magic, *spheres of annihilation* have always attracted a certain fringe element of worshipers who either venerate the spheres directly or view them as objects beloved in the eyes of their own destructive divinities. Two gods in particular have actively supported this practice: Rovagug and Groetus. The former generally prefers for his cultists to seize control of spheres and use them to cause as much destruction as possible. One consequence of this still exists in Osirion, where the well shaft within the pyramid of Kamalia the Brazen that descends to the Darklands may have been excavated using a sphere controlled by the bloodthirsty god-king.

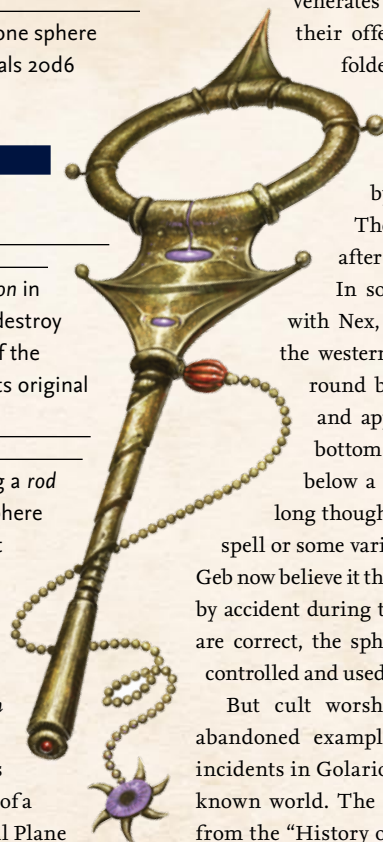
Much more limited in number, the followers of Groetus are prone to worship spheres as aspects of their looming, skull-

moon deity. Within the hurricane-lashed Sodden Lands of western Garund, one such cult lurks within the abandoned, partially subsumed ruins of the city of Hyrantam. Serving as their icon and altar, referred to as "The Maw of Groetus," their sphere hovers 10 feet above one of the city's old astronomical towers, set against the perpetually storm-filled sky, appearing from below almost like the eye of a hurricane. The cult venerates the sphere daily, ritualistically feeding it their offerings and also their prayers, written on folded slips of blessed paper. The precise origin of their sphere remains unknown, but it may have been provided to the cult by their god or summoned from the planes by their founder.

The aftereffects of a sphere often linger long after the sphere has moved or been destroyed. In southern Geb, far from the ravaged border with Nex, the earth bears one such scar. There, on the western edge of the Axan Wood, sits a perfectly round borehole, 30 feet wide, impossibly smooth, and apparently bottomless. No light reaches the bottom, and objects sent down the shaft vanish below a depth of 2 miles. While the borehole was long thought to be the result of a massive *disintegration* spell or some variety of mutated purple worm, authorities in Geb now believe it the result of a sphere, possibly one summoned by accident during their nation's brutal wars with Nex. If they are correct, the sphere still exists miles down, waiting to be controlled and used once again.

But cult worship of isolated spheres and rumors of abandoned examples pale in comparison to two specific incidents in Golarion's past, from nearly opposite ends of the known world. The first incident comes to modern scholars from the "History of the Shory War," a fragmented chronicle of the Osirian Pharaoh An-Hepsu XI's brief but intense war against the Shory Aeromancers. The source describes "the devouring spheres and their keys, both gifted by the Seraph," and the apparent ability of the god-king to control multiple spheres from a considerable distance, and possibly even to transport others through the spheres like through *gates*. The source of his spheres and the hinted-at controlling talismans appear elsewhere in Osirian history as well, linked to the truly ancient Pharaoh of Forgotten Plagues and "the Seraph of Devastation," though no other details remain.

After the end of the war, the extant records give no detail regarding the fate of the god-king's spheres, but Osirionologists firmly believe that at least one of them was uncovered many centuries later by Pharaoh Kamalia the Brazen, linking her exploitation of a sphere with that of her predecessor. As for the other sphere and their controlling talismans, they may remain locked within the pharaoh's lost tomb, or imprisoned with his other misbegotten "gifts" in the ruins below the city of Shiman-Sekh.





Far from northern Garund, the second reference comes from distant Vudra on the vast eastern continent of Casmaron. According to the poet-historian Adikavi Katrasadda, multiple spheres were used in a mad gambit to destroy a creature matching the description of Volnagur the End-Singer, one of the Spawn of Rovagug. This source does mention that the spheres survived and were entrusted to the Maharaja of Vudra, who had them sealed away within a trio of windowless blue iron towers. Unlike its Osirian counterpart, however, the Vudrani tale makes no mention of the spheres' original source.

## EYES OF THE GODMIND

The genocides between the planes of Axis and the Maelstrom fluctuate between axiomite crusades and the emergence of protean hordes, sprinkled with the actions of Heaven and Hell against their common metaphysical enemies. Fearful and confused by the proteans' ability to manipulate probability and bend the flux and flow of the Maelstrom to their shifting wills, and inspired by the spheres naturally found within the depths of the Negative Energy Plane, the axiomite Godmind created its own version of the spheres. This unique *sphere of annihilation* became known as the *Ghost of Departed Quantities*, or less formally as the *Eyes of the Godmind*.

Unlike its natural kindred, the *Ghost of Departed Quantities* appears out of focus, as the laws of reality distort its deadly periphery of seething planar disruption. Neither random nor mere visual white noise, the contorting border ripples with a corona of manifesting and fading symbols and equations, like those of the axiomites themselves. Representing the manifest death of probability where all permutations vanish, condense, and collapse down to the vanishing point of perfect, sterile Law, this sphere is apparently self-aware and ravenous. At least one protean lord and a pair of keketar choruses fell victim to the *Ghost of Departed Quantities* before it vanished from history, and the axiomites claim ignorance as to its fate. While they speculate it was lost or destroyed, others feel it was not lost so much as loosed upon the Cerulean Void with no regard for the consequences that might follow, and that the ravenous object is still out there, blindly consuming, or perhaps acting as an unstoppable agent (or possibly an aspect) of the Godmind itself, hunting down some specific target—maybe even the proteans' mysterious god, the Speaker of the Depths itself.

## BLACK HOLES

Given the *sphere of annihilation's* similarity to real-world black holes, GMs might be tempted to deviate from the artifact as written in order to draw inspiration from the mysterious singularities. What if, rather than being static unless controlled, a sphere possessed an active pull and automatically drew in objects with a form of telekinesis? And since real black holes draw in the light around them, they're naturally invisible. What if *spheres of annihilation* were likewise naturally invisible, and they could only be detected by their pull, objects

## NEW SPELL: SPHERESCRY

### SPHERESCRY

**School** divination (scrying); **Level** sorcerer/wizard 3

**Casting Time** 1 hour

**Components** V, S, AF (onyx sphere worth at least 50 gp)

**Range** see text

**Duration** 1 minute/level

**Saving Throw** none; **Spell Resistance** no

This spell allows remote viewing through spheres that have previously consumed some portion of the spellcaster's body: a single digit of a finger or toe at a minimum. The caster can view and listen to events within a 20-foot radius of the associated sphere; this radius follows the sphere if the sphere moves. Unlike a true *scrying* spell, no other spells operate through the associated sphere, but *spherescry* produces no indication of its activity on the target and cannot be discovered by normal methods of magical detection.

falling into them, or regions of warped space surrounding them? Each of these options could put a unique twist upon an already unique object.

And since gaming isn't always beholden to real science, what of the pop-science idea of black holes opening into other universes, or into some sequestered reality on the other side of the event horizon? Perhaps objects falling into a sphere aren't actually destroyed, but rather are locked away within a pocket reality—and if so, can they escape or be released? What else might be trapped on the other side of the sphere?

## MORE BIZARRE ORIGINS

One theory of the spheres' origin is that they are spontaneously generated within the Negative Energy Plane. But what if their origin had less to do with being features of the Void and was more to do with that plane's natives? Consider the idea of the spheres as the paradoxical eggs of something from the Negative Energy Plane. What manner of creature could gestate within and eventually hatch from a perfect orb of all-consuming nothingness? And what consequences would that hatching have upon a campaign? Certainly the spheres could be the eggs of such beings as void dragons—so rare as to be legendary, mating within the Void and producing spheres that consume all matter in order to feed the embryo gestating within. Alternatively, the spheres could be the gestating cocoons of other Negative Energy Plane residents, such as the plane's twisted and vaguely humanoid avatars known as the sceaduinar. Their hatred and jealousy toward any creature empowered by positive energy would explain the spheres' consumption. Should any sphere hatch, that event might even open up a rift to the Negative Energy Plane, allowing the creature to return home but causing irreparable damage to whatever world played host to its birth.



**Chapter**  **Eight**

# STAFF OF THE MAGI

"WHEN MY MASTER DIED, HE WAS SURROUNDED BY FIENDS, SENT AGAINST HIM BY HIS RIVAL, NIORMOR. I WATCHED HELPLESSLY FROM THE TOWER AS THE DEVILS CIRCLED EVER CLOSER, AND MY MASTER'S SPELLS GREW WEAKER AND WEAKER. FINALLY HE LIFTED HIS STAFF ABOVE HIS HEAD AND, WITH A TERRIBLE SHOUT, SNAPPED IT IN HALF. THE RESULTING EXPLOSION SHOOK THE TOWER AND BURNED THE FIENDS ALIVE IN A TORRENT OF MAGICAL ENERGY, SENDING THEM BACK TO THE BITTER PLANE THAT SPAWNED THEM. ALL THAT REMAINED OF MY MASTER WAS A BLACK MARK ON THE GROUND.

"THAT WAS TWENTY YEARS AGO, AND NOW I AM A WIZARD TO RIVAL MY HONORED MASTER. I HAVE FACED DOWN THE BEINGS OF A DOZEN WORLDS, AND DISCOVERED A STAFF OF MY OWN. AND TONIGHT, NIORMOR BREATHES HIS LAST. "

—SCHEYE ELDATHAR, MAGE OF THE SEVENTH CIRCLE



The *staff of the magi* is the quintessential wizard's staff, a symbol of power and mystery. In the right hands, it can hold off an army or face down the most voracious fiends. It is a wonder of the magical world, and every wizard secretly dreams of the day when his arcane research leads him to such an ancient treasure—or better yet, the secrets of its creation. For though mortals have long since lost the means of creating a *staff of the magi*, anyone who managed to unlock them afresh would find themselves elevated far beyond their station, perhaps into the company of the gods themselves.

*Staves of the magi* allow their bearers unlimited casting of several utilitarian spells, as well as the power to absorb magical attacks and return them to their casters as fire and lightning. Their most powerful ability is also their most dangerous, however: when broken or overcharged, a *staff of the magi* erupts in an explosion that deals massive damage to those around it, and often destroys its wielder in the process.

A typical *staff of the magi* stands 6 feet tall, with a core of solid wood inscribed with glyphs and wrapped with rune-covered iron bands. A *staff of the magi* is often warm to the touch, and some wielders report hearing a constant hum when using it. Others claim that the staff pulses in the wielder's hand, as if he clutched a vein, and the staff's heartbeat quickens when its powers are used.

## BASE ITEM

Below are the statistics for a standard *staff of the magi*, as presented in the *Pathfinder RPG Core Rulebook*.

### STAFF OF THE MAGI

**Aura** strong (all schools); **CL** 20th

**Slot** none; **Weight** 5 lbs.

#### DESCRIPTION

A long wooden staff shod in iron and inscribed with sigils and runes of all types, this potent artifact contains many spell powers and other functions. Unlike a normal staff, a *staff of the magi* holds 50 charges and cannot be recharged normally. Some of its powers use charges, while others don't. A *staff of the magi* does not lose its powers if it runs out of charges. The following powers do not use charges:

- *Detect magic*
- *Enlarge person* (Fortitude DC 15 negates)
- *Hold portal*
- *Light*
- *Mage armor*
- *Mage hand*

The following powers drain 1 charge per usage:

- *Dispel magic*
- *Fireball* (10d6 damage, Reflex DC 17 half)
- *Ice storm*
- *Invisibility*
- *Knock*
- *Lightning bolt* (10d6 damage, Reflex DC 17 half)

- *Passwall*
- *Pyrotechnics* (Will or Fortitude DC 16 negates)
- *Wall of fire*
- *Web*

These powers drain 2 charges per usage:

- *Monster summoning IX*
- *Plane shift* (Will DC 21 negates)
- *Telekinesis* (400 lbs. maximum; Will DC 19 negates)

A *staff of the magi* gives the wielder spell resistance 23. If this is willingly lowered, however, the staff can also be used to absorb arcane spell energy directed at its wielder, as a *rod of absorption* does. Unlike the rod, this staff converts spell levels into charges rather than retaining them as spell energy usable by a spellcaster. If the staff absorbs enough spell levels to exceed its limit of 50 charges, it explodes as if a retributive strike had been performed (see below). The wielder has no idea how many spell levels are cast at her, for the staff does not communicate this knowledge as a *rod of absorption* does. Thus, absorbing spells can be risky.

#### DESTRUCTION

A *staff of the magi* can be broken for a retributive strike. Such an act must be purposeful and declared by the wielder. All charges in the staff are released in a 30-foot spread. All within 10 feet of the broken staff take an amount of damage equal to 8 times the number of charges in the staff, those between 11 feet and 20 feet away take damage equal to 6 times the number of charges, and those 21 feet to 30 feet distant take 4 times the number of charges. A DC 23 Reflex save reduces damage by half.

The character breaking the staff has a 50% chance (01–50 on d%) of traveling to another plane of existence, but if she does not (51–100), the explosive release of spell energy destroys her (no saving throw).

## UTILITY

The uses of a *staff of the magi* are frequently obvious. Several of its abilities are straightforward offensive spells, such as *lightning bolt* or *fireball*. Yet not all of its abilities are so utilitarian.

Some abilities can be used to create terrain advantages or hinder opponents. *Ice storm*, for instance, causes damage for 1 round, but after that it creates difficult terrain and reduces Perception checks, and casting it in a corridor or mountain pass can severely hamper enemies. *Wall of fire* and *web* can also restrict opponents' movements or funnel enemies to a particular location. Even *hold portal* can be used to cut off an enemy's potential path (or to safeguard an ally's retreat).

The unlimited use abilities benefit the user not only by their effects, but also by freeing up magic item slots and spell slots. The wielder of a *staff of the magi* can cast *mage armor* at will, gaining the armor bonus without having to use up prepared spells or wear a magic item. In this manner, even the most trivial of abilities granted by the staff can add up to great effect.



Some abilities facilitate travel, but can also be used in creative offensive ways. *Passwall* creates a passage through plaster, stone, or wooden walls, but can also be laid as a trap; once the enemy steps into the created passage, the staff's wielder can dismiss the spell and eject the enemies out the far exit, trapping them in another room. *Plane shift* is useful for traveling, but can also be used offensively to send an enemy to another world.

Many abilities can be used in conjunction to create deadly effects. *Passwall* creates a tunnel which can then be filled with a *web*—or which constrains enemies and makes them more vulnerable to a *fireball* or *lightning bolt*. *Wall of fire* can encircle enemies before *pyrotechnics* blinds them. *Enlarge person* and *invisibility* can be cast on allies to increase their combat effectiveness.

The *summon monster* ability of the staff provides many useful options. A single *summon monster IX* can bring a powerful outsider, such as an astral deva or a glabrezu, whose abilities can be used for combat but also for other tasks: using any supernatural or spell-like ability (other than ones relating to summoning, teleportation, or planar travel), scouting (many can fly and turn invisible), negotiating with other extraplanar creatures, or providing information, as most powerful outsiders have impressive Knowledge skills.

The staff's ability to absorb spell levels is an oft-overlooked but highly useful ability. Like a *rod of absorption*, the *staff of the magi* can absorb incoming hostile spells with no action on the wielder's part, as long as the staff is in hand. This in turn recharges the staff, turning an enemy's attack into a direct advantage for the staff's bearer. However, this ability only activates if the user willingly lowers the spell resistance the staff grants. Lowering spell resistance is a standard action. Unfortunately, unlike a *rod of absorption*, the staff does not communicate how many spell levels it has absorbed to its wielder. This makes absorption risky; if the staff gains more charges than its maximum of 50, it explodes in a retributive strike.

The retributive strike ability is extremely dangerous, but can be useful as a last-ditch defense. If the staff's wielder is overwhelmed and death seems inevitable, there's always a chance that a retributive strike will both destroy the enemy and transport the wielder to a safe location. In a battle against terrible evil, a fight in which loss is not an option, a wielder may choose to use a retributive strike to ensure victory over the corrupt, whether she personally survives or not. A truly selfless hero who activates the retributive strike to destroy that which must be destroyed might even earn the favor of a god, and tip the potential for teleportation in her favor—or receive a message in the afterlife before finding herself resurrected.



## RELATED ITEMS

The *staff of the magi* shares many traits with other staves. Its absorption power is much like that of a *rod of absorption*, but its system of using charges to cast spells is that of a magic staff. Unlike most staves, though, a *staff of the magi* retains its powers even when reduced to zero charges. As the *staff of the magi* is an artifact and not a traditional staff, it uses its item caster level of 20 to determine the range and duration of spells, instead of the wielder's score.

Three of the offensive powers of the *staff of the magi* are fire-based: *fireball*, *pyrotechnics*, and *wall of fire*. A *ring of fire resistance* or similar fire protection item allows the wielder to use these powers with greater flexibility. Two of the staff's powers, *ice storm* and *web*, create difficult terrain or hazardous conditions. A *ring of freedom of movement* allows the wielder to move easily through these effects to strategically place his next spells.

Of course, the item most similar to the *staff of the magi* is the *staff of power*; both are staves, have a few similar magical powers, have abilities that don't rely on charges and persist even when the item is out of charges, and—most importantly—can be broken for a retributive strike, with similar damage and consequences. Whether the *staff of the magi* is the item that inspired the creation of the *staff of power*, or some god or legendary wizard took a *staff of power* and transformed it into the first *staff of the magi* is unknown, but both items are exceedingly powerful, and any cynical fool who refers to a mage's *staff of power* as a “poor man's *staff of the magi*” is likely to receive an unpleasant lesson in discretion.

## CAMPAIGN ROLE

There's no such thing as a standard, run-of-the-mill *staff of the magi*. Only a very powerful being can create one, and even then the creator usually requires a compelling reason to do so. This means that if the PCs manage to find a *staff of the magi*, it is an artifact with a powerful original owner who must have had a good reason for letting go of the staff. Generally, the original owner has died—perhaps killed for the very staff the adventurers hold. It is entirely possible that the original owner is still alive, though, and continues to seek his lost staff. What seems like a fabulous treasure may turn out to be a deadly liability as an evil wizard or lich hunts down the party to retrieve his staff.

A *staff of the magi* could also serve as a badge of office. An arcane college might use the artifact as a symbol of rule for its deans. If the staff were to disappear, the college would not only be devastated, but would also have access to dozens of powerful spellcasters bent on hunting down and recovering the artifact.

The *staff of the magi*'s absorption ability is both extremely useful to its bearer and eventually disastrous. When the staff gains more than 50 charges, it explodes in a devastating blast.



A character unfamiliar with spellcasting might have difficulty judging the number of charges a staff absorbs when blocking a spell—but never absorbing spells means the staff's charges dwindle until it can't cast spells at all. Characters must be cautious about how much of the staff's power they use and how much they replenish.

A villain might search out a *staff of the magi* for any number of reasons. Perhaps he seeks to deliberately break or overcharge the staff (or rather, force one of his minions to do it), hoping the release of energy from the retributive strike will energize some foul ritual, empower a baleful magic item, or perhaps destroy an equally powerful artifact.

Some arcanists claim that a *staff of the magi* crafted in a particular region could hold special powers for natives of that area. Likewise, a *staff of the magi* created by a powerful representative of a particular race or religion could be similarly particular.

## VARIANTS

Along with the archetypal *staff of the magi* presented on page 47, several strange and equally magnificent variants have been uncovered over the years, though most surface only briefly before being lost once more to the collections of powerful wizards and the fog of history. Listed below are just a few variants, all of which are artifacts in their own right. In addition, ambitious wizards attempting to create a *staff of the magi* usually end up crafting a *staff of power* instead. Stories tell of a handful of legendary wizards who grow learned and powerful enough to transform their *staves of power* into *staves of the magi*, but most sages hold these claims to be unsubstantiated.

### MAGI STAFF OF THE DEEP BLACK

**Aura** strong (all schools); **CL** 20th

**Slot** none; **Weight** 5 lbs.

#### DESCRIPTION

This crystalline blue-white staff fell from the sky during a dazzling display of falling stars. Sages believe it was once part of an enormous piece of ice drifting between worlds since the dawn of time, only coming to the world on a quirk of chance. Though as hard as crystal, the staff feels like wet ice, is cold to the touch, and gives the impression of great age. It slowly sinks in fresh or salt water (unlike true ice, which floats), and while it creates a cocoon of ice around itself when submerged, it is only after several hours that this coating is thick enough to cause the staff to bob to the surface. The staff's powers (and the equivalent *staff of the magi* powers they replace) are:

- *ray of frost* (*detect magic*, 0 charges)
- *reduce person* (*enlarge person*, 0 charges)
- *cone of cold* (*fireball*, 1 charge)
- freezing ray (*knock*, functions as *scorching ray* but deals cold damage, 1 charge)
- *water breathing* (*lightning bolt*, 1 charge)

- *fly* (*passwall*, 1 charge)
- *wall of ice* (*wall of fire*, 1 charge)
- *teleport* (*passwall*, 2 charges)
- *time stop* (*monster summoning IX*, 2 charges)

The staff otherwise has the normal powers and abilities of a *staff of the magi*. If it is broken in a retributive strike, the bearer has a 25% chance to be held in stasis somewhere (as *imprisonment*, no saving throw), a 25% chance to be transported to a random plane, and a 50% chance to be utterly destroyed.

#### DESTRUCTION

This item can be destroyed in the same manner as a normal *staff of the magi*. It is also destroyed if consumed by an elder fire elemental or an efreeti, or if cast into an active volcano.

### MAGI STAFF OF THE MAMMOTH

**Aura** strong (all schools); **CL** 20th

**Slot** none; **Weight** 5 lbs.

#### DESCRIPTION

Seven feet of twisted, gnarled spruce carved with primitive runes and icons depicting mammoths, tigers, and hunters form this regal staff. The staff has all the powers of a *staff of the magi* with the following changes:

- *sleet storm* (instead of *fireball*)
- *fog cloud* (instead of *pyrotechnics*)
- *wall of ice* (instead of *wall of fire*)

The staff can also cast *cone of cold* (15d6 damage, Reflex DC 19 half) for a cost of 2 charges. When casting *summon monster IX*, the *staff of the mammoth* always summons 1d4+1 celestial or fiendish mastodons.

#### DESTRUCTION

This item can be destroyed in the same manner as a normal *staff of the magi*.

### MAGI STAFF OF THE NECROMANCER

**Aura** strong (all schools); **CL** 20th

**Slot** none; **Weight** 5 lbs.

#### DESCRIPTION

This long staff of smooth, pale bone is bent in a swaying shape, like a crone's back, and is carved with ancient symbols of death and spirits, with the writing standing out in stark black from a thick paste of human ash rubbed into it. Any good creature who holds or carries the staff gains two permanent negative levels (similar to holding an unholy weapon). The staff's powers (and the equivalent *staff of the magi* powers they replace) are:

- *detect undead* (*detect magic*, 0 charges)
- *disrupt undead* (*enlarge person*, 0 charges)
- *spectral hand* (*knock*, 1 charge)
- *vampiric touch* (*lightning bolt*, 1 charge)
- *animate dead* (*wall of fire*, 1 charge)



- *finger of death* (plane shift, 2 charges)
- *energy drain* (monster summoning IX, 2 charges)

The staff otherwise has the normal powers and abilities of a *staff of the magi*. If broken in a retributive strike, the bearer has a 25% chance to be transported to the Negative Energy Plane, a 50% chance to be transported to a random plane, and a 25% chance to be utterly destroyed. Rumor has it that the staff contains a hollow space to hold a lich's phylactery, though arcane scholars point out that no sane lich would keep his life essence in a magic item that explodes when broken.

**DESTRUCTION**

This item can be destroyed in the same manner as a normal *staff of the magi*. It is also destroyed immediately if a good cleric casts *heal* on the staff while on the Positive Energy Plane.

**MAGI STAFF OF THE SCHOLAR**

**Aura** strong (all schools); **CL** 20th

**Slot** none; **Weight** 5 lbs.

**DESCRIPTION**

This shepherd's crook is formed of alternating bands of ivory and obsidian around a sycamore shaft. Golden runes run the length of the staff, twisting into new configurations as its various powers are used. The *staff of the scholar* has all the powers of a regular *staff of the magi* plus the following abilities: *contact other plane* (2 charges), *legend lore* (2 charges), and *scrying* (2 charges). If the wielder of the *staff of the scholar* uses its retributive strike ability and successfully travels to another plane of existence, he always arrives in the abode of a god of knowledge (though not necessarily a friendly one).

**DESTRUCTION**

This item can be destroyed in the same manner as a normal *staff of the magi*.

**STAVES OF THE MAGI ON GOLARION**

Unsurprisingly, the church of Nethys claims that the god of magic created the first *staff of the magi*. They tell that, from sunrise to sunset on a single day, Nethys crafted the staff and imbued it with utilitarian and protective magic. Once the sun sank below the horizon, Nethys' destructive side took over, and added offensive spells to the item. As dawn approached, both aspects of Nethys' psyche warred over the staff's final power. The destructive aspect created the retributive strike ability that would demolish nearby opponents and destroy the user. At the last second, Nethys' benevolent aspect added a way for the wielder to escape the blast by shifting to another plane, but unfortunately the sun rose completely before Nethys was able to finish the rune.

Thus, the wielder of the staff escapes its retributive strike only half the time.

Whether or not there's any truth to these legends, ancient records suggest that the first verified owner of a *staff of the magi* was an adviser to a god-king in ancient Osirion, nearly 7,000 years ago. With it, the advisor brought storms of fire and ice down on Osirion's enemies and moved about enormous stone blocks to build palaces and statues for the glory of the kingdom. When the god-king's rule ended and the next pharaoh stepped up, the adviser and his staff disappeared from the pages of history. Whether or not these accounts contradict the legend of Nethys creating the first staff remains open to debate, but one possibility is that the stories are directly related. After all, it's widely believed among religious scholars that Nethys began life as a god-king of Osirion, and it's entirely possible that the adviser mentioned in the histories was actually Nethys himself. In this case, the adviser's disappearance is either representative of a period in which he faded from public view while gathering strength and knowledge, or else merely a poet's way of saying that Nethys left his old life behind when he ascended the throne. When dealing with the histories of gods, little is ever certain.

Regardless, another *staff of the magi* resurfaced 500 years later across the sea from Osirion, in modern-day Andoran. There, a sorceress known to history as the Hawthorn Witch battled a nameless necromancer bent on capturing the witch's staff for himself. A fierce battle raged between witch and wizard, blasting holes in the landscape and boiling the sea where it lapped against the land. At last the Hawthorn Witch triumphed, summoning a blazing *wall of flames* to surround her enemy, but the flames sparked a forest fire that devastated the area. To this day, the hawthorn trees in that part of Andoran grow a black moss in patterns of scorch marks. Whether the staff traveled from Osirion to Andoran, or the Hawthorn Witch heard tales from Osirion and crafted her own staff, no one knows.

The first substantiated incidence of two different *staves of the magi* existing occurred 2,000 years later. The Tarrasque, the greatest spawn of Rovagug, terrorized Avistan until it was defeated and sealed away. Reports of the earth-rending battle include stories of a robed figure, identity unconfirmed, using a glowing staff to tear fearsome elementals from the earth and sky. The elementals battered their bodies against the Tarrasque in futile attacks that nevertheless distracted the beast from mortal targets. At the same time, a wizard far across the sea in the decaying Osirian empire compiled





a sheaf of scrolls illustrating and describing the powers of his staff. These simultaneous sightings lead most scholars to conclude that multiple legendary wizards learned how to construct *staves of the magi* by this period, though it's possible that the latter incidence was a reemergence of the Hawthorn Witch's staff.

Brief sightings of *staves of the magi* occurred throughout Golarion over the next 3,000 years. Reports of *staves of the magi*, along with dozens of other minor and major artifacts, still regularly surface in the markets of Katapesh, but few of these stories turn out to hold any truth.

Other tales bear more weight. In one, a circle of diabolists in Cheliox summoned a powerful devil and demanded a *staff of the magi* in return for a depraved sacrifice. The devil produced the artifact but imbued it with the power of attraction. The diabolists fell to fighting over the staff and destroyed each other in a series of arcane explosions. The staff disappeared from the wreckage and supposedly surfaced a hundred years later in the hands of House Thrune. No one knows if Thrune still possesses this *staff of the magi*—or if the story is true at all.

Arazni, the Harlot Queen of Geb, is known for her powerful necromantic abilities and the numerous powerful magic items at her disposal. At times she has been seen with a staff of considerable power: few live to see its glory, but stories arise that the Harlot Queen uses her staff to incinerate those who offend her with black-hued fireballs that explode with deadly cold. Other stories mention the Harlot Queen's ability to walk through stone walls by brandishing a staff before her, and still others indicate her staff can turn corpses into shambling zombies and mindless skeletons. Whether Arazni's staff is a variant *staff of the magi* or a unique magic item remains to be seen.

Quantum, in Nex, houses dozens of arcanists who claim to have owned a *staff of the magi* at one time or another. From the boasting stories of these sages, it would seem that a *staff of the magi* changes hands more often than the wizards change robes. One Arclord who sits on the Council of Three, however, definitively owns a *staff of the magi*, and openly carries it as he travels on business.

Stories occasionally surface about a *staff of the magi* created by a powerful priest of Aroden that bestows heightened intellect and force of personality upon bearers who worship Aroden or are of true Azlanti blood. In Ustalav, peasants tell of a staff created by the Whispering Tyrant, an intelligent artifact that bestows great power on students of necromancy but always seeks a way back to Gallowspire, with unfortunate consequences for its bearers.

## THE STAFF OF ELEMENTAL CASTIGATION

Thousands of years ago, the mightiest of the spawn of Rovagug, the Tarrasque, clawed its way from the Pit of

Gormuz to devour and destroy. Ordinary warriors could not challenge its might; only the most skilled of heroes, backed by divine might, stood a chance of beating back the abomination. Multiple legends survive from that day: fragments, unclear accounts, contradictory tales, and outright fictions. One story that seems to hold a thread of truth, however, tells of a staff used to help drive the Tarrasque into its hidden prison.

The *staff of elemental castigation* seems, by all accounts, to have been a *staff of the magi* with a strong affinity for summoning greater elementals with its *summon monster IX* power. The stories speak of an unknown combatant pulling towering earth elementals and billowing air elementals from the ground and sky to harry and distract the Tarrasque. When the beast seemed on the verge of succumbing to its imprisonment, the staff's bearer snapped its length against the ground. The staff exploded in a torrent of arcane energy that gave an edge to the attackers and contributed significantly to the beast's imprisonment.

Unlike a traditional *staff of the magi*, though, the *staff of elemental castigation* was not consumed in the blast. It reformed, with enchanted strands of air and earth binding together the broken slivers of wood. From time to time, the staff appears in stories and legends across the face of Golarion. Some claim it is the same staff now in House Thrune's possession, while others swear it fell into the Pit of Gormuz and lies near the sleeping beast himself. Arcanists theorize that the staff's powers were only heightened by its destruction and reformation so close to a place of ancient and fearsome magic. Whatever new abilities the *staff of elemental castigation* developed, it seems likely they are related to the elements of air and earth, and possibly have some dark tie to Rovagug's domain.

### STAFF OF ELEMENTAL CASTIGATION

**Aura** strong (all schools); **CL** 20th

**Slot** none; **Weight** 5 lbs.

#### DESCRIPTION

This staff functions as a *staff of the magi*, with several modifications. Its *summon monster IX* power can only summon elementals, and it has the following powers

- *summon monster IV* (elementals only, 1 charge)
- *elemental body IV* (2 charges)
- *planar binding* (elementals only, 2 charges)

Whenever the staff is broken in a retributive strike, it automatically reforms, but can never again be wielded by its previous possessor. A wielder transported to another plane by a retributive strike always appears on an elemental plane, while the staff itself is sent to a different elemental plane moments after reforming.

#### DESTRUCTION

This item can be destroyed by having elementals from all four elemental planes (earth, air, fire, and water) attack it at the same time while it is broken in a retributive strike.



Chapter Nine

## VORPAL SWORD

"CHEATING? WATCH YOUR FOOLISH TONGUE, BOY. I LABORED FOR NEAR HALF A CENTURY TO EARN THE GOLD TO CRAFT THAT BLADE, WHILE YOU WERE STILL TUGGING ON YOUR MOTHER'S BEARD. I FOUGHT PAST COUNTLESS GIANTS OF EVERY DESCRIPTION—AYE, AND WORSE—TO GET TO THE BEAST. AND I LOST SEVERAL GOOD DWARVES DOING IT.

"YES, I TOOK THE DRAGON'S LIFE IN ONE BLOW. 'TIS WHAT THE MAGIC DOES. WHEN YOU CAN STAND BEFORE A DRAGON, BRAVING ITS BITE, AND REMOVE ITS HEAD WITH A SINGLE CHOP, ENCHANTMENT OR NO, THEN YOU CAN CALL ME A CHEAT AND A COWARD. UNTIL THEN, SHUT YOUR MOUTH AND HOLD THE TONGS STEADY."

—THIMKRAN OF THE NOCKED AXE,  
DWARVEN HERO OF THE FIVE KINGS.



**A**nd with a mighty swing, the hero clove the dragon's head from its body. The single stroke that decides the battle is a powerful image; it has lain at the heart of heroic epics since the first bards sang of a warrior's deeds. Whether in the heat of battle or the grim halls of justice, a beheading is an eminently final act, one which captures the imagination with its horror—and potential.

A magical item of legendary power and expense, a *vorpal weapon* removes the head of its target on a natural 20 roll, immediately dispatching most enemies—at least, those that possess heads. While such weapons are rare, when they appear, they are the stuff of legend; most creatures presented with proof of a *vorpal weapon's* nature can and do treat its bearer with the caution and respect he deserves. In the presence of a *vorpal weapon*, a king or demigod may bow to the lowest peasant, for even an apprentice can get lucky with such a potent item. Though technically applicable to any slashing weapon, the *vorpal* property is most commonly placed upon swords—particularly longswords, bastard swords, and greatswords.

The *vorpal* weapon quality is the most costly quality in the game to add to a weapon, and with good reason—the special property of a *vorpal weapon* can come into play during nearly every battle. The ability to end a combat with a single, deadly stroke of the blade is one that many stalwart heroes crave.

The introduction of a *vorpal sword* (or another weapon with this property) into a campaign often gives the game a different feel. No matter how great the foe or dangerous the task, the group has a chance of felling the villain or monstrous beast and saving the day. All it takes is a bit of luck, and the day is won. However, that chance is often wasted on lesser minions of the true foe, but such is the risk of so powerful a weapon: it often slays those nearest to it, rather than those most in need of killing. *Vorpal swords* aren't the sort of item that anyone parts with easily, and a player looking to wield such a powerful weapon might take the harrowing step of going toe-to-toe with its current owner.

The *vorpal sword* is a terrifying tool of death and destruction. Little wonder, then, that everyone seems to want one.

## BASE ITEM

Rather than being a specific magic item, the *vorpal weapon* property is instead a trait that can be applied to any slashing melee weapon. This potent and feared ability allows the weapon to sever the heads of those it strikes. Upon a roll of natural 20 (followed by a successful roll to confirm the critical hit), the weapon severs the opponent's head (if it has one) from its body. Some creatures, such as many aberrations and all oozes, have no heads. Others, such as golems and undead creatures other than vampires, are not affected by the loss of their heads. Most other creatures, however, die

## POETRY IN MOTION

The *vorpal sword* owes its existence to the poem “Jabberwocky,” by Lewis Carroll. The nonsense poem appears in *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*. Although only 28 lines long, the middle 12 lines of the poem give us the form, function, and power of the most expensive of weapon enhancements:

*He took his vorpal sword in hand:  
Long time the manxome foe he sought—  
So rested he by the Tumtum tree,  
And stood awhile in thought.*

*And, as in uffish thought he stood,  
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,  
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,  
And burbled as it came!*

*One, two! One, two! And through and through  
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!  
He left it dead, and with its head  
He went galumphing back.*

In the poem, a single hero faces off against a fearsome, legendary monster and fells the beast by removing its head with a few well-timed strokes of his blade. Although it won't always be the weapon that scores the killing blow in a dramatic victory, the chance for a *vorpal sword* to do so—and the anticipation around the gaming table each time a character with a *vorpal weapon* strikes—often pays off in unexpected ways.

when their heads are cut off. A *vorpal weapon* must be a slashing melee weapon. If you roll this property randomly for an inappropriate weapon, reroll.

Strong necromancy and transmutation; CL 18th; Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *circle of death*, *keen edge*; Price +5 bonus.

## UTILITY

A *vorpal sword* has—on average—a 20% chance of threatening to behead a target every time it's swung. That chance of instant death by decapitation is not as straightforward as it seems, however. An attacker must first confirm a critical hit, which is not always an easy affair; oftentimes, when dealing with especially dangerous foes, the natural 20 necessary to activate the *vorpal* property is only one or two higher than the roll needed to hit the target in the first place. The target might also not be greatly hampered by the loss of its head or might not even have a head to begin with. While chopping the head off a golem or rolling a 20 against a gelatinous cube is certainly



satisfying, the *vorpal weapon* provides no additional benefit against such foes.

A *vorpal sword* can also prove to be its own worst enemy. Because of the expense of the vorpal property, such weapons cost a minimum of 36,000 gp to craft (based on the 72,000 gp base price for a +6 *weapon*). A character must be at least 11th level to cast *circle of death*, a prerequisite spell for the property. These facts essentially mean that a character should not expect to see a *vorpal sword*, even on a +1 *weapon*, until 11th level at the earliest—and that assumes an almost total investment in acquiring one. The high cost of the property necessitates a lower enhancement bonus, reducing the chance of regular hits, lowering damage, and jeopardizing the ability to confirm criticals and thus successfully behead opponents.

In spite of these potential drawbacks, the *vorpal sword* remains popular due to its ability to end combats swiftly. Battles that might otherwise have been risky encounters can turn into dramatic victories with just one swing of the sword. A fight that is going poorly for the players might suddenly turn into a heroic rally with a well-timed beheading.

Because of the way in which the *vorpal* property works, the wielders of *vorpal weapons* tend to focus on feats and abilities that feed and enhance their chosen weapon. The Critical Mastery feat is always a popular choice among such characters, as it helps improve the chances of confirming critical hits. Weapon Focus and (for fighters) Weapon Specialization (as well as the Greater versions of both feats) also help characters with *vorpal weapons* make up for the lack of a higher enhancement bonus on their weapons. *Vorpal weapon-wielding* fighters gravitate toward specialization in their chosen weapon type and tend to continue improving their primary weapon rather than replacing them.

*Vorpal weapons* are best employed against enemies with damage reduction, high hit point totals, and energy resistances. Against such opponents, a *vorpal sword* is an unmatched equalizer—if a character manages to roll that all-important natural 20. Conversely, amorphous monsters, constructs, oozes, swarms, and undead (except for vampires) have natural resistances to the killing effect of a *vorpal weapon*, and large numbers of weaker monsters have far less to fear from the wielder of a *vorpal sword*. The bearer of a *vorpal sword* might go toe-to-toe with a dragon and win in the first round, but a pack of frantically stabbing kobolds might lay him low all the same.

## RULES REMINDERS

A natural 20, regardless of the target or the weapon used, is always a critical threat. Don't forget that a creature who won't

necessarily be killed by the removal of its head probably still takes extra damage from the critical hit. Despite the use of *circle of death* to imbue a weapon with the *vorpal* property, this weapon property is not a death effect, and resistance or immunity to such effects does not apply to the decapitation caused by these weapons.

## RELATED ITEMS

Despite the overwhelming power of a *vorpal weapon*, there are a number of other item properties that interact with the *vorpal weapon* quality in interesting ways.

Many creators place the *keen* weapon quality on their *vorpal weapons*. Although this does nothing to increase the likelihood of beheading a target—the *vorpal* property activates only on a roll of 20, not a critical hit—it still expands the threat range of the weapon, making it possible to do additional damage whether or not the wielder manages to slay her target in a single swing.

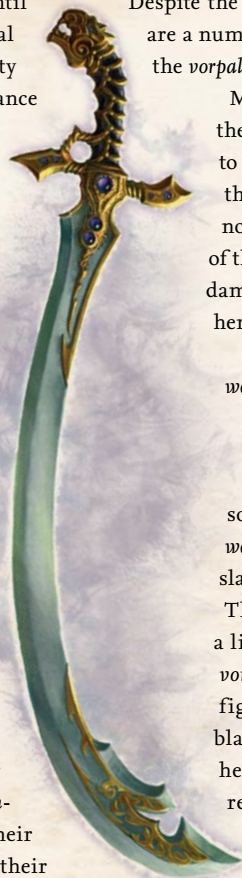
Likewise, some crafters make *vorpal wounding weapons*, seeking to deal more punishment to foes who survive the killing strike. Although the magic to create the two properties is not similar, the *wounding* weapon quality is sometimes seen as a weaker cousin of the *vorpal weapon*, bleeding out the target rather than slaying a foe outright.

The removal of a monster's head isn't always a life-ending prospect; hordes of trolls slain by *vorpal weapons* have been known to continue fighting because the wielder of the terrible blade did not appropriately dispatch their heads. In such cases, the beheaded target is reduced to a number of negative hit points equal to its Constitution, from which it can begin regenerating naturally. Some crafters add the *flaming* or *flaming burst* qualities to the *vorpal weapons* they forge expressly for these situations—if a regenerating creature has its ability to heal negated by the beheading blow, there is no risk of its return.

It bears mentioning that even *vorpal weapons* can be guarded against. Wearing armor with the *fortification* property makes it harder to confirm the critical hit of a *vorpal weapon*. Since the *vorpal* property depends on a confirmed critical threat to activate, the *fortification* property greatly reduces the chances of being slain by a *vorpal blade*.

## CAMPAIGN ROLE

A *vorpal weapon* isn't merely a toy PCs can create and hand off to their biggest, most-accurate warrior in the hopes that he will hew the heads from their enemies (although that model works). It's also a powerful storytelling tool, a reward worthy





of an entire campaign's efforts, and a banner that speaks loudly about the nature of its wielder.

A hero bearing a *vorpal weapon* may be strong and brave, but he is also obviously unafraid of gore and fully willing to wade into battle and end a life, suddenly and finally. That willingness leads some to believe that the wielders of *vorpal weapons* are angry brutes at best, and possibly even bloodthirsty maniacs. At the very least, such “one-hit wonders” may be difficult for other adventurers to work with because they see themselves as the stars and ignore sound battle tactics in favor of gambling everyone's lives on a chance at quick kill. Whereas many heroes gain their reputations on the basis of the threats they have defended the common folk against, carrying a *vorpal weapon* often results in an adventurer being known mainly for the spectacularly brutal way in which he dispatches his enemies. The weapon can even sometimes take center stage, relegating its wielder to a supporting role in local legends.

As a GM, be careful not to allow a player with a *vorpal weapon* to overshadow the rest of the group. Although it's important to place threats in front of the party that allow the *vorpal*-wielder to shine—and consistently pitting them against foes immune to *vorpal* strikes may leave players feeling cheated—it's also crucial to make sure that you tailor opponents to keep a single weapon from stealing the thunder of all the other characters in the game. The simplest way is to trade in a few powerful enemies for a horde of less powerful ones, so that other party members can deal with their own opponents while the fighter decapitates creature after creature with his *vorpal sword*, but there's also nothing wrong with including creatures unaffected by beheading (such as golems or oozes) or which require multiple decapitations (such as ettins and hydras).

### IGNOBLE INTENT

Just as heroes can bear weapons of immense power, so too can their enemies. In the hands of a villain, particularly one you're setting the PCs up to face, a *vorpal weapon* becomes a very dangerous thing. Tales of a vicious tyrant, a slightly insane priest, or a misguided avenger who tears the heads from his opponents can and should strike fear into the heart of even the bravest player. Perhaps more than any other ability, a *vorpal weapon* can suddenly alter the course of a PC's adventuring career—by ending it.

Keep in mind the NPC wealth guidelines from chapter 14 of the *Pathfinder RPG Core Rulebook*. A *vorpal weapon* costs a minimum of 72,000 gp, which means that heroic-level NPCs walking around with that sort of offensive equipment are at least 17th level. By that point, the players should be sturdy

heroes in their own rights, with more conventional magical weapons that may be just as powerful and more consistent in their effects.

Equipping a villain with a *vorpal weapon* shouldn't be done casually. Unless you plan for the PCs to flee—a ploy that often backfires with heroic adventurers—an encounter with a *vorpal*-equipped NPC means that you've got to be prepared for two potentially game changing outcomes: the PCs gaining a *vorpal sword*, and character death. The latter is especially important to consider, as unlike other encounters with foes who can beat characters to within an inch of their lives and still leave them standing or easily healed, a *vorpal* encounter is an all-or-nothing venture. For the former, remember that not all villains that possess *vorpal weapons* are classed NPCs. The balor wields both a *vorpal sword* and a *vorpal whip*, and it has the benefit of carrying these weapons without fear of passing them on to the players.

### HEAD GAMES

All manner of beings might possess *vorpal weapons*, but not all are bloodthirsty killers or beast-slaying heroes. The removal of an enemy's head is not only a swift way to end a disagreement, but can also be used to great dramatic effect. Consider the tradition in Irish and British poetry of the beheading game: a contest in which the honor and bravery of a hero is tested by a supernaturally empowered foe that has already endured a beheading of his own. The tale of Bricriu's Feast in the Ulster Cycle and the more famous “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight” are prime examples of such stories.

It might seem like an impossible feat to get players to agree to such a thing, but the greatest of heroes might be asked to accept a beheading blow in order to overcome a great obstacle or to placate a powerful antagonist whom the PCs can't yet face in combat. Perhaps, like Gawain, they have a token or magic item that protects them from genuine harm. Or perhaps, like Cú Chulainn in the Ulster Cycle, the hero's bravery (when others balk at the task) is enough to win them mercy from the attacker.

### VARIANTS

Several kinds of *vorpal weapons* exist in the world, but there are also those crafters that have altered the magic to create weapons that duplicate—or very nearly duplicate—the quality's effects. It should also be noted that in many cases, what appears to be a *vorpal sword* might not be as powerful as it seems. While tales abound of powerful warriors casually severing the heads of enemies by the score, many of these stories have nothing at all to do with *vorpal weapons* but rather merely emphasize the savagery of the subjects of the tales.



**EXECUTIONER'S HAND**

**Aura** strong necromancy and transmutation; **CL** 18th  
**Slot** none; **Price** 75,000 gp; **Weight** 8 lbs.

**DESCRIPTION**

This +3 *adamantine greatsword* is designed with a single purpose: to bring swift death to those tried and found guilty before the law. When wielded in a coup de grace attempt against a helpless target, the *executioner's hand* is treated as a *vorpal weapon*, and if the attack is a critical threat, it is automatically confirmed as a critical hit.

**CONSTRUCTION**

**Requirements** Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *circle of death, keen edge*; **Cost** 39,000 gp

**FROSTKISS WHIP**

**Aura** strong necromancy and transmutation; **CL** 18th  
**Slot** none; **Price** 128,300 gp; **Weight** 2 lbs.

**DESCRIPTION**

Ice covers the lash of this +1 *frost vorpal whip*. A *frostkiss whip* deals damage as though it were one size category larger (1d3 for a Small whip, 1d4 for a Medium whip, and so on). In addition, on command a *frostkiss whip* deals lethal damage instead of nonlethal damage, and it can deal damage even against creatures with armor bonuses greater than +1 or natural armor bonuses higher than +3.

**CONSTRUCTION**

**Requirements** Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *chill metal* or *ice storm*; *horrid wilting, keen edge*; **Cost** 64,300 gp

**VORPAL SWORDS ON GOLARION**

*Vorpal weapons* have existed on Golarion for untold centuries. Some sages argue over the reason for and region of their invention—and whether, in fact, they even began as swords at all—but most agree that the *vorpal* ability was devised to help slay the worst natural beasts in the world. The debate then descends into conjecture as to the nature of the monsters slain; whether it was for survival, glory, or justice; and other matters more trivial than the power of the item itself.

What is certain is that the *vorpal* property is rare. Although its usefulness is valued by most societies on Golarion, the cost of constructing such a weapon makes it prohibitive for many would-be wielders.

Race informs some individuals' ideas of *vorpal swords*. Elves often find the use of *vorpal weapons* to be without skill or art; they prefer subtler, more elegant weapons (though they may lose this distaste when faced with an overwhelming foe).

Gnomes are sometimes fascinated by the randomness and artistic merits of the head-severing quality, while humans, halflings, dwarves, and other races often take a more practical approach, viewing such weapons as good or evil depending on whose side is employing one.

In Chelixa and Taldor, as well as many of those two empires' former holdings (Andoran being the primary exception), a *vorpal weapon* is an expedient means of eliminating an enemy, whether it be in battle, by execution, or by gruesome assassination. It was a Taldan mage who

crafted the first *executioner's hand* for use in public beheadings of criminals in Oppara. Similar magic has since been adopted by Kelishite wizards, who craft a similar weapon known as the *Emperor's edge*. The most legendary, wealthiest, and most powerful of Qadiran dervishes are said to wield +1 *flaming holy keen vorpal scimitars* in battle, prepared to offer Sarenrae's divine flame in purification for any who need it.

Not all organizations and cultures see the powers of *vorpal weapons* as desirable. The Aldori dueling masters of Brevoy and the River Kingdoms, for instance, see the use of *vorpal weapons* in personal duels as crude and unworthy, while the Eagle Knights of Andoran shun their use almost entirely. Perhaps the place of greatest debate over the use of *vorpal weapons* is in the Lands of the Linnorm Kings. Some few outspoken individuals among the Ulfen there claim that the use of such magic should be banned from the hands

of princes seeking linnorm heads to prove their worthiness to rule, despite credible evidence that *vorpal weapons* have been employed by past heroes (see *Crumnir the Wurm-Eater*). Such outcries are generally given little credence, however, as detractors often point out that those who advocate such a ban are rarely brave enough to venture forth and slay a linnorm themselves.

Swords are not the only *vorpal weapons* on Golarion—other slashing *vorpal weapons* are nearly as common. The bladed scarf, the urumi, and the temple sword are all ideal candidates for use as *vorpal weapons*, and though the elven curved blade sees such enchantments less often, elves going up against particularly powerful foes (such as the demon Treerazer's minions in Tanglebriar) are rumored to have at least one such blade in their arsenal. Golarion's goblins have thus far lacked the magical skill to conceive of a *vorpal dogslicer*, and most common folk pray that no one gives them the idea.

Among the various faiths of Avistan and Garund, the deities whose followers seem to most favor wielding *vorpal*





weapons over other magic items most are Sarenrae, Gorum, Rovagug, and Urgathoa. The last of this group sometimes engages in a ritual known as the Reaping. In preparation, a cleric prepares *word of recall* on himself before donning a gray robe, taking up a +1 *unholy vorpal scythe*, and heading out into the world to wreak as much destruction as possible before he must call himself back to his sanctuary. Such rituals, the faithful believe, are a test from the Pallid Princess, who shows her favor by offering some boon to those who please her with their service. In *vorpal swords*, Sarenrae's faithful see an opportunity for a quick and decisive end to any conflict, thereby preventing as much suffering as possible for both the combatants and the innocent bystanders. As a result, many worshipers of the Dawnflower refer to the *vorpal sword* as the most merciful of weapons. Followers of Gorum are less philosophical about the weapons' effects, focusing instead on the sword's incredible potential for carnage. Most see *vorpal greatswords* as holy relics and signs of Our Lord in Iron's favor; as such, they rarely craft or commission the creation of such weapons, instead preferring to seek out and defeat current (especially heretical) wielders so that they can display valor and piety in claiming the weapon for their god. A warrior-priest of Gorum, girded in spiked *fortification* armor and wielding a *vorpal greatsword* as he chants hymns to his god, is among the most fearful sights a soldier can witness on the battlefield. Followers of Rovagug, of course, adore *vorpal weapons* for the chaotic destruction they can cause, far out of proportion to the skills of their wielder.

## CRUNMÍR THE WURM-EATER

Ulfen skalds often sing of *Crunmír the Wurm-Eater*. Though none living claim to have ever seen the weapon, it appears often in legends of lost princes who sought the powerful axe in the hope that its magic would be useful in killing an especially horrific linnorm and claiming their throne. Such tales nearly always end in the death of the hero and the loss of *Crunmír*, with the hope that another, more worthy prince will someday claim the axe on his way to assuming a throne among the Linnorm Kings.

*Crunmír* is a +2 *keen* returning throwing *vorpal greataxe*. In the most recent of the tales, a disgraced prince named Storjorn earns *Crunmír* by treating with a sea hag while stranded on a small island, after his ship and men were lost to the crushing waves. He returns from across the sea and seeks to fulfill his part of the bargain: for his freedom and the magical axe, he must hunt down and slay the linnorm that has tormented the hag. With a mighty hurl of *Crunmír*, Storjorn kills the beast, but he is crushed beneath the weight of the linnorm's falling corpse. Storjorn, *Crunmír*, and the head of the linnorm might rest there still, in some lost and forgotten bog, waiting for a worthy hero to claim the axe and the legacy it carries.

## BUT WHY A SWORD?

The fact that the *vorpal* quality is drawn from a literary sword is one reason that most *vorpal weapons* are swords, but there are other, more practical reasons as well.

The first is that *vorpal weapons* tend to be larger, heavier weapons; although it's possible to have a *vorpal sickle* or *handaxe*—and standard damage doesn't matter as much when compared to the *vorpal* weapon quality—these aren't typical of characters that are primarily front-line fighters, who tend to be the characters most interested in beheading opponents with a single stroke.

The second reason is that the majority of martial and exotic slashing weapons fall into one of two categories: swords and axes. Axes, while they do just as much damage as swords, have larger critical multipliers to account for smaller critical threat ranges. Most axes threaten a critical only on a roll of 20—the same roll on which a *vorpal axe* would otherwise behead a target—negating the primary advantage of choosing an axe over a sword.

## JORNGARL'S HARM

Perhaps the strangest *vorpal* weapon in Golarion is *Jorngarl's Harm*, a terrible, heavy weapon wielded by a canny frost giant of the Fog Peaks named Bjarlsfarn the Bloody. The weapon once was one of the *final blades* of Galt, a chipped and pitted killer called "Toothy Morris." Giants stole the blade while the Gray Gardeners were transporting it from Edme to Isarn, and a frost giant *seid* (runic sorcerer) named Jorngarl bound the murderous slab of steel onto an adamantine haft, creating an awkward-looking yet effective weapon with a fondness for heads.

Bjarlsfarn the Bloody has led raids into Galt and Taldor, murdering commoners and would-be heroes alike, including several Gray Gardeners hoping to reclaim "Toothy Morris" and the mercenaries they'd hired for that task.

### JORNGARL'S HARM

**Aura** strong necromancy [evil] and transmutation; **CL** 18th  
**Slot** none; **Price** 150,320 gp; **Weight** 24 lb.

#### DESCRIPTION

This Large +2 *keen* *vorpal greataxe* has an adamantine haft and a chipped, pitted guillotine blade instead of a curved axe-head. Obviously made for a giant's hands, the axe laughs evilly whenever it kills. Like the *final blades* of Galt, any creature killed by it (whether from decapitation or simple damage) finds its soul trapped within the blade, and it cannot be raised from the dead while so trapped. Presumably the Gray Gardeners would know how to release a soul from the blade.

#### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Magic Arms and Armor, *circle of death*, *enervation*, *keen edge*; Cost 75,320 gp



Chapter Ten

## WELL OF MANY WORLDS

"OH, THE WELL IS A DELIGHTFUL ITEM, TO BE SURE, BUT ITS UTILITY DEPENDS ENTIRELY ON THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE PERSON USING IT—AUDACITY, INGENUITY, AND ALL THOSE OTHER LOVELY MORTAL TRAITS. LIKE A PROTEAN'S WHIMSY, EVERY USE OF THE WELL IS A NEW ROLL OF THE DICE. YOU MIGHT FIND YOURSELF WITH A PORTAL TO THE PARADISE OF NIRVANA, TO A DEAD WORLD ON THE MATERIAL PLANE, OR TO THE VERY DEPTHS OF HELL ITSELF. OF COURSE, YOU CAN KEEP RECORDS OF WHICH POINT LEADS TO WHICH DESTINATION, BUT WHERE'S THE FUN IN THAT? AS WITH SO MANY THINGS IN LIFE, THOSE WHO DARE, WIN—EXCEPT WHEN THEY DON'T.

"BUT RIGHT NOW, YOU'RE NOT ON JUST ANY WORLD. YOU'RE HERE IN MINE, AND YOU WON'T BE LEAVING UNTIL WE'VE HAD A LITTLE CHAT. PLEASE, TAKE A SEAT."

—TEGRESIN, THE LAUGHING FIEND



Among the most powerful of magical items fashioned by mortal hands, the *well of many worlds* is also one of the most understated in appearance, hiding the wonders of the planes themselves within a mundane piece of folded cloth. When unfolded, all pretense of normality shatters as the well's two-dimensional fabric transforms into a yawning portal. Far from opening into a simple extradimensional pocket, the well opens instead to a random place on one of the many planes of existence.

Like a true door, a *well of many worlds* opens both ways. While the well promises its users ready and immediate access to vistas both bizarre and distant, it offers the very same to those on the other side. This wondrous egress also comes with one poignant restriction: each time the well is moved to a new physical location, it opens to a new planar location. Placed on one side of a room, a well might open a portal to the beatific wilds of Elysium, while on the far side it opens a portal to the destructive, infinite vacuum of the Negative Energy Plane. Many have tried to catalogue the sites these items visit, but the infinity of perils that may be encountered when traveling through a *well of many worlds* generally causes such endeavors to meet tragic ends before long.

## BASE ITEM

Below are the statistics for a standard *well of many worlds*, as presented in the *Pathfinder RPG Core Rulebook*.

### WELL OF MANY WORLDS

**Aura** strong conjuration; **CL** 17th

**Slot** none; **Price** 82,000 gp; **Weight** —

#### DESCRIPTION

This strange, interdimensional device looks just like a *portable hole*. Anything placed within it is immediately cast to another world—a parallel world, another planet, or a different plane (chosen randomly). If the well is moved, it opens to a new plane (also randomly determined). It can be picked up, folded, or rolled, just as a portable hole can be. Objects from the world the well touches can come through the opening just as easily—it is a two-way portal.

#### CONSTRUCTION

**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *gate*; **Cost** 41,000 gp

## UTILITY

In practical terms, the *well of many worlds* allows its user unlimited use of the *gate* spell, but unlike the spell, once opened, the well's portal remains open indefinitely unless the well is picked up and folded back into its inactive form as a swatch of cloth. And unlike a *gate* spell, the user has no direct control over the well's destination—only the well's placement can change it.

At first glance, the well's indefinite duration seems like a huge boon—not only does the spellcaster not have to prepare a high-level spell slot, but the portal also created also lasts as long as it needs to. Yet an actual *gate* spell provides its caster

the ability to choose a specific plane, and even the location on that plane it connects to. Additionally, while the spell can call specific creatures or types of creatures through a gate, the well has no such capacity. It simply creates a portal. This impartiality on the well's part—allowing entrance to beings on either side of the doorway, regardless of intent or nature—is perhaps the well's most dangerous quality.

For those interested in planar travel, the *well of many worlds* provides a ready means, though presuming some patience and the knowledge that creatures on the other side might not be pleasant. This might not matter to the desperate—a rogue pursued by a legion of fanatical zealots, hell-bent on escaping with a religious relic stolen from an unholy temple, might not care where he ends up, so long as it's far from his pursuers. Many planes reachable through the well would be safe, after all, and still others might allow a sudden visitor the chance to bargain with the natives. And of course, if the first attempt opens into an inhospitable vista, it doesn't take long to place the well 5 feet to the left and try again.

A *well of many worlds* can easily outlive its owners, and a portal left open and abandoned can have substantial effects as a distant plane's natives progressively exert their influence. An abandoned well connected to the Elemental Plane of Water could unleash marids or elementals intent on flooding a valley or bringing an oasis to a parched desert. (Indeed, an entire desert nation might owe its survival to such a well, whether it knows of the item or not). Similarly, a well connecting to the fertile plane of Elysium might cause health and plenty to slowly spread outward if Elysium's natives take it upon themselves to watch over the people in the surrounding lands or act as a subtle influence on their mores and way of life, inspiring their artisans and guiding their rulers. Of course, other planes' denizens might be less subtle or decidedly less benevolent.

The biggest drawback to the *well of many worlds* is that while the portal it creates is two-way, in most cases the physical magic item that creates the dimensional aperture exists only on the side where the portal was created. Thus, only a creature on the originating side can close or move the well—and anyone using it as an emergency escape portal has to leave it behind, risking someone else closing or taking it. This is why most long-term users of a well use it only in a fortified location guarded by many allies. A few wells, however, do allow a creature to close or move them from either side; these are especially treasured by planar travelers, as even in the most dire circumstances you can use the well and then bring the item with you, repeating this process until you arrive at a safe place. Of course, some of these truly portable wells actually suffer damage every time a user pulls them through from the “wrong” side, leading to erratic functionality, temporal distortion (someone using the portal may arrive seconds, minutes, hours, or even days earlier or later than another person who goes through before them), travel to parallel realities that resemble the apparent destination, harm to those using the portal, or the eventual cessation of function.

One thing to keep in mind when introducing a well of many worlds to a campaign is that it opens the doors to easy planar travel. If the item is a standard well and the PCs can't bring it with them, they still have easy access to many planes, allowing the GM to create planar adventures keyed to specific locations in the PC's stronghold, church, or favorite inn, in which the PCs travel to the destination plane and return home afterward. If the GM allows the PCs to bring their well with them after they travel, she must be prepared for frequent plane-hopping, as the PCs can easily get away from any threat or awkward situation, bringing their portal-creating item with them and jumping from dimension to dimension until they find something to their liking (however, this does open up the possibility of an interdimensional threat trying to track the PCs in their travels or even strike at the PCs through the well itself).

## RELATED ITEMS

A *well of many worlds* resembles a *portable hole* in terms of its physical dimensions and use, and a *gate* spell or any number of magical planar transportation devices with regard to function. Nevertheless, the unique interactions with the underlying realities involved in determining where a given location's portal opens sets it apart—a *well of many worlds* is not truly an artifact, but rather an item in a category all its own.

## CAMPAIGN ROLE

The rules of the game itself normally present a barrier against planar travel, with planar travel spells only becoming available at higher level. Unless a GM provides some other method of travel to the planes, such as a natural portal or an NPC capable of casting spells like *gate*, the planes remain inaccessible. The *well of many worlds* changes all that.

A *well of many worlds* provides immense utility, both to the players and to GMs interested in taking their game off-world. Despite its danger, the well allows PCs to travel the planes at will, potentially before they can easily survive on many planes. The well can also be a danger to GMs, since a carefully crafted metaplot on the Material Plane can suddenly vanish if the PCs go gallivanting across the planes. The planes are

incredibly vast and contain dangers and rewards radically different from those normally found on the Material Plane, so a GM who gives his players access to a *well of many worlds* should be well prepared. The PCs are likely to immediately head off in a new and alien direction or modify the current campaign in unexpected ways. For instance, PCs engaged in a campaign against demons might use their well to open a portal to a good or lawful plane. Along with buying equipment and magic especially suited to fighting demons, they might also recruit powerful allies. Suddenly a GM could find his carefully planned encounters and plotlines disrupted by archons, axiomites, or devils fighting alongside the PCs against their common enemy.

A villain in possession of a *well of many worlds* gains many of the same benefits, and her potential access to resources beyond her normal reach has major implications for their PC opponents. A cleric of Asmodeus might normally command a number of lower-ranking clergy, temple guardians, various worshipers, and perhaps a minor devil such as an imp. Such a cleric of the God-Fiend would usually lack the ability to call forth greater devils and bend them to her will, but if she founded her temple above a portal to a layer of Hell provided by a *well of many worlds*, that changes. Imagine a paladin's surprise upon bursting into the sanctuary, expecting the cleric and several warriors, only to find them flanked by a pair of bone devils. Beyond providing infernal muscle for campaign villains, a *well of many worlds* might eventually outstrip its original owner's capacity to control and regulate it, allowing a pit fiend or worse to establish a domain on the Material Plane.

Just as PCs could use a well to evade pursuit by enemies incapable of reaching them (or even finding them) across planar boundaries, villains could do the same. This can allow a campaign villain to escape PC-mediated justice, only to return later in the game, strengthened and emboldened by his travels across the planes.

## VARIANTS

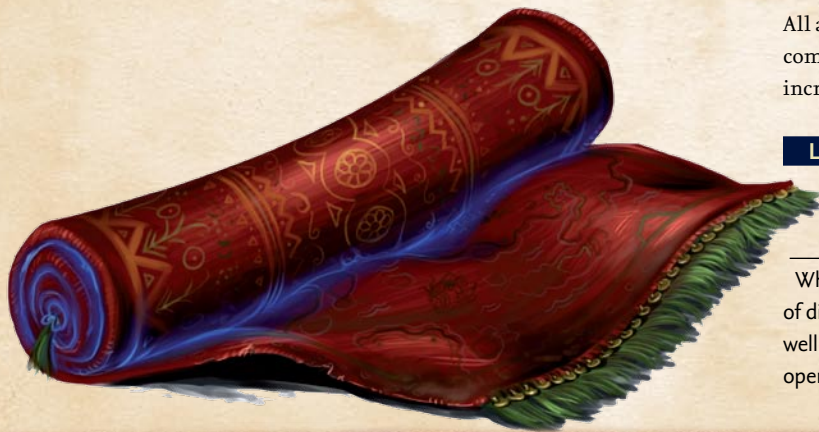
Over the years, intrepid spellcasters unsatisfied with the unpredictability and limited utility of the *well of many worlds* have come up with a number of variants on the classic item. All are far rarer than the standard well—which is itself hardly common—but in the right hands, such items can prove incredibly useful.

### LIAR'S WELL

**Aura** strong conjuration; **CL** 17th  
**Slot** none; **Price** 84,250 gp; **Weight** —

#### DESCRIPTION

When opened, this cursed *well of many worlds* has a 50% chance of displaying a false image of its destination. For example, the well may appear to open onto the plane of Axis while in reality opening onto a layer of the Abyss, though the difference is not





always to the user's detriment. Any creatures emerging from the other side are not subject to the illusion. The false image is defeated by a *true seeing* spell.

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**CONSTRUCTION**


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**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *gate*, *mirage arcana*; **Cost** 42,125 gp

**SHADOW WELL**

**Aura** strong conjuration; **CL** 17th

**Slot** none; **Price** 82,000 gp; **Weight** —

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**DESCRIPTION**


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Rather than opening to random locations across the planes, the *shadow well* opens only to random locations on the Shadow Plane (or random locations on the Material Plane when on the Shadow Plane). Regardless of which plane the user opens the well from, there is a 15% chance it randomly diverts the user into the Ethereal Plane, given its nature as a natural buffer between the two realities.

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**CONSTRUCTION**


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**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *gate*, *shadow walk*; **Cost** 41,000 gp

**WELL OF STARS**

**Aura** strong conjuration; **CL** 17th

**Slot** none; **Price** 60,000 gp; **Weight** —

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**DESCRIPTION**


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Rather than opening to locations on different planes, this well instead opens to worlds on the Material Plane. It does not, however, necessarily open to worlds with similar environments to that of its user; hence it can pose much the same danger as the traditional well in terms of both the unpredictable environs of the destination and the alien beings that might step through from the other side.

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**CONSTRUCTION**


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**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *gate*; **Cost** 30,000 gp

**WELL OF THE WELCOME RESPITE**

**Aura** strong conjuration; **CL** 17th

**Slot** none; **Price** 122,000 gp; **Weight** —

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**DESCRIPTION**


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While normally functioning as a standard *well of many worlds*, this well possesses a command word that supersedes its normal placement-based destination, and it instead opens up onto a single location designated by its maker during the well's creation (often the creator's home or a private, warded demiplane). Those finding the well are not immediately aware of this command word unless a spell more powerful than a simple *identify* spell is used, and the well's secret destination, whatever it might be, may or may not still be occupied.

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**CONSTRUCTION**


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**Requirements** Craft Wondrous Item, *gate*, *mage's magnificent mansion*; **Cost** 61,000 gp



## WELLS OF MANY WORLDS ON GOLARION

The first recorded creation of a *well of many worlds* comes from the writings of a Nexian scribe in the year -401 AR, though its maker liberally references their prior existence. Of those already in use, he holds that the majority are of extraplanar origin, though he also claims awareness of wells created by the ancient Shory and at least one from Tian-Xia that made its way west through various hands across Casmaron. Over centuries, awareness of the wells' manufacture spread throughout most of Garund and Avistan, until today, when most powerful wizards know of their existence—though wells remain powerful and dangerous tools whose manufacture is rarely attempted by any but masters of the magical arts.

While many have used wells in various pursuits, legends tend to form like pearls around illicit and flashy truths. Most tales of a well's use are of adventures and catastrophic disasters. Some of the best known of such tales concern **Nisha Starweather** (CG female tiefling wizard 3/rogue 12), a tiefling from the planar city of Galisemni who "liberated" the fortunes of wealthy diabolists in Chelixa for just over a decade. Starweather evaded capture in grand fashion, intentionally letting herself be discovered each time after snatching some interesting bauble, then slapping down a *well of many worlds* in mid-pursuit, blindly leaping through, and pulling it shut after herself. Once the thefts stopped, the official line from Chelish authorities was that she was presumed dead after having leapt through her well directly into a magma flow on the Elemental Plane of Fire. Many believe she survived and simply moved on to another world with different targets. On occasion, former victims still discover objects stolen from more recent targets left ostentatiously inside their homes, sitting in plain view, often decorated with colorful bows and bearing illusory calling cards.

Other less glamorous (though some might say saner) individuals use wells in a more judicious manner. For several centuries, rumors have circulated in southern Avistan of a dwarven merchant house in the Menador Mountains that uses multiple wells to maintain stable portals to other planes. With several wizards in the house's employ, members of the merchant family managed to safely experiment until they found suitable planar locations they could exploit for trade or importing raw materials (worked metal from Axis, timber from the maelstrom borderlands of Elysium, and gems and ore from the Plane of Earth). Of course, the house's actions have been relatively low-level, both to keep peace with the planar natives beyond the portals and to prevent rivals on Golarion from seizing the portals for themselves.

Attempts to utilize wells for planar trade don't always succeed, however. In 4038 AR, a dwarven merchant clan below the Fog Peaks of northern Taldor attempted to use the same tactic, hoping to create a stable portal to the Plane of Earth or Axis. After a decade of exploiting a connection to an efreeti city on the Plane of Fire, their second attempt to establish a portal led to disaster. When they opened a portal to the lower reaches of the Abyss, the well inundated the dwarves' entire city with demons. In the last minutes of their rule, the leaders of the city pulled down the ceilings of their entrance tunnels, locking the demons within the majestic caverns that became the dwarf lords' tomb. Today, the ruins of silent Mistholme remain, along with all of its wealth and the original well that led to the inhabitants' demise. No one knows if, deprived of further entertainment, the demons that destroyed the city have remained, but thus far few have been foolhardy or greedy enough to check for themselves.

As with the example of Mistholme, not all uses of a well lead to fortune. History records dozens of instances of planar breaches from Golarion to hostile outer planes. Of these rifts, many are the result of an unfortunate placing of a *well of many worlds*. A string of such events between 4508 AR and 4527 AR in Oppara was the result of a single cursed *liar's well* that was repeatedly gifted and later reclaimed by Illemar Garmin, a wizard seeking to kill or maim the students of his former teacher. Given their nature, these cursed wells change hands frequently, typically leading to misfortune. And then there are wells with minds of their own, rumored to be cursed above and beyond the standard definition of a *liar's well*, twisted by proteans or possessed by fiends.

## RESEARCHING LOCATIONS

According to some legends, the location onto which a *well of many worlds* opens when set down in a particular spot is random. This is false. In fact, as many adventurers in possession of wells have verified, a well placed in a given location always opens onto the same extraplanar location, no matter how much time passes (or how many other uses of the well occur) between openings. This fact helps confirm what many sages have long suspected: that the magic of the

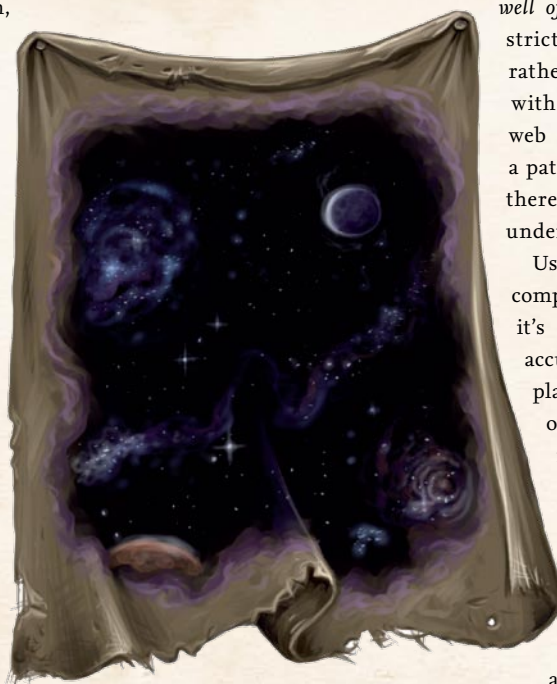
*well of many worlds* does not come strictly from within the item, but rather from how the item interacts with the immeasurably complex web of reality. And where there's a pattern, no matter how complex, there will be those who seek to understand it.

Using careful research and complex mathematical equations, it's possible for a scholar to accurately predict where a well placed in a given location will open to. The factors that must be considered in such a calculation are immense, on par with discovering a new planet by analyzing anomalies in a star's electromagnetic spectrum, and scholars frequently rely on orreries and codices of known well

locations (see below). An adventurer or sage attempting to predict a well's destination for a given point of origin must spend a week researching and then succeed on a DC 40 Knowledge (planes) check representing the awesome feat of pattern recognition necessary. Failure has a 50% chance of returning a false positive to the researcher, making him confident of an ultimately incorrect prediction.

In addition to the brute force method, scholars often employ other means of locating the proper position in which to open a *well of many worlds*. Divination magic such as *commune* and *contact other plane* can confirm or deny adventurers' suspicions without risk and may even give a direct answer. While exceedingly rare, codices of known locations compiled by planar cartographers over the course of their adventures using a well occasionally turn up, though these sometimes contain dangerous errors or deliberate misinformation. More than one fiend has acquired new servants by leaking a supposed location to a fantastical treasure horde.

Finally, it's important for any user of a *well of many worlds* to remember that the outer planes are infinite, and hence mostly empty. Although there are many well-known locations on the planes, and *wells of many worlds* seem to have a certain





affinity for them, it's common for those opening a well in an unknown location to find themselves in a blank wasteland, thousands of miles from any recognizable landmark or intelligent creature.

## TEGRESIN'S DEVOURING WELL

Possessed of a malign intelligence, *Tegresin's Devouring Well* allows its user to select the well's destination, but at the expense of a drop of fresh blood from the user and another sentient creature. In most cases, the well operates normally, but at its own discretion it may deposit the user within the Prison of the Laughing Fiend, the demiplanar home of the well's true owner.

This well first appeared in Nex, discovered by an apprentice of the great wizard a century after he vanished. Sitting silent alongside two mundane wells, it was bound in stasis and marked with the words, "Novel, purchased far too cheaply in the Suq al-Azzmir from the janni merchant-prince. Possessed? Not what it appears to be. Do *not* trust the fiend."

In recent history, the well was seized in 4640 AR by the blue dragon Bezelasus the Looming Thunder. Rather than retaining it, the dragon proceeded to lease the object to interested parties, renting it out through intermediaries. What none of his customers realize is that Bezelasus himself fell victim to the well on his first attempt to use it and now leases it out as part of some infernal bargain with its creator.

## TEGRESIN THE LAUGHING FIEND

An enigmatic fiend of unknown type and alignment, Tegresin remains bound in his demiplanar prison, only able to interact with the planes by drawing individuals into his domain. Though he typically manifests as a grinning quasit adorned with a tarnished, oversized crown, his shadow (which oftentimes moves independently of his manifested form) is sinuous and reptilian, with disturbingly elongated limbs. Tegresin's motivations are often opaque but not outwardly malevolent—at least at first.

Those drawn to Tegresin's demiplane through the *Devouring Well* find their way home blocked until they deal with the fiend, either by striking a deal or breaking his apparent tedium and loneliness through conversation. Tegresin's bargains, however, tend to be complex, and carry with them the haunting notion that even a favorable deal (be it for knowledge, power, or wealth) always carries an intangible cost hidden behind the fiend's quixotic smile. Does a wish to rule a nation mean everyone else in the bargainer's country of origin will die? Does a desire for powerful children invite rape by a lord of Hell? When it comes to striking bargains, it may be that Tegresin is every bit as tricky as a djinni's *wishes*.

For further details on Tegresin and the Prison of the Laughing Fiend, see *Pathfinder Chronicles: The Great Beyond*.

## RANDOM PLANAR DESTINATIONS

To determine where a *well of many worlds* leads when opened in a given area, roll on the random planar destinations table below.

d%	Plane
1–5	Abaddon
6–17	Astral Plane
18–22	Axis
23–27	Elysium
28	First World
29–33	Heaven
34–38	Hell
39–43	Material Plane
44	Negative Energy Plane
45–49	Nirvana
50–52	Plane of Air
53–55	Plane of Earth
56–58	Plane of Fire
59–61	Plane of Water
62	Positive Energy Plane
63	Random Demiplane
64–70	The Abyss
71–75	The Boneyard
76–83	The Ethereal Plane
84–95	The Maelstrom
96–100	The Shadow Plane

## RANDOM DEMIPLANES

While the number of demiplanes accessible through a *well of many worlds* is limitless, below are a few ideas of various demiplanes a well might open onto. Information on all of the realms listed below can be found in the *Pathfinder Chronicles* supplement *The Great Beyond*.

d%	Demiplane
1–6	Crypt of the Dying Sun
7–12	Freehold of the Rogue Angel
13–19	Leng
20–25	Mnemovore
26–32	The Circle Between
33	The Dead Vault
34–41	The Dimension of Time
42–49	The Dimension of Dreams
50–55	The Fleshwarren
56–63	The Immortal Ambulatory
64–69	The Lost
70–75	The Machine Armory
76–85	The Prison of the Laughing Fiend
86–100	Unlisted demiplane

# PATHFINDER

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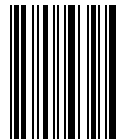
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