

THE SANDBOX

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A JOURNAL OF SANDBOX GAMING FROM SINE NOMINE PUBLISHING

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Welcome to the first issue of *The Sandbox*, a house publication for Sine Nomine Publishing and my games. Long-time fans of SNP will have had plenty of experience with the freebies and bonus material I like to push out every so often. The *Mandate Archive* series, the *Black Tides* supplements, the *Codex of the New Earth*, free modules like *Grandfather's Rain*, and other squibs and bits have been regularly produced over the past four years of Sine Nomine's existence. Each of these series have been aimed toward a particular one of my games, and while they've been a convenient way to get you free material, I've been spread thin enough that I haven't always been able to keep them coming regularly.

The Sandbox is my solution to that. Rather than being dedicated to a particular game, the bits and bobs you'll find in these pages might be system-neutral or they may be written for any of my games. When I get a passing idea or small notion, I'll be able to fold it into these pages with minimum fuss, delivering up piping-hot articles and snippets for your free delectation.

What will you find in *The Sandbox*? Anything and everything. Malevolent cults for *Silent Legions*, new tech for *Stars Without Number*, fresh adventures for *Scarlet Heroes*, or anything else that strikes my fancy and is too brief to expand into a larger project. You'll also find updates on my current projects and announcements for new releases. If it's short, useful, and self-contained, it's got a home in *The Sandbox*.

When will *The Sandbox* be appearing? Right now, it has no specific schedule. I keep an edition open in my workspace and when I get a new idea I write it up and toss it in the bin. When I pile up ten or twelve pages of content, then it's time to wrap it up and send out a fresh issue. You can likely expect a year-end omnibus edition, however, that should be available in print as well as PDF.

Does *The Sandbox* take submissions? Alas, not at present. Coordinating the assembly of a zine is serious work, and *The Sandbox* is meant to streamline my workflow rather than add a new hat to my responsibilities. Still, fans interested in sharing their own material for my games are encouraged to spread their works around to other players.

And now I leave you to the pages that follow. First you'll find *The Last Prince*, a new class for the *Scarlet Heroes* RPG. While a playable class in itself, it's intended to demonstrate some of the ways in which you can create special purpose-focused classes to fit a particular player's concept. Since *Scarlet Heroes* is a one-on-one game, there's no reason that a GM shouldn't mold the particular rules of the world to fit the needs of a single player. After all, a single player is what the game is meant to support.

Next up in this issue, you'll find ***Kickstarter Production Guidelines***, giving an outline of the steps and processes necessary for turning a small publisher's notion into a finished RPG product. It's not the only way, but it's the way that's worked for me for my past three Kickstarters. Those indie publishers among my readers can likely benefit from some of the nuts-and-bolts specifics I've put down here.

Readers who find this article of interest should keep in mind the substantial amount of free art I've released to common use on DriveThruRPG/RPGNow. If you look up the ***Scarlet Heroes Art Pack*** and the ***Spears of the Dawn Art Pack*** you should be able to snare a hundred images suitable for use in your own products. If you can't afford custom art for your own hobby creations, low-cost stock art and free art like these pieces can make a product possible.

After that, cleanse the palate with a couple of one-roll tables meant to aid a busy GM. Find the details of ***A Quick Backwater Spaceport*** and find out ***What's That Abandoned Building***. Just roll one of each die type and check the tables to get answers you can use in play.

And with that, it's back to the book mines. I've got the ***Silent Legions*** Kickstarter to wrap up, even though that's mostly a matter of waiting for the art to come in. I've also got work to do on getting ***Starvation Cheap***'s text in order by April.

In that book you'll find a full guide to mercenary legions and military sci-fi campaigns for ***Stars Without Number***. Aside from a simple system for resolving the ugly business of planetary wars, you'll get tools for generating armies, creating specific military units, and laying out battles. Player characters are woven into the war, given the opportunity to influence the outcome of battles with easy mission templates that the GM can drop in whenever they need a quick bit of martial content. The whole is designed to provide sandbox freedom for the group while keeping to the classic tropes of military science fiction, with most of it system-neutral and perfectly usable with other game systems.

Beyond that, the misty shores of Tudor England await an alt-history game set in 1555 England later this year, and then the stellar conflict of Proteus Sector and the brutal eugenic warfare that rages through its stars. It's going to be a busy year for me here at Sine Nomine, and I can but hope that its labors will prove fruitful for you.

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Cover art by Jeff Brown. Interior art by Nikola Avramovic

THE LAST PRINCE

A NEW CLASS FOR *SCARLET HEROES*

The Last Prince (or Princess) is the last of their kind, the final heir to some crumbled nation or vanished tribe. Perhaps not wholly human, perhaps tragically mortal in their inheritance, the Last Prince carries the name of a people who are no more. They know that their kind will vanish with their own final breath.

Yet the certainty of their end lends these heroes strength. They have nothing left to fear and nothing left to mourn. They will leave a mighty tale in their passing, and let those who come after remember their dauntless courage and the lost glory of their people.

Many of the refugee peoples that fled the Red Tide came in numbers too few to be sustained. Some dwindled, others blended with the stronger groups, and some perished in blood and fire. Whatever the manner of their passing, only the Last Prince remains.

CLASS QUALITIES

The Last Prince is treated as a Fighter for all general purposes, including attack bonus, hit points, and Fray die. They may use weapons and armor as a Fighter, and such magic items as are allowed to the class.

The Last Prince receives a bonus three-point trait; "Last Prince of Their People." They may describe the nature of their lost tribe, nation, or civilization, naming three virtues or qualities that their kind prized. When rolling checks related to those virtues the Last Prince may add this trait. The Last Prince may have no other three-point trait.

The Last Prince cannot be *Raised* or *Resurrected*. Once they perish, their people are at an end and their age has passed into legend.

If a Defy Death roll ever reduces the Last Prince to zero hit points, they do not suffer the usual consequences, but instead undergo a tremendous last stand or final burst of glory in which they overcome the challenge before dying with suitable magnificence.

The Last Prince is scarred by the downfall of their kind. They may roll or choose from the Dooms table to determine the manner in which their people were destroyed, gaining the benefit and suffering the penalty related to that dire end. Perhaps the Last Prince was involved in this awful fate, and perhaps they were merely the last one standing after it.

The Last Prince starts with initial equipment as a Fighter, though lost caches of valuables or long-missing artifacts of their people are perhaps known to them.

D8 THE DOOM THAT CAME TO THEIR PEOPLE

1 Blood. Your people perished on the swords of a savage foe, all from old men to mewling babes. Neither shall you show mercy. After defeating a foe in mortal combat, you inevitably kill them. It is impossible to disarm you; everything you touch is a weapon doing at least 1d8 damage.

2 Fire. Your people were consumed in a volcanic eruption, sorcerous explosion, cataclysmic earthquake, or other exhalation of violence. You can't stand to leave strangers to perish in similar disasters and must try to save all whom you meet in such states. Choose a phenomenon associated with the disaster; you are impervious to it.

3 Strife. Your kind slew each other, rival princes or feuding factions resulting in an all-consuming civil war. You cannot bear to lead any but a few close friends. Your grim self-mastery leaves you immune to *Charm* spells or sorcerous mental compulsions.

4 Faith. Your people followed dark gods and paid an awful price for it. God-hated, you are entirely impervious to clerical magic both benign and harmful. Your grim resolve doubles healing from other sources, potions, and from first aid after a battle.

5 Decadence. Your people rioted away their strength in strange perversions and self-harms. You are unable to resist the offer of a drink, drug, or other pleasure. Even so, no poison or sickness can kill or incapacitate you, though you may be discomfited by them.

6 Treachery. Your people trusted promises that led them to an awful doom. You are forever unable to discern truth from lies, even with magic, save when clear proof or common reason tells you otherwise. You always become aware of ambushes or treachery just before it becomes too late to act on it.

7 Folly. Your people strove to do a thing they should not have done, or were contemptuous of a peril that eventually consumed them. Once per game session, seek a goal or ignore a danger in a manner that the GM agrees is exceedingly foolish. When you do so, reset your Defy Death die to 1d4 and regain half of any lost hit points.

8 Despair. Your people lost heart, scattering and joining others, turning from their name and their past. You are forever unable to deny or conceal your name and identity, and others find it strangely impossible to tell even the smallest lie about you and your actions. The truth of what you are shines through too clearly.

KICKSTARTER PRODUCTION GUIDELINES

PROCEDURAL NOTES FOR THE ASPIRING RPG CREATOR

I've run several Kickstarters in the past couple of years: the ***Spears of the Dawn*** KS for an Africana-inspired fantasy game, the ***Scarlet Heroes*** KS for a one-on-one fantasy game of pulp heroism, and the ***Silent Legions*** KS for a sandbox Lovecraftian horror game built for compatibility with ***Stars Without Number***. All of them have been distinct successes, with the first drawing more than \$10,000 and the last two bringing in more than \$18,000. My latest Kickstarter had 1,109 backers by the time it closed. As I'm a confirmed fan of supporting other small indie RPG publishers, I'm going to break down the exact production flow I use.

There are plenty of places where you can find tips for marketing a Kickstarter and winning backers. That's not what I'm going to talk about here. I'm going to talk about those steps and procedures you can establish to avoid catastrophic failure. There are many, many places where an RPG Kickstarter can go astray, and it's important to avoid these snares.

IN THE BEGINNING

My first step in production was to identify the scope of the project. In the case of ***Silent Legions***, I was going to write a 150-page game of sandbox Lovecraftian horror. It was going to be illustrated in black and white with a color cover. It was going to be available in PDF and print-on-demand formats through the OneBookshelf sites, and it was going to be compatible with ***Stars Without Number*** and its sister games ***Other Dust*** and ***Spears of the Dawn***.

It's important to define the scope of the project because there will be an overwhelming urge to let it balloon during the Kickstarter. As the dollars come in and the pledge total rises, there will be a ferocious urge to promise more and more to the backers if only they give you a little more cash for it. This feeling will be especially acute around the 15-day mark, during the dry season of the mid-campaign doldrums. There may even be days when your total shrinks; these days will leave you champing at the bit to offer some fresh bonus.

Resist this. You have set a scope. You have prepared for that scope. You have not prepared to offer ad-hoc upgrades. Promising new material that you haven't actually prepped is a golden road toward blowing your deadlines in the best case or blowing the entire project if your luck is out. If you haven't prepped it, *you can't offer it*.

You *can* offer inducements and stretch goals that don't appreciably add to your workload. In the case of ***Silent Legions***, the two stretch goals I offered were an art release and mobi/epub format options. The art release was essentially no effort on my part. I had to be certain to negotiate full rights purchases from the artists, but that was simply a matter of

paying somewhat more for the art than I would otherwise. The mobi/epub was more work, but it was very simple work—I just reflow all the text into a single-column document, clip wide tables so they fit on a tablet, and export. In neither case was I obliged to actually do more creative work.

You cannot guarantee the ability to do future creative work. If you're the second coming of Lester Dent and know down in your bones that you can knock off a new product in a specific timeframe, then maybe you can give it a shot. But Lester Dent is dead and we hacks of a lesser age are obliged to show a little more prudent humility about our ability to readily execute worthwhile creative output on demand. It's something you hope for, that you might expect even, but it's not something you can safely bet your entire reputation on producing.

Once I'd established what exactly I was going to be Kickstarting, the next step was to finish writing it. I've heard a lot of people maintain that they can't afford to spend the time and effort needed to complete a product before they're sure it's going to be a paying proposition. I have sympathy for their preference; writing is *hard*, and it's a business of sheer misery to write, test, and get to final draft a project that turns out to be unsalable. Nobody wants to spend months on a project only to find out they've wasted their effort.

Unfortunately, you have to do it. If you're going to be a success, the stage of writing the document to an edit-ready final draft is mandatory. Either you will do it before running a successful Kickstarter, in which case you will have nothing else to distract you, or you will do it after running a successful Kickstarter, when scores or hundreds of backers will be staring impatiently at you and wondering where their game is. It will be hard enough to get it done when you have nothing else tormenting you; you do *not* want to make it harder.

Some writers will insist that the money or the pressure will help speed up their writing. It's possible. I wouldn't want to suggest that I know their writing habits better than they do. I'd just observe that they're setting themselves up for a situation where either they're right or they're going to be publicly humiliated. That's not a bet I'd care to place for myself.

The alternative is much, much safer. If you have your final draft in hand, you've put a floor under how bad things can get. In the absolute worst case, your backers will still have a playable game. Your name will not join the list of others, known all too well, who have humiliated themselves before their audiences by an inability to deliver even a skeleton of what they've promised. Running a Kickstarter is risky enough as it is. You want to nail down every scrap of risk management you can secure, especially if it's work you know you're going to have to do anyway.

DOING LAYOUT

Once you have your final manuscript in hand, you have a choice to make. You can now perform the layout work yourself if you have the expertise, you can hire a layout designer to do it for you before the Kickstarter launches, or you can budget layout design into the KS itself. Each alternative has its advantages and costs.

Ideally, you do the work yourself. This usually requires a copy of InDesign, preferably InDesign CC licensed through the Adobe Creative Cloud offer. You can get an *a la carte* subscription to InDesign for about \$20 a month with a year's subscription, and there are academic discounts for the whole package. However you slice it, you really need this program to do serious book design and layout work, even if you stick with freeware image-processing software like GIMP. If you're working on an absolute shoestring you can go with Scribus as a free alternative, but InDesign repays the effort.

The advantage of doing the layout work yourself is twofold. First, you can easily cut and fit your text to suit your pages. You're the author, so you can easily edit your own text to make the page elements fall neatly and organize them handsomely on the page. You don't need to go through edit approval cycles, assuming your layout designer is even willing to provide subediting. Second, it is cheap. It costs you only your time, which you're presumably ready to invest.

The disadvantage is that it does require a significant amount of expertise. The more elaborate the layout, the better you have to be to pull it off. A clean, graceful, well-organized page of black and white text is relatively simple to execute, but once you start throwing in watermarks and color elements and complex page features you start to need some real design chops if you're not to make a muddled hash of it. If you're completely innocent of layout work and typesetting, you might need several months of dedicated work to produce even respectable basic text pages.

If you have the time and have a serious intention of making money as a small RPG publisher, however, I would strongly recommend you take this course. It will require work to learn the proper use of these tools and the basic rules of page design, but the more you can do for yourself, the less you need to pay others. You can afford to indulge your whimsies and try out oddball products when you're not on the hook for hiring a layout designer each time. One of your biggest advantages as a one-person producer is that you can respond quickly and efficiently to your ideas. The ability to put them into a clean layout plays to that virtue.

If that kind of self-education isn't an option, you can hire a layout designer to put things together for you. This is easier desired than it is done. There are relatively few skilled RPG layout designers. Ordinary commercial designers would laugh at the wages you could offer them, so the people who do this work for indie RPGs tend to be those who are fans of the hobby, those who just want a little side work, or

those who really have no damn idea what they're doing with their copy of InDesign. The latter are unfortunately prevalent, and few of them realize it.

Your best bet is to find a product you like and see who it was who did layout for it. Many of them will not be interested in doing additional work, or might've only done the first project out of love for it, but a few might be willing to take on your project if you have a final manuscript to prove your earnestness. There is no fixed, customary price for RPG layout work. Some will quote you a flat fee, while others might require so many dollars per page. Others might have a setup fee plus a per-page rate. Some might provide their own art for page features and elements, while others might require you to come up with the markings and geegaws that their layout requires.

Some designers prefer to have all the art done before they begin working. This allows them to get the entire job done in a single sweep, even if it might require awkward use of the art or "creative" text flowing. Others prefer to work before the art is done, and they'll create specific slots and blanks for illustrations where the text should have them. At this stage, you're not likely to have the art available unless you've gone with an all-stock-art project, so the latter sort of layout designer is going to be preferable.

Unfortunately, hiring this layout designer is a significant cost to a project. While writing requires nothing but time, you might not have the ready cash to hire a layout designer, or you might not be willing to risk it without proof that your KS is viable. In these cases, you're obliged to fall back on the third and least secure alternative.

You need to find a layout artist, discuss the project with them, get a firm quote on the price, and then add that price into your Kickstart budget. Under no circumstances should you just assume that you'll find a layout designer once the campaign is done. Finding one, negotiating an acceptable price, and getting the lines of communication clear are not the sort of things you want to deal with under a deadline. Without a quote you don't even have a semi-reasonable price and timeline to work into the anticipated delivery date.

This is the riskiest move to make at this stage of development. Even the best will in the world can't guarantee that the designer will really be able to deliver at the time, price, and quality standards that you've established. If you pay them beforehand and work with them through the process before starting the KS, you might lose your money on a flaky designer but you won't be left holding the bag two weeks before your project is due for delivery.

Even so, sometimes a creator really has no choice. They want a project that's beyond their own power to lay out, but they can't afford to hire a designer up front. For these cases, there really is nothing to be done but to find a designer, get a quote, and price it into the Kickstarter. Remember to add 20% to it, because these things inevitably get pricier.

HIRING ARTISTS

Once you've chosen how to deal with your layout, the next step is to find your artists. One of the best resources I've found for this is the Freelancer forum at RPG.net. You can post up your requests there and get a very healthy response from artists of all kinds and prices. There are a few basic things to understand about hiring artists before you begin.

First, be clear about your terms. Explain exactly what you need, what file format you need it in, how you intend to pay, and what rights you want to buy. For black and white line work, you usually want 600 dpi grayscale .TIFF files. For shaded black and white work, 300 dpi tiffs are sufficient, since the sharp contrast of linework doesn't need to be preserved so precisely. For color work, you want 300 dpi CMYK tiffs, as the eventual print product will be doing color in CMYK's gamut. You do not want jpegs, or gifs, or pngs, or bitmaps, or any other such thing. You want tiffs.

For rights, you usually want non-exclusive use rights. This will allow you to use the art in any way you please, but it will also allow the *artist* to use it in any way they please, including reselling it later to other buyers. If you don't want other people to use it as well, be prepared to pay extra for exclusive rights.

As a very crude measure, expect to pay as least \$25 for a quarter-page black and white line-art illustration. Double it for half-page and quadruple it for full-page. Add extra if it's a complex scene. Add extra if it's a particularly intricate drawing style. Add extra if you're buying more than use rights. Double it if it's in color. If it's a color cover, expect to pay at least \$250 and don't be surprised at quotes of \$500 and up.

Some artists will offer to work more cheaply than this. In some cases, they just honestly don't know their own worth. In others, they're working someplace where the cost of living is very cheap, and they're looking to get business with pricing. And others, regrettably, are just bad artists and not worth regular rates. Even so, you should be hesitant to pay any less than these rates, because ultimately you're going to get what you pay for and you want to build relationships.

Some artists might also offer to do spec work, drawing something for you that you can buy if you like it. Avoid this. If you're not certain whether or not an artist fits the project, commission a quarter-page and see how they handle it. An artist should never be working unless they know they're getting paid for it. Spec work is unhealthy for them and will lead you into bad habits. Keep things businesslike.

How do you know which artists to hire? Look at their work and consider it together, as a whole. Do these artists look good together? Do their styles complement each other? An artist may have a great manga-inspired drawing style that looks really good, but if the rest of your artists are all about the moody realistic pencil work they're just not going to fit. You need to choose artists that work well together, not just in isolation. Take your time finding a good selection.

How many artists should you hire? That depends on the size of the project and the number of applicants with good, compatible styles. But here we encounter one of your most important tools in managing art for your project– the art control sheet.

THE ART CONTROL SHEET

The art control sheet is the central clearinghouse for your project's art. It's how you keep your artists organized and how you keep a clear eye on the progress of your project. It's also a vital part of predicting your project costs.

It begins with a Google Drive account. Inside the folder for your project, make a new folder labeled "Art." Inside that folder, make another folder labeled "References." Put your art reference images into that folder, categorized appropriately. Stuff everything in there that you want your artists to see as hints for what your game should look like, and put as much as possible in it. If there are other details to the project's visuals, put them in note files here.

Now, inside the "Art" folder, make a Google spreadsheet entitled "Art Control Sheet." Label the following columns: *Slot Name, Size, Height, Width, Owner, Status, Topic*. Each row of this sheet will describe a different illustration slot and the information you need to farm it out to the artists. If you've got your layout complete by now, you can take the slots directly from the layout. If your designer is still working on it, add slots to the sheet as each chapter or section is completed and your needs are determined. Also put in slots that you know you're going to need, like covers, chapter splash pages, or the like.

Each illo slot has its own name, usually a compound of the chapter and topic– "INTROSPLASH", for example, or "SYSCOMBAT". You use this name to reference slots clearly and minimize confusion. For Size, enter "1" for a full-page illustration, "5" for a half-pager, or "25" for a quarter-pager. Round up in borderline cases. You'll use this entry to help you project final art costs– you can sum it at the bottom of the column and multiply it by \$100 to get the ballpark budget for black-and-white line art at those sizes.

Height and Width are the exact sizes of the slot, down to a tenth of an inch or centimeter. The artists need to hit this size extremely accurately if they're to fit the slot properly. You do not want to be forced to squish or rescale art to make it fit. For irregularly-shaped images, make a "cutout" image file that the artist can use as a template.

The Owner column is the initials of the artist who has claimed the slot. If it's blank, no artist has yet claimed it. Status is either blank for an illo yet to be started, "Sketch", for a piece that's had its sketch approved, or "Finished" for art that has been delivered and is ready for insertion into the layout.

Topic is a brief description of what the illustration should be about. You can give exact details about what should be depicted or just a general concept, though the more precise

the better. Some artists like to have liberty in their creations, and it's easy enough to tell them that they can be free with a slot, but others like to have a very clear idea of what is to be drawn. Be ready for a measure of liberty to be taken with the topic; for the prices you're paying you're not going to be able to dictate every detail. If you have a sketch in mind, put a link here to a shared image.

Every illo in the book needs to have a line in this art control sheet. If your layout is incomplete and you only have some slots ready to define, then put in the ones you have, adding more as your designer fixes the specific slots in a chapter. Ideally, though, you want all of the slots named, measured, and given topics before you start giving out art assignments.

Once the art control sheet is done, copy the file and move the file up to your main project directory. Rename the copy "Private Art Control Sheet". Change the columns to *Slot Name*, *Projected Price*, *Promised Price*, *Paid Price*, *Owner*, and *Status*. This private document will be your control sheet for tracking the amount of money you expect to pay for a slot, how much you actually promised the artist, how much you've paid them so far, and the current status of the slot. At the bottom of the sheet, record the PayPal addresses for your artists so you have them close to hand when it comes time to pay.

For the projected price of a black and white line-art book, assign \$100 to every full-page illo, \$50 to every half-page, and \$25 to every quarter-page, with a color cover estimated at \$500. Simply sum the slot lists to get a crude estimate of your final art cost for the book. Add 20% to that for a better estimate, because nothing will ever be quite as cheap as you'd hoped it would be.

As your final step, set the Art folder publicly viewable. You'll be sharing the folder with all the artists you hire, so they need to be able to see the art control sheet and the reference images. You can simply pass out the Google Drive share link to them; they don't need to log in under their own Google accounts. If you're particularly paranoid you can lock it to specific accounts, but really, nobody cares, and if they did you could use the publicity. Just make sure to keep the private art control sheet out of the shared directory, since you don't need to be waving your financials around.

MANAGING THE ART PURCHASES

Now let the artists start picking slots. Each artist can choose a slot and quote a price. If it works, record the details in your private art control sheet and then enter their initials into the public art control sheet, showing that the slot is taken. You might reserve some slots for especially appropriate artists, but try to give them as wide a choice as possible.

When they provide workable sketches of their slots, pay them half the promised price. *Pay promptly*. Do not set it aside for the end of the week, do not pay only on the 31st of the month, and do not wait for the spirit to move you. Pay them

now, and record it in your private art control sheet. There is no excuse for making an artist wait more than ten minutes after approval to get paid. This will mean many instances of repeatedly logging into PayPal. Deal with it. Everyone will be happier this way, and you won't have to wonder which of your artists have actually been paid yet.

Sketches are meant to establish that their basic idea is sound and good enough to take to final. Remember that you are paying them small indie RPG rates, which means you do not get unlimited revisions. You get one, at most. If a part of a sketch doesn't work, explain what's wrong, explain exactly what to do to make it right, and live with the result. If you can't, be prepared to pay extra to the artist for extra rounds of revision, because \$25 for a quarter-page does not buy you concierge service.

In the same vein, once you get the final art, pay for it. If they have done things basically the way the sketch depicted them, you don't get a free redo. Any amendments at this stage should be for completely unacceptable problems, and not just stuff that doesn't quite match your vision. If you want that kind of fine-grained editing, then again, be ready to pay for it.

Once the artist has completed a slot, they get to pick a new one. The process rinses and repeats until all of the slots have been taken, filled, and completed. While they're doing this, perform monthly audits of your art progress— count how many slots are filled, how many have yet to be filled, and compare it to your remaining time until the proof print deadline. If your history of art production does not project out to a successful, timely completion, start hiring additional artists and hand them the art control sheet. If your existing art stable is not going to finish the job in time, you want to find out several months in advance, not the week that the print proofs are due for submission. *You must get the art and layout fully completed at least one month before your Kickstarter is due for delivery*. You'll understand why this is the case after you read the section on print proof creation.

What if an artist flakes on you? That's another thing you check during the end-of-month project audit. If an artist seems to have vanished, send a prompting email. If you don't get a reply and a firm completion date given within a week, open the slot back up and advise them that you're handing it to someone else. If they do give you a firm completion date and they miss it, open the slot and tell them that it's not working. If you absolutely love this artist's work and want to give them unlimited rope, then do so— but on your private art control sheet, note down a drop-dead date. If they can't deliver by then, you *have* to open it up.

What if an artist flakes after you paid for the sketch? Let it go and chalk it up to experience. This can hurt, especially if you've forked out a significant amount of money, but one of the advantages of the art control sheet is that you're never out of pocket for more than half a piece at a time. Don't make a public furor of it. Just note the situation down for future reference. You won't be using them again and you won't be

recommending that artist to other publishers, but it's neither necessary nor professional to go in for some kind of blacklist.

The key behavior at this stage of production is simply to *pay attention*. You need to know how many slots are done, how many slots are pending, and how many slots haven't even been taken. You need to know how fast they've been getting done and how much time you can logically project as being necessary for full completion. If you don't pay attention to these details they will not get done properly, and you will run into serious problems when you're missing just one illo on the day your print proofs are supposed to be submitted.

LAUNCHING THE KICKSTARTER

I don't have much advice for this. Others have done a much better job of explaining how to make an enticing and appealing Kickstarter and the kind of marketing effort you need to make it happen. I'll hand you over to their tender counsel, though I'll point out one very useful trick you can do thanks to your preparation.

You can offer the game's beta manuscript to backers immediately on pledging. Put a link to a Google Docs folder in the first backer-only update, and put the beta in that folder. In the FAQs, direct backers to the first update to download it. Yes, there's a chance the link could get passed out to the general public, but honestly, if people care enough to even look at it you're ahead of the game.

Some backers will pledge a dollar just to look. In my experience, these people will be less than 1% of backers, and some of them will then upgrade to higher pledge levels. Others will pledge, read the game, and decide they don't want it after all. You may lose a few pledges that way, but in the long run, this is actually to your advantage. By the time the KS completes, the people remaining will consist exclusively of those who like your final product a good deal. Nobody will be particularly disappointed by what you create, because all the people who had particularly strong dislike for it have already bowed out at no cost to them.

A completed manuscript makes backers feel much better about your Kickstarter. It's proof that you have something real to offer and that you're capable of completing a project. At the very least, it's something they can take away if you get hit by a meteor before this thing closes out successfully.

SUCCESS! NOW WHAT?

So your Kickstarter was a success. The artists are working, and the illos are coming in. What do you do now?

The first thing you do is *not spend the money*. You probably have a significant wad of cash right now, and it can feel like a great time to make some capital investments or take some of the excess money and have some fun with it. This is not the time. The time for that is after you've finished fulfillment and can be dead certain you won't need the ostensible profit.

The second thing you do is set aside a portion of it for taxes. Subtract your projected project expenses from the total you received and then take a third of the remainder for taxes. Your specific situation may be more or less, but a third is a good minimum in the United States. Uncle Sam is going to want this money and you need to be ready to give it to him.

The next thing you do is sit down with your draft and start combing it for editing and proofing purposes. Ideally, you've spent the money for editing at an earlier stage, but given the economics of publishing indie RPGs, we do a lot of this ourselves. It's not nearly as good as having a real editor look at it, but you might as well use this downtime productively while the artists are working.

Make sure to keep up your art audits at the end of every month. Send updates to your backers every couple of weeks or so; you don't need to spam them, but you should let them know how the art is progressing and release fresh betas to them if you have them available. Don't vanish.

Eventually, you're going to have all your art in, your edits complete, and your book all ready for the printers. Hopefully you've got this done at least a month before the due date, because now it's time to order print proofs.

ORDERING PRINT PROOFS

If you are offering your project in print format— and there is no earthly reason why you should not— then you're going to need to get a print proof of each format before you can start selling them. This outline assumes that you are using OneBookshelf for your print-on-demand needs; they run the DriveThruRPG and RPGNow sites, among others, and are the 800 pound gorilla of the small RPG publisher world. If you don't have your game on the OBS sites, you're missing out on an order of magnitude more sales than you're going to get through Lulu or Amazon CreateSpace. You need OBS.

First, you need to create a product entry for your project after getting a publisher account with them. You can leave this product entry skeletal for now. All you need is an entry to which you can upload the print files you've created with InDesign. The details of doing so are beyond the scope of this article, but OBS has a lot of helpful tutorials on getting the exact print export settings correct.

You'll also need to use the Lightning Source cover generator to create an InDesign template file for your cover. This is submitted separately from the book block itself. Generating the template is simple, but once you have it, there are a few things you need to remember to do.

First, the template will have an ISBN block on the back page. Delete that. There should be no ISBN of any kind on the cover or it will confuse the POD process.

Next, when placing your cover image files, be careful of the bleed zone. All of that is potentially going to go away,

especially for hardcovers that get the edges of the image wrapped around the book boards. Anything you put there is going to be lost. You need to position your text and other art elements so that they're not too close to the bleed- if you've got a half-inch of bleed on the top margin and your title sits a half-inch further down from that, the end print result is going to have your title uncomfortably close to the top of the board, even if it seems like there's plenty of space in the file.

Lastly, be careful about the spine. You don't want to guess when you're telling the template generator how many pages are in your book, because if you make the spine too narrow or too thick your graphic element for it will end up printing along the edge of your front or back cover, which looks terrible.

Once you have your files ready, upload them to OBS. It will take 2-4 business days or so before they are transmitted in turn to Lightning Source, and then another 2-4 days before Lightning Source either accepts them for printing or bounces them back with some error. If everything is a go, you can now order the proofs and expect their arrival within about a week.

Lighting Source is cheap, high-quality, and fast. It is, however, *extremely* finicky about print files. Do not be surprised if it bounces. If you can't understand the complaint, then you can ask OneBookshelf for advice, but usually it will be fairly obvious what's wrong. In particular, be very careful that your text and cover elements do not impinge on the bleed. LS will bounce that right back, even if the element isn't really an issue where it is. Move everything securely inside the bleed.

As you can see, it's going to take about two weeks to get a print proof returned to you. If this is your first time doing this, assume that you are going to blow two proof cycles before you get it right, so you need at least six weeks to get a clean copy. If you've had experience at this, you can be optimistic, and assume you'll only blow one proof.

Worse than this is always a possibility. If this is your first rodeo, I'd actually recommend you take the finished layout and get an early proof printed even before all the interior art is complete. If you can get the cover right and the interior text right then adding the interior illos is highly unlikely to screw up your file. It only costs \$20 or so to get both a hardcover and softcover shipped to you, so it's well-worth it.

DOING FULFILLMENT

And now, with your print proof in hand, we come to the final step in the process, and the one upon which so many other RPG Kickstarters have miserably foundered. We have come to the diabolic demands of fulfillment.

Conventionally, small RPG publishers have offered their backers pledge levels at which a physical book would be mailed to them. This has been the ruin of many a poor boy. Creators have an extremely bad habit of simply eyeballing shipping prices, or assuming that existing ship prices will not increase between now and the time of Kickstarter delivery.

Worse, they have assumed that it is a relatively trivial undertaking to ship hundreds of books to addresses around the globe. They imagine that they'll just sit down with a stack of boxes and a roll of bubble-wrap and knock that little job out in an easy and comfortable afternoon.

They will not. Shipping and fulfillment is an actual job, with actual skills involved, and those lacking the skills will be harshly appraised of that in the event. There are a hundred small points to understand if you're going to do it yourself.

So don't do it yourself. Hand it off to actual professionals who know how to handle these situations. When developing your Kickstarter you have three basic options here, one of which I vastly prefer.

The first and simplest option is to just not offer print copies. This is going to result in a significant decrease in Kickstarter interest, as there are a lot of RPG buyers who have no use for PDFs, or prefer them simply as an adjunct to a printed product. If you do go this route, however, you completely eliminate all the hassle of physical fulfillment, which is a very precious benefit. When the PDF is ready, you just go to OBS' account management and generate a free discount code. Email the code to your backers. Your job is then done and your Kickstarter is a success, for precisely zero dollars in fulfillment costs and five minutes of your time.

Still, if you're building your RPG right you're going to want to have a print option available at the OBS sites anyway. If you can get the proofs square you can simplify your life by offering pledge levels for at-cost codes that let the backer order the book from OBS for its print cost alone. They pay that plus shipping and they get their book.

This is my favorite option, as it combines the simplicity of digital-only fulfillment with the benefit of allowing people to get print copies of my game. You need to be extremely clear about the details in your pledge level, however, including an estimate of the print and shipping costs for backers. You also need to explain to the backers how they're getting a better deal this way than waiting for it at OBS. For example, the \$20 pledge level plus the \$11 hardcover print cost plus shipping is less than the \$40 print cost plus shipping they'd pay at retail.

Once your print proofs check out, you just send all the backers the freebie PDF code and the print-level backers an additional at-cost print code. It's possible to generate individual codes for backers, but honestly, I just make a single code and hand it to everyone. Yes, that does mean that someone can pass their code to someone else and let them order the book at-cost. You might theoretically lose some money that way, but you've already been paid up-front for the Kickstarter and if you're the average indie RPG producer, anonymity is your worst enemy anyway. If it makes you all that nervous, just set the code to expire in a month or so and make a different code to hand out to people who don't get around to ordering in that timeframe. If you do this, however, make sure to make it clear to the patrons that this is the case.

The third option, and the most laborious, is to fulfill the print pledges yourself through a subcontracted fulfillment house or using the OBS site to order books for other people. The former is relatively simple, though it costs money and requires effort in finding a suitably trustworthy shipper. I can't offer recommendations myself, as I've never done it that way, but if you do you want to find this shipper before you set your pledge levels. They'll be able to give you ballpark shipping estimates which you'll need to fold into your pledge levels.

The OBS website allows you to upload a CSV spreadsheet of names and addresses to populate your address book. If you didn't get too many print orders you can use this to individually order and ship books to backers.

What you absolutely do not want to do is to commit to sending hundreds of books from your kitchen table. This will be excruciatingly difficult, especially for international shipping, and it runs the risk of blowing a hole in your funding when it turns out that boxes, bubble wrap, and the USPS aren't as cheap as you thought they were.

Another dire mistake is the sending of multiply-sourced physical goods. You've seen it before, no doubt: t-shirts and tchotchkes and dice and whatnot, all offered as stretch goals or add-ons to a basic pledge. They are invitations to horror. Every additional physical object you promise must be sourced, paid for, and delivered before you can even start to ship your goods. You put your project hostage to the slowest supplier and you immediately bump your shipment out of the safe, cheap, low-tax media category into a magical land of VAT and suffering. The extra money you make from marginal pledgers is not worth the agony of trying to coordinate all this cruft and its delivery. You are writing an RPG. Deliver an RPG. If they want a t-shirt, put one up at Cafe Press.

WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

This entire guide has been written with an eye toward defensive Kickstarting. If you follow these guidelines, you eliminate almost any possibility of certain extremely common Kickstarting scourges, such as incomplete manuscripts, terminal artist flakery, and fulfillment hell. This does tend to mean that any calamities that befall you will then be the *less common* Kickstarting scourges instead.

What should you do when disaster strikes? First, at all costs, *don't freeze*. One of the worst possible things you can do is to go incommunicado with your backers, vanishing into a black hole of helpless denial. If your fulfillment house burnt your book shipment, Amazon froze your payment account, the tax man claimed half the money, or you broke all the bones in your hands, *tell the backers*. A sad litany that draws down into an eventual admission that the project is a failure is something people will forgive sooner than vanishment.

Next, identify whether or not you have enough money to overcome the setback. If it turns out that your best artist has actually ripped all the work they gave you from somebody

else and half your book needs to suddenly be re-illustrated, just look at your project finances and see if you can cope with the setback. Identify the cost of solving the problem.

If the cost is more than the Kickstarter can support, you have a choice to make. If you ever want to run a Kickstarter again, you need to take this information to the backers, explain the exact numbers involved, and tell them that you're going to have to back-burner the project until you can make enough money to buy a solution to your problem.

Your audience won't be happy, but if they think you're making a good-faith effort to overcome a problem that wasn't due to your fumbling, then they'll likely forgive you. You can't run another Kickstarter until you've paid off this one— and for heaven's sake don't try to run a second to pay off the first— but your reputation should be salvageable.

If the problem truly is insurmountable and you really can't see yourself ever getting enough money together to deal with it, you need to go to the backers and explain that the Kickstarter is a failure. Release everything you have for it: the completed manuscript, the existing art, whatever you've got in the way of a PDF. Throw yourself on the mercy of the public and admit your failure. You will take heat from this, but the heat will pass. Don't expect to be doing a Kickstarter again any time soon, however.

If the Kickstarter is a failure, you need to refund any money left over, pro-rating it by the original pledge size. It may be that you've ridden this project so far that there's nothing left to give, but hopefully you've recognized the inevitable soon enough to at least give a little money back. Remember to keep the tax ramifications in mind, however— if you collected this money in one tax year, you'll likely need to pay taxes on it before handing our refunds in the next.

Hopefully, none of the advice in this section will be necessary to you. But if it is, remember that the only way out is through. You can salvage some truly horrific trainwrecks if you just keep going and don't freeze up.

REJOICING IN VICTORY

So you've got the book out, everybody has their PDF codes and at-cost coupons, you've put aside money for the taxman, and *mirabile dictu*, you still have some profit left. Congratulations! What should you do now?

Go back and identify the parts you did wrong. Review the project from its very start and mark out those assumptions you made that were incorrect, those prices you figured that turned out to be wrong, and those people you hired who did not work out well. *Learn* something from the Kickstarter, however successful it may have been.

Kickstarters are a great way for small indie publishers to tap into networks of fans and enthusiasts. You just need to be willing to pay attention and take the process seriously.

YOUR KICKSTARTER CHECKLIST

You can run through this checklist to help ensure that you're covering all the bases for your Kickstarter. Some of the steps may not apply to your particular method of creation, but you'll want to at least glance through the entire list before you start getting too deep into any particular phase.

- Is the exact scope of the project defined, including the stretch goals you will offer?
- Is the writing final-draft complete for the project, including any stretch goal writing?
- Have you decided how you are going to handle the layout for the project?
- If you're doing layout yourself, is the layout finished and are the art slots identified?
- If you're hiring a layout artist pre-KS, are they finished with the layout and have they indicated the specific art slots that need filling?
- If you're hiring a layout artist to work after the KS funds, have you found the layout artist, purchased a page or two of draft work to establish the workflow and acceptable results, and gotten a firm quote on the project's cost?
- Have you created your art control sheet and collected your art references? Have you added any special notes on the art direction to the references?
- Have you identified a stable of artists with compatible styles who are willing to work for you? Have you had them fill a few art sheet slots already so you have some initial art for your Kickstarter page, gauged their production speed, and have had a chance to get used to art receipt and payment?
- Have you established your method of fulfillment and verified the costs involved? If you're going to be offering printed books shipped to backers, have you found a fulfillment house to handle it and gotten firm quotes on per-book ship prices?
- Have you established a Kickstarter budget including the cost of layout, art, any editing you hire out, and any fulfillment or shipping costs you have chosen to bear? Have you formed these numbers from solid quotes and experienced projections? Have you added 20% to that because it won't be that cheap? Have you added 10% more to cover Kickstarter's cut of the take? It may be a few percentage points less, but plan defensively.
- Have you put together a handsome Kickstarter page using all the appropriate glitz and art which other sources of advice beside this article have counseled you to use?



- Have you established a reasonable timeframe for completion? Have you then doubled that timeframe to find the actual likely completion date? Yes, I mean doubled.
- After the Kickstarter successfully funds, are you conducting monthly project audits in which you track your exact art completion rate, insert illos into the draft file, and maintain contact with your artists? Can you project a completion date from current art completion rates? Is it a good date or is it a *bad* date?
- Are you using the downtime while the artists work to edit, proof, and otherwise clean the text and layout? Are you communicating with the backers every two weeks or so, giving them updates on art completion and fresh betas?
- Have you completed the art and layout with at least one month to spare in order to give yourself a window for print proof approval? If this is your first print project, have you ordered an incomplete proof to make sure you've got the cover and basic interior right?
- Have you sent the discount codes or shipped the print books to your fulfillment house, including extras?
- Have you adjusted your gross Kickstarter take by the cost of production and held back an appropriate amount of money for taxes on what remains?
- Have you done a postmortem on your project, identifying the your incorrect assumptions and flawed processes? Have you figured out how you're going to avoid those problems in your next Kickstarter?

A QUICK BACKWATER SPACEPORT

A ONE-ROLL GENERATOR

Players in *Stars Without Number* have a habit of landing on less-than-sophisticated worlds. Often the only part of these planets they see is the starport and its environs, so a GM sometimes needs to generate such material in a hurry. The tables offered here should give you some ideas for play.

D4 WHAT'S SO BACKWATER ABOUT IT?

- 1 The PCs are the only ship in port for some time.
- 2 The port gear is dangerously outdated and worn.
- 3 The locals really dislike or mistrust offworlders.
- 4 They're missing some important facility or service.

D6 HOW ARE SHIPS AND CARGO SECURED HERE?

- 1 Absolutely no security on an open field.
- 2 Native longshoremen extort cash for "security".
- 3 The local ruler "secures" cargo in his storehouses.
- 4 Ships are kept in caves until fees and taxes are paid.
- 5 The warehouses and hangars are weather-unsafe.
- 6 The local military keeps very careful watch on both.

D8 WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE STARPORT STAFF?

- 1 The portmaster is a corrupt and greedy political hire.
- 2 Maintenance staff are totally incompetent.
- 3 They expect outsiders to follow odd cultural taboos.
- 4 They are utterly torpid unless bribed or frightened.
- 5 Their total effort is monopolized by the local military.
- 6 They're interested only in pleasing the local ruler.
- 7 They think outsiders are made to be bilked.
- 8 Nobody important speaks the PCs' language.

D10 WHO NEEDS TO TALK TO OUTSIDERS RIGHT NOW?

- 1 A desperate native, despised and hated locally.
- 2 A hidden outlaw seeking passage offworld.
- 3 A local ruler in dire need of advanced medtech.
- 4 A spouse seeking to duck out from a marriage.
- 5 A local inventor with a plausible but terrible idea.
- 6 A local warlord who wants offworlder muscle.
- 7 A con man seeking to trick the PCs out of cargo.
- 8 A marooned offworlder seeking passage out.
- 9 A failed rebel in need of rapid departure.
- 10 An outworlder-hater who wants to harm the PCs.

To use this page, just roll one of each type of die: d4, d6, d8, d10, and d20. The results should give you a quick grasp of the local flavor and at least one particular problem that might require the intervention of outsiders. Employ it as necessary to give your players something to do on short notice.

D12 WHAT'S THE NEAREST POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT?

- 1 A spectacularly filthy dive bar full of criminals.
- 2 Native animal races, sometimes with escapees.
- 3 Public executions of criminals and political losers.
- 4 Animal baiting of a very dangerous native lifeform.
- 5 Brothel offering a morally repugnant sort of service.
- 6 Club for native elite and rich offworld visitors.
- 7 Arena for pit fights between enthusiastic natives.
- 8 Sporting field for physically hazardous native game.
- 9 Beautiful nature site full of prostitutes and con men.
- 10 Pleasant public park with vendors and strollers.
- 11 Restaurant that serves something deeply unnerving.
- 12 Public temple or shrine with some remarkable relic.

D20 WHAT'S THE PROBLEM HERE?

- 1 Maintenance staff is stealing vital parts off ships.
- 2 A plague has suddenly hit the area.
- 3 A local war zone suddenly engulfs the port.
- 4 Rebels scheme to seize the port and its ships.
- 5 A dangerous religious festival is underway.
- 6 The last outworlder did something horrible here.
- 7 The local ruler wants to conscript the PCs for war.
- 8 Another outworlder set the PCs up for trouble.
- 9 The local ruler won power by hating foreigners.
- 10 A natural disaster strikes just after the PCs land.
- 11 The only people with money here are loathsome.
- 12 Local troublemakers are hunting for foreigners.
- 13 The local construction is frail and about to crumble.
- 14 Native weather is making take-offs very dangerous.
- 15 The local economy just got shocked by outsiders.
- 16 The locals strip ships for some desperate need.
- 17 Goods bought here are often fake or counterfeit.
- 18 The local cops think the PCs are agents of a foe.
- 19 The PCs are mistaken for expected contractors.
- 20 They're using a dangerous pretech device here.

WHAT'S THAT ABANDONED STRUCTURE?

A ONE-ROLL GENERATOR

There are times when a GM needs a little quick filler for exploration. The tables below offer a quick one-roll method for creating an abandoned building suitable for planting in some untamed planetary wilderness or long-lost alien city. Just roll and tweak the details to fit the context.

D4 WHERE ARE THE USABLE ENTRANCES?

- 1 The front or main entrance is still passable.
- 2 There's a sinkhole or tunnel to a basement level.
- 3 There are holes in the roof.
- 4 A wall or window has given way.

D6 WHAT'S ITS MOST NOTICEABLE FORM OF DECAY?

- 1 Extremely rickety; structural supports are failing.
- 2 Local vegetation has almost entombed it.
- 3 Fire has scorched large portions of it.
- 4 External sheathing is decaying or falling away.
- 5 Water has soaked it; molds, mosses, and slime.
- 6 Large pieces have been blasted away or collapsed.

D8 WHAT WAS ITS BASIC ORIGINAL USE?

- 1 Residential. People lived in it, either as home or hotel.
- 2 Industrial. It was a factory, farm or workshop.
- 3 Governmental. Local officials worked there.
- 4 Entertainment. It was a club, theater, or dance hall.
- 5 Infrastructural. Sewage plant, roadwork garage, etc.
- 6 Fortification. It was for frontier defense or civil order.
- 7 Culture. It was an art gallery, shrine or cultural center.
- 8 Commercial. People bought and sold something here.

D10 WHAT'S WORTH FINDING IN IT?

- 1 A cache of local currency was left behind.
- 2 A valuable cultural artifact or historical item.
- 3 Interesting bank accounts, legal data, or land deeds.
- 4 One or more persons in desperate need of help.
- 5 A somewhat cumbersome but precious object.
- 6 A cache of weapons, armor, or other military tech.
- 7 A functioning vehicle of some kind.
- 8 Useful equipment related to the building's purpose.
- 9 Nothing. Everything is ruined or worthless inside.
- 10 Roll again, but it's actually a trap or dangerous.

You might choose to roll more than once on the dangers and things worth finding, or roll multiple interesting features and blend them together. For maps, just grab a few one-page dungeons from the net and sub in whatever seems most fitting for the structure.

D12 WHAT DANGERS EXIST IN IT?

- 1 Savage local fauna have nested in it.
- 2 One or more dangerous humans are lairing there.
- 3 A roof or floor is threatening to give way.
- 4 Something is emitting a dangerous gas or radiation.
- 5 Live power lines look dead until touched.
- 6 Violent action risks collapsing a room or area.
- 7 A type of dangerous local plant grows inside.
- 8 Security bots are still operating inside.
- 9 Something here is diseased and contagious.
- 10 The useful thing is propping up a room's ceiling.
- 11 Something waits to ambush those who emerge.
- 12 A dangerous toxin has spilled in the building.

D20 WHAT INTERESTING FEATURES DOES IT HAVE?

- 1 The running water still works, and is stuck on.
- 2 The building is partially buried.
- 3 Exiles, criminals, or social outcasts once laired here.
- 4 The building is at a dramatic tilt.
- 5 There was a vicious combat here at some point.
- 6 An important official lies here with vital documents.
- 7 Secret rooms were built for the original owner.
- 8 It's heavily adorned with local religious symbolism.
- 9 It was built in fanciful, artistic, and impractical ways.
- 10 It's all concrete and fortified angles.
- 11 The power is still on and may mix badly with water.
- 12 It was a refuge for a hiding person at some point.
- 13 One or more looters died to the dangers here.
- 14 Has a small library of prohibited or interesting texts.
- 15 Numerous crumbling pieces of art around the place.
- 16 Flowing fountains or water features, semi-functional.
- 17 Unusually deep basements or tunnels.
- 18 Someone tried to repair or rebuild it at some point.
- 19 Part of it is perfectly preserved.
- 20 It was actually meant for multiple purposes.

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