


PATHFINDER[®] **ADVENTURE PATH**[™]

REIGN OF WINTER

ADVENTURE PATH  PART 5 OF 6

RASPUTIN MUST DIE!

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ADVENTURE PATH™

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Paizo Publishing, LLC
 7120 185th Ave NE, Ste 120
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Printed in China.



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REIGN OF WINTER



WALKING UNSEEN WORLDS

There's a chapter in the *Reign of Winter* Adventure Path called "Rasputin Must Die!" It means exactly what you think it means, and we want you to write it."

That's pretty much how I remember it, cornered as I was by the holy trinity of AP developers—Rob McCreary, Adam Daigle, and James Jacobs—at a tall lobby table at PaizoCon 2012. Talk about intimidating. I seem to recall that at some point Erik Mona walked by, with a snickering "Heh—you guys finally talking to Brandon about Rasputin?" With a last echoing "Dooo iiiit, duuude," he sauntered off, chuckling. Within a few short hours, the announcement of the mere title of the volume would be the buzz of the convention, and already with a full-throated chorus of supporters and naysayers, I knew exactly what sort of challenge I faced as I returned home to Texas with the assignment.

Apparently I'd been setting myself up for the assignment for some time without realizing it. For several years I've

hosted members of Paizo's staff and our extended family of freelancers at my annual Civil War-era *Call of Cthulhu* game at Gen Con. The adventure has become somewhat infamous, as I understand it. Titled *Black Cow's Milk, Black Hen's Eggs*, the story threads together actual historical events during the Battle of Gaine's Mill, real members of the 4th Infantry of Hood's Texas Brigade, and, well, unspeakable cosmic horrors. And, of course, there's the ongoing obsession, collection, and study of early spiritualism and occult apparatus and artifacts that dominate my research website, mysteriousplanchette.com. Turns out that stuff comes in handy when writing an adventure set in early twentieth-century Russia.

Apparently, the developers who had played in those Gen Con sessions believed that adventure exemplified the skill set to successfully pull off an adventure of the magnitude of "Rasputin Must Die!" Meticulous research,

Devotion to historical accuracy. A penchant for filling in the gaps of historical fact with fantasy. And the ability to weave what we know of our world's history into a believable amalgamation with characters definitely not of this world.

My head swam with ideas. I was locked in at a 13th-level starting point, which meant PCs would be powerhouses, and were coming to a world of decidedly low level-limits. Given lower PC levels to work with, I might have written an adventure in which the PCs took on the roles of Rasputin's real-life murderers, in a replay of historic events. But that wasn't an option, and the magic wielded by PCs at this level, without the shackles of something like the Prime Directive to control their actions, was just too historically disruptive. At least I can fight back with tanks and guns, I thought. I considered advocating for a magic-dead Earth, but ultimately we all recognized we couldn't strip away the PCs' power for an entire adventure.

MANKIND AND MAGIC

The story I hoped to tell was based on two presumptions. First, I theorized that the magic our myths and legends speak of was once real in our world, but has since faded. Second, everything that happened in the adventure had to happen in the gaps of our real-world history, without contradiction or disruption of the status quo.

The first assumption was the easiest to accept. The myths and stories upon which our game is based have their roots in our collective human culture, from the heroes of Greek myth to the prophets of Testaments Old and New. If one assumes, as I did for this adventure (and as many faithful do), that some of those tales are true, and that the prophets of old really did turn rods to serpents and summon plagues of frogs and locusts—or that modern TV ghost hunters actually have a chance of finding anything, or that saints' relics can heal the sick—then the burden of acceptance of the adventure's events would be much lighter at the gaming table. The second half of this assumption, which has become a trope of fantasy, was that magic has faded from our world since an earlier age of miracles. That is, with the rise of industry and the substitution of science for superstition, only the occasional great supposed seers whose names alone conjure thoughts of mysticism and power—Edgar Cayce, Aleister Crowley, Blavatsky, and Rasputin, among others—have been born capable of tapping into that magical force. And in this case, I reasoned, Rasputin was able to bring back even more of that lost magic with the Earth-bound imprisonment of his mother, her presence and his influence calling back creatures long since fled from Earth (or slumbering in dark corners) and wielding phenomenal power not seen since the days of the Old Testament. With his defeat, I reasoned, all would again be right with the world.

ON THE COVER

The “Mad Monk” Rasputin himself appears on this month's cover, along with a whole trench-full of World War I soldiers who use all the tricks and technology of modern warfare to keep the PCs from reaching Rasputin's sanctuary, where he holds his mother Baba Yaga captive.

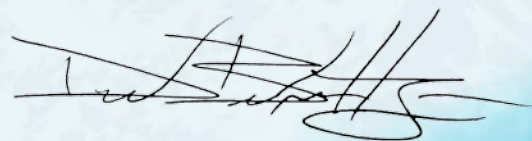
THE GAPS HISTORY LEFT BEHIND

The latter assumption, however, is more daunting, and takes significantly more skill than just settling on a cosmological decision about the nature of magic on Earth. Early on, I settled on one overriding mantra that I'm afraid even began to annoy my developers: “All of this really happened.” The story I was telling here, I repeated to myself, was simply putting our world's real history into game terms and Pathfinder mechanics. For nearly 4 months, I told myself: Rasputin survived his murder. Fables of Baba Yaga are fact. And, in 1918, a little chicken-legged hut appeared in Siberia, from which emerged a group of strange people with legendary powers. And if you search Siberia long and hard, or listen to those generations-old tales, you very well may discover the remains of a destroyed prison camp surrounding a ruined monastery. I won't tell you where it is, but if you go there, maybe you'll find a buried blade of unusual metal, or strange burn marks on ruined walls.

More importantly, I wanted to write something that could really have happened from our real-world historical perspective. I didn't want a single glitch. From the timing of Rasputin's and Anastasia's resurrection, to the inclusion of Tesla's strange technology, I wanted to assure the audience that they would find no distracting historical hiccups, without resorting to an “alternate timeline” Earth or any such mechanism. This must be our world.

No matter what I did, the events shaped by the adventure had to inevitably result in the same basic outcomes found in our history books, including the final recovery of all the Romanov remains. I gave myself a hard and strict line of demarcation between the fiction I was trying to tell and the facts and figures that make up our known history. In other words, if these events were possible, this is exactly how they went down, and in a way plausible given the history our textbooks tell us. I just had to fill in the gaps with the history humans never recorded.

So maybe—just maybe—this is how it all really happened.



Brandon Hodge
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