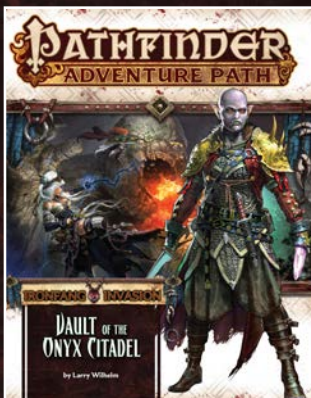


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ON THE COVER



Nowhere is safe when the land itself carries foul intent! A mean-tempered zarxorin welcomes the mavens of the Ironfang Invasion to the Vault in this month's cover art by Remko Troost.



IRONFANG INVASION

ADVENTURE PATH 6 OF 6

VAULT OF THE ONYX CITADEL

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REFERENCE

This book refers to several other Pathfinder Roleplaying Game products using the following abbreviations, yet these additional supplements are not required to make use of this book. Readers interested in references to Pathfinder RPG hardcovers can find the complete rules of these books available online for free at paizo.com/prd.

<i>Advanced Class Guide</i>	ACG	<i>Occult Adventures</i>	OA
<i>Advanced Player's Guide</i>	APG	<i>Ultimate Combat</i>	UC
<i>Bestiary 2</i>	B2	<i>Ultimate Equipment</i>	UE
<i>Bestiary 3</i>	B3	<i>Ultimate Magic</i>	UM



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EXTRA SHINY

Here we are again. The sixth volume of every Adventure Path is a chance for the developer to wipe her proverbial brow, exhale, and say, “That was a hell of a ride, wasn’t it?” It’s a weird little ritual now, where we talk about the challenges and the growth and how happy we are. But, y’all...

Ironfang Invasion kicked my ass.

This job is harder than I ever gave it credit for. Developing adventures is hard; I knew that going in. But I’ve been developing adventures for years, so how bad could developing six adventures be?

It turns out it’s one of those “exponential challenge” deals. Like, I can ice-skate and I can juggle, but if I try to juggle while I ice-skate, I fall on my butt. And wow, did I fall on my butt a few times over the course of Ironfang Invasion. There were tears at multiple points. Tears and liquor and swearing and *oh my god, why the hell is there no CR 14 ooze you can find in a forest?!?!*

But it’s done, and as I foreshadowed above, I learned a lot in the process. Hopefully people have a fun time with the challenges and opponents that the Ironfang Invasion

brings to the table. Time will tell—we have to wrap up the entire Adventure Path before the first volume even hits store shelves, so it’s impossible to know how the audience will react until the project is already in our rearview mirror. As after all my creative endeavors, I have to let go and focus on making the next one even better. On to new adventures!

Most of the lessons learned over the past 10 months have been about organization, record-keeping, math, responsibility, and the importance of family (because you can’t work in the entertainment industry in America without shoe-horning in a moral about the importance of family). Adventure Paths, as it turns out, are major projects that touch many people’s lives, both inside the company and out. There’s a temptation to see them solely as a creative endeavor—to hold it back until it’s perfect or to feel defensive when your choices are questioned—but no one benefits from my little self-indulgent flights of ego. Keeping to a schedule means no one has to work weekends, and those questions lead to a stronger, better product. While I’ve always loved our editors here at Paizo,

the hectic process of creating an Adventure Path has only confirmed how central they are to every product and our overall reputation as professionals. The editors had no patience for my excuses and tracked down the errors that crept into my work as stress levels mounted. For that I am incredibly grateful. Everywhere this Adventure Path succeeds, thank the Paizo editors.

Everywhere it falls flat, you can still blame me. I gotta take credit for something.

BETWEEN A ROCK AND A—WELL, JUST ROCKS

Most of “Vault of the Onyx Citadel” occurs inside a rock. More accurately, most of the adventure takes place inside a massive geode somewhere deep in the Plane of Earth, and while the adventure location is technically on another plane, the intention isn’t to make it feel like an interdimensional romp. The Vault is isolated because it needs to be safe and unknown for story reasons. In your home game, it could just as easily be an Orvian Vault deep in the Darklands (we opted against that because we’d already touched on the Darklands in this Adventure Path) or a secluded stronghold in some forgotten valley (this was considered and set aside so as not to step on the toes of Rise of the Runelords).

The Vault of the Onyx Citadel (the place, not the book) is a vast, mysterious, alien wilderness—a snow globe of adventure that can serve either as a backdrop for the campaign’s climax or to open up future opportunities. As you can see from the map on page 26, the PCs investigate only a small corner of the self-contained world over the course of this volume, but many ancient and mysterious locations remain to be discovered. “Continuing the Campaign” on page 64 describes a few points of interest, but don’t limit yourself to these entries if you’d like to add new locations or adventure hooks to this strange wilderness or even begin a new campaign. It’s a classic fantasy trope for a new generation to come of age and seek to investigate the mysteries and legends their forebears left unanswered. Ancient xiomorn magic and technology scar every corner of this vast world, and outsiders—from the shaitans and xorns featured in this adventure to elementals, mephits, and thoquas—migrate in and out with the extraplanar “seasons” like birds do in the mortal realm. GMs who want to extend their ongoing campaigns can vastly increase the resources of the Ironfang Legion and grant Azaersi and her commanders a few mythic tiers (by way of Vault Builder magic), forcing the PCs to explore the Vault’s secrets, decouple additional geomantic nexuses, and gather more allies before finally bringing an end to the Ironfang Legion.

The overall point of the Vault is to isolate the PCs once again, just as they were at the outset—with few friends or resources to call upon besides their own

MEANWHILE, ON THE FRONT...

As “Vault of the Onyx Citadel” opens, the Ironfang Legion has expanded its lines farther than ever before, solidifying its claim on western Nirmathas and spreading out over the Plains of Molthune. More importantly, the Legion has broken the backs of regional defenders: Tamran is still rebuilding after a daring raid by the hobgoblins, and the defense force of Molthune’s Mindspin Province is still counting its dead after several ingenious ambushes by Ironfang forces. With little left standing in the Legion’s way, only the PCs give the hobgoblins reason to pause.

Wary now that the PCs have won control of the *sardonyx shard*, General Azaersi fully expects a counterattack by human forces. Her expansion has slowed, and her army now focuses on reinforcing its current holdings, while other units are pulled back through the Stone Road to defend the Onyx Citadel from the imminent attack.

wits and the allies they might win along the way. Now, however, instead of being hunted, the PCs hunt. Instead of running, they chase. Every step brings them closer to the monsters who destroyed their way of life, rather than desperately increasing that distance. Even if you have no desire to explore every nook and cranny of the Vault, the isolation it imposes starkly contrasts with the isolation the PCs endured in their earliest days as adventurers. Game Masters who want to play that up might consider either removing access to spells such as *gate* and *plane shift*—simply making them unavailable to PCs—or else imposing a Vault-wide *dimensional anchor* effect generated by the Onyx Citadel (no doubt a side effect of whatever magic it uses to maintain the Stone Road). Either of these options forces the PCs to once again rely on their own ingenuity and resources.

At long last, we here at the Paizo offices get to put Ironfang Invasion to bed. Beginning next month is the Ruins of Azlant Adventure Path, headed by the unflappable Adam Daigle and kicking off with Jim Groves’s “The Lost Outpost.” I’ve already been assured I (and I alone) get to play a mermaid.

Scratch the last item off my bucket list.



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VAULT OF THE ONYX CITADEL

FOREWORD

PART 1: ALLIES AND ENEMIES

PART 2: HOMECOMING

PART 3: ENTERING THE VAULT

PART 4: SIEGE OF THE ONYX CITADEL

NPC GALLERY

CONTINUING THE CAMPAIGN

ECOLOGY OF THE VAULT BUILDERS

RELICS OF THE VAULT BUILDERS

BESTIARY