



# Review : Islands of Purple-Haunted Putrescence

Review by Lev Lafayette

## Product and Overall Description

Cover art is meant to be striking or memorable and The Islands of Purple certainly achieve that. Prominent in the foreground is exposed buttocks, being worn by one of those improbable young female adventurers who decides that if she's going to go out into the world of danger she needs to put on some thigh-high boots, some short vambraces, a belt, and a skimpy pair of knickers. In the background is the reason that she's dropping her sword; a giant purple tentacled blob that seems to have captured one of her comrades who decided on even less clothing, but also with a comrade in a short-dress carrying a pistol. To be fair the work by Faustie it is fairly well well-executed; it is just largely devoid of creativity.



In many cases you *can* judge a book by its cover, and this is one of those cases. *Islands of Purple Haunted Putrescence* by Venger As'Nas Satanis describes itself as "An old school weird science-fantasy campaign setting and wilderness hex-crawl... an old school campaign guide and sandbox hex crawl created for use with virtually every fantasy paper & pencil tabletop roleplaying game", by which the author means Dungeons & Dragons and immediate derivatives. It comes with an solid table of contents (the disorganised text needs it), a two-column justified serif presentation with a good sense of content to whitespace. The inside back cover has a colour map of the three islands (Korus, Kelis, and Krevian). Despite a hex-grid there is no scale offered, but deep in the text its mentioned that the larger (Korus) is about 1,000 square miles; it is also the island that seems to have a water supply. Most of the internal line drawings are context-based and show some skill and creativity along the general style of Lovecraftian horror, which is not surprising given the author's activities. The writing style is informal, chatty, and verbose.

## Setting, System, and Characters

An opening description establishes the islands as "a land of jungle and stone bordered by eldritch beaches of violet-black sand. Ruins of cities, temples, and statues litter the landscape". There is reference to "the Great Ones", "Snake-Men", and crystals that power pylons that open gateways to other dimensions which, inevitably, means that the islands are populated with a fun-house of beings and technologies. The sands give off a purple mist after rain, which is a nice aesthetic touch.

So just as one is getting a good sense of the surroundings and perhaps wanting to know how this all comes about... we jump to the author's own mini-game system, V6D6, which is essentially roll a variable dice-pool (1d6 standard) and count the highest with 6s high (successes) and 1s low (failures). Players can reserve dice for future actions. It's nothing particularly exciting and the reserve system is prone to enormous abuse. This is then following by the author's opinion on some combat options, and finally a rather impressive description for scenario development. The latter is certainly one of the best parts of the book, although the same structure several times in a row would become rather formula rather quickly.

The material then jumps to some random tables for character background. The twenty examples from the Darker Secrets table ranges from being near-sighted (not a particularly dark secret one would think), allergic to "exotic foods", having a slimy green tentacle with suckers, being a product of incest, a serial killer, or a rapist. This is followed by

twenty example flashback scenes that afflict a character, almost all with the sex, death, and monsters motif.

Jump-cut now to a table about magic use on the Purple Isles, which is "unstable, radioactive, and addictive". Every time a spell is cast, roll a d6; on a roll of 6 it doubles in some effect, on a roll of 1 it fails spectacularly (unless the wizard decided to align themselves with Chaos and become gradually mutated instead), on a 3, roll on "The Magic User Rolled A Three" table - yes that's what it's called, which can summon a purple worm (who eats someone before disappearing), converts a nearby tree into a "beautiful, voluptuous woman with magenta skin tone" etc. Magic items also fail on a roll of 1 on d6 when used, and finally, of course, there's a table for various dimension gateways which pop up with alarming regularity. Where do they lead? Jungles full of cannibals! Derelict spaceships! Earth in the 21st century!

The text then leaps to an underdeveloped version of the monk character class, a short (d12) random table for critical hits, personality traits for magical swords which includes "likes to quote Nietzsche" (all magical swords on the Purple Islands have personality and ego), and an origins table, followed by a scarring table for when characters are brought to zero hit points or less (including "effectively castrated", "spinal injury - can't walk" etc).

Finally the author deems us worthy to learn about the twenty-thousand year history of the Islands, which mysteriously appeared as one, was split apart by magical forces, and has had its share of rulers, plagues, wars and the like.

Interesting the Isles are sapient albeit of a single personality, and they are given six personality traits, some of which are contradictory : "The islands are as psychotic and broken as a computer with multiple conflicting personalities. Every day it's something different and frequently a handful of divergent goals will try processing themselves at once".

We are then offered a random chart of fairly scenario seeds with some pretty uninteresting thematic content, and a random chart of equally uninteresting personal connections to the islands, followed by a random chart of rumours, a random chart of nocturnal events (e.g., forget all your spells, go sleep walking, wake up with a strange woman with a 1 in 6 chance she's dead, etc).

### **The Islands Want Slave Women**

The Islands don't have a government apart from local rulers and as such don't have currency, but apparently knowledge, shelter, magic/high tech items can serve for barter.. and women. Yes, apparently a universal medium of exchange among the humanoid inhabitants "attractive and fit young adult females would fetch [the equivalent of] about 1,000 gold pieces", which each item of this unit of currency provided the owner a +1 CON bonus. The Island has interventionist deities as well, blasphemy and defilement against the Dark Gods will result in punishments and there is a 13% chance per day that a cleric can engage in Divine Intervention.

Then there's the Purple Putrescence itself, the result of "a blasphemous union between Ancient Wyrms and Great Old One. Although, more than one sorcerer has reason to believe the unholy abomination was spawned betwixt Yogsoggoth and the mother of all purple jellies", which oozes and consumes that which it encounters. It's sort of a deity in its own right, one supposes, described as being a mile long, two miles wide and "a semi-sentient being of dribbling, putrid, gelatinous filth".

Also crystals of various shades can be found on the islands, formed from the decayed bodies of ancient wyrms. Although non-magical and do not detect as such, they provide magical effects. They have a glimmer, equivalent to a wand's charges.

There are six major factions on the island; Purple Worshipers, Overlords, Koshi, Children of Light, Snake-Men, and Disciples of Zygak-Xith. There is, of course, a random table for encountering members of such groups and a random table for determining "Changing State of Affairs" within these factions. An extended period of time on the Islands results in a test against the "Adventurer/Native Relations Table" and maybe even the "How Do We Feel About Our Neighbours? Table". Disappointment is expressed that there isn't a Table for describing tables (and perhaps a subtable for chairs).

Each major faction receives a short write up, according to their appearance (clothing etc), numbers (around a few

hundred each), nature, agenda, tech-level, and currency (cf., previous comments). Unsurprisingly there's a wandering monster table full of random beasts that want to eat you and the like, with each hex-area also containing requiring a check on the random trap table.

### **Keyed Encounters Without Rhyme or Reason**

A very large section of the text is dedicated to keyed encounter areas, effectively frozen in time until perceived by the GMs adventuring party. These have no relationship to each other and can be derived from various points in space and time. For example, there's Giant Spiders of Thaar whose treasure includes "an Arnold-autographed DVD of Pumping Iron and a hardcover book (full color) on making Asian cuisine". Other encounters include cybermen under the control of a supercomputer, a huge carnivorous maggot, green-skinned slave girls conditioned to accept their slavery, purple harlequins of madness, skeletal undead pterodactyls, ape-men who worship a radioactive copy of the Necrominicon, an insane clown posse, half-demon concumbines for the Emperor Strigoia, a 1970s scifi porno casting couch complete with actress ("Samantha has a legitimate passion for scifi and uninhibited sex"), and so forth.

Each of these dozens of encounters usually is provided a few paragraphs of description. Some of the potentially more interesting ones are provide next to nothing. For example, key 028 and 071 "Crashed starship" - that's it! In addition to this there are two large unkeyed old-school (i.e., utterly improbable) dungeons maps. The author excuses himself: "I didn't have the time, energy, or creative juices left over to fill the dungeons and dungeon-like areas contained in the book. Rather than half-ass it, the maps are present for GMs to use and populate as they see fit".

Overall the encounters are a combination of Lovecraft without the actual mythos or themes, *Expedition to the Barrier Peaks* without the sense of wonder and plot coupons, the fun-house of *White Plume Mountain* minus the fun (let alone the puzzles), and a lot of beautiful-women-are-objects thrown in. The encounters have a poor sense of game balance as well; some encounter locations have monsters as trivial to defeat as the zombie rednecks (1 HD each, albeit with an infectious bite), others range to Zathra, the giant prehistoric psionic reptile-bird (HD 15) and Satan's Little Helper (13 HD, 4 attacks per round, extremely fast).

### **Spells and Items**

There's a number of new spells and magic items that come with Islands, starting off with an over-powered second-level "This Night I Shall Purple Your Soul", which drives the afflicted to a suicidal urge or teleporting everyone to Italy, c1817. Another is "Napalm Shower", a fourth-level spell that covers an area 30' x 40' with a sticky burning jelly that does 3d6 damage per round for six rounds with no saving throw. Several others are described in the most minimal terms, and with no reference whatsoever to typically important issues such as components, range, or duration.

Several pages are spent on new magical items, including a heavily described but essentially trivial hologram staff, a sword which gives variable bonuses depending on alignment, a brooch of bad wishes (1 cursed wish per day), a sword that sunders opponent weapons, shields, or magic items, and a necklace of ears which grants the wearer a bonus to hearing perception. With the possible exception of the last example, the spells and magic items are generally uninteresting.

### **Evaluation**

The Islands of Purple-Haunted Putrescence was successfully funded via Kickstarter at the beginning of 2014 and is the follow-up to Liberation of the Demon Slayer. Over a hundred and fifty people backed the project with one brave individual putting in \$165 for a full collection of goodies. It can only help that the backers don't feel so badly about what they received, because I felt like I had precious minutes of my life stolen off me by reading this.

Whilst the author offered a the Kickstarter "a level of weirdness, science-fantasy, gonzo (without getting too silly), and horror/exploitation that you've rarely seen...", I've seen a *lot* of more of all of those in other products. In particular I want to emphasise that it's not weird at all; rather it's boring, and misogynistic. Nor is it gonzo, because that requires first-person experience. There is a central motif (y'know, *purple*) which is fine, but there isn't much else to go on. The

Purple Islands could totally disappear from *any* campaign world and the inhabitants could breathe a collective sigh of relief and get on with their lives.

The thing is, there are wasted opportunities here. A dynamic struggle between six major factions scattered over three islands could account for something. The potential of a single, if mentally disturbed, consciousness between the three island masses could really be made into an interesting character. The use of Lovecraftian horrors such as Mi-Go could have been given a purpose, or even the namesake of the product itself.

Further, despite the rambling text and terrible organisation, the general layout is fair with good breakdown of headings and spacing. The artwork is typically quite good as well, and one hopes that the artists continue and hone their craft. But overall, this is a terrible product that has absolutely no reason for existence.

**Substance 1/5, Style 2/5**

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