

Sample file

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## Special Thanks

Thanks to my playtesters for putting up with years of abuse, to Bill and Clark for creating Necromancer Games and preserving the First Edition feel, Bill for creating Frog God Games as a vehicle for this to make it into print, and most of all to all the rabid, loyal fans out there who have been clamoring for this adventure for eight years and without whom this wouldn't have been possible.

And extra special thanks to all the folks at Paizo Publishing for their Pathfinder Roleplaying Game. We couldn't have done it without you!



**FROG  
GOD  
GAMES**

**TOUGH  
ADVENTURES  
FOR TOUGH  
PLAYERS**

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# Foreword

## What A Long, Strange Trip It's Been

If you're reading this, then there's a good chance that you've been along for the ride that has been *Slumbering Tsar* for some time...and if not, welcome aboard! This compilation is called *The Slumbering Tsar Saga* for a reason, and it's not because the adventure in and of itself is a saga; it's because the adventure has been through a saga. If you've been on this ride for awhile, then you may have heard this story before, but I'll share it one more time for the sake of those who have not. After all, if you laid down the scratch for this beast of a book, I figure you deserve a little history.

I became a fan of Necromancer Games when I found a copy of *DI: The Tomb of Abythor* at my friendly local game store, Game HQ in Oklahoma City (there's a blatant plug if I ever saw one). Shortly after selling my first adventures to *Dungeon Magazine* in 2004 I got the idea to do a prequel of sorts for Necromancer's quintessential dungeon-crawl adventure, *Rappan Athuk: The Dungeon of Graves*. Of particular interest to me was part of the adventures prologue—a little bit of atmospheric text drawn from Bill Webb's own campaign from years earlier.

*Many hundreds of years ago, the forces of good allied to destroy the main Temple of Orcus in the ancient city of Tsar. With their temple in ruins, the surviving priests of this accursed demon-god fled the city with an army of enemies on their tail...*

That little bit of text gave me as much inspiration as the entire adventure had. I had to know about this Tsar. Why did the forces of good form an alliance and attack? How did the followers of Orcus survive to flee, and most importantly, if the priests of Orcus led the forces of good into a trap at the *Dungeon of Graves*, why didn't they ever return to their temple and rebuild? Just exactly what had they left behind and why? Could it be that the whole thing was a ruse to draw attention away from some terrible secret lost and forgotten in ancient Tsar? Thus was born the genesis of *Slumbering Tsar*.

From that came the idea of Tsar being an entire temple-city surrounded by a wasteland of war-torn battlefields left behind by the long-ago conflict, the subterfuge of the Great Retreat, and the mystery of the Hidden Citadel. I pitched it to Bill Webb and Clark Peterson of Necromancer Games, and they liked it. I envisioned it to be a single book of

a couple hundred pages, maybe the size of *The Lost City of Barakus*. However, from conversations with Bill I was told that Necromancer wanted smaller adventures rather than more of the mega-adventures like *Barakus* that they had been producing. So *Slumbering Tsar* underwent the metamorphosis from a single mega-adventure to three smaller adventures: one for the *Desolation* around the city, one for the temple-city itself, and one for the lost Citadel of Orcus. The outline was approved and writing began.

The scope of the book expanded. I had asked for a year in which to write the trilogy and was on track when I turned *The Desolation* in after four months. Bill began working on its development, and I turned to the task of writing *Temple-City of Orcus*. I soon realized, however, that couldn't get everything I wanted in a book the same size as *The Desolation* and asked Bill if I could go a little bit longer with it. He said, "Sure." Big mistake.

Six months later I turned in *Temple-City of Orcus*...half-again as long as *The Desolation*. *The Desolation* went into the production schedule and Bill told me to hurry and get *Caverns of the Barrier* (what is now known as *The Hidden Citadel*) done because he wanted to see how this whole adventure was going to end. I told him I might need a couple extra months beyond the original year I had estimated. He said, "Not a problem." That Bill is a trusting fellow.

By the time eight more months had passed I was ready to turn in *Caverns of the Barrier*, equal in length to *The Desolation* and *Temple-City of Orcus* combined. I shudder to think what would have happened had *Slumbering Tsar* been a four-part series—I might not be done with the original draft yet. But after a year-and-a-half it was done, and *The Desolation* was off to a printer in China. Then the fourth edition of the world's oldest fantasy roleplaying game was announced and production came to a halt. The distributor pulled the plug on d20 products, and *The Desolation* died before it ever saw the light of day. A few years later Bill was able to release it as a pdf-only product along with a few lost Necromancer Games titles, but for all practical purposes *Slumbering Tsar* was dead and Necromancer Games was on hiatus.

I spent the next few years writing primarily for Paizo and their Pathfinder line and eventually their new Pathfinder Roleplaying Game, spiritual heir to the 3.5 edition. During

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that time I pitched *Slumbering Tsar* everywhere I could. It didn't fit with the Paizo adventure path format and at over 500,000 words altogether was simply too large for practical publication by another company. The risk was just too great, the chances of success too slim. Finally after several years, I was back where I had started.

Then out of the blue Clark Peterson contacted me. He had been judging for RPG Superstar for Paizo and had gotten a good look at the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game. He still wanted to find a way to produce *Slumbering Tsar*, but his real-life work was simply not going to allow him to, so he hooked me up with Bill Webb again after all these years, and Bill had an idea. Necromancer Games couldn't exist without Clark—he was half of the magic formula—so Necromancer wasn't going to be able to come out of hiatus yet due to real-life scheduling conflicts, but Bill was wanting to start up a new company, Frog God Games, for the sole purpose of producing *Slumbering Tsar*. It would be converted to the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game and divided up into 14 bite-size pieces, and we would sell it through a subscription. Subscribers would receive a pdf of each of the 14 chapters as they came out and, when all were released, the entire thing would be compiled into one giant book and shipped to everyone who had subscribed.

Bill gathered together Chuck Wright who had done layout for some Necromancer Games products, cartographer Robert Altbauer from his excellent map work online, and artist James Keegan from his work on *Wayfinder*. With this team assembled in 2010, the work began, the company was launched, and the book went up for sale while I began editing, crunching stat blocks to Pathfinder, and getting a final opportunity to tinker with what I now been working on for six years. We had hoped to sell 100 copies, maybe 150—just enough to cover expenses and maybe make a little bit of money to pay the people working on it. Then the orders started coming in numbers exceeding our expectations. Looking at the numbers we realized that we would be able to achieve that ever-elusive dream in the RPG biz—profit. With that Frog God Games was launched in earnest. Bill found an additional partner in Matt Finch of Swords & Wizardry fame and suddenly we were producing adventures both from the Necromancer backlog as well as new materials, all in both the Pathfinder system and Swords & Wizardry. *Swords & Wizardry Complete* came to fruition and then *The Tome of Horrors Complete*, the *Tome of Adventure Design*, *Black Monastery*, an update for *Rappan Athuk*, and numerous other products that Bill had been itching to do for some time. All because you guys, the fans, decided

you wanted to see *Slumbering Tsar* and were willing to subscribe to a pdf series, sight unseen, from a brand-new start-up company in order to make it all happen.

The list of people I have to thank for this project seeing the light of day is endless, from people like Lou Agresta plugging the adventure in his *RPGAggression.com* blog, to Dawn Fischer coming on board voluntarily to serve as a proofreader and editor and ultimately joining the company in that position, Skeeter Green for assisting in conversions of monsters, Greg Ragland in conducting playtesting, Robert Trifts and Mike Azzolino of *Chronicles: Pathfinder Podcast* for getting the word out, and a host of *WereCabbages* and staff members of Paizo Publishing for providing support and encouragement.

Also a very special thanks is owed to the fans on the messageboards who have poured their own hearts and souls into this project to make it commercially successful through reviews, word-of-mouth advertising, and all their encouragement and support of me and the rest of the Frog God Games staff. There are too many to name but I'd be remiss in not at least pointing out *Endzeitgeist* and *Dark Mistress* for their many reviews critiquing the books on both their strengths and flaws in order to help us improve. And finally thanks to those fans who went the extra mile and systematically compiled errata for us to incorporate into the final publication and make the book that much better. Leading the charge on 16 pages of messageboards commentary was the incomparable DaveMage supplemented in no small part by the rogues' gallery of Anguish, bstern, catsclaw227, Dark Sasha (our very own Dawn Fischer), davrion24, dunbruha, Jzavoda, piedpiperpublishing, Kthulhu, laricg99, leem, Leonal, Leopold, Pale Writer (our very own Chuck Wright), skeetyrbug (our very own Skeeter Green), Sozin, and Tammeraut (some hack we claim we don't know). And to the many, many others who helped make this possible and who I've forgotten to mention. You guys are the best!

Like this foreword, this book has been a very long and strange trip with the help of a thousand hands on a journey of as many miles.

Thanks for riding along.

Greg A. Vaughan

May 2004 – March 2012

## Author's Note

A couple of quick things to clarify before you dive into the book. When the Pathfinder conversions for this book were originally started, Paizo's *Pathfinder Bestiaries 2* and *3* had not yet been released. Conversions from the original OGL sources were made for the first few pdf releases of the series. As a result, the conversions presented herein may not always exactly match the official Pathfinder conversions published by Paizo. With the compilation I have updated those stat blocks to reference the *Bestiary* sources but have not changed the stat blocks themselves, in order to maintain the integrity of the original conversions that were done and balanced specifically for this adventure. You can choose to view those particular monsters with stat block deviations as merely regional variations of the particular species or just replace them altogether with the Paizo versions. I just wanted to let you know so that when you looked at a belker, for instance, and realized it wasn't a perfect match for the *Bestiary 2* version that there was a reason why.

Of final note, a few people have asked about the distances between locales featured in or referenced by the adventure: places like Bard's Gate, the Grand Duchy of Reme, and others. Like the Necromancer Games products of old, *The Slumbering Tsar Saga* is designed to be dropped into your own campaign world so those distances are kept purposely vague. While Frog God Games may someday perhaps stitch its adventures together into a coherent campaign world for some future product, for now there is no such official interpretation, so make the adventure yours and fit it where you will in your own homebrew or some other published setting. The adventure is yours; make it work for you and your gaming group.

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# The Slumbering Tsar Saga

## Book 1

### The Desolation

By Greg A. Vaughan