

World of Warcraft: Beta Test Preview

Patty Estill has an extensive overview of the eagerly anticipated game.

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Write to Dana at : adriayna@yahoo.com

From the Editor

Welcome to the September edition of the *Silven Trumpeter*. This past month has been quite exciting for the gaming community for those of us (myself included) who attended Gen Con 2004. Since most of our coverage did not meet the deadline to be included in this month's *Trumpeter*, you can expect to see an extended feature next month reflecting our coverage of the con.

With each gaming convention I visit, I learn new things, interact with interesting people, and gain new insights. Although I've been playing role-playing games for a number of years, I only recently began to attend gaming conventions and was pleasantly surprised by how much I didn't know I was missing! The con, even the small-scale con, is an amazing experience for any gamer—a time when you can interact with others who share similar interests; a time where you can learn about the next "greatest" game you'd otherwise never hear about; and a time when your hobby is officially "cool." I encourage everyone, even those new to gaming, to give a gaming convention a chance.

This month's *Trumpeter* has a host of excellent content! We feature interviews with both *David Carradine* (of *Kill Bill* fame) and with Ed Greenwood, the creator of the *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting*. We also have a host of interesting articles including part II of the world building series by Scott Fitz and short fiction by Aaron Todd.

Best Regards,

Dana Driscoll

Dana Driscoll

Editor In Chief
Silven Crossroads E-zine



by Scott Fitz

Gaming Tips : World Building 102b: Environment Building the MoonHunter Way

Last month in part one of this series, we covered the first part of the world-building process. If you are interested in this process, start by reading the first article in this series (located in the August edition of the *Silven Trumpeter*). This month's article covers the actual process of building the world itself, a checklist of things to consider when world building, and a host of tips related to world building.

Build the Environment - Process

- 1) **Review the 7Cs.** This is where you will be using them. For those of you who need a refresher from last month, the 7Cs are: consistency, connection, chrome, cycle, conflict, control, and continuity.
- 2) **Environment Conception:** Like a character, any game environment will have a conception. An environment's conception is best described by the key bits- the themes, images, and ideas the GM chooses to build the environment around. The conception defines the major controlling ideas, visual images to be incorporated, determining key important ideas, and bits of chrome to be added. Make sure that most of the key bits you have received from your players are incorporated into the conception. Once you have a conception firmly in mind AND feel comfortable with it, proceed.
- 3) **Generate initial bits:** This is a brainstorming process. Simply think about the setting and jot down any idea you have about the environment. Sometimes source books and historical/ technical resources are useful at this stage. If the flow of ideas needs some help, ask yourself these questions "What do I need?", "What do I want?", "What is cool?". Jot down the ideas on a pad, 3x5 cards, or in a text file, what ever is comfortable for you.
- 4) **Sift and sort:** After you have a good comfortable number of bits, stop and look at them. Select the ideas you like AND are in line with the key bits and conception, discard the rest.

Using the Creation Checklist (which will be presented below), organize the bits you generated and key bits. This will show where you might still need work.

5) **Top down process:** This process is summarized as, "Big Ideas to small ideas, new ideas branching out." Start with your most important ideas, then branch out from there by determining the impact of your important (big) ideas upon the setting. Do not forget the impact of the important ideas upon other important ideas. The 7Cs are used on this step to help you generate new ideas (small) that fit with what you have. Look at an idea, and see how each of the 7Cs apply to it. Work with the new/small ideas the same way until there seems nowhere new to go.

6) **Bottom up:** This process is summarized as, "Foundation ideas building upon a skeleton." Start this step by sorting the Important/Big and new/small ideas again, as you did in step 4, using the checklist. Using these ideas and the checklist as a foundation, build upon them by following them to their logical conclusions. You can check each idea or important element against the 7Cs to see what is applicable.

The bottom up process allows you to close up gaps and add the details and connections to make the world more real. The bottom up process includes determining rationales/ reasons behind "the way things are." Again, the 7Cs are your friends in making the foundation work strong.

7) **Sort and Polish:** Check all the ideas and world elements/ bits you have. Make sure they are complete and well formed in your mind. It is easiest to sort them by the checklist, as it will make referencing the materials easier. Remember all things added to the game environment must match the controlling ideas/ themes/ images. They must not be added no matter how cool or momentarily interesting they are.

About the Author

A gamer since 1976, Scott has worked in and around the game industry for many years. He has spent most of his life in the grail quest of gaming: the perfect game. To that end his has honed his game craft to razor sharpness. Now he gives out game advice on a number of Internet sites.

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If after your sort and polish, the environment does not seem complete, repeat steps 4 through 7. Go to step 3, if you are highly dissatisfied with the results. Two or three times through the process is quite normal.

Author's note: My personal record is five times, so do not feel dejected if you are not satisfied with it all after the first run through.

8) **Formal Write up of your notes:** Organize and clean up all your notes. Put them in a useful order. I recommend typing them up on a computer, so you can manipulate and reprint them when you need them. I then put the formal write ups in my GM campaign binder, so they will be at hand when I need them.

Checklist

The checklist is here to increase your verisimilitude by reminding you what to cover. As you remember, your job as the builder of a game environment is to give the environment the illusion of completeness. You do not need everything, complete and whole; you need "just enough" for you and your group. Put most of your attention and effort creating detail in areas of the environment that your players will be interested in or interacting with. Conversely, in areas the players don't care about, you need very little detail... just one or two vague ideas will suffice. The checklist is here to make sure you cover every aspect of the environment.

In addition to explaining each checklist item, I have included what you might want to consider in that area.

Themes and Images: Major controlling ideas, visual images to be incorporated, small important ideas, key bits, the most important world themes.

Worlds Specs: Planetological lists... if needed.

Terrain: Major terrain features, environment, climate, appearances. Remember that cities and even buildings have terrain (Hills, changes in ground level, fountains, rivers, wind patterns).

Flora/Fauna: All things alive (or independent ambulatory) be they domestic, wild, predators, or just important to people.

Resources: Things both renewable and non-renewable.

Races and Peoples: Descriptions, coloring, profiles, and modifications to any rule mechanics. This includes ethnic/subtypes of peoples as well.

Cultural Overview: This is the culture in broad simple strokes. Major themes of the culture. Languages/ Morals/ Common Beliefs/ the Unknown/ Needs

Institutions-Major: Areas of control and Power. These should be the important groups for both the setting AND the adventuring characters.

Calendar/Standards:

Holidays: Historical, Cultural, Religious, Political

Laws and Morals: Legal rules/ responses/ punishments/ and manners. Social and moral rules are often more strictly enforced than laws.

Family: Types/ Sizes/ Values

Social classes: Formal and Informal/ Birth and Earned.

Political Power: Institutions and groups of political/social power, control, and who enforces the control. The power structure of the area.

Economics: Money/ trade/ value/ subsistence/ working/ monopolies

Religion: Beliefs/ Organizations/ Groups

Technology and Common Power: These are the common mechanical (and sometimes metaphysical) means that the environment uses to do things. Transportation could be the means of a horse, a cart, a car, a flying carpet, or mystical gate. It depends on what the people in the environment use to do things.

Military Weapons and Tactics

Industrial/ Production

Medical

Agricultural

Communication

Math and Science: Math Engineering, Algebra. These

things are the foundation required for other cooler sciences and building projects. Many "primitive peoples" had more complicated math abilities than we have today.

Construction

Information: Writing/ Printing/ Processing. How does it get moved?

Other Knowledge

Transportation: Land/ Sea/ Air(?) and other

Arts/ Literature: Forms/ Usage/ Needs/ Ideals

Shadow: Criminals/ Assassins/ Deceit/ and those on the margins of society.

Power: Magic per type, Psionics, Other. This is the area for details on power. Notes on users, attitudes towards it and practitioners, and prejudices. This also links to technology and common power section.

Paranormal: Weird beasties, supernatural entities, spirits, demons, Gods, the Unknown.

History Brief: Every world has two histories, the actual one and the one that people believe is true.

Rules: Special modifications in game system needed to accommodate the world. This could be a power system, special skills and races, and items.

Build the Environment -Things to consider

The following list is a hodge-podge of tips that can assist you in your own world building process.

Big and small text: This is an idea borrowed from technical writers. It is a tool for making sure the project gets done. Big text is the important, large, and visible aspects of a subject. Small text is all the details that are not as important, that simply fill out or illustrate a big text idea. Focus on the big text initially for all checklist areas. Only work on small text of the most important areas AFTER everything else is done. If it is not an area that will impact the character's lives, avoid doing the small text for it.

Paintbrush tool: The paintbrush tool is a trick borrowed from computer use. Find a time/ place, fictional or real, that is similar to your game environment. It does not have to be a perfect match, just close. This is your "paint". You can then describe things with the phrase, "It is like X, with these differences Y". Using the paintbrush technique, you can describe things in one line that would have taken a paragraph.

Note: This is mostly for your own use. If you are going to describe things this way to the players, make sure they know the time/ place/ piece of fiction you are painting from. If they don't you are going to have to give the complete explanation.

You can even have multiple "paints" if your game environment is complex or diverse enough.

Once you have your "paint", you can use it multiple times. If there is an area you have not worked out, dip into this other place and paint it into your own world, copying much of it whole cloth from this other time/ place.

Originality vs. Accessibility: Remember to balance originality and accessibility when creating a game environment. New and original environments seem more exciting and novel. It follows for some people that adding more and more new and unique elements will make them more exciting. If the environment is too exotic or unique (or just plain weird), the troupe may not have a frame of reference to understand it. This could make for too steep of a learning curve required for players to play. If the curve is too steep for "just a hobby", they will either lose interest in or become frustrated by the scenario or campaign. Either does not bode well for the campaign. You do not need to be Tolkien or MAR Barker and create your own alien world from scratch.

One issue that can come up when creating a unique game environment, especially a more exotic one, is that you can leave your players "out of the loop" because they do not know all the myriad little things about it. The GM will think the game is whizzing along, but the players begin to look at the GM blankly because they don't know why things are happening or why people are doing what they are doing. This can be corrected by making sure the players and the GM are "on the same page" about the setting, by checking along the way that they have "absorbed"/ understood the setting information the GM has provided.

DaS vs. DiP (Development at Start versus Development in Play)

There are two basic methods of environment development. They are two extremes, DaS (development at start) and DiP (development in play). The extreme DaS would be to make up EVERYTHING about the setting before ever playing that

setting; the extreme DiP would be to start playing without even having a basic idea about the environment, and just make it all up as you go along. While there are those who champion the extreme positions, most gamers favor a mixture of the two. This gives you a strong foundation (DaS) to build upon as the game progresses (DiP); at the minimum starting with some strong ideas about the environment and leaving the minor details to be filled in later as needed. Find a comfortable balance for yourself and stick to it.

Knowledge is Power: While there are no special fields of study required to create a game setting or environment, ignorance will not help. A little bit of knowledge will go a long way in making your game environment more interesting and complete. Learn a little bit about what you want in your setting, so you can make the best choices for your setting.

How to acquire said power of knowledge? Consult the Tomes of All Knowledge. This is also called the GM's reference section. This is where you should go to get all the information you really need on a subject.

Children's Books: That's right. They are quick, simple, easy to read, and have lots of pictures you can show your gamers. Unless you are building an epic masterpiece, they will probably fill your needs. **Almanac:** Tons of facts in one handy book. The highlights include a summary of history, conversions, distances, maps, and lot of weird details you can use.

Encyclopedias: They have half to two page explanations on a variety of subjects applicable to settings.

TV: With the hundreds of channels available in most areas, some of them will have educational programming. Sit down and watch a program about history, or how a city works, or how police do their jobs. A little information goes a long way to create verisimilitude.

The Internet: Somebody has probably done all this work before and has posted it up on a site.

Fiction books with similar settings: The author has done all that research before you and applied it to his or her story.

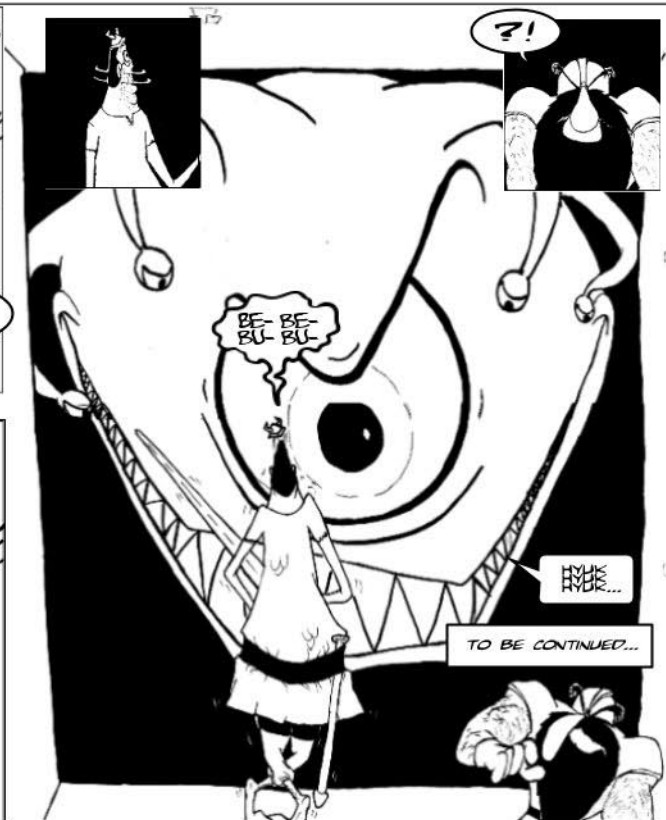
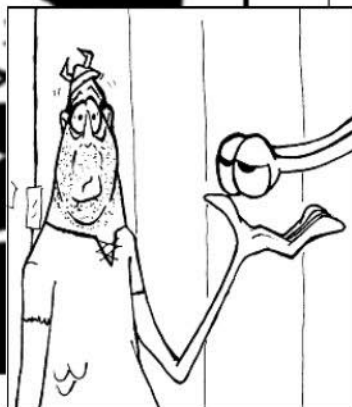
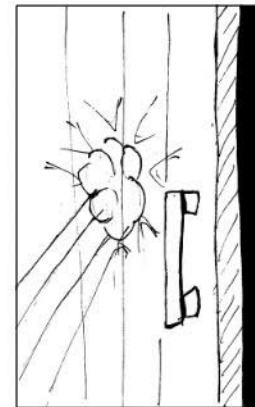
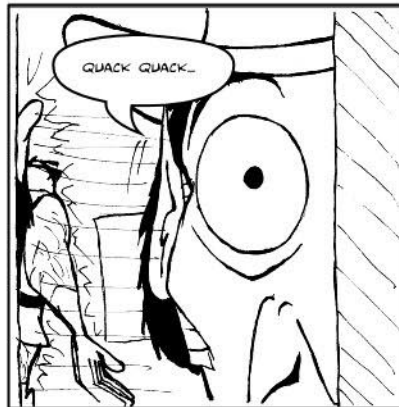
There you have it! An overview of the world building process, a list of items in a world you should take into consideration and develop, and a host of assorted tips to get you started. Good luck in your future world building endeavors!



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by Smokestack Jones





by Edward Kopp

Interview: DAVID CARRADINE

Recently, we had a chance to have a quick chat with David Carradine, one of the guests of honor at GenCon 2004. Carradine has had a prolific acting career with his most recent appearance in *Kill Bill (Volumes 1&2)*. Past acting roles included a legendary performance in the NBC show *Kung Fu* and *The Iron Circle*. This interview was conducted in person on August 21st, 2004 by Edward Kopp.

So let me ask you a couple of questions. First I'm curious, did you know what GenCon was before you got here? And, what do you think of it so far?

Well, there are certainly a lot of them. And they all seem to have a lot of money, so they must have good jobs. But then, gamers tend to be smart people, so they would get good paying jobs. And, they are nice people; they all seem to be nice people. I'll tell you I've been to conventions where you can't really say that. Some people are kind of over the top. They're bottom feeders. But this place is pretty cool.

Did you know that in *Dungeons and Dragons* there is a class of character, almost like a profession, called a monk and that it was heavily based off of the character Kwia Chang Caine.

Don't they have to pay me for that? [laughs]

I don't know. That's why I was letting you know.

No, I don't know anything about that or *Dungeons and Dragons* really. I have a son who is fully addicted to it. You know when he was that age and going around his mother to get the advance for the book so he could play. I'm not really into games, just the ones that happen in the bedroom.

Those are the more universal games, right? I wanted to ask you another question. I noticed you played the flute in *Kung Fu*, *The Iron Circle*, and in *Kill Bill II*. Whose idea was it at those times, is that something you had input in or was it something that came to you?

Well, in *Kung Fu*, there was a guy who was on the show who gave me a flute he made. And so I started carrying it around. And then he gave me another one; then he taught me how to make them. I went through a lot of flutes in *Kung Fu*. *Circle of Iron*, the original title is actually *The Silent Flute*. It was my idea to make it five feet long and put the blind man's cane in it and fight with it and everything. Those particular flutes I had actually planted the bamboo and I went back and harvested it and cured it and made the flutes myself. And then with *Kill Bill*, you know Quentin [Tarantino] is so into homage that if I'm in the picture, I've got to play the flute. And I'm going to play the flute again. And that is the flute from *The Silent Flute*, *Circle of Iron*, that long one. And the other is from the picture I did with Brandon Lee, *Kung Fu: The Movie*, the picture I made with him where he plays my son in it. So, yeah, it all ties together.

But Quentin does that. I mean Michael Madsen is wearing the same suit he wears in *Reservoir Dogs*. Not in the scene

with me, but later on when you see him as a member of the viper squad in the flashback. The black suit. Don't ever say anything about *Men in Black* around Quentin Tarantino because he'll say what are you talking about? They stole it from me.

I know that you started as a musician and then got into acting through music. What instruments do you play? And I know you are in a band, how often do you get to play?

Oh, whenever we get the chance. We rehearse all the time. If you want to call it rehearsing, we get together and play anyway. You know, I mean, its kind of weird but at 67 years old I've got a bunch of these guys who have been playing with me for years and basically we act more like a garage band than anything. We just get together and play and when we get a gig we do it. The instruments I play? Piano, guitar, flute, all the reeds for that matter. You know the fingering is all the same. Drums, harmonica, but you know anybody can play the harmonica. All kinds of drums, a little bit of sitar and bilaluga, another Indian instrument, kind of an Indian cello. Bilaluga means heart enchanter and it does. If you can imagine with all those sympathetic strings the vibration you get its pretty wild...a bitch to tune though.

Finally, I'm curious, what projects do you have coming up that we can look forward to?

You know, I can't really talk about anything coming up. They're all just a little bit too early to talk about but there's about five of them. The only one that I can talk about is not

a real movie, it's a cable television series about western heritage, gunfighters, and shit like that. But that's not really what I do, that was just, "ok I'll do that."

When I looked at your history, and what you've been doing and it goes all the way back to Shane and before that. I've noticed that you are a really busy actor and that you do a lot of work. I've heard people comment how Kill Bill is supposed to revitalize your career. What do you say to people who think that?

Well sure. I have not been making studio pictures. The last studio picture I made before this was *Bird on a Wire* in 1990. So actually you could. Harvey Winstein calls it a renaissance.

Well I really appreciate you taking the time to talk with me.

We graciously thank Carradine for taking the time out of his busy schedule to talk to us.

[Editor's note: the *Silven Trumpeter* also wants to send warm thanks to Ed Kopp, conductor of the interview. Ed spent quite a few precious GenCon hours working to setup and finalize the interview.]

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by Khaz Axzen

Cruxuzule Mamnibia: Demon of Zauurcrag Part I

After defeating the demon possessed, vampiric necromancer Primus Creed and crippling his unsavory cult in the Khorian city of Isegoth, our heroes Sarel Duthar, renegade frost elf from the frozen north, Khaz Axzen, dwarven mercenary and former slave from the gladiatorial arena's of Siraq, sold their swords to a silk merchant headed south west through the kingdom of Reban. Stopping over at the frontier town of Voth they were wrongly accused in the killing of a prominent local's son. Again running from the law, they find themselves on the front line once more, in the ongoing battle between good and evil.

High atop the ragged teeth of the Terror Mountains, perched amongst the ruined tower of Zauurcrag, ancient stronghold of the once powerful demon high lords, the blood demon lifted its horned, baboon-like head. It inhaled deeply taking in the hot night air, thick with the smell of putrefaction wafting up from the Twisted Forest below.

Standing fifteen feet tall, Cruxuzule Mamnibia was an imposing figure even by demonic standards. The hellspawn's massively muscled, humanoid torso and powerful canine legs were clad in blood red armor that stood out against the jet black skin of its sinewy arms and bat-like wings. Its long, spiked tail flicked back and forth in perpetual annoyance.

Raising its bestial snout to the red moon, the demon let out an inhuman cry of exaltation, signaling its return to earth's material plane of existence after thousands of years in exile. Creaking like dried leather unfolding, Crux stretched its wings wide. Although useless on this plane of heavy gravity for flying, they were needed to balance the huge frame of its earthly form, and the hooks at the top could be employed as weapons. Echoes of the glorious past bounced around the haunted mountain range, carried on the howling wind: thundering war drums and the occasional wail of a tortured soul reached the demon's long, pointed ears.

Cruxuzule turned and strode over to its mount, a huge, skeletal bird-like creature, and swung easily up between its wings.

Issuing a fierce screech from its viciously hooked beak, the beast leaped off the tower. Spreading its skeletal wings to soar on the air currents, its rotten flesh flapped in the wind. The demon directed it north, out of the southern wastelands, toward human civilization, toward blood and souls.

Alighting right in the middle of a small human village in the midst of a summer solstice celebration, the blood demon leaped from the back of its mount, scattering humans as they fell all over each other trying to get away from the monstrous figure. Parents swept up their children as screams of terror cut through the night. An old man was trampled over while he lay on the ground, clutching his chest in fright.

About a score of surprised, bedraggled dirt farmers formed a quaking defensive semi-circle around the demonic intruder and its hellish mount, shaking crude stone weapons and farm implements, while others, woman and children mostly, fled in all directions. The demons olfactory senses sorted through the myriad of smells, searching for the bitter, distinctive stink of adrenaline, characteristic to those few beings known as warriors or champions, or the acrid stink of sorcery, carried by mages, wizards and self-proclaimed demon hunters. But all the smells present were almost completely obscured by the musky scent of fear which rolled off the lice-infested humans in waves; there were no worthy challenges here, but there was blood and souls aplenty.

Gazing down at the pitiful farmers with eyes that resembled hot coals, the demon spoke in its booming, steel scraping rock voice. "Where are your champions?" Its simian mouth struggling to form words in a language never meant to be spoken by its kind.

A man, young even by human standards, stepped forward, brandishing a bone tipped spear. His poorly tooled, leather armor hung loosely from his gaunt frame.

"We don't need champions to deal with the likes of you, Hell spawned scum! Now leave us, or we will slay you and leave your carcass for the flies, if they'd have it!"

About the Author

Khaz Axzen and wife Donna currently live in the Pocono mountains in north east Pennsylvania with their two children, Devan and Lauryn. When not working or chasing the kids around, Khaz enjoys reading, writing, watching Yankee games and shopping for additions to his fantasy knife collection.

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"We have no warriors among us," stammered an old man from behind the youth, holding a rusty pitch fork in front of him like a pole arm. "We are poor, but what we have is yours, if you spare our young and our women."

Cruxuzule let loose a laugh which sounded like small stones rolling down a rocky hillside. Somewhere behind it, the wet sounds of tearing flesh mingled with the screams of the dying as the undead bird feasted on the flesh of the living. The metallic, coppery smell of blood reached the demon's flaring nostrils.

Reaching back between its folded wings, Cruxuzule drew its huge rune sword. The same color as its blood red armor, the sword hissed like a living thing as it came free of its sheath, in anticipation of feeding. The brash youth was the first to fall as Cruxuzule waded into the faltering line of humans, the protesting earth beneath its taloned feet burned black with every step the demon took.

With great sweeping strokes, the sword cut through upraised weapons, flesh, and bone like it was linen, dealing unclean death with every stroke. Heads and limbs were severed, arteries sliced, blood sprayed, and souls were sent screaming to Hell, until no humans were left whole or standing.

It took a moment for the berserking, gore-covered demon to realize there was nothing left to kill. Sheathing its bloody sword, which writhed and murmured in protest, Cruxuzule then held out its left arm and with the claws of its right hand slashed a shallow cut along the wrist, letting a small pool of blood to form in its cupped right palm. The blood demon then flung the droplets on the ground, while reciting an incantation in the guttural language of Hell. Each spot of the demon's acidic blood began the swirl and boil, growing and taking on the shape of small, lesser demons.

Scaled, greenish-black gargoyles with great tusks jutting from their frog-like heads emerged from the muddy, blood covered ground. They spread their stiff wings and blinked in the red moonlight as if being awakened from a long slumber. Razor sharp claws attached to long, ape-like forelimbs gouged the earth while they sat on powerful reptilian haunches. Serpentine tails flicked back and forth like demonic hounds waiting for a treat from their masters.

After allowing the gargoyles to sate their appetites on the remains of its recent victims, Cruxuzule then sent them after the escapees who fled into the night with orders to bring them back to Zaurcrag alive and whole. The gargoyles were ordered to wreak havoc on the surrounding countryside which would ensure the arrival of champions and warriors to the area, maybe even priests. Then Cruxuzule and his minions can feed on their hardy blood, and send their strong, energy-filled souls to Hell.

Remounting its hellish steed, the high blood demon, called Crux the enforcer among the human slaves in times past, took to the skies and headed back to the tower. There it would await its minions and orders from Zaranoth, the Duke of Hell, the demon responsible for re-opening the gateway between Hell and earth.

Seated in the darkest corner of the tavern, facing the main, batwing doors, Khaz Axzen and Sarel Duthar dined in silence.

From under his concealing cowl, the frost elf stared at the fire in the hearth, slowly sipping on a flagon of water, appearing to be deep in thought. In reality, the elf was keenly aware of the hushed conversations pertaining to himself and his odd, dwarven comrade. Here in the small mining and farming town of Voth, on the southwestern frontier of Reban, frost elves were more tolerated than in the northern kingdoms, but non-humans were still rare and not trusted.

Without looking directly at them, Sarel noted a group of four drunken youths rise from their bar stools and navigate their way through the crowd. A large blond haired young man the others referred to as Henry led the group. His soot stained cloths, red skin and massive arms told the astute frost elf

that this boy was most likely the town's smithy apprentice.

"Look at all them skin pictures on baldy over there!" Slurred Henry, referring to the tattoos covering Khaz's muscular arms, barrel chest and bald head. "I wonder if he escaped from the circus!"

"I wonder if the skinny elf is his girlfriend!" said another, evoking nervous laughter from some of the onlookers.

Sarel lightly kicked Khaz under the table as the drunken youths fanned out around the young blacksmith, who stood with his right hand resting atop a heavy looking hammer, staring down at the pair. The bar grew quiet as the patrons looked on, anticipating a confrontation.

"Can I help you young sir?" asked Sarel as pleasantly as he could over the sounds of Khaz chewing and growling.

"We don't care for strangers around here, elf!" Henry replied, his voice thick with alcohol.

Pushing back his cowl and revealing his frost blue skin and snow white hair, Sarel smiled at the drunk, although the smile didn't reach his almond-shaped, sky-blue eyes; these remained narrowed and dangerous.

"We are just passing through master smith, and I assure you, my friend and I are not looking for any trouble." Sarel hoped that by flattering the young man with a title he was obviously too young to achieve, and revealing his heritage, they could avoid a confrontation.

"Then maybe you two should start passing on then and don't touch any of our women on the way out!" As he finished, Henry leaned forward and slammed his left hand on the table.

Without looking up from the huge turkey leg he was gnawing on, Khaz drew his hatchet from his belt and slammed it down on the scarred table top, embedding it between Henry's fingers, a hair's width from cutting them off. The movement was so fast that the drunken youth never had a chance to withdraw his hand. A loud gasp rose from the onlookers as two of Henry's friends lost their nerve and backed their way to the batwing doors of the tavern's entrance.

"Careful whoreson! I been killin' since before you was even a twinkle in yer drunken daddy's eye!" The dwarf growled, then, with just the hint of a smile he added, "An the frost elf here just might eat ya's!"

The smell of urine suddenly hung heavy in the air, as Henry's last remaining companion soiled his pants, turned, and bolted for the door.

Seeing he was suddenly alone, Henry straightened and slowly backed away from the pair, bumping into tables and chairs on the way. His face was so red with embarrassment and rage that it almost appeared purple. Pausing at the batwing doors, he turned and glared back at them—Sarel noted the hatred and rage burning in his otherwise stupid eyes—before he stormed off, his steps reverberating on the plank board sidewalk in front of the tavern.

"Good one Khaz!" scolded Sarel, "that one will be back with more friends!"

"So be it elf, ya wanna' be gawked at? Go check in at the zoo!" Glaring around the room, Khaz rose his gravelly voice. "Can't a dwarf eat in peace?"

Before anyone could answer the angry dwarf's hypothetical question, Henry came exploding back through the batwing doors, clutching at the red mess that used to be his abdomen, attempting to hold his guts in. Eyes wide with terror and surprise, the brash teen looked around, seeking aid, before collapsing dead on the sawdust-covered floor.

A rasping, slithering sound accompanied the resonance of clicking on the wooden sidewalk outside the tavern, followed by hissing. Some patrons immediately ran for the back door through the kitchen, while others rested shaky hands on the hilts of weapons as they backed away from the entrance.

Sarel and Khaz were on their feet, shouldering their way to the front of the crowd; all eyes were focused on the batwing doors to the street.

The creature entered the tavern in a low crouch; its tusked, frog-like head was low to the ground as it cautiously stalked through the doors on scaled, simian arms that ended in razor sharp, bloody claws. Hooked, leathery wings were folded on its reptilian back, while its long tail still scraped and rasped on the timber sidewalk outside. Acidic saliva

dripped from its maw while it flicked its forked, serpentine tongue in and out between rear pointing, serrated teeth, tasting the air.

Under bony brows, the abomination's red eyes swept over the stunned crowd. Many noticed several arrows protruding from its body as it scraped its powerful rear leg and haunch against the doorframe, breaking off two fletched darts as if they were no more than annoying thorns.

Although as big and graceful as a large mountain lion, the creature was as broad and heavy as a cow. It slowly mounted the corpse of its victim, front claws sinking into Henry's dead flesh with a wet popping sound. To the horror of the shocked crowd, it began to feed, tearing off a large piece of meat and throwing back its head to swallow.

Backing up, the terrified bartender who was closest to the carnage knocked over a tray laden with pewter goblets, causing the creature to rear up on its hind legs with surprising speed, stiffening as if to lunge over the bar at the man.

Sarel instinctively circled to his right, upending tables and chairs to distract the creature while moving into its line of sight, hurling a dagger as he moved. The knife flew true, sinking between the blackish green scales of its shoulder.

Hissing, the monstrosity went back down to all fours and crouched. Like a spring uncoiling, it launched itself at the frost elf, propelling itself forward with all four limbs and one flap of its wings. With only a split second to react, Sarel drew another dagger from inside his cloak and held it in front of him defensively as the creature crashed into him, enveloping the frost elf with its wings and limbs.

Before his vision was obscured, Sarel saw Khaz's hatchet from the corner of his eye. Firelight glinted from the steel-embossed blade as it tumbled through the smoke filled air, end over end.

Crashing through a table with bone-jarring force, Sarel felt one of his ribs crack as the air was forcibly pushed from his lungs from the creature's weight.

Struggling for air, and blinking away the stars flashing before his eyes, Sarel realized the dead weight on top of him wasn't moving, and acidic blood was dripping from

the gaping wound in the creature's neck and burning his exposed skin.

Fighting to stay conscious, Sarel was aware of Khaz's broad shadow falling across him as the dwarf first pulled his axe from the creature's neck, then rolled its weight off the pinned elf.

"Dumb elf!" Khaz mumbled as he hauled Sarel to his feet with the help of the grateful bartender. Cleaning the gore from his weapon, Khaz looked up at the shocked crowd still gawking in disbelief; the entire episode, though it felt like hours, actually transpired in just a few seconds.

"Yer welcome!" Khaz said sarcastically to the onlookers, re-sheathing his now clean axe.

"The frost elf conjured that there demon to kill young Henry!" Someone in the crowd shouted as a slender older man with gray, short-cropped hair, and the insignia of town constable on his leather breastplate walked into the tavern, looking around in disbelief.

"We all saw the dwarf threaten im'! Hang em'!" Shouted someone else, as the constable eyed Sarel and Khaz suspiciously.

"Shut up Milo!" This from the bartender, who was returning from the kitchen with a bucket of fresh water and a clean rag for Sarel, whose pale blue skin was turning an angry, blistery red where the creature's blood dripped on him.

"You also all saw the elf save my fat arse from that...*Thing!*" He said, gesturing at the grotesque corpse on the floor, which seemed to be decaying right before their eyes. As they watched it began melting and turning the sawdust covering on the floor into a noxious, foul smelling mush.

"If I wanted ta kill the loud mouth son of a whore, I woulda killed him wit my hands, ya buncha ungrateful bastards!" Growled Khaz, clenching and unclenching his meaty fists. He took a step toward his accusers, his face a dark shade of angry scarlet.

"Now who else has sumthin ta say? Eh?"

The constable quickly stepped between the angry dwarf and the accusing crowd, his hand conspicuously resting on

the hilt of a long sword hanging from his belt. This gesture seemed to raise Khaz's ire another notch, who likewise let his right hand come to rest on the live oak handle of his hatchet.

Sarel quickly put a restraining hand on the dwarf's broad shoulder, a move that sent fire bolts of pain through the elf's injured ribs, but Sarel knew that even uninjured he wouldn't be able to restrain his friend; it would take several large men to hold the muscular dwarf.

"The traveling magistrate will decide if anyone's to hang here Milo," said the constable over his shoulder, never taking his suspicious gaze off Sarel and Khaz. "I am afraid you two will not be allowed to leave, at least until I collect some statements and figure out what the hell went on in here."

Before Khaz could give an angry answer, the bartender sidled in next to the constable, holding his hands out between the arguing parties.

"Well then I'll give my statement first Otto!" The bartender said, addressing the constable by name. "Henry and his boys were drunk and lookin' for trouble. The dwarf merely warned him off. These two," he continued, indicating Sarel and Khaz with a wave of his hand, "never even left their seats until after Henry was dead. That's when the elf jumped between me and that creature, that's what happened!" He had to pause to catch his breath before continuing. "Now I'm taking them into the kitchen to clean the elf's wounds before his skin burns off. You question these ungrateful drunks!"

He then turned toward the kitchen, indicating with a nod of his head that Sarel and Khaz should follow. Khaz paused at the kitchen door to give a rude, one-fingered hand gesture to Otto and the crowd before stomping out of the main room.

Once in the kitchen, the bartender whispered something in a frightened waitress' ear, who then ran to the back of the kitchen, and disappeared up a flight of back stairs.

"What in the hell's wrong with these people?" Steamed Khaz while pacing back and forth, "and that law man can kiss my..."

"Shhhhh!" The bartender cut off Khaz's expletives. "I'm grateful to you lads for saving my old carcass out there. No matter what the others say, I'm in your debt. But all I can offer you two right now is my back door." He seemed to almost be pleading.

"I ain't goin' nowhere!" Growled Khaz, followed by some mumbled dwarven curses.

"Khaz is right, uhm, what do we call you sir?" Asked Sarel, dabbing his blistered skin with a wet rag.

"Name's Lyle. But..."

"Lyle. Khaz is right Lyle, we have nothing to fear." Sarel continued, interrupting the flustered barkeep. "I'm sure this Otto is a reasonable man and once he retrieves his statements, he will see it our way. Running would just make us look guilty of something."

"I ain't runnin' nowhere!" Repeated Khaz, before plunging his bald head into the water trough beneath the well pump, cleaning the food from his bushy red beard and mustache.

"We paid ta sleep in beds tonight, and that's where I'm sleepin'."

The young serving girl returned down the stairs carrying Sarel and Khaz's travel packs and placed them on the large table dominating the center of the kitchen.

"Thank you Greta, now go out in the common room and serve everyone a fresh mug of ale on the house. Give Otto his usual wine with a shot a spirits." Lyle thought for a second before adding, "And let him know it's not going on his tab." He then went over to the cupboard and took out an empty flour bag and began stuffing it with black bread, wax wrapped cheese, jerked meat and a wine skin, while talking over his shoulder.

"Your right about Otto, he's a good enough man, but there's been a lot a weird happenings hereabouts the past month or so. Whole villages destroyed, them creatures running around the woods, many of the folk out there lost kin." The bartender stopped to catch his breath, placing the flour bag on the table with their packs.

"I used to be a military man, and I done some law work. I can tell you two lads are good sorts, but, you're hardened fighters and those folk out there are scared. If they get it into their heads that a lynching's in order..." Lyle's voice trailed off while he scratched his sweaty head, then looked pleadingly at Sarel. "Well, there's been enough blood spilt, and those folk are my folk, good or bad. I don't want to see any more needless bloodshed."

As Khaz was about to protest while Sarel contemplated their options. Greta returned to the kitchen, still looking more than a little scared. "Henry senior is coming, and he's got some of the militia with him!" She said before returning to the common room.

Lyle reached into a pouch under his apron and pressed some coins into Sarel's palm. "Here's the money you paid for your room. Please lads, I'm begging you."

Sarel handed Lyle back the money, "Keep it for the food and your help Lyle." The elf said softly, patting the bartender on his shoulder. He then grabbed his pack and the food and walked to the back door, left arm kept close to his side, to protect his injured ribs.

"Bah!" Exclaimed Khaz, picking up his own pack and stomping past Lyle to the back door. "I gotta find some dwarves ta pal around with, a'm sicka elves and humans!"

"What was that thing anyway?" Khaz asked Sarel as they moved through the darkness. Lyle had directed them to an alley that ran behind the stable in the rear of the tavern. The alley emerged on the outskirts of town. Large, wooden buildings housing grain, wool, and iron ore lined the street, along with a brewery and a large blacksmith forge owned by Henry Sr.

"Gargoyle." Answered Sarel, saving his breath; his injured ribs made breathing uncomfortable.

They moved as stealthily as possible, keeping to the shadows. This part of town was usually patrolled by the local militia, but as Lyle pointed out, Henry Sr likely called the guards to the tavern. The pair had almost made it to town's end when Sarel heard footsteps behind them on the timber sidewalk lining the street. Khaz also heard the

footfalls, whoever was following was not attempting cover their pursuit.

With practiced efficiency, Khaz suddenly hopped off the sidewalk to his right, drawing his hatchet and turning in the middle of the hard packed, dirt road, poised to throw if need be. Sarel spun where he was, drawing a throwing dagger and silently gasping in pain as fire shot through his injured left side.

Standing before them were two humans. One had also hopped off the sidewalk to the street, tracking Khaz's movements with a drawn short bow. Short and stocky, he was almost as broad and muscular as a dwarf. A black topknot, dark skin, and slanted eyes gave away his eastern heritage. Like Khaz, he wore an open leather vest, exposing dark tribal tattoos, a ritual right of passage for eastern sailors. They wound intricate designs around his arms and abdomen, likely extending down his legs to his ankles that were covered in brown, deer skin pants and laced boots.

"That dart better kill me human!" growled Khaz at the easterner, who smiled a wolfish grin in return, and lowered his aim to Khaz's crotch area.

"We're not looking for a fight!" This from the large man on the sidewalk, although still in the deep shadows of the granary warehouse, Sarel could see he stood with his legs spread, arms up, and with his palms out, showing the pair he held no weapon.

"Take the bow off my friend or you die where you stand!" Commanded Sarel. "That's not negotiable."

"Amir!" The large man barked, slowly lowering his right hand away from his body, indicating the easterner should lower the bow, which he did with a sneer.

"Now, good faith gentlemen, lower your weapons, please." He stepped from the shadows of the sidewalk, into the moon lit street, his hands still out and in the open. Sweat beaded on the man's freshly shaved head. An iron gray goatee and lined, weather-beaten face marked him as a man in his fifties. Despite the heat, he was clad in a light worn coat of chainmail plated at the shoulders and left arm. Sarel was impressed that the chainmail as well as his high leather riding boots were oiled sufficiently and cared for so as not

to make a sound, yet they were dulled against any revealing glints. This man was a professional mercenary.

"My name is Garelgar Janlyn; I am in the employ of the Baron De Vothia. This is Amir Sotho," he indicated the bow toting easterner. "It was his arrows you saw in the creature you felled back in Lyle's place. We had been tracking it and others like it for three days now."

"If you work for the barony as an officer of this province, and you know we had nothing to do with the appearance of that gargoyle, why are we slipping out of town like thieves in the night?" Asked Sarel suspiciously. He joined Khaz in the street, but like the dwarf, still had his weapon in his hand.

"I have sent word to Otto, although I didn't have to. If he suspected you of any wrongdoing, he never would have allowed you to slip out the back door," answered Garelgar matter-of-factly. "He was actually looking out for you, at my behest. We heard that the two of you might be passing through here with a silk merchant as hired swords."

Khaz shot the frost elf a questioning look, so Sarel asked the question that was now on both their minds. "How would you know that? And why would you care?"

"I can answer all your questions, as well as have Amir tend to your wounds; he was a priest of Nuune in his homeland, if you accompany us out of town to our camp..." Garelgar cast a quick look behind him before adding, "Now."

"If we ain't done nuthin wrong and you's know it, the law knows it, why can't we stay here?" Rumbled Khaz, still upset about not getting to sleep in a bed tonight.

"As an officer of the Barony, it's within my power to pass judgment on your behalf as far as the law is concerned. But what I can't do is persuade Henry Lankum Sr. and the rest of the town to see reason through their anger and fear and not lead a lynch mob down here looking for you two." As if on cue, they heard raised voices and shouts from the side street where Lyle's tavern was located. Torchlight bounced

and flickered off the wooden buildings at the mouth of the street, casting long, ghostly shadows.

"It's my job not only to ensure your safety, but the safety of the citizens of this town. Tomorrow they will see things in a different light, but for now, the best thing to do is get outa here, and let them fizzle out. Hopefully no one will get hurt."

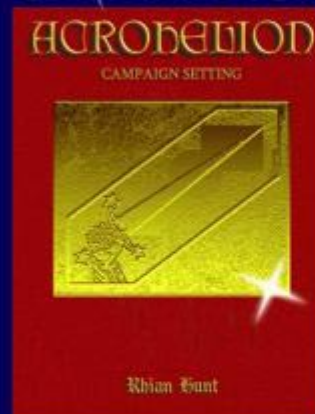
"All right. You win Mr. Janlyn; lead us out of town. But once we are out of danger I trust we are obligated to you for nothing," replied Sarel, ignoring Khaz's groan of annoyance.

"You have my word, now come, quickly." With that, Garelgar started down the street to the outskirts of town, followed by Sarel and a mumbling Khaz Axzen. Amir melted into the shadows to take up the rear.

TO BE CONTINUED

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by Pike Stephenson

Interview: KAMERON M. FRANKLIN

It has been nearly a year since Wizards of the Coast made Kameron M. Franklin's dreams come true. As you may recall, Kameron was the winner of Wizards *Maiden of Pain* novel open call contest. His reward was the task of penning a novel to be published by Wizards as part of the new novel line titled *The Priests. Maiden of Pain*, which is to be the third book of the series, is set for publishing in 2005. The first book of the series, *Lady of Poison*, written by Bruce Cordell, is already out in paperback as of July of this year. With the first draft nearing completion, Kameron took a few moments to answer questions and offer insights about the book publishing industry through the eyes of a first-time novelist.

When did you start writing the first draft?

I started writing the draft in January.

How complete is your first draft?

At this point, I'm about halfway finished. The due date was originally the beginning of September, but Phil Athans was kind enough to extend it 30 days because they needed my short story for the upcoming *Realms of the Dragons II* anthology. [Phil Athans is Kameron's editor and has worked for TSR/ Wizards since 1995. He has edited over 70 books to date and is also the author of *Annihilation*, book five of the *War of the Spider Queen*.]

Can you tell us more about the *Realms of the Dragon II*?

Realms of the Dragon II was conceived when Phil Athans was deluged by some great proposals, and they didn't have enough room to fit them all in the first anthology. *RotD2* will feature mostly new authors new to the Forgotten Realms, many of them runners up from the *Maiden of Pain* open call. Some of the names I know are Murray Leeder, Ed Gentry, and Harley Stroh.

The piece I was asked to contribute is titled "How Burlmarr saved the Unseen Protector" and focuses on a village of gnomes in the Sword Mountains.

Through the writing process, has your story come together as you expected? Did any new plot twists or threads develop as you wrote?

I've stuck pretty close to the outline that Phil approved back in December. He suggested a couple minor plot changes that I incorporated. I did add on a fairly major encounter between a couple supporting characters at the end to bring some closure to a subplot that had been left unresolved.

Characters can come to life during heated writing sessions; did any minor characters take on a new, more dominant role? Did your main character reveal different facets of their personality you had not previously explored?

As I mentioned, a couple supporting characters ended up getting some more "page time" than I had originally planned. One of them also transformed from a cowardly opportunist to a sly, conniving manipulator after some input from my wife, a change that really added some wonderful dynamics to the interactions between the villains in the story. Ythnel, the main character, has stayed pretty true to my original vision.

Every writer has a slow day, which is to be expected. Have you hit any major roadblocks? If so, how did you go around them or did you blast right through?

There were some days where I was only getting out a couple hundred words at a time, or less. I tried everything, from reading other things to get inspired to walking away for a couple days to just pushing through. A lot of times, going back and reading what I had written previously helped me get in the right frame of mind.

You said before that you had written mostly short fiction. What have you learned about writing, and yourself, after working on a full-length novel?

That I love the freedom of the longer format over short fiction. It allows for developing and exploring ideas more than a 7000-word limit ever could.

How do you feel your writing has been influenced as you've worked with a professional editor? Would you call him a back seat driver or an invaluable navigator?

It's always good to have another pair of eyes looking at your work. Phil takes a really hands-off approach. And he's open to discussing any suggestions he made. The changes he made based on my outline definitely made it a stronger story.

How about a teaser for our readers? Can you tell us about a character and maybe a brief bio or some oddity about them that engaged you?

Ythnel Duumin is the heroine of Maiden of Pain. She is a young cleric and the story follows her first excursion from Loviatar's Manor, the temple in Bezantur. I liked the idea of having a relatively young and sheltered person of faith coming out into the big world and dealing for the first time with people who don't share her viewpoints. She has a rather innocent interpretation of Loviatar's dogma that is challenged as she interacts with both non-believers and believers that have different opinions of what it means to follow the Willing Whip.

There you have it, another look into a novel in the making. If you have any comments or questions for Kameron, you can reach him at his website, www.kameronmf.com. Also, be on the lookout for Maiden of Pain, which is set for release next summer.

About the Author

Alicia (Lynxara) writes the webcomic Fantasy Wars and the RPG Wars comic strips for the Silven Trumpeter. She graduated from Roanoke College in Salem, Virginia in 2002 with a major in Religion & Philosophy and is currently a graduate student at Radford University in Radford, Virginia. When not changed to her word processor, her hobbies include anime, video games, and of course, role-playing.

About the Artist

Elizabeth Ellis (KouAidou) draws the webcomic Fantasy Wars and the RPG Wars comic strips for the Silven Trumpeter. She graduated from the University of Maryland with a major in Japanese in 2003 and is currently at large. When not shackled to her art supplies, her hobbies include anime, translating, and of course, role-playing.



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by *Patty Estill*

Beta Playtest Preview of World of Warcraft



World of Warcraft has a number of great things going for it. First, it's being developed by Blizzard, well-known for quality and addictive games. Second, it is set in the well-known and popular universe of Warcraft. And then the other attractive features of the game simply build from there. So where shall we begin? There is so much to discuss regarding this great MMORPG that we will divide the game features into sections. In this first section, we will look at character races and classes.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

There are two factions in World of Warcraft: The Alliance and The Horde. The available character races and classes are determined to a degree by which faction the player chooses, and each race has certain character classes that can be selected as well. Each race also has a specific starting area in the world, as well as other common traits regardless of the class chosen. Some characteristics impact gameplay, whereas others are just for fun.

THE ALLIANCE

Humans

The Humans of Stormwind are a resilient breed, having survived an invasion by the savage Orcs during the First War. During the Second War, the armies of Stormwind rallied with the Alliance to reclaim their homeland of Azeroth. After the success of the Second War, Stormwind was rebuilt and Human civilization began to flourish once again throughout the southlands. With the recent invasion of the Burning Legion - which left the northern kingdom of Lordaeron in ruins - Stormwind now stands as the last bastion of human civilization. Following the heroic examples of the legendary Sir Lothar and King Llane, the defenders of Stormwind are considered to be among the fiercest warriors in the land. They stand resolute

in their charge to maintain the honor and might of humanity in an ever-darkening world.

Human characters can choose from the following character classes: Mage, Paladin, Priest, Rogue, Warlock, Warrior.

Human characters begin their journey in World of Warcraft in Northshire, Elwynn Forest. This is an area of farmlands and forest areas, and a few lakes, including some beach areas. It looks peaceful and beautiful, but Elwynn, like other areas in World of Warcraft is not without its hazards. There are roaming wild beasts, human enemies, gnolls, kobolds, and the dreaded Murlocs, which can best be described as vicious, demented fish. More details on the enemies later.

The human home city of Stormwind stands as the last bastion of Human power in Azeroth. Rebuilt after the Second War, Stormwind is a marvel of Human design and engineering. Stormwind's guards keep the peace within the city's walls, while the young king, Anduin Wrynn, rules from his mighty keep. The Bazaar District bustles with trade from across the continent and beyond, while Warriors of every sort can be found wandering the streets of Old Town. Unaffected by the ravages of the Scourge in the north, Stormwind still faces its own threats, both from without and from within.

Night Elves

The reclusive Night Elves were the first race to awaken in the World of Warcraft. These shadowy, immortal beings were the first to study magic and let it loose throughout the world nearly ten thousand years before Warcraft I. The Night Elves' reckless use of magic drew the Burning Legion into the world and led to a catastrophic war between the two titanic races. The Night Elves barely managed to banish the Legion from the world, but their wondrous homeland was shattered and drowned by the sea. Until recently, the Night Elves closed themselves off from the rest of the world and remained hidden atop their holy mountain of Hyjal for many thousands of years. The Legion's invasion brought the Night Elves out of

their long period of slumber. They now have renewed interest in shaping the world, and for the first time are allying themselves with other races to insure the continued survival of Azeroth. As a race, Night Elves are typically honorable and just, but they are very distrusting of the 'lesser races' of the world. They are nocturnal by nature and their shadowy powers often elicit the same distrust that they have for their mortal neighbors.

Night Elves characters can choose from the following character classes: Druid, Hunter, Priest, Rogue, Warrior.

Night Elves begin in an area off Kalimdor's northern coast, on the island of Teldrassil, a stunning testament to the power of their magic and their connection with nature. After the cataclysmic events that followed the invasion of the Burning Legion, the Circle of Ancients and powerful druids combined their powers to grow an immense new world tree on Teldrassil. They called the tree Teldrassil, meaning "crown of the earth" in their native tongue. The night elves made their new home in the boughs of Teldrassil, creating a forest of mighty trees and flowing rivers, bathed in the endless night that fell over the lands of the elves from the dawn of time. However, the calm of the enchanted forest has slowly fallen into the shadow of a sinister presence. Crazy furbolgs and fouler beasts have appeared in Teldrassil, and it occupies all the attention of the vigilant Sentinels and the wise druids to ensure the safety of their new home.

A sprawling city of moonstone and wood, the night elf capital of Darnassus stands as a shining beacon atop Teldrassil. Within its mighty walls are housed countless druids, hunters, and warriors, led by the priestess of Elune, Tyrande Whisperwind. A stunning marvel to the ability of night elven craftsmen, the ethereal Temple of the Moon rises above the tree line, balanced by the druids' meticulously cultivated meditative grove. Trade from the main continent bustles through the city's trade quarter, where night elves, dwarves and humans alike haggle for wares and services. Delicate bridges and

pathways crisscross the serene waterways of the city, the pristine waters reflecting the glowing light from the moons above.

Dwarves

The stoic dwarves of Ironforge are an ancient race of robust humanoids who live beneath the snow-capped mountains of Khaz Modan. The Dwarves have always been fast allies with the Humans, and they revel in the prospects of battle and storytelling alike. In past ages, the Dwarves rarely left the safety of their mountain fortresses. However, whenever the call to battle sounded, they rose up to defend their friends and allies with unmatched courage and valor. Due to a recent discovery that uncovered fragments of their ancient origins, the Dwarves have undergone a remarkable transformation. The discovery convinced the Dwarves that the mighty Titans created them from stone when the world was young. They feel that their destiny is now to search the world over for more signs and proof of their enchanted heritage and to rediscover the Titans' hidden legacies. To this end, the Dwarves have sent out their Prospectors to all ends of the world in the hopes of discovering new insight into their shrouded past. These journeys led to Dwarven excavation sites all over the known world, some of which serve as outposts and some of which serve as potential hunting grounds for enemies of the Dwarven race.

Dwarven characters can choose from the following character classes: Hunter, Mage, Paladin, Priest, Rogue, Warrior.

Dwarves begin their adventure in World of Warcraft in Anvil Marr, Dun Morogh. The jagged, snowy peaks of Dun Morogh provide the Ironforge dwarves with a limitless supply of ore and stone for their ambitious engineering endeavors. From the city of Ironforge, dug deep into the mountains, to Anvil Marr in the Coldridge Valley, the marvels of Dwarven ingenuity mark the land. Not all is at peace in Dun Morogh, however. The Dwarves' insatiable digging at the Gol'Bolar Quarry unleashed a menacing tribe of Rockjaw Troggs from their subterranean den. While the massing Trogg invasion looms over the lands of King Magni Bronzebeard, the Frostmane Trolls have taken advantage of the distraction to attempt to reclaim their ancestral home. Life is harsh in the white-powdered mountains of Dun Morogh, but what the Dwarven people lack in height they make up for in heart and valor.

Gnomes

The eccentric, often-brilliant Gnomes are one of the most peculiar races of the world. With their obsession for developing radical new technologies and constructing marvels of mind-bending engineering, it's a wonder that any Gnomes have survived to proliferate, for often their inventions and devices do not work as expected, sometimes with disastrous results.

Thriving within the wondrous techno-city of Gnomeregan, the Gnomes shared the resources of the forested Dun Morogh Peaks with their Dwarven cousins. Though the dwarves of Ironforge also have a propensity for technology and engineering - it is the gnomes who provide the critical, visionary designs for most of the Dwarves' weapons and steam vehicles.

The Gnomes served the Alliance well during the Second War, but strangely, they refused to send any personnel to aid their allies during the Burning Legion's recent invasion. Though their designs helped turn the tide against the Legion, the Dwarves and Humans were shocked by the Gnomes' decision to withhold their courageous troops and pilots. When the war ended, the Alliance discovered the reason for the Gnomes' sudden withdrawal. Apparently, an ancient, barbaric menace had risen from the bowels of the earth and invaded Gnomeregan. Knowing that their allies' priority was defeating the Burning Legion, the Gnomes decided to make their stand alone. Though they fought valiantly to save their beloved city, Gnomeregan was irrevocably lost.

Nearly half of the Gnomish race was wiped out during the fall of Gnomeregan. The ragged Gnomes that survived fled to the safety of the Dwarves' stronghold of Ironforge. Committed once again to the Alliance's cause, the Gnomes spend their time devising strategies and weapons that will help them retake their ravaged city and build a brighter future for their people.

Gnome characters can choose from the following character classes: Mage, Rogue, Warlock, Warrior.

Gnomes begin their journey in World of Warcraft also in Dun Morogh.

THE HORDE

Tauren

The Tauren are huge, bestial creatures who live in the grassy, open barrens of central Kalimdor. They live to serve nature and maintain the balance between the wild things of the land and the restless spirit of the elements. Despite their enormous size and brute strength, the remarkably peaceful Tauren cultivate a quiet, tribal society. However, when roused by conflict, Tauren are implacable enemies who will use every ounce of their strength to smash their enemies under hoof. Under the leadership of their ancient chief, Cairne Bloodhoof, the Tauren allied themselves with the Orcs during the invasion of the Burning Legion. The two races have remained steadfast allies ever since. Like the Orcs, the Tauren struggle to retain their sense of tradition and noble identity.

Tauren characters can choose from the following character classes: Druid, Hunter, Shaman, Warrior.

The home city for the Tauren is Thunder Bluff, which lies atop a series of mesas that overlook the verdant grasslands of Mulgore. The once nomadic Tauren recently established the city as a center for trade caravans, traveling craftsmen and artisans of every kind. The proud city also stands as a refuge for the brave Hunters who stalk their dangerous prey through the plains of Mulgore and its surrounding areas. Long bridges of rope and wood span the chasms between the mesas, topped with tents, longhouses, colorfully painted totems, and spirit lodges. The mighty chief, Cairne Bloodhoof, watches over the bustling city, ensuring that the united Tauren tribes live in peace and security.

The Tauren begin their journey in World of Warcraft in Redrock Mesa, Mulgore. Not much is yet known about this area of the world but check back for updates as more information is revealed as we further explore the world.

Undead

Having broken free from the tyrannical rule of the Lich King, a renegade group of undead seek to retain their own free will while destroying all those who oppose them. Known as the Forsaken, this group is dedicated to serving their leader, the banshee queen Sylvanas Windrunner. These dark warriors have established a secret stronghold beneath the ruins of Lordaeron's former capital city. Situated deep beneath

the cursed Tirisfal Glades, the labyrinthine Undercity is a sprawling bastion of evil. Within its shadowy confines, Sylvanas' royal apothecaries scramble to develop a devastating new plague - one which will not only eradicate their hated Scourge rivals, but the rest of humanity as well. To further their dark aims, the Forsaken have entered into an alliance of convenience with the primitive, brutish races of the Horde. Holding no real loyalty for their newfound comrades, the Forsaken have duped them into fighting against their common enemy - the Lich King. Only time will tell how these disciples of doom will fare in their mission of vengeance.

Undead characters can choose from the following character classes: Mage, Priest, Rogue, Warlock, Warrior.

Undead characters begin in Tirisfal Glades and their home city is The Undercity, an area far beneath the ruined capital city of Lordaeron, the royal crypts have been turned into a bastion of evil and undeath. Originally intended by Prince Arthas to be the Scourge's seat of power, the budding "Undercity" was abandoned when Arthas was recalled to aid the Lich King in distant Northrend. In Arthas's absence, the Dark Lady, Sylvanas Windrunner, led the rebel Forsaken to the Undercity, and claimed it for her own. Since taking up residence, the Forsaken have worked to complete the Undercity's construction by dredging the twisted maze of catacombs, tombs, and dungeons that Arthas began.

Orcs

The savage, green-skinned Orcs are one of the most prolific races of Azeroth. They are commonly believed to be brutal and mindless, possessing no humanity or empathy for other races. Born on the hellish world of Draenor, the Orcs were brought into the kingdom of Stormwind through the dimensional gateway known as the Dark Portal and forced to wage war on the Humans. Although few are aware of their history, the Orcs once cultivated a noble, Shamanistic society on the world of Draenor. Tragically, the proud Orc clans were corrupted by the Burning Legion and used as pawns in the Legion's invasion of Azeroth. The Orcs managed to rebel, however, and they were ultimately able to help turn the tide against their demon masters. Led by the young Warchief, Thrall, the Orcs have reclaimed their strength and honor. Now, the Orcs stand ready to fight not for the sake of conquest, but for their right to survive in their adopted world.

Orcs begin their journey in World of Warcraft in Durotar and their home city is Orgrimmar, named in honor of the legendary Orgrim Doomhammer. Orgrimmar was founded to be the capital city of the Orcs' new homeland. Built within a huge, winding canyon in the harsh land of Durotar, Orgrimmar stands as one of the mightiest Warrior cities in the world. Behind Orgrimmar's immense walls, elderly Shamans patiently share their knowledge with the Horde's newest generation of leaders, while Warriors spar in the gladiatorial arena, honing their skills in preparation for the trials that await them in this dangerous land.

Trolls

The vicious Jungle Trolls, who populate the numerous islands of the South Seas, are renowned for their cruelty and dark mysticism. Barbarous and superstitious, the wily Trolls carry a seething hatred for all other races. One tribe, however, was forced to overcome its prejudices when it encountered the Orc Warchief, Thrall, and his mighty Horde. The Trolls of the Darkspear tribe, long since exiled from their ancestral lands in Stranglethorn Vale, were nearly destroyed by a band of aquatic Murlocs, but Thrall and the Horde managed to save them. In return the grateful Trolls swore an oath of eternal allegiance to the Horde.

Led by the cunning Shadow Hunter, Vol'jin, the Darkspear Trolls now make their home in Durotar along with their Orkish allies. Their village, named after their fallen tribal elder, Sen'jin, lies along the eastern coast of the harsh, rocky land. The Darkspear tribe also occupies tracks within the nearby jungles of the Echo Isles.

As part of the Horde, the Trolls have extended their loyalty to the mighty Tauren, but they have little trust for the manipulative Forsaken, whom they believe will visit only misery and strife upon their allies.

Troll characters can choose from the following character classes: Hunter, Mage, Priest, Rogue, Shaman, Warrior.

Trolls also begin their adventure in World of Warcraft in Durotar and their home city is Orgrimmar, named in honor of the legendary Orgrim Doomhammer

CHARACTER CLASSES

Druid

Druids are the keepers of the world. Locked in slumber for generations, they awoke to meet the threat of the Burning Legion during its recent invasion. After Archimonde's defeat, the Druids chose to remain in the waking world and help to rebuild their shattered lands. The Legion's attack left a terrible scar on the natural order, and the Druids seek to heal it. The Druid gives players several play style options. The Druid in normal form is a caster that can fight with spells or via melee combat. In Bear Form the Druid becomes a Warrior with Rage. While in Cat form the Druid becomes a Rogue with Energy and stealth. The Druid can also transform into two other special animal forms. The Druid can also take on the role of a Priest, casting spells to heal itself and fellow characters. A Druid is not as versatile in their abilities as a Priest is, lacking the spells Holy Word: Shield and Resurrection, but is otherwise a very capable healer

STRENGTHS:

- Multiple gameplay styles
- Several weapons options - Staves, Axes (with training), Daggers (with training), Spears (with training), Two-handed Axes (with training), Unarmed Weapons (with training)
- Fast travel using aquatic and travel forms
- The most powerful buff of all character classes
- The ability to transform into cool looking animals that impress other players and add a lot of character, flavor, and humor to the world

WEAKNESSES:

- Armor restricted to cloth and leather
- Forms are not as versatile as their counterpart classes
- Can't use items or druid spells while in the various animal forms

Hunter

Azeroth is home to a wide variety of beasts. From the new world of Lordaeron to the old world of Kalimdor, all manner of creatures can be found. Some are friendly, some are ferocious - yet they all have one thing in common. Each creature shares a special connection with Hunters. Hunters track, tame, and slay all manner of animals and beasts found in the wild. Whether they rely on bows or firearms, Hunters consider their weapons and pets to be their only

true friends.

STRENGTHS:

- Can tame and control various beasts
- Has special abilities vs. beasts
- Can use various beast special abilities
- Can travel very fast using Aspect of Cheetah and share it with Aspect of the Pack
- Is the only class that can name their pets

WEAKNESSES:

- Can initially only wear leather armor, making it less able to absorb damage than the Paladin and Warrior
- Can't wear plate armor
- Very few melee abilities, and is more effective at ranged combat

Mage

The Mages of Warcraft once centered their powers within the mageocracy of Dalaran. After that kingdom's destruction by the Burning Legion the arcane arts spread to the far corners of the world.

The Mage is a very important and helpful party member. One of the Mage's most powerful abilities is Polymorph, which allows it to control the number of monsters currently attacking the party. The mage is also able to use a teleportation spell, allowing it to travel through the land more quickly. Mages can even summon in food and drink to help everyone recover faster from battle.

STRENGTHS:

- Can Summon Food and Drink
- Powerful Area of Effect Damage Spells
- Can gain Teleportation spells for self, and at higher levels, for the entire party

WEAKNESSES:

- Difficulty fighting monsters that resist spells
- Difficulty staying alive at lower levels because of low hit points
- Fragile, easily killed in certain situations
- Limited to cloth armor

Paladin

Upholders of the Holy Light and defenders of the Alliance, the Paladins can be found in the northern forests of the Tirisfal Glades, fighting back the advance of the Forsaken, to the southern reaches of the Blasted Lands, ceaselessly upholding their vigil against demonic forces from beyond the Dark Portal. Wielding their mighty hammers and the strength of the Light, these holy warriors command forces in battle, continuously throwing themselves into the fray wherever the fighting is the thickest.

The Paladin is a mix of a melee fighter and a secondary spell caster. The Paladin is ideal for groups due to the Paladin's healing, Seals, and other abilities. Paladins can have one active aura per Paladin in the party on each party member and use specific Seals for specific players. Paladins are pretty hard to kill, thanks to their assortment of defensive abilities. The Paladin can also heal with Holy Light, unlike other combat classes. The Paladin is an Undead specific fighter as well, with several abilities designed to be used against the Undead.

Paladins are limited to the Alliance only.

STRENGTHS:

- Can wear the heaviest of armors
- A melee fighter who can also heal
- Can resurrect other players
- Auras can benefit the Paladin and party members
- Can summon a custom armored Warhorse mount

WEAKNESSES:

- Very gear-dependent
- Cannot equip as many weapons as Warrior class
- Does not have as many combat options as Warrior class
- Must remember to use the correct aura and seal for each party member and for each battle

Priest

The Priest class is the master of healing, crowd control, and hate control. Other classes such as the Shaman, Druid, and Paladin can heal, but not as well as the Priest. The Priest can also resurrect dead players along with the Shaman and Paladin. The Warlock also has the ability to resurrect,

through the use of soul stones. The Priest has some buffs that can help party members. The Priest can even take control of humanoid monsters at higher character levels.

STRENGTHS:

- Most powerful healing class
- Can resurrect other players
- Powerful buffs for self and others
- Ability to charm humanoid monsters
- Desirable addition to groups

WEAKNESSES:

- Limited to cloth armor
- Fragile and easily killed in certain situations
- Must learn the finer points of being a good healer

Rogue

At home in the shadows and skilled at disappearing from sight, the Rogues of Azeroth are most comfortable when acting in the background. Twisting events to their favor, striking only when advantage is greatest: this is where a Rogue excels. With their cunning tricks, physical abilities, and mastery of concealment and disguise, Rogues have no trouble finding employment as thieves, cutthroats, spies, and assassins.

The Rogue is a very involved and fun class to play. Your effectiveness depends on how well you learn to use the Rogue. There is a lot to take in, but players can master the Rogue with knowledge and experience.

STRENGTHS:

- Stealth abilities allow the Rogue to reach places more easily than most classes
- Strong lock picking abilities/access as opposed to other classes
- Sprint ability allows the Rogue to more easily escape battle and get a free short burst of speed in traveling

WEAKNESSES:

- Limited to cloth and leather armor.
- Mastering successful stealth usage is critical to success
- Must learn and use successful combos

Shaman

Shamans are the spiritual leaders of their tribes and clans. They communicate with spirits, have visions of the future, and guide their people through the darkest of times. Many mistake their wisdom and serenity for a pacifist nature. When challenged, though, shamans have a range of powers available for dealing with threats to the natural order.

The Shaman is a secondary Healing class (to the Priest) with a fun assortment of spells and options. The Shaman is especially liked by party members for its Healing and beneficial totems. The Shaman has up to four types of totems: Air, Earth, Fire, and Water. An important part of playing the Shaman is figuring out which totem is best to use in each situation.

The Shaman is similar to a Paladin without as much armor.

Only Horde characters can be Shamans.

STRENGTHS:

- Ability to heal themselves and other players
- Ability to resurrect other players
- Ability to get Wolf Form early on allowing them to travel very fast
- Can recall back to their home location with Astral Recall
- Receives a spell for breathing under water

WEAKNESSES:

- Limited to leather armor
- Must learn to use totems properly

Warlock

Warlocks were mages that delved too deeply into the roots of demonic power. Consumed by a lust for dark knowledge, they've tapped into chaotic magic from beyond the world. The Burning Legion now feeds them its powers, allowing them to channel destructive energies and call upon the powerful emissaries of their demon masters.

The Warlock is a more involved class to play. Warlocks have pets, many different spell combos, and a reagent compo-

nent requirement for some of their spells. This means that playing a Warlock takes a bit more learning than some of the more straightforward classes. The Warlock has a lot of very cool and fun abilities including Eye of Killrogg, Fear, Pets, and more. The Warlock is a very fun class to play once you figure things out.

STRENGTHS:

- Can use pets for fun and to attract enemy aggression
- Can hand out Soulstones that allow self-resurrection
- Can create healing potions in the form of Healthstones
- Can summon other players using Ritual of Summoning
- Can breathe underwater using Unending Breath
- Can summon its own Felsteed horse rather than buying one for a lot of gold
- Can use Eye of Killrogg to scout
- Can take control of a Demon for a short amount of time
- Can heal itself using Drain Life
- Can solo very well by using a pet to act as a group of two characters complementing each others' skills

WEAKNESSES:

- Limited to cloth armor
- Fragile and easily killed in certain situations
- Soul Shards take up inventory space
- Must learn to control both your pet's and your own skills to ensure high efficiency

Warrior

Warriors are the melee-centered class. These characters are tough as nails and masters of weaponry and tactics. The special abilities of the Warrior are naturally combat-oriented. The Warrior is the ultimate toe-to-toe fighter with the most options available to him. Unlike other Warriors you might have played in other games, the Warrior of World of Warcraft has many different options and abilities to use during combat.

STRENGTHS:

- Able to equip all armor and almost all weapons
- Takes the most damage before becoming incapacitated
 - Great close range melee skills
 - Lots of equipment options
 - Ability to slaughter monsters

WEAKNESSES:

- No healing abilities, relies on food or other players to heal
- Very gear dependent class

So which is the best? Well.... That really just depends on how you like to play. As you can see there are a number of advantages and disadvantages to every character class. I prefer playing casters, and I personally love playing the mage more than any other character class so far.

There were many cries from the beta testing community that mages were greatly overpowered. Tell that to my mage who died repeatedly trying to complete simple quests at the beginning levels! The development team has been busy working on improvements to the game including continual work on balancing gameplay between the character classes. The latest patch made a number of significant changes to many of the character classes, removing a few spells from the mage characters and either adding or reducing mana costs and/or effects of spells. This latest patch was just implemented so stay tuned for more information on how these latest changes effect the balance of characters and gameplay.

Impressions so far:

- Character customization, in terms of appearance is ok but some variety in facial looks and expressions would be a nice addition.

- Night Elves especially need a greater variety of facial appearances.

- There seems to be good balance (i.e. relatively equal ease and difficulty in completing quests and defeating enemies) between all the character classes

- The diversity between the character classes makes it easy to create good groups for completing higher level and elite quests.

- It would be nice to see cloth armor that wasn't a robe for mages and priests.

More information coming.... In the next section we will look at graphics, gameplay, quests and areas.

See the game corner for World of Warcraft here:

▶ <http://www.silven.com/pcmac.asp?case=gamespace&id=23>

by Matthew J. Hanson

The Adventures of Starlanko the Magnificent

When Good Dragons go Bad!

Starlanko the Magnificent, wizard and salesman, did not remember the town of Casbell looking so depressed. He did not remember the shops with barricaded doors, or the people stuffing their worldly possessions into carts and hauling them away. But this is how Starlanko and his companions found the town of Casbell when they rode in.

"Something's wrong here," said Candessa Voliar, the newest addition to Starlanko's party. She was a wizard that Starlanko had known (but not as well as he would have liked) from his days in the wizard's academy. The two had just recently reunited.

Starlanko's most long-standing companion was a man named Redreck the Fierce. Redreck was a bold fighter who spoke only when he had something important to say. He said nothing now.

One the other hand, Funbane—the talking sword that slew only what his name suggested—had no problem saying unimportant things. "I doth believe that the noble lady is correct."

Starlanko the Magnificent agreed. There was something wrong. In order to discover the source of the problem, Starlanko went where any adventurer would go in the moment of crisis: the nearest bar.

"Why the answer t'that's simple, ain't it?" said the bartender as he poured a glass of wine, a mug of ale, and a tankard Morlian Death Mead. The bartender was a rugged old man with a patch over one eye. "It's all on account of..." he leaned forward and whispered, "the dragon."

"Why doesn't the city find some sort of a dragon slayer?" Starlanko asked.

"Tried that we did." said the bartender. "Twice, actually. First off a big fancy paladin in shiny armor showed up with an enchanter, a cleric of Leolus, and a halfling thief,

or 'rogue' as he liked to be called. They were all ready to slay the beast, 'till they got one good look at it. Then they turned tail and ran."

"Was it really that powerful?" Candessa asked sipping her wine.

"Power ain't had nothing to do with it, Missy. The beast ain't even that big, for a dragon. They ran on account of it was a silver dragon, and as everybody knows silver dragons c'ain't be nothing but good. Tell that to those'n who's had their families devoured. But it seems a paladin can't be seen killing a 'good' dragon so that's the end of that."

"And the second time you tried?" Starlanko asked imbibing his ale.

"I was getting to that, I was," said the tender. "A few days after the paladin left, then who should show up, but an anti-paladin, a necromancer, a cleric of Rorstorth, and a halfling thief, or 'rogue,' as he liked to be called. They all offered to get rid of the dragon for a price, but the mayor wouldn't stand for it. Couldn't have the town saved by minions of evil."

"I'll have another," said Redrick.

"Never mind whether it's evil or it ain't evil to let more o' your townsfolk get gobbled up. So the mayor sent 'em packing, and now most what's left of the town is packing as well."

"So if you can't get somebody good to do it..." said Starlanko.

"And you can't get somebody evil to do it..." said Candessa.

"Aye. What we really need is somebody what's neutral."

About the Author

Matthew J. Hanson is an aspiring writer, as well as a long time gamer. He normally lives in Minnesota, but is currently finishing his senior year of college in Beloit Wisconsin. Recently, his 10-minute play *Who is Ruth* was selected as the winner for the American College Theatre Region III winner, for their 10-minute play competition, and it will be advancing to the national competition in April. If you would like to learn more about Matthew J. Hanson, please feel free to visit his website at www.matthewjhanson.com.

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"You know I don't normally do this sort of this sort of work," Starlanko the Magnificent said, as he crouched behind a grassy knoll.

"Shh," said Candessa Voliar. She was currently invisible, just like Starlanko and Redreck. Funbane had been left behind to "hold down the fort." Both Starlanko and Candessa could also currently see invisible things, so only Redreck was unsure of his companion's whereabouts.

"I consider myself more of a merchant, really. I go into dungeons often to locate spells of course, but just slaying something for money is not really my standard fair."

"The famed Starlanko the Magnificent isn't nervous, is he?" Candessa prodded. "Me? No of course not. I have a plan. Several plans actually."

"Good, now keep quiet, I think it's coming out."

Sure enough, moments later a silver dragon emerged from the cave they were watching. It was small (for a dragon), which corroborated the reports that it was only a juvenile.

"I've got a reading," Starlanko said. His eyes glowed with the arcane energy that allowed him to see magical auras for the duration of the spell.

"Me too," said Candessa. "Definitely illusion magic."

"Spell casting abilities, but not more than a first level," Starlanko reported. "Fits for a silver dragon of this age."

"Or a red," pointed out Candessa.

. The dragon swept its vision across the landscape. Then it held up its nose, and sniffed the air. It cocked its heads as though it had detected an unexpected scent. The dragon paused, look around once more, and then launched into the sky. Starlanko, Candessa, and Redreck watched as the winged beast disappeared on the horizon.

"Let's go." Starlanko said. He let Redreck lead the way, both so he would not accidentally bump into anybody, and just in case they ran into any nasty surprises. The group reached the cave with no problems.

"Okay, crew. Let's search for clues," Starlanko said. He cast a spell of *alarm* at the entrance to the cave to warn him if the dragon returned, then cast a very handy spell that he once purchased from a drunken diviner in Tallidan. "There's a large cavern up ahead," Starlanko said. "It fits the profile of a hoard room very well. Let's start there. I don't detect any traps between here and there."

Redreck still lead the way. Sure enough, the cavern Starlanko detected was the hoard room. It was piled with coins, gems, and valuable items both magical and mundane. They searched the room to see if there was anything that could give them some hint as to why the "silver dragon" was so hostile. After a few minutes, they found nothing. By then their invisibility had worn off. It made Starlanko very nervous.

"Pass me the bag of holding," Candessa requested. "I'll set up the surprise while you guys check out the rest of the place."

"I don't like the idea of splitting up," Starlanko said.

"It will get done a lot quicker this way. I'm a big girl. I can take care of myself."

Starlanko passed Candessa the bag. He and Redreck walked down another passageway. The hall wound around several turns and had several small off shoots. It finally ended at a large wooden door. The door was locked,

but Redreck soon had the it disconnected from its hinges.

The fierce warrior walked through the shattered doorframe and examined the room. "What would a silver dragon want with a room full of flour?"

"I don't know," replied Starlanko, "but we'll be finding out soon." There was a ringing inside Starlanko's head. It was the *alarm* spell he had cast earlier. The dragon was back.

Starlanko quickly cast spells of *invisibility*, and *protection from energy*, on himself and Redreck, and then they were running back down the passage to the treasure hoard.

"Ah, I can smell that your friends have arrived." The dragon sat on top of its hoard, sniffing roughly in the direction of Starlanko and Redreck. Candessa was nowhere to be seen. She had recast invisibility on herself as well. "Now what is it you wanted to show me?" The dragon asked.

"Just this," Candessa's voice said. Then she dispelled the dragon's illusion. It was not a big difference, but definitely a noticeable one. "You're the ghost of a silver dragon?" Candessa asked. Casting the spell had forced her to become visible once again.

"No, I'm a white dragon, see. White. And if you notice there's no magic spell or anything making me white. I really am a white dragon."

"You look more like you're a silver dragon covered in flour," said Starlanko the Magnificent.

"What!?" the dragon protested. "That's preposterous. Why would I do something like that? I'm a white dragon, who was pretending to be a silver dragon. I'm very clever."

"No you're not," Candessa said. "You're a silver dragon pretending to be a white dragon pretending to be a silver dragon. White dragons have different skeletal structures, different head shapes, not to mention they don't get spell casting abilities until they're at least adults. You're defiantly a juvenile. Next time you pretend to be

something you're not, take some anatomy classes."

"Don't tell me what to do," the dragon retorted. "I am so sick or people telling me what to do. You're just like my mom, 'play nice with your sister,' 'don't eat the humans,' 'if you keep smoking your breath weapon won't work when you get older.' Well I sure showed them. I don't need them. I'm my own dragon."

"Are you saying you've been terrorizing the nearby village because you want to rebel against your parents?" asked Starlanko

"No, I've been doing it because that's who I am, my parents just don't understand that. Nobody understands me. Also, I thought it would be a good way to impress girls."

"I think now would be a good time," said Candessa.

"Okay."

Starlanko and Candessa both cast *fireball* at the same time, which not only burned the dragon directly, but also set off the barrels of alchemist's fire that Candessa had buried in the dragon's hoard while Starlanko and Redreck had been searching. It was more than enough fiery death to reduce the young dragon to a charred corpse. Luckily the three adventures had all remembered to ward themselves with *protection from energy* against the fire.

"Poor guy," Starlanko said. "He never really had a chance."

"He was terrorizing the village," Candessa pointed out. "He probably would have eaten us if he'd gotten the opportunity."

"That's fair," Starlanko said. "Let's loot his stuff."



by Jeffrey E. Thetford

Exclusive Interview: ED GREENWOOD

Ed Greenwood is most well known for being the creator of the Forgotten Realms campaign setting. He has been known to work in libraries, write SiFi, horror, mystery, romance, battle dragons, sign treaties, and mediate trade agreements all from his computer. But if you ask him, he is the happiest writing lore about the Realms.

Greenwood and I have been communicating via e-mail and at conventions for about five years now, and I think I can say he is one of the most interesting people I have ever had the privilege to know. Those of you who have ever seen him talk at a convention know what I mean when I say Ed is a "one man show" and has been known to bring a seminar to a halt with his wit and willingness to answer any and all questions pertaining to the Realms. This interview was conducted via email just two days before GenCon Indy 2004. Even whilst he was packing, you can tell from his in-depth answers to each question that he has a passion for what he does.

How did you get your start in the writing business?

I've always been 'a writer,' jotting down tales and scenes and fragments for my own amusement from the moment I could form the letters of the alphabet with a pencil, and writing (pretty awful, at first) stories of "what happened next" to favorite fictional characters by the time I was six (which is why the Realms began when I was seven or eight).

I come from a family of writers, and all through my youth worked on school yearbooks, "little" literary magazines, senior citizens' center newsletters, church bulletins, and magazine articles. I'm Canadian and at that time the Canadian literary community was a small, cozy family; I had some books of mine published early on.

How I got started in the *gaming* writing business was simple: I started writing articles for *Dragon® Magazine* (or *The Dragon* as it was then, a name I still vastly prefer); they started publishing them (the "Curst" monster in issue #30 was my first). Kim Mohan was impressed by the use of footnotes in my Gates article (in *Dragon* #37) and that soon led to a "Contributing Editor" position (which meant they were interested in seeing all of the steady flood of articles I sent them) and lots of appearances in *Dragon*. I worked *Forgotten Realms®* references into my articles to give my players some fun, these got noticed, and when TSR was looking for a new campaign world setting, they contacted me, and the rest, as they say (ahem) is history.

From the books that you used to read in your family's basement when you were young, which non-fiction writer had the greatest influence on you becoming a writer?

That's a toughie, but not as hard as choosing a fiction mentor from the cast of hundreds, I suppose. Winston S. Churchill's *History of the English-Speaking Peoples* and his World War II history were things I read over and over, as was Ewan Montagu's *The Man Who Never Was*. I suppose the most influential was William Rose Benét, who edited a tome called *The Reader's Encyclopedia*, which is an encyclopedia of literature from ancient myths right through modern controversial plays. Because its short entries about novels and characters often concisely summarize plots and story elements, it became my guidebook for which of my father's thousands of books I should hunt down and read next (and next, and next . . .) Any good library should have a copy (says the longtime librarian).

What fiction/non-fiction writer most influences your writing today?

No one that I can think of strongly influences my writing (on the other hand, I read about a dozen novels a week, and everything I read probably has some small influence on me, even if it's just "ugh—mustn't ever do THAT!") I suppose, if I have to pick just one, it's still going to be P.G. Wodehouse, because of his *effortless* use of prose. He can often make a reader (who can't possibly "remember" the "England that never was" that he's describing) visualize something without his ever really describing it. Lord Dunsany also comes close to this lyrical effortlessness, and I thereafter look to Kipling, Zelazny, Pratchett, and so on (the list is very long). However, please bear in mind that I'm having to grasp at an answer, here: there's no writer I "follow" or try to emulate.

What was the most difficult part of designing the early Realms?

If by "early Realms" you mean before TSR started publishing it (and the most difficult part became the 'traffic cop' role of making sure Writer A didn't kill off Character X before the time of Writer B's novel that starred Character X, or destroy a kingdom that Writer B was going to use, and so on), it was finding time enough to give every spot on the ever-increasing maps the same level of rich detail. Even now, the published Realms concentrate on the Heartlands and neglects more distant areas (although the 3rd Edition Realms sourcebooks are trying to paint in some of those "forgotten corners.") I not only had to give the tourist-guidebook details ("That spire on your left is the blah blah blah, and the field on your right is planted with barley,") I had to give the underlying reasons ("Barley sells well in the markets of Sembia, so of course the

farmers here plant blah blah blah”) and the *life* of every locale (not just “the Hatfields hate the McCoy’s” stuff, but which merchant has a covert trade agreement with another merchant, local attitudes toward other villages, or the distant ruler or strangers or all gnomes, and so on.) I’ve had a busy life (yes, outside gaming!) and have never had quite enough time to do a really satisfying job.

Now, I’m not advocating that all gamers use or need that level of detail, or that folks should feel bound by any “canon” details in their own game. I’m saying that as a writer of imaginary fantasy settings gamers have to pay for, I believe I must provide such a level of detail (to give value for money, if nothing else.)

With the advent of 3E and v3.5, what do you think of the direction that the Realms are heading, taking into consideration your earlier vision of what you wanted the Realms to become?

I’m not a fan of endless prestige classes; my ideal Realms sourcebook would have no stat blocks and minimal class and ‘hard’ game notations. It’s enough to say that “Roldro is a powerful wizard (perhaps a W12)”, because I want to use the space on the pages to give gamers the maximum amount of usable over-and-over lore (“Roldro collects old maps, and will pay handsomely for any good ones of XXX, but he’s not the prissy old collector he likes to pretend to be. A retired former herald, he’s keenly aware of the genealogies of six kingdoms, and very quietly makes a good living identifying ‘lost heirs’ and throne claimants for every cabal willing to pay for such information—even if it leads to coups and bloody civil wars and shattered thrones. Moreover, Roldro once received The Tome of Ineffable Magicks in payment of a debt, and has mastered . . .”) That sort of stuff is FAR more useful to DMs trying to spin plots and subplots in their own campaigns than stats for Orc Encounter #36. After all, there are already tons of published stat blocks those DMs can use for such needs.

With that said, I’m happy that Realms sourcebooks are continuing to be published and are continuing to “paint

in the map” of the Realms, covering the fuzzy areas and adding more detail. I’m also pleased that Realms novels go from strength to strength in the field, because the more *stories* going on in the Realms, the more gamers think about the Realms, the more it seems alive, and the more interesting it stays.

What direction would you like to see D&D go? Is there an area of the game that has not been explored that you would like to see fleshed out in a book, supplement, or module?

I would love to see a sourcebook that deals with merchant shipping, caravans, banking; currency, trade flows, and commerce; with heraldry, courts (laws and justice, not just enforcement and sentencing); and Court etiquette (“How do I ask to see the king?”), so that gamers could have a sample business contract in mock-medieval language that they could photocopy and “fill in the blanks,” and so on. A book that covers all the neglected stuff, if you will.

Now, a gaming business person will tell you (as many have told me) that something like this would *never* sell, but I think it’s a matter of dressing it up in the right attractive clothing. Stuffing in enough goodies, if you will. Give me photocopy-able handouts DMs can give to players (writs, proclamations of thanks for PC heroism, “Wanted” posters for fugitives, charters for adventuring companies and grants of arms for nobles and the just-knighted, and so on). To use a Realms example, sneak in a simplified Sword Coast “Pirate and Traveler”-style board game that gives me a deck of cargo cards that I can draw from, to tell me very quickly “what’s in this wagon” or “what’s down in this ship’s hold *besides* the slave girls we’re rescuing—if they’re chained to bombs, I’d like to know that *before* I go down there with my flaming torch in my hand.”

That’s just one idea off the top of my head, of course; like any gamer, I have many others.

What other games do you enjoy playing?

Lots of games, from board games like *Arkham Horror*, *Awful Green Things From Outer Space*, *Kingmaker*, *Empires of the Middle Ages* and *International Oilman* to role-playing games like *Call of Cthulhu* and *Metamorphosis Alpha*. I rarely have time to sit down and really enjoy games these days, but I like simple card games and board games with simple mechanics but strategic difficulties (especially if the board itself is beautiful to look at). Many of the Cheapass Games appeal to my sense of humor and desire for fast-playing; enjoyable games that don’t appeal to rules lawyers or are likely to end in furious disagreements over how well they’ve accurately simulated this or that real-world military detail.

You have said that your gaming group gets together about once or twice a year for a marathon gaming session lasting up to three days. Do you still have these marathon sessions?

Whenever we can, which isn’t nearly often enough. Yes, things are falling apart for the ‘home’ Realms players, which isn’t surprising when you consider that we’re scattered all over the world now, with busy professional lives and young families of our own. (It’s hard to get someone to show up for a gaming session when they’re on the other side of the world, backpacking alone from ancient monument to ancient monument. It’s even harder when they’re tenured professors teaching heavy class loads at a large university, trying to stay fit, *and* juggling infants at home.) That’s the problem with having a group of incredibly bright, imaginative, inquisitive, and handsome people; they can go far in life—and have.

Who is the most underrated NPC 'bad-guy' from your home realms campaign? How about from the merchandised Realms?

Manshoon is the most underrated NPC villain in the published Realms, because the TSR Code of Ethics prevented me from showing the Zhentarim as really competent, early on, and I was never able to dwell on the extent and sophistication of Manshoon's Machiavellian plotting and subtle spread of influence. For a man *not* directly supported by a deity (as, for instance, Elminster is), Manshoon achieved more than anyone else in the current Realms, in matters of acquiring information and in being able to influence others.

He was well on his way to having a Realms-wide network of informants and agents that could persuade a farmwife in Halruua to purchase this sort of cloth instead of that sort, so subtly that she might not even be aware her decision was being influenced. Why does that matter? Well, if you do that to several thousand farmwives, you change entire markets, profiting thereby and ruining rivals. (This is something modern-day multinational business concerns understand all too well.) Larloch *could* establish the same degree of influence, but isn't interested in doing so—and is far less 'in touch and in tune' with daily life in the Realms than Manshoon is, and so could never match Manshoon's subtlety. So the 'real' Manshoon is the Master Manipulator, not Fzoul's puppet. (In fact, this could just be his ploy: set Fzoul up to be the figurehead, er, target, whilst sly and urbane Manshoon schemes unhampered in the background. . . heh-heh.)

In the original 'Home' Realms campaign, the most neglected villain was a certain Lord of Waterdeep whose identity I'm going to keep secret because the Company of Crazy Adventurers (the PCs) STILL haven't stumbled into understanding the depths of his villainy. He's been quietly in the background of almost every guild scandal and important-NPC-murder they've seen, and they've just never picked up on the clues. I think I may have him try to romance one of the Adventurers with an eye to marrying her (and trying to slay most of the Adventurers on their ways to or from her wedding feast), acquiring her land and wealth, and then have her slowly poisoned, just to see if they notice this guy *then*. Perhaps if he put on a dragon suit and roared at them . . .

Now that *Eberron* is here, what do you see for the future of *Forgotten Realms*? Do you think it will be overshadowed and essentially phased out like *Greyhawk* was with the advent of 2nd edition?

We've had a good, long run. The Realms could quite possibly end up as a fiction-only setting, as *Dragonlance*® did for a time, or even be licensed out to another company. Those aren't my decisions, which is a good thing because I'd probably be a terrible businessperson.

Under the original Realms agreement, there are conditions under which the Realms "reverts" to me, so I doubt the current copyright holders will let those conditions happen.

I am privy to the very good business reasons for the creation of *Eberron*, and agree with them, but the Realms novels are selling so well that it would seem foolish to make the Realms "go away," and there's also the proven track record of the Realms, which has been a profitable financial engine for far longer than most settings in the fantasy gaming world have lasted (popular settings have been "brought back" repeatedly, but that's not the same thing). If you have a winning racehorse and you buy a new one (let's call it, er, *Eberron*), you'd better make sure it can win races before you send your proven winner to the glue factory.

However, as a game designer, I'm interested in seeing what's done with *Eberron* (I view it as "another platter on the buffet" for all gamers, not as a rival or enemy to the Realms), and the Realms has built up a fandom over the years that will not let the setting die (like Tolkien's *Middle-Earth*, *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, and so on). Even if the *published* Realms ended tomorrow, the Realms will go on—something that pleases me very much. I have friends all over the world because of the Realms. I'm regularly asked what Realms character names mean because people want to apply them to their babies. I get asked to perform marriages as Elminster . . . so the Realms has a life of its own, now, far larger than any one person or company.

What do you feel is wrong with the writing industry today (specifically pertaining to fantasy writing)?

The popularity of reading, along with general literacy within the population, is decreasing (people are busier and busier, and spend more time on the Net, or play computer games, or do other things with their leisure time.)...so the pie is shrinking.

At the same time, the efforts of the publishing industry to "modernize" so as to chase the highest sales (such as print on demand, closely tying print runs to preorders, and pay-for-title-publicity demands by the chain booksellers and by internet retailers) are all contributing to a drift toward a few large conglomerates having more and more control over what books we all read, what books we can see in a store to browse through, and so on. This is good for popular writers who are "on top" of the sales charts right now, and bad for anyone new and unknown.

It's also bad for any genre that can be seen by someone with power in a conglomerate as "bad" or "controversial." ("Oh, you play/read that *D&D* Satanic stuff? No, we don't carry that—this is a respectable town, and we don't cater to creeps like you.") Gaming fantasy writing gets hurt by that.

In the wider fantasy field, publishers are always trying to chase and find "the next Tolkien" or "the next Harry Potter," so they like look-alikes. On the other hand, they *say* they want new and different stuff, two desires that are difficult to reconcile in a genre that has always used tropes seen as clichés (the evil wizard, the princess needing rescuing, the evil usurping king, the wicked fairy, the dragon that must be slain, et cetera).

Fantasy is also becoming more "mainstream," which has meant that as a wider audience gets interested in it, it gets more fragmented and specialized, so we now have more romances set in fantasy kingdoms, more whodunits, political thrillers and war stories, and, yes, westerns set in a fantasy setting. This means some of the older forms of "popcorn good fun sword & sorcery," like Conan, and Fafhrd and the Mouser, tend to get 'left behind' in publishers' thinking.

So writers increasingly have to tailor their fantasy writing to what publishers or editors want, and (with a few stellar exceptions, like TOR Books, which lovingly publish a very broad line of ‘types’ of fantasy literature) the reader wandering into a local bookstore has narrower and narrower choices of what sort of fantasy books he or she can pick off the shelf. I think John Bellairs, were he alive today but starting as an unknown, would have trouble getting his classic book *The Face In The Frost* published—and that’s a horribly tragic state of affairs.

It is obvious that you have a lot of passion for writing and even more passion for your characters in your books. What advice could you give novice writers on how to create such vivid and living characterization in their stories without sounding fake or scripted?

Everyone writes in a slightly different way, but you have to be able to imagine vividly, and communicate your imaginings clearly. In other words, if I create Xorgul the Potmaker, I have to know what he looks like—and know how to quickly give the reader a good idea of his appearance without taking pages to describe every last detail. I have to remember to do that when the reader first meets him in the pages of my book and how much to reinforce it later so the reader won’t get him mixed up with, say, Zorg the Tentmaker. That’s the rock-bottom basic part.

More importantly, I have to know how Xorgul thinks and talks, and be able to ‘put myself into Xorgul’s head and think and talk like him,’ so I can establish what his character is and stick to his character so he reacts consistently to things. Then I can write scenes where someone gets killed in front of his eyes or his pants fall down in the marketplace and have him react correctly and believably *for Xorgul*.

That brings us to the third part. I have to know what drives Xorgul, what moves him: what he’s aiming for in life, or if he even knows or has thought about it, who and what he hates, what he wants to get or to be, what will make him angry, what will make him cry, and what or who he loves.

Now I know how to be Xorgul, and I can write a scene where Xorgul gets disguised as a beautiful lass or magically transformed into a walking, talking chamberpot and my reader will still say, “Yup, that’s Xorgul, all right.”

What it all boils down to is this: you have to care about your characters. Not fall in love with them or use them as personal wish fulfillments or alter egos, but take care in crafting them, even if they’re walk-on “extras” who don’t get speaking parts or who exist just to get killed by the hero. That hulking guard the hero slays to get into the castle has a wife and kids back home, and is bored, and has to pee, and the leather jack under his armor itches like fun, and he’s remembering when he won that great hand in the card game last night, and WHA—euggghh! (Hulking guard falls dead, hero drags dagger out of guard’s throat and runs on into glory. Hulking guard fades to black, choking on his own blood and desperately trying to . . . trying to . . .)

We all write differently, and not every writer is going to want or need to write all this down for every hulking guard. Yet we all have to THINK about it, even if we do so only subconsciously and in seconds. If we don’t, you can usually tell by the odor of the written result.

Elminster is probably the single most recognized NPC from the Forgotten Realms campaign setting. How did you create such a living personality?

I needed someone too powerful for lazy role-players to have their characters casually slay to shut him up (hence the “has powerful magic” part,) and who could be an unreliable and cantankerous source of advice (add the “old wise sage with major attitude” part). This gave me someone PC adventurers needed but couldn’t push around or always go running to (because he might be off saving the world somewhere else, so couldn’t they handle their scraped knees themselves for once, hmmm?).

This gave me *how* he had to be (see my answer to Question 12 for where I went from there on developing him). Mostly I wanted an old fart that could bluntly tell the emperor that

he had no clothes and always get away with doing so. The guy who causes utter silence at a wild party by saying what everyone suspects but no one dares to say out loud.

From that needed role, the rest of him developed, step-by-step. So he’s not a Merlin clone (though that’s the role he’s mostly playing), a Gandalf rip-off, or a Belgarath parody, and he’s *not* my alter ego. He’s the guy so powerful that he can take your best shot, yawn, and then stand there without retaliating, and calmly say, “Ye seem more hostile than most adventurers who come here seeking to slay me. Why, may I ask? Is thy codpiece too tight? Crown on crooked, this morning? Bored with slaying helpless children? Or just seeking glory and too stupid to think there might be a *reason* for my reputation? Hmmm?”

He’s not a munchkin (too tall and too low a voice, for one thing), he’s the lover and most trusted servant of the most powerful deity in the world he lives in, beyond all munchkinism. Which lets me use him to examine more important issues than merely chasing power such as: what do you *do* with all that power once you’ve got it? Once you’ve had it for centuries, and outlived everyone you cared about, and most of their countries, too? What’s it like to go insane because you’re just so tired of it all, but aren’t allowed to just lie down and die? How do you react when you know that’s the trap you live in? What keeps you going? What do you still believe in, and care about? And *then*, when you start the final fall-apart anyway, what do you rush to do in the dwindling time you have left? What does it really mean to love entities (gods, individual people, horrible scaly monsters)? To love ideas? Countries? A world?

If you follow along watching what this Elminster guy does and says, and jot it all down, well—he creates himself, as he goes. Just like real people do.

Did you expect Elminster to become so legendary?

No, I expected Elminster to be the ‘Old Storyteller’ narrator of the Realms who introduced us to other characters and their unfolding stories, and then faded away off the page

as the harp strings thrummed, and the reader plunged into those stories. I expected him to be the old guy people went to consult (like the oracle at Delphi, whom the reader never directly sees in the old tales), rather than onstage much. However, the books people at TSR thought differently, so I ended up writing a series of Elminster books. His tale isn't quite done yet, but the Old Mage's legendary status is a perfect illustration of the way commercial writing works; it's not about what you the writer want to say, it's about what your audience wants to hear. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle grew to hate Sherlock Holmes and killed him off—and his readers *demand*ed his return and didn't want to buy anything else by Doyle.

A lot of vocal gamers and readers hate Elminster and want to see him gone—but the sales figures tell the different opinion of the more silent majority.

Was Elminster patterned after you or one of your original gaming group?

No, he isn't me and was never an echo of any real person (or gaming character, PC or NPC). His speech, mannerisms, and character have all developed 'on their own' over the years, making him increasingly unique (despite what some believe). I'm often asked to pick actors I'd like to see portray El in a movie, and I can say that Nichol Williamson's Merlin in the movie *Excalibur* (which came out well after Elminster's character was established, of course) is pretty close in manner of speech, tone of voice, and accent. Ditch the earring and skullcap, and change the red hair to flowing white, of course.

Over the years I've often put on a costume and portrayed Elminster at conventions, but please understand that this is a fat fantasy author *playing* the Old Mage, not anything like the Old Mage himself.

Finally, what little tidbit of advice can you give to all of the aspiring writers out there that dream of seeing their name on the cover of a fantasy novel?

Keep writing, don't be discouraged by rejections (they mean you didn't fit what the editor or publisher was looking for just then, not necessarily that your work is bad), keep looking at your own stuff as harshly as you can trying to see how you can do it better, and read, Read, READ. See how everyone else writes (*not* just one person you can copy) and soak it all up. Use your local library, and don't just read fantasy books. (Cookbooks are good: if you're drooling at the end of a recipe, how did the writer manage to make you do that? Look hard, and learn.) Do this for years; never stop doing it. Collect images from your own dreams and jot them down. Save them like treasures, and eventually see if they can be stirred into the recipe that is your next fantasy novel. Don't think you know how to ride a horse, or use a sword, or besiege a castle, because you saw it in a movie once—very few characters do anything "right" in movies. Research how those things are done, and taste and smell and feel. Not because your "but magic works here" world will be exactly the same, but because you need to understand *why* they work the way they do (or did) in the real world.

Moreover—and this is more important than all of the above—a memorable fantasy novel is about memorable characters doing interesting things. Don't just show me a vast and beautiful fantasy world with castles floating in the clouds and pegasi chasing unicorns through ancient forests, *tell me a story*.

"It's all about the story, stupid." Pretend you're talking to people in a quiet bar, or around a campfire, and trying to scare or impress them, or make them laugh, by telling a better story than the story the last guy just finished telling. Not a longer story or a wilder story: a better-told story. Use all the tricks of pacing and talking loudly or quietly, of ham acting, of describing vividly . . . and hey, you'll have a fantasy novel you can put your name on, and see published (and be proud and not ashamed of it, too).

We thank Ed Greenwood for his time and eagerly await his upcoming works!

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by Jeffrey E. Thetford

Shades of Duty, Part I

People were coming. He could sense the life in their bodies as he had done so many times before. Adventurers, stalwart and eager, had been here before—not these mind you, but others. There were always others. They would come, as before, palms itchy from greed and the anticipation of what they would find. With gleaming steel, flashing magic, and eyes wide with thoughts of wealth and power, they would come and he would slay them. Each crying for their gods to help them, each dying with those prayers unanswered.

Uthar moved silently through the dark chamber toward the heavily enchanted crypt door. With little more than a thought, he turned his semi-solid body into swirling vaporous shadows that seeped through a pinhole next to the main crypt seal. His shadowy essence poured over the ceiling of the antechamber and mixed with the stale air of the room, finally coalescing inside of a small niche that held several chest-high statues of long dead nobles and lords of little fame except to have a likeness carved for posterity.

The black motes of his eyes sparkled for but a moment as he surveyed the outer chamber. In his once mortal coils, he would have had little chance seeing anything but blackness in the tomb, but as a shade guard, he watched the scene before him as if it were high sun in his hometown of Lac Dlarrin. The images of home came and went for he had spent far too many years torturing his mind with thoughts of returning. All he known had been dead near a century.

Uthar did not think it a curse to wait eternity as the guard over a forgotten relic, sworn to kill any and all that broke into the tomb. At least this is what time had taught him. He would vanquish these new trespassers with deadly precision and return to his wait for others to come. They always came. However, this time a strange feeling was turning in his essence, growing with each passing moment.

He had performed his duties a hundred times, and each time he felt the same—cold and emotionless. Yet a familiar feeling, one he thought long dead, was rising in his shadowy

essence. A deep, grating sound filled his ears and he quickly formed into a more human shape and pulled his dark blade, looking for the intruder that had slipped in. He saw nothing but the same dusty trappings of the crypt. There was no intruder, only the sounds of his own laughter. He looked deep into his thoughts to find the cause of this sudden upsurge of emotion and could only find one thing that it could be: it was regret. Perhaps the time had come, he thought, to give up his duty and let the contents of the tomb be raided. Let the next set of adventurers to breach the door and have the thing he protected. But it was not his place to change the edict given to him by the lords of Caramont, but his onus—even if those that set him on his task were mere bones now. His thoughts of desertion were gone an instant later when a series of powerful blows assailed the entrance followed by a stream of muffled curses as the would-be intruders he had felt were at the door.

It started as a few short taps upon the door as someone worked methodically around the frame of the tomb door, seeking for a weakness. Uthar moved silently through the room, the thoughts of laughter and regret slipping to whispers in his mind as he assumed his roll as defender once again.

Yes, come in, Uthar thought. It had been a while since he had dispatched any thieves and he found that his essence reverberated with each tap on the door with the desire to kill. The blows became harder as the assailant continued looking for any weakness in the stone. Uthar smiled inwardly knowing that none would be found as the door was magically woven with the shadows.

With practiced movements he twirled the dark blade, performing a warm up routine he had learned as a member of the Shadow Knives of Caramont. The blade turned easily, bringing a smile to his dark lips as he remembered wielding other blades in his former life. But this blade was special. Infused with the very essence of shadow power, it was as powerful, if not more so, than most blades he had seen in his existence.

He thought back to the day Vynmarius, the city's Archmagis, made him a shade guard and set him on the task of protecting the artifact sealed in the far chamber. In his mist-filled mind, he saw himself crouched in that dirty alley between the pub and the whorehouse listening. Then, as fast as a breath, the sound of footsteps drew close. The cut of flesh. The grunt of pain. The gurgle of a blood filled throat. The body of Doune the Grim, leader of the Black Earls of Caramont, and visior to the king, laid at his feet; his blood filling the cracks in the cobblestones of the alley.

Regret. That unfamiliar emotion, one of fops and sweet smelling whores, took root in his mind that day.

Doune the Grim had discovered that several high council members had been stealing from the city coffers and when the treasurer of the city was found dead, it was all the proof that Doune needed to go to the King and denounce the entire council as traitorous thieves. That was until the Precarian, the head of the Shadow Knives, had found out what Doune knew and ordered his death. With his murder, the council and the thieves' guild could continue their profitable relationship. Uthar's death was payment to the city's Archmagis for other, darker debts. Uthar's trial was swift and his execution public, choking on the end of the executioner's rope, watching the assembled commoners cheer and bet on how long he would dance until death took him. When his slumber of death was lifted, he was bound to this tomb by his duty to Caramont and the council.

Vynmarius explained his duties well that day.

"You are bound, Uthar, by the very fabric of this *shadow cocoon* to keep all those who would dare to steal what is rightfully the council's," the mage's raspy voice echoed in his head as he remembered. "You will protect it with your very soul. For if it is taken from this place, you will pray for the hangman's rope again rather than the hell that I can deal you." Vynmarius did not explain the pain inflicted on one's soul when becoming a shade guard. Uthar felt as if his flesh

were being flayed from his body—if he actually still had either of them. The chilling burn of what he had become had never truly stopped. He only became numb to its constant pain.

The reason for guarding the artifact was not totally explained to him or if it was he was not listening. Vynmarius said it was called the Shadow Lens and a famous dwarven smith of the Deep-Gem clan had created it long ago. The lens was thought to take in the shadows of its surroundings and magically transform them into magical, viscous oil. The oil was then used to give the great stone ships of the clan the ability to pass through rock as a ship moves on the open sea.

"An artifact of another era, left in the ruin's of one of the cities in the Deadlands," Vynmarius said casually.

Uthar put the thoughts from his mind. All of that was in the past- ancient history. All that mattered now was that the would-be thieves were here.

*

"Damn son-of-a-dog-sired-gully dwarf!" Gadlyn exclaimed as his hand and arm shook from the impact of his warhammer on the tomb door. It only took him a dozen or so whacks against this particular one to figure out that it, like the others, would not budge using brute strength alone.

"Aw'right, wizard man, your turn," the dwarf said angrily. Valdicor stepped forth and gave the dwarf a tilted smile of condescension as he pulled a small pouch from his belt.

"Are you sure you don't want to give it another whack?" Valdicor said with a sideways glance. Gadlyn raised his hammer and stepped toward the mage only to be stopped by a hand over his head. Koulor looked down at Gadlyn and smiled.

"I wasn't going to hit him hard, at least not at first," Gadlyn said as he winked at the barbarian. A young elf dressed in worn leathers, carrying a longbow of white ash, and engaged by a circling vine of mahogany stepped up to the dwarf and gently took him by the arm.

A figure slid down the trunk of a gnarled and blackened oak and brushed the smudges from his green-tanned leathers.

A half-elf of nearly sixty winters wiped the sweat from his brow. There had been a breeze, he thought as he watched the sun sink lower in the western sky. The days were growing longer which meant that the nights would be nearly as warm as the days—a thought that brought a sigh across Aomas' lips.

"This is the last tomb for the day," Aomas whispered, his throat becoming suddenly dry. "After we make our search, we shall camp here and set out for the next after morning feast. Just let Valdicor do what it is he does best."

Valdicor smirked at Gadlyn as he cast his magic on the door.

"You would be wise, my little friend, to listen to our good elf here—" His condescending speech was halted by the explosion that threw him forty feet back into the dirt.

Koulor was in motion instantly. He ran and scooped the mage into his arms and carried him behind a stand of rocks a few yards away. Aomas pitched into a backward somersault and landed with his back against an ancient oak, his fingers massaging the readied blade in his hands as Gadlyn flew more than ran toward the stone shelter where Koulor had disappeared. A small figure darted up the side of the stand of boulders, an arrow strung and ready—aimed with the deadly precision she was known for. The horses whinnied loudly and Aomas turned in time to see them pull away from their ties.

"Laeirtill- the horses!" he yelled. The elf stowed her arrow and bow, leapt from the standing stones and darted after the running mares.

"What in the nine hells was that?" Laeirtill yelled as she moved gracefully through the trees.

"Just Valdicor doing what he does best," Gadlyn said smugly. Aomas ignored him as he turned to the blackened and smoldering mage.

"Are you all right," he asked quietly. Valdicor opened his eyes and motioned for Koulor to help him to his feet. He bled from dozens of cuts and scraps but his wounds did not look serious.

"I am fine," he said coldly as he pushed the barbarians arm away and promptly fell to his knees.

"Yes, fine." Gadlyn said flatly. "Be glad yer alive and not laying in a heap of ash from that blasted misfired spell!" Valdicor shot the dwarf a hot look.

"It was not I who did that!" he said caustically. "I only cast a simple spell to undo the enchantments on the door . . . but there was . . ." Valdicor sat hard on his pack and rubbed his temples.

"But there was *what!*" Gadlyn snorted. Valdicor glanced up and shook his head in confusion.

"There was . . . something else, something that seemed to collide with my magic. I checked the door for wards before you started your infernal banging and found only a simple spell cast on the jamb. But as I cast my counterspell, something . . . clashed with my magic." Valdicor spoke in confused tones.

"Bah!" Gadlyn scoffed, "Ye just can't admit you made a mistake, can you magic man!"

"No!" Aomas cut off the dwarf. "It is something else. If Valdicor says it was not his mistake, then I believe him." Aomas gave Valdicor a reassuring smile. He had known him for nearly two decades and knew he was no upstart wizard by any means. To see him so confused about a spell gone awry caused him concern. Laeirtill tied off the horses and started toward their camp when she stopped and stared at the crypt.

"Aomas, the tomb door!"

The ranger looked through the settling dust around the burial site and saw that the stone door was off the tomb and broken in half, pieces of the surrounding jam shattered into palm-sized chunks.

"Valdicor," he called to the wizard. Koulor helped the mage to his feet.

"I guess your misfired . . . it seems that your spell worked," Gadlyn corrected himself as he slapped the mage on the back and gathered his things. Valdicor grimaced at the pain in his head, managing a half smile.

"Wait," Aomas called to him, "let us rest until Valdicor gains his feet." Valdicor held up a hand and pushed away from

Koulor.

"No," he said sternly. "I will not be the cause of delay in our quest for the lens. If it is in this tomb, then the faster we retrieve it, the faster we can take it to the High Moor and complete our task." Valdicor looked as stiff as always, his jaw set determinedly forward.

Yes, their quest, Aomas thought. Since the release of the phaerimm from their prison under the Anauroch, the surrounding lands had been razed by bands of goblins, giants and changelings lying claim to stolen properties and killing or enslaving all that crossed their path. But the worst were the creatures that led them—the Dubh Cruach, or dark dwarves. Riding harpy mounts, the Dubh Cruach fell upon their prey and slaughter them with little regard to mercy. They made their home in the sands of the Cluanna Desert until recently. Now, they persuade goblin tribes to ravage the towns surrounding the Deadlands and draw the giants of the Dragonpeaks down from their mountain homes to stop any rebellion against them.

The organization that hired him and his friends had heard rumor of an ancient dwarven artifact that may be able to help in the battle against the Dubh Cruach and their minions. Caleb, his contact in the capital city of Ju'Terrana, had said that the artifact, known only to his sources as 'the lens,' was rumored buried in a tomb somewhere in or near the Fields of the Fallen. Aomas hoped Caleb's information was correct for there were literally thousands of burial mounds and tombs hidden among the field's hills and deep grasses. His companions, once known as the Shining Souls of the South, took little urging to rejoin for a chance to cross swords again in battle, although he never mentioned the dark dwarves.

"Lad," Gadlyn called, drawing Aomas from his thoughts. "Ye better ready yerself so we can get on with searching this empty tomb and convince the lass here to cook us up some of her rabbit stew!" Laeirtill tossed a stone at the dwarf that clanked off his battered helm.

"You know my name, little man," she said jokingly, "Or has your memory faded with your good looks!" Gadlyn sniffed in her direction as he headed for the tomb. Laeirtill walked to Aomas and slipped her hand into the crook of his arm.

"Shall we?" she asked, winking. Aomas smiled. Laeirtill was the youngest of the group and was probably the most beautiful elf he had ever seen. Her waist length raven-black hair and tan, supple skin gave her a beauty that filled his heart with joy whenever she was near. And her eyes, strikingly blue and sprinkled with a hint of gray, reminded him of the breakers that crashed into the Black Coast. He could lose himself in those eyes. But it was not her beauty alone that drew him to her, but her precision with a bow as well for he knew of no one who rivaled her deadly accuracy.

Aomas never told anyone, save for Valdicor, of his love for Laeirtill since she joined the Shining Souls. The mage said it would 'stress' their working relationship too much and he reluctantly agreed. However, he could not help but steal a quick glimpse of her or watch her dance-like fighting style during battle as he dreamed of caressing her skin in the privacy of his chambers.

"Yes," Aomas sighed finally, "Let us go."

Gadlyn walked toward the tomb but stopped a dozen paces from the toppled entrance next to the barbarian.

"Well? Are the behemoth here and I to be the only one's to go in while the rest of you sun yer'selves?" Gadlyn stood, hands in fists on his hips, trying to look menacing next to the nearly seven foot tall barbarian.

"We are coming," Valdicor said as he semi-staggered toward the pair. Aomas blinked when he noticed he was still staring into Laeirtill's eyes. Clearing his throat, he headed for the tomb.

*

Uthar flew back to the niche and flattened against the wall. No one had ever destroyed the entrance before! Usually they gave up but now the tomb lay open with little hope of repair, even if he could repair it. Again, emotions he thought long dead with his corporeal body swirled in his thoughts. Pulling from the wall, he floated to the niche opening, his dark blade at the ready as he forced his emotions cold and dark once again, the thoughts of protecting the tomb in the forefront of his mind.

*

When everyone was at the crypt, Valdicor stepped up to the entrance and cast a spell on his dagger. The blade flared brightly as he stepped into the blackness of the opening. Immediately Valdicor knew something was wrong. He felt the familiar tingling of a spell surround him but before he could stop and reverse his direction, he slipped into the darkness. As he entered, the light of his dagger faded to barely the glow of a dying candle and his senses were accosted by swirling shadows.

"Hold!" he yelled through the entrance, although he figured that his companions would not hear. If his assumptions were right, he had just stepped through a portal—but to where?

"Curious," he mumbled as he looked closely at his dagger. When he saw the dark shadows that flowed around his enchantment, he knew.

"Not so curious when you consider where you are, thief!" hissed a voice from the darkness. Valdicor crouched defensively, waving the dim light of the dagger into the shadows. Uthar sprang from the niche and flew toward the mage, waving his dark blade in a zigzag pattern.

"Who's there?" Valdicor shouted into the darkness, his light spell doing little more than casting a pale glow a few feet away.

"Your death!" hissed the voice as a slice of blackness cut into his right shoulder and ran across his chest, the enchanted dagger tumbling away to his left. Immediately, Valdicor's shoulder became numb as if struck by ice, the feeling spreading across his chest following the path of the attacker's blade. Grunting in pain, he tumbled forward, banging hard into a pedestal, sending an unseen dust coated bust of a nobleman crashing to the ground. Pushing himself to his knees, he mumbled arcane words and a moment later a bubble of deep purple flashed around his body and then vanished in the darkness.

"Aomas!" Valdicor cried as he dug into a pouch on his hip, "Hurry!"

*

"Something's wrong!" Koulor shouted as he watched Valdicor vanish into the darkness of the tomb. Gadlyn pulled his

hammer and leapt through the entrance without hesitation. Laeirtil and Aomas followed close behind as Koulor said a quick prayer and squeezed into the tight doorway. After a few moments, he pushed himself through and into the tomb.

When Aomas entered, dark mists assailed his senses and he heard the sound of a battle but saw nothing but darkness. Off to his left and a dozen steps away, the dim light of Valdicor's dagger caught his eye. And in front of him, a flashing of purple light drew his eyes to the center of the room. The light lasted but for a moment, but long enough for the barbarian to faintly see Valdicor on his knees covered by an egg-shaped flash of purple light. Above the mage was a swirling pool of darkness that hammered against Valdicor's protection shield, each hit sending purple tendrils of light crackling around it.

"Koulor!" Aomas shouted from the shadows to his right, "Flank!"

Koulor waved his sword before him to keep from running into any hidden creatures, picked up Valdicor's dagger and tucked it into his belt. Seeing the flash again as the creature assailed the mage's shield with another blow, he started forward.

Uthar entered the shadow-frenzy that always overcame him when he fought tomb robbers. He was not sure if this was an effect of being a shade guard or the cause of living in the tomb for so long. Whatever the reason, his arms wielded the blade almost of their own accord, slamming the dark metal into the mage's shield. From battling hundreds of would-be robbers, he discovered the shadow blades ability to bend and destroy many spells.

The shade guard watched as each strike pulled the shadows from the air, sending streaks of sizzling purple-black liquid pouring down the magical shield. Looking to his left, he watched three figures slowly moving toward him—two elves and a dwarf. When the dwarf was a few paces away, Uthar yelled and leapt sideways, slicing down and across with his blade.

"Die, tomb robbers! Only those of Caramont nobility may venture into this sacred place!" The practiced speech fell from his lips without a thought.

"Gadlyn, look out!" Aomas shouted as he squinted to see through the shadows ahead. The shadows swirled and seemed to thicken as he strained to see into the chamber. Nothing. Suddenly, the sound of clashing of weapons reverberated throughout the chamber followed by a stream of dwarven expletives as the retreating Gadlyn pushed into Aomas, forcing him back. Aomas reached for the dwarf but grasped only shadows. Another echo of clashing weapons then someone grunted and fell to the floor.

"Gadlyn!" he yelled again as he pushed Laeirtil to the side and darted into the mists. He had only taken a couple of steps when he tripped over something that sent him down to his knees. It was Gadlyn.

"Gadlyn's dead," Aomas whispered as he reached back and felt Gadlyn's still and lifeless form.

"No!" Laeirtil gasped as she knelt down and reached out for the dwarf. She recoiled and shrieked as her hand passed over the gash that had lay open his neck.

Koulor knelt next to where he saw the last purple flash and reached out and found the mage.

"No time for rest," he whispered.

"This place is not on our plane and I am guessing our attacker is either a creation of this place or a resident of it," Valdicor said through labored breaths. Koulor puzzled at Valdicor's words. He was not too familiar with otherworldly things, having always trusted in his sword and muscles to get him through life. A moment later, a deep, gravely laugh echoed out of the darkness.

"If you stand still, you will make this an easier task for all and your death will come as swiftly as did the dwarf's. Though if you wish to run about in the darkness, then do so. It makes no difference to me." Uthar circled back to where he could see those that remained alive.

Maybe the years of guarding the tomb had done something to him, or maybe the sudden rise of the emotions he felt earlier had changed him. Whatever the reason, Uthar suddenly felt the need to let these robbers see him before they died. He raised his left hand and produced a metal tube. With a few words, he sent a portion of the shadows swirling inside.



The room began to take shape as the mists were drawn into the tube and the daggers enchanted light in Koulor's belt began to grow brighter. Where nothing but darkness was before, the chamber took on the look of every other dusty and drab crypt they had seen except for the black, shadowy figure that fluttered like a flag in a light breeze, his body shifting and flowing like the shadows around him.

All looked to where Gadlyn lay motionless in a growing pool of blood; his warhammer still cradled in his hands and his head cocked back at an odd angle showing where the shadow figure's blade had nearly taken it off. Koulor slowly slipped the greatsword from his back and held the blade high overhead as he clutched Valdicor's dagger in the other. With muscles that rippled with his growing rage, he growled at his dark enemy and stamped the ground with his sandal covered feet.

"I'll eat your heart out, shadow bug!" the barbarian howled as he lunged forward, the great sword slashing the air before him. Uthar, his face shrouded by a gray scarf that hid his smile, tumbled low and to Koulor's left as the barbarian's blade came down hard to find only the dusty stone of the floor, the flagstones shattering into dark slivers. He looked to his left just as the creature slashed with its blade. Koulor gritted his teeth and screamed in pain-filled rage as the blade dug deep into his knee and unleashed its shadowy power. From the knee down, his leg grew numb before he could manage a step. The shade guard was back then, carving line after line across Koulor's forearm until it too went limp with numbness and his great sword dropped to the floor.

Valdicor was up and running then, his hands twisting and carving the arcane symbols of a spell as he recited the words needed to release its stored magic. He ran past Koulor and stopped a few feet from the shadowy form, making sure he had an unobstructed view.

Uthar jumped back, his body flattening into a puddle of blackness against the wall, and sprang out toward the mage, his blade leading. Valdicor finished his spell, sending a beam of blinding, blistering light that shot forth and slammed into the guard.

Uthar's world exploded in searing pain that penetrated every inch of his body. His ghostly howl echoed in the chamber as his body twisted and rolled through the air, thrown back by the force of the spell to slam against the same wall he had just used as a springboard. He hacked at the beam with his blade but every time it met the spell's effect, it rebound back against the wall. Uthar howled in rage and pain as the beam began to etch through his shadowy armor and bite into the black skin beneath. With great effort, he pulled the dark tube from his belt, popped off its cap, and thrust it toward the mage.

Aaomas leapt for the shade's arm and grabbed it, slamming it against the wall but was too late. The metal tube flew end over end, its contents spilling out as it tumbled toward the mage.

Koulor flipped the dagger around and threw it handle first at the tube. The dagger tapped the side of the container just enough to send it over the mage's head and toward the unopened tomb door. Valdicor, startled by the events and still shaky from defending himself from the shade, stumbled back and tripped over a pile of dust-coated books. The beam of searing light arced across the room and met the tomb door at the same instant the vial smashed into it. The mixing of his powerful spell and the shadowstuff from the vial exploded into a ball of gray, flashing matter that rolled out from the door and across the antechamber of the tomb.

The Shining Souls of the South had little time to react before the rolling mixture of light and shadow consumed them.

Uthar fell, or rather poured to the ground when Valdicor's beam arced away, and the tomb robber that had held his arm against the wall released his grip. He began to form anew into his familiar dark form when the wall of magic tore over him. He watched as the shadows around him and his very essence were pulled into the bubbling magic and he was torn apart by the mixture of raw power. A moment later, Uthar opened his eyes and noticed that he was still standing amidst the turmoil. Trying to flow along the floor and leave, he found instead feet that slapped against the stones.

self. He knew his body was long ago rotted away with time and that he was only a shade guard, his essence that of the very shadows that surrounded him. As he looked closer at his flesh and noticed that he could see through, that his body was neither shadow nor flesh. Then all of the emotions of his former life flowed into his mind as he looked to the body of the dwarf being carried away by the cacophony of magic, and he was filled with sorrow. Leaping forward, he grabbed the dwarf by the legs and found that his transparent hands held fast. Crawling up his body, Uthar grasped the dwarf by the head and stared into his lifeless face.

Spending over a century killing any thing that dug its way or happened into the tomb, Uthar was being given a chance by some unknown power to leave this world having done at least one act of goodness. The life he had as a child in Caramont and as a Shadow Knife could hardly be considered virtuous; stealing and killing in the name of power and nobility could only be considered traits of a hired assassin and rogue. A life destined to end up in a place as dismal and lonely as this tomb. But now, as he stared into the face of the slain dwarf in his arms, he understood. This one was different, he felt, and knew what he must do.

"Forgive me," Uthar said as lay across Gadlyn's body and thought of his mother in Lac Dlarrin. "Forgive me."

A flash of light surrounded them both and Uthar felt his essence drawing into the dwarf. He watched as the dwarf's wound knitted together, leaving only a thin red line where only minutes before his life-blood had flowed. Slowly, he felt himself float up toward the tomb ceiling, his transparent body becoming nothing more than a twinkle of sparkling blue light. As he died for the second time in his existence, Uthar's essence was filled with emotion. He felt like he was laughing, but could not hear any noise. It did not matter. None of it mattered.

He was free.

"This can't be!" he screamed as he looked at the naked, flesh-covered body of his former

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Through the Lens of History Using History for Better Gaming

by Sean Holland

Vision 11: With Scimitar, Veil and Book Muslim Women Warriors

Before beginning this month's article the Lens wishes to shed some light on Islamic practices that are often imperfectly understood.

The term *jihad* is usually used in an overly simplified way. Muhammad taught that there are two *jihads*: a greater and a lesser. The greater *jihad* is each Muslim's personal struggle to be true and faithful to God. The Prophet defined the greater *jihad* as the fight against the soul's inclination to do evil.

The lesser *jihad*, the armed struggle against the enemies of Islam, is the most widely known in the Western world. It is only the *'ulama*, legitimate religious authorities, who can authorize the use of force in such a struggle. The Prophet himself preferred negotiation when possible, but was not reluctant to use the sword when needed to defend his faith and his people.

The Prophet and Islam gave women rights and protections that they had previously lacked in traditional Arabic culture; they conferred inheritance and property rights, forbade female infanticide and limited a man to four wives (and then, only if he could treat them all equally and equitably). Muhammad relied on his wives for support and advice and welcomed all, man or woman, who were willing to fight to defend Islam.

Many of the restrictions on the dress of Muslim women are cultural rather than religiously imposed. The Qur'an simply requires modesty (from both men and women.) Some cultures choose a more extreme interpretation than others do. The veil is both traditional and practical in the Middle East, especially Arabia, where it shields the face from sand and sun as well as prying eyes.

Women and war often come together in Islamic history; the Lens will look at some of the individuals and

traditions that exemplify the martial history of Islamic women.

Part I - The History

Women warriors were not that rare among the Bedouin tribes in the pre- and early Islamic era. The Prophet and early Caliphates counted women warriors among their armies, sometimes even entire units of pious woman fought for the faith.

It is traditional among Muslim tribes for women to act to encourage the men to fight. The young women, *amriya*, of the Murra Bedouin accompanied their men to battle carried in camel borne litters beating tambourines and singing. During battle the *amriya* sang, recited poetry and drove those of their own side who tried to flee back into battle.

Umm Omara was a healer and a warrior as well as an early convert to Islam, who went into battle festooned with layers of girdles to tear apart for bandages, a bag of healing herbs and salves, a water skin and a sword. She played an important role in the Battle of Uhud (625 CE) where the wives of the Quraysh chieftains fought along side their men and other women in the defense of Islam. Umm Omara acted as a field medic, tending the wounded so that they could return to battle, even sending her own son back into the fight after bandaging his wounds (he later died in the battle). When the Prophet was attacked, Umm Omara leapt to his defense with her sword, saving his life but suffering fourteen cuts, some bone deep, in the process. The Prophet would later say of Umm Omara, "At the Battle of Uhud, wherever I turned to the right or left, I saw her fighting for me."

After the death of the Prophet, Umm Omara again took up her sword to oppose the False Prophet in Yamamah. During that campaign, she took eleven wounds and lost her hand, but she survived and continued as a healer and a midwife to the end of her days.

About the Author

Sean Holland is a gamer with 26 years of experience. He currently DMs one D&D campaign and plays in two others. He has a BA in History (minor in Philosophy) from the University of Portland, Oregon, and is working on a MA in History at the University of Georgia. He does writing and play-testing for the game industry. If you look at any of AEG's recent One Word series of books for the d20 system you will find his name in there somewhere and he has had other writings published over the years as well.

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Aisha bint Abu Bahr, the last and youngest of Muhammad's wives, opposed the rule of the fourth Caliph, Ali, who had seized power after the assassination of his predecessor, Uthman. Aisha sought both justice and the reconciliation of the various factions that had emerged after the Prophet's death. At the Battle of the Camel (656 CE), Aisha inspired her heavily outnumbered followers to great effort from camel back with song and oration, but numbers told and she was defeated. Ali spared her life and Aisha submitted to his rule but she continued to seek peace between the divisions of the faith until her death.

There are several tales of Khawlah bint al-Azwar al-Kindiyyah, a high born Bedouin warrior woman and knight of Islam. Khawlah first came to prominence when, clad all in black armor, she charged a Byzantine army leading a unit of knights who broke the enemy line and rallied the Islamic army. Only afterward, when confronted by the general of the Islamic army did she reveal that she and her followers were all female. She had avoided the general out of modesty, as proper for a woman of her rank.

Khawlah married Ali, the fourth Caliph, but did not live in his household, instead she lived and trained with her warriors. Khawlah was said to be "more ferocious than a rain cloud over Yemen." She and her warriors were once captured by the Byzantines, who surprised and overran her camp. Khawlah and her warriors were mocked and confined to their tents by their captors but the women fought free using the tent pegs as weapons.

In the Middle East, many women among the *Khawarij* (the political dissident movement in Islam arising in the mid-seventh century) won renown for their prowess

and skill in battle, among them was Ghazala who defeated al-Hajjaj, an Iraqi tyrant, in a duel. The *Khawarij* retreated from warfare after reactionary leaders who opposed women warriors evolved a vicious strategy to remove them. The reactionary Muslims killed and exposing the naked bodies of the women they captured in their battles with the *Kharijis* (the singular form of *Khawarij*), a tactic suggesting an attitude toward women on the battlefield far different from that of the first Muslim community. The strategy was effective in driving *Khariji* women from direct participation in war. Such tactics reflect the movement of Islam towards reestablishing the male dominance of the earlier Arabic cultures which took place in the Middle East in the centuries immediately following the Prophet's death.

Among the warlike Afghani, women often fought side by side with men. One named Malalai is known to have turned the tide of combat during the Battle of Maiwand (1880) against the British. When the Afghani warriors began retreating, Malalai shouted a *landey* (poetic couplet):

*Young love, if you do not fall in the battle
of Maiwand,*

*by God, someone is saving you as a token
of shame.*

Then, using her veil as a standard, she lead the warriors back into the fight and to victory.

The Muslim royal courts in India often maintained units of women soldiers (*urdubegi*) which served as attendants and bodyguards for the *zenada*. The *zenada* was the women's quarter of the Indo-Muslim elite and included the ruler's wives and concubines along with their children and an extended family of aunts, unmarried sisters and cousins.

The *urdubegi* were organized as military battalions with officers drawn from their own ranks. Not simply guards, some served as palanquin bearers, a role demanding great physical strength. At times the *urbubegi* were privileged to guard the ruler himself. Sometimes the *urdubegi* took to the field and served in armies. *Urdubegis* were allowed to marry, the married ones rotated out for a few months each year to attend to their domestic duties before returning to continue their service.

Part II- Breaking it apart and putting it back together

All cultures have their own female warriors, some are just harder to uncover. The warrior legacy among Islamic women has been, to some extent, deliberately suppressed as part of a reactionary political-religious agenda among the Arabic Islamic community.

The women and women's roles described in the article can be inspiration for characters from such a society when women warriors were allowed or even encouraged. In D&D terms they would be fighters, bards, clerics (Umm Omara is an excellent model for a D&D cleric) or even paladins.

An interesting option would be to have the society be reactionary and have restricted women's "proper roles". One could play a character who was a descendant of a great heroine- such as Umm Omara, Khawlah bint al-Azwar al-Kindiyah or Ghazala- who wishes to see her ancestor restored to her proper role in the histories, perhaps by emulating her deeds. This would be quite a challenge. Perhaps the character would have to disguise her sex while adventuring and building a reputation. Maybe she would end up campaigning for women's rights, social and political, and challenging the very structure of her society. Possibilities for intrigue, blackmail and adventure would abound in such a campaign.

Supplemental d20 Material:

New Feats

Urdubegi [General]

You serve your ruler as an incorruptible guard of the *zenada*, serving in both war and peace. Your position is both honorable and well respected.

Prerequisites: Female, Strength 10, Base Attack +1.

Benefit: You receive a +1 bonus on your Listen and Spot checks and to Will saves. You gain a +1 moral bonus on damage rolls when directly defending your ruler or the *zenada*. Due to your status and connections, you gain a +2 circumstance bonus to Gather Information and Knowledge (nobility and royalty) checks when dealing with people in your kingdom.

Special: This may be chosen as a Fighter bonus feat.

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by Artemis Jade Wetzel

THE MAIDEN AND THE DRAGON

A dragon traveling one winter's eve
Did see a thing he could not believe.
A maiden with ivory skin so fair,
Filling jars with snow that had fallen there.
And harshly her tattered cloak did blow,
As she stood shivering in the heavily falling snow.
So gentle and warm was the light in her eye
That the mighty dragon began to cry.
And so a disguise he did don that day,
With selfless intentions to take the fair maiden away,
Away to a place so safe and warm.
Disguised as a woodsman gathering wood for the storm.
But upon his arrival to her home he finally saw
That the cold, young maiden rocked a child, not yet three.
So the mother's intentions for the snow now shined true,
To heat for her child now blue, a bath for warmth renewed.
And the great mighty dragon knew
That they must take flight
Or their time would be up by dawn's first light.
And so fast on his back did he bear them away
And in the guise of the woodsman, with them he did stay.

About the Author

Born in Flint Michigan in 1973, and raised on Military bases for the better part of her life, Artemis now resides in Wisconsin. She is a 15-year veteran of Dungeons & Dragons and was very happy when d20 came along. She also enjoys writing and has written many pieces including a short film. She has been married for two years now, and was lucky enough to get a husband gamer. Together they have two sons, Gaelen and Elijah, who are born gamers. Some of her writing inspirations are her family, all things chaos, Tim Ziehr, Wil Wheaton, David Eddings, Gene Rodenberry, George Lucas, Shrodingers Cat, all things Star Trek and so many more



by Melissa Piper

Years ago, during times long forgotten, elves and humans roamed the Earth. Both races were considered equals, with no race holding sway over the other. The Drow were among the Earth-dwelling races, but they were looked upon as evil scourges who had no place in society. After decades of fighting with their elven cousins, the Drow were driven into the deepest caves and tunnels, forced to live their lives shrouded in darkness.

Within these dark tunnels, the Drow began to worship dark deities, such as the horrific Queen of Spiders. The Queen demanded great sacrifices from her followers, which often lead to her followers' deaths. Many Drow did not agree with the Queen's practices, and in response they joined forces and retaliated against the Queen's Legion. The resulting civil war was long and bloody, with neither side gaining the advantage against the other for very long.

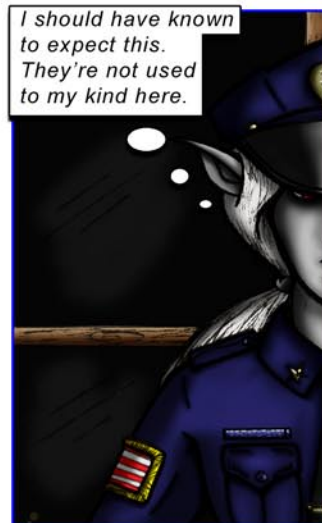
Eventually, the two factions of Drow split and formed their own societies. The rebels came to be known as the Light Drow, and the followers of the Queen were called The Dark Drow. Throughout the years, the Light Drow worked to establish ties with the surface world, and welcomed new technologies created by the surfacers. The Dark Drow, on the other hand, often stole from

the Light Drow. They established no ties with the surfacers and relied on the Queen of Spiders to provide them with what they needed.

Meanwhile, on the surface world, the humans were developing new technologies at an alarming rate. These new technologies put undue pressure on the elves, as they were not able to keep up with the humans' advancement. The elves pleaded with the humans to change their methods of development, claiming that the planet's valuable resources were being depleted. The humans resisted and continued their development. Slowly, the elves began to disappear. Some say that the elves could not adapt to the new world, while others claim they refused to adapt.

The Light Drow, who remained underground during the humans' time of advancement, eventually felt that it was time for them to return to the surface. However, when they set foot on the surface, they were met with prejudice and discrimination. Many could not find jobs because of the discrimination they faced, and remain poverty-stricken because of it. However, the police saw the Drow as a great resource, thanks to their keen nighttime eyesight and darkvision.

This is the story of Mariana Varcen, a Light Drow who made it through rigorous police training and is about to embark on her first day on the job. Although she thinks that her new life on the surface world is hard, she is about to learn that being a Drow and an officer is even harder...



by Aaron Todd

Travinara : Part 1

The two halflings sat underneath the late-day shade of the Wizen tree as they awaited whatever was to happen next. It was the time of Travinara for Parto and Droito. They had reached the age of Matura, which was the time before adulthood where they needed to learn what contributions they would make to better their society. Travinara provided that time for them. They would spend the next year exploring outside the world of their well-beloved town of Wellmoore.

Parto and Droito were the only pair of twins in the entire history of Wellmoore, and this was a legendary day as the town's favorite sons journeyed off to find their fates. Before they left, the town threw them a grand party, knowing that it might be the last they ever saw of the twins. Such was the danger of Travinara. What the world held for Parto and Droito, the town could only imagine.

The first stage in their journey was to spend a day and night at the edge of town underneath the Wizen tree. The ancient tree had been there since before the town had even existed and was said to have seen the half-lives of a half-hundred halflings. It was where everyone from Wellmoore started their journey.

The sun was setting on the eve of the first night of Travinara. They had been at the tree for no less than four hours already, but neither had felt any great insight into the lives that would soon be calling for them. Their dinner would consist of some bread that their father had packed for them in backpacks that now hung from gnarled knobs on the tree. They also carried water with them in hand-made flasks of waxed, softened deer

hide, sewn together by the silk of a local worm.

"Parto," Droito began.

"Yes, Droito." Parto replied as they sat at the base of the tree, looking in different directions as they spoke.

"Parto, what do you suppose we will find during Travinara?" Droito continued to gaze down the road as it drew away from their village.

"I don't know, brother . . ." Parto was watching the road that came into the village. It was where they would start and end their journey from the only place that they had known their entire lives. The only road into town bent like an old knee just a few feet from the edge of the tree before it headed out into the world.

"The town expects great things of us, you know." Parto continued, "And I'm not sure why. Besides being twins, what makes us any different than any of the other guys in the village? We play ball with them, we schooled with them. Why, just yesterday we fished with Dona. Why should we be any different?"

"I don't think that we are. I think that the village simply wishes us to be because there are two of us. The town has never seen the likes of us. Why, they could just as soon look into the water and see their reflections as understand what it is like for us to look at each other in the daylight."

Fully expecting to see a small animal come out from behind one of the bushes, the brothers watched intently until they both believed that they would not see anything.

About the Author

Aaron Todd is a devoted husband and Computer Operations Manager in a Philadelphia suburb. A classically trained literature buff and an award-winning poet, he has turned his attentions over the last year to his long-sought-after career as a novel writer. With his first work nearly finished, Aaron is actively seeking a publisher and agent. In his free time Aaron likes to jog, bike ride, read Star Wars novels, and enjoys a challenge at any level. With Football, Hockey, and Lacrosse as his favorite things to watch, activity is never in short supply.

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"No, I think that they are just curious. No one has ever gone to Travinara any way but alone. They must think that we will return with a great revelation about the outside world. That's what I think. They want us to change their lives," Droito offered.

"But they've all been out there themselves. It is a curious thing," Parto mentioned.

A noise from behind them got their attention. It was a rustling sound that could have been a deer foraging for food behind a bush. They both turned to look behind the tree. One turned left, the other right, in unspoken accord, to see if they could find the source of the sound.

Fully expecting to see a small animal come out from behind one of the bushes, the brothers watched intently until they both believed that they would not see anything. It was just as they were about to turn back around and return to their places by the tree when they caught sight of something moving quickly across the top of one of the bushes.

Standing, as if on cue, the two halflings flanked the tree, each reached for the small hand-forged weapons at their sides, Parto to his left hip and Droito to his right. While they were growing up, they discovered that each favored a particular hand. Droito found himself using his right hand for most tasks, Parto his left. They found this trait particularly useful when they were required to do tasks. It made most of their work much easier.

The creature moved the opposite direction this time. They were intrigued and wanted to approach, but they knew that tonight they were supposed to spend the night under the

tree. Did that mean exactly under the Wizen tree or just near it? Neither was sure, but they looked at each other from opposite sides of the old road marker and knew exactly what the other was thinking.

There wasn't any sort of direction for the journey, just a beginning and an end in the same place. They could go anywhere they wanted and do anything, but the journey needed to start and end here, by the Wizen tree.

"So, do you think we should?" Parto asked his brother.

"I'm not sure. It could be anything. Probably just an animal looking for dinner. A small one by the sound of it." Droito didn't take his eyes off the bush while he spoke.

"You're probably right. If it comes closer, we can," Parto turned back around and returned to his seat at the base of the tree. Droito was right with him.

The natural sounds of the day were replaced by the sounds of the evening as the night-blanket settled in around them. Whatever animal had caused the noise in the bush, now seemed to have found another place to hunt. The dark-beetles sang their ode to the night sky while the small chirpets played their leg music in the grass. The only light came from the half-moon that glowed a soft orange in the sky.

They went to sleep early. The sun would wake them in the morning and remind them that their journey had begun. As they each drifted off, they couldn't help but wonder why they needed to be by this tree for the first night of their journey. Maybe it was just tradition, they thought.

Parto was awakened by a nudge on his left side. He opened his eyes to find his brother already awake. But it was still night.

"Parto, wake up. I think we're starting," his brother prodded him again.

"What do you mean? It's still dark. We should be sleeping. We need to rest. We've got a long journey..." Parto didn't manage to finish his sentence. As he focused his eyes, he could see that his brother was sitting up and staring face to face with a small field deer. It showed no sign of fear at all and it sat with its hind legs folded under it on the ground.

"I'm glad to see you are both up." The deer spoke to them. "Do you know who I am?"

Neither of them answered right away. Neither was sure that they should.

"Come now, I'm not going to bite you. Didn't anyone tell you who I am?" The deer asked again.

"No," Droito looked to his brother before speaking to the animal.

"I guess I shouldn't be surprised. No one ever seems to know who I am when they come to Travinara," the deer mused. "No matter. I will simply explain. My name is Chukra. I am one of many spirit guides to your people. I will be the one to aid you in your journey through Travinara. It is indeed a great time in your life, but it will be full of challenges and dangers. It is my intention to help you through some of those more difficult times."

Parto and Droito looked at each other as the deer finished his introduction. Were they really seeing this? Hearing this?

"I know what you are asking yourselves, and yes, I am real. At least, as real as you need me to be."

They still said nothing.

"It's okay. In the morning, this should all make much more sense. Right now, you are thinking that you should be asleep. You are even be wondering if you still are asleep. And perhaps, for now, that doesn't matter.

"When you arise in the morning, it is your destiny to go south, away of your village. And for the majority of your travels you will continue in a southerly direction. Do you understand this in as much as I have told you?" The deer was as much telling them as asking.

Both of the young halflings nodded their heads, acknowledging the deer, but they continued to stare at the animal in silence.

"In the evening, you will use the Tiana star to guide you. During the day, I'm certain you young men can find your way. Now, there is no road for you to follow, but to begin,

in two days walk, you will come across a road that will lead you into the town of Dupaal. Have either of you been there before?"

"No, we've never been more than a day's walk from Wellmoore. But our father goes there after every tomato harvest," Parto replied. He appeared to be relaxing a bit.

"Really, I would have thought that by now, the two of you would have done some exploring in your lives. No matter. Dupaal will simply seem that much more a wondrous place to you. It really is quite a town. Anyway, once you reach Dupaal, you will need to find a place to stay for the night. But, I assume you have little more than a few grommels for your journey, don't you?"

They both nodded their heads in affirmation.

"Yes, Travinara is best experienced by making your own way. Earning your keep will teach you many valuable lessons. So, once you have found a way to earn some money, stay in Dupaal for a few days. You will find it most interesting, and a good way to begin your Travinara.

"Now, there are a few things that you should know before entering the town of Travinara. First, you must never bed down with a woman who wears a blue scarf." Chukra instructed.

"But why?" Droito asked.

Startled by the question, the deer appeared at a loss for an answer. Chukra pulled his head back and blinked a few times before answering. "Please just trust me on this. Never bed down with a woman wearing a blue scarf. You will regret it! Next, you must never accept a gift from a merchant of any kind. You must pay for everything you receive! And do not ask why. Just don't let anyone give you anything!" Chukra was practically chiding them, now.

"Finally, you must stay no longer than a week in Dupaal. If you stay longer than that, you may never leave. Why is another question that I cannot answer," Chukra finished his lesson and remained quiet for the first time since they awoke.

"So, what awaits us in Dupaal?" Parto asked. His nervousness now appeared to have faded.

"Only the first step in your Travinara. Your new life begins there, but it will not end there if you heed the three things I have told you."

"And how do we know you are not misleading us?" Droito asked cynically.

"Those necklaces you wear about your neck," Chukra began. "They were no doubt made for you by your mother? Everyone is given one when they begin their journey. I have seen one like that before." the deer nodded down towards Droito's chest.

"No. These were made by our Aunt. Our mother died giving birth to us. We never knew her." Parto interjected as he pulled the necklace slightly away from his chest and rubbed the inset green stone with his thumb.

"Ahh, then for that, I am sorry. Every boy should have a mother. Especially if there are two of you. But no doubt your father did a fine job raising the two of you." Chukra said with a touch of remorse.

"But what of the necklace?" Droito asked.

"Yes, the necklace. If you need me for something, simply press those necklaces against your chests and say my name three times. I will appear. If you do not trust me then, I am sorry, and you simply never need to call on me again. But I am here to help you through this journey, so don't take it lightly."

The twins still looked at the deer with a skepticism that had replaced their nervousness. This new information seemed reasonable enough, but the source was still a question.

"Well, my time for you tonight has come to an end. You need your rest. The next year of your lives is going to be a very long one indeed. Please do heed my warnings and I will see you both again soon."

The twins awoke at the same time, to the sound of a horse trotting towards them on the road as it approached the bend by the Wizen tree. The man atop the horse simply nodded,

smiled, and tipped his hat as they passed and continued on towards Wellmoore.

The brothers looked at each other silently for a moment, each unsure what to say. "Did you," Parto started.

"Yeah," Droito was finishing his brother's thought for him.

"So, what do you think?" Parto asked.

"I think that we should go to Dupaal. We have a year to find out if what we saw last night was real or not. And we've got no place better to go, do we?"

"I guess not," his twin replied. He put his hand to his chest and pulled the necklace from inside his tunic. He turned it so he could look at the stone embedded into it.

"Yeah, I wonder if Mother is watching us right now," Droito looked to the South as he wondered.

"Well, brother," Droito turned back to him. "Shall we have some breakfast before we leave?"

"Yes, I think that would be a good idea. We've got a lot of walking ahead of us today. South is it?" Parto reminded them both of what they had seen during the night.

"South it is," Droito said definitively.

Moonhunter Says: Characters not to Play - The "Mysterious Character with No Past":

The Mysterious Character with no Past (MCwNP) is cheap plot device in poorly written novels and bothersome character in games as well. In an attempt to be mysterious, the MCwNP appears from nowhere. He will not speak of his past, nor make any reference to anywhere he has been or anything it has done. The MCwNP normally storms in, solves the issue, disappears, and comes back chapters later to save the protagonists again. That is how it works in the novels. In a game, MCwNP hang around. The character is normally dark and brooding, but is always quiet and violent. These attempts to be mysterious make the character untrustworthy (the players are supposed to accept this character without questioning his motives or reasons?) and difficult to plot for the GM (Without a history or reason for existing the GM is supposed to come up with plots and subplots for him?) In addition, GMs are supposed to accept this pile of character mechanics without any explanation as to where the character developed his abilities and why he should be allowed in the game. In most cases, these attempts at generating mystery are actually attempts to run a character without having to create a conception or history. Every character needs to be part of the world it is in. Even if the character does not tell the other characters about herself, that history and all the elements that make her part of the world need to be there.

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by Pike Stephenson

BOOK REVIEW ; THE RAGE

Title: *The Rage* (Year of the Rogue Dragons)

Author: Richard Lee Byers

Published: April 2004

Published by: Wizards of the Coast

Price: 6.99

Review by: Pike Stephenson

The Rage, a Forgotten Realms novel, is the first book of the trilogy *Year of the Rogue Dragons*. It follows a band of adventuring monster hunters that find themselves in the middle of an epic event as cataclysmic as the Time of Troubles.

Dorn Graybrook leads an exotic team of characters through the country of Impiltur. Dorn is a half-golem, a man magically grafted with several iron limbs after a devastating dragon attack occurred when he was a boy that left him nearly torn in two and left for dead. Years of training for gladiatorial combat honed his skills, as well as his thirst for vengeance against any and all dragons. He travels with his comrades Will Turnstone, a halfling rogue, Pavel Shemov, a priest of Lathandar, and Raryn Snowstealer, an arctic dwarf ranger. They cleanse the land of vile threats for the right price.

Their path intertwines with a beautiful bard named Kara who wishes to enlist their help solving the cause of dragons are entering a feral-like rage. This rage is not new to the Realms. Within the last millennium another rage took hold of the Dragon kin as they laid waste to the civilized lands. But with this impending crisis, sages and scholars have predicted devastation that could lead to the extinction of all the civilized

races. After a town the heroes attempt to defend is nearly destroyed by a raging group of drakes, Dorn and his band flee for their lives and have little choice but help the bard and possibly save the Realms from certain doom.

Their quest takes them to Lyrabar where they make another ally in Taegan Nightwind, an Avariel or winged elf, and discover that the Cult of the Dragon is behind the rage. The heroes follow the elusive trail of a long thought dead wizard who leads the cult and search for the secret behind *the rage*.

In the story there is a love interest that buds between Dorn and the bard Kara that felt awkward but was inevitable. Dorn grew up fueled by his hate for dragon kind and felt nothing else. Kara will be the key to reuniting him with hope and happiness, if they can survive.

The story works like a fuse on a god-like cannon, sizzling towards massive destruction and propels the characters into some precarious circumstances. As the story and characters develop, I find myself drawn to Taegan Nightwind, the Bladesinging winged elf. He rose from a primitive, nomadic existence and built himself a reputation as a Maestro or duelist instructor with the skill and panache of any Alexander Dumas character. He lives a hedonistic life until introduced to Kara and the others but through good conscious cannot allow the woeful indiscretions of a mad wizard destroy the world he had come to love as his own.

Byers fills the pages with a massive helping of epic high fantasy. Aside from the different races of the heroes (arctic dwarf and half-golem), you get lycanthropes, zombies, demons, and dragons; blacks, greens, faerie, vampires and a dracolich! Monsters ran rampant throughout the novel and as I read the battles I was taken back to some of my more memorable game nights. I also enjoyed the way he handled the spells that I have known by name for years. He wrote their casting and effect in a way that made them feel new and exciting.

The Rage was a fun read and one I recommend to fans of epic fantasy. The novel heralds the entrance of a new team of heroes worthy of many stories to come.

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by “Dregg” Carpio

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION: Wu Shu Review

Welcome to another chapter of “Lights, Camera, Action,” your monthly rant on cinematic and action role-playing. In the past few months, I have focused on two themes that I felt were important to the genre as a whole. In fact, I truly believe that without the early pulp and dime novels the cinematic experience would not be what it is today. It ironic that works of literature written before the advent of film could be so crucial to the genre’s development, and these early novels have influenced the minds and spirits of the many who see the world behind the camera lens. This month I am going to give you all a break on the film history and focus on a genre based role-playing game that I have found more than perfect for a GM or player who wants to get his or her feet wet in the fast pace world of action films and stories.

A good system is worth its weight in gold, and it is important to choose a solid system where you will spend most of your time playing. In this day and age we have over three hundred different role-playing games on the market, either indie published or mainstream. When I started gaming there were only ten or so systems out there; it was not too hard to choose your poison when your choices were so thin. So if you are anything like me, your closet is a mini-gaming store with shelf after shelf of games that you may have never played before. How can you choose what game suits you?

I put myself to the test a few days ago when I was doing my annual eBay exodus, getting rid of the dead-weight games and make the space for new ones. I asked myself, “If I had to choose only one game, one singular RPG that summed up everything that I consider great role-playing material what would it be?” I sat and looked at all of my books one by one and made an excuse of why each book belonged in my collection. Most of it was collectors’ mumbo jumbo, like my Pulp RPGs, which I keep for source material. Then came the licensed stuff like *Buffy*, *Star Trek*, and *Star Wars*. Again more source material or pure fan-boy value. Then the game came to me.

It was a printed-out copy of an indie RPG I bought on RPGNow two months ago. Something that I had promised to run for my friends and now sat in a folder waiting to be unleashed. Sad to say as I sifted through the sands of games (some still in shrink wrap), it was the \$5 game that won the RPG death match and was declared the game I would keep if all others had to go.

So with that I give you my choice of RPG, something that defiantly gives you the most bang for your buck and spells out Cinematic with a capitol C. I give you the game that has visited the genre buffet and has taken great lengths to bring a little bit of everything to the gaming table:

Wu Shu: The Ancient Art of Role Playing

By Daniel Bayn

I will stat by saying that *Wu Shu* is one of the best deals out there in indie RPG-land that you could spend your hard earned five dollars on. The game is sheer brilliance all wrapped up in a 27 page PDF.

Now don’t judge a e-book by its cover. Yes *Wu Shu* is an independently made role-playing game, and yes its only available on PDF, but what you are getting in return is far more than some gamer’s note about a pipe dream RPG he did in college. A lot of gamers have a stigma when it comes to games in electronic format, and rightfully so. Most of the games on RPGnow.com are badly designed, horrid homebrews that keep flooding the battle fields each and every month. About a good 40% of these are 3rd party companies having fun with the d20 license.

The game itself is void of eye candy, so don’t expect top of the industry art or WotC layouts. What you can expect is a mechanic system that works, and a game that you and your players can have up and running in about hour easy (with fully made characters.)

About the Author

“Dregg” aka James Carpio is a native of San Francisco, California who now lives in the wilds of Suffolk County, NY. James has written for the likes of Eden Studios, Fuzion Labs, random gaming E-Zines and is currently designing games for his own gaming company Chapter 13 Press (www.chapter13press.com). James can be found at most Northeast conventions and game days with his family doing demonstrations for other gaming companies he supports and running promotional support for I-CON, Gotham Gamers Guild and Wild Gazebo Productions for whom he is affiliated with.

Lets look at some of the bells and whistles of the game:

Wu Shu works on a simple d6 pool method. It is not the same workings of the pool systems you would see in a White Wolf game or *Shadowrun*, but instead is a new and interesting take on the old tried and true. In *Wu Shu* you build an action from the ground up. The player describes the action to the GM in vivid detail from the beginning of the action to the execution. As you put in more detail, the dice pool gets bigger and bigger (until you reach the cap of six), so a player with a flair for the cinematic can really mop up.

The game also gives a filibuster method where you start out with the max dice and have to justify it to the GM, if the GM does not find your action worthy of the dice he can reduce the number accordingly. Each set of actions can be done player by player or with the communal mode where all the players create attacks in unison and just go for it.

The characters are made up of two to four traits; these work more like descriptors for your heroes that allow you to express your characters in your own words instead of trying to hunt for just the right skill or ability and hope it does your creation justice. Each trait starts at two dice and the GM will give you an additional four to six to spread around to make things more defined.

Combat works on a similar principle. When in combat you break your dice up into two pools “yin and yang.” These are the equivalent to attack and defense dice. Simply enough, roll the dice and she with the most successes wins; the difficulty being the trait (or traits) being used. Yin and yang also aid your character in sweeping the floor with thugs and mooks, and the more you put into yin, the less dice the mooks get to use to attack you. If you think of that scene from Tarantino’s *Kill Bill Vol. 1* with Uma and the Crazy Eighty-Eights you can

imagine what some one who has a high Yin can do. Another built in modifier is "nemeses and chi." Nemeses give your named bad guys the ability to soak up damage so they can come back to battle another day or take on multiple opponents, and Chi is the ability to use luck to pull items out of thin air or save your character from a nasty death. Finally, character generation includes a mechanic called weakness. Weakness is a trait like all others, but since it is your character's sore spot it has a score of one. And whenever you have to use that trait, your difficulty is that of the weakness. Good luck!

The Worlds of Wu Shu

If you think of the word "world" means meta-plot in the land of RPG, Wu Shu does not have one. The game does come packaged as a generic action genre RPG, but it does give you three short "scenarios" that you can get your feet wet. This is a very strong point in my book, any game that gives you a choice of settings to play in is saying "yes, you can do anything with me, but if you have no ideas you can play one of these." This a bonus point for the designer because he leaves the game to the other's imaginations. What even sweetens the deal is the designer has done a *Matrix* conversion, which you can find for free on bayn.org. It does justice to the *Matrix* storyline, and you cannot beat the price. *Wu Shu* lends to the style of cinematic action gaming and is definitely worth a look even if you do not buy the game.

Out of the Box?

Wu Shu can be played as soon as the PDF is opened on your PC. The rules are simple to learn, and once you get the hang of the mechanics there will be even more places you can take the system. I have even seen an *Exalted* conversion over at RPG.net. As for myself, I can happily say that so far I have not found any reason to make house rules for the game. I have not yet found a broken rule and I do not expect to.

For the cinematic GM this game fits like a soft leather glove. My challenge to you is buy a copy, invite some friends over, and see how long it takes you to be sold on the system. I personally hate to have to learn new game systems, but this one took about a whole 20 minutes to digest and put into my memory.

Presentation

Last we look at the over all presence of the game. This part would be my only nit pick. The system, mechanics, and quality of effort gets a serious A+, but the layout, lack of format, and mix of fonts gets a D. I know—what the heck do I expect for \$5.00? The author has gone on and done a few more expansions to the game and each one looks better than that last. I hope the good folks at bayn.org are thinking of a print run, as I would be first in line to spend money on this creation of brilliance.

I apologize for the short rant this month, but I hope I have turned some of you on a great system that will give you hours of over-the-top, cinematic fun. Next month I return with my experience of writing a RPG and the influences that brought me there.

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by Shane Cubis

Antipodean Adventures : *Federation*

"Never before have a group of self-governing, practically independent communities, without external pressure or foreign complications of any kind, deliberately chosen of their own free will to put aside their provincial jealousies and come together as one people, from a simple intellectual and sentimental conviction of the folly of disunion and the advantages of nationhood. The States of America, of Switzerland, of Germany, were drawn together under the shadow of war. Even the Canadian provinces were forced to unite by the neighbor-hood of a great foreign power. But the Australian Commonwealth, the fifth great federation of the world, came into voluntary being through a deep conviction of national unity."

-Sir John Quick

G'Day all. This month I intend to look at an event that helped Australia to "grow up." The Federation of Australia, a landmark event in the Australian political arena, occurred when a group of disparate and rival colonies cut some of Mother England's aprons strings through uniting into a single nation. I present it to you in the hopes that it will provide a suitable backdrop for a more cerebral RPG campaign. If politics bore you, however, you may wish to flick over to *RPG Wars*.

What Happened?

In 1901, Australia became a nation in its own right. Although significant ties to the Mother Country were maintained, the southern continent was free to determine its own destiny as a united body. How did this come about? Not through war, rebellion, or even in anger. Australia federated as the result of a referendum, and the main issues were trade, defense, and labor-oriented in nature.

The Federation movement was around fifty years old, having had its birth on the goldfields and in the unrest at Eureka (see the *Silven Trumpeter* Issue 2). People on both sides of the political spectrum were interested in having an independent Australia although for different reasons. One of the most important backers of the movement was the Chartist group

who demanded egalitarianism in the political process (one vote, one value), payment for parliamentarians, and annual parliaments.

Henry Parkes (1815 – 1896) was one of the major agitators for federation. He came to Australia in the 1830s with his wife and son, eventually finding work and building his own business. As politicians were not paid at the time, Parkes went bankrupt on a number of occasions. He was a gifted speaker, in touch with the people, and played a major role in the movement to stop convicts being shipped to Australia. Nonetheless, he was responsible for a great deal of reform in the school, hospital, and local government sectors. His basic political philosophy was that voters should see you as "the man of the hour." He certainly inspired many to take up the mantle of a united Australia.

One of the major setbacks to Australia moving forward was the endemic rivalry between colonies. Even sport, always an important indicator of Australian social and political climes, was not immune. Queensland and New South Wales played rugby, whilst the other major cities played Australian Rules football. A second sign of the rivalry among colonies was the transportation system. When train lines were built throughout the colonies, New South Wales adopted the standard railway gauge, Victoria the 5'3", while Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia used the 3'6". This meant the trains couldn't run from one colony to another. By the far most damaging effect of the disunited colonies were the trade restrictions between New South Wales and Victoria. New South Wales favored free trade, whereas the southern colony was fiercely protectionist. Crippling tariffs had to be paid by any merchant wishing to trade goods across the Murray River which divided the two colonies. Politics in the years leading up to federation generally revolved around this issue, with parties taking one side or the other. Needless to say, they were usually divided along state lines.

In 1889, a report was made by Major-General Edwards, informing the various colonies that if Australia were invaded,

About the Author

Shane Cubis is a young, fit, Australian plagiarist with an affinity for Spider-Man. He has recently succumbed to internet peer pressure and now secretly refers to himself as a 'gamer.' He wrote and starred in an award-winning short film, "Dream Date" (also starring Aussie cricketer Brett Lee), has had an article published in 'Knights of the Dinner Table,' as well as regular articles in such publications as 'Tertangala,' 'The Northern Leader,' and 'Beanz Baxter.'

He has an Honors degree in History/Politics, and is currently studying to be a primary (grade) school teacher. On Saturdays he calls bingo - a job his nana got him five years ago. His favorite book is 'Catch 22,' his favorite band is TISM, and his favorite movie is 'Back to the Future.'

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they would be in a great deal of trouble due to the lack of a unity or federation of the armed forces. Without a centralized authority, they were vulnerable to an attack from the Germans in New Guinea, the French in the New Hebrides, and Russian or American imperialism in the Pacific. This provided the second major impetus for the men in power to consider the benefits of federation.

Racism played a huge role in the quest for national independence. Labor was at a premium in the second half of the 19th century and for certain jobs it was impossible to hire on laborers. Black workers from Melanesia, referred to as Kanakas, were brought in (often illegally and against their will) to do work on the Queensland cane fields. The jobs they were hired on for involved work seen as demeaning to white men. The Kanakas, along with Chinese and other Asian laborers - who were played significantly less for their hard work - were seen as undercutting the opportunities of white workers. Fear of being reduced to slavery was widespread, and the idea that a national government could regulate immigration and work practices took hold among the trade unionists of the land. This was such a powerful movement that the first acts of the Australian parliament were to deport the Kanakas and heavily restrict Asian immigration.

Speaking of labor, the trade unions became more and more militant in the midst of and in the aftermath of the depression of the late 19th century. Maritime and shearing workers were

especially active in the battle for better conditions, shorter hours and more pay. Eventually they realized that unionism and strikes were not enough to enact change. Politics was where the action was, and so a party was formed. The first labor government in the world ruled in Australia for seven days in 1899.

Two referenda were held before Australia became federated. Both posed the question of whether Australia should be self-governing. The first, in 1898, required that the New South Wales 'yes' vote exceed 80,000. This did not occur, and the drafters went back to work – this time settling once and for all the proposed problems of deadlocks, states rights, division of income between colonies and the federal government, amendments to the constitution and the location of the national capital. The second referendum, in which dedicated federalists campaigned furiously, was successful after Western Australia received certain concessions, including the promise of a railway line from Kalgoorlie to Port Augusta in South Australia. Edmund Barton, a Liberal Protectionist who had served in the legislative assembly of New South Wales, was sworn in as Australia's first Prime Minister.

January 1st, 1901 saw thousands of people flock to Sydney to celebrate the formation of the Commonwealth of Australia. At 11 o'clock a procession, led by shearers and made up of many floats that illustrated various aspects of Australian life, made its way through the city. People cheered, laughed and wept, the new flag was hoisted, and the newly appointed Governor-General, Lord Hopetoun, read letters of congratulation from the Queen and British parliament. The event was charged with a spirit of optimism and all sides of politics looked for to a bright future.

Even so, federation was not a one-off process. Rather, the links to Great Britain have gradually dissipated over the last hundred years. The most recent change occurred in 1986, when it was ruled that England had no authority to alter Australian law. In 1999, a referendum was held on the question of whether Australia should become a republic. The motion was defeated – perhaps providing proof that we still have a long way to go towards independence.

Federation Adventure/Campaign Ideas:

1. The party is a 'dirt unit', charged with the task of digging up skeletons from the opposing sides' closets. They could be committed to a particular cause, or simply hire out their investigative skills to the highest bidder. A businessman, who stands to lose a great deal of income from federation, could pay the PCs to frame a prominent trade unionist for soliciting prostitutes, embezzlement, or something more sinister.
2. The PCs are prominent businessmen and women who seek a certain agenda. They may be sugar cane farmers from northern Queensland, fighting federation so they can continue to exploit Kanaka labor. Another option is to play bankers looking to establish a central government, in order to better control and organize their business.
3. The players take on the role of out-of-work laborers, attempting to shake up bourgeois society and establish something approximating a worker's utopia. Marxism was not well known in Australia at the time, but it was plain to see that the upper crust did not have the workers' interests at heart. This campaign would focus on trade unionism and the fight for better conditions ("pennies on the pay, hours off the day"), and the realization that the parliamentary system was a powerful means of enacting change, so long as your ideals are not co-opted and compromised.

Other Genres

Science Fiction: The reptilian slave lords of Cubisia-6 are the representatives of various off-world companies, looking to make money from the rich mineral reserves on the planet. They have been there for over a hundred years, intermarrying and reproducing, and see themselves more as citizens of Cubisia-6 than of their own homeworld. The companies they work for strongly oppose the loss of income that an independent and united Cubisia-6 would bring, and will stop at nothing to bring these rebellious employees to heel. The PCs are six-limbed slave miners, caught in the middle of a political conflict bigger than they will ever be.

Fantasy: A group of dwarves, employed on individual contracts to work for a human lord, have got their bearded heads together and decided to form a trade union. They intend to insist on equal pay, better hours, and two

representatives at court. The lord, sincerely unhappy at the prospect of this nascent uprising, hires the PCs to "negotiate" with the dwarves. His true intention is for the party to act as strikebreakers. If there is a dwarf in the party, the lord offers him double pay to betray his striking cousins.

Modern: A large group of white collar workers have grown tired of the fat cat bonuses and golden handshakes given out to incompetent upper management. They simultaneously quit their jobs, seceding from the nation to form their own country. Now a number of blue collar workers and others are thinking of joining the fledgling nation, leaving the country with a significant labor shortage. The government must act before the new country is recognized by the United Nations or else accept their existence and try to capitalize on their independence.

Horror: A cabal of Chinese demonists, furious at the racist legislature of the new nation, summon up fell creatures to smash and destroy the celebrations in Sydney and Melbourne. The PCs are government troubleshooters who must destroy the diabolical menace and liaise with both sides of the conflict. Further, racial violence against Asians is threatening to rise in response to the attacks, and innocents must be protected.

Conclusion

Federation took place 104 years ago, and its effects are still felt in the modern political arena. The Australian system is a mélange of the British Westminster system and the American parliamentary process, and the constitution has certain holes that can be exploited. Furthermore, Australia was seen as not needing a Bill of Rights, and this could make for some dire events in the future. Over the past century, international relations have moved from a following of England's lead to more of a reliance on the USA, and all that that entails. I believe there is great scope for interesting games and stories in the arena of politics, and Australia has one of the most intriguing and unique systems in the world. For more information, you can visit: <http://australianpolitics.com.au>

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by Matt Haught

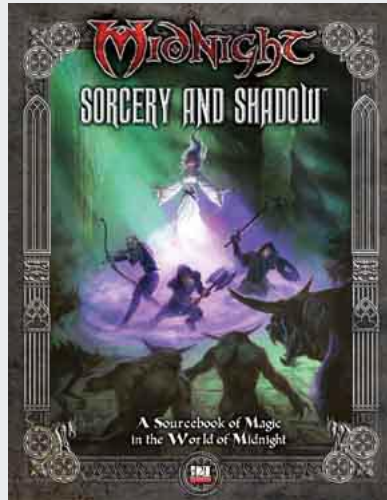
d20 Review : *Midnight - Sorcery and Shadow*

"Sorcery and Shadow"

Author: Will Hindmarch

Publisher: Fantasy Flight Games

Review date: 08/12/2004



Introduction:

Sorcery and Shadow is a magic sourcebook for Fantasy Flight Games' Midnight campaign setting, a dark, depressing world of conquered lands and doomed resistance against an overpowering evil. The best way I've heard it described was simply "Imagine Middle Earth if Sauron had found the Ring." Orc hordes have overrun the countryside, purging the conquered lands of all the Fey races and subjugating the humans under the boot heel of their cruel masters, the Legates of Izrador. Elves, dwarves, halflings and gnomes fight a losing war of guerilla resistance against the advancing armies. Learning, magic, weapons and writing are outlawed in the occupied lands. Hope is a fleeting dream that many have forgotten under the grinding oppression of a century of warfare.

Into this depressing, hopeless world emerge the PCs, unlikely heroes fighting to their last breath for freedom, even if it means only the freedom of oblivion. While Midnight has its own proprietary rules tweaks, it is really this pervasive atmosphere, coupled with a rich and detailed history and an overpowering sense of fighting the good fight in the face of almost certain annihilation, that makes the game what it is. Sorcery and Shadow expands that history without sacrificing the atmosphere that helps make Midnight great.

Presentation:

Sorcery and Shadow is a 62-page softcover with glued binding and black and white illustrations throughout. The cover and paper seem to be of average quality and durability. The art consists of pencil-shaded black and white drawings, similar to many of the works in the core campaign book. The desperation and faint glimmers of hope, so integral to the feel of the campaign world, are ever-present in the pieces.

Review snapshot

CLASS: Campaign Expansion

STR: 12 (Physical). Standard soft-cover binding.

DEX: 13 (Organization). Good table of contents, but no index. Information laid out in logical chapters.

CON: 8 (Quantity of the Content). 62 pages of flavor-heavy content.

INT: 15 (Quality of Content). Excellent variety of content, all fitting in with or expanding on standard Midnight fare.

WIS: 14 (Ease of Use). Sticks to the Midnight standards, with few exceptions. Those exceptions are easy to comprehend and include, even into a non-Midnight game.

CHA: 17 (Look & Feel). Beautiful cover, good interior illustrations, and tremendous flavor and atmosphere.

How we rate our reviews

Scoring definitions.

18 = *Superior. Best of the best.*

16 = *Very Good. Part of a Baker's Dozen.*

14 = *Good. Most gamers would like this.*

12 = *Fair. Some gamers would like this.*

10 = *Average. Most gamers would be indifferent.*

8 = *Subpar. Flawed, but not without promise.*

6 = *Bad. Most gamers would dislike this.*

4 = *Very Bad. Among the Dirty Dozen.*

2 = *Inferior. Worst of the worst.*

Reviewer's Bias: I received a review copy of this product.

From the Back Cover:

The dark lord Izrador has conquered Eredane, retaining his power by outlawing all weapons except those in the hands of his servants. And the most powerful weapon of all is magic. In a world where an evil god strives to claim all magic for himself, every spell matters.

The Meat and Potatoes:

Sorcery and Shadow begins with a discussion of how knowledge, specifically magical knowledge, has been brutally suppressed during the Last Age. Like the rest of the book, this overview of ages' worth of desperate attempts to retain powerful knowledge adds to the rich history and atmosphere of Midnight. Each paragraph adds a little more detail to the world, but the introduction of a mythical power nexus, thought to be the origin of all arcane power in the land of Eredane, adds a whole new chapter in the Midnight saga. This site, Aradar, is referenced throughout the book, as a legendary place that most scholars believe never existed outside of folktales. Sorcery and Shadow leaves the veracity of these rumors unclear allowing GMs to decide for themselves whether or not Aradar is a reality. Either way, it makes an intriguing campaign goal for the PCs and a welcome addition to the Midnight world.

One of Midnight's unique game mechanics is the method of magic item creation. Magic items may only be created in special arcane sites known as 'power nexuses'. Each power nexus is a unique location rendered magical by some unknown power. Each has an affinity for different types of magic and enhances or eases production of items of that type. Chapter Two, Sorcery and Shadow, introduces several new power nexuses. For example, Dragonsgrave is a power nexus formed by the rotting carcass of a dragon that died raving and insane, forgotten by Izrador, his master. Necromantic magic, especially that which is intended to combat Izrador and his minions, is easily imbued into items of power here. Additionally, in this chapter, Sorcery and Shadow details two strongholds - one a haven for Channelers serving the forces of good, the other an underground torture chamber for the Shadow's minions. Both are provided with maps of the facilities as well as background information to flesh out the locations.

Chapter Three deals with the core of Sorcery and Shadow's substance: spells. First, it introduces a new type of magic item, the rune of power. This is similar to a scroll or other use-activated item but is far cheaper and easier to produce. However, they are limited by their immense size, requiring large objects such as buildings, standing stones or other architectural constructions on which to inscribe them. Still, they are excellent ways for resistance fighters to leave a small bit of help (or harm) behind for those that follow in their path. Also in this chapter are new spells, as well as suitable quests to learn them. What really pleased me, however, was the inclusion of sidebars detailing the evolution of various runes and glyphs describing spells and spell schools. Sorcery and Shadow compares and contrasts runes from different cultures, showing their origins and meanings. It's the little details like these that make Midnight such a robust, fleshed-out setting.

Chapter Four is a grouping of mostly mechanics-based content intended for players or GMs. It includes new feats, most of which are useful only to spellcasters in the world of Midnight. For example, Blood-Channeler allows particularly hardy Channelers to gain more spell energy from their life essence, which could prove very valuable if the agents of the Shadow press them into a corner.

Another innovative game mechanic introduced in the Midnight rules is the Heroic Path. This is a set of related abilities that the character gains as he progresses, regardless of character class. These abilities are intended to make up for the nearly complete lack of divine magic and materiel succor available to PCs in the land of Eredane. Sorcery and Shadow introduces four new Paths for PCs or major NPCs to take. One, the "Shadowed" path, seems perfect for creating a conflicted, brooding PC. The power of this path comes from Izrador himself, and has serious drawbacks for a PC engaged in combating the evil from the North. What is more dramatic than a character whose very fiber of being is tied to the dark god, yet who fights a losing battle to free the lands from his grip nevertheless?

Four prestige classes are also presented in Sorcery and Shadow: the Collaborator, the Gardener of Erethor, the Snow Witch and the Syphon. The latter three PrCs are actually groups whose members share similar traits and skills, while the Collaborator screams "Wormtongue!" The Syphon in particular is intriguing, being the only PrC in the book that might appeal to warriors. Think of it as a Spellsworn with a twist. As intriguing as it may be, though, Syphons are not looked upon kindly by the resistance, and are actively hunted by the Shadow for the crime of practicing magic.

Chapter Five presents new magic items and monsters. Small, single-use magical items known as charms are explained and fleshed out with added rules for naturally occurring charms. Several new covenant items, magical items that grow in power with their possessor, are also detailed, including a trio of items carried by the Dornish warrior-poet Bjornar. These items are all infused with story and atmosphere, as well as being innovative in terms of game mechanics.

The four new monsters presented cover a fairly wide range of Challenge Ratings, with the Courtesan Imp at CR 2, Usurper at CR 5, Gulgarog plant at CR 9 and the Ilmalafar at CR 12. Strangely enough, none of the creatures directly serve Izrador, but are instead evil of their own volition.

Conclusion:

Sorcery and Shadow provides some very well thought out options and additions for a Midnight campaign, with new heroic paths, feats, prestige classes, spells, items, monsters and locations. The immersive atmosphere I have come to expect from Midnight is present in force, supported rather than contradicted by the new material. Despite the short length, Sorcery and Shadow seems to add a considerable amount of novel content to the setting. Every Midnight game needs a copy of this book.

Where to buy

This product is available to our readers at a discount from our partners FRP Games:

http://www.frpgames.com/cart.php?m=product_detail&p=10834&ref=sil

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by Bradford Ferguson

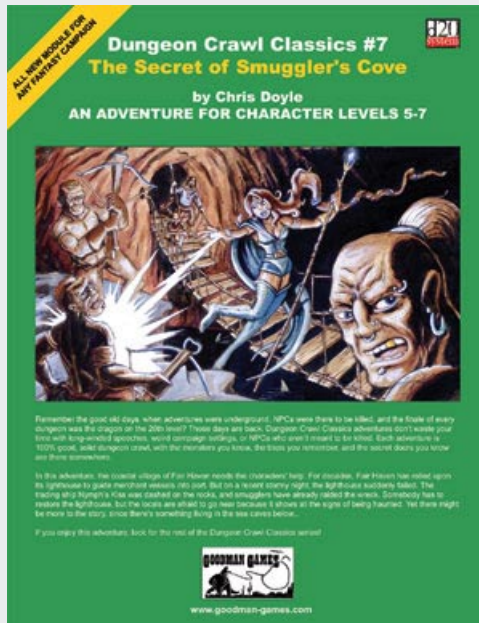
d20 Review : Dungeon Crawl Classics 7

"Dungeon Crawl Classics #7: The Secret of Smuggler's Cove"

About: 40 pages, soft cover, black & white interior, \$12.

Publisher: Goodman Games (2004)

Review date: 08/13/2004



From the Back Cover

"Remember the good old days, when adventures were underground, NPCs were there to be killed, and the finale of every dungeon was the dragon on the 20th level? Those days are back. Dungeon Crawl Classics adventures don't waste your time with long-winded speeches, weird campaign settings, or NPCs who aren't meant to be killed. Each adventure is 100% good, solid dungeon crawl, with the monsters you know, the traps you remember, and the secret doors you know are there somewhere.

"In this adventure, the coastal village of Fair Haven needs the characters' help. For decades, Fair Haven has relied upon its lighthouse to guide merchant vessels into port. But on a recent stormy night, the lighthouse suddenly failed. The trading ship Nymph's Kiss was dashed on the rocks, and smugglers have already raided the wreck. Somebody has to restore the lighthouse, but the locals are afraid to go near because it shows all the signs of being haunted. Yet there might be more to the story, since there's something living in the sea caves below..."

Introduction

Dungeon Crawl Classics is a series of adventures published by Goodman Games. They are fairly straight forward hack-n-slash adventures with an old-school feel to the presentation. This adventure features a light house, a ruined manor house, and some sea caves. There are a variety of challenges including some swimming and possibly some underwater combat. The player characters (PCs) fight some smugglers, fishmen, and other monsters. The Secret of Smuggler's Cove is designed for 6th-level characters.



Review snapshot

CLASS: Adventure

STR: 10 (Physical). Staple-bound book.

DEX: 14 (Organization). Well-organized and laid out.

CON: 16 (Quantity of the Content). Plenty of adventure and various challenges.

INT: 10 (Quality of Content). Too much treasure. Too many encounters as written. Interesting aspects, but background remains mostly a mystery.

WIS: 12 (Options & Adaptability). Adaptable, but if you ran the first adventure it will have several similarities to your players.

CHA: 10 (Look & Feel). Simple maps and crude art, but good old-school feel.

How we rate our reviews

Scoring definitions.

18 = Superior. Best of the best.

16 = Very Good. Part of a Baker's Dozen.

14 = Good. Most gamers would like this.

12 = Fair. Some gamers would like this.

10 = Average. Most gamers would be indifferent.

8 = Subpar. Flawed, but not without promise.

6 = Bad. Most gamers would dislike this.

4 = Very Bad. Among the Dirty Dozen.

2 = Inferior. Worst of the worst.

Reviewer's Bias: I received a review copy of this product.

Presentation

The Secret of Smuggler's Cove is a 40-page, staple-bound soft cover d20 System adventure book written by Chris Doyle. The cover looks old-school with the style of the art and color of the background. On the inside cover there are blue and white maps like some of you may remember from old modules. There are other black and white maps and all the maps are simplistic, but they get the point across. The art is black ink and is crude and cartoonish--kinda like that old stuff. There are player handouts near the end and a short write-up on the town that is near the adventure site.

Eerie Similarities

Earlier in the year, I reviewed DCC #5: Aerie of the Crow God which featured: a lighthouse, several dangerous fights on stair cases or trails on cliffs, more than a handful of harpies, sea caves that can be entered during low tide, and some juvenile skrags (sea trolls). The Secret of Smuggler's Cove had all of these elements, so if you bought and/or ran Aerie of the Crow God, then you will likely be disappointed with the similarities. In the case of DCC #7, there's a fight on a staircase that involves a saving throw from a spell effect and then Balance checks from bull rushes which can result in a fall of 60 feet or more which would likely kill most 6th-level characters. Luckily, there is only one harpy and skrag, but your players are sure to groan when they see the harpy if they played through DCC #5.

The two adventures were written by separate authors in two different countries, so I gotta blame the editor for the similarities as they should have been nixed.

Monty Haul

After I read through the adventure, it seemed like the amount of treasure for the difficulty and number of challenges was too high. I had a hunch. As the total treasure value isn't listed in the front like it was for DCC #5, I had to whip out the Dungeon Master's Guide and load up a spreadsheet program in order to check what the adventurers should get based on the DMG and what the

adventure actually gives them. So I totaled up the challenge ratings and encounter levels and accounted for the extra equipment that named creatures or characters have. To sum things up, the adventure should have given out 140,700 gold pieces of treasure, but it gives out a total exceeding 409,000 gold pieces. Some of that treasure is hard to get to because it resides in an underwater chamber, but it is still not able to be excused. With all this treasure, the characters could buy the town that is near the adventure location...the whole town.

Challenges

Despite these drawbacks, the adventure still does a good job of presenting a variety of challenges, an interesting layout, and an interesting situation. In addition to tough combats, there are a variety of traps and it is simply tough for most characters to get around. Fighters who wear heavy armor won't like this adventure a whole lot. There are some interesting aspects to the layout as some tunnels and chambers are entirely submerged. Also, the whole setup for the story behind the adventure is different, but it is unlikely that the PCs will figure it all out.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, I cannot recommend this adventure to fans of the Dungeon Crawl Classics series or people who are considering this adventure for a change of pace. Simply put, better DCC adventures are out there. DCC #6 - Temple of the Dragon Cult is the best that I've reviewed. The adventure isn't horrible, it's just average.

Where to buy

This product is available to our readers at a discount from or partners FRP Games:

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by Melissa Piper

d20 Modern Review : Horizon - Mechamorphosis

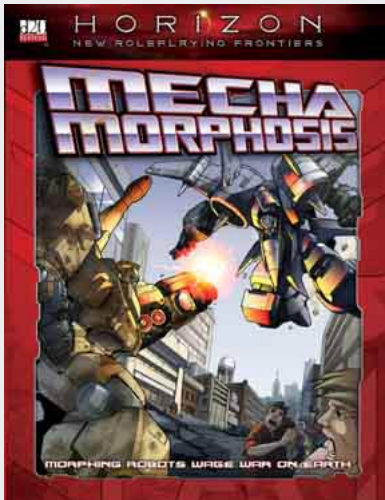
"Horizon: Mechamorphosis"

About: 64 pages, soft cover, black-and-white interior, \$15

Authors: Lysle Kapp, Rob Vaughn

Publisher: Fantasy Flight Games (2004)

Review date: 08/29/04



Reviewer's Bias: I received a review copy of this product.

From the Back Cover

"An ancient, secret war wages across the galaxy, and Earth has become its latest battleground. Welcome to Mechamorphosis, where you don't just pilot the giant morphing robot-you are the giant morphing robot!

The power-hungry Tyrant mechamorphs have followed their peaceful Exile and Animech cousins to Earth, hoping to enslave humankind and suck the planet's resources dry. Only the valiant Exile rebels and the wise Animech warriors can stop them.

In this d20 mini-RPG, players take on the roles of giant morphing robots, intelligent living machines that can change forms and appear as vehicles, weapons, and even robotic animals. Spy on enemies with your miniaturizing massmorph ability, take on airborne foes in high-speed aerial combat, or send your companion mechamorphs-smaller 'bots that can merge with your form-off to do battle for you. You can constantly adapt and upgrade your powers with form feats, but beware...so can your enemies!

'd20 System' and the 'd20 System' logo are Trademarks owned by Wizards of the Coast and are used according to the terms of the d20 System License version 5.0. This product requires the use of the Dungeons & Dragons Player's Handbook, published by Wizards of the Coast, Inc. This product utilizes updated material from the v.3.5 revision."

Introduction

Welcome to a new genre of mecha battles, where your character is the artificially-intelligent robot, not the human pilot that you may expect! Horizon: Mechamorphosis is a Transformers meets Voltron type of product where you take on the role of battling 'bots that have made Earth their new home. The robots, or Mechamorphs, can transform themselves into everyday vehicles, animals, and even structures. The two main groups of battling 'bots are the

Review snapshot

CLASS: Campaign Supplement

STR: 13 (Physical). Soft cover book that sustained some corner fraying, but is still decently strong for a soft cover.

DEX: 17 (Organization). Product had logical chapter divisions and a table for almost everything.

CON: 16 (Quantity of the Content). There was a lot of information crammed into those 64 pages!

INT: 14 (Quality of Content). Some small slips in editing and some concepts are hard to grasp at first, but game information was detailed and strong.

WIS: 13 (Options & Adaptability). Can be adapted to any campaign utilizing mecha, but utilization of PHB limits adaptability.

CHA: 14 (Look & Feel). Art is great, but it is still black-and-white.

How we rate our reviews

Scoring definitions.

18 = *Superior. Best of the best.*

16 = *Very Good. Part of a Baker's Dozen.*

14 = *Good. Most gamers would like this.*

12 = *Fair. Some gamers would like this.*

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2 = *Inferior. Worst of the worst.*

Tyrants and the Exiles, with the Exiles fighting to keep humanity from ending up as the Tyrants' slaves. This book contains rules for building any type of mechamorph you desire, be it an Exile, a Tyrant, or one of your own creations. In order to use this book to its fullest, you will need a copy of the Player's Handbook (PHB) and the Monster Manual (MM).

Presentation

Horizon: Mechamorphosis is a 64-page, perfect-bound soft cover book. The full-color cover depicts two mechamorphs engaged in battle. This cover illustration looks like it could have come directly from an animated cartoon, complete with a threatened city environment and fleeing people. The title Mechamorphosis is colored with a metallic gradient. The entire cover illustration is encased by a brick-red border. Although the cover is in full color, the interior is completely black-and-white. All chapter and section headings are written

in a black, futuristic font. The page numbers are also written in this same font, except that they are white and set inside a mecha's targeting scope. The side margins measure about 1" and contain the chapter number and title. All pieces of art throughout this product are done very well. Although all of the art is grayscale, each drawing contains excellent detail. No one artist's work jumps out more than another since it is all great. The chapters are relatively short, with no chapter consuming more than 10 pages.

The Mechamorph System

I will tell you right off the bat that the bulk of Mechamorphosis is dedicated to creating your character. In fact, seven of the eight chapters (that's about 88% percent of the book!) discuss character essentials such as ability scores, feats, skills, morphing, and gear. Only the final chapter delves into the world of the mechamorphs. While some readers may view this as a lack of vital of information, I see this as one of the book's strong points. I can give you several supporting points to my reasoning, one of which being the difference between the development of mechamorph characters and human characters.

Chapter 1 takes a moment to explain how to generate ability scores and how to assign priority levels for your character. Honestly, when I first started reading this chapter, I didn't even know that I was in chapter 1 yet! There is no chapter heading for the first chapter like there is for each remaining chapter, so I relied on the title in the side margin to alert me this fact (I must also mention that this chapter title is misspelled. Instead of reading "The World of Mechamorphosis," the title instead reads "The World of Mechamorphosis." If this is some type of creative misspelling that I do not understand, please correct me). But I digress. Since mechamorphs are so much larger than humans, some scaling is required in order to be compatible with the d20 system. If this factor was not taken into consideration, mechamorphs would get to add +40 to their damage rolls at first level! The authors discuss this scaling process in order to keep the game mechanics compatible. Perhaps, though, one of the most interesting aspects of the book comes in the form of priority levels.

Priority levels are assigned to five character aspects at the beginning of character development: ability scores, alt form, form feats, special powers, and gear. Players assign

priority levels to each of these five character elements, from 1 to 5, with priority level 5 being the most powerful (oddly enough). A player assigns priority levels according what he or she wants to be his or her character's strengths. Then, players receive a number of points that they can spend in order to improve their character, according to where their priorities were set. For example, let's pretend that you have given priority level 5 to your mechamorph's ability scores. By doing so, you are allotted 36 points that you can spend to increase your character's six ability scores (strength, dexterity, constitution, intelligence, wisdom, and charisma) according to Table 1-3. Another player may set her character's ability score priority level to 3 and only receive 28 spend-able points, but she will receive more spending points in another area that she has given a higher priority to. Sound confusing? It took me about three or four read-throughs to fully grasp this concept as well, but it's actually a neat system once you get the hang of it. This method was designed so that characters are well rounded and unique, as long as players assign different priority levels to their characters.

Alt Forms and Classes

Of course, if you are going to play as a mechamorph, you want to know what type of things you can morph into! Chapter 2 discusses the three types of alternate (or alt) forms that your mechamorph can change into. First of all, there are Animal alt forms (Animorphs), which are mechamorph forms that resemble Earth animals. There is no table listing possible animal forms that your mechamorph can assume, but the authors do mention that you are only restricted by your mechamorph's size. Since mechamorph sizes range from small to immense, you have a lot of freedom when deciding what animal you want for your mechamorph. The authors refer you to the MM in order to derive statistical information for your creature. Next, there are vehicle mechamorphs. Unlike Animorphs, types of vehicle mechamorphs that you can choose from are restricted to a table of generic vehicles, such as dirt bikes and trucks. Do not worry if you do not know anything about a vehicle you are reading about in the table, because descriptions of each vehicle follow soon after. Finally, players have the option to play as an object mechamorph. These mechamorphs can assume the form of mundane objects and structures, and are more often spies, healers, and protectors as opposed to fighters.

You will find four new classes that progress up to 20th level. These classes are meant to replace the ones in the PHB and are specific to the Mechamorphosis campaign. The new classes, Controller, Scientist, Scout, and Soldier, reflect the personality attributes of mechamorphs and depend on certain priority levels in order to be used effectively. For example, Scientists are mechamorphs that "seek innovative methods and new ways of thinking to reach their goals." They are often healers that prefer to build and prepare mechamorphs instead of fighting them. Therefore, Scientists should give high priority to gear so they have the equipment they need to build and fix. Normally, I would recommend that more than four core classes be provided, but due to the fighting nature of this supplement, these four classes appear to cover the personalities of the mechamorphs well.

Skills, Feats, and Special Powers

Skills and feats are a common element in any d20 System product worth its cover price. Horizon: Mechamorphosis includes both of these, but condenses their uses so that you can spend more time enjoying the game instead of worrying about rules and physics. For example, the d20 Balance, Escape Artist, and Tumble skills have been combined into the Acrobatic skill. Therefore, if you need to make a check based on one of the three aforementioned skills, you would simply make an Acrobatic skill check instead. There are also new uses for familiar skills, such as Build and Repair (which now comes in a trained and untrained version).

Feats now come in two flavors; general and form. Altogether, there are 58 general feats and 28 form feats that can be used within the Mechamorphosis rules. That's a lot of feats! Some familiar general feats are listed in the general feats table, such as Power Attack and Weapon Finesse. There are no descriptions for these feats, however, since you can read their descriptions in the PHB. Instead, descriptions of new general and form feats are given alphabetically. For example, one new general feat is Artful Pilot, which allows your character to maneuver through blaster fire without scratching its paint job. Hybrid, a new form feat, allows your mechamorph to morph into a hybrid form that uses parts from its primary and alt forms. Neat!

Finally, your mechamorph has the ability to use special powers. Special powers are similar to the spell-like abilities that you will find in the d20 system and PHB. All

of these special powers are based off of cleric, druid, and wizard spells, except that wizard spells are used through technology and cleric spells are used through nexus energy. The authors give you a few samples of special powers that you can adapt to your mechamorph, but readers are advised to refer to the PHB when searching for special powers. Basically, if there is a spell that you want your mechamorph to use from the PHB, then you can take it right from the source and give it a "mechamorph-ized" name. Although I was disappointed that there were not any new special powers, I guess this keeps Mechamorphosis consistent with its primary reference, the PHB.

Weapons and Gear

I won't mention much about the weapons that mechamorphs can use, since most of them can be found in the PHB or are spur of the moment objects (such as telephone poles). However, chapter 6 does mention some firearms you can use, along with appropriate damage factors and attack bonuses. The majority of these firearms are blasters that rely on nexus energy as their primary source of fuel. There are also some great drawings of weapons that are worth taking a look at in this section. In addition to weapons, you will also read about gear that you can buy in order to customize or upgrade your mechamorph. Objects such as autojacks, landing wheels, infrared sensors, and low-light sensors all appear here. While the gear-related information is not extensive, it does supply a broad base of items that can be included into any Mechamorphosis campaign.

Conclusion

Although it is only 64 pages, Horizon: Mechamorphosis is a very informative little campaign supplement. Not only does it explore new ways to create characters, but it also grants you freedom in the way you design and develop your character. I found that both game-masters (GMs) and players would find this to be a very useful book for any mecha-related campaign. Individual GM and player sections are not explicitly marked, but I believe that both parties can use all information in this book equally. I was also glad

to see that the authors made good use of the book named as the primary reference, namely the PHB (although you should have a copy of the MM as well). I have seen books the name a primary reference on the back cover, but waste time by re-printing the information from the source or re-invent the rules.

Since Mechamorphosis is pretty much a battle-oriented campaign, you can expect to spend most of your playing time either gearing your mechamorph for battle or fighting the enemy. Therefore, if you are someone that prefers a story-oriented campaign, this product is probably not for you. Also, since the goal of Mechamorphosis is to make battle simple and fun, you would probably not care for the system this book utilizes if you are a stickler for rules. In any case, if you can look past the fast pace and relaxed rules used in Horizon: Mechamorphosis, then I would suggest giving this book a shot. After all, when I first received this book, I was leery of what it had to offer. Now that I have read it, I am glad I gave it a chance and I will be sure that it does not just sit idly by and collect dust on my bookshelf.

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Greetings Fellow Freedom Lovers!

The *Prompeldia Herald* sold in some significant numbers, apparently. No doubt this was due to Gremply Slivers and his bumbling ministry buying up any unsold stock. The *Post*, on the other hand, has no official endorsement yet continues to be the leading newspaper of the realm. We need no shock headlines nor salacious woodcuts to sell our work.

We simply rely on quality journalism and political professionalism, unlike a certain halfling I know who has once again tried to get us shut down. Slivers' goons may be happy to know that they came very close to raiding our presses. Alas, when you hire buffoons, you get buffoon results. Part of the up and down of being an unfavorable ruler, ay? You have to hire idiots to love you, but they can't do their job!!

In other news, Sulenna Ruy's rival thieves guild has been ousted and will no doubt be shut down very shortly. I expect Prompeldia's streets to run with blood, but as long as it belongs to the seedy underbelly of our once-fair town, I really cannot bring myself to care. I hope Ruy and the bucktoothed mayor drown in each others' entrails. Then perhaps Eldor will see fit to draw us back into their fold.

Here are the headlines from around the world.

-Editor X

Kalamar: Child Welfare Group Decries Politicized Education

BET KALAMAR: A leading parents' group has slammed the education system of Kalamar, calling it "outrageously politicized and biased." This condemnation comes hot on the heels of an independent report from the Concerned Citizens Collective, claiming that objective history was not being taught, and that children were repeatedly called upon to praise both Emperor Kabori I and The Knight of the Gods, Deb'fo.

"This is unacceptable," said *Kalamar Kids* spokesman Heller Harland. "We cannot expect these children to grow into free-thinking adults if they are having these politics crammed down their throats. Where's the dissenting voice? Where's the alternative opinion?" Harland went on to say that the children of the realm should be taught about different modes of government and the true story behind Emperor Kabori I's ascension.

A representative of the throne has dismissed the *Kalamar Kids* outcry as "foolish and uninformed." In a speech delivered from Kalamaran Royal Court, he stated that "Kalamar is a divine empire. His Most August Supremacy Kabori I rules by divine decree, and as such is unassailable and infallible. The current education system merely reflects this self-evident truth. I respectfully advise that the members this misbegotten league should take a few remedial courses themselves."

The nobles present were vastly amused by this comment, and it seems that educational reform in Bet Kalamar will have to wait for another day.

Brandobia: 'Human Brandobia Policy' Legislated

PREMOLEN: Human lobby groups, claiming that cheap demihuman labor undermines wages and conditions and threatens to make slaves of us all, have forced the government to put immigration on the political agenda. Legislation,

The Prompeldia Post is a newspaper from the world of Kenzer & Co's Kingdoms of Kalamar setting. It is written entirely in character, from the point of view of an editor and publisher in the town of Prompeldia. The reporters from the paper are entrenched in various locales around the continent, from where they report back to the mysterious Editor X (who grates under the thumb of a crimelord mayor) through an undisclosed system involving divination and teleportation magic.

The stories may not always be accurate (due to the vast distances and general unreliability of magic, sources and reporter bias), but hopefully they will sell the editor enough papers to keep in business.

If there is anything you'd like to see reported in the Prompeldia Post, or if you have a story to break to the readers of that city, please send in on to Shane Cubis at rubikcubis@bigpond.com He'll forward it on to Editor X at his earliest convenience.

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colloquially known as the ‘Human Brandobia Policy,’ has been drafted by leading human supremacist Calwell Barton.

“We want these gnomes, dwarves and halflings out of Brandobian dominions. Not for their negative attributes, but for their positive ones – they are able to withstand far harsher conditions and longer working hours than humans. This makes them sturdier employees and a threat to our human way of life.”

Barton called upon all employers to blackban demihuman labor or risk rolling strikes and general insurrection from human workers. Meanwhile, the Gnomish Labor League has struck back at Barton, claiming that demihumans have been under the human thumb too long, and that their lower wages cannot be blamed on the hardworking gnomes.

“We gnomes have been lambasted by the government of the day long enough,” proclaimed one outrageous little manikin in a squeaky voice, “We toil, polish gems, do our best to earn an honest day’s living, and what do we get in return? Nothing but lies and vilification. It is time for it to stop.”

The gnome was shouted down, given a few coppers, and deported.

Svimohzia: Atavius Adds Another Victory Notch

VOHVEN JUNGLE: Our favorite elven prince has chalked up another win in his quest for the Shimzei Verdun, successfully parleying with a fearsome red dragon, whilst his companions waited outside the wyrm’s lair. Embedded reporter Ibus Canesh was the only member of the party to accompany Prince Atavius into the home of the dragon, where he filed this report:

“The lair of the beast was rank with the stench of burning death. Human skeletons littered the mouth of the massive cave system, and the heat was almost immediately intolerable. Prince Atavius strolled in confidently, but one

could see the sweat on his otherwise perfect brow.

The encounter with the dragon was short-lived, but favorable. In exchange for the promise of sending her a group of twenty human slaves once his quest was complete, the mighty wyrm gave up a piece of vital information. It seems that Atavius will have a trickier time extracting the priceless idol from its resting place than he thinks.”

Other news from the expedition is that Versus has begun vomiting every morning and the young hobgoblin bard is having some difficulty rhyming ‘Atavius’. Moonknight Delphinus has retained her composure and is praying nightly that the gods help to keep the noble party on track.

Ibus Canesh receives 5% of all treasure recovered and has sworn this will not affect his journalistic integrity.

Reanaaria: Farmer Spies Machine of War and Destruction

Jeremy Dookettle, a radish farmer from Baethel, claims to have stumbled upon a “huge building full of wizards and clerics, all working on these big metal golem things.” Dookettle, who has never seen a golem before, is nonetheless familiar with the term through the stories of a childhood nanny named Emaethelia. “They was just like the Iron Pirate Kiddie-Eater from the stories,” he stated, “but with fiery eyes. And they was talking like people!”

Family and friends have urged people to take Dookettle’s story with a grain of salt, citing his fondness for moonshine liquor and a propensity to lie. “Remember when he said he met Vasau in the woods?” said neighboring cabbage grower ‘Old Man’ Scape. “Or when he saved a fairy from a horde of rampaging owlbears?” Dookettle maintains the truth of both tales, insisting that the fairy granted him three wishes that he unfortunately squandered on sausage and women.

Authorities are equally skeptical of the farmer’s ‘talking golem’ story, although they have promised the people of Baethel that they will investigate. A call has been placed for freelance adventuring parties to sign up for the mission, in

which they are to scout out the area and bring back proof of the truth or falsity of Jeremy Dookettle’s alleged sighting.

The Wild Lands: Latest Youth Craze – Mimicking Lycanthropes

Disaffected youth throughout the major settlements of Torakk have started growing their hair, wearing ragged furs and snarling, in an attempt to mimic the powerful beastmen known as lycanthropes or werewolves. Some have even gone so far as to have their teeth filed, and have fashioned a rudimentary claw apparatus that they strap to their hands.

“When you’re part of a pack, you’re a real hero”, claims wolfish ringleader ‘Claws’ Vance. “It gives us something to do – something to aspire to.” The popularity of the movement seems to prove the truth of Vance’s statement. Wolfism is spreading like wildfire, from its apparent origin in Daruk to outlying areas of Paru’Bor and even far-flung Norr Bharr. Parents have a far more concerned reaction to the trend, which is allegedly interfering with tasks necessary for the survival of the community.

Red Bearchester, father to one of the faux-werewolves, has seen a massive decrease in productivity since his daughter started mimicking the animalistic shapechangers. “Nothin’s been done. Now I’m thinkin’ of gettin’ one of them druids in to teach these kids that werewolves isn’t a game. Or maybe of them ex-lycanthropes that done got healed by the church. They’d set these kids straight with some speech about waking up naked with blood in yer mouth, or mating with wild dogs.”

Responses from actual lycanthropes range from bemused to outraged. “If these silly little humans want to be werewolves, I can help them out.” Told an anonymous wererat, in an exclusive interview, “I’ll even do my best not to rip out their foolish throats in the process.”

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