

INTRODUCTION

AS *DRAGON WARRIORS* is coming up to its quarter century, it's now almost as venerable as those classic original role-playing games—*Dungeons & Dragons*, *RuneQuest*, *Traveller*—in whose company it was once a cheeky whippersnapper.

Those who enjoy *Dragon Warriors* respond to something unique about it. Which sets us to wondering: what is the essence of *Dragon Warriors*? Most certainly that essence doesn't lie in armor-bypass rolls or other game mechanics. Indeed, the best Legend campaigns we've played in have used the GURPS system. And the rules mean nothing to those who live in the *Dragon Warriors* world, for whom 'mystic' and 'warlock' and 'sorcerer' are all interchangeable shorthand for a guy you really should steer well clear of.

So, is *DW* then defined by the world of Legend? We think not. Some of the great role-playing games are completely identified with an entire fantasy sub-creation. Tekumel and Glorantha spring to mind. The world of Legend, on the other hand, was always intended to be our world—only skewed.

Some parts are closer to the 10th century, others to the 14th, but the point was always to create a backdrop that would be recognizably and convincingly medieval. It was never about creating a place that was alien and strange. The familiarity of Legend is what gives players freedom to create their own stories there.

Not rules nor world, then. From a personal perspective, the important thing for us has always been the *flavour*. That, for us, is the essence of *Dragon Warriors*. Our aim was to put something dark, spooky and magical back into fantasy role-playing. Loathing the medieval Disneyland of *Dungeons & Dragons*, with its theme-park taverns, comedy dwarves and cannon-fodder profusion of monsters, we made Legend as vividly dreamlike as the Middle

Ages seem in stories, a place dripping with a European folktale sensibility. The flavor of what fantasy ought to be.

In Legend, faerie creatures are as amoral as cats and as heartless as children. A goblin in the rafters can spoil a whole night's sleep, while a troll under the bridge ahead is reason to change your travel plans. And these creatures are rare. Walking into a tavern in Legend and finding an elf at the bar would be like strolling into your real-life local and seeing a polar bear.

In Legend, human emotion is just as strong as magic. The scenario 'A Box of Old Bones', which originally appeared in *White Dwarf* magazine in 1985 and which is bound to re-emerge before long, makes it clear that the miracles associated with holy relics are sufficiently rare and vaguely manifested that a fake relic can go unnoticed for years, getting by on the strength of its placebo effect and the willingness of clergy and believers to collude in seeing evidence where they want to see it. Our rule was never to evoke magic if a non-supernatural plot point would do.

Fantasy games like *D&D*—or, these days, *World of Warcraft*—belong to the George Lucas or Chris Columbus branch of role-playing. *Dragon Warriors* would be a movie by Guillermo del Toro or Tim Burton. In literary terms, if *D&D* is *Eragon*, then *DW* is *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norell*. Now that the righteous passion of youth is mellowed somewhat, we see that neither approach is right or wrong. Fantasy has room for all flavours. Take your pick.

Turning now to thanks, regrets and reminiscences... *Dragon Warriors* owes its existence to Ian Livingstone and Steve Jackson, whose brainwave was to see that role-playing could be smuggled into bookshops. We were never that interested in solo gamebooks, but as soon as we saw the first Fight-

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ing Fantasy book we started planning the pitch for *Dragon Warriors*.

The game system too owes a debt to Livingstone and Jackson, interestingly enough. We had self-published a little RPG called *Mortal Combat* in the late 1970s. This came to the attention of Games Workshop, with whom we discussed a UK rival to *D&D*. Workshop's working title for this was 'Adventure'. The deal never happened, but it gave us an excuse to focus our role-playing sessions towards creating a set of rules and a world (in fact, several worlds) that ultimately evolved into *Dragon Warriors*.

With hindsight, there are things we would do differently. Oliver always argued strenuously against polyhedral dice, but Dave resisted a pure d6-based system—wrongly, as he now admits. As the whole point of *Dragon Warriors* was to be accessible to everybody, the low price-point of the books was pretty much invalidated when you had to go searching for twelve-sided dice. Democratization of the dice supply would also have helped to break the authority of the GamesMaster—a term we abhor, preferring 'umpire' or 'referee' as more indicative of the group story-creation that we feel good role-playing should be.

Philippa Dickinson, our editor at Transworld, recognized that role-playing broke the normal publishing rules about age groups. That's why the original *DW* books showed no sign of being targeted at 11-15 year olds, even though those were almost certainly our main market. We played it ourselves, after all, and our friends—and we were twentysomethings, as I hope were many of those who bought the books first time round.

Completists may wonder what other *DW* books are out there. We used Legend as the setting for our *Blood Sword* series of gamebooks (Knight Books, 1987-88), where we elaborated the end-of-time storyline that hangs over the world as the year 1000 approaches. Later, some of the story threads in *Blood Sword* were used for three novellas called *The Chronicles of the Magi* (Hodder, 1997). We're still not sure if we consider *Blood Sword* to be canonical—or whether the year 1000 would really pass in Legend with much hysteria, and not a little magical mischief, but maybe *sans* the direct intervention of God Almighty. The flavour of *DW* can be grim and horrific as well as whimsical, but such grimness is usually on a personal level. A character's soul can be in peril, lives can be threatened by treachery, individuals can be torn by loyalties and inner conflicts.

And yet, in a Legend campaign, it is not usually the fate of the world that hangs in the balance. Not *merely* the fate of the world, at any rate.

At the risk of evoking comparison with Robert E Howard's estate, whose discovery of new stories seems almost to have dwarfed Howard's output while alive, there was also an entire world of *DW* rules and adventures, much more extensive than in the original six books. This is the *Invaders & Ancients* book, which was to have been incorporated into Chaosium's *Questworld* project. When that deal failed to come about, we reworked the material into a massive worldbook, called *Ophis*, that would have comprised some of *DW* books 7-12.

If you're interested, a little glimpse of that continent of *Ophis* will feature in *Shadowline: The Art of Iain McCaig* (Insight, 2008). But that is all there is, alas, as in those days we did our work in non-electronic form. The manuscript may have taken the train to Dumfries or been used to lay the cornerstone of a church or used to light a fire on an especially cold winter's night—all those fates that the one and only copies of things are wont to suffer. But, like life, the loss is what makes the rest of it so precious.

For the resurrection of *Dragon Warriors* we particularly want to thank James Wallis, who needs no introduction as one of the great luminaries of gaming. We are honoured that *Dragon Warriors* is appearing as one of the first publications of Magnum Opus Press, and grateful to James for lavishing such attention to make it a truly mouth-watering edition. We also must thank Ian Sturrock for editing, revising and improving our original material into a new edition for a new era of gaming.

And we are most grateful to have such excellent companions in our ongoing exploration of Legend—in particular Steve Foster and Tim Harford. Steve has been with us from the very beginning, designed *Mortal Combat* and in fact originated several of the most colourful characters of the *Dragon Warriors* world including Tobias of the Knights Capellar and arch-wizard Cynewulf Magister. Tim has woven some of the eeriest, most exciting and most affecting campaigns of Ellesland and enhanced it immeasurably with his ideas. Along with them, we are privileged to have adventured with Aaron Fortune, Paul Gilham, Frazer Payne and Tim Savin—heroes of Legend, dear friends, stalwarts all.

—Dave Morris