

Dragon Warriors - A Personal Perspective

([Shaun Hately](#))

Hello Shaun. Please can you tell us a little about yourself?

I'm a schoolteacher and aspiring author living in Melbourne, Australia - I teach gifted (very smart) kids for a living and rely on the social interaction and mental stimulation I get from gaming to keep me sane.



Tell us about your very first experience with Dragon Warriors. The why; the where; the how.

I started playing and running games of D&D when I was seven - the old blue box basic D&D, and I really enjoyed it. But D&D was really expensive in child-level budget terms - a single scenario cost me months of pocket money. I was constantly begging my parents for money to buy game books. When I was either ten or eleven, I was at Robinsons Bookshop in Frankston (a well-known independent bookshop here - it was a proper bookshop, crammed with nooks and crannies) and while looking at the Fighting Fantasy gamebooks in the children's section at the back, I saw the first three Dragon Warriors books on the same shelves. "The Ultimate Roleplaying Game" legend at the top caught my eye. I leafed through and realised that, yes, this was a proper RPG, not just a gamebook. And from memory, it only cost \$3 or \$4 for each of the books - for comparison, the AD&D Players Handbook I'd been wanting was about \$30 from memory. I could get a book every couple of weeks! I was with my Dad and I showed him, and he immediately doubled my pocket money so I could up that to a book a week - he knew these games meant a lot to me, and was probably also sick of me begging for much more money.

When I got home, I read the first book from cover to cover straightaway. The first thing that grabbed me was this was a rules system that felt a little less abstract to me than D&D – the 'comic strip' that showed how the combat system worked really drove home how you could visualise every step of the fight. Did I hit? YES! Now did the shield block? NO! Did I penetrate the armour? YES! As opposed to D&D - "I hit Armor Class 6..." OK, I missed, but why did I miss? Was it a lousy blow? Was it the shield? Was it the armour?

But it was "The King Under the Forest" that really got me. Compared to the published D&D scenarios I'd seen – which wasn't many because of money – it was just so evocative. And I knew enough of classic literature and history, to immediately make the Vallandar and Arthur connection. I also loved the 'treasures of the kingdom' and wanted to throw that clever little disappointment at my players as soon as possible.

Where did you go from there? The 80s, 90s, and so on. Did you leave DW for a while and come back, or have you been there all along?

I had some fairly miserable times in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It was not a happy childhood in a lot of ways – the year I was twelve – 1987 – was particularly hellish. Gaming was my relief from my real life problems, and was the only place I found it at all easy to find friends – and that has remained true all my life. So I've gamed as much as I can since then. But it wasn't always Dragon Warriors. There was a period from 1987-1990 or so, where it was definitely the game I played most, but that was with other kids who, like me, had been drawn to the game, in part, because it fit our budget. Most of them, once they had the money, wanted to shift over to AD&D, and I went with them out of necessity more than anything else – not that I dislike it, but it was a matter of it being much easier to find people to play with. In the mid-1990s, I was lucky enough to fall into a group of people who, while we still played a lot of AD&D, and then D&D once they dropped the A, were willing to try and play other games, and the core of that group is now the core of my regular gaming group. We've played so many different games and Dragon Warriors is periodically part of that mix when it's my turn to GM. I also ran Dragon Warriors a couple of times at local conventions in the late 1990s.

When Dragon Warriors was revived as a living product in 2008, I started running it consistently at least once a year at local conventions. I found a lot of people joining those games because they remembered the six little books from their early gaming life.

Tell us about a memorable character that you've played or someone has played in one of your games.

Leaving aside Mistress Marta, who I've never actually played except as an occasional NPC, but who I created for 'Friends or Foes'... I haven't had as much chance as I'd like to play characters in DW. I've nearly always been the GM. But I'm currently participating in an online game run by Stephen Keightley where we are playing through the classic 'Sleeping Gods' campaign (although he's added an immense amount to it), and I'm really enjoying playing a Sorceress called Hariot. She's very young – she left Ongus where she was an apprentice to Mistress Marta, as soon as she could escape the city without Marta dragging her back because of her age. And she set out to see the world, walking all the way to the north of Albion before falling into adventure. I love this rather prim-and-proper city girl who is proving a lot tougher than she ever expected to be. She's always a little shocked when one of her

spells actually works – she Fossilised somebody a couple of sessions ago, as a rather desperate last-ditch action and was honestly astonished that the spell really did what the book said.

What's your favourite DW scenario?

It is 'The King Under the Forest', but if I take away the strong nostalgia bonus that the first one gets, 'A Box of Old Bones' would be very close.

How did the Yahoo group come about?

I was reading a Dragon magazine and it mentioned there was a 'list-serv' list for AD&D – ADND-L – which I immediately joined. About 1995 or 1996. Immediately I wanted a similar type of place for Dragon Warriors. I searched around for some free way I could do this – I was a near penniless university student at the time and I went through a few different free services – I can remember names like graffiti.net, makelist, and coolist, existing then dying or being swallowed up by Yahoo. About the same time I also set up 'The Unofficial Dragon Warriors' homepage on geocities – another free service that Yahoo eventually swallowed. Again, there was nostalgia for the old game (although it was only about a decade since it had been a new game).

When did the Library of Hiabuor come about?

One of my childhood dreams was to be a 'real games designer' – by which I meant, a 'properly published' one. I wrote a few little unofficial things I put up for download on the web in the 1990s but it wasn't until James Wallis asked me if I'd put together an introductory/convention scenario for the new Dragon Warriors release that I had anything released in any proper sense – that was 'A Weak Pleasure' which I co-wrote with Mark Turner, one of my regular gaming group. But then – I got the chance to submit ideas for the official sourcebook that would become 'Friends or Foes' and three of my ideas were accepted, and that was the moment I'd felt I'd achieved my childhood dream – I'd been paid for game writing that was in a real book from a real publisher, and I was also given the chance to contribute to what eventually became the 'Players' Guide'. Anyway, that was the period where I decided to set up a proper DW webpage – unlike my ancient and increasingly dated Geocities-based page. The [Cobwebbed Forest](#) – brilliant page – had also appeared by then, I think, and that probably inspired me as well. And finally, I could see that e-mail lists were on the way out and I thought a web-based forum might be more used – which it was, although Discord and Facebook are now more prevalent.

Other DW resources - any recommendations?

I've already mentioned '[The Cobwebbed Forest](#)' which I think is the best DW website out there – unless there is something I have missed. And the Discord and the Facebook group are both really useful too. 'Casket of Fays' is great – a sustained zine – not speaking specifically about DW here, I just know how many zines get started on all sorts of topics and produce only one issue... which is fine if that was the intention, but often it wasn't.

What does Legend hold for you in the future, and what do you hope for Legend in the future?

I am really looking forward to the upcoming new material – 'Brymstone', 'The Cursed King', and – of course – I have a very, very personal interest in seeing 'The Summoner's Tale'. I have a couple of projects of my own ongoing – designing a GM's screen for my own game (which I will share) and finishing a partly completed Gazetteer of Albion – I'll be going straight back to work on that in a minute – for use in my own game (although again, I will share it with others). I have also – for about nine years now – been slowly working on a novel set in Ongus, the capital of Albion. It's basically fanfic that, if it is ever finished, I'll likely release under the Serpent King fan licence. It's kind of a kid's book – although it's already nearly 300,000 words – it's really aimed mostly at the type of very clever kids I teach. And it's fun for me – it's allowed me to explore some theories of magic in the game I have... and to get to know Ongus much better than I did.

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