

PRIME MATERIAL

Prime Material #3. Published for Alarums & Excursions in June 2013 by Rogers Cadenhead, 135 Jenkins St., Suite 105B #244, St. Augustine, FL 32086. Email: cadenhead@gmail.com. Web: <http://cadenhead.org>.

‘Pathfinder’ Comic Headed in Right Direction

There have been several comic books adapted from role-playing games over the years.

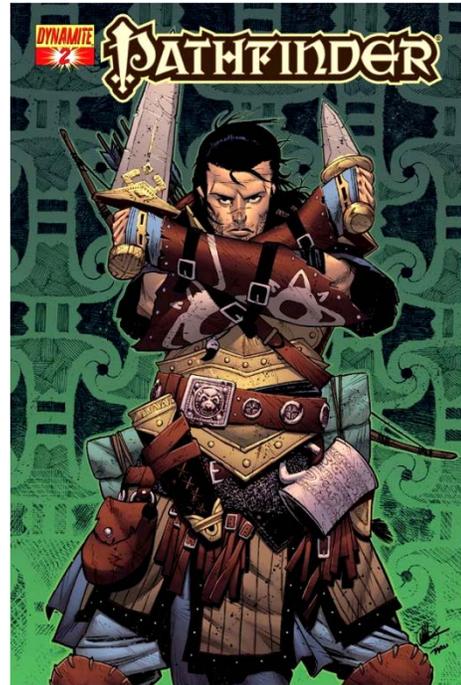
Eclipse Comics published a four-issue *Villains & Vigilantes* mini-series in 1986 by the game’s creators, Jeff Dee and Jack Herman.

From 1988 to 1991, DC Comics published an *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* series that lasted for 36 issues, a *Dragonlance* comic that spanned 34 issues, a *Forgotten Realms* title for 24 and a *Spelljammer* book for 15.

In 2010, IDW secured the license for a new *Dungeons & Dragons* comic book based on the fourth edition rules and setting. It has published 16 issues of that series, a five-issue *Dark Sun* mini-series, five-issue *Forgotten Realms*, two-issue *Eberron* and five-issue *The Legend of Drizzt: Neverwinter Tales*. A new mini-series, *Forgotten Realms: Cutter*, began in April.

The newest entrant to the subgenre of RPG tie-in comics is *Pathfinder*, a monthly series launched by the comics publisher Dynamite and the game company Paizo Publishing in 2012 for the Pathfinder game.

I’ve read the first three issues, and it’s an excellent mix of comics and game material. The story by writer Jim Zub and artist Andrew Huerta is about an adventuring party that journeys to a new place, the town of Sandpoint, and becomes embroiled in a



mystery involving aggressive goblin raiders with grotesque marks on their bodies.

Huerta’s a much better illustrator than the ones I’ve seen on IDW’s D&D books, which weren’t even salvaged by Marvel Comics legend Sal Buscema doing the inking.

Zub’s story is a little thin thus far, but his protagonists are an intriguing bunch. There’s an enigmatic female human sorcerer from Varisia covered in tattoos, a foolhardy male human fighter, a female elf rogue of the Forlorn and a serious-minded human wizard who reinvented himself in middle age as an aspiring Pathfinder. (I didn’t know it when I read the comics, but these are iconic

characters featured in the game rules and adventures as pre-rolled characters.)

Where this comic stands out is in the quality of the supplementary role-playing material. James Jacobs, the creative director for Pathfinder, has provided enough on Sandpoint and the places encountered by the characters to serve as the starting point for a campaign.

Issue #1 contains a six-page Sandpoint gazetteer with a map of the town of 1,200 on the Turandarok River, a two-page encounter on a Junk Beach locale outside the town and four pages with stats and background on the PCs. There's also an 11-by-17 playable map.

Issue #2 includes a two-page description of the Shank's Wood locale, a two-page encounter at a decrepit building called the Shankshack, two pages on PCs who join the party and another 11-by-17 map on the shack.

Issue #3 has a six-page scenario in the Paupers' Graves cemetery with a write-up of the male ghoul who presides over it, Jediah Kheln. An 11-by-17 map covers catacombs under the cemetery.

All of the game material is in color with terrific art and production values on par with Pathfinder's *Adventure Path* modules. The maps are included as inserts that can be slid out of the comic without damaging it.

So far, seven issues of the monthly comic have been published and a *Pathfinder: Goblins!* five-issue mini-series begins in August.

Though I own the *Pathfinder Core Rulebook* and *Bestiary* and several adventures, I've never played the game. This comic makes running a campaign sorely tempting. Sandpoint is big enough for PCs to get into trouble and small enough not to overwhelm a new GM.

"It seems over the past few months I've managed to insult and degrade just about everyone who reads *A&E*. I've placed myself on my own arrogant throne and cursed, ranted, raved and insulted intelligent and nice people. I'm sorry. Truly. I've been a real ass I admit. I don't want to make excuses for my actions because there are none ... I will cut down drastically on comments (probably) as they seem to only lead to trouble." — a contributor to *Alarums & Excursions* 82 (June 1982)

Mailing Comments for A&E 452

David Dickie: Welcome back to *A&E*. For someone who has been gone from gaming for decades, you didn't take long to get back up to speed.

Your Lanotalis campaign — if that's what you call it — has a nicely established history in which there's plenty of room for players to make their mark on the world.

I like campaigns where it doesn't seem like the races, countries and leaders are on a long winning streak and each new year is better than the one that preceded it.

Yours feels like one in which things are one more conflagration from turning into utter chaos.

One of the better decisions Wizards of the Coast made in fourth edition *D&D* was to establish the default campaign setting as one in which the forces of goodness and civilization were isolated in places surrounded by danger and mystery. Senior game designer Richard Baker called it "points of light in a dark world." He wrote in the *Wizards Presents Worlds and Monsters* preview, "Most of it is monster-haunted wilderness, and the centers of civilization are few and far between. ... [T]he vast majority of anything is probably hungry or hostile."

I got the same impression from your setting.

My condolences on the loss of your wife and the illness of your friend. What you're doing for him makes me want to drag my childhood friends back to the gaming table after 25 years.

Pum: I've done some puttering around on Eclipse developing Android apps. I prefer NetBeans for Java programming because I've used it for so long, but Eclipse seems like the more popular IDE in the Java community.

Every time I look at an Android tablet I find it to be way too heavy. If I could find one that was as light and elegant as the Apple iPad I might be tempted to switch. As a longtime Java programmer I could do a lot more with an Android device.

Myles Corcoran: Glad you like RSS. I got involved a few years after its creation and use it all the time as a reader and web publisher. My site the Drudge Retort makes extensive use of RSS in PHP/MySQL code I wrote to find and publish news.

I'd never heard of David Weseley and Braunstein before. Thanks for calling that bit of early RPG lore to my attention.

Your Microlite74 campaign sounds like a much richer experience than what I'd expect from an original D&D clone. I can't tell how much of that comes from the rules and how much from smart DMing. Your monsters do interesting things.

Lisa Padol: Your writeup of *Monsterhearts: Monsterwarts* was one of the strangest play sessions I've ever read. I've often wondered whether an RPG could be written to approximate a daytime soap like *One Life to Live*, where the twists and turns in the relationships of the main characters are more important than the things they accomplish.

From the way you've described the game, *Monsterhearts* seems like it could be great for soaps.

How many strings do you get when you reveal that the man living your life is actually your heretofore unknown hypnotically suggestible twin brother, brainwashed by your mother into believing he was you?

Spike Y. Jones: I haven't heard of anyone using XyWrite in a long time. I was an editor at StarText, an online service run by the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, in the early '90s. I taught myself how to write XyWrite macros to automate as much of the job as I could.

Robert A. Dushay: *Star Frontiers* was one of my first experiences as a GM where the players evaporated. I wanted to run it more than they wanted to play, and all we ended doing was fumbling our way through starter scenarios before wandering back to *AD&D* second edition.

Recently at Chamblin Bookmine, an enormous used bookstore in Jacksonville, I bought a bootleg of *Star Frontiers*. Someone had printed and bound the game and a supplement in a softcover and distributed it without permission.

Patrick Riley: I like the idea of the unfated in a world driven by fate, but I'm having trouble figuring out how that's possible. Can anyone be truly fated in a world with unfated people who can muck it up? If you're fated to

be president of the United States in 2008 and an unfated state senator gives a brilliant speech that propels him to the White House four years later, fate wasn't much good to you at all.

A world that has an ironclad fate for most people, in which that fate is known to some of them, could be pretty grim for the unfated. If you know your fate is glorious and there's a minority who could prevent it, you might logically conclude that it's your fate to hunt them down and eliminate the threat.

Regarding *Friday the 13th: The Series*, the Chiller cable network runs a 16-episode marathon every few weeks.

That show's haunted object of the week is a workable RPG premise. There were some fun cheap genre shows during the TV era of first-run syndication.

Messages to the Prime Material

Here's a few quick comments on Prime Material 1 for *Alarums & Excursions*.

Gaming? Not for me at all. I remember local fans playing *Settlers of Catan* many years ago, but it never caught my interest at all. (There's a lot of things most fans like that never caught my interest ... comics, anime, etc. For me, I started with *Trek*, then conrunning and costuming, and then fanzines and now steampunk costuming. No generic fan am I.) Perhaps my only connection to gaming might be the fact I went to school with Ed Greenwood. We both got our degrees

in Journalism at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute (now Ryerson University), but while I was taking notes for my classes, Ed was designing that enormous dungeon he sold for megabucks. Wonder who spent their time wisely that day?

— **Lloyd Penney**, May 1, 2013

I didn't know that Ed Greenwood also had a background in journalism — I graduated from the University of North Texas in 1991 with that degree.

I did some of my best work as a dungeon master during boring class lectures.

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