

THE SAGA

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DWARVES!
Character Gallery,
and what we bring to the table.

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SO WHAT DO WE WANT OUT OF OUR TABLETOP GAME?

by Michael Bielaczyc

Ever since 2020, I had been running more intense and involved campaigns. Probably influenced by the time everyone had in 2020, my players and I really leaned into serious story heavy games. I even finished one of those campaigns, and it felt amazing. But since then, I have been running a West Marches game to test out SagaBorn d100, and it has me questioning how seriously I was taking my gaming.

Every plot had to be realistic, every locale based in reality, every NPC fleshed out with motives and secrets. And it was exhausting. One time after prep, the game got canceled at the last minute, and I was distraught. I had stuffed so much info in my head that would totally just flutter away in the two or three weeks before the next session.

By contrast, in the West Marches game, I roll on a table and my player's characters fight monsters. Not always, sometimes they talk, but mostly they fight. And I give them every excuse to. Some creatures in the SagaBorn D100 are even categorized as Monsters. They have no empathy, often no intelligence, and heroes can feel good for slaying them. In the late 90's, I remember many gamemasters who were excited to do things like having the heroes fight and slaughter a bunch of goblins. And then have the heroes find the goblin kids they just orphaned. I was guilty of stuff like this too. It was a good step in letting our hobby grow, to ask questions about how we view other beings in our games. But what about the players? These days, I don't find any pleasure in pulling the rug out from under my players. They are here to have fun, and my job is to provide it.

So now I will totally tell the players, these are monsters, they do evil things, have fun swinging your sword or blasting a fireball.

Some months back, a group of my players were really upset about real world stuff. So, instead of the normal wilderness exploration, an NPC came up to them with a mission to free some people who had been forced into labor by a corrupt local oligarch. The elf walked up to the heroes and said, “Wanna kill some fascists?” We had a fun night letting off steam, fighting for righteousness, and going home satisfied.

So when I think of gaming these days, I try to let all that stress that I used to carry about the game just float away. I have fun playing a game with friends rather than trying to be Adventure Zone or Critical Role. I ask myself what do we want out of the game this week, and that’s what I concentrate on. And have fun with it.



CHARACTER GALLERY



KNOLLEN THE BERSERKER

by Megan Clancy

There's something that happens to Knollen—he can't really describe it. Some people say they see red when they get mad, but they don't, it's just how they feel. But Knollen really does, at least sometimes. And it doesn't always involve getting mad, either. Being scared enough will do the trick.

The red mist rises up, time slows down, and off he goes. After all the dust settles, he has to find out what his body got up to while his mind wasn't paying attention.

Knollen started life as a foundling and had the wildly good fortune to be taken into the Family's household when he was five or six. He grew up in the kennels, starting as the lowest dog boy and working his way up to assistant kennel master, looking after the Family's hunting hounds.

He liked the work. Dogs will give you back ten times over what you give to them, every time. Stupid loyal, just like Knollen himself. He would have stayed there until he was old and gray, if it wasn't for Lady Paulina. Polly.

Polly understood dogs, and she'd been coming to the kennels to play with her father's hounds Knollen's whole life. They grew up

in parallel households, her in the big house, him in the kennel's quarters. Her glinting, lopsided grin charmed him when he was a boy, but she never looked his way.

Then one day when she was eighteen and him twenty, she turned that grin on him. That was it for Knollen. It hit him like a physical blow, love.

She started coming to see him instead of the pups, and he was delirious with the beautiful, almost-painful new feelings he had for her. By then, he had enough saved up to get his own little place not too far from work. She came to stay with him sometimes, laughing with him over the dreadful dinners she cooked. Polly was so far above him in every way, Knollen couldn't believe his luck. He should have known it couldn't last.

One evening, he'd been walking home after a late night at the tavern, not paying a bit of attention beyond where to put his foot on the next paving stone. Whoops, there were three toughs after him down the alley. He would've run, but they had another one coming from the other end. Boxed in.

The smallest one tried to take his purse, with the lock of Polly's hair he always kept close, and then his bruiser boyfriend cracked Knollen in the head with a blackjack. They meant to push him down, but the blow knocked something loose instead, something raw and furious that had never been in him before.

The red mist rose for the first time, and after it was all over he was the only thing that walked out of that alley on two good legs.

Polly understood him. When he stumbled home near dawn, she looked at his wild eyes, the crusted drool on his chin, and the fingertips red with other people's blood, and she pulled him inside. She spent an hour cleaning him up like he was coming down from a bender. She wasn't scared of him a lick, either. What a woman she was.

After that time in the alley, it was like a dark room in his heart had unlocked. Knollen never thought of himself as an angry man, but every bump or jostle when he walked down the street was enough to cause the red tendrils of mist to crawl into his vision.

One time, he thought he'd been cheated in a card game, and he nearly killed the man who did it. Violence lived in him as it never had before, and it frightened him. He didn't understand what he was until Polly came to him one night, bringing a book she'd found in the Family's library.

Berserker.

It all made sense, the red mist, the loss of control, the violence. He didn't know what caused it, or why he was cursed.

He'd heard a preacher once who said that most everyone had a secret talent that might never come out in the normal course of a life. But with the help of his god, a man could find his gods-given gifts.

Knollen supposed that might be true. How would you know you had a talent for talking to fish if you lived in the middle of the plains, or had a gift for the sword if you were a fancy lady? And how would you know if you had a talent for going berserk unless a passel of toughs tries to threaten your life?

He'd like a word with that preacher's god; it seemed like a bad system for handing out abilities.

Knollen didn't know what his future held. Gods knew he needed something; the dogs were afraid of him now. Even Dwenna, who he'd raised from a pup, would show her teeth when he walked by her kennel.

Polly's father accused him of beating the dogs and threw him out.

And when that happened, Polly stopped coming round. He'd tried to kid himself it was love—but maybe she'd just been slumming after all.

He always knew he would be somebody's dog. Dangerous as he was, he needed someone holding the leash. And for him, that was Polly—who better? But dogs are loyal, if nothing else, and even after the Family took her away, he was still hers. He supposed he always would be.

Out of hope and options, Knollen thought of drowning in the river. The old master did it sometimes with the runts, though he never had the heart to do it, himself. It would be peaceful, drifting down to the bottom and all his problems gone forever.

One evening he found himself walking there, and on the way, a small piece of parchment nailed to a board caught his eye. Join the Wanderers, it said, and Make Your Fortune.

He thought of Polly. Of his small, cold room.

He'd join the roadworks project, and if it didn't work out, there was always the river.



DARK RETURN

INTO THE WORLD

A BRIEF REPORT ON DWORVES

Well, my book on dwarves has been delayed more than I had anticipated. So, I have sent this brief summary of things I have discovered thus far.

First, let's discuss the generalities of the dwarves. They are shorter and stouter than us terans, with bodies and faces much broader than ours. They are shorter than we are, averaging around four and a half feet tall, but they still often weigh around two hundred pounds. They have as varied skintones as us, though they often tend to have darker hair; blonde and red-haired dwarves are a rarity, but more common in the north. They live quite long, more than doubling the average teran age to around 180 years.

ORIGIN

So where did they come from? The dwarves claim to be the first species to gain sapience on Uteria. This happened during the god wars, when powerful, and some say divine, beings fought a horrible and devastating war. The dwarves often say that they were born into war, and it takes wisdom to grow from the mistakes of your youth. When discovered by the gods, they were recruited into the different factions of the deities, and they fought for untold years. As the god wars seemed to reach their culmination, Trund, the god of the forge, took five clans of the dwarves and put them in a long slumber so that they may hopefully survive the end of the war. The dwarves call this the Long Sleep, from which they awoke only 5000 years ago.

Since then, they have migrated and split into many different groups, integrating themselves into our current world.

TIMELINE

Age of the gods

- Dworvs evolved during this tumultuous time.
- Dworvs fought for both sides.
- Some dworvs went into the Long Sleep.

Third age

- 1789 The Dworvs awake from their slumber.
- 1832 The Five Clans form and war breaks out.
- 2367 A group of dworvs rebel and leave the Five Clans and travel south.
- 2396 A group of dworvs settle along the shore of the Aversola Ocean in the settlement of Saerhem. They begin to craft boats and become well known for that craft.
- 2472 A large group of the nomadic dworvs find Greyhelm Mountain and some settle to form a kingdom.
- 2501 Another group settles in the far south and creates Havn.
- 4753 Oradrim, a dworven priest, left Greyhelm to form his own kingdom of Dorgordum.



Fourth Age

- 5489 The Greyhelm Rebellion. A sect of dworvs reject the church and its strict laws. They name themselves the Vhadar, or Free Dworvs.
- 5491 The Free Dworvs reject Greyhelm and head out on their own.

MAJOR CULTURES

Next, let's break down the many cultures of dwarves. This is not to say that within each is a vast array of beliefs, myths, and values; these are just common traits for these larger dwarven groups.

In the far north, all the dwarves awoke from the Long Sleep. As war broke out among the different clans, many dwarven groups left the cold lands and headed south. This was the start of the current dwarven cultures.

Hrimhel Dwarves (Urodaar) are the five clans of warring dwarves who still fight in the underground halls of the far northern mountains. Their culture has not changed much in thousands of years, stunted by constant warfare and greed. They hold true to the old traditions of the gods, seeing their warfare here as a divine continuance of the war between the gods.

Greyhelm Dwarves (Gruvaar) live in a large kingdom in the Swordspyne Mountains. The mountain dwarves are a hard-working culture whose belief in crafts is only surpassed by their religious piety. They have a caste, or focus as they call it, based society. Mountain dwarves are chosen for a profession in their youth, and their goal is to master it. They are also known to use valta, a stimulant used for focus and relaxation.

Free Dwarves (Vhadar) are the dwarves who rebelled from Greyhelm in 5489. They are the main dwarves we find living in teran cities and settlements. They rejected the religion and culture of Greyhelm but still hold many of the same beliefs as their original heritage. Many free dwarves also detest drugs, as the use of valta in Greyhelm was the impetus for their rebellion.

Saerhem Dwarves (Sahvaar) is a small kingdom of dwarves that settled along the northwestern shores of Atheles. They are master boat crafters as well as renowned tradesmen. They reject war and do not take sides in conflicts. They are also culturally the least religious of many of the dwarven cultures. They believe in the

gods but do not think that they hold sway over their lives, nor that they deserve to be worshipped.

Havn Dworves (Suntaar) live in the far south among the desert cliffs of the wastelands. The Havn Dworves lived here long before the lands were destroyed by the Great War. Due to the corruption of the lands, much of their culture is based around trying to rejuvenate the lands. They are hampered by the giant drakes and wyveres of the south, which they both revere and hunt.

COMMONALITY - ENGINEERING AND CRAFTSMANSHIP

While each dworv individual and culture has their own multi-faceted strengths, one thing that is a common trait in most dworvs is their ability for crafting. Dworvs excel at engineering and design. Whether it be architecture or boat making, armor crafting or pottery, dworvs have a knack for making.

MORE TO COME

Obviously, there is much more to delve into with the dworvs, and I will address this in the full guide I am working on. Until then, I hope this is enough to give you a better idea on our cousins we share this world with.



ON DWERANS

I guess I am pretty lucky. Bordon tolerates people like me. King Boric and the Senate don't mind us non-terans.

Funny, people call me a half dworv, but what most really see is someone less than them. But Bordon is better than most places I've been.

Better than the small town I grew up in, the hypocrites. They would invite the free dworves for their counsel and their work, but truly they looked down on them. And they especially looked down on my mom...a woman "so depraved" she bore a half dworv child.

But we moved here. Pa worked as a guard, and I took the same job. My title earns me some respect. I hear them talk, sometimes. "At least he's not one of those pointy-eared devils," they say. They say these things while I stand guard on these dworven-built walls, in this dworven-designed city.

My dworven blood doesn't forget.

—Venric, Sergeant at Arms, Bordon.



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