

Looting the Dungeon: The Quest for the Genre Fantasy Mega-Text

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Abstract

Popular genre fantasy diverges in a number of significant ways from Tolkien's mythic vision of fantasy. As a result of the genre's evolution away from this mythic model, many of the critical approaches used to analyse genre fantasy, often developed from an understanding of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, do not identify new norms and developments.

The RPG, a commercial codification of perceived genre norms, highlights specific trends and developments within the genre. It articulates, explains and illustrates core conventions of the genre as they have developed over the last thirty years.

Understanding the evolution of the genre is predicated on a knowledge of how the genre is constructed. Assuming the primacy of Tolkien's text and ignoring how the genre has changed from a literary extension of myth and legend to a market-driven publishing category, reduces the applicability of our analytical models and creates a distorted perception of the genre.

This thesis seeks to place the RPG, and its related fictions, at the centre of the genre by recognising their symbiotic relationship with the wider genre of fantasy. By acting as both an articulation of perceived genre norms, and also as a point of dissemination and propagation of these conventions, the RPG is essential to the understanding of fantasy as a genre.

The RPG conventions of world building, magic systems and party formation are particularly relevant to the development and adaptation of existing critical approaches to fantasy.

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Introduction

The shared universe thing is much more like a new literary form than it is just a version of everything that's been there – C.J. Cherryh¹

This contention by Fantasy author C. J. Cherryh, that the shared universe is a 'new literary form' serves as the kernel around which this thesis is constructed. It will be argued that the Fantasy Role-playing Game (RPG),² in conjunction with its related literature, fictions and novelisations, the Role-playing Game Fantasies (RPGF), has created a meta-text with which we may more effectively analyse Genre Fantasy (GF). In effect, the RPG has distilled and adapted perceived rules and conventions of fantasy literature into a codified and systemised framework or formula and thereby described the mega-text of genre fantasy. This systemisation was necessary in order to adapt the literary conventions into a workable ludic structure. This ludic frame is thus an articulation and codification of the essential elements of early fantasy literature, which we can use as a meta-textual commentary on fantasy literature post-*Dungeons and Dragons*. As a result, the RPG is an essential component of any critical framework utilised to analyse modern genre fantasy, be it as a meta-textual commentary, an example of the generic mega-text or as a codified system for the construction of fantasy narrative.

In order to explore this contention, the first part of the thesis will concentrate on the construction of fantasy as a literary genre and the historical development of the RPG and its relationship to Fantasy Literature. In the second part of the thesis, the proposal to use the RPG as a commentary on Genre Fantasy will be explored through an analysis of the concepts of world-building, integrated magic systems and the formation of quest parties in both the RPG and literary forms. This will illustrate how the RPG, and its conventions, can be utilised to re-conceptualise approaches to fantasy literature and produce a new analytical paradigm.

¹ 'The Universe of C.J. Cherryh', interview in *Locus*, 20:4 (1987), p.5.

² A fantasy RPG simply defined is a game, in which players engage in immersive improvisation using an agreed upon fantasy setting and core codified rules. A full discussion of this can be found in Chapter 2 with a further glossary of terms in Appendix 1, an example Gamesmaster script/ notes in Appendix 2 and a character generation sheet in Appendix 3.

Fantasy scholars have typically placed J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* at the heart of the genre, and argued this text has greatly influenced the formal and generic composition of much Fantasy literature.³ This thesis will explore the influence of the *The Lord of the Rings* on the development of the first RPGs and how, as the game has evolved from these initial influences during the 1980s and 1990s, the RPG has both influenced and become descriptive of fantasy writing produced in this period. As the construction of genre is obviously mutable and evolving we must be prepared to re-consider established positions and re-evaluate customary approaches and terminology. The close relationship between RPGs and popular GF, apparent in the fantasy fiction produced between 1980 and 2000, suggests that RPGs should be understood and utilised as part of any critical framework to analyse GF. Taking into account the impact and core conventions of RPG rule-sets allows for a more developed analysis of GF than we have thus far found. Since the RPG has gained little, if any, recognition in the world of fantasy scholarship, this thesis investigates the relationship between the Fantasy RPG and the genre, focusing in particular on how RPG concepts and conventions entered into the genre through RPG tie-in novels, and how these conventions, as part of an overarching fantasy meta-text, can be used to help facilitate examination of GF texts.

For the purposes of this study, the term 'RPG' refers to a narrative/ludic text composed of gaming modules, rule books, scenarios and assorted paraphernalia and indicates Fantasy RPGs specifically, rather than referring to all RPGs and Role-playing systems.⁴ RPG is not being used to refer to the gaming experience and the interactive play of the RPG, which in this instance has been labelled the gaming 'session'. This distinction, fundamental to understanding the binary construction of the RPG as text and as game, is detailed further in Chapter Two, and for convenience Appendix One lists a glossary of Gaming terminology.⁵

³ Where Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* has been quoted citations have been given from the combined edition J.R.R. Tolkien *The Lord of the Rings* (London: HarperCollins, 1991)

⁴ Since the creation of *D&D* in the 1970s, Role-playing games have been developed for SF, Horror, Urban Gothic, Steampunk, Cyberpunk, Neo-Gothic, and cross-genre settings.

⁵ Appendices 2-4 contain further specific gaming related material and information. Appendix 2 is an excerpt from a GM gaming script. Appendix 3 contains a sample Character Sheet and Appendix 4 contains the game related stats of several fantasy characters.

As the term fantasy can encompass a multitude of meanings, Genre Fantasy, or GF is used as a specific term denoting a sub-genre of the broader genre of Fantasy. GF is particularly associated with adventure fantasy, heroic fantasy and quest fantasy specifically of the 1980s and 1990s. Why this term is important and how it has been constructed forms the substance of ‘Chapter One – Defining the Genre’. In order to clearly demonstrate the relationship between RPGs and GF the meanings of these terms must also be clear and well defined.

Meta-text refers to an extra-literary form which can be used to analyse literature, and this thesis argues for the construction of a Fantasy mega-text using the rubric and concepts inherent to the RPG and therefore positioning the RPG as a meta-textual commentary or para-literary influence on GF. The RPG concepts of world building, shared world narrative, character and party generation in addition to magic systems combine to form a meta-textual commentary on the generic fantasy mega-text. As this forms the central argument of this thesis no one specific chapter details this definitively, although the majority of the core arguments can be seen in ‘Chapter One – Defining the Genre’ and Chapters Three, Four and Five.

While care has been given to explaining critical references and thought, the key critical foundations of this study utilises are comprised of Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Vladimir Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale*, John Clute and John Grant’s *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, Brian Attebery’s *Strategies of Fantasy* and Farah Mendlesohn’s *Rhetorics of Fantasy*. An additional important work which has in part influenced this thesis is Diana Wynne Jones’ *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland*. These texts under-pin the analysis presented in this study, with Campbell providing a basis for the analysis of narrative structure, characters, and their archetypes found in GF and Propp the key features of narrative construction therein. The works of contemporary scholars Clute, Attebery and Mendlesohn, are key to understanding the current critical construction of the genre, and the recurrent motifs found therein. In addition, Wynne Jones has been particularly important in identifying the stereotypes common to much GF, if primarily through the form of satire.

The principal primary sources utilised are the works of J.R.R. Tolkien as a foundational text within the broad genre of fantasy and in the arena of GF Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman's *Dragonlance Chronicles*, R.A. Salvatore's *Forgotten Realms* novels,⁶ in particular his *Drizzt Series*, and the *Riftwar Saga* of Raymond E. Feist, all of which clearly incorporate the conventions of the RPG and all of which began in the 1980s and have continued to the present day. While other literary examples have been used, such as David Eddings' *Belgariad*, significant use has been made of these particular primary texts. For many aspects of this study, accurate figures for the readership of fantasy would have been an advantage. A demographic breakdown of who reads fantasy, and what fantasy they read would have been invaluable. Similarly, a study tracing the importance and impact of Del Rey as an editor and publisher, along with research into the impact of the Ballantine Adult Fantasy series, is long over due. However, appropriate material on these topics has been almost impossible to obtain, as there are few readily available comprehensive academic studies of these topics. To study fantasy is to study a popular genre of fiction, which encompasses the publishing and marketing category of fantasy, and the fan perspective of what is fantasy. While comprehensive figures are difficult to obtain, these perspectives form a necessary part of this study.

The analysis presented here will explore the relationship of the RPG to developments in genre fantasy in the 1980s and 1990s. It will seek to elucidate how the codification of fantasy conventions for the ludic form influenced the settings and narrative which were utilised by fantasy authors. It will challenge existing critical approaches to fantasy that rely on Tolkien for providing the foundations of analysis with little consideration of how many apparent fantasy conventions owe little to his work. This thesis will thus demonstrate how the RPG may function as a commentary on the text and thus provide a cohesive framework for analysis. The first chapter, therefore, will examine the construction of genre in contemporary scholarship and how this can be re-conceptualised to take account of the development of the RPG. The second chapter will contextualise the RPG and explore its relationship with the genre of fantasy. The second part of the thesis, comprising chapters three, four and five, will analyse how

⁶ R.A. Salvatore is the author of a long running series of *Forgotten Realms* novels which focus on the continuing adventures of a dark elf character, Drizzt Do'Urden. For ease of reference and to avoid confusion, when the series as a whole is referred to the term *Drizzt Series* will be used. The specific narrative sequences and novels will be given their correct titles when applicable.

the codified forms of world building, magic systems and character generation found in the RPG can be utilised to analyse GF.

Section One – Examining the Foundations

Genre Fantasy, Tolkien and the RPG

Like so much Fantasy scholarship, the place to begin seems to be the works of J.R.R. Tolkien.⁷ It seems that one cannot discuss fantasy without discussing Tolkien. Due to the volume of readily available and well known scholarly material on Tolkien and his work it is perhaps unnecessary to go into explicit detail of how, why and to what extent he influenced the genre of fantasy. One of the more important recent texts is Tom Shippey's *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* in which Shippey traces out the influences on and techniques of Tolkien's work from *The Hobbit*, through *The Lord of the Rings (LotR)* to *The Silmarillion*.⁸ However, some brief discussion is necessary of how Tolkien's work affected the genre, in addition to how it is related to the RPG and to the extent that the RPG was influenced by his work.

While *LotR* was initially published as three volumes over the period 1954-55, it was with the unauthorised inexpensive Ace paperback editions and the official Ballantine paperbacks in the 1960s, rather than the relatively expensive 'official' hardbacks, that *LotR* became a favourite on American university campuses.⁹ The popularity of, and familiarity with, the series is evidenced by such cultural artefacts as the 'FRODO LIVES' badges¹⁰ and Leonard Nimoy's *The Ballad of Bilbo Baggins* appearing in the mid to late 1960s.¹¹ The cultural influence of Tolkien's work has continued in more recent years with Peter Jackson's films adaptations of *LotR* and the planned film

⁷ The body of scholarship available on Professor Tolkien and his work is both considerable and well known. In particular the Tolkien Society maintains an extensive bibliography of work focused on Tolkien and his writing www.tolkiensociety.org For specific texts detailing a range of perspectives see T. A. Shippey, *The Road to Middle Earth: How J.R.R. Tolkien Created a New Mythology*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1982); Verlyn Flieger and Carl F. Hostetter ed. *Tolkien's Legendarium: Essays on The History of Middle Earth*, (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 2000) and Lin Carter *Tolkien: A look Behind 'The Lord of the Rings'* (New York: Ballentine Books, 1969).

⁸ T.A. Shippey *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* (London: HarperCollins, 2000), J.R.R. Tolkien *The Hobbit; or There and Back Again* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1937), idem. *The Fellowship of the Ring* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1954), idem. *The Two Towers* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1954), idem. *The Return of the King* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1955), J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1977)

⁹ The Ballantine Books editions, released in 1965, bore the heading 'The Authorized Edition of the Famous Fantasy Trilogy' on the cover.

¹⁰ Theodore Roszak *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (University of California Press, 1995) p.40

¹¹ From the album Leonard Nimoy *Two Sides of Leonard Nimoy* (Dot Records, 1968).

adaptation of *The Hobbit*.¹² It is difficult to deny, or quantify, the impact of Tolkien's work, especially in the field of fantasy.

It is now commonly accepted in fantasy criticism that the genre of fantasy originally coalesced around Tolkien's *LotR*. Brian Attebery has described *LotR* as forming the mental 'template' for fantasy, at least in the Western English fantasy tradition.¹³ Andy Sawyer has argued that fantasy as a popular genre has evolved at least twice, the first iteration of 'sword and sorcery' or 'heroic fantasy' stemming from Howard's *Conan*, and the second stemming from Tolkien's *LotR*.¹⁴ Therefore, *LotR* is generally accepted as a central and important text at the centre of popular fantasy and at the heart of Western English fantasy.

In addition to critics and scholars, Tolkien's work has also been identified as a key and influential text by authors in the field. Many authors regard Tolkien's trilogy as having a discernable impact on what they write. Robin Hobb describes this in terms of an inspirational 'quest':¹⁵

[...] in a sense, he [Tolkien] sent a whole generation of us forth on a quest. We were doomed to fail of course. There was not, and simply is not, anything that is 'just like' *Lord of the Rings*.¹⁶

Other noted authors have viewed Tolkien's work more critically. Michael Moorcock infamously described *LotR* as 'Epic Pooh' and China Miéville has argued that:

Tolkien is the wen on the arse of fantasy literature. His oeuvre is massive and contagious – you can't ignore it, so don't even try. The best you can do is consciously try to lance the boil. [...] Tolkien's clichés – elves 'n' dwarfs 'n' magic rings – have spread like viruses.¹⁷

¹² *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* dir. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2001); *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* dir. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2002), *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* dir. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2003). Peter Jackson is also due to direct the currently pre-production *The Hobbit Part 1* (New Line Cinema, expected release 2012) and *The Hobbit Part 2* (New Line Cinema, expected release 2013)

¹³ Brian Attebery *Strategies of Fantasy* (Indiana: University of Indiana Press, 1992) p.14

¹⁴ Andy Sawyer 'Who "Owns" Children's Fantasy?' *Foundation* Vol.32 No.88 (2003) pp.5-18, p.16.

¹⁵ Robin Hobb is a popular author of modern genre fantasy, she also writes urban fantasy under the name Megan Lindholm.

¹⁶ Karen Haber ed. *Meditations on Middle-Earth*, (London: Simon and Schuster, 2002), p94

¹⁷ An oft-cited quotation attributed to Miéville. See

<http://www.panmacmillan.com/displayPage.asp?PageID=3395> [last accessed 11/11/10] and Henry Farrell 'Socialist Surrealism' in Donald Hassler and Clyde Wilcox eds, *New Boundaries in Political Science Fiction*, (Columbia S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), p.272

Despite the negative tone of Miéville's comment, it is clear that Tolkien, and the work he inspired, had a significant impact on Miéville. While he may not like it, he admits that 'you can't ignore it'. Indeed Miéville's attitude as a reaction against Tolkien is not uncommon. Harold Bloom argued for a consideration of how writers wrote against the work of their predecessors in an attempt to find an original poetic vision, and he described this reaction as an anxiety of influence.¹⁸ Bloom's argument goes beyond suggesting simply reaction to previous literary work, and suggests that in act of trying to escape literary antecedents, contemporary writers ultimately invoke them. Therefore, in trying to escape Tolkien, Miéville in effect invites close comparison. However, whether one views Tolkien's work as a positive or negative influence, it remains the acknowledged and identifiable touchstone for understanding fantasy as a genre.

It should be made clear that acknowledging *LotR* as a key text in the formation of the fantasy genre, is not an implied or tacit argument that it was the *first* fantasy text or the fantasy ur-text. Paul Kincaid has argued convincingly that attempting to isolate the ur-text for SF, and by analogy, fantasy, is an exercise in futility.¹⁹ To locate *LotR* as fantasy ur-text would deny or ignore the tradition of the fantastic in which Tolkien was writing, and the importance of earlier fantastic texts such as Robert E. Howard's Hyborian Age stories, Lord Dunsany's faerie stories, the work of William Morris, and the importance of epics, myths and legends.²⁰ Yet the separation of the fantasy tradition, of which *LotR* was just another work in a long line, and the genre of fantasy, of which *LotR* was a formative prime text, is an important distinction. It would seem that historical precedent is not necessarily the defining attribute of an important key text, and that later works can assume primacy over their earlier counterparts.

The argument that Tolkien's *LotR* is a key text is based on Attebery's formulation of the 'fuzzy set'.²¹ Attebery suggests that important texts within the literature of the fantastic have emerged over time, with 'like' or similar texts clustering around the

¹⁸ See Harold Bloom *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1973).

¹⁹ Paul Kincaid 'On the Origins of Genre' *Extrapolation* Vol.44 No.4 (Winter 2003) pp.13-21.

²⁰ For a more comprehensive list and discussion of Tolkien's influences see T. A. Shippey *The Road to Middle Earth: How J.R.R. Tolkien Created a New Mythology* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1982) and idem. *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001)

²¹ Attebery *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992) Chapter 1.

identified key text, causing a loose set to emerge. The genre is thus composed of identified key texts that illustrate or demonstrate important aspects of fantastic literature and are therefore representative of other works which exhibit similar patterns. As the boundaries of these ‘fuzzy sets’ are entirely porous and permeable, the resulting models can be combined into a literary Venn diagram to form the body of the genre. Attebery’s suggestion, therefore, is that *LotR* is the identifiable text at the centre of a fuzzy set and is illustrative of a particular type of fantasy writing. As both Attebery and Sawyer note that *LotR* is central to the formation of the popular genre of fantasy it can then be read as the key text at the centre of the GF fuzzy set.

In the case of the fuzzy set distinction, primacy is not always attributable to the earliest example of or most critically respected text, rather the focus is on how representative, illustrative and influential the key text is. These points are not always mutually exclusive, but it is an important consideration in evaluating whether or not we should locate any particular text at the centre of a fuzzy set. John Clute argues that *LotR*, in addition to Tolkien’s famous lecture ‘On Fairy Stories’, did much to consolidate a particular approach to fantasy writing and world creation.²² In fact Clute goes so far as to suggest that Tolkien’s ‘Secondary World’ became a ‘template which later writers have become accustomed to use as a *fixed* background against which all sorts of stories, very few of them full fantasies can be told’.²³ This argument echoes Attebery’s claim that Tolkien’s work is a template for Western fantasy.²⁴ To both Clute and Attebery *LotR* is clearly a key text of GF literature, and Tolkien’s work in general is rightfully placed at the centre of the GF fuzzy set. However, this thesis posits that it is not necessarily *the only* fuzzy set. For Attebery, Tolkien’s world is illustrative of a particular approach to fantasy story-telling and the principal example of this formula or standard. Yet even within his discussion of Tolkien’s work, Clute notes that although many authors have apparently used Middle Earth as a fixed background, ‘very few of them [are] full fantasies’, creating an apparent paradox discussed here in Chapter Three – World Building. This paradox

²² John Clute, ‘J.R.R. Tolkien’ in John Clute and John Grant eds., *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, (London: Orbit, 1997), pp.950-5.

²³ Ibid. Full fantasy refers to a specific model Clute suggests as a guiding principle for the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*. It is a four-fold model, derived from Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, and is comprised of Wrongness, Thinning, Recognition and Healing. Clute expands upon this in ‘Grail, Groundhog and Godgame’, *JFA*, 10:4 (2000), pp.330-337.

²⁴ Attebery *Strategies of Fantasy* p.14

suggests that although Tolkien and *LotR* are influential, *LotR* is perhaps not as representative of the genre as we might assume. If it is true that a significant number of authors have adapted Tolkien into a common and identifiable form which is nevertheless inconsistent with the narrative structures in *LotR*, and it is also true that the key text should be 'like' the rest of the set, then it is likely that a different text, representative of this shift, has since entered the GF sphere and taken its place at the centre of the GF fuzzy set. I believe this text to be the Fantasy RPG.

The most in/famous fantasy RPG, *Dungeons and Dragons (D&D)*, was clearly inspired by Tolkien's *LotR*.²⁵ It was not until the Sixth printing of the original *D&D Basic Set* in 1977 that references to Ents were changed to Treants, Hobbits were changed to Halflings and several other references to Tolkien and *LotR* were removed due to copyright infringement.²⁶ At least until that point, indeed since then, it was clear that Tolkien's *LotR* was a model for the *D&D* game, at least in terms of character and creature descriptions, and while subsequent editions and adaptations have developed along different lines, the original conception of *D&D* is hard to separate from Tolkien's influence. However, what is also evident is that *D&D* adapted conventions, descriptions and concepts into a narrative/ludic form, which necessitated changes to the narrative formula, or model, that Tolkien had used and that subsequent fantasy authors noted these changes.

²⁵ *Dungeons and Dragons (D&D)* (TSR Hobbies, Inc, 1974)

²⁶ See <http://www.acaeum.com/ddindexes/setpages/original.html> [last accessed 20/10/10] Other examples included the removal or alteration of terms which infringed on Tolkien's literary copyright, such as Nazgûl and Balrog. The 1st to 5th printings used the terms Hobbit and Ent, as visible on page 9 of the *Men & Magic* supplement included in the *Basic Set*.

Diana Wynne Jones and Defining the Genre

To argue that Tolkien's work is inspirational and influential, and yet not at the centre of the genre's fuzzy set requires further discussion. This distinction can be illustrated by *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland*.²⁷ A renowned and popular children's fantasy author, Diana Wynne Jones' humorous A-Z of what by that time were considered fantasy clichés, was written to '[poke] fun at the large number of adult fantasies set in what the writers fondly believe to be a medieval landscape'.²⁸ Organised as a guidebook for 'tourists' (readers), it makes reference to the 'management' (authors) who organise these tours via brochures (novels) whose conclusion will only be reached at the end of the third brochure (last book of a trilogy). While the critical value of the *Tough Guide* may be overlooked due to its albeit pointed humour, when read in conjunction with Clute and Grant's *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* it provides a counterpoint to the literary historical perspective therein. Yet behind the humour is a very serious and important consideration: the *Tough Guide* is an author's perception of the constraints, rules and conventions of the genre in which she writes. That Jones does not believe in conforming to these conventions and therefore ridicules them does not lessen the validity of the study. Jones discusses this idea of the boundaries of convention in 'Two Kinds of Writing':

Every hidden assumption I discovered seems to be felt as a law, or a rule [...] They shackle the speculative fiction written for adults [...] But let no one argue that these hidden assumptions about writing for adults are not there. I assure you they are. I felt every one of them like a ball and chain when I tried to do it. I think it is high time people started examining them in order to free the wealth of good stories cramped under this load of old iron. For, when all is said and done, it is telling a good story, and telling it well, that is the point of both kinds of writing.²⁹

Jones believes there are rules and conventions associated with fantasy writing and that they are constricting and pervasive and it is these rules that are the substance of the *Tough Guide*. The *Tough Guide*'s importance to this thesis is twofold. Firstly, Jones' book is an overt confirmation and codification of perceived clichéd conventions and 'rules' of fantasy written in the 1980s and 1990s and is therefore an

²⁷ Diana Wynne Jones *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland* (London: Gollancz, 2004)

²⁸ Diana Wynne Jones, 'Inventing the Middle Ages', www.leemac.freeseerve.co.uk/medieval.htm [last accessed 04/08/10].

²⁹ Diana Wynne Jones, 'Two Kinds of Writing', *The Medusa: The Journal of the P.J.F.*, 1 (1990), pp.1-4, p.4. See also <http://suberic.net/dwj/medusa.html> [last accessed 04/08/10]. The two types of writing identified are writing fantasy/speculative fiction for adults and for children.

identifiable study of GF convention that can be interrogated. Secondly, because of the humorous bent of the book and the focus on lampooning conventions Jones does not explore why these conventions evolved and where they came from. As a result we have an opportunity to investigate these conventions and use them to further contemporary critical thought.

The relationship between the *Tough Guide* and Tolkien is a complex one. The 2004 Gollancz edition bears a subtitle which reads, ‘Actually very little to do with *The Lord of the Rings*.’ While this may refer to the fictional ‘blurbs’ on the back of this edition by Aragorn son of Arathorn³⁰ and Gimli son of Gloin,³¹ it is a very pertinent point, as it could also imply that the conventions and stereotypes Jones mocks did not in fact originate with Tolkien’s work. Conversely, even a work that has ‘little to do with’ *LotR* makes mention of the fact that *LotR* exists and draws distinctions based on the assumed primacy of Tolkien’s epic. It seems that even in its absence Tolkien’s influence is felt and *LotR* remains a fantasy touchstone. However, if the significant key text in the genesis of the genre is Tolkien’s *LotR*, then a book that satirises the conventions of the genre should refer directly to the themes, characters and settings of *LotR* more directly rather than this circumspectly. If Tolkien’s *LotR* is excluded from Jones’ parody, if the satire is focused on what appear to be core conventions that nevertheless do not appear in his work, then one could argue that the least innovative examples of fantasy, the centre of the genre, must not be derived from *LotR* but rather from a different set of ‘core’ texts which utilise these clichés.

A further point that complicates the argument is that Jones was a student of Tolkien’s and may have avoided criticising his work for more personal reasons such as loyalty, friendship and respect. However, suggesting that because *LotR* does not conform to the stereotypes highlighted by Jones and therefore *LotR* is not representative of the centre of the genre does not mean that Tolkien’s work was never central, it suggests that by 1994 the genre had shifted away from the original paradigm of fantasy created by Tolkien and toward a different key text and into a fuzzy set. These conventions and clichés are present in fantasy that followed Tolkien and although *LotR* greatly

³⁰ “I’ve got a magic sword actually, so I’ll stick with that if you don’t mind. Even if it is broken.”

ARAGORN son of ARATHORN

³¹ “Would have been a lot more use on the quest than three Elven hairs.” GIMLI son of GLOIN.

informed that work, it has clearly followed a different paradigm. It is arguable that understanding the historical, cultural and paraliterary significance of the RPG, in particular *D&D* and RPG-based GF, can explain this movement toward a perceived ossified and fixed formula.

Jones' *Tough Guide* describes a generic fantasyland brimming full of cliché, stereotype and convention. Some of the entries seem to refer to *LotR*. For example, the entry for 'Dwarven Fastness', states:

A wondrous place. It normally occupies the whole inside of a mountain. It has concealed gates, often protected by runes. Inside there is gallery after gallery carved out of the mountain, usually ornamented with Dwarven sculpture and jewels. [...] the place is so many-levelled and labyrinthine that Tourists easily become lost there. [...] on occasion the fastness will be deserted, long-abandoned.³²

This entry is reminiscent of Tolkien's mines of Moria in *LotR* as well as of the Lonely Mountain lair of Smaug, Erebor, in *The Hobbit* (1937). Yet in both of Tolkien's incarnations of the Dwarven Fastness, the hall has been occupied by a monstrous force, and has been corrupted rather than being abandoned or deserted. GF texts abound with further examples, such as the lost Dwarven Kingdom of 'Mithril Hall' which leads to the Underdark in *Streams of Silver* (1989) by R.A. Salvatore which bears strong similarities to Tolkien's Moria.³³ The ruined city of Xak Tsaroth in Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman's *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* (1984), while not a Dwarven Fastness, is a ruined city that has collapsed into a dark chasm and appears to fulfil a similar narrative role and function. The Mac Mordain Cadal of the Grey Tower's Dwarves in Raymond E. Feist's *Magician* (1982), although not a citadel, is an ancient Dwarven mine in which one of the characters gets lost. Again this appears to match the essence of the cliché that Jones identifies. By no means are these the only examples of underground lairs and important tunnel systems. In Eddings' *Belgariad* the characters encounter the underground caverns and city of the Ulgos in *Magician's Gambit* (1983) as well as the underground dungeons and tunnels of Ctuchik's city of Cthol Murgos. These examples are not limited to texts from the early 1980s and 1990s; the mountain kingdom of the Firbolg in Elizabeth Haydon's *Rhapsody* (1999 – 2002) trilogy fits Jones' description almost exactly, even if the

³² Wynne Jones *Tough Guide* (2004) p.63

³³ The term mithral is an obvious reference to Tolkien and illustrates the inspirational or influential aspect of Tolkien's writing on GF texts.

word Dwarf is not used. So while it may appear that the cliché has been derived from Tolkien's work, these GF texts have adapted it, emphasising alternative constructions and its narrative function as a place of adventure and lurking evil.

Consider Jones' entry on 'Wizards':

Wizards are normally intensely old. They live solitary lives, mostly in towers or citadels, or in a special City which has facilities for study. They will have been studying magic for centuries and, alas, the great majority have been seriously dehumanized by those studies. Two-thirds have become evil, possibly agents of the Dark Lord. The remaining good one-third have become eccentrics or drunks or just very hard to understand. Evil or Good, Wizards are the strongest magic users of all except for the Dark Lord and Goddesses and Gods, and can usually be distinguished by the fact that they have long beards and wear robes. [...] if crossed, most wizards get childishly offended and exact terrible revenge. Angry Wizards are likely to throw lumps of Landscape hither and thither, move Mountains, wave Weather systems about [...], hurl Demons, flood or bury cities and pollute whole Countries with sleeting magics.³⁴

If we consider *LotR* as representative of this type of fantasy, then the reference to wizards should be applicable to the character of Gandalf, and perhaps to that of Saruman. Superficially, this does indeed appear to be the case. Gandalf and Saruman are incredibly old and both correspond to Jones' polarised good and evil wizards. Lastly, both Saruman and Gandalf wear the requisite robes and beards. What is perhaps surprising to note, however, is that in terms of the power wielded by wizards in Jones' entry, neither Gandalf nor Saruman fits the description. Despite instances of Gandalf becoming annoyed and angry, the confrontation between Gandalf and Saruman, and the various battles and perils encountered by the Fellowship and later whole armies in *LotR*, Gandalf does not perform active magic or create spell effects in the way Jones describes as common to wizards. In fact, when confronting Saruman or the Nazgûl, Gandalf does not cast a fireball spell, conjure lightning, move mountains, rip up the landscape, or create floods. In *LotR*, Gandalf's magic is limited to illusion,³⁵ the conjuration of light³⁶ and breaking the spell of fear created by the Witch-King of Angmar at the battle of Minas Tirith.³⁷ Even when faced with the

³⁴ Wynne Jones *Tough Guide* pp.240-241

³⁵ In creating the appearance of horses riding the crest of the flood of the river Isen. *The Fellowship of the Ring* 'The Flight to the Ford' p.209.

³⁶ The creation of a glowing light from his staff in Moria. *The Fellowship of the Ring* 'A Journey in the Dark' p302

³⁷ Although, the breaking of the Witch King's spell could in fact be seen as the power of the ring Gandalf wears that inspires courage, rather than any direct counter-spell. *The Return of the King* 'The Siege of Gondor' p791

Balrog in a direct one-on-one confrontation, Gandalf faces it with his sword and staff, rather than employing magic spells. If the argument is advanced that as a good wizard Gandalf chooses not to employ magical effects, then his evil counterpart Saruman, freed from this moral constraint, should exhibit vastly more illustrative magical effects. However, with the exception of the vague ‘fires of Isengard’³⁸ and some inference of magical hypnosis,³⁹ it once again appears that Middle Earth is not a land of active, wieldable magic, even by evil wizards. The cliché of angry, magically powerful wizards who can directly affect the world around them with magic, does not originate with *LotR*. If we accept Jones’ characterisation of Wizards as magically active, we must recognise that this is not from Tolkien, and therefore it is not a Tolkien-esque construction. It appears that the convention that Jones highlights is one that has borrowed the archetypal image of the wizard, either from Tolkien or Arthurian Myth, while at the same time adapting the concept into something more active.⁴⁰

The active nature of magic as a usable, wieldable force can also be seen in Jones’ description of ‘magic’ in the *Tough Guide*.⁴¹ Here she highlights nine major categories and an additional tenth catchall category. Again, it is difficult to find any significant correspondence between Jones’ definition and the magic of Tolkien’s *LotR*. Nevertheless, a reader of fantasy will undoubtedly recognise many of the forms of magic that Jones outlines. Yet, if they don’t originate with Tolkien, the presumed centre of the genre, where do they originate? The clichés of the genre are clearly taken from somewhere, simply not from *LotR*. Thus they must come from some other source that corresponds to a different approach to or conception of fantasy. Jones is

³⁸ Which in the recent Peter Jackson film adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003) is represented by alchemical gunpowder in *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (2002). The entry in Tolkien’s work reads ‘there was a crash and a flash of flame and smoke [...] a gaping hole was blasted in the wall’ and it is described as ‘Devilry of Saruman! [...] the fire of Orthanc’. *The Two Towers* ‘Helm’s Deep’ p.525

³⁹ Both the technique taught to Grima and found in *The Two Towers* ‘The King of the Golden Hall’ p.502 and used by Saruman in *The Return of the King* ‘Scouring of the Shire’ p.995

⁴⁰ The archetypal image is linked to Carl Jung’s Archetype of the Wise Old Man, but there is obviously a distinction between the image and the concept. See Polly Young-Eisendrath and Terence Dawson, *The Cambridge Companion to Jung*, 2nd edn, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) for an accessible summary of key points, or Carl Jung *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, recorded and edited by Aniela Jaffé ; translated from the German by Richard and Clara Winston, (London: Fontana Press, 1995) and ‘The Dual Mother’ *Symbols of transformation: an analysis of the prelude to a case of schizophrenia*, Collected Works of C. G. Jung, 5, trans by R.F.C. Hull, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956), par. 612. .

⁴¹ Wynne Jones *Tough Guide* pp.127-128

also responsible for the extensive entry ‘Magic’ in the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*.⁴² In this entry, Jones again focuses on identifying types of magic found in Fantasy and notes:

Although notions of magic differ slightly from writer to writer, there is a remarkable consensus among fantasy writers, especially writers of genre fantasy: magic, when present, can do almost anything, but obeys certain rules according to its nature.⁴³

Jones constructs an impressive list of different iterations of magic found in fantasy and yet does not associate a single one with Tolkien’s work. *LotR* is in fact conspicuous in its absence. Also missing from her list of magical examples are the various magic systems and formulated magical rules associated with RPGs and their related fictions. In fact she notes that, ‘attempts to write to a system or define the rules [...] produce shallow and simplistic fantasies.’⁴⁴ This opinion, in conjunction with the absence of any consideration of the RPG magic system, could be read as an additional example of the lack of critical regard for RPGs and RPG-based fictions. Yet Jones’ insistence that magic conform to rules, in addition to having discernable effects, would suggest that the RPG magic system provides an excellent conceptual framework for the discussion of magic as an active force within genre fantasy.

Jones’ *Tough Guide* is not completely ignored as a critical resource. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn make special reference to Jones’ *Tough Guide* in *A Short History of Fantasy*.⁴⁵ They cite Jones’ entry on ‘Horses’ in particular:

Horses are of a breed unique to Fantasyland. They are capable of galloping full-tilt all day without a rest. Sometimes they do not require food or water. They never cast shoes, go lame, or put their hooves down holes, except when the Management deems it necessary as when the forces of the Dark Lord are only half an hour behind.⁴⁶

The only horse in Tolkien’s *LotR* that resembles this description is Shadowfax, a *meadh*, a breed of horse that Tolkien specifically mentions as an exceptional breed and atypical:

⁴² Diana Wynne Jones, ‘Magic’, in Clute and Grant eds, *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, pp.615-8

⁴³ *ibid.* pp.615-616

⁴⁴ *ibid.* p.616

⁴⁵ Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, *A Short History of Fantasy*, (London: Middlesex University Press, 2009), p.144

⁴⁶ Wynne Jones *Tough Guide* p.100

For Gandalf took the horse that is called Shadowfax, the most precious of all the king's steeds, chief of the *Mearas*, which only the Lord of the Mark may ride. For the sire of their race was the great horse of Eorl that knew the speech of Men.⁴⁷

For the most part, Jones has aimed the majority of her entries on texts other than Tolkien's. More importantly, *LotR* often has no correspondence to the conventions that Jones highlights, again suggesting that Tolkien's work is not representative of genre fantasy. James and Mendlesohn suggest that Jones' targets are 'medievalist fantasies'.⁴⁸ They define Medievalist Fantasy as:

A story set in a world based in some loose way on the world of the European Middle Ages, often drawing its inspiration from medieval romance and the Matter of Britain, and frequently in the form of a quest fantasy.⁴⁹

What problematises this definition is that not only does it fit *LotR*, it is also very similar to their proposed definitions for Heroic Fantasy, High Fantasy, Quest Fantasy, Sword-and-Sorcery and Theatre Fantasy.⁵⁰ While each definition highlights a subtle or finely nuanced difference, they appear to be at least heavily overlapping and self-referential. If there is no clear distinction between the terms, then their use as definitions and descriptors is somewhat limited. This problem of definition is not attributable to James and Mendlesohn; rather their definitions are examples of a symptomatic confusion in the genre as to a clear system of classification. As there is no agreed upon overarching framework for the classification of Fantasy, or even agreement on the definition or limits of Fantasy it is unsurprising that a plethora of overlapping and indistinct terms has developed over time. The confusion of terminology leads to critical misunderstandings and arguments at cross-purposes. If we suggest that Jones' *Tough Guide* is lampooning Medievalist Fantasy, and it is also mocking generic conventions, we are led to the conclusion that Medievalist Fantasy is the generic norm or that all genre fantasy is Medievalist Fantasy. Clearly this is not the case. This argument about definition is addressed in Chapter One – Defining the Genre and is linked to the need to re-conceptualise the genre in light of the impact of the RPG and of reaching a critical consensus over terminology.

⁴⁷ J.R.R. Tolkien *The Two Towers* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1956) Chapter 2 'The Riders of Rohan' p.425

⁴⁸ James and Mendlesohn *A Short History of Fantasy* p.144

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.254

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.254-255

What is clear from the above discussion is that *LotR*, while influential, inspirational and important, is not representative of a significant proportion of more recent genre fantasy writing. Indeed, many elements assumed to be derived from Tolkien's work are in fact conceptually different, and it is perhaps only the superficial appearance of these conventions that makes them appear as Tolkien-esque. It then follows that *LotR* is not the key text at the centre of the fuzzy set. The RPG, while not a true narrative text in the traditional literary sense, is conceptually closer to the conventions of genre fantasy Jones lampoons than is *LotR*. In effect then, the RPG is a meta-textual commentary on and illustrative of these concepts and conventions, and as a result its conventions should factor into any critical analysis of the genre.

Why the RPG?

As a narrative/ludic text the RPG clearly does not form part of the traditional construction of a literary genre.⁵¹ Nevertheless, the RPG is a product of the literary genre, deriving its existence from fantasy literature. The RPG's distillation, assimilation and codification of particular core fantasy conventions into rule-sets and guidelines constitute an untapped critical resource with which to analyse genre fantasy and it can be used as a meta-textual commentary on the conventions of the genre and facilitates further critical discourse. The traditional literary and historical view of the genre has not adapted to the genre's evolution and development, as the genre has evolved, in conjunction with its adaptation and dissemination through ludic/narrative forms such as the RPG and RPG-associated computer games.

James and Mendlesohn have stated that 'in the hands of real hacks (that is, people writing to a franchise) the quest form is easy to exhaust' and that 'the Weis/Hickman books are very derivative'.⁵² Yet by their derivative nature, these books illustrate genre convention, and therefore are a necessary source for the study of fantasy. In addition, although these texts are termed 'derivative' they are not uninspired Tolkien clones. Even if they are heavily influenced by Tolkien's work, borrowing terms, narrative objects and settings, their nature as a narrative/ludic product, rather than a direct literary product, means that they are part of a different tradition. Therefore, as representative of clichéd fantasy, and as representative of RPG-based fiction, the key text of their fuzzy set, *D&D*, should be identified and considered. To accurately analyse and evaluate genre fantasy texts, a scholar of the fantastic must be aware of the core concepts in order to identify when they are being subverted, inverted or discarded. While Jones listed many of these in *Tough Guide*, the RPG and RPG-based literature explain and contextualise these conventions. It follows that these stereotypes and genre conventions should be isolated and examined in order to clarify the general dynamics of and shifts in the genre over time. Just as Tolkien's work

⁵¹ While some narratives, such as those by Gene Wolfe, have been described as ludic, in that they imply a game between author and reader, the RPG is by definition a ludic text with narrative elements, a text which details and promotes a game that is constructed through story and therefore narrative/ludic has been used as the descriptor.

⁵² Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn *A Short History of Fantasy* (London: Middlesex University Press, 2009) p.123

inspired imitators so to has the RPG. As a result, the conventions of the RPG have become the clichés of GF. The RPG can therefore be read as a codified form of genre cliché and convention. As a result, the RPG is fundamental to both the formation of the genre as it stands⁵³ as well as to a deeper, more accurate analysis of genre convention.

The RPG has often been overlooked by academics in the field of fantasy scholarship for a number of reasons. The most obvious and defensible reason is that fantasy scholarship has traditionally concentrated research on literary texts and not on ludic/narrative texts, games and other related fantasy products. However, literature is not created in a vacuum, markets are not isolated islands and fans and consumers do not purchase only one type of product; therefore, a more inter-disciplinary approach is necessary. The genre of fantasy, like any other literary genre, is constructed by authors who are influenced, at least in part, by external factors. As Steven Erikson notes about his professional association with Ian C. Esslemont:

The synergy between two creative processes is a curious thing; beneath the obvious surface (where glancing linkages can be made with elan), there are a host of more complicated relationships at work [...] Factors were at work on us all the while: the outer world—our studies (where we were learning the craft of fiction writing), the books we read, the films we watched, the ongoing analyses we engaged in on myriad subjects, from anthropology to war fiction and nonfiction [...] The only thing we brought into that magical world was a set of sensibilities shaped by what we liked and what we didn't like [...] simply a reflection of our imaginations using anything and everything at our disposal.⁵⁴

If the creative process of writing is significantly influenced by non-literary factors, then it seems logical that, in order to identify core conventions of the genre, we consider the external sources that have deeply affected authors and their creative processes. Within the genre of fantasy, the RPG has had considerable literary influence. As Erikson goes on to say:

The role of *AD&D* is seminal to modern fantasy fiction. If anything, its influence is so vast it can be hard to get a handle on it.⁵⁵

⁵³ Perhaps more accurately, as it stood in the 1980s and 1990s.

⁵⁴ Steven Erikson 'The World of the Malazan Empire and Role-playing Games'
<http://www.stevenerikson.com/index.php/the-world-of-the-malazan-empire-and-role-playing-games/>

[last accessed 01/11/10]

⁵⁵ Ibid., [01/11/10]

While this is clearly the view of one author, it at least provides a starting point for the consideration of the RPG in terms of its relationship to the genre.

A second reason academics may have overlooked its influence is the misconception that the RPG, and its related products, tie-ins and media forms, represents a small niche market of fans and gamers who game rather than read literature. However, as Vander Ploeg and Philips have noted, gamers ‘comprise an increasing and significant proportion of the readers of fantasy fiction’.⁵⁶ However, the emerging dominance of the medium of the computer game, and the attention it has rightly attracted, has overshadowed the importance of the RPG. As W.A. Senior notes, “‘gaming’ has been relocated to a new dimension with a close connection to science fiction; it often refers to the rapidly expanding universe of the video game’.⁵⁷

While Senior locates a new definition of the word ‘gaming’ to refer specifically to video gaming as opposed to the historical or traditional meaning of gambling, this bypasses the use of the term ‘gaming’ to refer to RPGs, a form that precedes the popular home-computer game.⁵⁸ Indeed, it also overlooks how the mathematical rubric and structures of RPGs have influenced computer game construction. Senior’s awareness of the computer game, but lack of knowledge concerning RPGs is not uncommon within the field of fantasy scholarship, despite the popularity of the form, and the impact it has had on the fantasy landscape. The resonance of the term ‘gaming’ that Senior identifies is linked to William Gibson’s cyberpunk world in *Neuromancer*,⁵⁹ and Senior addresses it in terms of Science Fiction becoming a reality. In the sister field of Fantasy, it could be argued that ‘Gaming’ has also affected reality, but in the terms of the fantasy RPG, both the pen-and-paper games and their computer game counterparts. While the dominance and prevalence of the computer game as a new media form has overshadowed this RPG term of ‘gaming’, this should not exclude consideration of the narrative/ludic form of the RPG. The

⁵⁶ Scott Vander Ploeg and Kenneth Philips ‘Playing With Power: The Science of Magic in Interactive Fantasy’ *JFA* Vol. 9 No.2 pp.142-156 p.144

⁵⁷ W.A. Senior ‘On Language, with a Nod to William Safire’ *JFA* Vol.12 Issue 3 pp.247-249, p.247

⁵⁸ Although William Crowther and Don Woods *Colossal Cave Adventure* was released in 1976 and 1977 and was an early text based adventure game developed at Stanford University that ran on a large mainframe computer with Microsoft eventually releasing a version for the IBM PC in 1981. *Zork* (Infocom 1981) is perhaps the most famous text adventure descendant of *Colossal Cave Adventure*.

⁵⁹ William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace, 1984)

development of the RPG and its approach to fantasy can be considered as an extra-literary meta-text which comments on and influences approaches to the related literary medium and genre.

At the very heart of the literary academic endeavour (the analysis of texts, close reading, the search for more accurate and representative definitions, and the construction of analytical approaches and frameworks) is the desire to achieve a deeper understanding and comprehension of the works and genre being studied. This thesis therefore interrogates the role of RPGs in the construction of the genre. It also demonstrates how the RPG is fundamental to understanding the wider genre of fantasy by examining the interdependent and symbiotic relationship between the literary genre and the game products. Scholarship tends to focus on distinct or original texts that attempt to deepen or widen the genre and define its outer boundaries. However, in order to identify how texts subvert genre norms and push the boundaries of genre convention, we must have a clear conception of the stereotypes and clichés they subvert, as well as their origins. As Amy Devitt has said in relation to the construction of genre, ‘Variation within literary texts is generally more highly valued than is similarity’.⁶⁰ She also notes:

Where rhetorical genre theorists often seek texts that typify a genre, examine writers’ conformity to generic conventions, and study readers’ roles in promoting generic expectations, literary genre theorists are more likely to seek texts that break the rules of a genre, to value writers who violate conventions, and to act as readers promoting unconventional generic readings. Great authors have often been admired for their “breaking” of generic conventions, thereby expanding the literary universe.⁶¹

Innovative novels are interesting, engaging and often of a higher literary quality than their generic counterparts. Yet, texts which exist on the periphery are, by definition, not representative of the genre as a whole; they are the exceptions and they are not the most illustrative of genre conventions. In fact, non-conventional texts and the importance that academic scrutiny places on them create a distorted perception of the genre as a whole, skewing the focus towards ground-breaking works and the edges of the genre, rather than toward its centre. In this respect, and with the exception of Jones’ parody of perceived stereotype, it seems that literary genre theorists have

⁶⁰ Amy Devitt ‘Integrating Rhetorical and Literary Theories of Genre’ *College English* Vol. 62, No.6, July 2000 pp.696-718 p.706

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp.704-5

overlooked an important point. The core of the genre, the centre of the mass of popular fantasy literature, is better suited to explain the fundamentals that non-typical texts exploit or subvert, while the unique or distinctive texts better illustrate the range of possibilities beyond them. Literary merit is not necessarily an indicator of critical worth, and popularity should not always be anathema to critical value.

The sample texts within this thesis have been chosen to reflect their critical worth as illustrative of genre convention, not their literary merit. In addition to their worth as examples of the generic structures of GF, these texts are intimately associated with RPGs. As these example texts are illustrative of the relationship between the RPG and the literary genre of fantasy they have been used to explore stereotypical fantasy conventions and why the RPG can be adapted to the critical analysis of fantasy literature. Examples from the sample text have been included in each chapter in order to highlight the link between the RPG convention and the literary genre.

Synopsis of Sample Texts

As Rick Altman notes, albeit satirically, ‘There is no sense in doing genre criticism, it would seem, without first constituting a corpus that is incontrovertibly generic’.⁶² Despite his disdain, however, if we first carefully select representative texts, we can see the examples more clearly and can then apply them to less stark or obvious texts. In light of this the three main RPGFs discussed are: *The Dragonlance Chronicles* by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman, the associated literary series drawing on *D&D*’s gameworld *Dragonlance*; *The Icewind Dale Trilogy* by R.A. Salvatore, set in *D&D*’s *Forgotten Realms* gameworld; and *Magician* and the *Riftwar Saga* by Raymond E. Feist, set in a private gameworld of Feist’s that he originally modelled on *D&D*. Each of these RPGFs marks a different aspect of the relationship and impact of the RPG on genre fantasy literature.

⁶² Rick Altman, *Film/Genre*, (London: British Film Institute, 1999) p.17

Weis and Hickman's *Dragonlance Chronicles*

The *Dragonlance Chronicles* are a direct novelisation of a concurrently developed RPG of the same name. Margaret Weis, an author, was deliberately paired with Tracy Hickman, a game designer, to co-author the novels. The novels themselves were written as the game was being developed by Hickman and play tested by Hickman, Weis and their friends. The novels and game share identical characters, setting and plot. The *Dragonlance Chronicles*, the first trilogy set in the *D&D*-based gameworld Krynn consists of *Dragons of Autumn Twilight*, *Dragons of Winter Night*, and *Dragons of Spring Dawning*.⁶³ The publication of the novels coincided with the publication of the initial *Dragonlance* game modules, with DL1-5 corresponding to the first novel, DL6-9 corresponding to the second novel, and DL10-14 corresponding to the last novel in the trilogy.⁶⁴ Both novels and game modules covered approximately the same plots and events within the gameworld, which essentially detail a dragon war and the return of healing clerical magic to the land. The books, and indeed the first modules, utilise a band of characters, the quintessential balanced party, who find themselves caught up in tumultuous events, ultimately leading to the return of healing magic to the world and thus creating the perfect *D&D* gaming world complete with dragons, magic and healing.

The creation of the new setting for *D&D* games was a commercial decision to expand the *D&D* franchise and construct a fresh setting for adventures. Hickman, as lead game designer on the project, play-tested his new modules with his gaming group, which included Weis. The pair authored the novels in tandem with the plot of the gaming modules and as such the novels can be seen as a literary illustration of the

⁶³ Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman, *Dragons of Autumn Twilight*, poetry by Michael Williams, (London: Penguin, 1986); *idem*, *Dragons of Winter Night*, poetry by Michael Williams, (London: Penguin, 1986); and *idem*, *Dragons of Spring Dawning*, poetry by Michael Williams, (London: Penguin, 1986); these will be referred to collectively as *Chronicles*.

⁶⁴ Dragonlands 1-14 are Tracy Hickman, *Dragons of Despair*, (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR, 1984); Douglas Niles, *Dragons of Flame*, (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR, 1984); Tracy Hickman, *Dragons of Hope*, (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR, 1984); Tracy Hickman and Michael Dobson, *Dragons of Desolation*, (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR, 1984); Michael Dobson, *Dragons of Mystery*, (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR, 1984); Tracy Hickman, *Dragons of Ice*, (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR, 1985); Jeff Grubb, *Dragons of Light*, (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR, 1985); Tracy Hickman and Laura Hickman, *Dragons of War*, (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR, 1985); Douglas Niles, *Dragons of Deceit*, (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR, 1985); Tracy Hickman, *Dragons of Dreams*, (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR, 1985); Michael Dobson, *Dragons of Glory*, (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR, 1985); Harold Johnson and Bruce Heard, *Dragons of Faith*, (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR, 1986); Tracy Hickman, *Dragons of Truth*, (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR, 1986) and Douglas Niles, *Dragons of Triumph*, (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR, 1986).

game and gameworld in a true symbiotic relationship. *The Annotated Chronicles*, a collector's edition of the trilogy, contains notes and anecdotes in the margins from Weis, Hickman and several of the original gamers who play-tested the module, and these detail the close links between the game development, the game-play and the novels.

As it was originally conceived of in game terms, the trilogy is in fact a direct novelisation of the related game, both the overarching plot and world of the game modules, as well as details and developments from the play-testing sessions. The central characters were created as playable characters within the *D&D* system and then developed through play-testing before they were adapted into literary characters. Unlike R.A. Salvatore's *Drizzt Series*, the focus of the *Dragonlance Chronicles* was to illustrate the concurrently developed game, and the inclusion of Hickman, a game designer, in the novelisation process highlights and emphasises this connection. So rather than the usual procedure of RPGs adapting a literary text into a game, in this instance the game was adapted into a literary text.

The plot is centred around the exploits of a band of friends and adventurers, led by the Half-Elf Tanis, as they embark on a series of missions and quests to untangle the mystery of the recent rise in evil forces in the land. As a consequence of their travails, they cause clerical or healing magic to return to the land, and prevent an evil goddess from consuming the world. The end of the trilogy leaves the world in a state of upheaval and chaos, rife for further adventures and quests.

R.A. Salvatore's *Icwind Dale Trilogy* and *The Forgotten Realms*

Salvatore's *Icwind Dale* trilogy is a step separated from its related game. While Salvatore was commissioned to write a trilogy, he was not at that point a gamer, nor was there a specific game module that he was to novelise. Rather, Salvatore was to write a trilogy using the game setting and conventions of the recently launched *Forgotten Realms D&D* setting. He was to dress the story in appropriate *Forgotten Realms* terminology, use identifiable game concepts and utilise previously under-documented map areas. His characters were not to be crossover characters from other novels or from the game. Unlike Weis and Hickman, Salvatore's trilogy was to

explore the potential of the gameworld and to help foster interest in the new game setting.

Like Weis and Hickman, R.A. Salvatore has written RPG-linked novels, specifically in the *D&D* setting of *Forgotten Realms*. Unlike Weis and Hickman, however, Salvatore was not involved in game design until after his relationship began as an author with TSR. His first major gaming credit is his co-authorship of the *Menzoberranzan* campaign boxset with Ed Greenwood in 1992 which followed his publication of a fantasy trilogy set in the Underdark realm and the city of Menzoberranzan. The *Icewind Dale* trilogy⁶⁵ and the *Dark Elf* trilogy⁶⁶ are both set in Faerûn and represent the first six books of the on-going *Drizzt Series*.

In relation to how he started writing for *Forgotten Realms* Salvatore has said:

It was one of the strangest episodes of my writing career. At the time I began writing the asked-for proposal, the *Forgotten Realms* setting was nothing more than a prototype and a single novel, the excellent *Darkwalker on Moonshae* by Doug Niles. When TSR asked me to write a Realms book they sent me all that they had, which amounted to...*Darkwalker on Moonshae*. Thus I came to believe that the Moonshae Isles were the *Forgotten Realms* setting.⁶⁷

[TSR] asked me to audition for the second *Forgotten Realms* novel...I honestly believe it was more luck than anything else at that point because what had happened was most of the TSR writers were in-house people [...] but all the other in-house people were scrambling to do *Dragonlance* novels because *Dragonlance* at the time was just huge, and no one knew how big *Forgotten Realms* would be.⁶⁸

The significant difference in Salvatore's novels when compared to the *Dragonlance Chronicles* is that Salvatore wrote the novels in a loose setting of the gameworld that became codified after he wrote about it. *Waterdeep and the North* by Ed Greenwood 1987 gave only the loosest descriptions of the area of Icewind Dale north of

⁶⁵ R. A. Salvatore's *Icewind Dale Trilogy*, (1988-90) comprised of R. A. Salvatore, *The Crystal Shard*, (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR, 1988); *idem*, *Streams of Silver* (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR, 1989) and *idem*, *The Halfling's Gem* (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR 1990), also available as a collector's omnibus: R. A. Salvatore, *The Icewind Dale Trilogy* (Seattle: Wizards of the Coast, 2000) and as part of the *Legend of Drizzt*, (Seattle: Wizards of the Coast, 2007) reissue of the series in chronological order.

⁶⁶ R. A. Salvatore's *Dark Elf Trilogy*, (1990-91) comprised of R. A. Salvatore, *Homeland*, (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR, 1990); *idem*, *Exile* (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR, 1990) and *idem*, *Sojourn*, (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR, 1991) also available as a collector's omnibus edition: R. A. Salvatore, *Dark Elf Trilogy*, (Seattle: Wizards of the Coast, 2000) and as the first three books of the *Legend of Drizzt* reissue.

⁶⁷ Interview with R.A. Salvatore from www.rasalvatore.com [last accessed 04/08/2010]

⁶⁸ Interview with R.A. Salvatore from www.theforcenet/jed council/interview/salvatore3.shtml [last accessed 05/08/2010]

Waterdeep. The 1988 module *The Savage Frontier* by Paul Jaquays, although detailing more of the savage lands North of Waterdeep, did not codify Icewind Dale, but rather gave a broad sweep of the Northern Lands focusing on the 'barbarian' tribes. Due to the timescales involved, it is clear that neither of these modules had a significant impact on Salvatore's writing of the first trilogy. It is also clear that the development of the Menzoberranzan module occurred after his Menzoberranzan based trilogy. In this case it seems that the literature led the game and influenced game creation rather than the game dictating the novel as in the case of *Dragonlance*.

What makes Salvatore an interesting comparison to Weis and Hickman is that although his books are set in a published gameworld the plot and novels were not based on any one specific game, and so apart from the setting the book is a traditional Genre Fantasy. Salvatore's stories about the adventures of Drizzt Do'Urden (the Dark Elf at the centre of the narratives) and the Companions of the Hall (his friends and fellow adventurers) are set in the *Forgotten Realms* world of Faerûn, a gaming world based on the *AD&D Forgotten Realms* RPG. The world that Salvatore's characters inhabit is detailed and intricate and as it is a published gameworld the setting is available as an external and verifiable entity beyond his narrative descriptions. While he is writing to a much freer model than Weis and Hickman, it is still a restrictive template. The settings of Icewind Dale, the Underdark and the various other lands that appear in Salvatore's adventures, are codified in various modules and adventure packs published by and for the RPG. Salvatore sets his adventures in areas of the gameworld that had, until the publication of his stories, been only loosely defined. The popularity of his books has led to the publication of gaming modules that detail these areas and codify their inhabitants so that fans of the books can set their own games within these confines. This is an example of the symbiotic relationship among author, reader, gamer and game. Salvatore's novels expanded the gameworld and attracted readers to other books in the series as well as to the related games. Gamers read the books and started basing campaigns in Icewind Dale, leading to new game modules being published to cater for the market. Gamers experiencing only the new modules were then led to the novels as examples of the location. The game influenced the author, the author influenced the game and both novels and game have reached an ever-widening audience through an effective strategy of cross-marketing.

Salvatore's stories, focused on the adventures of a small group of heroes, particularly the character of the Dark Elf Ranger, Drizzt Do'Urden, and how they combat evil across the realm, span several volumes and, although the different adventures can be read as one continuing history, there are discrete story arcs. As it is set in the *Forgotten Realms* there are a significant number of recognisable conventions and traditional fantasy elements, ranging from ubiquitous magical items and dragons, to evil races and monsters. While many fantasy authors attempt to create fantasy worlds in which to set their fantasy adventures, Salvatore has used a pre-existing fantasy gameworld and has attempted to write an adventure that both conforms to the expectations and rules associated with an existing, well known and detailed world, and at the same time subvert and undermine these 'rules' in order to challenge the reader.

As the series is an ongoing narrative, there are never any definitive resolutions and ultimate quest rewards in the same way that these occur in many other fantasy series; rather the adventures continue with new enemies and new quests, mimicking the style of RPG campaigns. This lack of Tolkien's 'eucatastrophe', appears to set Salvatore's work apart from traditional GF and the literary models used to describe fantasy narrative, such as Clute's *Full Fantasy*.⁶⁹ However, it could be argued that this makes one aspect of his stories more believable as Salvatore's characters don't become the ultimate masters of the universe or wielders of god-like power, nor does the land end or complete once the quest or adventure finishes. That is not to say that he doesn't conform to the RPG convention of general escalation and this is visible through the gradual increase in the severity of threats posed and the power of the Companions' avowed enemies. The enemy characters range from human assassins and standard RPG monsters to Demon Princes from a hell dimension. Ultimately though, Salvatore's books are representative of RPGF and therefore are a useful example of an aspect of genre fantasy that is rarely examined from a literary perspective.

⁶⁹ See J.R.R. Tolkien 'On Fairy Stories' in *The Tolkien Reader* (Alwin & Unwin, 1966) and John Clute 'Grail, Groundhog, and Godgame' *JFA* Vol.10 No.4 (2000) pp.330-337

Raymond E. Feist and the *Riftwar Saga*

Feist's *Magician* is conceptually closer to mainstream genre fantasy still. Feist's first book of the *Riftwar Saga* has all the appearances and trappings of Genre Fantasy.⁷⁰ However, Feist was a gamer and much of the creation and development of the Midkemia setting, including several of the characters and some of the plot lines, were developed from private gaming sessions between himself and his friends. This was not initially a commercially released game, it was not set in an official *D&D* locale and was not initially marketed as a tie-in or game novelisation.⁷¹ *Magician* was solely marketed and perceived as a GF and not an RPGF. It is an excellent example of a Genre Fantasy novel with a hidden gaming ancestry that illustrates the close links between the concepts of RPGs and Genre Fantasy.

Raymond E. Feist is an American author, and he cites Fritz Leiber, H.P. Lovecraft, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Robert E. Howard, A. Merritt and H. Rider Haggard as significant influences on his work and writing style.⁷² His best known work is the *Riftwar Cycle* or *Riftwar Saga*.⁷³ The first book of this still ongoing series, *Magician*, was a bestseller and has been in constant print since it was first published in 1982. It concerns the lives of two young foster brothers and the world in which they grow up. As Pug and Tomas grow toward manhood, they end up following very different paths and doing so during the tumultuous events of a great war that has beset their realm. Pug is a small, dark-haired boy, not particularly popular with the girls, nor is he as athletic as his taller, blonder, blue-eyed foster brother Tomas. Pug becomes an apprentice to the keep's resident magician whilst Tomas follows the more traditional martial role and becomes an apprentice to the Weapon Master. As their lives develop, they become embroiled in the great Riftwar and, in his own way, each plays a pivotal role. Although both boys live in a noble's keep, neither is a noble character to begin

⁷⁰ Feist's series has changed title a number of times as the series has grown, and each distinct grouping of novels being given their own sub-title, such as the *Serpentwar Saga*, however, for ease of reference the term *Riftwar Saga* will be used to denote the entire body of work utilising Midkemia as a setting.

⁷¹ The worlds of Midkemia and Kelewan were 'home-brew' *D&D* settings.

⁷² Haber ed. *Meditations on Middle Earth* (London: Earthlight, 2003) p.8.

⁷³ The first trilogy consists of *Magician*, (London: Granada, 1982), *Silverthorn*, (London: Granada, 1986) and *A Darkness at Sethanon*, (London: Grafton, 1987). These have been followed by several other titles; some have been co-written by other authors and at least three have been written to accompany computer roleplaying games. The terms Cycle and Saga have been used interchangeably by both fans and Feist himself over time to describe the series, for ease of reference the term *Riftwar Saga* has been used.

with, but both are fated to become great heroes of epic importance. Each of these central characters epitomises the wish fulfilment aspect of Genre Fantasy: one becomes the warrior king, the other the most powerful wizard.

Feist's Midkemia itself appears to be modelled on various historical real-world locales. The Kingdom of the Isles, the home of the heroes and the setting for much of the first story, appears to be a pseudo-medieval Europe, with the Tsurani invaders from Kelewan being modelled on the Japanese samurai tradition. The land to the south of the Kingdom of the Isles is named Kesh: it is reminiscent of Middle Eastern and Ancient Egyptian lands and plays a more important role in later books. This is an example of a secondary world that has close ties to the 'real' world yet is clearly not 'connected' to Earth. As Feist has stated in an interview:

I draw upon Earth cultures to provide the texture, so that if I say, people from Rodez are "Spanish-like" or people from Bas-Tyra are "French-like" that conjures a quick recognition, albeit a little stereotypical. Isalani in Kesh is obviously very Chinese, while the Pure Bloods are a blend of Egyptians and Parthians.⁷⁴

In terms of stereotypical fantasy conventions, the first book contains the all-important scene with a dragon, a set of magical armour, a magical sword and an ultimate goal: to defeat an evil, all-powerful foe, albeit not a Dark Lord. The two young heroes both rise to the top of their chosen arts, win wives and receive noble titles. All is facilitated by a mysterious and ancient sorcerer who has been meddling with fate and destiny in order to achieve this very end.

Of interest in this study is the fact that Feist's world was originally designed as a private RPG gameworld and that the novels were an offshoot of the games Feist played with friends. While *Magician* is not a specific re-telling of any one gaming campaign, Feist acknowledges that the construction of the world and the 'history' created was developed during gaming sessions.

I didn't create the world of Midkemia, first of all. Midkemia is a collaborative undertaking, started by Stephen Abrams and Jon Everson when they were graduate students at the University of California, San Diego. It began as a series of linked together gaming environments, and as people (such as myself) came aboard, it grew, developed, and evolved. The original Friday Nighters [...] were part of the

⁷⁴ Interview with Raymond E. Feist www.writerswrite.com/journal/mar00/feist.htm [last accessed 07/08/2010].

Triton Wargaming Society at UCSD. [...] One of the things about Midkemia which makes it a great narrative environment, is I don't have to be bothered with creating that environment; it's a virtual world, and I look at my writing as "historical novels about a place that doesn't exist".⁷⁵

Since the initial publication, the links between Feist's original gameworld, the novels and further gaming tie-ins and spin-offs have become further enmeshed and intertwined. Of particular note in this regard are the computer games, *Betrayal at Krondor* and *Return to Krondor*, and their tie-in novels, *Krondor: The Betrayal*, *Krondor: Tear of the Gods*.⁷⁶ The books were novelisations of games, which in turn were based on the *Riftwar Saga*, which were originally conceived of as part of a game. Despite the close links between game and novel, the initial reception and reviews of the book did not label *Magician* as a role-playing game spin-off or tie in, but rather evaluated it as a fantasy novel. In terms of this study, Feist's *Riftwar Saga* forms the far end of the gaming-related fantasy scale, the side closest to non-gaming fantasy and the wider genre of fantasy.

Fantasy has continued to evolve as a genre, and despite the importance of Tolkien's work, we must recognise that new texts and articulations of fantasy have arisen. As a result we must re-conceptualise the genre to take into account these additional perspectives. Critical thought and theory must be continually updated by integrating all useful approaches to the analysis of fantasy, regardless of their historical antecedents and literary merit. By integrating the RPG and its related fictions into the literary model of the genre, and by analysing the recurring patterns and conventions therein, existing scholarship and approaches to analysis can be augmented and developed. The first step in this process is to interrogate how we define the genre and to establish a workable model from which to build.

⁷⁵ Interview with Raymond E. Feist www.writerswrite.com/journal/mar00/feist.htm [last accessed 07/08/2010].

⁷⁶ *Betrayal at Krondor*, (Sierra On-Line, 1993); *Return to Krondor*, (Sierra Studios, 1998); Raymond E. Feist, *Krondor: The Betrayal*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1998) and *idem*, *Krondor: Tear of the Gods* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000).

Chapter One – Defining the Genre

The distinction between texts which are ‘Genre Fantasy’ (GF) and texts which are part of the ‘genre of fantasy’ is arbitrary but also necessary. Farah Mendlesohn has said that ‘the debate over definition is now long-standing and a consensus has emerged, accepting as a viable “fuzzy-set” a range of critical definitions of fantasy’.⁷⁷ Yet the consensus that Mendlesohn has identified pertains solely to constructing the genre through the fuzzy set, rather than to a consensus of definitions within the genre. In fact she emphasises that critics are ‘much more likely to pick and choose’ amongst academic definitions and other ‘definers of the field’.⁷⁸ By examining various approaches to what fantasy is, Eugene Reynolds’ article ‘Up Against the Walls of Genre: The Many-Mansions Manifesto’ suggests that the debate over the boundaries of the genre, what it contains and the definitions of terminology, is still contentious.⁷⁹ Even if a general consensus which defines the genre has emerged, then the established debate over genre definition has ignored or overlooked the fantasy RPG and the influence it has had on other genre texts.

Lars Konzack and Ian Dall, for their article ‘Fantasy and Medievalism in Role-Playing Games’, make no references in their bibliography to *JFA*, *Foundation* or *Extrapolation*, nor is there any reference to the work of Brian Attebery, Christina Brooke-Rose, John Clute, Kathryn Hume or Farah Mendlesohn. They quite obviously approach fantasy literature from an anti-academic stance. Nevertheless their article makes the valid point that there is a problem in defining fantasy. They state:

There has been much confusion about the terminology of fantasy. On the one hand the supposedly qualified to formulate theory on academic level have either completely ignored the field or only been able to relate to it by jettisoning all categories whatsoever. This has left those actually involved in the field to what amounts to folk practices and verbal traditions, resulting in a directly misleading terminology.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Farah Mendlesohn *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Middletown, CT. Wesleyan University Press, 2008) Introduction p.xiii

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Eugene Reynolds ‘Up Against the Walls of Genre: The Many-Mansions Manifesto’ *The New York Review of Science Fiction* Vol.22, No.6 (February 2010)

⁸⁰ Lars Konzack and Ian Dall, ‘Fantasy and Medievalism in Role-Playing Games’, in Markus Montola and Jaakko Stenros eds, *Playground Worlds: Creating and Evaluating Experiences of Role-Playing Games*, (Helsinki: Solmukohta Ropecon ry, 2008: available as a .pdf at <http://www.ropecon.fi/pw/>) p.272 [last accessed 10/04/10].

These academic ludologists believe that the study of fantasy has thus far ignored or overlooked the research in role-playing game studies, a point also made by Scott Vander Ploeg and Kenneth Philips in 1998.⁸¹ While Konzack and Dall's opinion could be seen as ill-informed, given the limited bibliography of works they have consulted for their article, their point has some merit. They believe that the literary academic construction of fantasy is inaccurate and misconceived, and with respected authors such as Vernor Vinge stating, 'I regard science fiction as a branch of fantasy', one can understand their perspective.⁸² Andy Sawyer notes that fantasy criticism is 'bedevilled' by the use of the same term, 'Fantasy' for several distinct and incompatible concepts. Indeed Brian Attebery in *Strategies of Fantasy* describes how 'fantasy' is used as a term for the mode, the genre and the formula.⁸³

Obviously, the RPG is at the centre of the role-playing game community's conception of fantasy and given the argument that Vander Ploeg and Philips made over a decade ago, perhaps literary academics should take note of this, if not immediately ascribe importance to it. Attebery's fuzzy set relies upon intention, selection and perspective in order to define the genre, and it is past time that this perspective included a consideration of the RPG and its related fictions. Kincaid argues that trying to identify ur-texts and primary sources is futile.⁸⁴ But while he argues that no one text can be labelled as the ur-text or be viewed as the beginnings of the genre, because, 'there is no ancestral text that could possibly contain, even in nascent form, all that we have come to identify as science fiction',⁸⁵ this does not preclude the identification of key and formative texts that have affected the genre. In fact, Attebery's fuzzy set relies on the identification of key texts in order to map changes in the evolving genre. Kincaid also argues that:

[...] the more comprehensively a definition seeks to encompass science fiction, the more unsatisfactory it seems to those of us who know the genre. To which one response is that we simply ignore the question altogether. The Clute and Nicholls *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (1993) contains reference to just about every form of science fiction, but though there is an entry on 'Definitions of SF', it

⁸¹ Scott Vander Ploeg and Kenneth Philips 'Playing With Power: The Science of Magic in Interactive Fantasy' *JFA* Vol. 9 No.2 pp.142-156

⁸² Vernor Vinge 'What future for Fantasy' *JFA* Vol.19 No.2 (2008) pp.175-177

⁸³ Andy Sawyer, 'Who "Owns" Children's Fantasy?' pp.5-18 and Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* Chapter 1.

⁸⁴ Paul Kincaid, 'On the Origins of Genre' *Extrapolation* Vol.44 No.4 Winter 2003 pp.13-21

⁸⁵ Ibid. p.13

doesn't actually include a definition of sf. [...] it does not arrive at a single, comprehensive overview of what science fiction is. Either there is no such single, comprehensive definition or, as when *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* concludes that science fiction 'challenges readers to decide', we finally admit that science fiction is defined not by something intrinsic to the genre, but rather it is in the eye of the beholder. In other words, many of us end up echoing Damon Knight: science fiction is 'what we point to when we say it'?⁸⁶

This is equally true of fantasy as a genre, and as Mendlesohn argues, the consensus is not to a single definition, but to an approach to definition. It might be easier to ignore the construction of the genre and dismiss it as settled, but if the agreed upon definition of the genre ignores the RPG and its related novelisations then it is an inaccurate representation. However, considering the division in how to construct and define the genre of fantasy, it is important to be clear about how it is being defined in this thesis.

We can use Todorov's term 'The Fantastic', to encompass all forms of strange, weird and non-mimetic fictions, and in particular three main categories or genres: Science Fiction, Horror and Fantasy.⁸⁷ Similarly, Attebery argues that instead of using Fantasy as the term for the supergenre, which leads to confusion, the Fantastic serves as an identifiable and distinct term.⁸⁸ Within the identified 'genre' of fantasy under the supergenre term The Fantastic, are situated the specific fantasy types or identifiable sub-genres. These then conform to the fuzzy set approach, in which each sub-genre is identified by a key text. Therefore, the wider category of fantasy, one that includes a broad range of fantasy stories, is the 'genre of Fantasy'. Under this heading occurs 'Genre Fantasy' (GF) which in this case is referring to the narrow grouping of sword and sorcery, sword and sandal, heroic fantasy, and quest adventures, set primarily on secondary fantasy worlds in which magic can be, is, or has the possibility of being, wielded. We can then advance a logical and simple construction of agreed terms and categories: The Fantastic as supergenre, Fantasy as genre and Genre Fantasy as the conventional sub-genre.

Genre Fantasy or GF corresponds to the 'formulaic fantasy' described by Attebery in *Strategies*, and would commonly fall into the category of Portal-Quest (PQ) in Farah Mendlesohn's *Rhetorics of Fantasy*. GF can trace its ancestry comfortably back to H.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.1

⁸⁷ John Grant and Ron Tiner, 'Fantasy', in Clute and Grant eds, *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, Fantasy' pp.337-40.

⁸⁸ Attebery *Strategies of Fantasy* p.11

Rider Haggard's *Quatermain*,⁸⁹ Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Barsoom*,⁹⁰ and Robert E. Howard's *Conan*⁹¹ in terms of style, and Tolkien's *LotR* in terms of setting and description. This construction of fantasy as a sub-division of a wider fantastic structure finds some support in Konzack and Dall's article.⁹² While their definitions of fantasy are not without problems, they provide an interesting perspective on the debate of genre. They argue for three main constructions of fantasy:

Fantasy A, or *Fantastic Fiction*, refers to non-mimetic fictions and 'includes all kinds of fiction that are not realistic, from horror and weird fiction, to fairy-tales and science fiction'.⁹³ Their first category is therefore the same as Atterbery's broad super-genre, labelled 'The Fantastic', above. *Fantasy B*, or *Sub-created Fantasy*, refers to that type of fantasy 'particularly focused on creating magical worlds with an alternative history'.⁹⁴ Their examples of this include J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*,⁹⁵ J.R.R. Tolkien's *LotR* and Robert E. Howard's *Conan* stories. They subdivide sub-created fantasy into three sub-genres:

Children's Fantasy:

In this subgenre, the heroes are children who are introduced to magical worlds of make-believe. The aims of this particular subgenre are manifold but incidentally most of these fictions are concerned with the theme of growing up.⁹⁶

Epic Fantasy:

[...] in which the fiction is based on historical expertise and moral dilemmas among characters. The subgenre aims to bring about alternative ways to aesthetically present cosmological and meta-physical thought, and to discuss religious and philosophical questions.⁹⁷

And Sword and Sorcery:

[...] an action-based subgenre with muscular barbarians, women in chainmail bikini, and evil warlocks. The aim of this sub-genre is to worship heroic vitalism, claiming that uncivilised action surpasses civilised thought.⁹⁸

⁸⁹ H. Rider Haggard's adventures about Allan Quatermain (1885-1930)

⁹⁰ Edgar Rice Burroughs Mars stories collected under the name *Barsoom* (1912-64)

⁹¹ Robert E. Howard Conan series (1932-36)

⁹² Konzack and Dall, 'Fantasy and Medievalism in Role-Playing Games', p.272

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.271

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.271

⁹⁵ J.K. Rowling *Harry Potter* series (London: Bloomsbury, 1997-2007)

⁹⁶ Konzack and Dall 'Fantasy and Medievalism in Role-Playing Games' p.272

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.272

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.272 Although they acknowledge that this definition is based on Thomas Carlyle *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966)

Their second category of fantasy, with its specific and limited sub-genres, can sit fairly comfortably alongside previous academic definitions of the genre and is similar to the conception of the ‘genre of fantasy’ noted above. That said, this construction is particularly limited, and does not account for much of the critical discourse identifying other key texts around which additional fuzzy sets have accumulated. However, what makes their classification most interesting to this study is the third type of fantasy they identify, Fantasy C or *Gygaxian Fantasy*:

Finally, a lot of role-players use the term fantasy to describe a role-playing experience in the *Dungeons & Dragons* tradition created by Gary Gygax and David Arneson in 1974. This approach to fantasy [...] also covers many online fantasy games, and literature that are based on fantasy game experiences, such as the *Dragonlance* paperback series.⁹⁹

From the gaming or ludologist perspective, the narratives constructed within games, during the gaming session in either traditional pen-and-paper RPGs or computer game variants, are valid constructions of fantasy. Additionally, this construction accounts for RPGFs, such as *Dragonlance* and *Forgotten Realms*. By combining this gaming perspective of fantasy with more traditional sub-genres of Mythic or Epic Fantasy and Sword and Sorcery, we can construct a more meaningful fuzzy set or grouping that corresponds to core genre conventions. It is this sub-grouping that the term GF describes, in effect a form of ‘typical’ fantasy positioned at the centre of the genre. Consequently magic realism, literary fantasy, historical fantasy *et al* are here viewed as wider extensions of the genre, located at a distance from this core ‘stereotypical’ adventure quest. In this framework the ‘Fantastic’ is the broadest of categories, while fantasy literature is separate and distinct from the GF texts. While other forms of fantasy may contain aspects of GF’s conventions and clichés, they exist toward the periphery of the genre as they attempt to push the boundaries and create innovation. The central GF texts are those most representative of genre norms and conventions. By isolating and analysing the core concepts of genre fantasy, we gain a clearer picture of it. As David Fishelov has argued:

[...] even in those areas of modern literature where it seems that generic rules are absent, the innovative areas of canonic literature, generic rules are still a vital part of the literary communicative situation. These generic conventions might be viewed as a challenge, or a horizon, against which the writer and his reader have to define themselves. The writer may stretch the generic rules, he may produce some

⁹⁹ Konzack and Dall ‘Fantasy and Medievalism in Role-Playing Games’ p.272

unpredictable ‘match’ between different existing conventions of existing literary genres (or even between literary conventions and conventions taken from other media), but in order to understand the overall significance of his text, we should be aware of the generic system against which he is working. A writer does not create in a textual vacuum, and a rebellious child is still part of the family.¹⁰⁰

In order to accurately analyse innovative fantasy texts, one must first be clear on the generic conventions. When the fantasy critic has defined and codified the core, it becomes easier to isolate those elements of the wider genre that subvert, invert or play with convention. While it is commonly accepted that fantasy contains clichés and conventions, as illustrated by Jones’ *Tough Guide*, RPGs and their related fictions identify these conventions, as well as provide rationales and a set of terms with which to explain and utilise them. However, as Ralph Cohen has argued:

[Genres] are historical assumptions constructed by authors, audiences, and critics in order to serve communicative and aesthetic purposes... Groupings arise at particular historical moments, and as they include more and more members, they are subject to repeated redefinitions or abandonment.¹⁰¹

The RPG is illustrative of the historical rise of convention within the genre as fantasy evolved from Tolkien through to the modern day. Games, gamers and game designers have become part of the dialogue through which the genre is defined. An inclusive definition of the genre of fantasy should therefore also consider the perspectives of the consumer and fan, editor and author, in addition to that of the critic and academic. Stableford has said that, ‘our first and most intimate experience with the fantastic is the substance of our dreams’,¹⁰² yet while this is almost certainly true, one of the first experiences of the ‘genre of fantasy’ occurs upon our first entrance to a bookshop and seeing the section marked ‘Fantasy’.¹⁰³ While this is undeniably a market driven representation of the genre, it is nevertheless a powerful and prevalent representation of fantasy. Curiously, the fairly arbitrary marketing decisions involved, as well as the collecting of ‘like’ books that appeal to a specific market, are reminiscent of Attebery’s fuzzy set. Conceptually, the market formulation of fantasy and the academic approach to defining genre are not mutually

¹⁰⁰ David Fishelov *Metaphors of Genre: The Role of Analogies in Genre Theory* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993) pp.82-83.

¹⁰¹ Ralph Cohen ‘History and Genre’ *New Literary History* 17 (1986) pp.203-18, p.210

¹⁰² Brian Stableford, ‘How Should a Science Fiction Story Begin’ *JFA* Vol.12 Issue 3 pp.322-337, p.323

¹⁰³ Also commonly labelled Science Fiction, or Science Fiction and Fantasy and similar.

incompatible. During a panel discussion on ‘Twisting Genre’, China Miéville has been reported to have said:

Above all, genres are marketing categories. Even what’s described as literary fiction is a genre; in Britain, it’s just the result of a very successful marketing campaign to persuade readers that it’s not a genre. But even if you think genre is a marketing idea, that isn’t to say it doesn’t have its own integrity and protocol. If you set really stupid, rigid rules for yourself, you can rise to the occasion.¹⁰⁴

The fantasy section of a bookshop could then be argued to represent the genre, at least from a market-driven perspective and for a specific time period. There must then be an overlap between the fan perspective and the market perspective.

The publishing industry’s construction of fantasy, in addition to its construction of many genre or marketing categories, is not wholly representative, nor is it without failings. The children’s literature section of bookshops rarely, if ever, separates children’s fiction into genre, and so fairytale, science fiction, fantasy, spy narratives and school stories rest comfortably side by side. ‘Fantasy’ as a marketing category is therefore something distinct from the marketing of children’s literature, although there are obviously many children’s stories within the genre. ‘Fantasy’ is also separate from the more general classification of ‘fiction’, although examples of the genre can be found in the mainstream fiction section as well. In this sense ‘Fantasy’ is used as a label for a specific type of narrative.

This specific pigeonholing has led to several authors denying the classification of their work as they perceive some categories as pejorative. Margaret Atwood is an oft cited example of an author denying the label of Science Fiction for her novels.¹⁰⁵ She prefers the term ‘Speculative Fiction’ as a more accurate label, though in essence it is simply a less culturally charged term. Terry Goodkind has also said that his *Sword of Truth* series is not fantasy.

¹⁰⁴ China Miéville, Comic-Con 2010, ‘Twisting Genres’ reported in *The Guardian Online* by Ryan Gibley, ‘Comic-Con: Tron to Angelina Jolie’, 23 July 2010. www.guardian.co.uk/culture/booksblog/2010/jul/23/comic-con-tron-angelina-jolie [last accessed 3rd August 2010].

¹⁰⁵ Atwood’s widely reported statement concerning her novel *The Handmaid’s Tale*, (London: Cape, 1986) was ‘No, it certainly isn’t science fiction. Science fiction is filled with Martians and space travel to other planets, and things like that. That isn’t this book at all. *The Handmaid’s Tale* is speculative fiction’. See http://www.randomhouse.com/resources/bookgroup/handmaidstale_bgc.html#interview [Last accessed 05/08/2010].

I am a novelist; I am not, in the essential sense, a fantasy author. To define me as a fantasy writer is to misunderstand the context of my books by misidentifying their fundamentals.¹⁰⁶

Goodkind rejects the term fantasy despite the fact that his series concerns the adventures of a warrior wizard travelling through a fictional secondary world populated by magical creatures, wizards and witches, attempting to fulfil or deny ancient prophecies and casting down evil, magic-wielding emperors in order to bring peace to the land. These magical elements and the plots of his novels would seem to suggest that his work is part of the fantasy genre, despite his objections and protests. However, it is clear that authorial intention, critical classification and fan perspectives are overlapping approaches to the definition of the genre. Despite authorial intention or desire, and despite academic reasoning and definitions, the market can, to a limited extent, dictate what comprises the genre of fantasy. Moreover, the relationship between market and fan is a complex one.

The market definition of fantasy is only one perspective on the formation of the genre but it is closely related to the construction of the genre by readers and fans.¹⁰⁷ Orson Scott Card argues that, ‘the boundaries that were once fluid now are much more firm, because the publishing category reinforces the identity of the community of readers and writers’.¹⁰⁸ Fans of fantasy may begin by sampling what they believe are representative texts from this market categorisation, but the sample available on the bookshelf is often limited to recent books, novels being promoted, and the ‘classic’ fantasy texts, such as Tolkien’s *LotR*. Consequently, for the most part the experience of the customer is limited exposure to a small number of ‘fantasy’ texts. If they find a taste for this type of narrative, fans will soon turn to word-of-mouth recommendations, reviews and increasingly, information online through websites such as Amazon,¹⁰⁹ of what to read next. The fandom of SF and Fantasy has long

¹⁰⁶ See for example Terry Goodkind’s comments at <http://web.archive.org/web/20051217105437/http://terrygoodkind.com/chats/PIchat5.php> [Last accessed 06/08/2010].

¹⁰⁷ Currently no comprehensive reader study of fantasy fandom and readership exists, however for a comprehensive study of the presumably related SF fandom see Camille Bacon-Smith *Science Fiction Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

¹⁰⁸ Orson Scott Card *How to Write Science Fiction and Fantasy* (Cincinnati, OH: Writer’s Digest Books, 1990) p. 9

¹⁰⁹ www.Amazon.com and its geographically specific sites such as www.Amazon.co.uk all of which recommend products based on what customers have viewed and what they have purchased. There are

been acknowledged as an identifiable and vocal group, even if various sub-groups have differed widely in their focus, approach and appreciation of genre fiction.¹¹⁰ Even author or series specific fansites such as Malazan Empire,¹¹¹ Crydee¹¹² and Westeros¹¹³ contain designated sections for the discussion of other fantasy and science fiction works with recommendations by members.¹¹⁴

Fans have an impact on the genre in that they are often vigorous promoters of favourite authors and series, and are happy to recommend them to any and all who enquire. In turn, publishing houses then target or promote the books and authors that conform to this perceived market. Rick Altman in *Film/Genre* makes the following observation that encapsulates this idea:

Paradoxically [...] the standard view of film genre sets up industry and audience each as an agent of the other. While in one sense ‘genres are “made” by the collective response of the mass audience’, in a more fundamental way they are originally established and named by the film-industry. In an apparently continuous loop, like two serpents biting each other’s tails, industry and audience are seen as locked in a symbiotic relationship leaving no room for a third party.¹¹⁵

Specific fan advocacy on behalf of key texts, must-reads, fan favourites and classic fantasy, of course, has ties to at least one critical perspective, Brian Attebery’s construction of the genre in *The American Fantasy Tradition*.¹¹⁶ Attebery’s approach specifically used the fantasy bookshelf as a metaphor for genre construction that appears to be an adaptation of Knight’s argument, ‘We know what fantasy is when we see it’. Yet it is also a precursor to Attebery’s ‘fuzzy set’ argument advanced in

also recommended reading lists compiled by other customers and forum boards discussing related products.

¹¹⁰ For instance, while magazines such as *White Dwarf* cater to the fantasy gaming fan, The Tolkien Society is a more literary focused and organised fandom. There is serious need for further study of fantasy fandom and readership.

¹¹¹ A fansite and forum for the *Malazan* series of novels by Steven Erikson and Ian C. Esslemont <http://forum.malazanempire.com>

¹¹² A fansite and forum for the *Riftwar Saga* by Raymond E. Feist <http://forum.crydee.com/>

¹¹³ A fansite and forum for the *A Song of Ice and Fire* series by George R. R. Martin <http://asoiaf.westeros.org/>

¹¹⁴ For a more comprehensive fansite see www.sf-fandom.com which has a broad SF and Fantasy range discussed on the forums. Fans frequently recommend a wide variety of books with classics such as Tolkien, Cook, Donaldson appearing alongside recommendations for newer fantasies by Abercrombie, Stover, Miéville and Erikson.

¹¹⁵ Altman *Film/Genre* (1999) p.16 Altman is quoting Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genre: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (New York: Random House, 1981) p.294

¹¹⁶ Brian Attebery *The Fantasy Tradition in American Literature: From Irving to LeGuin* (Indiana University Press, 1980)

Strategies of Fantasy.¹¹⁷ The ‘bookshelf’, and then the fuzzy set, argued that the genre be constructed around key or influential texts and then those books that were ‘like’ them. The concept allowed the fantasy academic to create loose groups of texts that were ‘like’ specific key texts and is a natural evolution of the fan approach to the creation of genre boundaries. By identifying specific cores, we could construct a literary Venn diagram from the grouped clusters and observe a picture of the wider genre. Those closest to the heart of the graphic representation would be the most ‘like’ and those furthest away would be the least ‘like’. For example, if *LotR* is identified as a key text, one might place Terry Brooks’ *Sword of Shannara* in close proximity due to its faithful attempt to recreate Tolkien’s narrative. One might then place Stephen R. Donaldson’s *Thomas Covenant* a step removed in order to illustrate a relationship with *LotR*, but also reflect the nature of Donaldson’s books as answers to rather than followers of Tolkien’s work. Of course such decisions rely entirely upon the argument and opinions of the individual constructing it. However, in general, the fuzzy set facilitates the creation of categories in which relationships and differences can be mapped, and rough, permeable boundaries sketched.

A key strength to this approach is that the boundaries between sets are flexible, inter-linked and mutable, and so the construction reflects the internal links and feed-back loops generated within the genre. Therefore the fuzzy set allows for a construction of the genre that can be constantly updated and re-conceptualised. A flaw in this approach to the genre is that this focus is directed specifically at those ‘important’ texts that somehow alter, re-conceptualise, or re-define fantasy, leaving those texts that form the majority of the genre under-researched and under-represented. If a book was ‘like’ another, then it is enough that one book of that type has been identified and analysed. This compartmentalisation of key texts and their imitators emphasises the concept of sub-genrification within the field, as by identifying a key text and others that are like it, we can too easily classify the ‘followers’ as part of the key text’s sub-genre.

Another problem inherent to this construction is that the size of the associated fuzzy set that coalesces around the key text is rarely taken into account when evaluating the

¹¹⁷ Attebery *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992) Chapter One.

construction of the genre, nor is the concept of how the surrounding books are 'like' the key text. This is because there is nothing in the formulation of the fuzzy set that defines the parameters of comparison, and thus it relies heavily on each individual's judgement. This can be partly explained by the fact that many of the most interesting texts differ from expected norms, and therefore small niche fantasies, or fantasy texts that approach the bounds of the genre at obliques, are usually considered the most intriguing and intellectually stimulating. This leads to a disproportionate academic emphasis on these interesting texts and an unrepresentative construction of the genre can easily follow. Yet as Beebee notes, 'genre is only secondarily an academic enterprise and a matter for literary scholarship. Primarily, genre is the precondition for the creation and the reading of texts'.¹¹⁸ This argument is echoed by Devitt: 'In fact, genres are defined less by their formal conventions than by their purposes, participants, and subjects'.¹¹⁹ It therefore follows that to successfully analyse a genre, the literary scholar must be familiar with the subtexts and reading conventions that fans ascribe to that genre and this necessitates engaging with the perceived norms, which are, by definition, most commonly found in the standard, unoriginal and 'derivative' fantasies, rather than in the interesting, innovative and original ones.

If we take the fan perspective into account we should then subject popular texts to the same rigorous analysis usually reserved for what are deemed more literary fantasies. Of course, if we consider the fan approach then we must also acknowledge the gamer/gaming perspective. As Vander Ploeg and Philips have noted, 'Game players with whom we have spoken have agreed that much fantasy art, including fiction, has begun to seem as if taken from game scenarios',¹²⁰ and also that '[gamers] comprise an increasing and significant proportion of the readers of fantasy fiction'.¹²¹ Therefore, if the genre is to reflect common conventions and concepts, then those identified by gamers should at the least be considered. Also, if the definition of genre is to be accurate then some study of gaming influences, games and game related literature becomes necessary. Lastly, and perhaps most convincingly, many current and new authors have grown up with RPGs and RPG-influenced computer games.

¹¹⁸ Thomas Beebee *The Ideology of Genre: A Comparative Study of Generic Instability* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994) p.250

¹¹⁹ Amy Devitt 'Integrating Rhetorical and Literary Theories of Genre' *College English* Vol. 62, No.6, July 2000 pp.696-718 p.698

¹²⁰ Vander Ploeg and Philips 'Playing With Power' p.147

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p.144

Established authors such as Steven Erikson,¹²² Ian C. Esslemont, Raymond E. Feist,¹²³ China Miéville¹²⁴ and newer authors such as Joe Abercrombie,¹²⁵ Scott Lynch,¹²⁶ and Adrian Tchaikovsky¹²⁷ have openly discussed their history with gaming.¹²⁸

If we are to understand the approach and concepts that may have influenced these new authors of the fantastic, whether they are reacting against them, or utilising them in their fictions, then it seems both inevitable and essential that we consider the role and impact of RPGs. In fact, given that a number of authors have described the impact and influence of RPGs on their writing, it could be argued that the RPG has supplanted Tolkien as ‘the mental template’ for fantasy and thus assumed a central position as key text within the GF fuzzy-set.¹²⁹ Attebery has argued that:

Tolkien’s form of fantasy, for readers in English, is our mental template, and will be until someone else achieves equal recognition with an alternative conception.¹³⁰

The RPG and its related literature have generated that ‘alternative conception’ and deserve ‘equal recognition’. Attebery’s fuzzy-set rule is partially predicated upon knowledge of the wider genre and the ability to isolate important key texts, and this necessitates a broad understanding of the genre and a wide knowledge of those texts that are popular or inspirational. This is heavily reliant on a subjective perspective or, ‘You know it is a fantasy when you see it’.¹³¹ As Attebery does not lay out specific guidelines, strictures or reasons for the selection of a key text, there is no reason to preclude the RPG or its novelisations from consideration. If the identification of key texts is solely the province of the fantasy academic, who refuses to consider RPG related material, then the set constructed will not resemble the genre as whole but rather only its periphery.

¹²² Interview with Steven Erikson www.bscreview.com/2008/06/on-the-spot-at-bscreview-interview-steven-erikson/ (last accessed 20/08/2010) acknowledges both his and Esslemont’s gaming background.

¹²³ Feist has acknowledged his gaming group in the majority of his novels, as well as on www.crydee.com.

¹²⁴ Interview with China Miéville www.believmag.com/issues/200504/?read=interview_mieville (last accessed 20/0/2010)

¹²⁵ Interview with Joe Abercrombie www.sffworld.com/interview/204p0.html (last accessed 20/08/2010)

¹²⁶ See his personal website www.scottlynch.us/author.html (last accessed 21/08-2010)

¹²⁷ See Tchaikovsky’s personal website www.shadowsoftheapt.com (last accessed 21/08/2010)

¹²⁸ Jim Butcher, the author of the urban Fantasy series ‘The Dresden Files’ advertises his LARP society on his author page www.jim-butcher.com

¹²⁹ Attebery *Strategies of Fantasy* p.14

¹³⁰ Attebery *Strategies of Fantasy* p.14

¹³¹ Clute, ‘Introduction’ in Clute and Grant eds, *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, p.viii

In his introduction to *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, John Clute paraphrases Damon Knight's oft cited remark about defining Science Fiction in relation to the difficulty the editors had in setting out the encyclopedia's working definition of fantasy. This simple statement contains one of the points that this thesis seeks to address, the question of objectivity and subjectivity in defining fantasy texts. Depending on the scholar and his/her view of the genre, the conception of fantasy offered and the definitions achieved will vary. As Mendlesohn and James discuss in the introduction to *A Short History of Fantasy*,¹³² scholars may approach fantasy from several different points of view and they have chosen four core theoretical approaches, exemplified by: Michael Moorcock, 'whose *Wizardry and Wild Romance* locates fantasy in the language in which it is written'; Brian Attebery, 'whose *Strategies of Fantasy* understands fantasy as a "fuzzy set" with a core and even hazier corona of texts'; John Clute, 'whose grammar of fantasy in *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* is made up of four movements, wrongness, thinning, recognition, healing'; and Farah Mendlesohn herself, 'whose *Rhetorics of Fantasy* sees fantasy as a number of fuzzy sets determined by the mode in which the fantastic enters the text'. Their selection of theoretical perspectives has informed their literary historical perspective and therefore, they conceive of fantasy as 'a conversation that is happening [...] between the authors of the texts and the readers'. This thesis seeks to add to that conversation by including the additional perspective of the RPG and RPGF, as it has affected author, fan and gamer, in addition to forming a substantial part of fantasy publishing.

Todorov came to a similar conclusion with his swan analogy:

[...] a hypothesis which is based on the observation of a limited number of swans but which also informs us that their whiteness is a consequence of an organic characteristic would be perfectly legitimate. To return from swans to novels, this general scientific truth applies not only to the study of genres, but also to that of a writer's entire oeuvre, or to that of a specific period, etc.¹³³

Altman explains Todorov's analogy as:

¹³² James and Mendlesohn *A Short History of Fantasy* (2009) Introduction p.4

¹³³ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: a structural approach to a literary genre*, trans by Richard Howard, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1975) p.4

Given the well-known genre of swans, claims Todorov, I can take a small number of specific swans at random, study their organic make-up, and come to legitimate conclusions regarding the entire genre.¹³⁴

So by extending Todorov's metaphor of swans and the fantastic novel, RPG related literature could be seen as a black swan that has never been added to discussion of the genre. Or perhaps more accurately, scholars have seen the white swans of GF and RPGF and dismissed them as derivative and uninteresting, turning instead to the rarer and more interesting black, blue, red and green swans that seem to redefine what it is to be a swan. However, despite the popularity and fame of this metaphor for genre, it is not as accurate as simply stating that despite the appearance of formula, generic composition and lack of innovation, there is a great deal to be learned from studying the bare forms of the genre. We can then apply our knowledge of them to the rarer and more literary examples of fantasy, to gain a clearer picture of how the genre evolves and innovates.

Problems of definition within fantasy scholarship exist, and, at least for the foreseeable future, will continue to exist as long as we continue to dismiss the market definition and marketing categories through which many readers encounter fantasy and as long as we ignore the role of the Role-Playing Game. Indeed, until we can all discuss fantasy using the same terminology and lexicon, we cannot even debate the subject without arguing at cross purposes. This is why the RPG is important to defining fantasy, not only through its influence and its prolific back catalogue of fantasy fiction, but through its use of a common lexicon and an understandable base set of terminology that can be used to describe, analyse and deconstruct fantasy.

¹³⁴ Altman *Film/Genre* p.6

Chapter Two – The RPG, Meta-Text or Mega-Text?

Janet Murray writes, ‘The more we see life in terms of systems, the more we need a system-modeling medium to represent it – and the less we can dismiss such organised rule systems as mere games’.¹³⁵ We can construct the RPG as a para-literary, or extra-literary, commentator on generic conventions and recurrent concepts found in GF, and this allows us to label it as a fantasy meta-text. The fantasy RPG has re-conceptualised and codified conventions within GF and has helped establish them as guidelines for modern fans and authors, although Diana Wynne Jones referred to them as laws or rules.¹³⁶ RPGs, specifically *Dungeons and Dragons (D&D)*,¹³⁷ took as their central inspiration a selection of popular fantastic texts, isolated both their unique and common elements and then adapted these strands into a collated and codified system, a bricolage of genre fantasy conventions. Although the aim of this adaptation was to create a playable game system and world that would be enjoyed by fans of the fantasy genre, an unforeseen consequence of this systemisation was the production of a cohesive, rational and flexible framework with a potential for the critical analysis of GF. The game designers had to provide a system by which the fantastic worlds and scenarios could be understood, navigated and explained by any fan, and also be adaptable to numerous fantasy settings. This system also had to be interesting and playable as a game in order to maintain engagement and commercial viability. Lastly, as the game had to conform to what readers perceived fantasy worlds to be, the game system had to be recognisable as fantasy. This fantasy gaming system, intrinsically linked to the genre, created a recursive loop of inspiration between the game and the literature. The game first drew from the genre then fed back into it through fans, readers, players, authors and creators. The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the importance of the RPG in the construction of genre fantasy and argue that the RPG is a meta-text that is invaluable for critically analysing fantasy.

¹³⁵ Janet Murray *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, 1997) p.3

¹³⁶ Diana Wynne Jones ‘Two Kinds of Writing’ *The Medusa: The Journal of the PJF* 1 (1990) pp.1-4

¹³⁷ *D&D* is generally considered the first major commercial RPG, published in 1974 by TSR (Tactical Studies Rules, Inc.) and was created by Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson. A subsequent related but slightly different game by the same company and creators is *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons (AD&D)* (TSR 1977). For the sake of simplicity *D&D* will be used throughout as it is the first definitive game.

Why the RPG?

Scholars of the fantastic have been engaged for several decades in the process of identifying the key features of fantasy narratives, linking and connecting trends, conventions and concepts into recognisable and coherent taxonomies. From text specific criticism such as William Senior's *Variations*,¹³⁸ through John Clute's encyclopedias of fantasy and science fiction,¹³⁹ to Brian Attebery's¹⁴⁰ and Farah Mendlesohn's¹⁴¹ genre-wide thematic approaches, they have, thus far, underutilised the RPG rulesets and practices as a mode of analysis which has already accomplished much of this work. Even in the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, the entry on RPGs concentrates more heavily on late 1980s and early 1990s artefacts rather than outlining the historic impact of *D&D*.

Due to the RPG's adaptation of popular fantasy adventure narratives and GF texts, it is *uniquely* situated to provide a credible analytical approach to much of the adventure and quest-based fantasy narratives of the 1980s and 1990s, in addition to supplementing the traditional analysis of other GF texts. This type of fantasy is, admittedly, often referred to as formulaic fantasy or fantasy by numbers.¹⁴² Nevertheless, by utilising the RPG as a 'Rosetta Stone' for this type of formulaic fantasy, we can gain particular critical insights into many genre conventions. As the RPG has already collated and defined many of these we can correct much of the division created by ambiguous fantasy terminology if we instead utilise the terminology of the RPG. This will allow us to re-configure existing approaches to fantasy analysis and adapt them into a more flexible methodology. The RPG contains within it a specific glossary of terms and concepts which gamers and fans have used to discuss fantasy. Indeed, new generations of fantasy scholars and authors have already assimilated much of this conceptual framing for fantasy through their exposure to RPGs, television or film, and thus the need to understand and utilise this

¹³⁸ W. A. Senior, *Stephen R. Donaldson's Chronicles of Thomas Covenant: Variations on the Fantasy Tradition*, (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1995).

¹³⁹ Clute and Grant eds., *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*; John Clute and Peter Nicholls eds, *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, rev. 2nd ed. (Orbit, 1999).

¹⁴⁰ Attebery *The Fantasy Tradition in America and Strategies of Fantasy*.

¹⁴¹ Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* and Mendlesohn and James, *A Short History of Fantasy*.

¹⁴² Attebery, *Strategies of Fantasy* pp.1 and 10. See also David Eddings, *The Rivan Codex*, (London: Voyager, 1999), 'Introduction', for an author's perspective on the 'fantasy formula'

interdisciplinary and wider media-based approach is imperative to the development of academic discourse within the genre.

Vander Ploeg and Philips note that the gamer and the fan are becoming increasingly important in terms of fantasy readership and, as Senior has commented, the computer game has become a dominant medium in the new era. An example of this emerging trend of gaming discourse can be seen in the programme listings for International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts (the conference of the IAFA) over the last few years, in which a substantial number of papers have been given on RPG computer games and concepts, and also in which a division has been set up to accommodate this emerging academic field within the study of the fantastic.¹⁴³ The Science Fiction Research Association conference in 2010 dealt with a number of RPG and gaming issues, particularly through a two-hour introductory class in the analysis of video games in addition to games and gaming being the topic of several roundtable discussions.¹⁴⁴ There are also a range of articles, journals and books that deal with games, gaming and RPGs, albeit with a wide range of focus, from social studies, medical and psychological studies, to computer science, gaming studies, and so on. Of particular interest and relevance here are the collections of essays and articles edited by Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin focusing on the impact of games, gaming and game concepts on media, narrative and authorial constructions. The first book in the series, *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance and Game*, has as its focus the relationship between story and game from multiple perspectives as well as a consideration of new kinds of literary and performative play.¹⁴⁵ The second book, *Second Person: Role-Playing and Story in Games and Playable Media*, builds on the foundations of the first collection and contains essays and articles by scholars, authors artists and game designers.¹⁴⁶ The third book in the series, *Third Person:*

¹⁴³ ICFA 31 (International Conference for the Fantastic in the Arts 16th-20th March 2010) Visual and Performing Arts Division and the Communities and Culture Division had between them over twelve papers on aspects of computer games with five looking specifically at RPG computer games and a further two papers referencing RPGs. [VPA Sessions 10, 19, 29 & 56 and Communities and Culture session 18].

¹⁴⁴ SFRA 2010 - Far Stars and Tin Stars: Science Fiction and the Frontier (24th-27th June 2010) began with a two hour course on videogame analysis by Palo Verde II.

¹⁴⁵ Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance and Game* (London: MIT Press, 2004)

¹⁴⁶ Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin *Second Person: Role-Playing and Story in Games and Playable Media* (London: MIT Press, 2007)

Authoring and Exploring Vast Narratives (2009),¹⁴⁷ is a collection of scholarly essays on the interaction of game, narrative and media, with a particular focus on the interaction of computer games with various media formats such as comic books, film and television. Again it utilises the multiple perspectives of authors and designers, artists and academics. Beyond media, communication and narrative studies as illustrated by the Harrigan and Wardrip-Fruin collections, the RPG has been used in understanding medical or psychological behaviour,¹⁴⁸ game narratives¹⁴⁹ and constructions of social identity.¹⁵⁰ In light of such developments, it seems increasingly appropriate to contemplate the usefulness of the RPG in the analysis of character design, world building and narrative construction in fantasy literature, particularly given the symbiotic relationship between genre and game.¹⁵¹ Stuart Moulthrop comments on Murray's statement about '[seeing] life in terms of systems', that, 'this confluence of sentiments, if not of doctrine, suggests that ludology and narratology may not be absolutely antithetical'.¹⁵² While we accept the narrative systems offered by Propp and Campbell as revealing in terms of fantasy narrative and structures, we can now add the RPG as an additional conceptual framework.

Before defining and investigating what the RPG is as an artefact, it is important to establish how it synthesises and distils seminal fantasy texts. In order to achieve this, the most straightforward approach is to examine how those acknowledged textual influences on *D&D* were used as the basis for its creation. The tracing of ancestry is a double-edged sword when trying to argue for the importance of a literary text within a genre. For instance J.R.R. Tolkien's *LotR* is important not because it slavishly followed the established conventions, but because it broke new ground and redefined what was considered fantasy. If the RPG were a literary text, establishing it as a synthesis of existing fantasy would not prove its worth. However, from a critical

¹⁴⁷ Pat Harrigan *Third Person: Authoring and Exploring Vast Narratives* (London: MIT Press, 2009)

¹⁴⁸ Yao-Chung Chuang, 'MMORPG Game-Induced Seizures', *CyberPsychology and Behaviour*, 9:4 (2006), pp.451-456.

¹⁴⁹ Gonzalo Frasca, 'Simulation versus Narrative: Introduction to Ludology' in Mark J. P. Wolf and Bernard Perren eds, *The Video Game Theory Reader*, (London: Routledge, 2003) and Gonzalo Frasca (2000) 'Ludology Meets Narrative: Similitude and difference between (video)games and narrative' www.jacaranda.org/frasca/ludology.htm [accessed 19th July 2010]

¹⁵⁰ Gary Fine *Shared Fantasy: Role-Playing Games as Social Worlds* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002)

¹⁵¹ A distinction between the approach offered in this thesis and that of the aforementioned articles in the various other disciplines is that the focus here is on the RPG as textual artefact and the conceptual philosophy of the game rules, rather than aspects of imagination, performance and play.

¹⁵² Stuart Moulthrop, 'From Work to Play' in Harrigan and Wardrip-Fruin *First Person* pp.56-69, p.64

perspective, its importance as an articulation of fantasy conventions and its use as a codified framework of convention drawn from established canonical fantasy, in effect its nature as a meta-textual response to fantasy, is an argument in its favour. The importance of the RPG hinges on the pedigree of those literary influences which form its critical bibliography, as it is from this corpus that it distils its rules, conventions and standards.

Vander Ploeg and Phillips note the importance of early fantasists on the creation of RPGs:

Taking their inspiration from fantasy literature by authors such as J.R.R. Tolkien, Fritz Lieber, Edgar Rice Burroughs, A. Merrit and Jack Vance, a small group of role-playing enthusiasts in the late 1960s began developing a new manifestation of the fantasy context.¹⁵³

They refer to a famous list of fantasy authors known to have influenced the creators of *D&D*. As part of the original edition of the *AD&D Dungeon Master's Guide* (1979), Gary Gygax attached 'Appendix N – Inspirational and Educational Reading',¹⁵⁴ a list of those fantasy texts which Gygax, his friends and fellow gamers, thought were important fantasy works, and which led directly to the creation of the rules and conventions of *D&D*:

Science fiction, fantasy, and horror movies were a big influence. In fact, all of us tend to get ample helpings of fantasy when we are very young, from fairy tales such as those written by the Brothers Grimm and Andrew Lang. This often leads to reading books of mythology, paging through bestiaries, and consultation of compilations of the myths of various lands and peoples. Upon such a base I built my interest in fantasy, being an avid reader of all science fiction and fantasy literature since 1950. The following authors were of particular inspiration to me. In some cases I cite specific works, in others, I simply recommend all their fantasy writing to you. From such sources, as well as just about any other imaginative writing or screenplay you will be able to pluck kernels from which grow the fruits of exciting campaigns.¹⁵⁵

While literary fantasy often drew from a wide variety of sources, ranging from ancient myth cycles (such as Norse Mythology's influence on Tolkien and Eddison), through epics to legends (T.H. White's use of Arthurian legend) and fairytales (Dunsany's *King of Elfland's Daughter*), Gygax *et al.* were most heavily influenced by existing fantasy literature in creating the adventure-driven aspect of the game, and drew

¹⁵³ Vander Ploeg and Philips 'Playing With Power' p.142

¹⁵⁴ Gygax, *AD&D Dungeon Masters Guide* (TSR Inc., 1979).

¹⁵⁵ Gygax, 'Appendix N' *AD&D Dungeon Master's Guide* (TSR, 1979) p.224.

equally heavily on the myths and legends to dress the gameworlds. By extension, their creation, *D&D*, is a product developed specifically from fantasy as they perceived it, an adaptation and codification of the commonalities and conventions of the genre, rather than a reflection of its far reaches, in an attempt to distil what Gygax *et al* perceived as core concepts and conventions. From these they created a set of rules that had a universal application within a game system. The aim was to adapt elements from the most popular and well known texts and thus create a base fantasy reality and a collective approach to fantasy narrative. Due to their focus on the action and combat commonly found in Sword and Sorcery or Heroic fantasy in order to make the game exciting, coupled with their desire to create a mythic, epic world to be explored, the game is an attempt to combine the action of Howard's Hyboria with the grandeur of Tolkien's Middle Earth. This combination of two major approaches to fantasy has created what I have termed GF, a micro-adventure, set in an epic world.

Gygax's appendix lists many works recognisable to every scholar of the fantastic, including the fiction of Poul Anderson, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Robert E. Howard, Fritz Leiber, Michael Moorcock, J.R.R. Tolkien and Jack Vance. Even without Appendix N, a number of literary sources for *D&D* can be easily identified. Equally significant is how Appendix N indicates the approach and purpose that Gygax and Arneson¹⁵⁶ took to fantasy and the *raison d'être* for their game. Aardy R. DeVarque¹⁵⁷ has attempted to link their sources to game-specific examples in 'Literary Sources of D&D'.¹⁵⁸ One such example concerns the initial magic system for *D&D*, which borrowed many components and even names of spells from Vance's *Dying Earth* (1950)¹⁵⁹ (see in particular 'Mazirian the Magician'). DeVarque/Hahn suggests that 'Hypnotic Pattern' is an adaptation of 'Felojun's Second Hypnotic Spell', 'Prismatic Spray' is based on 'The Excellent Prismatic Spray', 'Boots of Striding and Springing' are linked to 'Live Boots', and 'Ioun Stones' and are all found in Vance's 'Mazirian the Magician'.¹⁶⁰ Yet borrowing only the dressings of the worlds, the superficial images and descriptions, leaves out much of what makes

¹⁵⁶ A typographical error in Roz Kaveney's entry 'Games, Fantasy' notes Arneson's name as Arenson in Clute and Grant eds, *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, p.382.

¹⁵⁷ The online pseudonym for Joel Hahn, an RPG enthusiast and library archivist Niles Public Library, Illinois.

¹⁵⁸ Aardy R. DeVarque/Joel Hahn, <http://www.webcitation.org/5QUGV3ikF> [last accessed 19/04/10]

¹⁵⁹ Vance, Jack *The Dying Earth* (Hillman Periodical Inc., 1950)

¹⁶⁰ See also Vander Ploeg and Phillips 'Playing With Power' pp.142-156

fantasy popular. The tone and style of much fantasy is not represented in the manuals and codices of *D&D*. Gygax and Arneson attempted to create the mechanics of fantasy, to supply the dressing and accessories to flavour the world, but left much of the tone, style and attitude present in so much of the fantasy writing, to the gamers who would recreate, mimic or use during their improvised play in-game and in-session.

Even from the limited example of Hahn's list, it is clear that Gygax was influenced and inspired by some of the most important and definitive fantasy texts of the 20th century. On the surface, therefore, the RPG appears to have the proper ancestry and literary pedigree to be academically credible in terms of source material. *D&D* was influenced by the selfsame myth cycles, epics, legends and faerie tales that inspired the authors from which it, in turn, drew inspiration. In fact, over its many iterations and editions, *D&D* and other RPGs have drawn extensively from world myths and legends in order to further populate and detail the various game-worlds. From its inception, *D&D* was intended to adapt the common concepts of the genre, upon which stories and adventures could be built. By defining, describing and codifying a fantastic world and how it works (its history, geography, political systems, racial diversity, and so forth) any number of different adventures could be created. Gygax and Arneson have in fact adapted a set of mechanical conventions from a wide sampling of fantasy texts, much like Propp's structuralist approach to folk tale. Hence, while of course the RPG cannot represent the differing styles of fantasy narratives nor their various tones, these could be recreated through the gaming experience and interaction of players as they co-created and followed the stories and adventures. What the gamers actually do with the concepts and the rules established in the rulesets and adventures is not monitored, but it is structured and influenced by those rulesets.

What is the RPG?

The RPG is at once a simple thing to describe in general terms, and yet highly complicated in specifics and exceptions. As Drachen and Hitchens explain, also echoing Damon Knight, in their article for the *International Journal of Role-Playing*,¹⁶¹ an academic journal specifically for the analysis of RPGs:

When players, writers and game designers say ‘this is a role-playing game’ there are no problems, they all seem to know what each other means, what is and is not a role-playing game. Yet there is no commonly accepted definition of the form.¹⁶²

They go on to say that there is a ‘lack of a widely accepted definition of what constitutes a roleplaying game’.¹⁶³ Their article, the first in the first issue of the journal, indicates the importance of this debate and that this is a fundamental problem in the study of RPGs that has yet to be settled satisfactorily within academic discourse. No single workable definition is universally applied. RPGs cross media formats, embracing pen-and-paper table-top games or computer games. They cross genres and can be based in Fantasy, Horror and SF-related environments or any combination thereof. They can involve one player or several hundred as evidenced by single player RPG computer games such as *Baldur’s Gate*¹⁶⁴ or massively multi-player online RPGs such as *World of Warcraft*.¹⁶⁵ They can vary in terms of how they are played, with gaming sessions occurring at a table as in classic *D&D* or in forests, castles and ruins in a LARP (Live Action Role-Play) event or tournament. In short, RPGs are many and varied. Nevertheless, although they appear radically different, they share a common ancestry and concept.

As Hitchens and Drachen point out, there appears to be an inherent insider knowledge that defies specific and objective definition, but which carries an assumed knowledge of history, concepts and key texts. While gaming has a long history, RPGs are considered to have *coalesced* around *D&D* in 1974, much like the conceit that modern

¹⁶¹ Michael Hitchens and Anders Drachen, ‘The Many Faces of Role-Playing Games’, in Anders Drachen ed. *International Journal of Roleplaying (IJRP)*, 1 (2008), pp.3-21.

¹⁶² Ibid. p.3

¹⁶³ Ibid. p.3

¹⁶⁴ *Baldur’s Gate* by Bioware (1998 onwards) is an RPG computer game set in the *D&D* based *Forgotten Realms*.

¹⁶⁵ *World of Warcraft* (or *WoW*) is an online RPG computer game produced by Blizzard (2004 to present).

genre fantasy *coalesced* around Tolkien's *LotR*.¹⁶⁶ While this is not the same as saying that *D&D* was the first RPG, like *LotR* it is the most visible, early proponent of the form. It is the best known, and general consensus holds that it is the seminal text. Although the importance of *D&D* is uncontested in relation to the development of the RPG, a brief history of gaming places *D&D* and the RPG itself in a useful historical context.

In the early 1970s Gygax was involved in the creation of a medieval mimetic wargame RPG called *Chainmail*¹⁶⁷ which contained a supplementary chapter detailing the inclusion of fantasy characters such as wizards. This led, ultimately, to the development of *D&D*:

[...] as the members began to get tired of medieval games, and I wasn't, I decided to add fantasy elements to the mix, such as a dragon that had a fire-breath weapon, a "hero" that was worth four normal warriors, a wizard who could cast fireballs (the range and hit diameter of a large catapult) and lightning bolts (the range and hit area of a cannon), and so forth.¹⁶⁸

This combined the appeal of a fantasy environment with the mechanics of an existing game system.¹⁶⁹ When Arneson and Gygax further refined the rules of *Chainmail*, to include more personal details of the Player Characters (PCs), *D&D* or modern role-playing was born.¹⁷⁰ This led to the development of a fantasy world setting, characters with defined statistics and attributes, weapons and armour classified in terms of power and effectiveness and a system through which the players could interact and design adventures. As La Farge notes:

[...] The rules guaranteed the reality of the game-world (how could anything with so many rules not be real?), and, if they were hard to understand, at least they were written out, guessable and debatable. [...] there were rules for everything: what kind of monsters you could meet in fresh water, what kind you could meet in salt

¹⁶⁶ See Paul Mason, 'In Search of the Self: A Survey of the First 25 Years of Anglo-American Roleplaying Game Theory', in Markus Montola and Jaakko Stenros eds, *Beyond Role and Play: Tools, Toys and Theory for Harnessing the Imagination*, (Helsinki: Solmukohta Ropecon ry, 2004: available as a .pdf at <http://www.ropecon.fi/pw/>) [last accessed 19/04/10]

¹⁶⁷ Gygax interview available online: <http://www.gamebanshee.com/interviews/garygygax1.php> [last accessed 01/04/09].

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Gygax available online:

<http://www.rpg.net/news+reviews/columns/lynch01may01.html> [last accessed 06/04/10].

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. .

¹⁷⁰ Tactical Studies Rules was formed in 1972 to develop and market the original game, it then became TSR Hobbies, Inc. in 1975, and then in 1983 it became TSR, Inc. TSR was then bought out by Wizards of the Coast in 1997, before Wizards became a subsidiary of Hasbro in 1999. For ease TSR will be used to denote the company that produced and developed *D&D* until 1997.

water, what wise men knew, what happened when you mixed two magic potions together. If you happened to meet a harlot in the game, you could roll two twenty-sided dice and consult a table which told you what kind of harlot it was. It would be a mistake to think of these rules as an impediment to enjoying the game. Rather, the rules are a necessary condition for enjoying the game, and this is true whether you play by them or not. The rules induct you into the world of D&D.¹⁷¹

Such level of detail and the intricate rule system created the illusion of reality; they made the world immersive. The complexity of the world encouraged complexity in character design. Individual characters, rather than units or squads, could be created with detailed back-stories that would impact gameplay and motivation, making the gaming experience richer and more immersive for the player. The Player Characters (PCs) became in-game avatars of the players themselves. By describing a fantasy world in encyclopaedic terms, defining lands, monsters, magic systems and complete settings, and combining this with a commercial product that achieved mass popularity, Gygax and Arneson codified certain fantasy worlds: *Greyhawk* a pseudo-medieval fantasyland, *Ravenloft* a gothic horror environment, *Spelljammer* a science fantasy universe, and *Al-Qadim*, an Arabian-flavoured fantasy world. They also created a general consensus of how these worlds should function. As a consequence, and unintentionally, the RPG created a new system for the creation and comprehension of fantasy worlds. Due to the phenomenal popularity of the RPG in the late 1970s and early 1980s, numerous fantasy worlds and texts embraced this approach to world design and mimicked the characteristics of gaming worlds, to the extent that these characteristics became apparent in contemporary genre fantasy.¹⁷²

The History of the RPG

Confusingly, the term RPG can be used to describe two separate and yet intrinsically linked aspects of roleplaying. The first is the RPG as artefact, the second the RPG as game experience. The RPG as artefact involves the concept of the RPG, the associated literature, the modules, the rulesets, handbooks and codices. The RPG as game experience involves the gameplay, the interactivity and narrative/ludic re-

¹⁷¹ Paul La Farge 'Destroy All Monsters: A Journey Deep into the Cavern of Dungeons & Dragons, a Utopian, Profoundly Dorky and Influential Game That, Lacking Clear Winners or an End, May Not be a Game At All', *Believer Magazine*, (September, 2006) available at: http://www.believmag.com/issues/200609/?read=article_lafarge#return3 [last accessed 19/07/10].

¹⁷² See Fine *Shared Fantasy* p.15

creation and improvisation, in essence the performance of the game.¹⁷³ Although both are obviously ‘the RPG’ they are clearly not identical. Marinka Copier argues that:

[...] a distinction can be made between role-playing games and the act of role-play. Role-playing, the activity of acting out or assuming a particular role, can be done in many forms and within many games, not only in role-playing games. RPGs just offer specific rules and settings which guide role-play.¹⁷⁴

Despite the oversimplification of RPGs ‘just’ offering specific rules and settings, Copier points to the difference between the RPG as a product and role-playing as the activity the product facilitates, enhances and guides. The RPG can therefore be viewed as the codified system that players use to guide, enhance and adjudicate their games, and which also details many aspects of the immersive world. The RPG can also be viewed as the ‘game’ being played, the interactive experience between players and Gamesmaster (GM).¹⁷⁵ Unlike *Monopoly*¹⁷⁶ or other board games, RPGs are developed and constructed by the players during play and the rules serve as guides and impetuses to gameplay. During play of a specific module or scenario the game becomes part improvisation and part reconstruction as players attempt to navigate the story or mystery set before them. Whereas *Monopoly* can be played by following the rules of the game, *D&D* requires the players to create the game within the framework of the rules. A transcript, in the form of GM notes, of a *D&D: Forgotten Realms* adventure is provided in Appendix Two. It highlights the structured re-creational approach as well as aspects of the improvisation commonly found in gameplay.

The concepts inherent to the roleplaying game are certainly not a modern phenomenon, and much of what has combined to form the modern RPG can be traced back to earlier games and art forms. Strategy games such as chess have existed for millennia. They articulate the idea of a structured recreation of battle or war in a regimented table-top setting with each player assuming command of a representational army. Collaborative improvisational performances have also existed

¹⁷³ The performance aspect of RPGs and the interaction of the various players has been fertile ground for performance studies, drama and improvisation, in addition to being of interest to neurophysiologists, psychologists and sociologists.

¹⁷⁴ Marinka Copier, ‘Connecting Worlds: Fantasy Role-playing Games, Ritual Acts and the Magic Circle’, paper delivered at the DiGRA Conference 2005: Changing Views – Worlds in Play. Paper available at <http://www.digra.org/dl/db/06278.50594.pdf> [last accessed 16/11/10].

¹⁷⁵ The GM is the referee, narrator and co-author of the interactive narrative. For a full listing of RPG terms and definitions please see Appendix 1.

¹⁷⁶ Parker Brothers 1935.

for hundreds of years appearing in, for example, the improvisations of the 16th century *Commedia dell'arte*. While the players structured the performance around specific known scenarios using key common figures, a great deal was improvised and the performance was fluid and dynamic until the expected conclusion.¹⁷⁷ Yet neither of these explains what is meant by the modern use of the term RPG, even if they can be identified as early precursors to strategy war-gaming and improvisational games.

It is generally agreed that the modern RPG, as a game concept, has evolved from two main traditions, in addition to the obvious literary fantasy tradition which influenced and shaped it.¹⁷⁸ The first ludic influence can be identified as the *Kriegsspiel*, or wargame.¹⁷⁹ The second major tradition concerns historical re-enactment.¹⁸⁰ The *Kriegsspiel* form of wargaming is credited to a Prussian officer, Baron von Reisswitz, in the early 19th century.¹⁸¹ It established rules for an educative and theoretical wargame that was employed to educate officers and to train them in the use of military tactics. Realising its potential as a method of training officers in battlefield strategy, many European armies adopted this game. The table-top war game itself was an adaptation of much earlier forms, although it used representative figures on an accurately scaled mock-battlefield in order to test tactics and war strategy, rather than using symbolic figures and battlefields as found in chess.¹⁸² This was accomplished by assigning realistic movement measurements to model military units, taking into account terrain penalties, unit size and troop type, all scaled to fit the map. It also used basic military combat statistics to gauge the strengths and weaknesses of the various forces represented. In this way officers could create realistic scenarios concerning how far a cavalry charge could reach, the effectiveness of infantry versus cavalry and so on, experimenting with, at least theoretically, innovations in tactics and

¹⁷⁷ For further details see J. R. A. Nicoll, *The World of Harlequin: A Critical Study of the Commedia dell'Arte* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), for a practitioner and academic view see Antonio Fava, *The Comic Mask in the Commedia dell'Arte: Actor, Training, Improvisation, and the Poetics of Survival* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2007)

¹⁷⁸ For a more detailed history of RPGs and their general mechanics see Ian Livingstone, *Dicing with Dragons: An Introduction to Role-Playing Games*, (New York: Signet, 1982) and Lawrence Schick, *Heroic Worlds: A History and Guide to Role-Playing Games*, (New York: Prometheus Books, 1991).

¹⁷⁹ <http://www.kriegsspiel.org.uk> (last accessed April 2009) provides a thorough and well referenced account with links to several academic articles, the majority of which are in German.

¹⁸⁰ Clearly fantasy as a tradition plays a significant role in the formation and formulation of the RPG, but the ludic traditions and influences are not necessarily the same as the narrative, although some overlap does occur.

¹⁸¹ Credit is often also given to von Reisswitz's son for further developing his father's basic ideas.

¹⁸² The games of Chess, Go and Hnefatafl can be seen as ancient, if abstract, forms based on a similar premise.

strategy. An important component of the game involved the use of an independent ‘umpire’, who served as an impartial arbiter and who would implement the players’ ‘orders’, reducing ‘cheating’ and mimicking the fog-of-war. There are obvious parallels between this role and that of a RPG GM.¹⁸³

In the early 20th century H.G. Wells adapted the *Kriegsspiel* into a tabletop game for casual play called *Little Wars: a game for boys from twelve years of age to one hundred and fifty and for that more intelligent sort of girl who likes boys’ games and books* published in 1913 by Frank Palmer.¹⁸⁴ This can be seen as the genesis of the table-top warfare game, as both a commercial venture, and as a ludic rather than pedagogical artefact.¹⁸⁵

Many of the games themselves appeared complex due to the specificity of the numerous, detailed rules and the seemingly complex statistical mechanics. However, these games are conceptually simplistic in that they consist of assigning arbitrary statistics relative to one another to representative figures, landscapes and types of soldiers.¹⁸⁶ As a result, the framework of the game is easily adaptable to almost any setting or time period as long as care is given to *relative* values among the troops represented. A Prussian Infantryman versus a Prussian Cavalry Officer is just as easily modelled as a Roman Centurion versus a Germanic Barbarian, or by extension an Elf Swordsman versus a Dwarven Axe-wielder. Therefore, the translation of the game into a medieval or ancient setting is not only possible but relatively easy and requires only a small conceptual change to make the game relevant to a fantasy setting. This adaptability is an important facet of this type of game and leads to an essential step in the evolution of RPGs, since the military strategy game had a significant impact on Dave Arneson, co-creator of *D&D*:

¹⁸³ For a further discussion specifically of the differences between RPGs and Wargames see Fine, *Shared Fantasy*, pp.8-11.

¹⁸⁴ Wells included an appendix ‘Little Wars and Kriegsspiel’ which provided more complex rules but which clearly identifies the link between the two. *Little Wars* is available on Project Gutenberg www.gutenberg.org/etext/3691 [last accessed 19th July 2010].

¹⁸⁵ A variant on this type of board game is *Diplomacy* (Hasbro, 1959) which relied upon players making treaties and agreements through interaction and discussion rather than resolving conflicts through random number generation.

¹⁸⁶ For example, if infantry are given an arbitrary strength of 5, the strengths of cavalry and artillery are then calculated relative to this base value, for instance cavalry 10 and artillery 15.

My parents bought me a wargame by the Avalon Hill company called *Gettysburg*. I thought there were a lot of possibilities there and I liked it a lot. I even talked my friends into learning how to play it. There was only one game a year that came out from Avalon Hill, though, so we started to design our own games.

Around 1968 I got in touch with some gamers in the Twin Cities that were playing with military miniatures and thought that was interesting and exciting. I played games with them for a couple of years and we started to make our own battles. That ended up leading to something a little bit closer to true role-playing when we started to set objectives for different generals that weren't necessarily military in nature. At that point I guess we started role-playing.¹⁸⁷

Just as the game *Chainmail* could be adapted into fantasy, so could the military strategy games favoured by Arneson.

The second tradition that had a significant impact on the formation of RPGs concerns the creation of re-enactment societies and how *LotR* combined with this development. *LotR* was exceptionally popular in American universities during the 1960s¹⁸⁸ and 1970s.¹⁸⁹ This time frame coincides with the cheap ACE paperback pirate edition of *LotR* as well as the subsequent 'authorised' Ballantine paperback editions. Tolkien's Middle Earth provided an escapist world that coincided with the desires of the 'counter culture'.¹⁹⁰ These students designed 'talkie' games, essentially ways for people to re-enact different scenes from the book, and to place themselves within the story. The *Society for Creative Anachronism* (SCA) is a well known and still functioning aspect of this Live Action Roleplay (LARP) movement:

The SCA started in 1966, when a few friends who were history buffs and science fiction/fantasy fans hosted a big outdoor party in Berkeley, California [...] Word of the SCA spread via friends and science-fiction fandom.¹⁹¹

There was an overlap of membership between this student movement and the fandom of SF and fantasy.¹⁹² This combination of students, fantasy literature, creative

¹⁸⁷ Dave Arneson interview 19th August 2004, <http://uk.pc.gamespy.com/articles/540/540395p1.html> [last accessed 19/07/10].

¹⁸⁸ Coinciding with the 'pirate' edition of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* published by Ace Books in 1965.

¹⁸⁹ Kraus, Gerard, 'The Quest for Interactivity or Interactive Narratives: their history, criticism and representation in the filmic media'. (Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Liverpool, 2006)

¹⁹⁰ Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition*, (London: Faber, 1970), p.40

¹⁹¹ <http://www.sca.org/officers/chatelain/sca-intro.html> [last accessed 19/07/10].

¹⁹² Some notable members of the Kingdom of the West involved in SF and fantasy were Poul Anderson, Astrid Bear Anderson (Daughter of Poul Anderson and wife of Greg Bear), Marion Zimmer Bradley, Amanda Cockrell, Rick Cook, Frank Herbert, Dorothy J. Heydt, Katherine Kurtz, Diana L. Paxson, Jerry Pournelle and Paul Edwin Zimmer. This list was taken from

expression and interests in roleplaying, table-top gaming and war gaming led to a confluence of ideas and concepts that resulted in RPGs and the market demand for them. As Fine notes, ‘Virtually every fantasy gamer has seen *Star Trek* and read Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* (1966) and the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (1965) and many references are made to these programs and books’.¹⁹³ Not only could students re-enact the battles from Tolkien’s world but they could place themselves in the action of that world and develop scenes based on key chapters or even scenarios not present in the books but set in the world of Middle Earth, thus creating the idea of RPGs as a gaming experience. Tolkien’s influence can also be traced through the various Middle Earth-based wargames that developed concurrently with *D&D*. *Battle of Helm’s Deep* (1974) and *Siege of Minas Tirith* (1975) were both commercial games by Fact & Fantasy Games. While these did not influence the creation of *D&D* directly, they are evidence of the desire and market for fantasy games in general and of the expanding field. At this time there was also a significant increase in the popularity of fantasy, particularly of the sword and sorcery type of fantasy marketed by Lester del Rey and Lin Carter. The interaction, influence and overlap between the games and the literature is discussed below.

D&D was not the only RPG marketed in the 1970s, but it was certainly the focal point of the emerging narrative/ludic form. In 1975, *Tunnels and Trolls*, a fantasy RPG board game, created by Ken St. Andre, and intended to be a simpler alternative to *D&D* was published by Flying Buffalo. In interview, St. Andre has said:

My conception of the *T&T* world was based on *The Lord of The Rings* as it would have been done by Marvel Comics in 1974 with *Conan*, *Elric*, the *Gray Mouser* and a host of badguys thrown in [...]When *T&T* was first written back in April 1975 the only other role playing game that existed was the first edition of *Dungeons and Dragons*, which I had seen exactly once. Great idea... lousy execution; hence my decision to write my own FRP game. I remember that I was determined to keep it simple, amusing and easy to play with commonly available equipment [...] I’ll admit that I was influenced a bit by the early *D&D*.¹⁹⁴

<http://history.westkingdom.org/AHP/WhereAreThey.htm> [last accessed 01/08/10]. The SCA facebook group forum has an alternative list under ‘Famous SCAdians’ which adds Robert Asprin and Mercedes Lackey, <http://www.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=2203308477&topic=10784> [last accessed 16/11/10].

¹⁹³ Fine *Shared Fantasy* p.35

¹⁹⁴ Ken St Andre in an interview for *Demon Issue*, 5 (1986), text available at <http://www.garenewing.co.uk/tnt/interview.html> [last accessed 19/07/10].

D&D was important and influential, even to its competitors. It set the benchmark and established conceptual frameworks for future roleplaying games. As Fine notes about rival games in this period, ‘Some of these games were inspired by *D&D*, others developed out of frustration with the game, but all have been influenced by it’.¹⁹⁵ The profile of *D&D*, while initially modest and limited to fan word-of-mouth, was raised significantly by a few specific conspicuous examples. One of the most important was its appearance in an early scene of Spielberg’s *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982). This scene highlights that the game was popular enough to merit inclusion and be recognisable to the contemporary audience. It also heightened awareness of the game in contrast to the mainstream media view and the various ‘moral panics’ associated with *D&D*. The book, and later TV film, *Mazes & Monsters*,¹⁹⁶ was a fictionalisation of the 1979 incident concerning James Dallas Egbert III, the young man who was ‘lost’ in the steam tunnels under Michigan State University. At the time a private investigator, William Dear, hired by the Egbert family erroneously told reporters that James had tried to commit suicide due to the influence of *D&D*. In the film version, the character, played by Tom Hanks, experiences a psychotic break while playing a live action *D&D* game in a mine near the university campus. Another example of *D&D*’s infamy concerns Patricia Pulling and BADD. Pulling, an anti-occult campaigner from Virginia, started the organisation BADD (Bothered About *Dungeons and Dragons*) in 1982 to campaign against RPGs following her son’s suicide that year, which she partly blamed on his playing of *D&D*.¹⁹⁷ The widespread publicity, both good and bad, certainly raised the profile of the game in the early 1980s.¹⁹⁸

A more positive representation of *D&D* in mainstream media was the children’s cartoon series produced jointly by Marvel and TSR.¹⁹⁹ Gygax served as an executive producer for the animated series which concerned the adventures of a group of five children in a generic *D&D* world. The character of Dungeon Master (a Yoda-like tiny

¹⁹⁵ Fine *Shared Fantasy* p.16

¹⁹⁶ Rona Jaffe, *Mazes and Monsters*, (New York: Delacorte, 1981) and the film *Mazes and Monsters*, dir. by Steven Hiliard Stern (McDermott Productions and Procter & Gamble Productions, 1982).

¹⁹⁷ See <http://www.holysmoke.org/wb/wb0017.htm> [last accessed 19/06/10].

¹⁹⁸ For further instances of *D&D* associated deaths please see the list on www.modern-psychiatry.com under ‘TV Violence’ [last accessed 26/08/2010]

¹⁹⁹ *Dungeons and Dragons* (TV series) dir. by John Gibbs, (Marvel Productions; Dungeons & Dragons Entertainment Corporation; Toei Animation Company and TSR, 1983-5)..

wizened old man who speaks in riddles) guides and mentors the young heroes (whom he generally refers to by the name of their class: Barbarian, Wizard, Ranger etc.) as they travel around the land righting wrongs and completing quests with the ultimate aim of returning to the 'real world'. The group's main adversary is the 'Dark Lord' Venger,²⁰⁰ whose deep voice, dark clothing and characterisation are reminiscent of Darth Vader.²⁰¹ The series emphasised the use of magical weapons, character classes, group co-operation and the continuing adventures motif common to *D&D* games, as well as providing a child-friendly rendering of many of the monsters and characters of the game.

The comparisons to *Star Wars: A New Hope* are not entirely tangential, as an obviously popular cultural artefact, *D&D*'s referencing of the film may have been a deliberate strategy to access the same market. Altman remarks that when *Star Wars: A New Hope* (Lucas, 1977) was released in cinemas, some film critics approached it as an example of a Western in terms of genre, in particular the scene with Han Solo in the Mos Eisley Cantina.²⁰² Film critics considering the film now would be hard pressed to ignore the fantasy elements of the story of a young farm boy with a hidden parentage who, guided by a mysterious old man, given a special sword and taught to use magical powers and with the aid of a rogue and a barbarian, rescues a princess from the fortress of a dark and powerful lord. Regardless, *Dungeons & Dragons*, the cartoon series, appeared to play on aspects of *Star Wars* and the popularity surrounding that film franchise.

The widespread awareness of *D&D*, and of RPGs in general, continued to grow from these beginnings as they crossed media formats and narrative forms. From being cultish, niche market games in the mid- to late-1970s, RPGs quickly obtained wide appeal throughout the 1980s and 1990s and remain global businesses that straddle multi-media formats including board games, books, films, computer games, merchandising and conventions. RPG companies, such as Wizards of the Coast, are

²⁰⁰ Roz Kaveney, 'Dark Lord' in Clute and Grant eds, *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, p.250

²⁰¹ A central villain from George Lucas' *Star Wars* films.

²⁰² Altman *Film/Genre* p.24

large corporations with international markets.²⁰³ While one critic has written about the gaming community that:

‘[they] could perhaps be pithily, if unkindly, described as *Lord of the Rings*-reading social inadequates’, this perception of the RPG gamer, sitting in a basement with a bunch of geeky friends pretending to be Elves, is just as outmoded a stereotype as the business being perceived as a niche market.²⁰⁴

To put this assertion in context, Blizzard’s *World of Warcraft (WoW)*, a Massively Multi-player Online Role-playing Game (MMORPG), has over 11 million monthly subscribers worldwide, a figure that represents over two-and-a-half times the population of the Republic of Ireland and is larger than the population of Greater London.²⁰⁵ *WoW*, however, is only one of these online games: several other major MMORPGs played daily have similar, if lower, monthly subscription figures.²⁰⁶ There are also hundreds of RPG websites and fansites. Some are game specific, such as the *WoW* forum,²⁰⁷ but the majority are more general in content. *The Forge*,²⁰⁸ *RPGnet*²⁰⁹ and *Allakhazam*²¹⁰ are popular and well known examples of the all encompassing websites which discuss numerous RPG games and related matters. These boards are frequented by fans, gamers and industry professionals, such as game designers, and encourage interaction and progressive dialogue.

²⁰³ Although Wizards of the Coast are now a subsidiary of Hasbro.

²⁰⁴ Mason, ‘In Search of the Self’ in Montola and Stenros eds. *Beyond Role and Play* (Helsinki: Ropecon ry, 2004) pp.1-14

²⁰⁵ This figure is somewhat in dispute with Blizzard claiming as of 21st November 2008 that it had 11.5 million monthly subscribers at <http://us.blizzard.com/en-us/company/press/pressreleases.html?081121> [last accessed 19/07/10]. Blizzard itself has claimed that the 11.5 million subscriber figure is still holding steady in a press release dated 25th May 2010: <http://www.wow.com/2010/05/25/blizzards-frank-pearce-predicts-renewed-subscriber-growth-with/> [last accessed 19/07/10]. The Curse.com article posted 30th May 2009 cites ten million monthly subscribers <http://www.curse.com/articles/wow-en-news/487363.aspx> [last accessed 19/07/10]. Wired.com reports the 11.5 million subscriber figure 23rd December 2008 <http://www.wired.com/gamelifeline/2008/12/world-of-warc-1/> [last accessed 19/07/10].

²⁰⁶ Other examples of current popular MMORPGs include: *Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures*, (Eidos Interactive, 2008); *Anarchy Online*, (Funcom, 2001); *EVE Online*, (CCP Games, 2003); *EverQuest II*, (Sony Online Entertainment, 2004); *Lord of the Rings Online: Shadows of Angmar*, (Turbine, 2007); *Star Trek Online*, (Cryptic Studios, 2010) and *Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning*, (Mythic Entertainment, 2008), although *WoW* remains the most popular.

²⁰⁷ *WoW* Forum, <http://forums.wow-europe.com/?sid=1> [last accessed 19/07/10]. In addition, there are several other region specific boards on *WoW*’s site dealing with North America and non-English speaking regions.

²⁰⁸ *The Forge*, <http://www.indie-rpgs.com/forge/index.php> [last accessed 19/07/10]

²⁰⁹ *RPGnet*, <http://www.rpg.net/> [last accessed 19/07/10].

²¹⁰ *Allakhazam*, <http://wow.allakhazam.com/forum.html> [last accessed 19/07/10].

The RPG Game

When marketing *D&D* to hobby stores, TSR used the following description in order to encourage the shops to stock their products:

While one of the participants creates the whole world in which the adventures are to take place, the balance of the players—as few as two or as many as a dozen or more—create “characters” who will travel about in this make-believe world, interact with its peoples, and seek the fabulous treasures of magic and precious items guarded by dragons, giants, werewolves, and hundreds of other fearsome things. The game organizer, the participant who creates the whole and moderates these adventures, is known as the Dungeon Master, or DM. The other players have personae—fighters, magic-users, thieves, clerics, elves, dwarves, or what have you—who are known as player characters. Player characters have known attributes which are initially determined by rolling the dice... These attributes help to define the role and limits of each character... There is neither an end to the game nor any winner. Each session of play is merely an episode in an ongoing “world”.²¹¹

As this description suggests, the RPG game is a simple, yet effectively ambiguous, construct. In more academic terminology Gary Fine describes them as ‘a hybrid of war games, educational simulation games, and *folie à deux*’.²¹² By *folie à deux*, Fine means a shared illusion or a collective fantasy constructed between the players and GM. Mackay defines an RPG in a more technical fashion as:

[...] an episodic and participatory story-creation system that includes a set of quantified rules that assist a group of players and a gamemaster in determining how their fictional characters’ spontaneous interactions are resolved. These performed interactions between the players’ and the gamemaster’s characters take place during individual sessions that, together, form episodes or adventures in the lives of the fictional characters.²¹³

In the process of gameplay, firstly, the players and GM agree upon a setting ahead of time. In the context of *D&D* this is usually dictated by a product or gameworld such as *Forgotten Realms*, *Dragonlance* or *Greyhawk*. The GM creates a scenario or linked series of scenarios (a campaign) or familiarises him- or herself with a purchased commercially-produced game module. Examples of commercial modules

²¹¹ TSR Hobbies, *Understanding Dungeons & Dragons* (1979), quoted in Fine *Shared Fantasy*, pp.6-7

²¹² Fine *Shared Fantasy* p.6 *Folie à deux* is more commonly associated with a psychiatric disorder, but Fine adapts the term to fit the concept of the RPG session.

²¹³ Daniel Mackay *The Fantasy Role-playing Game: A New Performing Art* (Jefferson, NC: Macfarland, 2001) p.4

can include a pre-packaged adventure box-set (*Forgotten Realms Campaign Set*),²¹⁴ a stand alone adventure module set in a gameworld (the *Greyhawk*-set *N1: Against the Cult of the Reptile God*),²¹⁵ or a linked module than can be combined with other modules to form a campaign or super-module (*G1: Steading of the Hill Giant Chief*²¹⁶). When the proposed setting and game scenario has been settled the players construct (roll up) their player characters (PCs) and record the data on character sheets.²¹⁷ The players negotiate their way through the GM-created or administered scenario utilising elements of improvisation, acting, random number generation and arbitration to complete the various tasks they are given or encounters they experience within the scenario. Although this reductive description greatly simplifies the variety of different types of RPGs and gaming groups that exist across the world, it does identify the core concept of this form of roleplay.²¹⁸

In essence, most of these interactive narratives begin with a GM and one or more players. The GM is responsible for constructing the narrative parameters of the adventure, for improvising and/or controlling Non-Playing Characters (NPCs), adjudicating on disputes and managing the plot development. NPCs are characters with whom the players' characters will interact during the course of the game and are almost always controlled and played by the GM, who is also responsible for the 'running' of the game. This is a creative as well as managerial position as the GM acts as director, continuity editor, note taker and adjudicator. The players of the RPG are usually responsible for the creation and portrayal of Player Characters (PCs) which are detailed on character sheets and updated during the course of the game.²¹⁹ The character sheet acts as the basic skeleton of information around which the player

²¹⁴ *Forgotten Realms Campaign Set* (TSR, 1987) module code 1031. It contained two books which detailed basic rules, adventure outlines, monster statistics and character sheets and was a basic introductory set building on the *AD&D* rule books and manuals..

²¹⁵ Douglas Niles, *Against the Cult of the Reptile God*, (TSR, 1982); an introductory stand alone adventure set in the *Greyhawk D&D* world. It contained a short 28 page booklet detailing the aspects of the adventure.

²¹⁶ Gary Gygax *Steading of the Hill Giant Chief* TSR, 1978 code G1 which could then be linked to *Glacial Rift of the Frost Giant Jarl* 1978 G2 and *Hall of the Fire Giant King* 1978 G3, collected together as *Against the Giants* 1981, which was then linked to another campaign *The Drow* which then finished with *Queen of the Spiders* 1986. The supermodule was then G1-3 with D1-3 (*Descent into the Depths of the Earth*, *Shrine of the Kua-Tao*, *Vault of the Drow* 1978) and Q1 (*Queen of the Demonweb Pits* 1980 by Gary Gygax and David Sutherland III).

²¹⁷ An example 3rd Edition *D&D* Character Sheet has been included in Appendix 3.

²¹⁸ See Appendix 1 for a glossary of gaming terminology and concepts as well Appendix 2 for an excerpt from a Gamesmaster's notes for a *Forgotten Realms* campaign.

²¹⁹ A blank *D&D* Character sheet has been reproduced in Appendix 3.

builds an in-game persona. The statistics noted on the sheets are necessary for the integration of the player character with the game mechanics. In addition to detailing basic attributes, character sheets usually contain information about the character's skills and abilities, equipment and background. PCs need not resemble the actual player, either physically or mentally. Indeed, they are frequently of different races, genders or species, and possess powers, skills or abilities that have no real-life equivalent, for example, the ability to see in infra red, cast magic spells, or even transform physically.²²⁰ If the GM is the director and original screen play writer of the game, then the player is the actor and the PC the character.

The gaming session begins when the GM outlines the initial prescribed scenario to the players. They then act out the adventure in a combination of oral, iconic and physical action for the duration of the session. Some games use dice and other means of random number generation to resolve in-game conflicts and events, just as with the table-top wargames.²²¹ The GM's description of the scenario will include hints toward player interaction and will also cover events and characters the players will meet, including encounters with anything in the gameworld from monsters to barmen. Oral and written information, in addition to the use of images, props and sounds, allow the GM to communicate these elements of the gameworld to the players and creates the fantasy environment in which the players imagine their PCs interacting.

However, there must be a balance between the fantasy of the gameworld and its imitation of the 'real world'. Thus emphasis is placed on making the fantasy world 'real'. As La Farge says, 'The rules guaranteed the reality of the game-world (how could anything with so many rules not be real?)'.²²² This blending of fantastic elements presented in a rational form is obviously necessary for gamers, such as La Farge, to initially immerse themselves in the gaming experience. At the core of this balance is the concept of rationality which forms the essence of RPG gameworlds.

²²⁰ This is in direct contrast to some LARPs in which the character should resemble the player in some or most respects.

²²¹ Again the dice represent the potential chaos of any 'real life' scenario, in which just because something happens nine times out of ten, there is still a chance that the unexpected could happen. Some games rely solely on roleplaying in order to resolve situations, but it is more common for some element of random statistical testing to be involved. *D&D* has become synonymous with a D20 based system, a 20 sided dice system.

²²² La Farge 'Destroy All Monsters'
http://www.believmag.com/issues/200609/?read=article_lafarge#return3 [last accessed 19/07/10].

Rationality as a concept in fantasy has already been highlighted by Mendlesohn in her chapter on ‘Immersive Fantasy’, specifically where she links it to the explanations of fantastic concepts in real world terms as seen in SF; for instance the fantastic dragons in Anne McCaffrey’s *Pern*²²³ are rationalised as genetic experiments. The RPG utilises this rationality in a slightly different way by codifying rules and explanations for how magic systems work, and creating the suggestion that the world is real because it conforms to rules. Due to the potential confusion a term such as ‘rational’ can cause in this context, the term authenticity has been used extensively here in its place.²²⁴ The use of dice also adds to this ‘believability’, as the random number generation adds an element of uncontrolled chaos mimicking the chaos of ‘real life’. This concept of the rational or ‘authentic’ fantasy world is discussed in detail in Chapter Three – World Building, and in particular the problem with defining fantasy as rational.

Usually there is no ‘end’ or final goal to the game; rather the game is about the actual gaming experience and progressing through the scenario, in addition to ‘levelling’ your character up and gaining better equipment. At concluding the original scenario the characters advance to another scenario in the next gaming session. The use of continuing characters creates a single narrative thread which links the series of continuing adventures and discrete narrative sequences into a coherent whole. The major narrative arc is not then plot based, but rather the development and growth of the characters as they progress through these adventures. The focus on character development and experience as the central linking thread is clearly distinct to the narrative/story focus of much literary fantasy, and indeed, the concept of completing the world is antithetical to the RPG. As an extension of the RPG concept into literary and narrative form, the RPGF has adopted this convention of the re-usable world, and focuses on character adventure rather than world shaping events. RPGFs therefore lack the overall sense of conclusion or eucatastrophe commonly identified as a convention of GF. This does not mean that there is no narrative closure at the end of any one particular sequence, but rather, as in a television serial, the conclusion of each episode or season generally allows for a sequel. This concept of the continuing quest, focusing on specific characters, partly explains the popularity of gaming fantasy series

²²³ Anne McCaffrey *Dragonriders of Pern* series 1967 to present.

²²⁴ Please see below Chapter Three – World Building

such as the *Icwind Dale* trilogy by R.A. Salvatore.²²⁵ Readers can enjoy the continuing adventures of their favourite characters, with the exploits simply growing grander and more epic.

Certain aspects of character based serialised sequencing correspond directly to the ‘bracelet fantasy’ that Mendlesohn has identified in *Rhetorics*.²²⁶ Many of the monster encounters and combat sequences within RPGFs are used simply to illustrate how the heroes have grown in skill and prowess over the course of the adventure. However, the serialised gaming novels, such as the *Icwind Dale* trilogy, contain several key encounters which are essential in creating the ‘story chain’ within each book and then subsequent books as the narrative builds upon each adventure in turn. For example, in *The Crystal Shard*, Drizzt and Wulfgar confront and defeat a white dragon, Ingeloakastimizilian. This confirms their martial ability like any other monster encounter. However, it is also integral to the solidifying of their friendship and trust, and it results in Drizzt finding the magical scimitar ‘Icingdeath’. The sequence is a necessary narrative kernel and essential for the story to develop: for Drizzt to be armed properly, for the development of the characters’ relationship and to demonstrate the near mythical fighting prowess of the characters. The sequence is then echoed in the sequel, *Streams of Silver*, when Wulfgar, Drizzt and their other companions face the shadowdragon, Shimmergloom, creating a narrative resonance that would be lost without the first sequence. In this sense the RPGF is closer in conception to a ‘serialised procedural’ television show in that the story develops episodically over a longer extended narrative, and early acts have repercussions in later instalments with the quest adventure as the procedure and the ultimate result as the conclusion to the overarching story arc.²²⁷

In game terminology the escalation of danger and reward for PCs is tied to the concept of ‘levelling’. As PCs thwart enemies, defeat monsters and complete scenarios they are rewarded with experience points (XP) to denote how they are becoming more capable and powerful. As experience points accumulate and pass

²²⁵ R.A. Salvatore’s *Forgotten Realms Drizzt Series* begins with the *Icwind Dale* trilogy 1988-90, with the prequel trilogy *The Dark Elf* trilogy 1990-91.

²²⁶ Mendlesohn *Rhetorics of Fantasy* p.29

²²⁷ See Jason Mittell ‘All in the Game: *The Wire*’ in *Third Person: Authoring and Exploring Vast Narratives* (2009) ed. Pat Harrigan pp.429-438

certain thresholds the character gains levels. As the PC reaches higher levels they gain access to new and greater powers and abilities (often represented in-game by modifiers to their dice rolls), which in turn allow them to face greater and more dangerous foes. The more powerful the foe vanquished, the greater the experience rewarded. For example, in the *4th Edition D&D Player's Handbook*, a Level 1 PC begins with 0XP and begins with a standard selection of skills, feats bonuses and powers associated with either their Race or their Class. When they accumulate 1,000XP they advance to the 2nd Level and gain a bonus utility power and a bonus feat. When they reach 2,250 XP they reach the 3rd Level and gain an encounter attack power. At 5,500 XP they reach the 4th Level and gain a +1 bonus to two of their basic stats as well as an extra feat. As a result the PC becomes more powerful and skilful, reflecting their growth in adventuring experience, as well as becoming more a highly specialised and individual character as the series of adventures and campaigns progress.²²⁸

This concept of continuation and extension, rather than conclusion and resolution, also illustrates how problematic the word 'game' can be in this particular setting.²²⁹ Rarely is one player in particular a winner. Often the 'game' is most fulfilling when the whole team of players succeed at any given task set by the GM. The advancement of the group through the scenario can be of more importance to the players than the specific advancement of their individual PCs. Christopher Lehigh, building on arguments by Claude Lévi-Strauss,²³⁰ argues persuasively that the RPG is better understood as 'ritual' than as 'game' in that game suggests disjuncture, whereas ritual suggests continuity.²³¹ The RPG emphasises a collaborative effort toward shared and continuous goals, rather than individual success. Just as the players are not in direct adversarial competition with each other, neither are they in direct competition with the GM. If the PCs die, the GM does not 'win', just as if the PCs survive and defeat the monsters, the GM does not 'lose'. The GM and the players co-operatively create

²²⁸ Rob Heinsoo, Andy Collins & James Wyatt *D&D Player's Handbook 4th Edition* (Renton, WA: Wizards of the Coast, 2008) p.29

²²⁹ See Lehigh, Christopher 'Ritual Discourse in Role-Playing Games' www.indie-rps.com/articles/ritual_discourse_in_RPGs.html for a more detailed discussion of this aspect. [Last accessed 19/07/10].

²³⁰ Lévi-Strauss, Claude *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966)

²³¹ Lehigh, Christopher 'Ritual Discourse in Role-Playing Games' www.indie-rps.com/articles/ritual_discourse_in_RPGs.html [last accessed 03/08/10].

a world and adventure through the use of rules, and navigate through a shared scenario dictated by the rules and events. This combination of rules, game and narrative find some correspondence to the ‘Godgame’ noted in the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, ‘A Story can thus be defined as a godgame whose rules govern its protagonists’.²³² The players and GM work together to find and resolve puzzles set forth in the very rules of the game and create the world, adventure and narrative outcome together. They create a story, develop a narrative, complete tasks and overcome obstacles, in order collectively to experience an imagined world and adventure defined by and accessed through its rules and strictures.

At the heart of many early RPG games was the concept of a small group of heroes who adventured through strange landscapes, dungeons and labyrinths in search of monsters to defeat, treasure to find and innocents to rescue. The repercussions of their ‘quests’ could be minimal individual rewards, such as the accumulation of better equipment and minor local rewards, for example making a small village safe from monsters. As the PCs advance in terms of level and experience, these narrative resolutions increase in terms of scale, and could include major world shaping events, for instance defeating an evil god, overthrowing an evil tyrant and so forth. The scale of the adventure is limited only by the players’ imaginations and the power of their characters. PCs that continued on further adventures, or ‘campaign’ characters, grew in skill, power and ability. Gamers could then re-use the same characters on multiple quests, allowing for an escalation of risk and reward. The 4th Edition D&D rules ‘cap’ or limit character level to a maximum of 30 levels (1,000,000 XP), and while players may continue using that character, the PC can no longer gain additional levels or abilities.²³³ The narrative conclusion is therefore dictated by the PC and not the world or setting, as it is the characters who have conclusions, not the gameworld.

This idea of levelling, escalation and the gaining of experience became integral to the RPG game and can be seen as analogous to many genre fantasy novels in which a young, inexperienced character is introduced at the start of the series only to grow in power and skill over the course of the series before being instrumental in world

²³² Clute, John *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* p.414

²³³ See Rob Heinsoo, Andy Collins & James Wyatt *D&D Player’s Handbook 4th Edition* (Renton, WA: Wizards of the Coast, 2008) p.29

altering events. Series of stories detailing the continuing adventures of a hero or band of heroes is obviously not a new concept, Howard's *Conan* stories (1932-36)²³⁴ and Fritz Leiber's *Fafhrd and Gray Mouser* stories (1939-88) are obvious early examples of continuing adventures. While the RPG model would imply a chronological sequence to the adventures, this is not necessarily the case in the literature. Salvatore's first trilogy *Icewind Dale* was followed by a prequel, the *Dark Elf* trilogy detailing the early adventures of Drizzt. The common element is the character or characters at the centre of the narrative forming the common link, rather than a focus on story and plot. Escalating narrative sequences appear to become far more common after the advent of the RPG, for example; Terry Brooks' *Shannara* (1977-present),²³⁵ Raymond E. Feist's *Riftwar Saga* (1982-present),²³⁶ David Eddings' *Belgariad* (1983-87) and then *Mallorleon* (1987-91),²³⁷ Janny Wurts' *Empire* (1987-92),²³⁸ Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time* (1990-2005),²³⁹ Terry Goodkind's *Sword of Truth* (1994-2007),²⁴⁰ and Robin Hobb's *Six Duchies* and *Liveship* series (1995-2010).²⁴¹ Nevertheless, these genre fantasy series, with the exception of Feist's work, have little overt connection to RPGs and gaming, and yet can still be constructed in terms of the RPG quest/adventure which follows the heroes on their journey, rather than focusing solely on their goal.

RPG and Literature

The relationship between fantasy literature and RPGs is certainly clear in terms of influence, as acknowledged in Appendix N of the original *AD&D Dungeon Master's Guide*. Like Tolkien, Gygax and Arneson derived inspiration from earlier works and

²³⁴ Penned by Howard 1932-36, but obviously the character continued in stories penned by other authors.

²³⁵ Although Terry Brooks' original *Shannara* trilogy was 1977-85, he has continued to develop the series and world further to the present, albeit it in separate linked trilogies rather than strict sequences. The latest book *Bearers of the Black Staff* (2010) with a further four *Shannara* books announced.

²³⁶ Beginning with *Magician* (1982), and the latest *At the Gates of Darkness* (2010). Although collected as various smaller sequences the entire series can be read as one long sequence with several characters spanning multiple volumes.

²³⁷ With two prequels added, *Belgarath the Sorcerer* (1995) and *Polgara the Sorceress* (1997).

²³⁸ Although this was a trilogy, it was part of the larger *Midkemia* series of books by Raymond E. Feist.

²³⁹ Although Robert Jordan died before concluding the series Brandon Sanderson was brought in to complete the series *The Gathering Storm* (2009), *Towers of Midnight* (2010) and *A Memory of Light* (to be published 2011).

²⁴⁰ Although Goodkind has announced a new *Sword of Truth* book *The Omen Machine* to be published 2011.

²⁴¹ Robin Hobb has sequenced her stories in three linked trilogies and a duology completed 2010

adapted them to their own use, or as Tolkien himself put it, they dipped into the ‘cauldron of story’.²⁴² While Tolkien drew upon a greater tradition of myth, legend and literature, Gygax and Arneson primarily used established fantasy texts to form their cauldron of story. Of course, when something is adapted to fit another purpose certain elements are changed, others are left out and some are elevated in prominence. Through their adaptation of fantasy texts into a codified rule-set, Gygax and Arneson unwittingly created a critical framework that stripped genre fantasy to its core concepts. Much as Propp identified key functions and narrative structures within folktales, so Gygax and Arneson identified a structured core to fantasy narratives and worlds. Through the RPG’s focus on finding the common parallels for how fantasy and fantasy worlds function, Gygax and Arneson attempted to distil a common framework for fantasyland construction and development. This was incorporated into their rule-sets as a way to develop and modify existing fantasyland settings so that no matter the superficial dressing or idiosyncrasies, be it a medieval European setting, an Arabian Nights setting, a jungle locale or an Elvish forest, there was a common approach to how to construct, how to navigate and how to interact with the fantasy setting. In attempting to isolate and codify complementary strands of narrative development, the group adventure, the quest and the tasks of the hero, and combining them with a systematic approach to individual character development in respect to rewarding the individual gamer’s progress, Gygax and Arneson created a new focus for fantasy that treated the character as central, and the setting as secondary. It is this separation of character, setting and narrative into distinct but connected categories within the game that then translates into the popular RPGF literature. No longer is the hero’s journey intrinsically linked to the fate of the land, and no longer is the hero the sole focus, but the land as a fixed and re-usable venue, the hero is part of a group, and the result of the quest or adventure is limited in scope and scale. Instead of a hero defeating the Dark Lord and saving the world, a *group* of heroes defeats *a* dark lord and restores peace to a *small area* of the world. It is through this adaptation and evolution that we can see the RPG and the RPGF as representative of a ‘new narrative form’ and that the approach to modern fantasy stories has been altered.²⁴³

²⁴² Tolkien, J.R.R. ‘On Fairy Stories’ see *The Tolkien Reader* (Alwin & Unwin 1966) p. 52.

²⁴³ Vander Ploeg describes this as ‘a new manifestation of the fantasy context’ Scott Vander Ploeg and Kenneth Philips ‘Playing With Power: The Science of Magic in Interactive Fantasy’ *JFA* Vol. 9 No.2 pp.142-156 p.142

At this stage in its history, the RPG fed directly *on* genre fantasy and used fantasy novels as inspiration and sources for gameworlds. Due to the links between gamers and readers of fantasy fiction, TSR realised the potential market for *D&D*-based novels and commissioned authors to begin writing fictions set in their game worlds.

As R.A. Salvatore reflects:

When I submitted [my unsolicited novel] to TSR in 1987 they really liked it but said they could only take *Forgotten Realms* books...[They] asked me to audition for the second *Forgotten Realms* novel...[...] all the other in-house people were scrambling to do *Dragonlance* novels because *Dragonlance* at the time was just huge, and no one knew how big *Forgotten Realms* would be. I just happened to land in the slush pile at the right time, when they needed a writer.²⁴⁴

Salvatore's novels were to expand the newly conceived gameworld into new territories and to provide background settings for new campaign modules that could be sold to gamers, in addition to attracting fantasy fans to the new game setting. Yet, Salvatore was not the first *D&D* author, and his books illustrate only part of the context.

The very first *D&D*-based novel was *Quag Keep* by Andre Norton.²⁴⁵ Norton used the *Greyhawk* campaign setting as the background and the narrative concerned the adventures of six teenagers magically transported to their *D&D* setting. The companions are gathered, equipped and then sent forth on a quest in typical *D&D* fashion. Following *Quag Keep* TSR began to publish more 'immersive' novels that forewent using a portal entry to the world, focusing instead on completely removed fantastic characters such as Tanis Half-Elven in the Weis and Hickman *Dragonlance Chronicles*. The gameworld of Krynn was the setting for the *Dragonlance* series of novels.²⁴⁶ As TSR developed and launched new game settings they would promote new lines of fantasy novels to complement those settings. Soon the campaign world of Faerûn in the *Forgotten Realms* game had trilogies and series by authors such as Douglas Niles, R.A. Salvatore, Christie Golden and Ed Greenwood.²⁴⁷ The first *Forgotten Realms* novel, *Darkwalker on Moonshae* (1987), was penned by game

²⁴⁴ R.A. Salvatore Interview <http://theforce.net/jedicouncil/interview/salvatore3.shtml> (last accessed 21/09/2010)

²⁴⁵ Andre Norton *Quag Keep* (New York: DAW Books, 1978)

²⁴⁶ There are currently 79 authors credited with published *Dragonlance* stories or novels, and currently 183 novels and 24 short story anthologies.

²⁴⁷ There are currently 70 authors credited with published *Forgotten Realms* stories or novels, and currently 221 novels and 17 short story anthologies in the *Forgotten Realms* 'library'.

designer and now author Douglas Niles.²⁴⁸ A month after it was published the *Forgotten Realms* campaign was officially launched. The following year saw the publication of the second book of the *Moonshae* trilogy, as well as *Spellfire* by Ed Greenwood, the original creator of *Forgotten Realms*, *The Crystal Shard* by R.A. Salvatore and *Azure Bonds* by Jeff Grubb and Kate Novak. There was clearly a ‘push’ to expand the *Forgotten Realms* as a literary franchise as well as create a strong market presence for the game. The apparent success of novels set in the gaming realms encouraged further publications and series. In 1991 the *Ravenloft* fantasy/horror *D&D* campaign world was complemented by its first two novels, *Vampire of the Mists* by Christie Golden and *Knight of the Black Rose* by James Lowder. Also in 1991, the first novels using the science-fantasy setting of *Spelljammer* were published, *Beyond the Moons* by David Cook and *Into the Void* by Nigel Finley. While these different settings were being developed in the literary marketplace, the *Dragonlance* and *Forgotten Realms* libraries continued to expand, in terms of both fiction and game modules. Such series became immensely popular and have remained in constant print, and their libraries have continued to expand with sequels, prequels and further stories set in the various gaming realms.²⁴⁹ These novels either adapted existing game modules like Weis and Hickman’s *Dragonlance Chronicles*, or explored and detailed adventures in new areas of the *Forgotten Realms*, like Salvatore’s *Drizzt Series*, providing background information, textured landscapes and game ideas for the readers, in addition to being fantasy stories in their own right. As a consequence of setting their fiction in gameworlds, the various authors had to follow rules and guidelines in order to maintain a consistency across the franchise. The narrative action was typified by a series of sequential adventures that led to a concluding battle or resolution, mimicking the structure of the RPG adventure or campaign, which in turn was an adaptation of the narrative structure of literary fantasy. The continued success of such titles today is testament to their popularity and illustrates how the RPGF became a core component of GF.

²⁴⁸ Douglas Niles was originally hired as a game designer in 1982. www.montecook.com/cgi-bin/page.cgi?int_dnd30_Doug (last accessed 21/08/2010).

²⁴⁹ R.A. Salvatore’s website www.rasalvatore.com is bannered with the headline ‘New York Times Best Selling Author’ and his biography claims that ‘his books regularly appear on the New York Times best-seller lists and have sold over 10,000,000 copies’ last accessed 19th July 2010.

Following TSR's success with this model other companies soon followed suit, for example the Black Library publications of the British company Games Workshop, founded in 1975. Initially, a game manufacturing company, producing games such as chess, go and backgammon, it became a licensed distributor for *D&D* games in 1976, and in 1979 Gygax considered merging TSR with Games Workshop.²⁵⁰ The two remaining founding members of Games Workshop, Steve Jackson and Ian Livingstone, rejected this proposal, choosing to stay independent, and went on to release the UK reprints of several American game titles, including Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu*, and develop a gaming miniatures company, Citadel. In 1983 Games Workshop launched its first major successful strategy table-top game, *Warhammer Fantasy Battle (Warhammer)*.²⁵¹ A futuristic SF version of the game *Warhammer 40,000 (40K)* was released in 1987.²⁵²

While Games Workshop has created and marketed several RPGs, they are best known for their strategy table-top wargames, similar to the *Kriegsspiel*, and are heavily reliant on large numbers of specific miniatures.²⁵³ What is of note, however, is that the Games Workshop set up 'The Black Library', a publishing arm of the company.²⁵⁴ The Black Library is a series of related novels set in the various game worlds of *Warhammer* and *Warhammer 40K*. Brian Stableford, under the *nom de plume* Brian Craig, wrote the first *Warhammer* novel in 1989.²⁵⁵ Since then there have been over 200 novels and anthologies released.²⁵⁶ The Black Library novels, like the novels set in *D&D* game-worlds (*Forgotten Realms*, *Dragonlance*, *Ravenloft*, *et cetera*) are linked not necessarily by author but by setting. These shared world fictions, marketed under a common logo and similar branding, created the appearance of a cohesive and

²⁵⁰ See 'The Ultimate Gary Gygax Interview'

<http://www.thekyngdoms.com/forums/viewtopic.php?t=37> last accessed 01/08/2010.

²⁵¹ As of 8th July 2010 *Warhammer Fantasy Battle* is now on its 8th revised edition.

²⁵² Also known as *Warhammer 40K*.

²⁵³ Games Workshop has developed some RPGs, notably *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* (1987 to present). In 2008 Fantasy Flight Games became the licensed developers of GWs settings in RPG and other game formats.

²⁵⁴ The publication history of Games Workshop is muddled. Boxtree published several of the early game-related books before the Black Library imprint was established, but the franchise's literary enterprise is generally referred to as the Black Library.

²⁵⁵ Steven Baxter's article 'Freedom in an Owned World' *Vector* <http://www.vectormagazine.co.uk/article.asp?articleID=42> [last accessed 13/11/10] is an interesting history and perspective of Games Workshop and their literary franchise.

²⁵⁶ 191 novels 1989-present, 18 short story anthologies 1989-present, authors include Dan Abnett, Barrington J. Bayley, William King, Kim Newman (as Jack Yeovil), Steven Savile, Brian Stableford and Ian Watson.

substantial block of fantasy and SF storytelling, much like the *D&D*-based books, rather than being marketed by author or individual series. This is particularly true when they are seen in a bookshop as the titles tend to be grouped together rather than interspersed with fantasy and SF texts arranged alphabetically by author. As a further point of interest, both Steve Jackson and Ian Livingstone are perhaps more widely known for creating the *Fighting Fantasy* ‘Choose your own adventure’ game books for Puffin (1982-95) and authoring several of the 65 that made the original series. *Fighting Fantasy* is now owned by Wizard Books and the latest is *Night of the Necromancer* (2010). So again, a strong link is visible between the game market and the literary market, with the *Fighting Fantasy* books neatly straddling the divide.

The market supported this strategy of games and novels as related and mutually supporting constructs, and the RPGF became part of a recursive force-feedback loop of influence, inspiration and the challenging of boundaries and norms which continues today.²⁵⁷ The books inspired new readers to play the games, and the games inspired gamers to read the books. The tropes and ideas of the gameworlds were disseminated to the general public through these genre novels, as examples of how stories, characters and narratives are structured in fantasy, and this has influenced a whole generation of authors and gamers, some trying to emulate game-related ideas, others attempting to improve upon them and still others trying to subvert or escape them. Altman’s reference to ‘industry and audience [...] locked in a symbiotic relationship leaving no room for a third party’,²⁵⁸ while not addressing RPGs and GF specifically, seems most apt to describe the relationship between Fantasy and RPGs.

Considering Vander Ploeg and Phillips’ findings that, ‘Game players [...] have agreed that much fantasy art, including fiction, has begun to seem as if taken from game scenarios’,²⁵⁹ and that ‘[gamers] comprise an increasing and significant proportion of the readers of fantasy fiction’,²⁶⁰ it may be useful to refer to the RPG construction of a fantasy world, or Gaming World, as a definitive typology of a Secondary World that is consistent, self-cohesive, rationalised and codified. In effect, the game world is a

²⁵⁷ Rick Altman *Film/Genre* p.16

²⁵⁸ Rick Altman *Film/Genre* p.16

²⁵⁹ Scott Vander Ploeg and Kenneth Philips ‘Playing With Power: The Science of Magic in Interactive Fantasy’ *JFA* Vol. 9 No.2 pp.142-156 p.147

²⁶⁰ Scott Vander Ploeg and Kenneth Philips ‘Playing With Power: The Science of Magic in Interactive Fantasy’ *JFA* Vol. 9 No.2 pp.142-156 p.144

‘real world’ in which magic can exist. With so many RPG products, tie-ins and books aimed at children, young adults and teenagers, it is of no small consequence that the vision and version of fantasy espoused by RPGs has had an impact on the generations growing up and reading fantasy in the 1980s and 1990s.²⁶¹

This new manifestation of fantasy can be contrasted with Stableford’s argument that ‘Our first and most intimate experience with the fantastic is the substance of our dreams’.²⁶² The idea of a regimented fantasy realm that adheres to rules and conventions is diametrically opposed to the illogic of a fantasy Dreamworld or Wonderland. Where the Dreamworld form of fantasy has more in common with the fantastic realms of Faerie which adhere to ‘dream logic’ and where the illogical can happen without comment, the RPG world has been rationalised and explained. Clute defines these two types of fantasy worlds as ‘Otherworlds’ and ‘Secondary Worlds’.²⁶³ The Otherworlds and Secondary Worlds are not bound to a mundane reality and are autonomous constructs, but where the otherworld can be defined through its use of arbitrary rules and the impossible, the secondary world has a level of rationality and self-cohesion. The relationship between Secondary Worlds and Gaming Worlds forms the body of discussion of Chapter Three – World Building.

Meanwhile, a significant number of RPG tie-in novels exist, with more being published every year. These are not RPGs *per se*, nor are they ‘choose your own adventure’ game books²⁶⁴ or ‘fanfic’.²⁶⁵ They are genre fantasy novels by professional authors that utilise the gaming worlds as the Secondary World settings for quests and adventures:

Though for several years TSR has been publishing fantasy novels under the TSR imprint, and though these novels have often been very successful (Weis’ and Hickman’s *Dragonlance* series, the *Forgotten Realms* books and R.A. Salvatore’s

²⁶¹ There is a short list of some well known Fantasy authors who have openly discussed their interest in and history with RPGs on pp.48-9 of this thesis.

²⁶² Stableford, Brian ‘How Should a Science Fiction Story Begin’ *JFA* Vol.12 Issue 3 pp.322-337, p.323

²⁶³ ‘Otherworld’ *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* p.738 entry by Clute. ‘Secondary World’ *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* p.847 entry by Clute

²⁶⁴ *Choose Your Own Adventure* series Bantam 1979-98 Although the most prominent and well known examples are the *Fighting Fantasy* series by Ian Livingstone and Steve Jackson Puffin 1982 – 95. The series has been continued by Wizard and now numbers over 65 books.

²⁶⁵ Although many fan magazines, such as *White Dwarf* (Games Workshop), have published fan written adventures and stories.

Dark Elf Trilogy, to name a few), critics have largely ignored these fantasy works, instead dwelling on the more traditional fantasy authors, such as Le Guin, Tolkien and Vampire novels, which constitute the fantasy canon (a bit ironic, considering the uneasy status of sci-fi/fantasy in university English departments).²⁶⁶

As Vander Ploeg notes, despite the number and popularity of these Role-playing Game Fantasies (RPGFs), they have been ‘largely ignored’ by ‘critics’. It must be emphasised that the Roleplaying Game Fantasy (RPGF) is a narrative form of the RPG in a literary format, rather than ludic/narrative form of the game. The RPGFs refer to aspects of the game such as ‘famous’ characters and game locations and are intimately linked through intertextual referencing to the RPGs they draw from and feed into. The RPGF is a sub-genre of the larger genre of Fantasy literature and is typified by its location or setting in an identifiable gameworld or ‘Secondary World’²⁶⁷ as it uses characters, monsters and plot elements associated with that gameworld. Traditionally, the RPGF will follow the gaming convention of focusing on a small group of heroes, similar to the gaming ‘party’ created in an RPG, and an organisation of party dynamics that corresponds to both Clute’s concept of the ‘Seven Samurai’ and Mendlesohn’s ‘Prince and the Courtier’.²⁶⁸ The Seven Samurai-type group is composed primarily of individuals who act as a cohesive unit, often sharing responsibility, leadership and possessing specific, unique traits and abilities. The group tends toward an egalitarian division of responsibility and is usually an external group who arrive in a locale to solve a problem or right a wrong. Typical examples are of course *Seven Samurai*²⁶⁹ and *The Magnificent Seven*,²⁷⁰ and *The Guns of Navarone*,²⁷¹ although there are a great many more. A more modern popular version in the 1980s was *The A-Team*.²⁷² An alternative to this group dynamic is a focus on one specific individual as the ‘hero’ with a group of supporting quest members, or

²⁶⁶ Scott Vander Ploeg and Kenneth Philips ‘Playing With Power: The Science of Magic in Interactive Fantasy’ *JFA* Vol. 9 No.2 pp.142-156 p.144

²⁶⁷ ‘Secondary World’ *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* entry by Clute p.847

²⁶⁸ *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* ‘Seven Samurai’ p.853 entry by John Clute. Mendlesohn, Farah ‘Crowning the King: Harry Potter and the Construction of Authority’ *JFA* Vol. 12 No.3, Fall 2001 pp.287-308

²⁶⁹ *Seven Samurai* 1954 dir. Akira Kurosawa

²⁷⁰ *The Magnificent Seven* 1960 dir. John Sturges

²⁷¹ *The Guns of Navarone* 1961 dir. J.Lee Thompson

²⁷² Produced by Frank Lupo and Stephen Cannell for NBC 1983-86, now a film dir. Joe Carnahan 2010.

‘companions’, on the adventure, a relationship that Mendlesohn discusses in terms of a Prince and the Courtier aspect of group dynamics in the *Harry Potter* series.²⁷³

As the RPGF is typically set in a world developed over time by designers and authors, it is common for characters, monsters, and locations to appear in multiple volumes; therefore, they can be classed as ‘shared world’ fantasies. This bears obvious parallels to other forms of popular entertainment such as the TV or film series tie-in novel, in which several authors may be contracted to write books detailing the further adventures of a particular hero or group. The *Doctor Who* and *Torchwood* series of novels currently published by BBC Books are prime examples. More relevant to the history of fantasy literature in this respect are the shared worlds²⁷⁴ of the Cthulhu Mythos derived from the original work of H.P. Lovecraft,²⁷⁵ Robert Asprin’s *Thieves’ World*,²⁷⁶ and the Black Library’s *Warhammer* and *Warhammer 40K* novels and anthologies. These shared worlds are settings and frameworks which various authors can develop and utilise, but they are constrained by the need to avoid radically altering, or contradicting the Secondary World as originally conceived, and they must obey the ‘rules’ set up for that particular reality. Although, in his *Forgotten Realms* novels, Salvatore could take licence with narrative aspects of the world or bend the rules governing use of weaponry and armour, he could not rewrite the map to make locations convenient or closer to the action of his narrative, nor could he include a radically altered magic system. A specific example from *Forgotten Realms* concerns a world-shaping event, the ‘Time of Troubles’, which coincided with the launch of the 2nd Edition of *AD&D*. The narrative event was used to justify changes to the rules and constructions in the game world, and both books and game promoted the new constructions. The Time of Troubles was thus a way of explaining why these game changes had happened in terms of internally consistent and narratively convincing in-

²⁷³ Mendlesohn, Farah ‘Crowning the King: Harry Potter and the Construction of Authority’ *JFA* Vol. 12 No.3, Fall 2001 pp.287-308. For further discussion of this please see below, Chapter Four – Quest Companions.

²⁷⁴ Clute identifies ‘Shared Worlds’ in *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* p.859 and notes *Star Trek* and *Doctor Who* as the two most famous examples from the genre.

²⁷⁵ See Joshi, Sunand *Primal Sources: Essays on H.P. Lovecraft* (Hippocampus Press, 2003) and *The Rise and Fall of the Cthulhu Mythos* (Popular Bluff, MO: Mythos Books, 2008) and Price, Robert ‘H.P. Lovecraft and the Cthulhu Mythos’ *Crypt of Cthulhu* #35 (Necronomicon, 1985) p.5 although Joshi acknowledges that the term itself seems to have been coined by August Derleth.

²⁷⁶ *Thieves’ World* was a shared world created by Robert Lynn Asprin in 1978 and was developed by several authors including Poul Anderson, Marion Zimmer Bradley and C.J Cherryh. It also led to the development of a *Thieves’ World* RPG in 1981 *Thieves’ World Complete Sanctuary Adventure Pack* (Hayward, CA: Chaosium, 1981).

world rationales. Under the pseudonym Richard Awlinson, Scott Ciencin and Troy Denning wrote *The Avatar Trilogy* which dealt with a quest group during the Time of Troubles, several of whom ultimately ascended to become gods.²⁷⁷ Following this reshaping of the *Forgotten Realms*, subsequent books and novels, such as Salvatore's later *Drizzt Series* novels, had to take account or make mention of the recent upheaval and therefore, any reference to the God of the Dead had to name Kelemvor as he had replaced the now destroyed god, Myrkul. Ultimately, changing the names of the gods founding the pantheon, and adding a new class of magic-user, does not necessarily mean that the world has fundamentally changed. The new gods assume the roles and responsibilities of those they have replaced, effectively limiting the change to a superficial re-dressing and re-naming of the entities, rather than fundamentally altering the concept of the pantheon. The inclusion of sorcerers, magic-users who are naturally gifted and access magic intuitively rather than being scholars, necessitates an explanation, but it does not effect the fundamental construction of the *Forgotten Realms*.

In the 3.5 Edition of the *Forgotten Realms Player's Guide to Faerûn* the editors note:

Chapter 7 of this book (the campaign journal), offers some updates on major story developments reflected in the *Return of the Archwizards* and *War of the Spider Queen* novel series.²⁷⁸

In this case, the game has been updated to match the narratives developed in *Forgotten Realms* RPGFs. Therefore, the game and related novels are bound in a self-supporting recursive loop where each is developed as part of a grander supernarrative in the shared world setting of the gameworld.

Clearly, however, in shared worlds such as these, the game designers and authors had to maintain a cohesive and complementary perspective on the world, if not necessarily a singular vision. No single author or designer could arbitrarily change the world without permission from the franchise. The development of the game, the various editions and codified rule-sets can be seen to form a series 'bible' which details the

²⁷⁷ 'Richard Awlinson' *The Avatar Trilogy* (1989) Scott Ciencin *Shadowdale*, Scott Ciencin *Tantras* and Troy Denning *Waterdeep*. The trilogy was followed by two sequels, James Lowder *Prince of Lies* 1993 and Troy Denning *Crucible: The Trial of Cyric the Mad* 1998

²⁷⁸ Richard Baker, Travis Stout & James Wyatt *Player's Guide to Faerûn* (Renton, WA: Wizards of the Coast, 2004) p.5

setting and defines the world and concepts. The bible does not dictate what story the authors must tell, and narrative freedom is still possible, but only within prescribed limits. Salvatore's experience writing for the *Star Wars Expanded Universe* illustrates this co-operative/individual dynamic neatly. He was informed by Lucas that in the novel *Vector Prime* (1999) the character Chewbacca had to die. Salvatore could not have killed off a canonical character without the permission of the franchise and the fan reaction to this was well documented at the time. Salvatore was given only a vague outline of what needed to happen in terms of the series' overarching development, and thus was free to a certain extent to write the novel and adventure he wanted. He was limited only by the fact that the world was already established and detailed, and that there were occasional plot elements that he should include.

As a result of this co-operative approach to world-building, in addition to a shift of narrative focus to the micro-adventure, fans were presented with several ostensibly different fantasy settings which adhered to a common approach to fantasy writing and narratives, as well as a common approach to world building. Each of the 137²⁷⁹ authors in the *Dragonlance* and *Forgotten Realms* franchises utilised the *D&D* approach to fantasy narrative which created the appearance of a unified, stable vision. By implication and weight of numbers if nothing else, this created an impression that this was a common approach to writing GF and that the use of *D&D* concepts were a base norm within the genre. Even given the tremendous variation of tone and style brought to the franchise by each author, and the different styles of stories that they told, be they single quest adventures²⁸⁰ or the political machinations of the history of the Elves,²⁸¹ the approach to the world as a stable, re-usable, gaming environment remained the same. Several of these franchise authors such as Salvatore, Weis and Hickman have gone on to write successful non-*D&D* novels, and yet much of their

²⁷⁹ 79 credited authors in *Dragonlance* related fictions, 70 credited authors of *Forgotten Realms* related fictions, with 12 of these authors writing both.

²⁸⁰ *The Heroes Sextet* is a series of standalone novels focusing on inter-related characters and events, beginning with *The Legend of Huma* 1988 by Richard A Knaak and ending with *Galen Beknighted* 1990 by Michael Williams.

²⁸¹ Elven Nations Trilogy, *Firstborn* 1991 and *The Kinslayer Wars* 1991 by Paul B Thompson and Tonya C. Cook and *The Qualinesti* 1991 by Douglas Niles

style and attitude was shaped by writing for the franchises. Weis and Hickman's *Death Gate Cycle* noticeably illustrates this point.²⁸²

In the *Death Gate Cycle*, Weis and Hickman include an appendix detailing the mathematical and symbolic structures of their magic system.²⁸³ Their use of a discernable and predictable system of magic, predicated on a mathematical structure, appears to be an adaptation of the *D&D* game mechanic and magic system, or at least an extension of that systematised approach to in-narrative magic:

We needed two competing systems of magic that made sense. [...] So, in order to create a believable pair of magic systems, I researched what amounted to Newtonian versus Quantum mechanics and, later, competing visions of quantum theory. I read popular science books regarding Relativity, quantum mechanics, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, parallel universes and chaos theory. The results were a wonderful and sensible pair of magic systems that made sense because they were modeled on quantum and chaos theories.²⁸⁴

Hickman's emphasis on a 'sensible' magic system underlines the nature of magic in *D&D* as an understandable and predictable system, rather than ill-defined spell effects and unrestricted notions of power. The worlds of *Death Gate* can also be linked to game design in that they are literally separated zones, adjoining but distinct, and focused on specific narrative and environmental aspects. Journeying between the zones necessitates travel through a portal and therefore, these realms appear as distinct gaming zones catering to specific adventures complete with realm-specific monsters, obstacles and challenges. The separation of the 'world' into elemental-based planes of air, fire, water and earth, and the inclusion of a central, lapsed, Edenic land which is a labyrinthine, magical prison filled with monsters, provides much of the structure for the first four novels as each 'elemental' land is explored. The remaining three books then detail the attempt to re-combine the worlds into a common Earth-like fantasyland. This structured, systematic approach to fantasyland construction, despite its use of familiar elements such as Elves, Dwarves, and dragons, creates a highly innovative and original setting. Weis and Hickman used the

²⁸² Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman *The Death Gate Cycle* (New York: Bantam, 1990-1994) a heptalogy comprised of *Dragon Wing* 1990, *Elven Star* 1990, *Fire Sea* 1991, *Serpent Mage* 1992, *The Hand of Chaos* 1993, *Into the Labyrinth* 1993 and *The Seventh Gate* 1994.

²⁸³ Interestingly, the inclusion of an 'academic' appendix discussing the world as real can be found in Tolkien's *LotR*. This is perhaps another example of how Tolkien influenced the genre, but that other texts now exist that are more representative of the concepts.

²⁸⁴ Tracy Hickman, taken from Hickman Newsletter #115, via www.immora.com/deathgate/author-quotes [last accessed 10/11/10]

methodology of the RPG as a guiding structure and framework for their world building, in order to make the illogical appear logical.

As a result of a large number of authors creating a significant body of fiction with the appearance of homogeneity, fans are exposed to a coherent and perceptible trend and philosophy of fantasy writing. Franchises have marketed and promoted their brands aggressively creating the appearance of RPGFs as a cohesive and dominant approach to how fantasy worlds and narratives are constructed. As a guiding principle, these game settings possess an internal consistency and predictable logic, in order that a system can be derived from them (or indeed that they are derived from a system). Authors and fans alike have been exposed to a pervasive vision of how fantasy worlds function and how to approach the construction of fantasy Secondary Worlds.

Several well-known series of RPGFs are associated with *D&D*-based fantasy, but, as noted by Vander Ploeg,²⁸⁵ two specifically typify this connection. The first, the *Dragonlance Chronicles*, co-authored by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman (1984–85),²⁸⁶ exhibits an unusually strong connection between game and literature in the initial series of novels. The second, the *Forgotten Realms* franchise, has a more typical relationship between the novels and the game. While both RPG gameworlds are based on the *D&D* game system, these were separate gaming worlds that provided a transferable gaming experience and allowed gamers to have a collective base for many of their games. The literature based in those worlds, the RPGFs, served to popularise the respective games, raise awareness of them and act as inspiration for gamers.

In the case of *Dragonlance*, while Hickman was developing the core game modules and game mechanics (an adaptation of traditional *D&D* rules) for *Dragonlance*²⁸⁷ the RPG, he worked with Margaret Weis to write the novel adaptations of the selfsame

²⁸⁵ Scott Vander Ploeg and Kenneth Philips 'Playing With Power: The Science of Magic in Interactive Fantasy' *JFA* Vol. 9 No.2 pp.142-156 p.144

²⁸⁶ Which then was expanded into the *Dragonlance* franchise 1984 to present.

²⁸⁷ The first game module was *Dragons of Despair Dragonlance AD&D Adventure* TSR 1984 by Tracy Hickman. The events of the game module correspond directly to the events detailed in the first of the *Dragonlance Chronicles Dragons of Autumn Twilight* (Random House 1984) by Weis and Hickman.

world and story, the *Dragonlance Chronicles*.²⁸⁸ The novels were a direct novelisation of the first game modules and story arc. Hickman plotted out the history of the events and worked with Weis to turn this into a ‘readable’ story. Thus the books are a novelised form of the RPG. In *The Annotated Chronicles*²⁸⁹ Weis, Hickman and others note specific examples of how their play-testing of the game led to the development of specific characters, sequences and plot points in the novels. Following the success and popularity of the *Dragonlance Chronicles*, the fiction series was developed further with Weis and Hickman co-authoring eleven further books in the series and a sequence of six young adult versions of the original *Dragonlance Chronicles*.²⁹⁰ The franchise could therefore expand both as a game supported by the fiction, and the fiction supported by the game. The two separate but related markets of fantasy literature and fantasy gaming were mutually beneficial, overlapping and illustrating the symbiotic relationship between game and fiction.

In terms of the relationship between the RPG and the tie-in novel, a second variant can be found in the *Forgotten Realms*²⁹¹ series of fantasy novels and games.²⁹² This series is less closely connected than the parallel development exhibited by the *Dragonlance* franchise. Authors Douglas Niles²⁹³ and R.A. Salvatore²⁹⁴ were each

²⁸⁸ *The Dragonlance Chronicles* 1984-85, comprised of *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* 1984, *Dragons of Winter Night* 1985 and *Dragons of Spring Dawning* 1985 Random House. Collected in *The Annotated Chronicles* Wizards of the Coast 1999.

²⁸⁹ The trilogy collected together with notes by the authors.

²⁹⁰ The Young Adult version began with *A Rumour of Dragons* 2003 and finished with *A Dawn of Dragons* 2004. Weis and Hickman also edited 20 short story collections, three ‘best of’ short story collections and have separately authored several other books set in the world. There are approx. 126 novels in the *Dragonlance* series that were not authored or edited by either Weis or Hickman, not including the 23 Young Adult books that followed Weis and Hickman’s young adult series.

²⁹¹ *Forgotten Realms* is a game franchise set on the secondary world of Abeir-Toril (usually called Toril), with the majority of early campaign settings being based on the continent of Faerûn. Originally conceived by Ed Greenwood in the 1960s as a story world, after he played *D&D* he adapted Toril to the game system. Stories and excerpts from the world were published in *The Dragon Magazine* from 1979 onwards. He sold the rights of the world to TSR in 1986.

²⁹² There are currently 70 authors credited with stories or novels set in the *Forgotten Realms*, 221 Novels and 17 Short Story Anthologies.

²⁹³ *Darkwalker on Moonshae* 1987 TSR was book one of the *Moonshae Trilogy* 1987 – 89, the other books were *Black Wizards* 1988, *Darkwell* 1989. *Darkwalker on Moonshae* was published one month before the official publication of the *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting* although the first *Bloodstone Pass* module (1985) by Douglas Niles and Michael Dobson was retrospectively re-designated a *Forgotten Realms* module.

²⁹⁴ The *Icwind Dale Trilogy* 1988-90 comprised of *The Crystal Shard* 1988, *Streams of Silver* 1989, *The Halfling’s Gem* 1990, these were followed by a prequel trilogy 1990 – 91 and 17 direct sequels (1992 – 2009), a quintet set in the same world (*Cleric Quintet* 1991 – 1994), a collaborative sextet overseen by Salvatore (*War of the Spider Queen* 2002 – 2005). The count at present is 23 *Drizzt Series* books, 6 related Drow books, 5 Cleric books and a new Drow trilogy in development.

commissioned to write a trilogy based in the new *Forgotten Realms* game-setting. They were instructed to set their novels in mutually exclusive locales and to avoid using cross-over characters.²⁹⁵ The purpose was to market and develop different areas of the *Forgotten Realms* fantasy environment, to inspire and encourage fans of the game and to detail specific settings within the game. The commercial purpose was of course to capitalise on the popularity of fantasy series and to increase profitability by maximising interest in the franchise. By setting adventures in various in-game realms, the authors developed the level of detail and variety of the gameworld. These new lands could then be codified and defined in game specific module handbooks and adventure modules to expand the game. The novels also served to attract new players as readers of fantasy curious about the world portrayed could be encouraged into playing the game and buying the gaming merchandise. Salvatore was asked to write a trilogy of adventures and to use game concepts in his story, although he was to set the story in an underdeveloped area of the fantasy world. When he was first contacted about writing the book he assumed that the entirety of the *Forgotten Realms* was simply the relatively small area of the Moonshae Islands, the location in Faerûn which Douglas Niles had used as the setting for his trilogy.²⁹⁶ Salvatore was then informed that the *Forgotten Realms* were a great deal larger than that so he chose the area of Icewind Dale, far to the North of Niles' setting. Instead of the Old Celtic Anglo-Saxon feel of the Moonshae setting, Salvatore created a northern Anglo-American frontier sensibility, and situated a raiding, Norse-based tundra-dwelling barbarian tribe just to the North of his small frontier settlements. While the *Dragonlance Chronicles* were initially an adaptation, or parallel development, of the game, the initial *Forgotten Realms* books are extensions to, and developments of, the gameworld rather than adaptations.

Tolkien and the RPG

Critics, scholars, fans and authors continually point to Tolkien's work as a formative influence, and indeed, *LotR* often serves as the touchstone for understanding fantasy as a genre, particularly when describing a new fantasy work. However, the extent to

²⁹⁵ R.A. Salvatore foreword and introduction Interview <http://www.rasalvatore.com/sidemenu/sampleChapters/de.html> [last accessed 19/07/10].

²⁹⁶ Interview with R.A. Salvatore from www.rasalvatore.com (last accessed 04/08/2010)

which *LotR* influenced the formation of the original *D&D* game was also significant. In an online interview Gygax discusses the importance of Tolkien's *LotR*:

How did it influence the *D&D* game? Whoa, plenty, of course. Just about all the players were huge JRRT fans, and so they insisted that I put as much Tolkien-influenced material into the game as possible. Anyone reading this that recalls the original *D&D* game will know that there were Balrogs, Ents, and Hobbits in it. Later those were removed, and new, non-JRRT things substituted—Balor demons, Treants, and Halflings.²⁹⁷

Indeed, who can doubt the excellence of Tolkien's writing? So of course it had a strong impact on *A/D&D* games. A look at my recommended fantasy books reading list in the back of the original DUNGEON MASTERS [GUIDE] will show a long list of other influential fantasy authors, though.²⁹⁸

While it seems that everyone remembers Tolkien's epic, it also appears that critics, fans, authors and detractors of Tolkien remember different aspects of *LotR* and that their interpretations do not necessarily agree with each other or accurately represent the text. It is true that *LotR* centres around a quest, but it is a quest to destroy a magical object, not acquire one. Sauron is not destroyed by the hero wielding the magical ring; it is in fact the destruction of the ring that allows Sauron to be defeated, but at the cost of unravelling the magic of the realm. Much of the Tolkien-esque fantasy that followed and imitated Tolkien inverted this concept. In GF it is assumed that the heroes will quest for a powerful magical item which will give them the strength, ability or opportunity to destroy the Dark Lord. While this could be viewed as an adaptation of Tolkien's quest, it clearly follows the concept of magical item acquisition and character levelling found in RPGs. Or perhaps this could be rephrased to reflect that the RPG took the quest from Tolkien but chose to focus on the *The Hobbit* and the treasure guarded by Smaug, rather than *LotR*.

RPG PCs start out as young, almost powerless, weak characters, but as their adventures progress they acquire new and better equipment, weapons and magical artefacts, and as a result they can confront and defeat ever greater foes. The focus of early 'dungeon-crawl' adventures was simply that; to acquire XP, loot, treasure and more powerful magical objects. While not unheard of in GF quest narratives, the idea of questing to deliberately destroy a magical artefact, instead of acquiring it and using

²⁹⁷ Many of *LotR* influenced items, creatures and terms were removed following a request from the Tolkien estate.

²⁹⁸ Gygax interview http://archives.theonering.net/features/interviews/gary_gygax.html last accessed 19th July 2010.

it, is relatively scarce. Tolkien's fellowship is guided by the wizard Gandalf, but as noted above, Gandalf is not a spell-hurling mage, he doesn't appear to engage in 'magical' battles and in fact rarely engages in any overt magical activity.²⁹⁹ This seems at odds with the tradition of the spell-hurling, magic-wielding mage character. Few GF narratives employ a powerful mage character simply as mentor and guide, particularly when the hero or party are faced with foes. Gandalf attacks orcs and goblins with his sword when a violent confrontation occurs, but in GF, ostensibly the tradition that descends from Tolkien, the magic user will cast fireball spells, magic missiles and lightning bolts with alarming frequency. One could argue that Gandalf is associated with fire because of the fireworks in the Shire and his confrontation with the Balrog in which he says, 'I am a servant of the Secret Fire, wielder of the flame of Anor'.³⁰⁰ Despite how we remember the confrontation of Gandalf and the Balrog, or Gandalf and Saruman, the point remains that Gandalf is not a typical GF wizard, he does not cast spells and work great and powerful magics, and he is a guiding figure rather than a true participant in the quest.

While *D&D*, and many GF fantasylands abound with magical swords, trinkets, jewels and potions, there are actually few of these to be found in *LotR*. Gandalf and Frodo possess magical blades, and a palantir is reclaimed from Saruman, but for the most part the magic of Middle Earth is subtle and not ostentatious. When Galadriel gives the quest party gifts upon their taking leave of Lothlorien, she does not equip them with magical armour and weapons, but rather with cloaks, brooches and food.³⁰¹ In fact there appears to be a scarcity of outright magical items on Middle Earth. By contrast Faerûn from the *Forgotten Realms*, Krynn from *Dragonlance* and Feist's Midkemia from the *Riftwar Saga*, are littered with various magical items and artefacts, from Drizzt's magical scimitars and Wulfgar's magical warhammer Aegis

²⁹⁹ His confrontation with the Balrog appears to be a mix of spiritual and physical and not an exchange of spells and counter spells. The confrontation with Saruman at the fall of Isengard reveals Saruman as a fallen wizard and Gandalf has stripped him of the majority of his powers *The Fellowship of the Ring* 'The Voice of Saruman' pp.562-573. Again this is not a magical duel. Gandalf is associated with fire, see 'A Long-Expected Party' *The Fellowship of the Ring* pp.21-40, but his fireworks can be explained in mundane terms.

³⁰⁰ J.R.R. Tolkien *The Fellowship of the Ring* 'The Bridge of Khazad-dûm' p.322

³⁰¹ The hobbits are presented with daggers, but they lack any significant magical power. The rope has a natural magic to it allowing it to untie itself according to Sam's desire when he and Frodo finish their descent. Sam is given Elven soil and seeds that prove more fertile than normal Shire soil. Frodo receives a vial of 'starlight'.

Fang, Raistlin's Staff of Magius and Tanis' sword Wyrmsbane, to the Tsurani teleportation orbs and magical rift machines.

In terms of intention and character focus, there are again differences between the tone of Tolkien's work and the general tenor of RPGFs. Despite their many encounters with monsters and villainous creatures, Tolkien's party of adventurers rarely initiate encounters or attack, and Aragorn and the others tend to be involved in defensive encounters throughout the series, or else engage in offensive actions when supported by an army. In RPGs and in RPGF it is common to find the characters hunting creatures, attacking the lairs of monsters, assaulting forces of darkness, and so on, rather than adopting the defensive ethos of *LotR*. As discussed above, what are often described as conventions descending from Tolkien, are more accurately described as the conventions adapted from Tolkien by the RPG that then influenced RPGF and GF.³⁰²

In terms of an example of genre fantasy, or in Attebery's terminology, a core text that forms the centre of a fuzzy set, *D&D* and its related fictions are a far more accurate reflection of current genre conventions than are Tolkien's work. The ubiquitous magical items, the quests to acquire greater and more powerful magical objects, the seeking out of small groups of monsters to slay and so on, are attitudes to fantasy taken from the games.³⁰³ Of course, we can trace much of the reason for this to the shift from the artistic passion of an author like Tolkien to a more market-driven model emphasised by the franchises. Tolkien devoted years to developing the world of Middle Earth but by maintaining a stable of authors, gaming companies can produce and publish several volumes of interlinked fantasy stories every year. This productivity places the franchise in direct competition to literary fantasists, who rarely produce more than two fantasy novels a year, and thus a shelf-space presence and brand recognition can be created by the franchise. The marketing of the entire franchise creates an interest in all the related products and not just a single author's work or a defined trilogy. As Mendlesohn has noted in relation to *Portal-Quests*, a

³⁰²See above, Chapter One - Introduction 'Diane Wynne Jones and the Toughguide to Fantasyland'

³⁰³It should be noted that many of Moorcock's fictional heroes quested for or searched for magical items, not the least of which was Elric's search for Stormbringer. Regardless, it does not support Tolkien as the central inspiration for the fuzzy set of GF and is another indicator that *D&D* brought core concepts from the entire genre and not just Tolkien's work.

defining characteristic and by extension perhaps one of the reasons they remain popular, is the travelogue and exploratory side of the narrative.³⁰⁴ The reader has an opportunity to explore the world. By producing numerous linked titles set all over the gameworld, the franchise accomplishes the same task as the exploratory grand epic, but over multiple volumes, series and authors' work. A result of this is that each volume of an RPGF need not develop the exploratory travelogue significantly, and can concentrate on developing a localised setting. This means that although the series as a whole acts as a travelogue and exploration of the world setting, individual series and novels concentrate on developing focussed landscapes and areas. For example, in R.A Salvatore's *Dark Elf* trilogy, the action of the first novel, *Homeland*, focuses on the Underdark Drow city of Menzoberranzan, the second novel, *Exile*, explores some wilder regions of the Underdark as Drizzt leaves the city, while the third, *Sojourn*, concentrates on Drizzt's initial exploration of the surface world in the region near Sundabar.³⁰⁵ Further exploration of additional areas is left to other novels in the related series and franchise. So rather than traversing the entire *Forgotten Realms*, each novel and trilogy is fairly geographically limited, but the tone of the travelogue is maintained as characters adventure in specific localised regions.

The numerous volumes of fantasy series such as *Forgotten Realms* may appeal to the fantasy fan who wishes to experience further adventures in a familiar fantasy setting and explore those settings, and thus the franchise deliberately exploits the very thing that Mendlesohn has noted as a defining characteristic of this type of fantasy. The staggering number of titles also offers many books to choose from while one waits for a favourite author to complete the next book in a specific narrative series or trilogy. The fantasy fan is unlikely to run out of *Dragonlance* and *Forgotten Realms* titles for some time thus ensuring a steady supply of fantasy narratives unaffected by publishing delays, author ill-health or death, procrastination or competing writing projects.

An example of the shelf or market impact of the RPGF titles can be found by briefly considering some of the Fantasy titles published in 1990: Robert Jordan's *The Eye of*

³⁰⁴ *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (Middletown CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008) see both Introduction and Chapter One – Portal-Quests. For ease of reference the category will be referred to as PQ.

³⁰⁵ R.A. Salvatore *Homeland* (1990), *Exile* (1990), *Sojourn* (1991)

the World and *The Great Hunt* (books one and two of *The Wheel of Time* series), David Gemmell's *Quest for Lost Heroes* and *Lion of Macedon*, Raymond E Feist and Janny Wurts' *Servant of the Empire* and Guy Gavriel Kay published *Tigana*. By comparison, *Forgotten Realms* published eight books that year: *The Halfling's Gem*, *Homeland* and *Exile* by R.A. Salvatore, *Horselords* by David Cook, *Dragonwall* by Troy Denning, *The Wyvern's Spur* by Kate Novak and Jeff Grub, and *Ironhelm* and *Viperhand* by Douglas Niles. Similarly, under the *Dragonlance* franchise TSR released a further six books: *Kaz the Minotaur* by Richard A Knaak, *The Gates of Thorbardin* by Dan Parkinson, *Galen Beknighted* by Michael Williams, *Riverwind the Plainsman* by Paul B. Thompson and Tonya Cook, *Flint the King* by Mary Kirchoff and Douglas Niles, and *Tanis, the Shadow Years* by Barbara Siegel and Scott Siegel.

While this is not even close to a comprehensive list of all GF published in 1990, it at least illustrates that in terms of GF *D&D* was producing a prodigious number of volumes in a single year that had the appearance of being two series, and this was set in direct competition with single authors writing diverse series. With fourteen new novels released in 1990, TSR were putting titles on shelves at a significant rate. While quality, longevity, literary excellence or even popularity of the novels are other issues entirely, the sheer number of titles released must give pause. According to the *New York Times* the *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling has sold more than 325 million copies³⁰⁶ compared to the *USA Today's* reporting in the same year that Tolkien's *LotR* franchise has sold over 200 million copies.³⁰⁷ The fact that Rowling has outsold Tolkien substantially in a fraction of the time does not necessarily mean that the *Harry Potter* series is more important, demonstrates high literary qualities or aspirations, or is even more influential. The longevity of a text is hard to predict, as is the impact any given series will have, nevertheless, the *D&D* books, by sheer weight of numbers, created a discernable impact on the genre of fantasy, created a perception of what fantasy is and through the continuing expansion of these series, illustrate that the market for this type of fantasy narrative continues to be profitable and important.

If we consider the sheer number of *D&D*-based books in combination with the fact that conventional genre stereotypes do not match with those aspects of Tolkien to

³⁰⁶ <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/11/books/11potter.html>

³⁰⁷ http://www.usatoday.com/tech/gaming/2007-04-23-lotr-gameplay_N.htm

which they are commonly attributed, it could certainly suggest that the construction of the modern fantasy genre is perhaps more influenced by RPGs and the RPGF than it is by Tolkien. If anything, Tolkien has influenced the current corpus of the genre second- and third-hand through adaptation, misremembering and poor imitation. This does not preclude the argument that Tolkien was once the centre of the genre, and in fact acknowledges Tolkien's influence on the creation of the genre and the original ideas upon which GF drew inspiration and then based its conventions, but merely emphasises that the genre has evolved away from his work. The RPGF has usurped Tolkien's place at the heart of the genre fantasy fuzzy set due to its representation and illustration of the conventions and stereotypes we now consider the least innovative 'norms'.

While Jones' *Tough Guide* has identified many of the perceived conventions and seemingly standard constructions in genre fantasy, the explanation and investigation of how the RPG and the RPGF have developed and utilised these forms is developed below. Meanwhile, the RPGF's systematised approach to creating gameworlds, in combination with how they have utilised familiar genre conventions, has ramifications for how RPGFs relate to narrative constructions of GF. Although many RPGFs frequently use quests, tasks and adventures as narrative justifications for exploring settings, the narrative approach to setting is not necessarily the same as in other quest-based fantasies. Mendlesohn's PQ category suggests that a common technique in GF is the exploratory travelogue and that 'they are almost always quest novels and they almost always proceed in a linear fashion with a goal that must be met [...] provid[ing] us with a guided tour of the landscapes'.³⁰⁸ Certainly many RPGF novels focus on quests that travel through various settings and explore them. From Drizzt's exploration of the wonders of the Underdark and the Drow city of Menzoberranzan as a lone rogue Drow, through his travels on the surface with the other Companions of the Hall to find the lost Dwarven Kingdom of Mithril Hall and then rescue their friend Regis the Halfling,³⁰⁹ much of the narrative is framed as a travelogue. Each book finds the heroes moving through new territories, encountering

³⁰⁸ Farah Mendlesohn *Rhetorics of Fantasy* Introduction p.xix

³⁰⁹ R.A. Salvatore's *Drizzt Series* books *The Dark Elf* Trilogy and *The Icewind Dale* Trilogy. The prequel *Dark Elf* trilogy details Drizzt's adventures in the Underdark, and *Icewind Dale* is focused on his adventures with the Companions of the Hall.

monsters or meeting new characters.³¹⁰ Yet, of the Immersive Fantasy Mendlesohn notes:

[...] the immersive fantasy invites us to share not merely a world, but a set of assumptions [...] once the fantastic becomes assumed, it acquires a scientific cohesion all of its own [...] we do not enter into the immersive fantasy, we are assumed to be part of it.³¹¹

This too can be applied to the RPGF. While Mendlesohn argues that her categories are porous and permeable, and that texts may move between categories, the fundamental constructions of the RPGF appear to classify it as ‘The Immersive Portal-Quest’. RPGFs use the quest and adventure travelogue to explore the realms, but frequently, the fantastic elements of the world are treated as mundane and matter-of-fact. Due to the substantial number of novels and games set in the *Forgotten Realms*, there is an assumption that the reader will already be familiar with the world, and therefore it is an assumed knowledge of the game-reality and the setting. This approach to the shared world setting, where all aspects of the world are known and expected, creates an immersive feel to fantasy novels that would otherwise be traditional PQs. The prevalence of this approach, even if just through sheer numbers of authors and texts, creates a substantial corpus of fantasy novels that straddle the PQ and Immersive categories. We could argue that Mendlesohn’s Immersive Fantasy does not involve just reader and character familiarity with the world, but rather character familiarity despite reader unfamiliarity. As the RPGFs have taken the conventions of the genre as a base, even a relatively inexperienced reader of fantasy may find the world created familiar and understandable due to its use of familiar concepts and clichés.

As a distillation and codification of genre convention, trope, stereotype and cliché, the RPG functions as para-literary text commenting on the nature of the genre, in effect a meta-textual commentary. The RPG also uses these conventions to create fantasy narratives, albeit in a ludic frame, and so it can also be seen as an example of the generic fantasy mega-text. The following section details some specific concepts from the RPG which necessitate a re-evaluation of traditional approaches to fantasy

³¹⁰ The use of Tolkien’s mythical metal Mithril in the title of the lost Dwarven kingdom, as well as the fact that the Dwarves were chased from this mountain kingdom by dangers from the deep again shows the influence Tolkien has had on RPGFs.

³¹¹ Farah Mendlesohn *Rhetorics of Fantasy* Introduction p.xx

analysis and which explain how the RPG has influenced GF narratives. Chapter Three – World Building focuses on the nature of a gameworld as a fantasy setting, considering both how the needs of the RPG have influenced its creation, and how this new formulation corresponds to a new narrative conception of GF. Chapter Four – Magic further develops the argument that the RPG magic system is an appropriate and accurate model for the discussion of magic in GF. Chapter Five – Balanced Party re-evaluates the quest group in light of the RPG ‘balanced party’ structure. These chapters integrate RPG concepts into existing academic approaches in order to create a more accurate model for analysis.

Section Two – Integrating RPGs into Fantasy Analysis

The reason the RPG is a necessary consideration in the study and analysis of fantasy can be summed up in one word, 'rules'. We could use other terms such as conventions, clichés, stereotypes and even formulas, but essentially the concept that makes the RPG essential is rules. As the 'G' in RPG stand for 'game', rules are, of course, essential to play, but they have also significantly affected the fantasy literature that followed the advent of the RPG, and in order to effectively analyse modern GF, we must first understand the rules, and then learn to use the lexicon which describes them to discuss the literature that descends from them. What these rules are, where they come from, why they exist and what they mean for fantasy are the questions this section answers.

The extent to which the RPG has shaped and influenced GF, and the extent to which the RPG is a reflection and illustration of the conventions of GF is a maddeningly nebulous, complex and self-sustaining recursive loop. To draw out single specific and identifiable elements from the whole framework is made difficult by the simple fact that each element relies on the others in a mutually supportive circular fashion. What is clearer is that, as a genre, Fantasy continues to evolve and develop. While much academic scrutiny has fallen on the most literary and innovative examples of the wider genre of Fantasy, the evolution is equally visible in GF narratives. While we continue to refer to critical models based on Campbell's *Hero*, we must accept that as the genre changes, so too must the critical approaches we utilise. The hero-centric, one land, one story model which Campbell analyses and which we traditionally associate with Epic or Mythic Fantasy, is no longer the prevailing model for GF narratives, as Edenic or pastoral resolution of Fantasy stories is no longer possible in multi-volume, extended series and linked trilogies so common to modern GF. In order to analyse GF accurately, in order to take into account the evolution of the genre, and in order to update critical approaches to GF accordingly, we must include RPG concepts and terminology in the critical frameworks used to analyse GF.

As Tracy Hickman notes:

The story of the writing of the *Dragonlance Chronicles* can be fully understood only in the context of the roots from which it sprang. Those roots were a role-playing game, which hit its popular stride in the late 1970s through the early 1980s. *Dragonlance* firmly has its roots in the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* role-playing games. [...] The rules, however, only provide a framework for telling stories – not the stories themselves. As *AD&D* evolved, the stories that were told were laid out in what we called ‘modules’. Game modules are little adventure settings that give players a location, setting, and characters to interact with through the rules. These modules, in the early days were primarily maze-like environments for the players’ alter-ego characters to explore, fight monsters, and collect treasure.³¹²

This section focuses on how the RPG’s methods of shaping, codifying, disseminating and reflecting genre conventions can enhance and update traditional literary scholarship in the field. By adding the RPG and RPGF to analytical structures and models of fantasy criticism we can refine analysis and produce more accurate analytical models.

Due to the complexity of the symbiotic relationship between the RPG and the genre, this section has been divided into three distinct but related chapters. The first considers the concept of World Building and how, in genre fantasy since 1980, the shift from an integrated story/world/hero paradigm toward a re-usable setting for micro-adventures seems to represent a desire to build more authentic-looking worlds, and how this then calls for a re-evaluation of how we approach narrative assumptions and evaluations of GF. The second concentrates on Magic Systems and the repercussions of narrative authenticity to understanding magic as part of GF worlds. The third, Quest Companions, illustrates how gaming concepts have led to a new structure of party formation within GF. While these elements are starkly visible in Weis and Hickman’s *Dragonlance Chronicles*, Salvatore’s *Icwind Dale* trilogy and Feist’s *Riftwar Saga*, they can also be seen in non-gaming associated fantasy such as Eddings’ *Belgariad*.

To describe the RPG’s influence on GF as representative of a paradigm shift is not overstating the case. The concepts of RPG world building illustrate the fundamental differences between the traditional literary models of Fantasy and GF. Traditional

³¹² Tracy Hickman *The Annotated Chronicles* ‘Prologue’

critical approaches to Fantasy assume specific norms of storytelling, narrative and structure, but the inclusion of RPGs, RPG concepts and ludic/narrative systems into any consideration of Fantasy reveals new structures within the genre that do not conform to the established theoretical positions. An illustrative example of this can be found in the consideration of the RPG Gameworld. The RPG changed GF settings by creating a re-usable world which then became the setting for multiple stories and adventures, supplanting the typical mythic world setting in which the journey of the hero is intimately tied to the fate of the land. The RPG presented fantasy authors with a continuing world bound by rules and strictures in which adventures happen but need not necessarily concern epic resolutions and ramifications. Therefore the structures and components of story, quest and adventure remain much the same, but the ramifications, repercussions and resolutions of these stories follow a different paradigm.

In order to accommodate useable and active magic within the gameworld, the RPG had to devise a methodology and mechanised system through which various examples of magic found in fantasy literature could be adapted for game use. The concept of the magic system provides an explanation for the changes relating to magic as an active component in GF worlds, outlined in 'Defining the Genre', and provides a rationale for the common construction of the active wizard or participating mage, distinct from the tradition of Merlin and Gandalf as wise guiding figures. Magic is one of the key defining characteristics of fantasy, but is a problematic concept for discussion and analysis. Magic, by definition, is non-rational, impossible and implausible. The RPG's introduction of magic systems that provide discernable, predictable rules concerning the use of magic in the narrative creates a new lexicon with which to describe the discussion of magic. The magic system also allows us to distinguish between different narrative approaches to magic. The magic of a gameworld can be distinguished from magic as whimsy or as *deus ex machina* and, by using the gameworld's lexicon, we can refine our definitions of magic to reflect the more nuanced and developed approach of gaming systems.

In addition to these shifts in world building and the systemisation of magic, the RPG has also re-conceptualised the quest group. While traditional fantasy narratives have often focused on the actions and adventures of a hero, ably aided by supportive

companions, the structure of the RPG as a game necessitated an adaptation. The game focused on the group as a co-operative party, with each player the active hero of his/her own narrative. Additionally, in order to foster diverse characters and create flexible adventuring groups, the RPG introduced the concept of Character Class and Class-specific abilities and rules. By dividing common fantasy character types into discernable and identified categories, each clearly defined and regulated by specific strictures and rules, the RPG redefined literary GF character types. The co-operative framework of the game emphasises teamwork and the need for groups to balance strengths and weaknesses within the party, thereby creating the flexibility necessary to deal with any eventuality. Thus, the quest is no longer about the lone hero and his/her goal, but about the group and the journey they undertake together. The Character Classes of RPGs, the rules that regulate them, the de-emphasis on single hero, and the emphasis on the importance of the group, sets the ludic model in opposition to the traditional structures of the fantasy narrative. The RPG concept is succinctly labelled the 'balanced party'.

These three elements of modern GF are, of course, inter-related. The nature of a world dictates the levels of magic within it and the rules by which it must be wielded. The features of a world's magic system dictate the talents of individual quest group members and the ways in which they supplement each other in the balanced party. The world itself, its landscapes, regions and cultures, affects how the companions move through it. World, magic and companion must be constructed in a cohesive, consistent and 'authentic' manner. An examination of each element in turn shows how the rules of the RPG have affected the nature of each, transforming early examples of irrational fantastic spaces into anthropologically authentic-looking ones with nuanced magic systems through which balanced parties manoeuvre in their attempts to achieve more modest, short-term goals on their micro-adventure in an epic setting.

Chapter 3 – World Building

A number of different, yet inter-related aspects of RPG settings both directly and indirectly affect the analysis of GF narratives. The RPG drew from the earlier literary genre a conceptual framework of rules that govern how and why a fantasy world should function. The rules of world building found in the various *D&D* franchises create a functioning meta-textual commentary on GF fantasy settings. The ramifications for modern GF include narrative and conceptual evolutions and structures, such as the nature and scope of the story, and the types of characters who engage in the adventure. Thus, the methods used to construct and maintain a Gameworld and the reasons for them are both relatively ‘simplistic’, and yet far reaching in terms of consequences and influence.

The ‘simplistic’ nature of world building in the RPG sense can be succinctly encapsulated by terms such as realism, rationality, verisimilitude or any number of like terms. Unfortunately, any use of these terms in reference to Fantasy creates problematic tensions due to the nature of Fantasy as essentially non-mimetic.³¹³ Given that fantasy is in part defined as a departure from mundane reality, a natural approach to the criticism of fantasy has been to focus on which aspects of the narrative do so. Patricia Monk uses the term ‘transparency’ to discuss the ‘essential criterion’ of mainstream fiction and ‘non-transparent’ to discuss the speculative fiction mega-text.³¹⁴ Her argument centres on the fact that realistic fiction inherently ‘mimics non-fictional reality so perfectly that only the events and characters specific to that fiction can be distinguished from extra-fictional reality’.³¹⁵ She has therefore labelled mimetic fiction as transparent, as the rules of reality are clearly discernable. Conversely, the speculative fiction mega-text is non-transparent because, ‘its conditions do not mimic but differ from those of extra-fictional reality [...] so that not

³¹³ A world with fire breathing dragons is hard to define as realistic. A world with immortal Elves and magical swords does not appear rational. Given the established use of verisimilitude in SF, genre and film criticism, the term possesses a complex history and associated meanings which are not necessarily conducive to clear argument.

³¹⁴ Patricia Monk ‘The Shared Universe: An Experiment in Speculative Fiction’ *JFA* Vol.2 No.4 (1990) pp.7-46

³¹⁵ *Ibid.* p14.

only the events and characters specific to the fiction but also almost everything else can be distinguished from reality'.³¹⁶

Monk's concept of 'transparency' is useful in highlighting the problem we face discussing the inherent reality or logic of fantasy worlds, yet it is framed as a negative binary polarity, transparent or non-transparent, as she does not consider translucent as a potential mitigating position within her scheme. Therefore Monk begins by contrasting the fantastic as a negative against the positive mimetic. A more useful term, therefore, is 'authenticity', which suggests a scale reflecting values of internal consistency rather than being dependent on external values of reality, while at the same time possessing a connotation of 'real' and 'rational', as well as elements of truth and coherency. This concept of authenticity would correspond to the rules of the RPG and reflects the fact that when the rules are structured, possessing an internal logic and coherency, they lead to a consistent and authentic creation. The construction of authenticity through a regulated framework of mutually supportive rules now permeates GF.

If a fantasy world includes magic, a clear divergence from the laws of our universe, but remains consistent, regulated and with predictable rules, it can be considered covertly authentic. Worlds in which rules are set to govern the fantastic elements, but whose rules are contradictory, whimsical or ill-thought out, could be considered inauthentic. For example, a story with no fantastic elements set in modern day Chicago and detailing the life of a P.I. would be overtly authentic. If the P.I. uses magic and battles vampires, as Jim Butcher's Harry Dresden does, as long as the rules governing the use of magic and the attributes of the vampires remain constant, coherent and predictable, then it can be described as covertly authentic. If, however, the rules governing magic and the attributes of the vampires shift and change according to apparent narrative whim and are thus unpredictable, the world can be described as inauthentic. Due to the consistency of Butcher's world building the setting for the *Dresden Files* remains covertly authentic. This reworking of Monk's approach in terms of authenticity allows for a greater flexibility to her model. Given that within a fantasyland the rules governing its reality cannot be taken for granted,

³¹⁶ Ibid., p14.

but can be rigorous and discernable, we need to use a term that is not binary, but can be flexible.

Of course, the concept of rules within fiction, and within fantasy in particular extends beyond the concept of the RPG and its related fictions. As Eleanor Cameron notes, there is an inherent paradox in constructing logical fantasy worlds:

With fantasy I believe that the author is required in the very beginning to establish a premise, an inner logic for the story, and to draw boundary lines outside which the fantasy may not wander. Without ever having to think about it, the reader must feel that the author is working consistently within a frame of reference, setting a certain discipline ... And the pool of magic seems remorselessly to seep away if the first premise (or promise, you might call it) is not kept, if there is the kind of betrayal in which the story is handled in opposition to the inner logic laid down in the beginning.³¹⁷

Cameron's 'inner logic' and rigorously maintained boundaries correspond directly to the concept of authenticity. While the fictional frame is a general narratological concept, the concept of authenticity addresses the distinctive characteristics of GF: the rationalising of the non-rational, the realisation of the unreal and the inculcation of veracity to obvious fiction. Huge fire-breathing dragons, spell-hurling mages and races such as Elves and Dwarves are inherently 'illogical', 'non-rational', and 'unreal', and yet the worlds they inhabit, their behaviour, and their existence are governed by rules and strictures which conform to an 'in-universe' logic. This authenticity is, in part, articulated by La Farge's reflection that the rules of *D&D* 'guaranteed the reality of the game-world' because 'how could anything with so many rules not be real?'³¹⁸

The relationship between RPG Gameworlds as settings and Secondary Worlds as GF settings becomes undeniable when we consider the concept of world building at its most basic level, the construction of the fantasyland itself. The concepts that have been adapted and codified by the RPG can be seen in subsequent GF texts. Of course the RPG did not invent world building, and in fact the aspects of fantasyland construction routinely utilised in RPGs came from fantasy literature. The adaptation

³¹⁷ Eleanor Cameron, *The Seed and the Vision: On the Writing and Appreciation of Children's Books* (New York: Dutton, 1993.) 166-167. See also Brian Attebery 'Eleanor Cameron: The Theory and Practice of Fantasy' *JFA* Vol.16 No.2 (2005) pp.96-109

³¹⁸ La Farge 'Destroy All Monsters'
http://www.believermag.com/issues/200609/?read=article_lafarge#return3 [last accessed 20/07/10].

of these settings into a system of generic rules for how a fantasyland should and can function creates a stable foundation from which to analyse the settings of GF. In effect, the gameworld acts as a standard from which deviation and innovation can be gauged.

World Building and the Fantasy Setting

Throughout this thesis the term ‘fantasyland’ has been used to describe many GF settings. While Diana Wynne Jones used this term satirically to describe the pseudo-medieval settings of much GF in her *Tough Guide to Fantasyland*, and John Clute also uses the term dismissively in both the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* and his article ‘Grail, Groundhog and Godgame’,³¹⁹ the term ‘fantasyland’ can be descriptive and useful. Terms such as Lost Land, Faerie, Secondary World and Alternate Earth may be useful in discussing specific fantasylands, but as an overall concept to describe the fantastic setting, fantasyland proves understandable, concise and descriptive, as long as we do not always assume the pejorative implications. Given that the term fantasyland is already intrinsically linked to what Mendlesohn has labelled ‘derivative fantasy’, Clute has described as a ‘thought-free setting’³²⁰ and what Attebery has labelled ‘formulaic fantasy’, as well as the commonly used expression ‘Extruded Fantasy Product’ there is little reason to coin a new term.³²¹ Nevertheless, a re-conceptualisation of ‘fantasyland’ is in order. Gygax listed a number of the literary influences that inspired and shaped the construction of *D&D*, and it is in this list of canonical/historical fantastic texts, both SF and Fantasy, that we can see the kernel of the modern fantasyland and trace its growth and development.³²² As ‘fantasyland’ is currently used to describe ‘derivative’ fantasy settings, it is apt when discussing the settings of *D&D* games that are indeed derived from multiple literary fantastic settings. As most literary critics are keen to acknowledge innovation and originality in fiction, the fact that many GFs utilise a setting reminiscent of a pseudo-medieval Europe is immediately taken as a signal that the work is unoriginal, long before the creative or original aspects of that setting are examined. Feist’s *Midkemia* is indeed a

³¹⁹ John Clute ‘Grail, Groundhog, and Godgame’ *JFA* Vol.10 No.4 (2000) pp.330-337

³²⁰ John Clute ‘Fantasyland’ *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* p.341

³²¹ Extruded Fantasy Product is now a common term for derivative fantasy and appears to have come about through a Live Journal discussion between Joseph Major and William December Starr in October 1999. <http://groups.google.ca/group/rec.arts.sf.written/msg/b5ba6cf88c2cec73?dmode=source> last accessed 15/10/10.

³²² Gary Gyax ‘Appendix N’ *AD&D Dungeon Master’s Guide*

fantasyland setting, and a pastiche of historically-based real-world locations and cultures; so too is David Eddings' setting for the *Belgariad*. Yet, the two bear almost no relation to one another. If both were derivative fantasylands we would expect a certain commonality, but the main quality they have in common is the borrowing of world settings from history to create distinct realms and lands within these authors' fantasylands. What is unoriginal is that both authors chose to construct settings with historically based analogues; the fantasylands themselves are in fact original and most certainly not 'thought-free'. Indeed, both Eddings and Feist use non-European-based settings for the realms of Malloreia and Kesh respectively, and yet this is not enough to remove the stigma of derivative fantasyland. George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* relies heavily on a pseudo-medieval landscape for the land of Westeros, yet his world is not generally considered a 'fantasyland'. It is thus possible to suggest that the term 'fantasyland' may indeed describe a certain lack of originality in the construction of worlds, but this is hardly definitive. In fact, referring to the originality of the world/setting as being of utmost importance can lead to potentially odd constructions.

For instance, Guy Gavriel Kay is an award-winning fantasy author, yet his recent fantasies have been derived, almost entirely, from actual historical events and settings.³²³ His reshaping of a documented aspect of Earth history by re-naming the world and characters with fantasy terminology and descriptions could be interpreted as 'unoriginal' as the setting, history, plot and characters are taken from history. Yet one would not label his work derivative, or a fantasyland. As a fantastic history, Kay's work is not GF and perhaps cannot be evaluated in terms of originality of plot, setting or character in the same way. But if Kay can be praised for an unoriginal fantasy story, it seems irrational to deride or criticise a world created by Eddings or Feist for lack of originality and imagination when they have attempted to create a new world setting and story rather than copy a pre-existing one. In such circumstances we are applying a double standard, insisting on originality as a defining and important aspect of fantasy and rewarding lack of originality in the case of Kay. It is however

³²³ Guy G. Kay's *The Sarantine Mosaic* composed of *Sailing to Sarantium* (London: Earthlight, 1998) and *Lord of Emperors* (London: Earthlight, 2000) is based on 6th Century Byzantium and he acknowledges a debt to W.B. Yeats' poems on the subject. www.brightweavings.com/ggkswords/earthlight.htm [last accessed 18/11/10]. *Under Heaven* (London: HarperVoyager, 2010) is based on the 8th Century Tang Dynasty <http://www.brightweavings.com/books/underheaven.htm> [last accessed 18/11/10].

clear that the setting is an important consideration in evaluating and categorising fantasy texts, not only in their perceived originality and innovation, but also in their authenticity and coherency.

Kay's use of Earth's past as inspiration for fantasy is not a new phenomenon. As noted below, Robert E. Howard drew on various historical time periods in his construction of the Hyborian Age. Setting fantasies in the past has become a convention, so much so that contemporary fantasies set in the contemporary 'real world' are often described as part of a sub-genre, Urban Fantasy. The need to emphasise the type of fantasy setting being utilised illustrates the perceived importance of setting to reader and market alike. In Mendlesohn's terms, Butcher's *Dresden Files*, concerning the adventures of a wizard detective in modern Chicago, qualifies as Intrusion Fantasy, as much of the narrative conflict concerns the effect and rectification of magic let loose in the 'real world' which Harry Dresden must then contain or defeat in order to protect the mundane populace. Yet the focus on a wizard detective, active magic, demons, fairies and various supernatural monsters highlights the fantastic element of the setting. It could be argued that the inclusion of active magic to this 'real world', is in fact a more unrealistic premise than stating that it exists elsewhere in a removed or Secondary World. What distinguishes many of these settings from one another is *how* those concepts are explored and developed, and the ramifications of these systems and magical realms within the narrative world constructed. In fact, despite the appearance of superficial similarities, the various rules and strictures of the various magic systems are often at the heart of the innovation and originality of the apparently derivative.

Deriving the Fantasyland

Derivative though it may be, in order to tell a GF story, the fantasyland setting seems almost unavoidable. Perhaps, more importantly, in order to subvert reader expectations, or to subvert genre norms, one must be aware of the conventions of fantasyland, or its literary forebears.

The fantasyland setting appears to come from a tradition that runs the gamut from Lost Land 'real' settings, through 'Secondary Worlds' up to and including the illogical Dreamworlds or Wonderlands.³²⁴ By adapting Kathryn Hume's spectrum of mimesis and fantasy³²⁵ we can construct a spectrum with Real Earth at one end, representing mimesis, and Whimsical Dreamworld or Wonderland at the other, representing complete departure from reality and true diegesis, with Secondary World suspended between them, effectively a balance between the logical and the illogical, reality and fantasy, real and unreal. Hume's approach focuses on fantasy as a 'deliberate departure from the limits of what is accepted as real and normal'.³²⁶ As a result she treats fantasy as an element of literature rather than viewing it as a distinct genre or mode, and is concerned with how it relates to the real. By reframing her approach into terms of authenticity and internal cohesion, this new spectrum builds on her observations while maintaining a focus on Fantasy as a genre.

The Real Earth side of the spectrum denotes settings that, while they appear fantastical, completely conform to our reality and universe. The Whimsical Dreamworld end of the spectrum denotes settings that are illogical, strange and divorced from recognisable reality and conform solely to non-traditional rule structures and apparent dream-logic. Although based on Hume's approach this spectrum is constructed not in terms of more or less fantastical, but in terms of authenticity, a term which in this case doubles for 'rational', as the inclusion of magic into any setting would automatically place it close to the far end of her spectrum. By considering the range of fantasy settings in terms of authenticity and an inherent logic or rationale, we can draw some distinct nuances which illustrate the nature of fantasy settings and the core concepts that the RPG draws upon.

The fantasy settings detailed below provided aspects of the RPG settings which then aided later authors in the construction of GF Secondary World settings. From the

³²⁴ This construction of wonderland runs partially counter to the definition provided by John Clute in the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, in which he stresses that wonderlands 'are worlds based on logical rules', p.1030.

³²⁵ Derived from her work in *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1984) although a similar method can be seen in SF criticism in Brian Aldiss and David Wingrove *Trillion Year Spree* (Thirsk: House of Stratus, 2001)

³²⁶ Kathryn Hume *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1984) Introduction p.xii

Lost Land comes the emphasis on the wild past as the setting for adventure and magic. From the Fantastic Earth comes a grander world setting, complete with maps, in which smaller stories are staged. From the Whimsical Dreamworld come the most fantastic creations and the origins of fancy, but it also shows us the need for boundaries and limitations. And from Tolkien's Middle Earth comes the kernel around which modern GF Secondary Worlds are constructed. Yet it is the RPG Gameworld that brings these disparate elements together into a cohesive approach to world building.

The Lost Land

The adventure stories of Haggard's Allan Quartermain³²⁷ have been cited by Pringle as a formative influence on modern fantasy writing.³²⁸ These 'Lost Land' tales are set in the 'real world', albeit in unexplored and unknown exotic locations far from civilised boundaries which are thus centres for adventure.³²⁹ Often conflated with 'Lost Race' stories, many of these narratives are set in parts of our Earth that have become lost over time, have been hidden, or are simply remote and so forgotten. These stories would fall close to the 'Real Earth' end of the spectrum, or mimesis, as they articulate a setting that is part of this world and the fundamental existence is essentially our own material universe. While aspects of the story may be fantastic, for example dinosaurs no longer being extinct, races being able to live in fabulous underground kingdoms or a giant gorilla named Kong being worshipped as a god on an isolated, forgotten island, the setting is, in general, rational and real and therefore overtly authentic. When Kong is found, he is hunted, trapped and exhibited as a popular attraction. The consequences of this action are equally believable and realistic; the 'monster' breaks free and wreaks havoc. The only truly fantastic elements of the story are the other monsters that exist on the island. Everything else is part of this world. Thus, authenticity is easier to construct in this form.

³²⁷ A recurring character in a series of books from the 1885 *King Solomon's Mines* to the 1927 *Allan and the Ice Gods*.

³²⁸ David Pringle 'Was Rider Haggard a Pulpster?' *Interzone* 135 September 1998 p.58

³²⁹ Brian Stableford, 'Lost Lands' and David Pringle, 'Lost Races' in Clute and Grant eds, *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, p.593-595.

Furthermore, the majority of references to witchcraft, spells and/or magic in the Lost Land are usually depicted as superstitious beliefs and practices which are debunked, ignored or defeated by the Western interlopers. If the fantastic elements, such as witchcraft, have an unexplainable effect (at least in scientific terms), for example in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* when the victims' hearts are removed from their chests via 'magic', then the tale moves toward the Secondary World.³³⁰ The rules of the fantasy setting allow for an 'unreal' fantastical element which has no place in the real rational world and therefore the story and setting moves away from the Real Earth setting. However, the majority of the story is still set in the actual world and is bound by real world rules and strictures. As a consequence, the lost land tales, for all their fantastic trappings, are in effect mimetic tales and therefore still overtly authentic.

An underlying concept in the Lost Land tale is that adventure is elsewhere, in wild and undiscovered places. Heroes journey from known into unknown wilderness in order to encounter the fantastic. The civilised world and the domestic or urban setting appear antithetical to the location of adventure and the fantastic within the Lost Land story. In fact, in order to encounter the truly fantastic, one must encounter the barbaric, the uncivilised and the un-evolved. This concept is well known in fantasy criticism. In *The Power of Myth* Campbell discusses the wilderness motif as the starting point for many quest myths.³³¹ For the fantastic to exist in the Lost Land tale, the heroes must find pockets of 'lost history' or 'lost tribes', remnants of a bygone age. From this perspective it seems that fantasy is locked in the past, in early history or even pre-history and only by discovering those hidden pockets can the adventurer experience the fantastic. This parallels the sense of the crossing of thresholds in order to experience adventure, and what Mendlesohn describes in the PQ fantasy; the fantastic lies elsewhere and the hero must journey to it.³³² That the fantastic lies beyond a threshold, through a portal, and is not contained in the known, is an argument made by both Propp and Campbell, and is well established in fantasy

³³⁰ *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, dir. by Steven Spielberg, (Paramount Pictures and Lucasfilm, 1984)

³³¹ From Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers *The Power of Myth* ed. Betty Sue Flowers (New York: Double Day, 1988) p.150

³³² Mendlesohn *Rhetorics of Fantasy* Chapter 1

criticism.³³³ More significantly in this case, in the Lost Land fantasy, magic and the fantastic are set in a lost age, a forgotten time that endures anachronistically and is conflated with a location. In effect time and physical setting become intertwined. In the Lost Land philosophy, magic can exist only in the past and in fact cannot exist in the modern day.³³⁴ The Lost Land as a setting focusses on a geographical location separated from the real, known and civilised world, which can house the fantastic as a remnant of a forgotten time or age.

Fantastic Earth

A second style of setting illustrates the balancing point between Real Earth and Secondary World, and is typified by Robert E. Howard's *Conan* stories in the Hyborian Age and Jack Vance's *Dying Earth*. While upon initial examination these examples bear no resemblance, the settings share a similar relationship to 'Real Earth' though in opposite temporal directions, the ancient past of Earth in the *Conan* stories, and the far future Earth in the *Dying Earth*. In essence, both settings are 'Real Earth' but removed in time in order to include fantasy elements and can therefore be seen as 'Fantasised Earth'. The fantastic transmogrification of Earth in the Lost Land tale is achieved through distance from the 'real'; in the Fantastic Earth tale, it is a temporal distance rather than a geographical or physical one. While Hume's scale would place these much closer to the far end of the spectrum, closer to fantastic diegesis, the connection of the setting to the real world in this conception actually places them closer to Real Earth.

Clute describes the Hyborian Age of Howard's *Conan* as set sometime around 10,000BC.³³⁵ The setting is thus deeply connected to Real Earth, but due to its removal in time it can be re-imagined as a fantasyland, complete with magic and monsters. Vance's *Dying Earth* illustrates the same fantastic transmogrification of Earth through time, but in the opposite temporal direction. Set in the far future,

³³³ Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folk Tale*, ed. by Svatava Pirkova-Jacobson and trans. by Laurence Scott, (Philadelphia: American Folklore Association, 1958) and Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, (London: Abacus, 1975)

³³⁴ Urban Fantasies and Paranormal Romance novels may seem to contradict this position, but in part they are distinguished by their use of a contemporary setting and the conventions of Horror, rather than conforming to an apparent genre norm which equates Fantasy with the past.

³³⁵ Clute, 'Howard, Robert E(rvin)' in Clute and Grant eds, *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* pp.481-483.

Vance can again take liberties with the construction of setting, while at the same time linking it to the contemporary world. As both Howard and Vance base their fantasy settings on the real world, the settings maintain an inherent but important link to this universe, and are not Secondary Worlds. They are this world, albeit deeply re-imagined and constructed. Again, as the settings have this connection to the 'real' they are not Whimsical Dreamworlds despite the apparent fantastic non-rationality. Thus, they are on the cusp between overtly and covertly authentic fantasy settings, with the majority of the fantastic elements conforming to rationalised explanations.

The setting of Vance's *Dying Earth* in the far future is a conceit more common to SF. However, this perhaps explains the pseudo-scientific approach to magic as a system of formulas and equations that harness energy or manipulate matter in a way that appears as 'magic'. Arthur C. Clarke's oft quoted line, 'Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic' fails to account for divergent rationales between future scientific advances and magic systems.³³⁶ Although the *effect* of advanced technology may be indistinguishable from magic, such as the crew of the starship Enterprise 'beaming' to an alien planet, the way in which the wonder is described or referred to distinguishes it as magic, rather than science. Pseudo-scientific terminology and the appearance of a rational explanation returns to the premise of believability in the fantastic. The attitude to magic is perhaps more evident in a less well used quotation, 'Witchcraft to the ignorant, ... simple science to the learned', the implication being that science is for the intelligent and the educated, whereas magic is for the ignorant and the stupid.³³⁷ A far future setting makes magic more 'believable' as it is simply a science or technology yet to be discovered, whereas a setting in the past implies (often erroneously) that the peoples of the past were ignorant, ill-educated and primitive. There is certainly a bias in Western literature toward science and the rational explaining 'miracles', and against magic, which is for the gullible and the unenlightened. Thus, in the Lost Land tale, magic is of the past, and is something non-rational, illogical and without rigour, an assumption challenged by the RPG magic system.

³³⁶ Arthur C. Clarke, *Profiles of the Future, An Enquiry into the Limits of the Possible*, 2nd rev. edn, (London: Pan, 1983).

³³⁷ Leigh Brackett 'The Sorcerer of Rhiannon' *Astounding Science Fiction* (1942) p.39

In the instance of the adapted Earth, the movement of setting from the known world into an uncivilised time is similar to the philosophy of the Lost Land tale, except this time it has been writ large. In a sense, both Vance and Howard have created a whole world which is a Lost Land, rather than being limited to small pockets. Where the Lost Land exhibited small, discrete areas of temporal remnants, far future and far past can create an entire setting of non-concurrent time. Yet this expanded pocket of adventure is again carved into distinct pieces complete with boundaries and thresholds. While one can adventure close to home, the travelogue and the journeying to new and, from the characters' perspectives, unexplored lands finds resonance with the practice found in the Lost Land tales. The separate kingdoms that make up the Hyborian Age setting contain distinct flavours and tones, each allowing a different adventure experience.³³⁸ Accordingly, the Hyborian Age is a precursor to generic fantasylands and the RPG Gameworlds.

The map of Howard's Hyborian Age raises additional points. Howard designed a map of his world, a convention later parodied by Diana Wynne Jones:

What to do first.
Find the map. It will be there. No tour of Fantasyland is complete without one [...] Examine the map [...] you are going to have to visit every single place on this map, whether it is marked or not.³³⁹

However, the map itself is important as it creates the illusion of a world, the appearance of an authentic setting. The map emphasises the nature of the setting as real and epic in scale, rather than a small, localised pocket of wilderness or fantasy in a known world. The second point is that the map itself is of a world with inherent climatic paradoxes and contradictions, with temperate climates occurring at the same latitude as deserts, which in turn adjoin frozen areas. Thirdly, the historically anachronistic settings and juxtapositions of wildly different cultures with little cross-

³³⁸ Conan's home realm of Cimmeria is an analogue of ancient Ireland and general Celtic barbaric past, the nearby Aquilonia appears to be a medieval French analogue which borders Ophir, an analogue of Italy and Zingara, a seeming analogue for the Iberian Peninsula. Further south on the map lie lands modelled on Ancient Egypt, Stygia, and a generic Middle Eastern area, Shem. To the far East on Howard's map lies Hyrkania, a land seemingly based on ancient Mongolia.

³³⁹ Wynne Jones *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland* Introduction.

cultural pollination is an early precursor to the distinct and discrete gaming zones found in RPGs as well as the pastiche fantasylands of modern GF.³⁴⁰

Although Jones suggests that the fantasy map is an integral part of GF, recent research by Stefan Ekman suggests that this is not necessarily true.³⁴¹ Indeed, Ekman argues that the convention of the fantasy map as a ubiquitous artefact is another misconception of the genre. However, the map has become so widely regarded as a necessary component of GF because it is indeed a common factor of more recent fantasy writing, if not necessarily a requirement of the fantasy adventure. Steven Erikson has given the following advice on creating a world:

[...] don't overwork it. Leave blanks spaces on every map. Leave room for mystery and later invention; and pay attention to the relationships between peoples, cultures, civilizations, in a way that makes geographical sense. For what it's worth, I always start with a map. Always. And use as much geophysical and geographical knowledge as you can accrue: the history of a river's drainage pattern can give you the history of a whole city's life and death right there, and even that of a civilization. So, leave room for the world to breathe and grow -- you don't need it all in place before you start, and I'd advise that you shouldn't, because if you can't grow in that world (and into it), then neither can your story, or your characters.³⁴²

Erikson marries the tradition of the map as illustrative of the strange world with a sensitivity for geographical influence on the history and development of settlements and cultures. It is perhaps unsurprising, given his background in archaeology and anthropology that he regards the fantasy map as fundamental to the creation of the world, with the landscape dictating and influencing the history of the various civilisations that populate such lands. His answer also suggests that the world created through this mapping process is a real world, or at least authentic, in that settlements and civilisations will be affected by the drainage patterns of a fluvial system, a concern more apparent in real world settlement evolution than in Fantasy.

Despite Erikson's nuanced approach to the fantasy landscape through the construction of maps, this careful approach to world building is probably not the norm. Not every

³⁴⁰ For a more complete investigation and analysis of maps in fantasy please see Stefan Ekman *Writing Worlds, Reading Landscapes: An Exploration of Settings in Fantasy* (unpublished PhD thesis, Lund University, 2010).

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² Steven Erikson during a posted Q&A on the TOR website for the re-read of *Gardens of the Moon*, <http://www.tor.com/blogs/2010/09/questions-for-steven-erikson-on-gardens-of-the-moon-start-asking> [last accessed 10/10/10]

author possesses training in reading landscapes and evaluating how terrain can influence settlement creation and distribution. David Eddings has stated that the world of the *Belgariad* and *Malloreon* began as a map he ‘doodled’:

[...] one morning before I went off to my day-job, I was so bored that I started doodling. My doodles produced a map of a place that never was (and is probably a geological impossibility)... I went back home and dug out the aforementioned doodle. It seemed to have some possibilities ... I realized that since I'd created this world, I was going to have to populate it.³⁴³

Eddings’ approach to map construction and fantasy world building appears closer to the style and structure of Howard’s map. Eddings felt no need to make the fantasy world geologically, climatically, or archaeologically logical and consistent. For Eddings it was the creation of the various core peoples and races that made the world come alive, rather than the land itself. This approach is conceptually closer to Howard’s, as his fantasy setting lacks the logic of Erikson’s planet despite his conceit that the Hyborian Age is in fact Earth’s past, but it functions as a perfectly adequate sequence of disparate lands to act as settings and backgrounds for adventures. This organic construction of setting as adventure background has been mimicked by at least one RPG-influenced author, Raymond E. Feist:

[Midkemia] began as a series of linked together gaming environments, and as people (such as myself) came aboard, it grew, developed, and evolved [...] One of the things about Midkemia which makes it a great narrative environment, is I don’t have to be bothered with creating that environment; it’s a virtual world, and I look at my writing as “historical novels about a place that doesn't exist”.³⁴⁴

In Feist’s case, the different lands and settings were created as discrete arenas for RPG play, which he then combined into a world setting for the purposes of his fantasy series. This could be seen as a modern articulation of the structure and approach used by Howard in the Hyborian Age, an *ad hoc* construction of a world by the piecing together of specific narrative and adventure settings.

A major distinction between the worlds of Howard, Eddings and Feist, and that of Erikson is that Erikson is the only one to attempt to construct a geologically, geographically and climatologically rational world. Yet each of these authors used a systematised and logical approach to the construction of the world, in which land,

³⁴³ Eddings *The Rivan Codex* Introduction

³⁴⁴ Interview with Raymond E. Feist ‘A Conversation with Raymond E. Feist’ at www.writerswrite.com/journal/mar00/feist.htm [last accessed 10/10/10]

people, culture, and magic are combined in a rational framework, which provides a stable and authentic world in which to base multiple stories and is conceptually linked to one of the approaches taken by RPGs to this aspect of world building. Howard, Eddings, Feist and Erikson used different real world cultural analogues, and their development of these realms into settings may differ, but each attempted to provide a series of discrete and identifiable zones in which to set adventures. So it is not that each world is a pseudo-medieval fantasyland, nor that each world is unoriginal, but rather that they are all part of the tradition that requires distinct locales that cater to diverse adventures, and they are divorced in some respect from our own world.

In the *Fantastic Earth*, by removing the setting from contemporary 'real world' into an adapted, yet authentic world, Vance and Howard illustrate a movement in fantasy setting creation. While the *Lost Land* tale featured a contemporaneous setting in which pockets of adventure could still be found, Howard and Vance both chose to utilise a non-contemporaneous setting. This positioning of the fantasy setting as 'temporally removed' rather than 'geographically removed' creates a distinct fantasy world to be explored, albeit adapted from the real. The temporal removal to create a distinct and discrete realm can therefore be seen as a step towards a complete Secondary World, while the use of a varied and diverse climatological and geographical world can be seen as the precursor to the Gameworld and its discrete gaming zones. Additionally, the temporal dislocation can be married to the concept of a lost age from the *Lost Land* to create the template of, or at least the predisposition toward, ancient settings for fantasylands.

Middle Earth and the Secondary World

Tolkien's Middle Earth is at once a Secondary World setting as well as possessing an implied connection to this world. Indeed the term 'Secondary World' is Tolkien's from his lecture/essay 'On Fairy Stories'. In the prologue of *LotR* 'Concerning Hobbits' Tolkien suggests that the world of Middle Earth, like Howard's Hyborian Age, is indeed an aspect of Earth's past, emphasising the ties between magic, adventure, fantasy and the past. What makes Tolkien's world distinct from Howard's in this sense is that the world evoked by Tolkien is almost entirely removed from an Earth-like setting, in terms of history, geographical construction, landscape, fantasy

racers, monsters and magic. It functions almost entirely as a Secondary World, completely removed from Earth, were it not for the prologue's suggestion:

Hobbits are an unobtrusive but very ancient people, more numerous formerly than they are today [...] Even in ancient days they were, as a rule, shy of 'the Big Folk' as they call us, and now they avoid us with dismay and are becoming hard to find [...] They seldom now reach three feet; but they have dwindled.³⁴⁵

The conceit that Hobbits, and by extension Middle Earth in general, are part of our world, is problematic in terms of the proposed scheme. To all intents and purposes Middle Earth functions as a Secondary World, and yet the prologue implies that it is in fact the Real World and that Hobbits continue to exist. Yet unlike Howard's Hyborian Age, one cannot fathom where to place Middle Earth in terms of Earth history. Elves, Dwarves, Halflings and Dragons have become ubiquitous in fantasy Secondary Worlds but have no place in the Real World, and so Tolkien's Middle Earth remains problematic until we realise that Tolkien envisaged his world as a mythology. In Real World mythology Herakles defeated the Hydra, Perseus rode the Pegasus and George slew the dragon. In this instance the apparent incongruity between the Real World and Middle Earth can be alleviated. By imagining Middle Earth as a mythic past, one need not give full credence to the events depicted as historical truth or objective truth, but can employ a metaphorical filter, an assumption of allegory and symbolism. Alternatively, due to Tolkien's influence on, potentially, his creation of this tradition, Middle Earth becomes a prototype for later fantasy Secondary Worlds and therefore, as an embryonic Secondary World, it cannot be expected to exhibit the fully developed norms now common to the setting. Since it is a pre-cursor to the GF tradition we cannot approach Tolkien's work with GF conventions in mind. In summarising Tolkien's position on Secondary Worlds found in 'On Fairy Stories', Greer Watson notes:

As Tolkien pointed out [...] readers of fantasy accept as real – within the story – events that could not happen in the physical world. He therefore distinguished the secondary world of the story from the primary world of the reader.³⁴⁶

Watson highlights the need for internal consistency and in-narrative reality as necessary for the Secondary World to be 'real', to be authentic. She also argues that

³⁴⁵ Tolkien *The Fellowship of the Ring* 'Prologue – Concerning Hobbits' p.1

³⁴⁶ Greer Watson 'Assumptions of Reality: Low Fantasy, Magical Realism, and the Fantastic' *JFA* Vol.11 No.2 (2000) pp.164-172

the world of Middle Earth is a separate entity, but one that was constructed with the 'primary world of the reader' held firmly in mind, indeed she interprets Tolkien's argument as a contract between author and reader in which they agree to construct a fiction that the fantasy world is real and is not this world. This creates a position which is somewhat difficult to argue when the prologue is considered. If Tolkien's position is that Middle Earth is the same world as ours, then it cannot be distinguished from the 'primary world of the reader'. If Middle Earth is a divorced Secondary World then the suggestions of our world as a continuation of Middle Earth contradict this position. However, while this highlights the problematic nature of the theory that the setting of *LotR* is the precursor to Secondary Worlds in modern GF, Tolkien's work, of course, remains seminal and influential.

Faerie and Wonderlands

The Secondary World is one of the most common settings now found in GF as almost all modern Fantasylands are Secondary Worlds. They are removed completely from Earth and are worlds in and of themselves. They possess histories, races, countries and continents and, in the most fully developed, a sense of authenticity. They seem real. However, contextualising the Secondary World as a setting is easier if we first examine the far end of the spectrum, the Whimsical Dreamworld.

The strength of the Whimsical Dreamworld is the breadth and variety of the fantastic it can encompass. It maps the outermost reaches of the fantastic imagination, and provides a home to the most surreal, innovative, and wonderful creations. Evolution and natural selection do not dictate who and what can live in a Dreamworld. Natural physical laws can be bent, broken or even up-held at the author's whim or need. The logic of the setting is found not in comparison to our world, but in contrast to it. In terms of the RPG, the Dreamworld serves as a source of inspiration and as a resource to be plundered. Dragons, Elves, Faeries, Wyverns, and a thousand other recognisable creatures and races from GF have been taken from a Dreamworld, adapted, rationalised and contextualised, in order that they can become part of a Secondary World. This is because the Dreamworld is a world without authenticity; its rules are arbitrary and cannot be predicted or learned. It can never be 'real'. In the *Forgotten Realms* one can become the proud owner of a 'Vorpal Sword'. The *D&D*

sword first appeared in *Supplement 1: Greyhawk* in which it is described as a sword that has a chance of causing instant death, in this instance through decapitation.³⁴⁷ In *Baldur's Gate II* it is described as an extra-planar weapon that magically can sever the link between the spirit and physical body of the victim.³⁴⁸ Yet the sword clearly originates with Lewis Carroll's 'Jabberwocky' from *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There*. The game took the fantastical concept and wrought it into a contextualised magical blade that fitted the rationale of the ludic system.³⁴⁹

When stories are set in lands of whimsy and caprice, all sense of real world logic is ignored and the world is shaped by narrative concerns. When Alice goes down the rabbit hole, she does not find a fantasy world in the sense of GF; she finds a dreamscape that follows dream-logic. The dislocating jumps from realm to realm and situation to situation, apparently at random from Alice's perspective, are a consequence of dream-logic rather than the usually more logical construction of fantasy Secondary Worlds and fantasylands. An example would concern the realm of the playing cards. They have no life cycle, no evolution and no place in a 'real world', and therefore they could not exist in a GF fantasyland as they are depicted. While clearly the Alice stories are fantasies and are set in fantastical realms, as Clute notes they are illogical dream fantasies and the crosshatch threshold crossing is dreamlike rather than related to Secondary World realms and kingdoms.³⁵⁰

Few modern GF works trace their heritage to Faerie, yet in at least one example, the whimsical nature of its dream logic finds a more authentic presentation and illustrates how an authentic Secondary World can be constructed from the Wonderland. The realm of Faerie, at once connected to and yet divorced from our own, is usually depicted as a series of inter-connected realms, each possessing its own inherent paradoxical logic and incomprehensible rule system. It is a land almost completely capricious and whimsical by nature. Rarely is Faerie depicted as a Secondary World

³⁴⁷ *Supplement 1: Greyhawk* 1976 see also *Dungeon Master's Guide* 1979

³⁴⁸ *Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn* (BioWare, 2000) the action dialogue box in the game would occasionally display 'Snicker Snack' if you made a successful attack with the blade.

³⁴⁹ Richard A. Knaak, author of several *Dragonlance* novels, also uses the term Jabberwock to refer to the mutated/monstrous offspring of a dragon that possesses pyrokinesis in his *Dragonrealm* series (New York: Warner Books, 1989-1997) beginning with *Firedrake*. He thus took the concept and adapted it to suit the structures and context of his world..

³⁵⁰ Clute. 'Alice in Wonderland' in Clute and Grant eds, *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* p.18

in which there is a discernable structure and logic, as this seems antithetical to the construction of the Fae. A notable recent exception to Faerie as a problematic fantasy Secondary World is the Faerie fantasy of Mathew Sturges.³⁵¹ By imposing an order and regime to Faerie, Sturges has re-conceptualised it as a Secondary World. He has done this, in part, by removing some of the wonder and arbitrary caprice of the characterisation of the Fae, and in part by visualising Faerie as a fantasy realm and treating it as if it were a Secondary World, adding a coherent logic and explaining many of the haphazard features of Faerie as remnants of a period of magical upheaval. As Sturges visualises fantasy he incorporates the ‘thinning’ Clute has isolated as a convention of fantasy writing, and refers to a past in which Faerie abounded with wild and unchecked ‘shaping’ magic, but the contemporary realm is in fact lesser. This adds an element of evolution and depth of history to the land Sturges has created, while at the same time providing a convenient and believable reason for the more extreme whimsical features of the realm, such as talking trees and fractured temporal zones.

Despite this exception, like dreamworlds, Faerie contains creatures and realms that defy explanation in any logical sense and the rules that govern the world are ultimately arbitrary and often paradoxical. The patchwork collection of lands and realms seem to contain no overarching logical structure or physics, and magic can be used as an extension of whim and an explanation for everything. In Chapter Five of Neil Gaiman and Charles Vess’ *Stardust*, a lion and a unicorn do battle for a crown.³⁵² There is a suggestion that this is connected to an old nursery rhyme, and a battle that the unicorn is destined to lose. Yet, there is no suggestion that this is the first or last time the two will do battle for the crown but rather that it is a recurring symbolic battle. If that is the case, then it is entirely possible that should the unicorn die in the battle, it will simply be recreated for the next one, thus removing any narrative tension and sense of repercussion. This would certainly be easy to view as illogical and whimsical, as no real world rationale can be made to explain a continual battle to the death between effectively immortal symbols. However, the confrontation fits with the

³⁵¹ Matthew Sturges, *Midwinter* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2009) and *The Office of Shadow* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2010)

³⁵² Neil Gaiman and Charles Vess *Stardust* (New York: DC Comics, 2007) originally a serial publication 1997-1998.

dream-logic of the faerie realm Vess and Gaiman explore.³⁵³ So while the Lion/Unicorn battle is narratively consistent in terms of Faerie as constructed by Gaiman and Vess, it is clearly distinct to a Secondary World such as Feist's Midkemia in which lions are not symbolic animals, but rather actual creatures, for instance, in *Prince of the Blood*, the young prince Erland joins Keshian nobles on a lion hunt.³⁵⁴ In this instance the lions are real creatures, their deaths are final and the danger to the characters is palpable.

Faerie and Dreamworlds are fantasy settings distinct from Secondary Worlds, in that Faerie defies the logic and rules of our universe in favour of an unknowable and paradoxical construction. While fantasy settings might be 'unreal' they can be constructed as if they are real; Dreamworlds on the other hand, can never be real or even appear as real. Distinct to Lost Land tales and the altered earth settings, Faerie and Dreamworlds are separate from this reality while remaining joined to it. In the case of Dreamworlds, the protagonist, like Alice, journeys to the Dreamworld and back. Faerie, conversely, is sometimes cast as a metaphysical reality that overlays our own and has points of connection or portals throughout the world. Despite the connection to the real world, Faerie is unreal, and is deployed as a direct magical contrast tied to the mundane reality of Earth. If nothing in this world can be magical, then in Faerie everything is magical.

Secondary Worlds

The extreme unreality of the Wonderland and the mimetic mundane reality of real world settings can achieve balance in the Secondary World setting. The Secondary World is a fantasy setting, conceptually linked to the rational SF alien world which, while fantastic and essentially unreal, possesses an internal coherence and rationality. In effect the Secondary World has discernable and predictable rules which limit the fantastic elements of the narrative. The Secondary World is an overarching term used to describe discrete otherworlds, in particular Fantasylands.³⁵⁵ It is generally seen as

³⁵³ The concept of magic as it relates to magical systems, whimsy and narrative constraints is developed in the following chapter.

³⁵⁴ Raymond E. Feist *Prince of the Blood* (New York: Doubleday, 1989) Chapter 11 'Hunting'.

³⁵⁵ Tolkien 'On Fairy Stories' *The Tolkien Reader* (1947; original lecture 1938; New York: Ballantine, 1966)

distinct from Faerie and other Wonderlands as it is not ‘bound to mundane reality’.³⁵⁶ It exists as a totality and is not dependent on an objective reality for contrast. Clute notes that the Secondary World ‘is impossible according to common sense and [...] is self-coherent as a venue for story’, and further that, ‘the rules by which its reality is defined can be learned by living them, and are not arbitrary like those of a wonderland can be’.³⁵⁷ In effect then, they are fantasy worlds which exist in their own right. They are not Earth, in any form or time period, and they are not dependent on ‘real’ Earth as a point of comparison or contrast. That rules can be learned and are not arbitrarily imposed is a mark of the authentic world, and given that they may not be immediately obvious we can then describe this as a covert authenticity.

Although Secondary Worlds can be created through a variety of techniques, they are united by a sense that at their most developed they ‘could exist’, just not in this universe as we understand it. In terms of the above scheme, the Secondary World balances on the pivot between the truly fantastic and the mundane. Clute’s assertion that Secondary Worlds are ‘impossible according to commonsense’ can be misconstrued. Magic as a wieldable force defies ‘commonsense’ and so from that perspective any Secondary World which contains magic can be described as ‘impossible’. Yet this categorisation is problematic. If magic makes the world impossible, then we are left discussing values of impossibility in order to differentiate between various realms. There are no degrees of impossibility, as possibility is a binary state. This poses no problems for an alien world or SF setting as science, technology and techno-speak can give an air of plausibility to offset the ‘impossibility’, but magic and GF do not have that option. Even the Appendix to Weis and Hickman’s *Dragon Wing*, which details in rational and scientific terminology how magic functions, cannot make the magic system plausible. It remains magic.³⁵⁸ There is, however, a clear distinction between the illogic of the Wonderland and Dreamworld and the apparent ‘impossible’ nature of the Secondary

³⁵⁶ Clute *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* p.847.

³⁵⁷ Clute *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* p.847.

³⁵⁸ Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman, *Dragon Wing*, (London: Bantam, 1990). The appendix takes the guise of an academic treatise on the differences between Sartan and Patryn magic systems and uses geometric theories in addition to a variant on chaos theory’s probability wave to describe how magic functions. Although, given that the series gradually reveals the setting to be a far future Earth that has been devastated by a cataclysmic accident, a direct contrast to the traditional fantasyland setting of *Dragonlance*, it is less of a surprise to find scientific language detailing the magic system in a similar fashion as that of Vance’s *Dying Earth*.

World whose rules are possible to learn and thus not 'arbitrary'. The principle difference therefore is the concept of authenticity, an attempt to make the world realistic, if not real, and to create a series of learnable and predictable rules. The covert nature of the authenticity requires that the reader learn the rules of the Secondary World, rather than accepting them as implied as in the overt authenticity of a real world setting.

While many fantasylands abound with magic, unlike in Faerie, not everything in a fantasyland is magical. The Secondary World appears as a balance between predictable mundanity and unknowable whimsy, the polar ends of the spectrum above. Secondary Worlds maintain an appreciation of the mundane by making magic a part of the world but not the sole reason for the world, and this creates a sense of 'reality' and believability. Magic becomes part of the universal rules governing the world, an additional force to consider along with gravity, magnetism and so forth; it becomes an additional natural law. This can be seen as a rational and scientifically logical approach to an inherently illogical proposition. It poses the question, 'If magic exists as an additional force in the world/universe what would the ramifications or manifestations be?' Yet in all other respects, the Secondary World attempts to present the world as 'real' and therefore something as strange as a recurring battle over a crown by a unicorn and a lion must in some way conform to a realistic or logical rationale.

While Faerie is often positioned in relation to this world by contrast, Secondary Worlds may exist in a universe that does not contain this world and can therefore explore the concept of magic as an additional universal force. In effect the Secondary World is a reality separated from our own universe and the inclusion of magic is a signifier, not that the reality does not exist, but rather that this is a different or alternative universe, or a parallel dimension. The existence of magic does not negate 'reality' and speculative fiction texts have long used fictive reasons for the inclusion of magic-like abilities or powers. In Marvel's comic series, the X-Men possess superpowers which are explained as originating from their genetic mutations. The fact that a mutated human gene would not and cannot make it possible for a character to suddenly coat his skin in an 'organic metal' like Colossus, shoot laser-blasts from his eyes, like Cyclops, or be able to teleport, like Nightcrawler does not negate the

fact that this pseudo-scientific language provides the appearance of a rational context. The couching of these supernatural or magical abilities in scientific rather than mystical language creates the illusion that they are possible, or at least that they are part of the rational lexicon of the scientific tradition. Yet arbitrarily, spell effects to accomplish the very same things will be seen in light of fantasy and in terms of whimsy, and therefore as unreal and non-rational.

Similarly, the Secondary Worlds used in SF, such as alien planets, futuristic settings and space habitats, are described in scientific textured language rather than the lexicon of myth and belief. The implication then becomes that these strange settings can be viewed as possible, as ‘thought experiments’ and as potential worlds in an infinite universe. This apparent contradictory approach to reading SF and Fantasy as distinct but related genres can be found in Anne McCaffrey’s *Pern* series.³⁵⁹ The dragon, long a mainstay of Western myth and more recently of Fantasy, is explained in the ‘Pern’ universe as an alien creature that has evolved on the alien planet in a symbiotic relationship to the ‘thread’ and been subjected to genetic experiments. This does not rationalise the dragon to any greater extent than does suggesting that they live in fantasylands as magical apex predators. The ‘explanation’ of dragons in terms of alien ecology is a seemingly scientific rationalisation, and is therefore potentially believable, whereas a mythic and/or magical rationalisation is viewed as inherently non-rational as it does not correspond to the scientific tradition. Essentially the nature of the dragon remains the same, regardless of how it is rationalised within the text. The reader is confronted with a dragon, and whether it is an alien creature or a magical monster seems a strange position to argue in terms of dragons being believable.

The argument of what is rational and what is non-rational has apparently been distilled to the language/setting used to rationalise, rather than questioning the premise of rationalisation in terms of in-universe or in-fiction structures. To view *Pern* as a ‘rationalised fantasy’ and distinct to traditional GF on the basis of scientific rationality, although accurate, does not negate the fact that in much GF ‘rational’ explanations for dragons, including life-cycles and biological niches, are often

³⁵⁹ Anne McCaffrey, *Dragonriders of Pern* series (1967 to present).

proffered or developed. Feist's *Midkemia*, with its discussion of the mating/life cycle of fire-drakes and great dragons, can be viewed as a rationalised fantasy as it has attempted to give a rational or logical in-narrative reason for giant, flying fire-breathing creatures, as part of the world, rather than resorting to linking them to 'alien creatures' in the mundane universe.³⁶⁰ Feist therefore creates and maintains an authentic fantasy world by providing an in-narrative and contextually logical rationale for the existence of dragons, despite eschewing the scientific plausibility of 'alien life-forms'.³⁶¹ Although it is a small distinction, we may, therefore, view the world of *Pern* as Science Fantasy and the world of *Midkemia* as 'rationalised fantasy'. Thus, we reclassify 'rationalised fantasy' as a sub-genre of Fantasy that creates logical or systematic rules to explain the fantastic. Science Fantasy then describes a world or setting that fuses scientific rationality with fantasy conventions and stories. Therefore the *Pern* stories, although they rationalise the fantastic, use the science-dominant language of SF and so the series can be considered science fantasy rather than rationalised fantasy.

The Secondary World limits and structures the fantastical elements in order to create the illusion of reality. By using rules that appear rational and logical within the narrative context, that also mimic natural laws and universal structures such as gravity, magnetism and so forth, the Secondary World creates a sense of authenticity and believability. The fantasy settings previously discussed: the Lost Land, the Fantastic Earth, the Dreamworld, and Faerie; all contributed core components, highlighted in the above discussions, to the creation of the gameworld. Yet the core components were chosen carefully, and the rules and regulatory structures inherent to the gameworld have rationalised these components into playable and more authentic attributes of the Secondary World.

The Gameworld as Setting

³⁶⁰ Raymond E. Feist, *Magician*, new rev. edn, (London: Grafton, 1992 repr. London: Voyager, 1997); *idem*, *Silverthorn*, (London: Granada, 1986); *idem*, *A Darkness at Sethanon*, (London: Grafton, 1987).

³⁶¹ Although the history of the Valheru as world travellers and plane walkers who transplanted the various sentient races across the planets of the Riftwar universe provides a rational, or at least authentic, explanation for the juxtaposition of the assorted sentient races existing on numerous planets were evolution would seem untenable.

The RPG is constructed from a series of rules developed from the genre. Gygax and Arneson drew upon those elements of fantasy settings that they believed essential to the formation of a fantasy world and adapted them into coherent and rational systems in order to construct an understandable and flexible framework for a gameworld.³⁶² We could describe this as looting the treasures of the fantasy authors listed in *AD&D*'s 'Appendix N'. The Gameworld as a setting bears a strong relationship to both the Secondary Worlds and the fantastic settings on which it is modelled. The constructed Gameworld also adheres to many of the conventions of the serial narrative in this way it further rationalises the narrative elements of early fantasy adventures. In turn, the constructed worlds of much modern GF bear a strong relationship to the Gameworld as setting.

Like a Secondary World, a Gameworld depends on rules since it must achieve a certain level of certainty, consistency and stability in order for the game to be played. If rules were whimsical and arbitrary potential players would find gaming difficult, if not impossible. As Gene Doty notes, the Gameworld is a collaborative construction and thus the world must be communicable between the players and the GM:

In a fantasy role-playing game (FRPG), the players collaboratively imagine a world with its peoples, creatures and history. Within this imaginary world, the players enact specific events involving characters which they created. These events cover the wide range of fantasy experiences, with an emphasis on magic, monsters and mayhem.³⁶³

While specific settings possess individual rules and idiosyncrasies, Gameworlds as a generic type must be navigable by players and GMs alike. This aspect of world building, that it be communicable to, at minimum, two people, means it must have rules and an understandable base. The Gameworld, and by extension, the fantasy Secondary World, is more than a simple setting; it implies a series of events, specific characters and races, and the inherent logic that connects them.³⁶⁴ As RPG Gameworlds and fantasylands have evolved they have developed a series of recurring characteristics, for example the appearance and characterisation of Elves, Dwarves

³⁶² It could be argued that their adaptation was less intuitive and more pragmatic, but in essence they derived the gameworld structure from a distillation of what they saw as defining characteristics.

³⁶³ Gene Doty 'A Toss of the Dice: Writers, Readers and Role-Playing Games' *JFA* Vol.14, No.1 (2003) pp.51-67

³⁶⁴ This is similar to the construction of the chronotope by M. M. Bakhtin in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Micahel Holquist, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) which locates a conflation of setting, time and character.

and other fantasy races, specific Character Classes such as the mage or warrior, the enthusiastic hero, the wise guiding wizard and so on. In addition to adapting rules for setting and world building, Gygax and Arneson adapted, codified and disseminated these elements of setting as they were recurring aspects of fantasy.

By reducing popular fantasy elements to bare components, Gygax and Arneson effectively mimicked some of the work of Campbell and Propp, although instead of looking at specific narrative functions and elements of story the gamers focussed on the fantasy elements and constructs that littered fantasy literature. The change in emphasis from descriptive to prescriptive can then be seen when the various iterations of *D&D* were launched. By agreeing that certain elements were necessary for the world to be a discernable fantasy gameworld, in that it should resemble a generic perception of a fantasy world, it should not have advanced technology, and magic should be a usable and active force, Gygax and Arneson created a base level of fantastic reality and a common set of rules that could then form the starting point for further experimentation and adaptation. The initial *D&D* world of *Greyhawk* was a rather nebulous and ill-defined world that lacked significant detail beyond conforming to common assumptions about ‘fantasyland’. It was a pseudo-medieval European-based world that contained specific adventure areas that could be expanded and developed as necessary. In terms of gameworlds, Toril, and in particular the continent of Faerûn, the setting for much of the *Forgotten Realms* literature, is more illustrative and became further codified and developed over time.

Like Howard’s Hyborian Age, Toril is constructed as a patchwork or mosaic of kingdoms, realms and lands, many borrowing directly from historical settings, each of which allowed for a different gaming environment. Should a player wish to play a barbaric Celtic adventure, the *Forgotten Realms* supply the Moonshae Islands as a convenient setting. If a Barbarian horde game is desired then the tribes of the Northern Tundra, north of Ten Towns, can be utilised. When the players want a forest adventure, a jungle quest, a desert trek, or any combination thereof, the *Forgotten Realms* possess a pre-made gaming zone already constructed, outlined and in place. The details of each land, including a history, economic system, rudimentary social and political frameworks, geography, local myths and legends as well as relationships and alignments to other lands realms and regions were laid out in detail

in the various gaming modules. Each of these lands, by necessity, cannot change or evolve. They are all locked as static discrete areas in order that players may experiment with them over time. Should the game setting of Toril conform to the narrative conventions traditionally associated with Fantasy, such as the single hero, who with his small band of companions, embarks on a quest and succeeds in healing the world, it would cease to function as an adaptable and re-usable game setting. Once the land is healed, the only option is to re-run the initial scenario, rather than continue the adventure. If a single hero is the focus, then one player is singled out as hero, while the others are reduced to followers and supporting characters. Neither situation corresponds to the goal of a consensual and adaptable world to use as a setting for multiple adventures for a co-operative of players. The nature of the game influences the structure of the narrative and the structure of the world.

While ‘fantasylands’ may appear as pseudo-medieval European analogues, game worlds, through necessity, tend to include a more varied selection of setting and this is evidenced in specific game related worlds such as Krynn in *Dragonlance*, Toril in *Forgotten Realms*, Midkemia in Feist’s *Riftwar Saga*, and Burn in Erikson and Esslemont’s *Malazan* series. Yet, the variation and diversity of landscape can also be seen in typical GF fantasylands such as George R.R. Martin’s Westeros, Gemmell’s Drenan and even David Eddings’ unnamed fantasy world as the setting for the *Belgariad* and *Malloreon*. That is not to say that the pseudo-medieval ‘fantasyland’ setting is not present, but rather that these worlds often contain a greater variety of setting than perhaps Jones’ *Tough Guide* would suggest. The medieval European setting is usually only one of several present in either a Gameworld or a fantasyland.

This construction of discrete and distinct areas as a stable adventure setting differentiates the Gameworld from the ‘full fantasy’ setting outlined by Clute.³⁶⁵ Clute outlines the fourfold process of wrongness, thinning, recognition and healing, but the game cannot fulfil the last two categories except in microcosm. In a closed narrative world, like Middle Earth, the author can construct a flawed world and the process of the narrative corrects this flaw, leading to recognition and healing.³⁶⁶ The

³⁶⁵ Clute ‘Grail, Groundhog, and God Game’ *JFA* Vol.10 No.4 (2000)

³⁶⁶ Constructing Middle Earth as healable is a contestable argument due to the fact that the world fails and becomes mundane, rather than heals. However, the point remains that the world concludes.

world is then complete and the story ends. In an RPG one cannot complete the world. It is designed to be on-going and n/ever changing.³⁶⁷

Clute identifies these rigid fantasylands as ‘unearned pastorals’ and does not appear to consider that some are designed specifically to form the backdrop of multiple storylines and adventures and that therefore, approaching them from a mythic or folkloric position ignores the fundamentally different narrative design.³⁶⁸ Clute’s description appears to be a response to Gary Westfahl’s description of the ‘pastoral’ as it relates to fantasy, in which Westfahl describes pastoral as the ‘goal of fantasy’, an ending or destruction of evil in order to create an Edenic world.³⁶⁹ If the fantasy pastoral is the creation of a ‘fully healed’ world or ‘happy ending’ at the end of the narrative, it is clear that RPGFs and much GF cannot fulfil this. While the *Dragonlance* heroes Tanis, Raistlin *et al* can quest to hold the evil Goddess Takhisis at bay by opposing her minions, they cannot fully defeat her and remove her taint from the land as that would close Krynn to further adventures and restrict the potential for quests within the landscape. Pug and Tomas become two of the most powerful beings on Midkemia by the end of the first *Riftwar Saga* novel, *Magician*, yet, this power serves only to equip them to face greater and more powerful challenges, rather than granting them the ability to heal the world or create an Edenic paradise from Midkemia. Salvatore’s Companions of the Hall, while powerful individuals and a force to be reckoned with on a local level, are insignificant when the *Forgotten Realms* as a whole are considered. The world is too big, the foes and monsters too many and too diverse, for a small group of heroes to dispatch or conquer them all.

While Tolkien’s *LotR*, with its traditional closed narrative structure, can complete the narrative cycle and thus conclude the world, constructing Middle Earth as the fantasy

³⁶⁷ The various subsequent editions of *Forgotten Realms* move the world forward and advance history, leading to new gaming areas or changes to existing gaming areas. The gameworld does develop and change over time, though usually these are narrative inventions used to explain changes in game mechanics proposed by the new editions, or are attempts to ‘explain’ a new land or area being created within the game. For example, the Ruins of Myth Drannor, found in the first three editions of the *Forgotten Realms* RPG have become a new magical Elven city of Myth Drannor in the fourth edition rules due to narrative events. The Archmage Khelben Blackstaff (a popular NPC and character from various novels) ‘died’ in the act of recreating the city. The effect is thus a new game area, a destabilisation of the area previously ruled by Blackstaff and therefore two ‘new’ gaming areas were constructed.

³⁶⁸ Clute ‘Grail, Groundhog, and God Game’ p.334

³⁶⁹ Gary Westfahl, ‘Pastoral’, in Clute and Grant eds, *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, pp.747-748

pastoral is problematic. *LotR* ends with the Elves leaving Middle Earth, Frodo's wound from the Nazgûl knife remains beyond repair and the magic of the world fades leading to a complete thinning of the world rather than healing, and this is clearly not an Edenic ending. Despite this, Middle Earth effectively reaches a narrative conclusion, a function which the gameworld cannot perform.³⁷⁰ The fantasy series is a popular mainstay of GF, for instance Terry Goodkind's *Sword of Truth*, David Gemmell's *Drenai* books, Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time*, Steven Erikson's *Malazan* series, Robin Hobb's *Farseer* related novels and George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, as well as the obvious series related to RPGs such as the *Dragonlance* and *Forgotten Realms* franchises and Raymond E. Feist's *Riftwar Saga*, and thus fantasy narratives that do not conform to the pastoral mode suggested by Westfahl are not insignificant in number, popularity or critical regard.

The 'failure' of these fantasies to conform to this model does not mean they are necessarily lacking in terms of narrative closure; rather they reflect a change in the generic fantasy mega-text and the conception of fantasy articulated by the RPG. Instead of conforming to the hero-centric mythic story cycle and closed narrative system, the RPGF utilises the same story cycle but on a micro or localised scale. The number of examples of popular fantasy failing to conform to Clute's conception of the full fantasy and Westfahl's fantasy pastoral is an indication that popular GF is conforming to a different system and convention that has not been fully explored in contemporary scholarship. The construction of the RPG gameworld emphasises the fantasyland as setting, background and landscape, whereas in the mythic fantasy and the closed narrative systems that conform to Clute's 'full fantasy' the land is part of the hero's trial and its 'healing' is part of the hero's reward. In effect, the common construction of comic structure, eucatastrophe or 'happily ever after' from myth and folklore, in which the hero and his/her companions save the world, has been found 'unrealistic' and 'unbelievable'. While discussing the impact of RPGs on his writing, Ian C. Esslemont has said:

³⁷⁰ Although describing *LotR* in this way is not without problems, as when combined with *The Hobbit* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1937) and *The Silmarillion* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1977) it can be argued that Middle Earth is a supernarrative constructed through multiple texts, and that the conclusion of *LotR* is not a 'healing' of the land, but rather the destruction of the land, the death of magic, and the triumph of mundanity.

In one foundational way you could say that the abandonment of the traditional single hero, single protagonist narrative line, in favor of the ensemble multi-character narrative, is perhaps traceable to Steve[n Erikson] and my RPG roots. In Malaz, we deliberately threw aside the (ridiculous in hindsight) conceit that any single individual can defeat an army, or overturn history. That's the old "great man" model of history that doesn't really stand up once you take a good long hard look at it.³⁷¹

A *direct effect* of the structure of the RPG on how he and Erikson approached fantasy was to reconsider the hero-centric narrative and the closed, 'healable' world as unrealistic and untenable in Fantasy. Again, the discussion has returned to realism and believability as necessary in fantasy. This could be read as a distinguishing characteristic of the evolving genre of Fantasy in which there is a movement away from the mythic and folkloric narrative systems toward the 'realistic' RPG conception of a realised world with an active construction of history. That is not to say, however, that Clute's model is redundant. The RPG conception of narrative creates an arc that could be viewed as a 'micro-myth' within the broader fantasy meta-text. For example, the first book of R.A. Salvatore's *Icewind Dale* trilogy *The Crystal Shard* could be summarised as follows: Set in a world in which the grand magics of the past have become legendary, an ancient artefact, the titular 'crystal shard', Crenshinibon, has re-emerged. A sentient, magical crystal entity, powerful beyond modern comprehension, it is a relic of an ancient era when powerful magics dominated the land. Clute's concept of thinning is therefore present in this context as the level of magic in the world has diminished over time, and the legendary artefact from the past is far more powerful than anything that could be created in the current setting.

In terms of wrongness, an evil mage uses the artefact to enslave and assume dominion over local evil races and monsters, such as goblins, orcs, trolls and giants. This corresponds directly to the wrongness of Clute's formulation, albeit on a smaller scale. Rather than a world-threatening evil, as in the case of Sauron, it is the local region that has been destabilised. The natural order of the region rather than that of the whole world has been disrupted, but even though it is on a micro rather than macro scale, the wrongness is still present. This indicates that, while in this instance it is a minor distinction, the RPGF is diverging from Clute's model.

³⁷¹ Ian C. Esslemont interview 'The Minimal and Finely Focused Fantasy of Ian C. Esslemont' http://clarkesworldmagazine.com/esslemont_interview/ [last accessed 15/10/10]

The main heroes of the narrative, Drizzt, Bruenor and Wulfgar, begin to battle the various creatures and minions as part of a series of adventures and battles.³⁷² Ultimately they realise that they are fighting symptoms of a destabilising force, rather than the actual source of the evil. They seek out the source of the evil, locate it and formulate a plan to defeat it. This appears to be a moment of recognition according to Clute's formula and is a direct correspondence rather than an alteration.

However, after the heroes recognise the threat of the crystal shard they defeat its wielder and break its power, leading to a healing of the region. In this case, though balance is restored and good has temporarily triumphed, it is on a micro scale. This resembles Clute's notion of Healing, and yet because the entire planet is not saved, and evil has not been banished forever, it fails in terms of the 'full fantasy'. Yet despite this failure, the narrative having reached its conclusion, redressing the evil and returning the land to its natural state, the narrative has in fact fulfilled every aspect of Clute's framework, but on a micro-scale. Therefore the RPGF conforms to Clute's model but with a difference in terms of scale, and this is a direct result of the narrative framework or conceptual foundation of the gameworld as a re-usable continuing setting for adventures.

The RPGF's micro-narrative set within a grander mega-text or supernarrative, mimics the RPG's focus on grand settings and continuing adventures with local rewards. This is arguably a much more 'realistic' form as the limitations of the heroes in terms of universal or global impact are acknowledged, and evil is recognised as a pervasive and ever present component of life that can be thwarted but never truly destroyed. Within *LotR*, the small group of heroes completely reshape the fundamental nature of Middle Earth, ending its use as a setting for fantasy adventure. The destruction of Sauron completes the mythic cycle and the grand supernarrative of Middle Earth and thus the setting is closed to further adventures and quests. The rules of the Gameworld insist on the setting being a re-usable and stable foundation for adventure, and these rules reinforce the perception that this is a real world in which a small group of heroes can have at best a limited impact on not world but regional events. The

³⁷² Although Cattie-Brie and Regis are present as characters, they do not become 'heroes' until the later books.

RPGF in fact insists on a more realistic version of fantasy in terms of a conceptual frame to the world, if not actually on realism in individual elements.

The Gameworld can therefore be seen as an effort to create *a real world*: one that includes multiple histories, legends and myths, various cultures, different races, different governmental and political systems, varied landscapes and geographical settings, and most importantly, a world that exists before, during and after momentous events. While Middle Earth contains an enormous wealth of history and mythology, it does not exist after the events of *LotR* as it slowly dies and becomes mundane. The entire setting is affected by the actions of a small group of heroes, as the fate of the land is intrinsically linked to the fate of the heroes. Each is part of the story of Middle Earth. Conversely, gameworlds feature multiple stories, rather than only one story existing for the land. As such, the Gameworld is a re-usable Secondary World which contains enough variation to allow for at least a limited number of subsequent adventures and travelogues through hitherto unexplored regions, as well as multiple passes through established and explored regions.

Thus, in order to create a sense of authenticity, the Gameworld mimics the real world in that history does not stop at the conclusion of a climactic or momentous event, nor is the conclusion of an epic battle the 'end of the story'. The focus of the gaming franchises on micro-adventures within a grander setting, while no doubt an intended design feature to encourage multiple gaming sessions and sell additional gaming resources, has the consequence of emphasising the inherently 'unrealistic' nature of previous epic narratives, while at the same time creating a more 'realistic' conception of fantasy adventuring. Moreover, RPGFs have managed this within the same mythic story frameworks Clute outlines in the 'full fantasy' and which Campbell discusses in *Hero*. The smaller adventure on a larger canvas brings the Gameworld, RPGF and GF into apparent conflict with the mythic mode of fantasy, for which Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* and Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* provide much of the critical foundation in fantasy scholarship. Both Campbell and Propp approach narrative construction with the assumption that a central character or hero acts within a closed and complete narrative system, a feature one finds in a number of GF texts. However, the Gameworld and the RPG create a

narrative space for party adventures and bands of heroes, not just one hero aided by companions, and allow them the freedom to continue adventuring through the land.

The Polder and the RPG

The construction of gaming zones, adventure areas and detailed narrative locations within Gameworlds potentially poses some problems for the traditional critical approaches to fantasy setting. These settings are utilised as narrative settings for numerous novels, short stories and series, and therefore Gameworlds are narrative settings as well as ludic. The peculiarity of the construction of the Gameworld as a static reusable narrative setting as well as a ludic background, as opposed to a setting or land inherently tied to the narrative and fortunes of the hero, reveals the Gameworld as a fundamentally problematic construction in terms of fantasy narrative, as has already been seen in relation to Clute's definition of the 'full fantasy'. The nature of the RPG as a meta-textual commentary on, as well as an example of, the generic fantasy mega-text can be illustrated by examining the relationship between the polder and the *Forgotten Realms* setting.³⁷³ As an aspect of the re-usable setting, the gameworld acts as a polder focusing gamer attention on one isolated portion of the map for the duration of a sequence. The discussion below highlights the need to re-evaluate existing scholarship in light of the concepts articulated by the RPG and the Gameworld.

The *Forgotten Realms* as a Polder

As a consequence of the entire Gameworld being locked in a narrative stasis, of establishing a stable consensus reality from which multiple games can be launched and the world re-used as a continual background, we can view the entirety of the Gameworld as a polder. Perhaps a more accurate description is that the polder can be reframed in order to account for the evolution of setting from the mythic mode to a mode more representative of modern fantasy. Clute's conception of the 'Polder' can be adapted to describe the discrete gaming zones and gaming locations within RPGF,

³⁷³ Clute, 'Polder', in Clute and Grant eds, *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, pp.772-773

particularly when the polder is read in light of Mendlesohn's use of the movement of the fantastic in *Rhetorics*.³⁷⁴ If we consider the notion of safe spaces, unchanging areas, the external threat and the internal attempts at preservation within RPGF, a new conception of domestic versus adventurous areas appears. While this is not what either Clute or Mendlesohn intended their approaches to analyse or conceptualise, by adapting these concepts and amalgamating them into a slightly different form we can re-conceptualise the polder as a gaming zone.

The patchwork realms of RPGs and RPGFs are definite, delineated and discrete bastions from which the hero must journey to engage in the adventure, even when these realms appear to be part of the chaotic fantasy surrounding them. The strange cities, countries, forests etc. have specific gaming functions, but their existence and reason for being are at the heart of the conception of the Gameworld as potentially distinct to the world of genre fantasy in general. For example the Underdark in *Forgotten Realms* is a distinct, discrete land separate from the main fantasy world and only having the most tangential links to the main gaming areas or world above. It is a realm of chaotic upheaval and yet has remained unchanged for thousands of years. The Drow (or Dark Elves) maintain their isolation and protect their enclave from external influence, while attempting Machiavellian coups on a near daily basis. The apparent chaotic change is set against a finite realm that remains untouched by the exterior world. The adventures within the realm are located either externally, in adventures to the surface world or the surrounding wilderness, or internally, the wars between the political houses in a series of bloody political battles and machinations. Each house, locale and aspect of the Drow world is in fact a discrete gaming area that must be maintained in order that further games can be played there. Yet the literature and the series of novels set in these areas must have at least the appearance of change, else they appear to lack impact and dramatic affect. So while these are not polders, they represent a concept of the RPG and RPGF which can be mapped onto other genre fantasy titles.

Clute defines the polder as:

³⁷⁴ Mendlesohn *Rhetorics*. The location of the fantastic and the movement of the hero is of course informed by Campbell's Mono-myth.

[...] enclaves of toughened reality, demarcated by boundaries [...] from the surrounding world [...] these boundaries are *maintained*; some significant figure within the tale almost certainly comprehends and has acted upon [...] the need to maintain them. A polder [...] is an *active* microcosm, armed against the potential wrongness of that which surrounds it, an anachronism *consciously* opposed to wrong time.³⁷⁵

The *Forgotten Realms* setting is an example of how we can adapt the definition of the polder in terms of RPG concepts. The setting of the *Forgotten Realms*, as a Gameworld, cannot age or evolve in the same way that a traditional fantasy narrative setting can. In the RPG it is effectively trapped in a temporal and narrative stasis until a new edition of the core rules is released and the narrative is moved forward a span of years. This is generally done by publishing a potted history of a time period in core edition rules and implying that games are then set after these events, expanding the narrative history to include newer and later dates, and thus suggesting that the world has aged. This temporal evolution is usually a justification for radical re-interpretations of old rules, the implementation of new rules, the establishment of new gaming areas, and providing an in-universe rationale for these changes. There is generally a long period of time between any significant developments of the Gameworld narrative; in the case of *Forgotten Realms* the first modules were associated with 1st Edition *D&D* rules published 1985-1989. In 1989 the 2nd Edition *D&D* rules were launched, coinciding with the publication of illustrative RPGFs such as *The Avatar Trilogy*,³⁷⁶ which detailed the ‘Time of Troubles’,³⁷⁷ which in turn led to the publication of *Forgotten Realms Adventures* by Ed Greenwood and Jeff Grubb in 1990.³⁷⁸ This publication updated the *Forgotten Realms* setting in light of the 2nd Edition rules, illustrated how the setting had been altered by the narrative event the Time of Troubles and was followed and supplemented by numerous modules, gamebooks, tie-novels, computer games and box-sets. The next major revision of the world and timeline occurred in 2001, one year after Wizards of the Coast, now the

³⁷⁵ Clute, ‘Polder’, in Clute and Grant eds, *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, pp.772-773. Emphasis is present in original text.

³⁷⁶ The Avatar Trilogy: Richard Awlinson (Scott Ciencin), *Shadowdale*, (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR Inc., 1989); Richard Awlinson (Scott Ciencin), *Tantras*, (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR Inc., 1989) and Richard Awlinson (Troy Denning), *Waterdeep*, (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR Inc., 1989). The trilogy was followed by two sequels, James Lowder, *Prince of Lies* (Renton, WA: Wizards of the Coast, 1993) and Troy Denning, *Crucible: The Trial of Cyric the Mad*, (Renton, WA: Wizards of the Coast, 1998).

³⁷⁷ A momentous event that saw the divine order and the pantheon of Gods completely re-organised, wild/chaotic magic and sorcery introduced to the setting, and updated character classes with new refined kits and rules.

³⁷⁸ Jeff Grubb and Ed Greenwood, *Forgotten Realms Adventures*, (TSR Inc., 1990)

licence holders of the *D&D* franchise, launched the 3rd Edition Rules. The latest edition of *D&D*, the 4th Edition, launched in 2008, has significantly advanced the timeline of the *Forgotten Realms* by 104 years and has radically altered the world setting. Until the radical alterations of the 4th Edition rules, the gameworld changed little. This has meant that the setting has remained relatively constant for over twenty years and has provided a stable setting for over 200 fiction titles.

So while the latest edition radically re-shaped the world, the *Forgotten Realms* remained a relatively static world for twenty-three years, while the additional histories and narrative developments did little to alter its inherent nature. By comparison, the relatively slow accretion of detail and slight temporal change is not anathema to the polder, as even Rivendell and Lothlórien experience some change over time. So while it may appear that the world has changed and evolved over time, many of the basic settings and structures have remained set, but have grown in detail. The Gameworld is thus locked in a temporal stasis similar to what Clute identifies as an aspect of the polder. Time does not move forward naturally and, as a result, an artificially enforced time-frame exists.

The twenty years of mundane time frame has translated into over 200 years of in-game history. Yet despite the significant period of time passing in-game, science and technology have not greatly increased, and the major changes (bar those directly relating to mechanics, character generation and playable classes and races) have actually been cosmetic and superficial in terms of re-dressing the world.³⁷⁹ Thus, even when the official timeline moves forward, for example from the 1st edition rules to the 2nd edition, which encompassed the Time of Troubles, it does little to alter the fundamentals of the setting. Like Tolkien's settings of Lothlórien and Rivendell, superficial things may change over time, characters may be born and die, but the land remains static, eternal and unchanging.

³⁷⁹ The death of Mystra the Goddess of Magic, a significant event in the Time of Troubles, is effectively made redundant by the character of Midnight ascending to godhood to replace her, even so far as to take Mystra as her name. Similarly Kelemvor's replacement of Myrkul has had few repercussions despite its apparent significance.

Entrenchment, Boundaries and Threat

In terms of the polder being defended against an external threat the *Forgotten Realms* may need to be considered from a different perspective. The setting of *Forgotten Realms* was originally conceived as a series of magically active lands that could be accessed through various portals and points of egress/ingress in the mundane world. Ed Greenwood, the original designer of the *Forgotten Realms*, has said that this aspect of the setting was toned down, and ultimately removed, due to concerns that some more fanatical players would attempt to find these portals and that this would add to the growing bad press accumulated by TSR and *D&D*, and the moral panic surrounding the games.³⁸⁰ However, from this initial conception we can support the idea that the *Forgotten Realms* were in fact a magical realm bounded and entrenched in order to be protected from the passage of time and the evolution of technology in the real or mundane world. This would then support the defence aspect of Clute's definition as the *Forgotten Realms* could be viewed as similar to the construction of Faerie beyond Wall in Gaiman and Vess' *Stardust* which Stefan Ekman has argued is a polder.³⁸¹

In *Stardust*, the portal to Faerie is a hole in a wall, by a small rural English village, that demarcates the boundary between the mundane reality and the magical reality of the patchwork realm of Faerie. Therefore a portal to a magical realm from the mundane becomes the threshold that must be maintained in order to protect the magical realm from the intrusion of the mundane. The *Forgotten Realms* can thus be defined as a polder. While the portal in Wall is actively defended by guardsmen in *Stardust*, the portals to the *Forgotten Realms* were never described as so manned. The question of an *active* defence, performed or orchestrated by a figure within the tale, would seem to be a stumbling block for this comparison, until we consider the figure of Greenwood himself. Greenwood is the acknowledged creator of the *Forgotten Realms*, but he is also a GM and a player. His most famous NPC is the character of Elminster Aumar, the Sage of Shadowdale, Archmage of the Realms and

³⁸⁰ See Allen Varney, 'Profile on Ed Greenwood', *Dragon*, 244 (Feb. 1998) p.112 available at <http://dl138.merp.com/arc/zines/DragonMagazineArchives/Drmg244.pdf> [last accessed 20/10/10]

³⁸¹ See Stefan Ekman *Writing Worlds, Reading Landscapes : An Exploration of Settings in Fantasy* (unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Lund, 2010) pp.112-124.

one of the Chosen of Mystra.³⁸² Elminster is one of the Guardians of the Realms, as well as an in-game avatar of Greenwood. Greenwood also used the character of Elminster ex-narratively to author letters to *Dragon Magazine (Dragon)*, and has maintained the conceit that Elminster has visited this mundane world fairly frequently.³⁸³ Thus as a guardian of the *Forgotten Realms*, an avatar of the creator, and a protector of the *status quo* nature of the *Forgotten Realms*, Elminster, in addition to the other powerful ‘Chosen of Mystra’ actively protects and enforces the protection of the magical realm, and prevents momentous change and scientific/technological progress.³⁸⁴ Therefore as in-game characters, or in Clute’s terms ‘significant figure[s] within the tale’, the Chosen of Mystra act as enforcers that protect the polder, inhibit progress and entrench the boundaries of the fantastic realm. Alternatively the Chosen of Mystra could be considered avatars of the game creators and designers, who themselves actively protect the *Forgotten Realms* from progress and normally evolving time in order to keep the setting static and stable, with the appearance of tumultuous change and chaos.

The one aspect of the polder identified by Clute to which the *Forgotten Realms* cannot conform fully is the concept of the boundary or threshold. The entirety of the *Forgotten Realms* is a polder and as such the only mundanity or ‘wrong time’ it can be protected from is the real world. While this would not be an issue if the original conception of the *Forgotten Realms* was adhered to, that it existed as parallel to the mundane world, this is not the case as the *Forgotten Realms* is considered a fully fledged Secondary World divorced from our universe and plane of existence.³⁸⁵ Yet, like the Secondary World being a Lost Land writ large, the Gameworld is a polder in totality. The whole of the *Forgotten Realms* is in fact an enormous polder, as if the

³⁸² Mystra is the Goddess of Magic in *Forgotten Realms*, her ‘chosen’ are Archmages who wield incredible power and are practically immortal. They guard and protect magic by maintaining the weave of magic through the *Forgotten Realm*.

³⁸³ This conceit was maintained in order that Elminster’s letters, articles and comments to *Dragon* could detail aspects of the *Forgotten Realms* while remaining potentially unreliable, something that would be difficult if the letters and comments were seen to actively come from Greenwood the creator.

³⁸⁴ For a specific example see Jeff Grubb, ‘Smoke Powder and Mirrors’, in Brian Thomsen and J. Robert King eds, *Realms of Magic*, (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR Inc., 1995), pp.32-50 in which another Chosen of Mystra, Khelben Arunsun, the Archmage of Waterdeep, orchestrates a plot to destroy gunpowder and prevent scientific progress.

³⁸⁵ Although Andre Norton’s *Quag Keep*, the first *D&D* novel, is set in the gameworld of *Greyhawk* and uses the conceit that gamers awake in-world as their player characters. In which case there is a literary precedent for considering the *D&D* worlds as destinations from the mundane world, in addition to Ed Greenwood’s character of Elminster.

land of Lothlórien had been expanded until it contained the entirety of Middle Earth. While this would seem to negate the *raison d'être* of the polder, this extension of the concept can be viewed externally in terms of the super-narrative and mega-text. The Gameworld has adapted the concepts from which Clute formed his argument, and therefore the meta-textual codification has led to a mega-textual adaptation and utilisation of the polder. The Gameworld thus functions as meta-textual commentary and as part of the generic fantasy mega-text, if not in fact as a prime example of the Secondary World in this specific instance.

However, the concept of the polder also lends itself, again by adaptation, to the consideration of gaming zones within the Gameworld itself, and this conception is perhaps closer to Clute's actual meaning of the polder. Yet, in order to illustrate the gaming zone in this fashion, we must combine the concept of the polder with what Mendlesohn has identified as the location and movement of the fantastic in *Rhetorics*. With the PQ Mendlesohn notes that the fantastic is elsewhere and the hero must journey to it, whereas with Intrusion Fantasy the fantastic invades the mundane. This locates the fantastic as either across a threshold, or transgressing a threshold. This aspect of distance and a barrier between the mundane or domestic and the fantastic adventure can also be found in Campbell's seminal work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, as he notes that the hero must journey to adventure from a domestic or mundane setting.

Each of these concepts, the polder, the location and direction of the fantastic, and the crossing of boundaries and thresholds in search of adventure, appear to be closely related and mutually supportive. Within an RPG scenario, it is common for the local region to be threatened by an external force, as in *The Crystal Shard*. In this instance, the domestic *status quo* of the region has been destabilised by the intrusion of an alien fantastic element. In *The Crystal Shard* this is illustrated by the increase in monsters and the emergence of the Shard itself. As protectors of the locale, the characters of Drizzt, Bruenor and Wulfgar must stop the alien intrusion, and prevent the region from changing. Therefore, they not only move from the tranquil and relatively mundane setting of Ten Towns to the wilderness regions surrounding it in order to answer the call to adventure, a movement traditional to fantasy adventures discussed by Campbell, but they also protect the region from change, an aspect of the polder

defined by Clute. This has been caused by the intrusion of an alien fantastic, as in the Intrusion Fantasy as defined by Mendlesohn, as monsters not normally seen in the region appear, the Shard itself is an ancient and alien artefact and the narrative tension has been created by the intrusion of these fantastic elements. Despite this, no official or obvious boundary or threshold has been crossed. There is a movement from the immediate vicinity of Ten Towns to the more rugged setting of the wilds around the mountains, but the transition is not demarcated by a river, a border crossing, or any substantial or recognisable threshold. Yet it is clear that the heroes have moved from the relatively safe domestic setting to one of the wild. The narrative therefore supports the concept that the threat is 'elsewhere', and the heroes must journey to adventure, but the narrative rejects the definition in terms of boundary and threshold.

To take another example, in *Magician* by Feist, the Kingdom of the Isles has been invaded by humans from another Secondary World. The intrusion of the alien fantastic leads to the heroes, Pug, Tomas and Arutha each answering the call to adventure and journeying from the stable, domestic, protected Duchy of Crydee into the forests and the wild. While each of the heroes undergoes a different RPG character quest (Pug becomes a master magician through magical trials and hardships, Tomas becomes a master warrior through the acquisition of magical objects in a forgotten mine and then training through battle, and Arutha becomes a 'master' prince or true ruler by experiencing the political RPG adventure), each acts to protect the Duchy of Crydee and to prevent it changing. Again there is movement from a domestic 'safe' zone to an area of adventure, but despite the grand wars, tumultuous events and epic battles, the Kingdom of the Isles does not evolve over time. There is no grand healing of the world, and the journey is not considered complete at the end of the narrative. Although Pug, Tomas and Arutha accept the call to adventure in the sense of Campbell's *Hero*, they never truly return. Arutha becomes Prince of Krondor, the second most powerful noble in the land, while his illegitimate elder brother Martin becomes Duke of Crydee and is the one who returns 'home' from the adventure.³⁸⁶ Tomas, after becoming a consummate warrior and general, becomes the

³⁸⁶ Although Arutha does journey to Krondor, return to Crydee to command the forces for a number of years before ultimately returning to Krondor to rule. His temporary return to Crydee as military commander can be seen as part of his adventure and journey, rather than signifying a home-coming.

consort of the Elven queen in Elvandar³⁸⁷ and warleader of the Elves and like Arutha he too does not return to life in Crydee. Pug attempts to return to life in the realms as a noble loyal to the ruling family, but again he does not return to Crydee, choosing instead to form a school of magic, and taking up residence on Sorcerer's Isle. In effect, each of the main heroes is irredeemably changed by their adventure; maturing and moving on to more mature and adult roles in their world.

All three heroes cross or are associated with different boundaries and thresholds. Pug is carried through a magical portal to the alien world Kelewan, a portal he must eventually close in order to protect the world of Midkemia. Tomas finds his magical armour and sword after becoming lost in the Dwarven mines, leaving the safety of the marked areas and passing through a strange cavern complete with a river and waterfall. Later Tomas skirmishes with the Tsurani invaders along the border of Elvandar, marked by a river, and when he assumes the mantle of the Valheru he forces his way across the border and rips the magical protections of the Lothórien-esque land aside. Arutha must cross a sea to reach the city of Krondor and begin the urban political adventure that ultimately results in his rise to Prince of Krondor.

RPGF and RPG inspired fiction conforms to the general narrative concepts of the monomyth, and the traditional fantasy story, but in each case there is a subtle shift of emphasis. This refusal to return to the domestic setting leads to Pug, and then his children, friends and allies, being seen to act through the ages to preserve the realm, and in a broader context, the world, from change and threat of change. Pug never gives up the call to adventure, the journey never ends and he must continue to face new and more dangerous opponents and tasks as time passes. In effect, Pug undergoes the monomythic story structure as a recurring cycle, continually answering new calls to adventure. In fact, Pug sets up a secret group called the Conclave of Shadows. This Conclave is a shadowy network of magicians, much like the 'Chosen of Mystra' in *Forgotten Realms*, who work behind the scenes of the realm to protect and nurture magic. They do this by confronting and defeating external threats such as the Tsurani invaders from Kelewan in *Magician*, an uprising of Dark Elves and the returning Valheru Dragon Lords in *Silverthorn* and *A Darkness at Sethanon*, Demon

³⁸⁷ A land *very* similar to Tolkien's Lothlórien.

Kings and the threats from other planes of existence in the *Serpentwar Saga* and the *Conclave of Shadows* series.³⁸⁸ Yet, despite the various Midkemia stories spanning generations, the world does little to change in terms of technology and science; it is in fact locked in a relative temporal stasis. It is as if the very act of protecting magic in the world, for the whole world, stops that world from changing or truly evolving. This concept can be contrasted with the fates of Lothlórien and Rivendell in Tolkien's *LotR*; both Elflands fade and are destroyed as magic in the land is undone by the destruction of the One Ring. The protected polders cannot hold against the destruction of magic, whereas in Gameworlds, there appears to be a common convention of a secret order that prevents magic from being destroyed, and thus they protect the entire realm and stop the world thinning. So while the Secondary World and gameworld settings of Midkemia and Toril are not polders *per se*, they function as polders and correspond to the essential fundamentals of the polder.

A last point in the construction of the gaming zone is that RPGs commonly have safe zones or sanctuary areas. These are areas in which characters can rest or be informed of their next adventure or quest. A convention of gaming that has become clichéd and trite even to itself, is that quest groups and their adventures begin in taverns.³⁸⁹ This convention clearly borrows heavily from the film Western saloon, and possibly for many of the same reasons: it provides a narrative explanation for how characters meet, it also allows for the characters to overhear news of events or disasters that might lead to an adventure, and gives them access to unsavoury types, merchants, and strangers, who can then be used by the GM to deliver information, further plots, aid or hinder the group. It is also a social place that essentially mimics the initial construction of the group of players around a table and therefore eases the transition into the narrative/ludic environment. While this initial meeting place need not be a tavern specifically, there is frequently some form of sanctuary to which the characters can retreat in order to treat wounds, rest, study spells and find respite from the adventure. The characters then go forth from the safe demarcated sanctuary into the wider world. However, due to the fact that RPG campaigns are in fact a series of on-

³⁸⁸ The Conclave of Shadows as formally constituted by Pug occurs in the Conclave of Shadows series, although the kernel of the concept can be seen in the actions of Macros the Black in *Magician*, and the use of greater and grander threats that take precedence over 'local' politics.

³⁸⁹ So prevalent is this convention that a major gaming forum is called 'You Meet in a Tavern' www.youmeetinatavern.com [last accessed 10/10/10]

going adventures, this structure, though it mimics Campbell's call to adventure, tends to recur several times, a fact which does not correspond to Campbell's narrative structure. This can be seen, as with the re-usable setting, as the mono-myth in microcosm, or the micro-myth. The RPG has effectively mimicked the story structure found in myth and literary fantasy and created a simulacra of this within the ludic frame, thereby adapting the established story form into a changed format.

RPG, Gameworld, and the Mega-text

Patricia Monk's *JFA* article 'The Shared Universe: An Experiment in Speculative Fiction', highlights an important aspect of the RPG and of the RPGF, the Gameworld. While Monk utilises the term mega-text, her conception is developed from Christina Brooke-Rose, rather than Damien Broderick's development of the mega-text in relation to SF.³⁹⁰ The mega-text, as Monk defines it, is an intra-fictional universe in which the story or stories are set. Importantly Monk also differentiates between setting and mega-text by quoting Hugh Holman's definition of setting, which is concerned with the physical and spiritual background. Monk incorporates Holman's definition and combines it with an additional strand of contextual information which can include 'physics, biochemistry, and ecology, which would not normally be considered in a mainstream novel as part of the setting'.³⁹¹ Monk also quotes Spider Robinson who has argued that:

Mainstream literature examines only megatexts which are prosaic or entirely make-believe. SF examines megatexts which are imaginary but viable, different but plausibly related to this one.³⁹²

Yet, as Monk highlights, Robinson has not made a distinction between mainstream mimetic literature and fantasy literature which he conflates as 'prosaic or entirely make-believe'. Robinson argues for SF mega-texts that are imaginary 'but viable', the distinguishing characteristic being that SF supernarratives are in some way

³⁹⁰ Christina Brooke-Rose *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially of the Fantastic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) see also Patricia Monk 'The Shared Universe: An Experiment in Speculative Fiction' *JFA* Vol.2 No.4 (1990) pp.7-46 and Damien Broderick *Reading By Starlight: Postmodern Science Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1995)

³⁹¹ Monk 'The Shared Universe', pp. 14-15 and also C. Hugh Holman, *A Handbook to Literature*, 4th edn, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merril, 1980) p.413

³⁹² Monk 'The Shared Universe' p. 15 or Spider Robinson *Melancholy Elephants* (Toronto: Penguin, 1984) Introduction.

possible, plausible and realistic. Monk argues that ‘the megatext of fantasy, however, is equally governed by an external constraint’ even if that constraint includes something as inherently non-rational as magic or the supernatural.³⁹³ Once again the discussion of fantasy is snagging on a linguistic barb, the problem of Fantasy being classed as make-believe, without gradient or distinction.

Monk then identifies three distinct types of shared world: the shared mega-text, the franchised mega-text, and the ‘mosaic novel’.³⁹⁴ The first, the shared mega-text is associated with a group of writers who have agreed on a setting and pool of characters, but who own creative rights to specific characters. The narrative is usually constructed from distinct but related short stories, such as Robert Asprin’s *Thieves’ World*. Monk’s definition of the franchised mega-text is more problematical. She argues that the franchised mega-text is controlled and shaped by a single author who invites and moderates submissions from other contributors. Her only example of this is C.J. Cherryh’s *Merovingen Nights*. This construction, a single author shaping the narrative, is clearly at odds with the number of Fantasy and SF franchises currently available, such as the various *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* series, as well as the *D&D* franchises, and even the Black Library franchises of the various Games Workshop *Warhammer* worlds. Each of these is a well established, multi-volume, multi-author series of inter-linked novels and short stories. The last category, the mosaic novel, is again limited to one specific example, the *Wild Cards* series edited by George R.R. Martin, an evolving form which began as a series of interlinked yet separate stories in *Wild Cards* to something more akin to a group-authored novel in *Jokers Wild*. As *Wild Cards* is not a static construct it is uncertain if Monk intended this to be a truly distinct category, or if this term has been used in this instance because that is the term Martin has used to describe the series.³⁹⁵ More significantly in terms of this thesis, Monk notes that:

There is, of course, no reason why a megatext should not exist without any fictions, as a game or secondary reality, and board and computer megatext games do exist: for example, the archetypal *Dungeons and Dragons*.³⁹⁶

³⁹³ Monk ‘The Shared Universe’ p. 16

³⁹⁴ Monk ‘The Shared Universe’ p. 24

³⁹⁵ For further details of the *Wild Cards* series history and development see George R.R. Martin ‘On the Wild Card Series’ in Harrigan and Wardrip-Fruin *Second Person: Role-Playing and Story in Games and Playable Media* (London: MIT Press, 2009) pp.15-24

³⁹⁶ Monk ‘The Shared Universe’ p.35

Although Monk overlooks the fact that by 1990 there were several popular *D&D* based novels, she does recognise the shared worlds of *D&D* as fantasy mega-texts.³⁹⁷ Although given the complicated editorial relationship of Lin Carter and L. Sprague de Camp with Robert E. Howard's *Conan* stories and the subsequent Hyborian stories, there is some argument that the first mega-text is in fact the Hyborian Age and not Asprin's *Thieves' World*. Alternatively, the development of the Cthulhu Mythos, developed by multiple authors in conjunction with H.P. Lovecraft, and then further developed after his death, suggests that this is also a contender for the title of mega-text.

Furthermore, Monk identifies several conceptual and developmental problems in Asprin's *Thieves' World*, the majority of which have been addressed and corrected by the *D&D* franchises. The problems identified by Monk and the authors of *Thieves' World* centre around the concept of an official vision of the realm constructed, upon which specific details, minutiae and the prosaic grounding of the world needed to be agreed. As *Thieves' World* was created by several authors, each with specific visions of the world, there was unavoidable conflict and confusion. Within franchise writing and commercial shared worlds, these issues are usually resolved by the construction of a series 'bible' which contains the detailed information and specific trivia necessary to give the illusion of depth and texture to a fictional world. Similar to a series bible are the various *D&D* manuals, codices, game books and modules. These publications established a rule-set, detailed minutiae, illustrated maps, and gave background information on cultural and socio-economic groups and organisations, and so formed the basis for the consensual reality. What distinguishes this from the franchise or series bible, is that these technical descriptions of the world were published to be accessible to the general public, not just the creators and authors involved in the project.

³⁹⁷ Including but not limited to the *Dragonlance Chronicles* by Weis and Hickman, R.A. Salvatore's first five *Forgotten Realms* novels, Douglas Niles first five *Forgotten Realms* novels, as well as *The Avatar Trilogy* by Troy Denning, Scott Ciencin and James Lowder, Ed Greenwood's first novel *Spellfire*, *Quag Keep* by Andre Norton and a number of other titles. While these RPGFs advanced the *D&D* mega-text through fiction, the various *D&D* manuals, modules, and handbooks also contained short stories, fictional histories and serial narratives which further developed the *D&D* worlds and detailed the *D&D* mega-text. It should also be mentioned that the first *D&D* related fiction, *Quag Keep* by Andre Norton, was published in 1978, the year preceding the first *Thieves' World* publication, *Thieves' World* in 1979 and thus identifying Asprin's *Thieves' World* as the prototype for modern fantasy mega-texts becomes less tenable.

In Monk's terminology, and by extension Brooke-Rose's, we can cast the RPG as a meta-textual commentary on the conventions of GF. The world and setting of the *Forgotten Realms* is a fantasy mega-text, developed and detailed through novels, short stories and gaming supplements. The *Forgotten Realms* RPG is therefore also part of the construction of the *Forgotten Realms* mega-text, in addition to being a meta-textual commentary on how and why that setting has been constructed. Salvatore's *The Crystal Shard* is therefore one of the fictive texts that adds to the *Forgotten Realms* mega-text, is a narrative example of genre conventions, and can be discussed using the meta-textual commentary provided by the RPG rule books that detail the setting used in the novel. In Broderick's terminology the construction would be described slightly differently, although the progression remains much the same.³⁹⁸ Using Broderick's framework, the RPG could be constructed as a meta-textual commentary on *the* GF generic mega-text as it is a distillation and codification of the genre's conventions and clichés. The history of the *Forgotten Realms* world and setting can still be viewed as a text-specific mega-text, but to avoid confusion a better term perhaps would be supernarrative. Therefore, Salvatore's *The Crystal Shard* adds to the supernarrative of the *Forgotten Realms* setting, utilising the conventions from the generic fantasy mega-text, and the RPG is a meta-textual commentary on both the novel and fantasy mega-text. The two positions are very similar, but in Broderick's model, formula fantasy or generic conventions form an independent generic mega-text, while Brooke-Rose and Monk suggest that mega-text is literally 'big-story' and thus text specific.

Monk's discussion of the mega-text highlights aspects of the shared world which have a direct correlation to the gameworld. She begins her analysis by quoting the editor and instigator of the *Thieves' World* series Robert Asprin:

Whenever one sets out to write heroic fantasy, it was first necessary to re-invent the universe from scratch regarding what had gone before... Imagine, I proposed, if our favorite sword and sorcery characters shared the same settings and time-frames.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁸ Broderick *Reading by Starlight* in particular Chapter 4 'The Uses of Otherness' where he discusses Brooke-Rose's approach.

³⁹⁹ Robert Asprin 'The Making of *Thieves' World*' in *Thieves' World* (New York: Ace, 1979) quoted in Monk 'The Shared Universe' p. 26

Asprin clearly identifies the purpose of the shared world as a re-usable setting in which multiple stories could be set. That *Thieves' World* was conceived of as a multi-use and reusable setting in and on which the characters could act and interact and multiple storylines could be developed places it in direct relationship to the Gameworld. Additionally, this concept of the shared, multi-use setting is in direct opposition to the traditional or presumed dominant form of the closed narrative system in which hero and land are locked in a single story. Given that this idea came to Asprin some four years after Gygax and Arneson had published *D&D* with much the same concept in mind, *D&D* predates this 'new' literary form, and should be considered rather than ignored. It could be argued that the ludic/narrative focus of *D&D* distinguishes it from the purely literary narrative of Asprin's creation, even if the two are similar in concept. Perhaps the most important aspect of both these conceptions of shared world is that they separate the plot and story from the setting by creating a distance between story resolution and the healing of the land. That is not to say that the setting becomes irrelevant, but in Clute's sense of the land and the story being intertwined for the purposes of wrongness and healing, a shared world, from literary or ludic sources, has taken on a very different narrative structure. So rather than constructing the fantasy story from a mythic or folkloric perspective, in which the world and the hero are symbolically and narratively conjoined, the shared world, at least in Asprin's case, creates a living world inhabited by multiple characters, each of whom has the potential to experience adventure. For Asprin this was to avoid the necessity of inventing a new world for each and every story, whereas for *D&D* it was a function of creating a setting for multiple games. This distinction means that the land is no longer tied to reflecting *the* hero's story, but rather *a* hero's story can be set in the land. The setting is thus authentic in that it mimics a 'real' world process of people and even heroes passing the land on to the next generation, for good or ill, or as Feist phrases it these are 'historical novels about a place that doesn't exist'.⁴⁰⁰ In effect this represents the consolidation of mimetic principles as an aspect of fantasy narrative, or a further instance of developing authenticity within gameworlds and world building.

⁴⁰⁰ Interview with Raymond E. Feist 'A Conversation with Raymond E. Feist' www.writerswrite.com/journal/mar00/feist.htm [last accessed 10/10/10]

Monk's discussion of the shared world, in particular the shift of narrative intention concerning the setting, is an important aspect of the gameworld and may in part explain why RPGFs have largely been considered failed fantasy and/or derivative. The conceptual shift from the closed narrative sequence in which character and land are locked in a symbolic and symbiotic relationship, the traditional fantasy narrative discussed and analysed by Clute, Attebery and Campbell, to an open-narrative structure as found in the shared world and the Gameworld, suggests that this is a distinct narrative form within the genre that requires critical re-evaluation on altered terms.

RPG, Gameworld, and the Multi-Volume Series

As the Gameworld setting is in fact a re-usable arena, it lends itself to the multi-volume series, and the open-ended series found in GF. Donald Palumbo describes Joseph Campbell's focus on the hero and notes that since the morphology of Campbell's Monomyth 'is, in broad outline, that of the quest', it 'fills in this outline with an anatomy of the archetypal hero and those specific events likely to occur at each stage of his adventure'.⁴⁰¹ Yet inherent within this approach is a focus on the single hero, on the single adventure, the recounting of which possesses a beginning, a middle and an end. While this appears a straightforward and logical approach, as Mendlesohn notes:

In the classic fairy tale, while the act of travelling provided the tools and proof of the hero's fitness, it is the final application and the proving that is of interest [...] In modern fantasy, increasingly, the adventure is the journey. Whereas in the fairy tale the crucial choices take place at the end of the story, in the modern fantasy, the crucial choices are played out, bit by bit, as the journey unfolds.⁴⁰²

Mendlesohn identifies the shift in fantasy story telling from the goal oriented epic resolution of the land toward a model that emphasises the journey, the travails and the continuing adventures of the hero. By extending her observations to include the RPG and its related fictions, we can augment Mendlesohn's argument to include a consideration of the group dynamic of the quest party rather than a focus on the single

⁴⁰¹ Donaldo Palumbo 'The Monomyth in Daniel Keyes' *Flowers for Algernon*: Keyes, Campbell, and Plato' *JFA* Vol.14 No.4 (2004) pp.427-446

⁴⁰² Farah Mendlesohn 'Crowning the King: Harry Potter and the Construction of Authority' *JFA* Vol.12 No.3 p288

hero. This addresses and corrects one of the problems that a direct application of both Propp's and Campbell's analysis on GF generates. By presupposing that modern GF conforms to the narrative construction inherent in myth and folktale, we can overlook the importance of the journey. In a multi-volume or open-ended series such as *Dragonlance*, *Forgotten Realms* or Feist's *Riftwar Saga*, while certain narrative conclusions are reached in the smaller published sets, trilogies and quartets, viewing the series from Campbell's or Propp's stance often ignores the interplay over the grand mega-text created. The 'journey' in these instances sprawls through multiple volumes, across numerous adventures and as part of several different narratives and grand supernarratives. Like Clute's full fantasy, the Campbellian and Proppian structures appear, but they do so in microcosm. Therefore, instead of focusing analysis on a grand or epic conclusion with the full healing of the world, we should reduce critical focus a localised healing and a reward more appropriate to a micro-adventure.

Many 'journeys' or adventures in the gameworld settings, however, do follow the same narrative paths Clute has identified. By their very nature, shared worlds cannot have the sense of Healing as Clute envisages it, or Eucatastrophe as Tolkien described. This closure of the realm would mean that future adventures would need be set elsewhere or elsewhen. These franchise fantasies keep the land as a constant, as a backdrop, across which the characters, players and stories can explore and adventure. By design, the land must remain 'unhealed', or possess an uncorrectable flaw that leads to micro wrongs. In Raymond E. Feist's *Riftwar Saga*, the continuing adventures led to a new 'greater' evil being created for each and every sequence, both an exercise in escalation and a need to address the point Clute notes, that the land needed 'Healing'. *Magician* ends with the magical 'rift' being closed, the 'evil' defeated, magic returned to the realm and in effect a sense of healing. There is, however, the open-ended ominous warning about greater evil, presumably originally an intentional opening for sequel development should the first book prove successful. The second book of the series, *Silverthorn*, does little to develop the 'cliff-hanger' of *Magician*, focussing instead on a linear and traditional quest narrative, and it is only in the third book of the sequence, *A Darkness at Sethanon*, that the dread warning is explored, reaches fruition and is concluded. Yet, Feist's series does not end at that point; a sequel quartet resurrects fear of an ancient enemy, and leads to a grander

confrontation against a new marauding horde. This sequence of escalating evil following a concluding episode of the narrative fulfils Clute's vision of the full fantasy, at least in part, but more accurately it can be envisaged as a series of journeys in a flawed, unhealable continuing land.

Clute's concept of the 'full fantasy' has its basis in Campbell's mono-myth, so the continuing adventure fantasy, the series of sequential journeys common to RPGFs, is therefore a series of mini-myths or micro-myths. The epic nature of the micro-myth adventure is built in stages over time, conceptualised as a sequence demarking various important incidents and adventures which shape the character. This would integrate aspects of the traditional structure of the epic adventure but re-conceptualise the framework on a smaller scale and on a re-usable landscape. Thus, the pre-existing tradition of the mono-myth adapts to shared worlds and continuing series. As noted by Esslemont, this brings a new level of realism or authenticity to the construction of fantasy storytelling, as GF moves from the mythic mode toward a mode which is discernibly Fantasy.⁴⁰³ It is this focus on Fantasy as a discernable entity and as a category of storytelling in its own right, beyond myth, folklore and legend that the RPG brings to the analysis of Fantasy. Fantasy may come from a tradition that incorporates myth, legend and folktale, but it is also an evolving literary genre whose evolution must be recognised, as must the RPG as a factor in that evolution.

⁴⁰³ Ian C. Esslemont interview 'The Minimal and Finely Focused Fantasy of Ian C. Esslemont' http://clarkesworldmagazine.com/esslemont_interview/ [last accessed 15/10/2010]

Chapter 4 - Integrating Magic and World Building

The Problem with Magic

Magic is often one of the key defining factors of Fantasy; if a narrative contains magic, it is considered Fantasy. Paradoxically the discussion of magic is also one of the most problematic factors of Fantasy. By its very nature, magic is impossible, so unlike SF futuristic technologies, strange and wondrous in their own right, magic is not possible, magic is not even plausible and magic is not natural, at least in this universe. SF authors can explain or rationalise their wonders in terms of future science, technology beyond our current level of progress or new abilities of further evolved species, but fantasy authors who write magic as magic, and not some pseudo-science psi-ability, must decide whether their magic is whimsy or a science. Orson Scott Card describes this division ‘science fiction is about what *could* be but isn’t; fantasy is about what *couldn’t* be’,⁴⁰⁴ and he discusses this point in relation to a short story ‘Tinker’ which he had submitted to *Analog*:

‘Tinker’ had psionic powers, a colony planet, a far future time period – if that wasn’t science fiction, what was? [...] As for John Tinker’s psionic powers, there was nothing in the story to suggest they weren’t *magical* powers.⁴⁰⁵

Magic, therefore, is also the reason for many of the strained terms used to describe Fantasy. If magic is impossible, then any work that uses it cannot by definition be realistic, rational, plausible or logical. Yet clearly we can draw a distinction between a world where magic is entirely whimsical and one in which magic is a limited natural force guided by rules. These two hypothetical worlds use magic in different ways, but while the nature of magic remains much the same in both conceptions, the frame in which it is deployed and discussed changes. The RPG approach to magic, the structured system based on rules, has significantly influenced modern GF, and an understanding of the ways in which it has done so must inform future discussion of magic in order that we may modify existing critical approaches.

⁴⁰⁴ Orson Scott Card *How to Write Science Fiction and Fantasy* (Cincinnati: Writer’s Digest Books, 1990) p.22.

⁴⁰⁵ Orson Scott Card *How to Write Science Fiction and Fantasy* p.4

Magic and Narrative

Magic is often one of the most important aspects of GF settings, as well as of RPGs. In RPGs magic is usually codified into a magic system.⁴⁰⁶ Although the term ‘magic system’ implies a game mechanic, and indeed derives from RPGs, it is a useful term to describe the various rules and strictures used to limit magic in order to create a functional narrative device within GF. The magic system is one of the laws of the GF natural world, designed and applied to facilitate drama, tension, intrigue and the other emotional effects of fiction written within certain confining limitations. More simply put, when Robert V.S. Redick⁴⁰⁷ was asked ‘How do you create tension in a world of magic?’, he responded as follows:

In a word, *restraint*. In my world of Alifros, for example, the use of magic always exacts a heavy price. [...] the greater the power bestowed, the higher the price.⁴⁰⁸

Redick addresses an important and substantive issue; if magic is capable of performing any feat, at any time, as often as characters either desire or deem necessary, then at best it becomes a *deus ex machina* causing a loss of narrative immersion, and at worst it removes all narrative tension from the text and destroys any sense of authenticity. One way to create a world in which magic functions believably thereby making it appear authentic, is to impose limits on its use. Limiting magic in this way is not a new phenomenon to GF, RPGs or RPGFs. When a hero finds a magic lamp s/he is often limited to three wishes, and as illustrated by Disney’s *Aladdin*,⁴⁰⁹ a rider on the wishing contract is, ‘Three wishes, to be exact. And ixnay on the wishing for more wishes. That’s all. Three. Uno, dos, tres. No substitutions, exchanges or refunds’.⁴¹⁰ Something as simple as the limitation on the number of wishes that can be granted illustrates the importance of limiting magic, and how such

⁴⁰⁶ See in particular Scott Vander Ploeg and Kenneth Phillips ‘Playing with Power: The Science of Magic in Interactive Fantasy’ *JFA* Vol.9 No.2 (1998) pp.142-156 for a more detailed discussion of the specifics.

⁴⁰⁷ Redick is the author of *The Chathrand Voyage* series, available from Del Rey and Gollancz. *The Red Wolf Conspiracy* (London: Gollancz, 2009)

⁴⁰⁸ ‘Conversation with Robert V.S. Redick, ‘What If It All Goes Wrong?’’, http://clarkesworldmagazine.com/redick_interview/ [last accessed 20/10/10]. Emphasis present in original text.

⁴⁰⁹ While the limitation is present in the original *The 1000 Nights* and the *One Night*, the humorous quotation from Robin Williams as the Genie in the Disney version is equally illustrative and entertaining.

⁴¹⁰ *Aladdin*, dir. by Ron Clements and John Musker, (Walt Disney Pictures, 1992), Robin Williams as the voice of the Genie.

limitations can drive narrative action and create narrative tension. The limits imposed on wishes are also illustrative of a basic magic system, a system of rules that govern the use of magic.

Redick goes on to say:

Last January at Vericon (Harvard) [2009], Kim Stanley Robinson explained his dislike for most fantasy. As he put it, in a world where anything is possible, nothing is interesting. And I agree. I've never been able to enjoy a fantasy novel where anything is possible. Indeed part of the joy of the reading is often the discovery of what is possible and what is not. Without a doubt, you have to keep a tight rein on your miracles.

And this brings us back to role-playing: another lesson I learned early was just how dull it was to play the part of a demigod, or other figure of unlimited power. I tired of that in an afternoon. Then I joined a campaign where magic was scarce; it had to be sought out and won at great price, and so did every reward of the game. And that kept me coming back for more.⁴¹¹

This point, that magic must be limited, or in Redick's terms, restrained, is an important distinction between the rational magic, as in magic systems found in GF Secondary Worlds, and whimsical magic, as found in purely fantastical realms such as Faerie. Robinson's argument that 'in a world where anything is possible, nothing is interesting' is generalised and sweeping, yet contains a kernel of truth. If magic is deployed as a *deus ex machina*, if it is used whimsically and inconsistently, then it can be difficult to construct narrative tension as the reader is often left wondering, 'Why didn't they just do that at the start?' If Secondary Worlds contain characters that can reshape reality at whim, and magic can explain anything and everything, then it becomes difficult to construct and sustain a believable and authentic world. In faerie tales and wonder stories, much of the narrative tension is created because the central protagonists are often unaware of the magical abilities available to them, such as Dorothy and her silver slippers in Baum's *OZ*.⁴¹² Conversely, in GF and RPGF many of the magic user characters are wizards and mages. These characters are portrayed as experts on magic and, therefore, ignorance of the power available seems both incongruous and incredulous and cannot be used to create narrative tension in an

⁴¹¹ 'What If It All Goes Wrong?' Conversation with Robert V.S. Redick http://clarkesworldmagazine.com/redick_interview/ [last accessed 20th October 2010] Emphasis present in original text.

⁴¹² L. Frank Baum, *The Annotated Wizard of Oz: The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, centenary edn, ed. by Michael Patrick Hearn, (London: Norton, 2000).

authentic world. If magic cannot be limited through the ignorance of the characters then an alternative option is to allow the world created to limit the magic itself.

The concept of limited magic, or systematised magic, can be found in RPGs. In *D&D*, in order to make magic usable, active and ‘balanced’, Gygax and Arneson had to limit its use severely. If a character can rip the tops off mountains, cast walls of fire and manipulate lightning at will, then compared to other characters they are ‘overpowered’. As Vander Ploeg and Phillips assert:

The rules mandate severe restrictions. Magic-wielders must have severe limitations placed on them, else they tend to unbalance the games. At high levels of experience and power, the mages are nearly god-like.⁴¹³

It is evident that in order to make Mage a feasible player Character Class, Gygax and Arneson needed to limit the power mages and wizards could wield in-game. In *D&D* this was accomplished by requiring mages to memorise their spells anew each morning after a full night’s rest. The number of spells a mage can memorise is limited by their intelligence and by each spell’s level. The number of spells available is also a limited and finite field detailed by the rule books and gaming modules. A result of this restriction is that a mage cannot simply use any spell at any time and is limited in the number of spells that can be cast in any twenty-four hour period. So while a mage can still wield incredible power, and the right spell at the right time can be almost miraculous, the clear and understood limitations make these feats more believable and make the world authentic. In terms of the ludic construction, it stopped players from simply throwing spells and magic around to solve every problem, and made the use of magic a controlled and precious resource. Tracy Hickman comments on this concept of balance in the *Annotated Dragonlance Chronicles*:

Balance is a fundamental principle in *Dragonlance* – nothing comes without a price in this world. Magic can be phenomenally powerful, but it carries an extremely high price here in Krynn.⁴¹⁴

And, further, Hickman notes of the Mage character Raistlin:

⁴¹³ Vander Ploeg and Phillips ‘Playing with Power’ p.147

⁴¹⁴ Weis and Hickman, *Annotated Chronicles* note by Tracy Hickman p.75

In game terms, Raistlin's magic has thus far consisted of two first level spells. According to the rules of the game, this would make him at a minimum a second-level magic-user [...] According to the game module DL-1 *Dragons of Despair* (which covers the events of the first half of [*Dragons of*] *Autumn Twilight*), Raistlin was a third-level magic-user, so he's holding one spell back.⁴¹⁵

While readers will not know this about the character, unless of course they have read the rules of the game, it provides the authors with a narrative spur, and prevents them from metaphorically or literally waving a magic wand to make enemies vanish. If readers are in fact aware of the specific rules, rather than diminishing interest in the character, it furthers interest and speculation as to which spell Raistlin is holding back.

In *D&D* worlds, magic is a resource to be harboured against great need; as such it is precious and jealously guarded. A result of this is that mage characters hoard magic until it is needed most, although neither player nor character can ever accurately gauge when that moment is or will be. Thus a tension is introduced whereby the mage must constantly weigh the price of deploying a spell against the need of the present moment and the potential needs of future encounters that day.

The *D&D* approach to magic is an example of only one such system, yet increasingly authors are developing nuanced magic systems that combine narrative flexibility with discernable limits. Vander Ploeg and Phillips comment on Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series, in which weaves of the elemental threads are used to create spell effects.⁴¹⁶ The complexity of weaves, the energy required to construct and manipulate them, as well as the energy needed to activate them, are limitations on what can be done with magic within that series. Moreover, Jordan adds an additional cost to the male use of magic, as the source of this power has been corrupted and tainted, causing male magic users to become increasingly irrational and unhinged the more they rely on and use magic. As a result magic becomes a last resort rather than the first choice in conflict resolution. Lastly, in Jordan's world, magic is an innate talent that not everyone possesses. Even if one does possess the talent for magic, being effective requires study and training. These further limitations on magic mean that active

⁴¹⁵ *Annotated Chronicles* note by Tracy Hickman p.101

⁴¹⁶ Vander Ploeg and Phillips 'Playing with Power'

magic users are a scarce commodity when compared to the number of mundane soldiers who can swing a blade, and thus Jordan's world achieves a certain balance.

Common to both the *D&D* approach and Jordan's is the insistence that magic be a talent as well as a skill. By emphasising both aspects magic is inherently reduced to a massively powerful force that can be wielded only by a limited few. The insistence that magic be a skill ensures that despite any one character having great potential or a natural aptitude, they must still devote time and effort to refining their gift and realising their potential. This limitation creates an authentic system of magic, or at least a magic system that appeals to a sense of natural justice; a character can have access to immense power but it is difficult to master the skills necessary to wield it, and, therefore, it is not cheaply earned or deployed on a whim. These limitations correspond to the perception of the fantasylands as authentic, as limitations on magic suggest that it is a real force. In our universe gravity, magnetism and atomic energy are powerful forces, yet difficult and complex to harness. By creating an equally powerful force in the fantasy realm and then limiting its use in the same way as atomic energy, a sense of authenticity is achieved. While this has evolved as a necessity in the gameworld, the technique for limiting magic in this way follows sound logic in terms of narrative tension.

The need for a coherent and rational magic system in order to create a sense of true authenticity is more easily illustrated by a flawed magic system. David Eddings describes the magic system of the *Belgariad* as sorcery. While *D&D* related works focused on the casting of specific and limited spells, Eddings used a much more simplistic system that has more in common with magic as wishing, than with a codified system. In Eddings' *Belgariad* the initial and primary source of magic discussed is 'The Will and the Word'. Eddings describes this approach in *The Rivan Codex*:

One of the major problems when you're dealing with wizards is the 'Superman Syndrome'. You've got this fellow who's faster than a speeding bullet and all that stuff. He can uproot mountains and stop the sun. Bullets bounce off him, and he can read your mind. Who's going to climb into the ring with this terror? I suppose I could have gone with incantations and spells, but to make that sort of thing believable you've got to invent at least part of the incantation, and sooner or later some nut is going to take you seriously, and, absolutely convinced that he can fly if he says the magic words, he'll jump off a building somewhere. Or, if he believes

that the sacrifice of a virgin will make him Lord of the Universe, and some Girl-Scout knocks on his door - ??? I think it was a sense of social responsibility that steered me away from the 'hocus-pocus' routine.⁴¹⁷

Anyway, this was about the time when the ESP fakers were announcing that they could bend keys (or crowbars, for all I know) with the power of their minds. Bingo 'The Will and the Word' was born. And it also eliminated the Superman problem. The notion that doing things with your mind exhausts you as much as doing them with your back was my easiest way out. You might be able to pick up a mountain with your mind, but you won't be able to walk after you do it, I can guarantee that. It worked out quite well, and it made some interesting contributions to the story. We added the prohibition against 'unmaking things' later, and we had a workable form of magic with some nasty consequences attached if you broke the rules.⁴¹⁸

Eddings' reference to the 'Superman Syndrome' is the same stumbling block highlighted by Philips and Vander Ploeg in terms of creating overpowered characters, and Eddings reaches the same conclusion as Redick does about the need to limit magic, a 'workable form of magic' which consists of 'rules'. By imposing a limitation on the use of magic, in this case the amount of energy required to effect a spell and the scarcity of the gift, Eddings attempts to limit the power and pre-empt questions of why or how the magic works, while at the same time constructing a believable system. What remains at the heart of Eddings' system is the flexibility of the unlimited wish magic. He need only have a character think something to enact a magical effect. So while Eddings appears to have created a limited system, it is actually very close to the unbounded miraculous magic criticised by Robinson, and it is only through narrative discipline that Eddings can create the impression of a viable system.

Unfortunately there are problems with Eddings' system, as occasionally and perhaps for the sake of narrative convenience, he circumvents or breaks his own rules or strains to explain why these near omnipotent sorcerers are not using magic to solve their problems. These lapses and the lack of a sufficiently codified or logical system cause narrative irregularities. For example, in Chapter Six of *Queen of Sorcery*, Garion and his companions are set upon by a pack of Algoths, troll-like creatures. Despite the fact that both Belgarath and Polgara are formidable sorcerers, they do not employ any magic to kill, disable, frighten, disperse or distract the Algoths. Nor do

⁴¹⁷ As an aside, Eddings' development of the *Belgariad* coincided with a number of the high profile news stories about *D&D* inspired acts of witchcraft and teen suicide in the early 1980s. His reluctance to use voiced spells and formulae for his magic system may have been influenced by this.

⁴¹⁸ David Eddings *The Rivan Codex* (London: Voyager, 1999) Introduction pp.14-15

they employ magic to hasten, empower or hide the group in any way. They rely instead on the martial prowess of the group and the timely arrival of Mandorallen. The sole use of magic is to light a fire after the attack. As Polgara uses sorcery to light a fire moments later, it is clear that she, at least, can use magic at this juncture and so has chosen not to use it, with no explanation as to why. There are extraneous narrative reasons for this apparent magical oversight: firstly, to introduce the character of the Mimbrate knight Mandorallen, and allow him to ride to the companions' rescue; secondly, to contrive a reason to leave the wounded Lelldorin at the home of Lord Oltorain, thus providing an opportunity for Lelldorin to learn to overcome his hatred of the Mimbrates and fall in love with the Lord's daughter. However, narrative immersion is difficult when there is seemingly no reason why the characters should not have employed magic and, therefore, magic appears to become a narrative device rather than an essential part of the world.

If Eddings had been using a magic system similar to *D&D*'s, he could have implied that Belgarath or Polgara had simply exhausted their supply of memorised spells, or that the spells they could still access would not be useful in the circumstance. If the system were based on complex rituals, or a need for complicated gestures and speech, or even if the characters needed access to direct sun- or moonlight as an energy source, these would have been perfectly good reasons for them not to act at that moment. However, given that either character had simply to voice a word combined with wishing it to happen creates the impression, or at least implies, that they are either deliberately imperilling their companions or are not competent sorcerers during combat situations. Neither option fits comfortably with the characters of Belgarath and Polgara as Eddings has defined them.

Eddings' arbitrary use of magic goes beyond combat situations. There is much discussion in the series about money, whether the group needs it in order to buy horses, rent rooms at an inn, and so on. Prince Kheldar acts at various points as negotiator in order to secure them the best prices and to make their coin purse stretch. Yet Belgarath and Polgara could easily transmute any metal coin into gold. There is no prohibition against or reason not to use the word 'change' and envisage a copper coin changing into a gold coin. Potentially, over time it would de-value the exchange rate, but given that Eddings does not use this as a reason and that the books concern

an adventure during a crisis, a reader cannot help wondering why they don't simply make some gold.⁴¹⁹ Additionally, it appears that the sorcerers can create whatever they wish at whim. Beldin creates a magical white-hot hook out of thin air in order to threaten a rival sorcerer with it: 'He held out his gnarled right hand, snapped his fingers, and there was a sudden flash. A cruel hook, smoking and glowing, appeared in his fist'.⁴²⁰ Similarly in *Sorceress of Darshiva* Garion creates a door out of nothing to replace the one that they destroyed entering the room.⁴²¹ Such acts, while narratively convenient and entertaining, raise questions as to why the group ever bothers with buying supplies when apparently any and all of the sorcerers can simply create whatever they want with a modicum of effort and in a fraction of the time.

While these previous examples illustrate a strained narrative construction, a direct contravention of Eddings' magical 'rules' occurs in Chapter Four of *Castle of Wizardry*. Eddings makes it explicit that magic requires an equivalent amount of energy as the physical counterpart of the action. When Murgos roll large rocks and boulders down on the party from the top of a ravine, Garion and Belgarath take turns 'pushing' or tossing the boulders far beyond the group. Given that the energy required to completely alter each rock's path would have to deal with momentum, mass and gravitational acceleration, one would expect that both Garion and Belgarath would be exhausted after only a few such boulders due to the direct correlation of magical exertion equalling physical exertion. However, 'Garion discovered that it grew easier each time he did it' and although Eddings does go on to say 'but Belgarath was drenched with sweat by the time they neared the bottom' it seems that the amount of energy needed to completely alter the trajectory of these heavy, falling rocks, is relatively minor.⁴²² This would appear to be in contravention of the 'system' Eddings envisaged.

⁴¹⁹ In Chapter Seven of *Sorceress of Darshiva* they meet an academic sorcerer at the University of Melecan who grew angry with an experiment and yelled 'change' while fuelling the word with his will. It resulted in the transformation of his plumbing into gold.

⁴²⁰ David Eddings *Demon Lord of Karanda* (London: Bantam, 1988) chapter eighteen

⁴²¹ David Eddings *Sorceress of Darshiva* (London: Bantam, 1989) chapter seven

⁴²² David Eddings, *Castle of Wizardry* (London: Bantam, 1984) p.79. chapter four It is also implied that Belgarath's fatigue is due to his recent exertions in battling a powerful rival sorcerer, and not the magical activity by itself. The combination of his previous magical exertions, in addition to this further 'exercise' is the cause of his exhaustion

If Eddings' world were a Wonderland, or if the story was in fact a faerie tale, then one could use the explanation that it is 'magic' and therefore inscrutable, unexplainable and unknowable. This attitude, dismissing narrative inconsistency on the grounds that magic is impossible and therefore applying rational rules and laws is an exercise in futility, overlooks the fact that Eddings intended the magic of his world to be taken seriously. Eddings intended his magic system to have rules; he constructed penalties for the breach of these rules and narrative consequences due to these rules. To then dismiss criticism of this failure to abide by his own narrative constructions on the grounds that magic isn't real, ignores the very conceit that Eddings attempted to create in his world; that in it, magic is real. Despite appearances then, Eddings' world setting for the *Belgariad* and the *Malloreon* does not truly follow an internally consistent or rational magic system. The magic system is therefore little more than a narrative convenience and whimsical device contrary to Eddings' claim in *The Rivan Codex*. This lack of authenticity in the Secondary World would shift classification of Eddings' series into an inauthentic Secondary World, and therefore closer to the whimsical rules of the Wonderland.

While the *D&D* magic system in the *Dragonlance* novels is no less a narrative device, especially as the authors never have to make clear or plain which spells any given mage or wizard has memorised, at least the strictures of the system require them to think carefully about when and how magic can be used. This creates a sense of authenticity and a feeling of internal consistency within the narrative and returns to Eleanor Cameron's point that 'the author is required in the very beginning to establish a premise, an inner logic for the story, and to draw boundary lines outside which the fantasy may not wander' because 'the reader must feel that the author is working consistently within a frame of reference' and 'the pool of magic seems remorselessly to seep away if the first premise [...]is not kept'.⁴²³ If the world setting deploys magic as a whimsical device, one without logic or set boundaries, then the setting is closer to the Wonderland with its 'arbitrary' rules. If boundaries are set on the use of magic and these are then contravened or misapplied, then the author is guilty of the narrative 'betrayal' outlined by Cameron. The very foundations of an authentic Secondary World in GF appear to rest on the approach to magic. The RPG illustrated

⁴²³ Cameron, *The Seed and the Vision* pp.166-167 See also Attebery 'Eleanor Cameron: The Theory and Practice of Fantasy' *JFA* Vol.16 No.2 (2005) pp.96-109

that in order to prevent magic ‘unbalancing’ a game, it must be heavily restricted. This sensibility has become part of the foundation of GF; as long as the author has a consistent and restrained approach to magic, the specific mechanics of it need not be revealed to the reader. More importantly, perhaps, is that the contravention of the rules of the magical world destroys narrative immersion.

However, while the argument has thus far assumed that Secondary Worlds in GF possess high levels of magic, this is not always the case. An alternative method of limiting magic within a GF Secondary World is to reduce the availability of magic in its entirety. Instead of formulating magic as a force wielded and deployed by characters, an author can reduce the level of magic in his/her world to nil or nearly nil. This does not mean that the Secondary World must become mundane, but rather that the world has little access to magic, or that the characters of that world have little or no access to magic. For example, in the *Drenai* books by David Gemmell, while there are occasional magical elements present, for the most part the world of the Drenai is without discernable magic. The various incarnations of the warrior priests The Thirty have the ability to astral project, and they exhibit a limited form of telepathy. The shamans of the Nadir cast spells, most noticeably the creation of were-beasts, but their magic appears analogous to that of Native American shamans in that much is ritual rather than active magic with discernable spell effects. Despite these and other occasional magical and supernatural elements, the world of the Drenai is primarily mundane. The magical abilities and effects of the Drenai world are heavily limited, both in terms of the availability of the power and the cost of deploying it. As a result of this limitation, Gemmell’s world does not encounter the same problem of narrative inconsistency as can be seen in Eddings’ series, nor is there a significant challenge to the authenticity of Gemmell’s world due to its closeness to a Real Earth model.

Thus, while RPGs did not invent the concept of limiting magic in order to maintain narrative tension and create authentic fantasy worlds, they rationalised the approach to magic into a formal system, and insisted that should magic be used, that it be limited and predictable. By focussing on the need to create a workable ludic system that could employ magic to accomplish wondrous feats, Gygas and Arneson understood

that magic needed to be constrained otherwise it would greatly unbalance the power dynamics of any given world or group of characters. Given that GF routinely employs multiple variations of magic, ranging from shamanistic naming magic to esoteric formulae, it is by examining the common ethos of the regimented limited system that we can develop a useful framework for the analysis of GF magic systems. This is particularly illuminating when we attempt to distinguish between authentic Secondary Worlds and wonderlands. Therefore the concept of the RPG magic system can be extended to analyse fantasy texts beyond RPGF and GF, and highlight narrative inconsistencies in many works that include active magic, as well as act as an indicator for the classification the text on the basis of authentic or inauthentic fantasy worlds. If magic is a defining characteristic of Fantasy, we can use the magic system as a method for applying a rubric of categorisation and developing a discernable framework for nuanced distinction.

Magic and Setting

Fantastic settings are not unique to Fantasy, particularly as the comparable genre of SF abounds with alien worlds, virtual realities and parallel dimensions. Yet one of the major distinctions between the SF alien world and the Fantasy Secondary World is that, commonly, the SF world conforms to the rules and constants of our own 'reality' and universe, an overtly authentic reality, and fantasy worlds do not.⁴²⁴ While liberties may be taken with 'Faster Than Light' travel, time travel and other physics-defying concepts, alien worlds and SF settings, for all their strangeness, are usually deeply connected to our own universe and the rules and physical laws of 'reality'.⁴²⁵ In Monk's terminology, despite their strangeness the SF worlds and settings maintain an element of transparency. The inclusion of 'magic' into a setting, a force not natural to our own world, means that by its very nature the fantasy setting violates the

⁴²⁴ This may appear as a spectrum ranging from Hard SF which attempts to rigorously abide by physical laws, to Soft SF which takes greater liberties with physics. Although it should be noted that Tom Godwin's 'The Cold Equations' *Astounding* 1954 a well known Hard SF story, still utilises FTL (Faster Than Light) travel as an integral story element. See also Orson Scott Card *How to Write Science Fiction and Fantasy* (Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 1990) pp.3-25.

⁴²⁵ Edwin Abbott's *Flatland* utilises dimensional theory, Hal Clement's *Mission of Gravity* is based on a rigorous extrapolation of gravitational forces and Darwinian evolution. So despite their implausibility, they are based in rational science and are possible within our universe.

core physical reality of our universe.⁴²⁶ This has led to a distinction between the ‘fantasy world’ based on the unreal, and the SF ‘alien world’, based on the real. While both SF and Fantasy routinely deploy fantastical settings, with strange creatures, bizarre landscapes and marvels unachievable in today’s world, the fact that SF has the appearance of being grounded in the real and Fantasy is grounded in the unreal is seen as a distinctive characteristic. This distinction appears to be caused by the reliance of Fantasy on magic.

The grounding of SF in our universe suggests that it is more deeply connected to reality as we perceive it, and therefore it is more ‘real’ than the fantasy setting which, due to its use of magic, is inherently disconnected from our universe and therefore less believable. Problematically, this then suggests that as fantasy worlds are removed from reality and they need not conform to the rules of our universe. In effect, because they utilise magic and not technology, they are inherently unbelievable and whimsical in their construction. This is a circular and paradoxical argument; believable fantastic settings must be inherently mimetic in order to be believed, yet mimesis can be viewed as antithetical to fantastic. However, it should be noted that the non-mimetic nature of fantasy is often offset by the inclusion of recognisable real world elements such as horses, historical cultures and armaments. Despite this, a central feature of Fantasy is its use of non-mimetic elements such as magic, dragons and Elves. Yet while SF can posit ‘what if’ questions such as ‘What if time travel were possible?’, something that is physically impossible, and be believed, it seems that Fantasy cannot posit a ‘What if magic were possible?’ and be treated with the same level of belief. It seems that the distinction comes down to ‘magic’ as inherently unexplainable in rational, scientific frameworks. Yet by including the RPG concept of the magic system, a rational and logical structure of predictable rules governing the use of magic, instead of classing magic as inherently impossible we can examine magic and magic systems in terms of authenticity.

The nature of the presumed reality of SF and Fantasy highlights one of the core conceits of modern literature, that a ‘real setting’ is intrinsically true, believable and somehow more real. Regardless of whether or not a fiction is set in the ‘real world’

⁴²⁶ While many modern day religions and spiritual associations believe in and use ‘magic’, this is clearly distinct to the magic articulated in RPGs and fantasy worlds.

such as Charles Dickens' London, or an alien planet, such as Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, the setting of a novel is never 'real'.⁴²⁷ It is a fictional construct, an articulation of a point of view or perspective of a certain time, place and culture. From a certain perspective, the London of Dickens' *Oliver Twist* is in no way more real than Le Guin's alien planets. One cannot visit Dickensian London; it does not exist, and in fact never actually existed. Even at the time he wrote about it, Dickens' London was not the London of this world. It is a representation of the thing, based on a perspective and interpretation of a real place, but not the thing itself. The inherent mimesis does not negate the fact that the place does not actually exist; it is the setting of the novel and thus while it may accurately depict and evoke a sense of the real world setting, it is no more real than a SF or Fantasy setting. However, since a number of assumptions can be made by the reader, in Monk's terminology we can define the setting as transparent. In the 'real world' of *Oliver Twist*, characters cannot simply fly, and while narrative coincidences may strain credulity, they are not a departure from the accepted reality. The reunion at the end of *David Copperfield* may be improbable, but it is not impossible. Within an SF or Fantasy world setting such assumptions are problematic until the reader can understand the rules of that universe, what Monk refers to as non-transparent realities. In Feist's Midkemia characters cannot simply fly, either, even though they are magical; the rules of the universe dictate that they must first activate a device that will enable them to fly, use a mount that itself can fly, or cast a spell that grants the user the ability to fly for a limited period of time. The use of a codified or at least consistent magic system goes to the authenticity of the fantasy world. Magic is not whimsical in Feist's writing; rules exist, and not everything can be done by simply saying 'it is magic'. Midkemia is then a covertly authentic setting in that it has internally consistent rules, strictures and boundaries that limit the fantastic. These rules create a discernable and predictable magic system. By adhering to these rules and not circumventing them, Feist confirms the covenant between author and reader that Cameron discusses.⁴²⁸

Even when it is inconvenient in narrative terms to limit the power and boundaries of a particular magic system, by adhering to the rules, by keeping the world internally

⁴²⁷ Ursula Le Guin, *Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1974) and Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 2nd edn, (London, Richard Bentley, 1839).

⁴²⁸ Cameron, *The Seed and the Vision* (New York: Dutton, 1993.) 166-167 See also Attebery 'Eleanor Cameron: The Theory and Practice of Fantasy' pp.96-109

consistent and logical, the author can create an authentic world that inspires belief and encourages immersion. We can view the magic system as a mitigating position between the science-based rationality of SF, and the whimsical and arbitrary nature of magic in the Wonderland.

Magic and the Critics

‘Magic and Mirrors’, a special edition of *The Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* (*JFA*), focuses on magic in fantasy texts.⁴²⁹ Two of the articles in this volume appear to represent the bias inherent in literary fantasy criticism with regard to RPGs. They are Edwin F. Casebeer’s article ‘Peter Straub’s *Shadowland*: The Initiation of a Magician’ and William M. Schuyler, Jr.’s ‘Magic as an Alternative to Science’.⁴³⁰ Another article in the same volume focuses on the magic systems of RPGs as a means of understanding how RPGs have affected magic as part of fantasy, although neither Casebeer nor Schuyler acknowledges RPGs and the systematised approaches to magic found therein.⁴³¹ This is despite the regimented structure of magic in Straub’s magical curriculum which utilises ‘levels’ as discussed in Casebeer’s article, and the fact that magic is the de facto ‘science’ of RPGs and would therefore seem to match perfectly with the theme of Schuyler’s article. Only Vander Ploeg and Phillips’ article ‘Playing with Power: The Science of Magic in Interactive Fantasy’, acknowledges the role of the RPG in the formation of coherent magic systems and how these can be utilised to re-conceptualise magic within fantasy narratives.

As Schuyler writes, ‘Some books treat magic as an *ad hoc* literary device to achieve wish fulfilment [...] But suppose magic works. How does it work? How shall we understand it?’⁴³² This set of questions, asked in 1998, could be answered in terms of the RPG magic system. However, although he seems unaware of RPGs, Schuyler

⁴²⁹ *JFA* Vol.9 No.2 (1998)

⁴³⁰ Edwin F. Casebeer, ‘Peter Straub’s *Shadowland*: The Initiation of a Magician’, *JFA*, 9:2 (1998), pp. 93-103 and William M. Schuyler, Jr., ‘Magic as an Alternative to Science’, *JFA*, 9:2 (1998), pp. 104-16.

⁴³¹ Vander Ploeg and Phillip, ‘Playing with Power’. While Casebeer and Schuyler would obviously not have seen Vander Ploeg and Phillip’s article prior to publication, in 1998 *D&D* had been in print and play for over 20 years, not to mention the vast array of RPGs that appeared in the 1980s and 1990s, again demonstrating the omission of this valuable resource.

⁴³² Schuyler ‘Magic as an Alternative to Science’ *JFA* Vol.9 No.2 (1998) pp.104-116, p.104

nevertheless focuses on two important points. The first confirms the assumption that there are apparently only two approaches to magic within fantasy criticism: the whimsical ‘*ad hoc*’ approach, and the scientific rational:

There is, it seems, a neat ontological dichotomy between science (whatever it may be called), which is our way of dealing with the natural world, and magic, which is our way of dealing with the supernatural world.⁴³³

The second point implies that the existence of magic can be framed as an SF thought experiment or ‘What if?’ question. These points are of course inter-related. If magic is part of a given universe, we can assume that it is part of the universal order and natural law. Therefore, the study of magic would fall under the auspices of science, ‘a systematically developed and organised study of the natural world’.⁴³⁴

The definition of magic as a fantasy science finds a distinct correspondence in the worlds of the various *D&D* franchises in which magic is studied by mages and wizards as a series of formulae, prescribed rituals and alchemical experiments and reactions.⁴³⁵ The *Dragonlance Chronicles*, later developed in the prequel trilogy *The Dragonlance Legends*, details Raistlin’s time as an apprentice mage and his testing at the Tower of Sorcery. This attitude to magic, as a learnable skill and academic subject can also be found in Feist’s *Magician* and the subsequent *Riftwar Saga* books. Pug is at first the apprentice to Duke Borric’s wizard, Kulgan, and then a student at the City of Magicians on Kelewan. As the series develops, Pug institutes an Academy for the study of magic on the island of Stardock, and then an elite and secret institution for the study of magic on Sorcerer’s Isle.

The title of Schuyler’s article, ‘Magic as an Alternative to Science’, suggests that the focus on magic as an academic study of a natural science is the very avenue of exploration he will take. Yet Schuyler does not note any of the available RPGs, RPG-related fictions, or in fact any of the available texts which feature an academic and intelligence-based magic-system, rather he concentrates on the riddles of Patricia McKillip’s *Riddle of the Stars* trilogy, and Randall Garrett’s ‘Lord Darcy’ stories. The central premise of his article is to develop an approach that can bridge the

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ This can be traced to the influence of Jack Vance’s *Dying Earth* series on *D&D*.

perceived dichotomy between magic as an inherently unnatural force, one that defies the laws of nature, and as a science, a study of natural laws.

[...] if a subject is a systematically developed and organised study of the natural world, it is a science [...]. On this reading, the 'Lord Darcy' stories are about natural science, not magic.⁴³⁶

If magic were to exist as a natural force, and we were to study it, experiment with it and define rules for its use and existence, then it would fall under the auspices of science. Schuyler's definition of a natural science, 'a systematically developed and organised study of the natural world' seems to be a perfect explanation of the magic system found in *D&D* and the concept of a consistent and rational magic system used by later authors of GF.⁴³⁷ Yet Shuyler appears to draw a distinction based on a real world rationale, that magic is inherently supernatural. If magic is part of the natural world, as it often is within GF, then there is no need to separate it from the natural. One of the defining characteristics of GF worlds is that magic exists as part of the fabric of reality, and thus is part of the natural world, not the supernatural. By suggesting that magic is separate from science, in effect imposing external real world rationality on a narrative conceit, Schuyler does not acknowledge those magic systems that attempt to codify, in a systematic and organised manner, the causes and effects of spells.

Regardless of whether or not we choose to refer to magic as a fantastical science, or as a mystical force, the codification and creation of limiting rules and strictures in the RPG magic system provides a pre-fabricated system for the discussion of magic in fantasy. The concept describes the reasons for the limitations on magic in ludic and narrative terms and it also highlights elements of narrative dissonance when the rules are not adhered to. Tolkien links the very creation of the Secondary World to magic, and the immersion in that world as part of the spell:

The moment disbelief arises, the spell [of the Secondary World] is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed. You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from outside.⁴³⁸

⁴³⁶ Schuyler 'Magic as an Alternative to Science' p.104

⁴³⁷ Schuyler 'Magic as an Alternative to Science' p.104

⁴³⁸ J.R.R. Tolkien 'On Fairy Stories' *The Tolkien Reader* (1947; original lecture 1938; New York: Ballantine, 1966)

Given this connection, it could perhaps be argued that Clute's term 'full fantasy' should be extended beyond those elements of story and narrative that he has isolated, to include a consideration of consistent or rational magic. A full fantasy would then be a narrative which possesses Wrongness, Thinning, Recognition, Healing and a Magic System, which would represent of the genre as it has evolved, particularly if the scale of wrongness and healing are reduced to reflect the localised recurring settings of GF, and the continuing nature of fantasy mega-texts.

A realm of magic, at least in GF and RPGF, appears antithetical to progress and scientific change, which confirms the perception found in the Lost Land tale that magic, adventure and the fantastic in a mystical sense, are fundamentally tied to the past and a forgotten age and to a refutation of scientific progress. This then returns to Clute's definition of 'Full Fantasy' requiring thinning of the world. The Gameworld, and by extension those Secondary Worlds constructed like Gameworlds (such as series settings and shared world settings) have attempted through their very construction to forestall any further thinning of the magical world. This position is not without challenge, as can be seen in China Miéville's Bas-Lag novels, which combine magic and science in a non-pseudo-medieval world.⁴³⁹ This combination of science and magic to create a magical science can be contrasted to Science Fantasy novels which create a scientific fantastic. In Miéville's Bas-Lag, magic or thaumaturgy is the de facto science of the realm, and has continued to evolve into various branches of academic study, for instance golemancy. These in turn have led to impacts on societal structures, such as the 'Remade' slave or servant class, and have helped shape the world of Bas-Lag.⁴⁴⁰ In effect, Miéville brings his fantasy world forward to an age analogous to the Victorian era, and has attempted to extrapolate a sophisticated modern age in which magic is at the heart of technology and this has resulted in a fantasy version of Steampunk.

However, since Miéville's work is an exception to the general rule of fantasy, that magic occur in the past and that the land remain locked in a pre-scientific era, we

⁴³⁹ China Miéville, *Perdido Street Station*, (London: Macmillan, 2000); *idem*, *The Scar*, (London: Macmillan, 2002) and *idem*, *Iron Council*, (London: Macmillan, 2004).

⁴⁴⁰ This is apparent in the distinction drawn between the treatment of the Remade in New Crobuzon in *Perdido Street Station* (London: Macmillan, 2000) and their more egalitarian role in the pirate city of Armada in *The Scar* (London: Macmillan, 2002)

must adapt our methods of analysis to include the authenticity of magic systems, in this an understanding of the RPG and the RPGF are essential. They can either be seen as problematic exceptions to the established norms, or can be integrated into the academic scholarship, thereby updating that scholarship. The shift in narrative construction toward a recurring mini-myth is neither revolutionary nor contradictory of traditional analysis, but rather an evolved form. This adaptation and shift in narrative construction is supported by the conception of the gameworld as a recurring and re-usable setting, and the increasingly common continuing series or sequence of novels set in the same world. By re-conceptualising magic to include a consideration of the RPG magic system, we can make a more nuanced distinction about how magic is used within GF and other Fantasy texts. The construction of authenticity, instead of a reference to realism or plausibility, emphasises narrative coherence and the use of rules as a guiding structure within Secondary Worlds. In all, the RPG adds to the understanding and analysis of GF by considering where these concepts have originated and the reasons for this construction and adaptation.

Chapter 5 Quest Groups and the Balanced Party

The party of adventurers is a central aspect of many fantasy RPGs, just as the hero and his/her quest companions appear as a central conceit of GF. Yet when we analyse GF, we more often focus on the hero rather than on his/her companions. Increasingly, however, GFs are developing groups of heroes, rather than concentrating on a sole hero supported by minor companions, and thus the role of companion deserves further scrutiny. These supporting characters, who they are, what they do and how they are portrayed, are perhaps the clearest reason why the RPG needs to be adapted for GF analysis. The essential RPG concept which encapsulates character generation, class and party formation is called the ‘balanced party’, a term which could describe the character groupings of many GF novels and series of the last thirty years. In order to establish how the balanced party as a concept can add to established approaches to quest party analysis, such as John Clute’s *Seven Samurai* and *Dirty Dozen*, or to investigations of the power dynamics inherent in fantasy groups, such as Farah Mendlesohn’s *Prince and the Courtier* approach, the background and inherent related aspects of RPG character generation and class must be established. Once the gaming concept has been clearly defined this chapter will then address the existing approaches to analysing quest companions, before establishing how the concepts can be combined to better analyse GF literature.

Introducing the Ludic Conception

The first editions of *D&D* focused on short, limited adventures, ‘Dungeon Crawls’, in which a party of Player Characters (PCs) embarked on missions to retrieve treasure and material rewards from haunted tombs, monster infested dungeons and dangerous underground cave complexes. The game’s construction encouraged co-operative play amongst gamers, de-emphasising the role of a central hero and emphasising a teamwork-based approach. Gamers, via their PCs, supported one another in order to defeat the monsters, beat the dungeon’s defences and retrieve the loot.⁴⁴¹ Since the game drew inspiration from popular fantasy novels, Gygax and Arneson adapted what

⁴⁴¹ In modern computer gaming terminology this would be the distinction between a ‘one-player/single player game’ and a ‘multi-player game’.

they believed were important aspects of fantasy. They had to create a logical and codified game system, one that represented the genre as they saw it, was adaptable and flexible enough to cater to individual gamer tastes and needs, and was also simple enough to learn and build from. They therefore had to distil or refine certain aspects of GF into manageable, basic concepts, one of which was the refinement of the various heroes, villains and other characters of the varied fantasy novels into specific, identifiable types, or Character Classes. We could, perhaps, unkindly refer to the Character Classes as stereotypical fantasy clichés, and indeed many of the characters generated via the *D&D* system can be played that way. But the Character Classes themselves are merely codified reflections of the types of heroes and characters that appear in fantasy adventures, the building blocks around which characters are designed.

These Character Classes, are defined by abilities, skills, strengths and weaknesses, all derived from fantasy literature. The Classes can be defined in four main categories: The Warrior, the Mage, the Thief and the Cleric. Each Class has specific talents and skills, as well as more generic traits. Importantly, these Classes are non-text specific, meaning we need not know which text inspired which Class, as they are refined from several sources within the genre. A result of this common distillation is that they can also be applied equally well to a host of specific literary characters. For example, Belgarath the Sorcerer from David Eddings' *Belgariad* may appear to resemble both Gandalf and Merlin. Belgarath is an old, wise man, with a beard and magical powers, as well as being a guiding force who shepherds the young hero towards his destiny. Such a comparison, however, confuses Gandalf and Merlin as classes of character, as archetypes, when they are more accurately examples of an archetype, as is Belgarath. Additionally, the comparison is conceptually flawed. Belgarath routinely overtly uses magic, whereas Gandalf and Merlin are usually associated with guidance and restraint and not out-right magical effects. Describing Belgarath as being of the Mage Class, however, uses the RPG convention to describe an intelligent and learned character who also routinely employs magical means and is an active participant in the adventure. In a similar manner, Conan, Boromir, Caramon and Wulfgar can be used as text-specific examples of the RPG's Warrior Class which is a distillation and reflection of the qualities necessary to be a physically powerful warrior in fantasyland. This use of the *D&D* Character Class system does not mean that

knowledge of the genre or of important characters is extraneous or superfluous. On the contrary, it can enhance our ability to describe characters, both in their adherence to and in their defiance of the class descriptions, but because the *D&D* system categorises character type into well defined terms and places them within a system designed to reflect and articulate the genre conventions that created them it is a useful approach to analysing fantasy character. Much as Campbell and Propp distilled the essence of mythic story and fairytale function, respectively, so have Gygas and Arneson articulated the essence of fantasy character type.

The combination of a multi-player system with identifiable Character Classes, and a narrative emphasis on group adventure forms the ludic frame that distinguishes the RPG from the traditional Mythic fantasy narrative. The scope and scale of the world can correspond directly to grand epic fantasy, but the narrative focus is always drawn to the group of adventurers, the party, with each character the hero of his/her own story. Since the scale of the world and the narrative repercussions associated with it have been discussed above, this chapter will illustrate how the ludic concepts of character generation, party formation, Character Class and character skills, can update current critical approaches to character analysis in GF.

Character Classes

The concept of the balanced party, like so many of the RPG conventions, is predicated on a number of other ludic structures and concepts within the game, in this instance character generation, statistical attributes and Character Class. In order to isolate and explain the group dynamics in a RPG balanced party, we must first outline the rudiments of character generation and Character Class. Consider the following:

Face it, the cleric is usually the guy who shows up last to the gaming table, a big, stupid smile on his face, saying, 'Hey, guys, I want to play. What's the party need?' To which everyone replies, 'We need healing. You're the priest. Shut up and sit down'.⁴⁴²

While automatically understood in gaming circles, this type of humour and observation relies upon insider knowledge not widely available to broader cultural

⁴⁴² R.A.Salvatore interview, available at www.rasalvatore.com/sidemenu/sampleChapters/cq.html [last accessed 31/08/2010].

groups. However, it illustrates the essential attitude to party formation and Character Class held by gamers, and underpins the concept of balanced party formation in RPGs. The RPG approach is focused on function dictating character design and construction, group dynamics and party formation, as well as the appearance and abilities of characters. In RPG campaigns, mages can cast spells to destroy powerful monsters, warriors can hack apart enemies for hours on end, thieves can pick pockets and steal riches... clerics can heal the party. It is a widely held belief that playing the cleric character, the group first-aider, is the short straw in party formation, but like many clichés and stereotypes it is often untrue. However, this attitude concerning the role of the character within the group, their function, is an essential conception of how characters are designed in RPGs. As such, understanding how the RPG approaches character design is necessary in order to contextualise how RPG quest parties are formed, and this in turn informs current critical models concerning fantasy characters and quest groups. The RPG approach to quest party design and the functionality of characters is summarised by Tracy Hickman:

In *AD&D*, there had evolved from the rules a typical ‘balanced’ party. The balance was found in having enough of the various skills possessed by the different character types so that you always had at least one character with the skill needed at any given time. These later evolved into archetypes of *AD&D*.⁴⁴³

The ‘balanced party’ is at the core of the RPG quest group. As a result it is often referred to in gamer shorthand or in-game terminology rather than being described objectively. As a concept it encapsulates the linked processes of character design and generation, as well as character function and Class. To simplify matters and unpack the dense shorthand employed by RPG players, the concepts of character generation have been reduced here to four main categories or Classes: Warrior, Thief, Mage and Cleric; a fifth hybrid category will also be explained, with examples of the Druid, Ranger and Paladin. This is followed by a discussion of the key attributes, both physical: Strength, Dexterity and Constitution, and mental: Intelligence, Wisdom and Charisma. The discussion will then move to how the groups are constructed before turning to established critical perspectives.

⁴⁴³ Hickman and Weis *Annotated Chronicles* p.20

The Warrior Class

The Warrior, also called a fighter, brawler, or mercenary, is a melee Class, one that specialises in physical conflict and combat.⁴⁴⁴ The ‘talent’ of the Warrior is that of ‘close-combat specialist’. The Warrior has two essential functions: he/she is the main physical damage dealer of the group; he/she should defend the party from physical attacks and absorb damage. In essence, the Warrior is a first-tier or front-line fighter who engages the enemy and draws the focus of their attack while the rest of the quest group supports the Warrior. The Warrior will generally have more hit points (HP) and better armour than the rest of the group and therefore can absorb greater amounts of damage with fewer penalties or long lasting effects than other members of the group.⁴⁴⁵ As a consequence, it makes sense in gaming terms for the Warrior to lead the charge into the fray, assuming the role of primary target, while the rest of the group supports him/her from a distance with spells and healing, and additional ranged attacks. A common nickname for this type of character is ‘Meat-shield’ for a guardian-type warrior, or ‘Tank’, for the major physical damage-dealing character. Both these terms carry the connotation of a solid, powerful, physical character which encapsulates much of the Warrior character portrayed in GF.

The Warrior usually has high physical statistics (stats), with emphasis on Strength and Constitution, followed in terms of priority by Dexterity, with mental attributes following as less essential, depending on what the gamer wishes to emphasise in terms of role-playing.⁴⁴⁶ In ‘in-game’ terms, this reflects the rationale that the Warrior classes spend time in physical training and practising with weaponry, rather than sitting indoors reading and studying, and therefore the Warrior will be a physical creature rather than a cerebral one.⁴⁴⁷ For example, when the character of Caramon Majerie is introduced in the *Dragonlance Chronicles*, Hickman notes, ‘here is our

⁴⁴⁴ The gaming term ‘melee’ refers to close-combat as opposed to ranged combat involving bows, crossbows and slings. It is based on the older term ‘mêlée’ which refers to close combat tournaments and tourneys such as the ‘grand melee’ common in the early medieval period (c. 12th Century), which were then replaced by jousting tourneys.

⁴⁴⁵ Hit Points refers to the statistical health value assigned to a character and measures how much damage the character can absorb before dying. See Appendix 1 – Glossary of Terms for further details.

⁴⁴⁶ See Appendix 1 – Glossary of Terms for descriptions of Stats and Class. As a rough guide the *D&D* system uses a base human range of statistics running from 1-18, therefore 9 is assumed to be the human racial average. Other races such as Dwarves and Elves have ‘modifiers’ applied to base stats and therefore can have 19 as the racial maximum for certain stats.

⁴⁴⁷ This is a bare skeleton of the character class, and obviously individual gamers will do much to ‘flesh out’ the character to make it distinct and interesting. See Appendix 3 for a detailed character sheet.

hulking brawn-over-brains fighter archetype'.⁴⁴⁸ Caramon is initially described as, 'the giant Caramon' with a 'booming voice' and 'muscular arms' who meets them with an 'affectionate greeting' which consists of hugging them all fiercely. Caramon's stats in the *Dragons of Despair* gaming module are as follows, and next to them for comparison are the character statistics for R.A. Salvatore's Wulfgar:

Caramon Majerie ⁴⁴⁹		Wulfgar ⁴⁵⁰	
6th Level Human Fighter		Human Barbarian	
Strength	18/63 ⁴⁵¹	Strength	20
Dexterity	11	Dexterity	15
Constitution	17	Constitution	17
Intelligence	12	Intelligence	13
Wisdom	10	Wisdom	12
Charisma	15	Charisma	13
Alignment	Lawful Good	Alignment	Chaotic Good

These base statistics identify the bare essentials of both Caramon's and Wulfgar's characters.⁴⁵² The two highest statistics of both characters are Strength and Constitution, corresponding to their roles as front tier, melee fighters, hardy and exceptionally strong. Interestingly, both possess above average Charisma attributes, and in Caramon's case it is relatively high, reflecting their open, rugged handsomeness and both are played/written as likeable young men. In terms of Dexterity there is something of a disparity, which is also evident in the values of Intelligence and Wisdom. While Caramon's lower stats indicate he is a straightforward 'brawn-over-brains' character with little complexity beyond the norm, we should note that his stats are still above 9, the racial average for humans in the *Dragonlance* setting. Wulfgar's 'improved' stats in Dexterity, Intelligence, and Wisdom reflect that he is an exceptional human in every regard, even if his major forte lies in his physical excellence.

⁴⁴⁸ Hickman in Weis and Hickman *Annotated Chronicles* p.33

⁴⁴⁹ Tracy Hickman, *Dragons of Despair: Dragonlance AD&D Adventuring* (TSR Inc., 1984) (Module Code 9130)

⁴⁵⁰ Stats taken from a *Forgotten Realms* RPG dedicated site, www.candlekeep.com/library/articles/wulfgar-35 [last accessed 11/11/10]. These are *D&D* v.3.5 stats.

⁴⁵¹ Caramon's Strength stat has an additional qualifier. While the base stat is the human racial maximum of 18, to reflect his exceptional strength a further mechanical qualifier has been added. The secondary number denotes a placement within a range of 1-100 (01 is the minimum, 50, the mean, 00 is the maximum) within 'Strength 18'. Caramon is therefore a Strength 18 human, but compared to other Strength 18 humans he may be stronger than some and weaker than others. In essence this is a bonus to gameplay and the mechanical dice rolling to resolve strength tests.

⁴⁵² The racial maximum for a human is assumed to be 18, the average is then around 9 or 10, and therefore a score around 18 is considered exceptionally high, while a score below 9 is considered low.

Two further Warrior classes further illustrate this relationship between the stats and the characteristics. Bruenor Battlehammer from R.A. Salvatore's *Drizzt Series* and Flint Fireforge from the *Dragonlance Chronicles*, both veteran Warriors, have the following stats:

Bruenor Battlehammer⁴⁵³

Dwarf Fighter
 Strength 18
 Dexterity 14
 Constitution 22
 Intelligence 15
 Wisdom 13
 Charisma 13

Flint Fireforge⁴⁵⁴

Dwarf Fighter
 Strength 16
 Dexterity 10
 Constitution 18
 Intelligence 7
 Wisdom 12
 Charisma 12

Again, like Caramon and Wulfgar, both Bruenor and Flint are Warrior classes and therefore have high physical statistics. Although Bruenor's Dexterity is somewhat higher than Flint's, in narrative terms this can be explained by the fact that Bruenor is an accomplished weaponsmith, who has mastered the skill of inscribing magical spells in the form of tiny delicate runes onto weapons he has crafted and therefore has a developed Dexterity attribute.⁴⁵⁵ However, it should also be noted that Flint was also once a blacksmith, even if he was not known for his intricate work. The only low value is once again Intelligence, and, like Caramon, Flint is a straightforward 'attack first, ask questions later' character. Flint has an intelligence of 7 which is slightly below average. This is 'played', not as outright stupidity, but as slower, methodical thinking reflecting the fact that Flint is not quick thinking.⁴⁵⁶

Both Bruenor and Flint are grizzled old Dwarven axe fighters as opposed to the brawny human warriors Caramon and Wulfgar. Both Dwarves are characterised as gruff, cantankerous and bad tempered, as well as blunt, forthright and skilled Warriors. Their years of experience have lent them insight into how battles are fought and how soldiers fare in the face of adversity, giving them a steady, solid presence in a fight. This is reflected in their above average Wisdom stats and their exceptional

⁴⁵³ Stats taken from a *Forgotten Realms* RPG dedicated site, www.candlekeep.com/library/articles/wulfgar-35 [last accessed 11/11/10]. These are *D&D* v.3.5 stats.

⁴⁵⁴ Tracy Hickman *Dragons of Despair* (Module Code 9130)

⁴⁵⁵ See the description of Bruenor's crafting of Aegis-fang in Salvatore's *The Crystal Shard* Chapter 11 'Aegis-fang' pp.117-124

⁴⁵⁶ There are numerous examples of the 'fast talking' Tas confusing Flint, but see the exchange in Weis and Hickman *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* Chapter 14 'Prisoners of the Draconians' pp.166-169

Constitution stats. As Tanis says to Flint, ‘I need you, grumbling old dwarf [...] They’re all so ... so young. You’re like a solid rock that I can set my back against as I wield my sword’.⁴⁵⁷ A clear description of Bruenor can be found in *Streams of Silver* which emphasises the ‘solid’ nature of his character:

The dwarf, Bruenor Battlehammer, leaned forward from his waist, his stocky legs pumping mightily beneath him, and his pointed nose, poking out above the shag of his wagging red beard, led the way. He seemed set in stone, apart from his legs and beard, with his many-notched axe held firmly before him in his gnarled hands, his shield, emblazoned with the standard of the foaming mug, strapped tightly on the back of his overstuffed pack, and his head, adorned in a many-dented horned helm, never turning to either side. Neither did his eyes deviate from the path and rarely did they blink.⁴⁵⁸

This quotation highlights the stereotypical attributes of the axe-wielding veteran Dwarf character. The descriptions lean heavily towards ideas of solidity and resolve, physical power and experience. Words such as ‘stocky’, ‘set in stone’, ‘gnarled’ give a sense of graceless yet reliable power which echoes the sentiment of Tanis’ plea to Flint. Bruenor is a character of resolution and focused attention, ‘his head [...] never turning to either side. Neither did his eyes deviate’. This is clearly a character with focus, determination and a straightforward approach. The only motion in the description is of the pumping of his legs and the slight movement of his beard. He is not loping along with a mile eating gait, he is not gracefully running through the undergrowth, he is pushing through the world, refusing to compromise. The beard itself, though exceptionally common in any description of a Dwarf in GF, is also an indicator of masculine strength which, when combined with the obvious damage to his helm and the notched axe, give him the appearance of a strong survivor, a battle hardened veteran.

Bruenor’s physical appearance is strikingly similar to Flint’s, although Flint is described as much older and is certainly less hardy than Bruenor with ‘eyes barely visible through the thick, overhanging, white eyebrows’.⁴⁵⁹ They are remarkably similar characters, possess strikingly similar attributes and embody similar characteristics, as both Flint and Bruenor play the role of veteran warrior whose experience will be a solid, reassuring presence in a fight, and also assume fatherly

⁴⁵⁷ Weis and Hickman *Annotated Chronicles* p.119

⁴⁵⁸ R.A. Salvatore *Streams of Silver*, Icewind Dale Book 2 p.8

⁴⁵⁹ Weis and Hickman *Annotated Chronicles* p.24

characteristics to the younger members of the band. The steadfast and indomitable nature of Bruenor is implied in the passage cited above. Flint's nature is clearly revealed when, after suffering a heart attack during the dragon fighting, carries on fighting and running on foot.⁴⁶⁰ He refuses to be a burden to his friends and continues to support and help them in battle until eventually even his Dwarven Constitution gives out and he dies.

Caramon and Wulfgar, on the other hand, exemplify the strong, honest, hot-headed young warrior hero type common to adventure stories and similar to Howard's creation Conan. Comparing passages describing Wulfgar and Caramon reveals a certain commonality. Wulfgar is described as follows:

The barbarian could use his unrivalled strength more effectively than deceptive feints and twists. Wulfgar's people were naturally aggressive fighters, and striking came more easily to them than parrying. The mighty barbarian could fell a giant with a single, well-placed blow.⁴⁶¹

This description highlights the emotional and aggressive tendencies of Wulfgar and his people. They are characterised by a love of battle, charging in and overwhelming a foe with their attacks, rather than being reasoned measured warriors who balance attack and defence and worry about battle stratagems, tactics and out-thinking their opponents. Wulfgar's lust for battle, and the 'berserker rage' can be seen in an excerpt below detailing a simple bar brawl:

Crying out to Tempus, the god of battle, the barbarian, enraged at the appearance of a weapon, slammed the man's head through the wooden planks of the wall and left him dangling, his feet fully a foot from the floor.⁴⁶²

Wulfgar, although aware that this is a brawl and different combat rules have been established, cries out to a god of battle, and then reacts disproportionately to the threat of a dagger. While the drawing of a knife in a bar fight elevates the threat level, Wulfgar does not seek to disarm him, a feat his combat training would make relatively easy, and instead slams the man's head through a wall and leaves him 'dangling, his feet fully a foot from the floor'. The barbarian rage clouds his strategic thinking and his aggressive attack does not take into account the potentially disastrous

⁴⁶⁰ Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman *Dragons of Spring Dawning, Annotated Chronicles* pp.1034, 1076, 1078, 1169-1172

⁴⁶¹ R.A. Salvatore *The Crystal Shard* (Lake Geneva, WI: TSR Inc., 1988) p.145

⁴⁶² R.A. Salvatore *Streams of Silver* p.418 Chapter 3 Nightlife.

consequences should he kill this man. Given that Wulfgar's strength is such that he could fell a giant with one blow, it seems reasonable that he could have simply knocked the man out with a punch. This rage and aggressive battle technique can also be seen in descriptions of Caramon:

With a roar like a wounded animal, the huge warrior leaped toward the draconians. Bamboo gave way before him, the shards splintering and cutting into his skin. Mad with the desire to kill, Caramon never noticed.⁴⁶³

Similarly, the impetuous, passionate Warrior can be seen in the character of Caramon. Like Wulfgar, Caramon is known for charging into battle with a battle-cry, rather than trying to eliminate foes as efficiently as possible. It is the joy of fighting rather than a soldier's ethic of killing efficiently. His critical faculties are disengaged as he becomes lost in a battle-rage. In particular in this quotation, Caramon is described as having an animalistic and sub-conscious drive to kill, an articulation of the 'fight or flight' response. A warrior ruled by his emotions and passions, rather than his experience and ability, 'Caramon emerged from the mist, roaring his battle-cry'.⁴⁶⁴ Like Wulfgar, Caramon charges in with a loud yell, crying out his animalistic joy in battle. These passages highlight the size, power and physical prowess of the young warriors in remarkably similar language and tone and illustrate how alike the characters are. Yet when compared to the description of Bruenor below the difference between the 'veteran Warrior' and the 'young Warrior' is highlighted:

The amazingly powerful blow dented Bruenor's helm and jolted the dwarf into a short bounce. Tough as the mountain stone he mined, Bruenor put his hands on his hips and glared up at the barbarian, who nearly dropped his weapon, so shocked was he that the dwarf still stood.

'Silly boy', Bruenor growled as he cut the youth's legs out from under him. 'Ain't ye never been told not to hit a dwarf on the head?'⁴⁶⁵

Bruenor does not lose his temper, yell or scream. In fact he treats the attack as a minor affront that needs to be dealt with and can't resist turning the counter-attack into a 'lesson' for his opponent. Even his reference to his foe as a 'silly boy' highlights Bruenor's patriarchal superiority and his attitude that as an older experienced warrior he is in a position suited to deliver lessons to the young, inexperienced warriors he faces. So where Caramon and Wulfgar charge into battle

⁴⁶³ Weis and Hickman *Annotated Chronicles* Chapter 14 p.171

⁴⁶⁴ Weis and Hickman *Annotated Chronicles* Chapter 18 p.220

⁴⁶⁵ R.A. Salvatore *The Crystal Shard* p.82

and are ruled by their aggressive tendencies, Bruenor is level-headed and methodical in battle, an implacable foe who can draw upon years of battle experience.

The distinction between the two types of Warrior can be described by the 'Tank' and 'Meat-Shield' labels discussed above. While Wulfgar and Caramon are Tanks, rushing into battle to destroy the enemy, Flint and Bruenor are more like Meat-shields, in that they think of the group and how it can best be defended by the removal of enemies in a methodical fashion. The character of Druss from David Gemmell's *Legend* can be seen as a non-RPG example of the literary Warrior class:

It was not age which depressed Druss. He enjoyed the wisdom of his sixty years, the knowledge accrued and the respect it earned. But the physical ravages of time were another thing altogether. His shoulders were still mighty above a barrel chest, but the muscles had taken on a stretched look - wiry lines which criss-crossed his upper back. His waist, too, had thickened perceptibly over the last winter. And almost overnight, he realised, his black beard streaked with grey had become a grey beard streaked with black. But the piercing eyes which gazed at their reflection in the silver mirror had not dimmed. Their stare had dismayed armies; caused heroic opponents to take a backward step, blushing and shamed; caught the imagination of a people who had needed heroes.⁴⁶⁶

There are clear parallels between the character of Druss and the characters of Bruenor and Flint. As an older, yet still physically powerful and imposing, veteran, he has learned the wisdom of battle tactics and is seen as a leader. Even the descriptions are surprisingly consistent, the beard, the bright eyes, the broad chest and an emphasis on solid physicality. Yet, his history is that of the younger Warriors, Caramon and Wulfgar, a bellowing, burly warrior, charging in to dismay and destroy his foes. Thus Druss encompasses both aspects of the Warrior Class extended over the time frame of his character, as a younger man he was a Tank, rushing to battle his enemies, and as the older veteran he has become a Meat-Shield whose function is to protect the younger warriors. Indeed, his death scene at the end of the novel is reminiscent of Flint's end. Druss faces down the Nadir hordes, despite dying from a poisoned wound, and buys his fellow soldiers time to retreat from the over-run wall, and thus his last act is as a Meat-Shield Warrior. While the terms Tank and Meat-Shield may not be suitable for academic discourse, the concepts they embody, that of attacking warrior and group protector, in combination with the RPG Class of Warrior, are applicable to character analysis in GF.

⁴⁶⁶ David Gemmell *Legend* (London: Orbit, 1984) Chapter 5 p.66

The Thief Class

The second major class type is a Rogue Class, generally exemplified by the Thief.⁴⁶⁷ The Thief occupies a curious position within the group, balanced between attack and support. As a secondary physical class, they can deal quite a lot of damage but cannot take much physical punishment. They can be seen as second-tier fighters, but their particular strength lies in their ability to pick locks, find and disarm traps, steal items and pick off individual enemies from the shadows. Thieves can utilise powerful physical attacks but these are usually limited to sneak attacks on a single, unsuspecting target. While their combat effectiveness is essentially limited by their lower HP values and lack of substantial armour, they are invaluable for many scenarios due to their disreputable skills and specialisation in clandestine operations. Moreover, should the characters be captured or placed in a gaol, Thieves can usually free them as they are the escapologists of the fantasy world.

Thieves tend to have high Dexterity scores and frequently high Charisma scores, especially if they are to be played as likeable rogues who can charm and con others. As semi-physical classes they also tend to have some Strength and Constitution above the racial average due to their habit of climbing walls and clambering over roof tops, but their physique would remain lithe and trim rather than bulky, and thus their Strength stat would tend to fall below the racial maximum while above the racial norm. Due to their choice of such a risky profession it is fair to assume that they will have at least some ‘street smarts’ and this can be reflected in slightly above normal Intelligence and Wisdom stats. Thieves will often have some limitations on the armour they can wear and the weapons that they can wield, with the in-game rationale that a Thief encased in platemail carrying a giant two handed great sword is not likely to be stealthy, silent or particularly agile.

While the concept of the thief bears parallels to Bilbo ‘the burglar’ in Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* there have been adaptations over time, not least of which is the race of ‘Kender’ from Weis and Hickman’s *Dragonlance Chronicles*. While the original

⁴⁶⁷ While the Class can be called Thief, a less specific term would be Rogue, as it encompasses all manner of stealthy, non-traditional martial characters, such as assassins, con-men, pirates, buccaneers and bounty hunters. However, for ease of reference the term Thief has been used.

conception of D&D was heavily influenced by Tolkien's work, subsequent editions and developed gameworlds using the *D&D* system attempted to adapt and build upon the essential game concept rather than the literary concept that originally inspired them. According to Jeff Grubb, a game designer and author:

I wouldn't say that Tracy hated Halflings as much as he was uncomfortable with what the Halfling was in most of our fantasy at the time. They were tubby homebodies, stout-hearted but fearful, more at home in pastoral England than the post-apocalyptic domain of Ansalon. The new kender were wilder than Halflings, fearless, sometimes as cruel as only children can be (which became the taunt). They were savage, warrior children, ever curious, ever alert. But even the best laid plans go awry, and in *Dragonlance*, that took the form of Janet Pack, who, in the course of dramatic readings, defined the nature of the kender and added something not initially anticipated. She, and as a result all kender since her, was cute. Extremely cute. Sweetly, lovably, frustratingly cute. And as a result, Tas and the rest of his kind are brave, fearless, taunting, and cute. And it's hard after seeing Janet play Tas, to imagine them any other way.⁴⁶⁸

As a game designer, Tracy Hickman was 'uncomfortable' with the Halfling/Hobbit type character in the new world he was designing, developing the new 'Kender' to replace the Halflings found in the earlier editions of *D&D*. The ubiquitous Halfling/Hobbit from Tolkien, because of their perceived homeliness and stout-hearted childlike personas, were felt to be inappropriate in a harsh, post-apocalyptic world. In Tolkien's *LotR* the reader is informed that The Shire has been protected by the Rangers led by Aragorn, in Krynn, and Hickman apparently felt that such a race would have died out as after the Cataclysm such people would have been destroyed in the ensuing chaos and therefore a hardier, more wild and independent breed was needed. Due to their diminutive size and innocent, friendly looking faces, Halflings had been conceived as perfect for the Thief Class in *D&D*, particularly given the influence of Bilbo as 'the burglar' from *The Hobbit*. Hickman developed this by changing the cherubic look of the Halfling into a half-wild, barbarian, child-like race, the Kender which, during the course of play-testing the character, was altered to include a level of 'cuteness'. Therefore he kept the idea of a 'race' of characters who could specialise in being thieves, with bonuses to Dexterity, and who could escape casual notice due to their diminutive stature.

Hickman also kept the comic-relief aspect of the Halfling, using the Kender to offset the serious leader, the grumpy veteran, the sinister mage and the virtuous warrior,

⁴⁶⁸ Jeff Grubb in Weis and Hickman *Annotated Chronicles* p.26

with a humorous and irascible character. The ‘Tas’ Grubb refers to is Tasslehoff Burrfoot, the Kender thief in Weis and Hickman’s *Dragonlance Chronicles* and below is a comparison of Tas’ stats to those of Regis the Halfling from Salvatore’s *Drizzt Series*, who may be seen as a more traditional version of the Tolkien-esque Hobbit thief character:

Tasslehoff Burrfoot ⁴⁶⁹		Regis ⁴⁷⁰	
4th Level Kender Thief		Halfling Thief	
Strength	13	Strength	10
Dexterity	16	Dexterity	18
Constitution	14	Constitution	15
Intelligence	9	Intelligence	13
Wisdom	12	Wisdom	15
Charisma	11	Charisma	15
Alignment	Lawful Neutral	Alignment	True Neutral

Both Regis and Tasslehoff provide comic relief characters for their respective narratives, and the pattern of their statistics proves fairly similar with high Dexterity, good Constitution and middling Strength. In this instance, both Regis and Tas are traditional Thief characters rather than assassins, and are intended as support characters rather than melee specialists. Once again, Salvatore’s character possesses significantly higher statistics than the *Dragonlance* character. In this case Regis possesses higher Intelligence, Wisdom and Charisma when compared to Tas.⁴⁷¹ Despite this disparity, the pattern remains roughly the same, with the Thief class exhibiting the highest stat value in Dexterity and then assigning the various other values to useful gaming statistics. A possible in-game explanation for Regis’ high Charisma attribute, and Tas’ comparatively low one, is that Tas is an annoying character who constantly irritates those around him, while Regis is a con artist and manipulator by trade and therefore has practised gulling people and manipulating them. However, neither character has any characteristic below the racial averages and in fact even when a characteristic is ‘low’, such as Tas’ 9 Intelligence, it is still

⁴⁶⁹ Tracy Hickman *Dragons of Despair* TSR 9130

⁴⁷⁰

http://132.209.40.23/w4/campagne/Downloads/Downloads_WotC/The%20Lone%20Drow%20Companions%20of%20the%20Hall.htm official Wizards of the Coast 3.5 edition stats for Regis [last accessed 11/11/10].

⁴⁷¹ A commonly held reason for this in gaming circles is that the *Dragonlance* characters were designed as playable, whereas the *Icewind Dale* characters were literary inventions given ‘official’ statistics after the fact and as such they are high level, powerful NPCs rather than playable PCs.

representative of the racial average and does not denote gross stupidity. Clearly, though, Hickman felt that the presence of a Thief Class was still essential to the ‘balanced party’ and that the game needed to provide this function. Later RPGs, and later editions of *D&D*, re-classed the Thief as a general Rogue and increased the combat aspect of the Character Class, allowing for the ‘Thief’ to become more active in combat situations.

Of course, the Thief Class is not limited to Hobbit/Halfling-type characters and races. Silk, or Prince Kheldar, from Eddings’ *Belgariad*, fits the Thief classification almost perfectly, despite Eddings’ lack of gaming experience, and thus proving the worth of using RPG terminology to analyse GF. Silk is initially described as:

[...] a small man, scarcely taller than Garion himself, and his face was dominated by a long pointed nose. His eyes were small and squinted, and his straight, black hair was raggedly cut. The face was not the sort to inspire confidence, and the man’s stained and patched tunic and short, wicked-looking sword did little to contradict the implications of the face.⁴⁷²

Silk has both a high acrobatic ability and can speak using intricate finger movements, corresponding to a high dexterity attribute. Moreover, he is both humorous and capable of adapting to any social situation, indicating high charisma and intelligence. He frequently displays flashes of humour and is the main source of comic relief within the series, much like Tas in *Dragonlance*, although for the most part Silk’s wit is sarcastic or mocking. He is at once a clown and a prankster and takes great delight in gulling merchants and engaging in skulduggery and other nefarious acts.

“Can’t you ever do anything without being sly?” Garion asked. His tone was a bit grumpy, since he was convinced that somehow he had been the butt of the whole joke.

“Not unless I absolutely have to, my Garion.” Silk laughed. “People such as I continually practice deception – even when it’s not necessary. Our lives sometimes depend on how cunning we are, and so we need to keep our wits sharp”.⁴⁷³

His delight in skulduggery is reflected in his physical attributes as his nose twitches and his eyes glint, regardless of whether the act in question is haggling with merchants, performing clandestine or covert missions or simply getting the better of someone. He regards his life as a game and despite the seriousness of the quest, he

⁴⁷² David Eddings, *Pawn of Prophecy*, (New York: Ballantine, 1983; repr. London: Corgi, 1993), p.72

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.214

delights in trying to win at every turn regardless of the broader consequences. Again this insouciant attitude can be seen in Tas' carefree curiosity. Another human character who apparently fits this model is Jimmy the Hand from Feist's *Riftwar Saga*. Like Silk and Tas, Jimmy is described as young and diminutive in stature. Due to the character's immaturity it is easy to accept him as a likeable Thief, similar to Dickens' Artful Dodger. Jimmy has not yet had to mature to adulthood and therefore can still act in an irresponsible, self serving and ignoble way. At the same time he is one of the 'good guys' and, when the reader first encounters him, Jimmy is attempting to cause problems and hamper the efforts of the villains of the piece. Like Silk and Tas, regardless of the penalties for failure and the severity of punishment, Jimmy views life as a game to be played, not an experience to be lived 'Jimmy grinned [...] The boy's eyes flickered wide a moment, but he never lost his grin'.⁴⁷⁴ Even when it is extremely dangerous, with no profit to be made, Jimmy follows Arutha to the docks to see them off and is left behind as the armed gangs close in, 'Anita looked up and saw Jimmy the Hand hanging over the edge of the dock, a nervous grin on his face'.⁴⁷⁵

Another curious point of connection between Tas, Regis, Silk and Jimmy are their relationships with the 'surly' or serious characters in their respective series. Both Regis and Tasslehoff antagonise and tease Breunor and Flint respectively, yet at the heart of the relationship is a deep-seated affection. In some respects this appears to be modelled on the deep seated affection that Gandalf has for the Hobbit characters, while acknowledging the frustration they cause: For example, when Pippin drops the stone into the well in Moria and Gandalf addresses him as 'Fool of a Took', or when Pippin again riles Gandalf by stealing the Palantir after the flooding of Isengard, yet Gandalf is motivated by concern for the Hobbit rather than real anger. This balance of affection and irritation is visible in both Tas' and Regis' relationship with the 'father figures' of their groups. When Tas is first introduced in the opening chapter of *Dragons of Autumn Twilight*, he clearly antagonises Flint. Yet as the series progresses Flint and Tas are paired as close companions, and Flint's death affects Tas more than it does the rest of the party. Regis is nicknamed 'Rumblebelly' by

⁴⁷⁴ Raymond E. Feist, *Magician*, new rev. edn, (London: Grafton, 1992 repr. London: Voyager, 1997), p.479.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p.493

Bruenor, and when he returns from an obviously disastrous tenure as the head of a thieves' guild, Bruenor does not press Regis for an explanation and makes room for him in Mithril Hall. Both parties accept their diminutive Thief characters, tolerate their irritating habits and exhibit a deep seated affection for them.

The common occurrence of the Thief class in GF literature, usually as a companion to the hero, and the equally common traits associated with the Class, certainly suggests that the RPG conception of the Thief is a useful model with which to approach analysis of quest companions. The function, description and characteristics of the Thief Class, when combined with textual analysis and additional critical perspectives, certainly illustrates the usefulness of the RPG as a meta-textual commentary on the generic mega-text of GF.

The Mage Class

The third class is that of the Wizard or Mage. This is the primary magical attacker and mass damage-dealer class. The Mage tends to wield strong offensive magical spells as well as a limited number of defensive spells. They are used to destroy or disrupt the enemy, enabling the Warrior to dispatch them more efficiently and effectively. Mages also use some of their arcane magic to protect the Warrior and the rest of the group from magical attacks. They are physically weak, wear little or no physical armour and must be protected from physical attack. Mages wield some of the most potent and destructive attacks in the game and are invaluable when attacking massively powerful foes or large groups of enemy combatants. However, their enormous destructive power is balanced by their physical frailty. A common nickname for mages, 'Nukers', comes from their ability to 'Nuke' large numbers of enemies or wide areas at once, causing large scale immediate damage.

Mages tend to have high Intelligence attributes as this corresponds to the number of spells they can memorise at any one time, although there are some spells that require other stats to be considered. As Gandalf remarks in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 'Someone said that intelligence would be needed in the party'.⁴⁷⁶ Essentially Mages are the academics of the fantasy world and have usually spent most of their lives

⁴⁷⁶ J.R.R Tolkien *The Fellowship of the Ring* Book 2 Chapter 3 'The Ring Goes South' p.266

studying ancient tomes in dusty libraries and rarely perform any physical task beyond the norm. A low Charisma score in a mage can be played as arrogance or an inability to understand people who are not Mages. Unlike Tolkien's Gandalf from *LotR*, the Mage is an active Class that casts spells, offensive and defensive, is an active participant in battles and not necessarily a guide/mentor character. While Gandalf undoubtedly uses magic during certain sequences of *LotR*, he does not cast a fireball spell or lightning spell in his fight with the Balrog in Moria. He faces the Balrog with his sword, staff and will, he does not unleash magical power in visible spell effects. Nor does he unleash a destructive spell against the Nazgûl during the battle of Minas Tirith. Rather he disrupts the darkness with light and inspires the warriors around him, giving them new heart. This is distinctly different to the character of Raistlin who utilises a sleep spell twice against armed foes in the opening chapters of *Dragons of Autumn Twilight*, and uses a floating spell to descend from the Inn while the others climb down the rope ladder.⁴⁷⁷ Below are the basic attribute statistics for Raistlin from the *Dragonlance Chronicles* and Gromph Baenre from Salvatore's *Dark Elf* trilogy:

Raistlin Majerie⁴⁷⁸

3rd Level Human Magic-user
 Strength 10
 Dexterity 16
 Constitution 10
 Intelligence 17
 Wisdom 14
 Charisma 10
 Alignment True Neutral

Gromph Baenre⁴⁷⁹

20th Level Drow Archmage
 Strength 9
 Dexterity 20
 Constitution 12 (18)
 Intelligence 30 (36)
 Wisdom 16 (20)
 Charisma 17
 Alignment Neutral Evil⁴⁸⁰

While the character of Gromph is an Archmage, and therefore well beyond the power and ability of the initial character of Raistlin, a comparison between their statistics shows the same pattern, if exaggerated in scale. Gromph and Raistlin both exhibit low scores (relative to their other statistics) in Strength and Constitution, while Intelligence is their highest score. This emphasises the academic nature and

⁴⁷⁷ Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman, *Dragons of Autumn Twilight*, (London: Penguin, 1986). Floating occurs on p.52, sleep spells, p.70 and p.100, and the burning hand spell p.101.

⁴⁷⁸ Tracy Hickman *Dragons of Despair* TSR 9130

⁴⁷⁹ Eric L. Boyd *Drizzt Do'Urden's Guide to the Underdark*. (Renton: Wizards of the Coast, 1999) updated to 3.5 Edition.

⁴⁸⁰ The bracketed values denote that the game stats are actually higher due to magical items and character bonuses, so Gromph's playing stats would be S 9, D 20, C 18, I 36, W 20, Ch 17.

intelligence base of magic systems within the D&D worlds. Gromph, as an Archmage and powerful leader has a charismatic personality in addition to being a dark Elf (Drow) and therefore ‘beautiful’, by contrast Raistlin has a lower Charisma score and that is reflected in the distrust that people feel when they meet him.⁴⁸¹ Raistlin’s low Constitution value was ‘gamed’ as a wracking cough and physical fragility caused by his magical testing to become a wizard, and his voice was then a harsh whisper:

The mage’s white skin had turned a golden colour. It glistened in the firelight with a faintly metallic quality, looking like a gruesome mask. The flesh had melted from the face, leaving the cheekbones outlined in dreadful shadows. The lips were pulled tight in a dark straight line. But it was the man’s eyes that arrested Tanis and held him pinned in their terrible gaze. For the eyes were no longer the eyes of any living human Tanis had ever seen. The black pupils were now the shape of hourglasses! The pale blue irises Tanis remembered now glittered gold.⁴⁸²

The description of Raistlin emphasises his frailty and an arresting strangeness that inspires fear, revulsion and distrust, explaining both the low Charisma and low Constitution scores. Each of these things is consistent with his statistical attributes. However, it appears that the actually gaming of Raistlin did more to cement the character in the minds of Weis and Hickman:

My friend Terry Phillips, took the Raistlin character – only roughly defined at that time. When I first turned to ask him a question, he answered me in character – with a rasping, whispered voice filled with cynicism... In that game that night, Raistlin as we know him today was born.⁴⁸³

There is a clear relationship between the base statistics that define the core aspects of the character in the novels and the in-game portrayals of these attributes. Of course, how a player chooses to represent basic characteristics and attributes is a highly individual and almost unlimited choice, but the connection between game and literature remains.

Interestingly, despite the apparent disparity between levels and statistical values, both Raistlin and Gromph are thin, wear robes, cast spells that have to be memorised each day, are feared by many and friends with few. The concept of the Mage Class therefore seems quite well defined, and despite the superficial similarity to Gandalf,

⁴⁸¹ Weis and Hickman *Dragons of Autumn Twilight* The first meeting with Flint and Tanis, p.34

⁴⁸² Weis and Hickman *Annotated Chronicles* p.34

⁴⁸³ Hickman in Weis and Hickman *Annotated Chronicles* p.34

both Gromph and Raistlin are fundamentally different types of characters; they are active spell hurlers, rather than guiding wizard mentors. This is an essential distinction between the Mage Class in RPGs and the literary derived Wizard mentor from the tradition of Merlin and Gandalf.

Further examples of this change of emphasis from guide to active magic user and spell hurler can be seen in Eddings' Belgarath from the *Belgariad* and Feist's Macros the Black from *Magician*. The character of Belgarath bears strong parallels to both Merlin and Gandalf. Belgarath is old and wise, wears robes and is knowledgeable about matters great and small. He is mentor to the young Garion, raising and training him to assume the mantle of king, as well as a guide and advisor to the quest group as a whole. Yet, despite his role as advisor, Belgarath routinely utilises 'active' magic with discernable spell effects. He is an active participant in the quest and more closely resembles the spell hurling Mage, than the advisor to the king. For example, when faced with a situation similar to Gandalf's encounter with the Balrog, Belgarath does not stand against the demon, but rather he raises his own demon in order to battle it.⁴⁸⁴ Where Gandalf uses subterfuge to gain access to Théoden in *The Two Towers*,⁴⁸⁵ Belgarath, when faced with a disbelieving and arrogant guard at Vo Mimbre, makes an apple tree magically grow from a twig found in his horse's tail.⁴⁸⁶ Despite the similarities in assuming a guiding role and similar physical descriptions Belgarath is a fundamentally different type of character, an active magic user.

In *Magician*, however, the significant Mage character of Macros the Black does not match the physical template associated with Gandalf, Merlin and Belgarath. Despite being thousands of years old, Macros does not appear as an old wise man, his hair is not grey or white, and although he sports a beard, Macros' facial hair is closely trimmed and dark, rather than long and flowing like Gandalf's.⁴⁸⁷ Like Gandalf, however, Macros is a guiding figure, albeit behind the scenes and in a great deal more sinister and morally ambiguous way. He facilitates the war with Kelewan in order

⁴⁸⁴ David Eddings, *Enchanters' End Game*, (London: Corgi, 1985; repr. 1994), Chapter Seven pp.94-98.

⁴⁸⁵ Tolkien *The Two Towers* Chapter Six 'The King of the Golden Hall' pp.499-500

⁴⁸⁶ David Eddings, *Queen of Sorcery*, (London: Corgi, 1984; repr. 1994), chapter 10 pp.117-118

⁴⁸⁷ The First description of Macros the Black: 'He was of average height, with a high forehead and deep-set black eyes. There were streaks of grey at the temples of his dark hair, but his beard was black as night. He wore a brown robe of simple material, a whipcord belt around the waist. In his left hand he held a sturdy oak staff.' From Raymond E. Feist *Magician* Chapter 11 'Sorcerer's Isle' p.197

that the Greater Path of Magic returns to Midkemia, and then orchestrates a breakdown of peace negotiations, which results in thousands of deaths, in order to seal the rift between the two worlds. While his actions are nobly motivated, the return of lost knowledge and the protection of the world against an external, alien force of chaotic destruction, Macros is ultimately responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of men, Elves and Dwarves. Additionally, Macros clearly commands great magical powers:

Macros aimed it [his staff] at the red barrier. A golden bolt of energy shot forth. It sped across the clearing and pierced the red barrier, to strike a black-robed magician in the chest. The magician crumpled to the ground, and a shout of horror and outrage went up from the assembled Tsurani. [...] They redoubled their assault upon the sorcerer, wave after wave of blue light and fire striking Macros's protective barrier. All upon the ground were forced to turn away from the sight, lest they become blinded by the terrible energies being unleashed. After this magical onslaught was ended, Tomas looked upward, and again the sorcerer was unharmed.⁴⁸⁸

So, like Belgarath and Raistlin, Macros belongs to a different type of wizardly tradition, one which emphasises the use of magical power in overt and visible spell effects. This does not negate consideration of the Wise Old Man archetype as established by Jung, nor does it dismiss Campbell's discussion of the guiding mentor figure and we should not ignore the importance of Merlin and Gandalf as formative influences on the creation of wizard characters within the genre. Rather, the RPG Mage Class represents this shift in Mage character type from the guiding mentor to the active party member.

The term 'Nuker', to denote a spell-hurling Mage, is perhaps too informal for the academic lexicon, however, the Mage Class, both as a concept and as a label, is certainly applicable and acceptable in the analysis of these character types. Particularly as the Mages now tend toward magically active participants in quest groups rather than mysterious guiding figures, and thus comparisons to Gandalf become less tenable.

The Cleric Class

The last major Class to consider is the Cleric. This is a primary support character with the role of primary healer and occasionally second-tier fighter. As the primary

⁴⁸⁸ Feist *Magician* Chapter 21 'Changeling' pp.402-403

ludic function of the Cleric is to act as party healer, of all the RPG basic Character Classes, the Cleric is the one most dispensable in narrative adventures. The healing aspect of the Clerical character can be accomplished through the use of healing potions and poultices, charms or objects. Alternatively, an author or GM may construct the narrative so that heroes only ever receive minor injuries and are thus able carry on, or so mortal wounds lead to dramatic death scenes. As a result, there are fewer direct analogues of the Cleric in GF, and even in RPGFs, than there are of Warriors, Mages and Thieves.

The Cleric channels divine energy in the form of defensive and healing spells to protect and aid the first-tier fighters, as well as possessing limited offensive spells conceptualised as divine wrath-type attacks.⁴⁸⁹ Clerics often act as second-tier fighters as many of them can wear strong armour and carry powerful weapons and thus can physically support the Warrior or, more likely, stand back to guard the Mage. Essentially the Cleric is either a 'Healer' or a 'Buffer',⁴⁹⁰ and the most important stat for the Cleric is Wisdom, as this dictates how many 'spells' or 'prayers' they can access. General physical stats follow Wisdom in terms of importance as they make the character useful in a fight. Intelligence and Charisma are often viewed as the least important for these action-oriented Clerics. A rationale for this concept of the Cleric stems from the idea that Clerics, unlike the academic Mages, spend time during their training performing menial tasks to teach them humility. Like in medieval monastic orders, Clerics are often depicted working vegetable gardens and engaging in physical activities. This emphasis on practical knowledge and appreciation of nature and the natural world coincides with an increased value for Wisdom and Constitution. If Clerics remained in cloisters studying scrolls and theological treatises they would then be depicted as closer to Mages in terms of statistics and attributes as they would emphasise scholarly intelligence and lack of physical prowess.

⁴⁸⁹ Often called prayers or chants rather than spells, but for sake of clarity the term spell is used for an action that results in a 'magical' effect.

⁴⁹⁰ Buffer refers to 'buffs', a type of spell that augments abilities or adds additional effects to the target character. For instance a 'buff' can increase armour values, augment strength or add additional damage to weapon strikes.

A convention arose in early editions of the *D&D* rule books which dictated that priestly characters, Clerics and Healers, could not wield bladed weapons.⁴⁹¹ This has links to the historical martial religious orders which joined soldiers in war but were not allowed to shed blood due to their positions as men of God.⁴⁹² The convention did not, however, prevent these warrior bishops and priests from breaking bones or smashing skulls.⁴⁹³ It thus became a convention that a Cleric character in *D&D*-based stories would carry a blunt weapon such as a warhammer or mace. This allowed for the smiting of enemies while at the same time differentiated these characters from Paladins, Warriors and Thieves. Examples of the RPG Cleric class can be found in Goldmoon in Weis and Hickman's *Dragonlance Chronicles* and Cadderly Bonaduce from Salvatore's *Cleric Quintet*:

Goldmoon ⁴⁹⁴		Cadderly Bonaduce ⁴⁹⁵	
5th Level Human Cleric		20 th Level Human Cleric	
Strength	12	Strength	16
Dexterity	14	Dexterity	15
Constitution	12	Constitution	13
Intelligence	12	Intelligence	16
Wisdom	16	Wisdom	18
Charisma	17	Charisma	15
Alignment	Lawful Good	Alignment	Neutral Good

Again the Salvatore character appears to have much higher base stats than those of the playable *Dragonlance* character, although each has high Wisdom attributes as befits proficient clerics, thereby increasing the number and power of the clerical spells they can cast. Additionally, it should be noted that Cadderly is the central protagonist of the *Cleric Quintet*, whereas Goldmoon is only one member of the quest group in the *Dragonlance Chronicles*. Thus, it would be natural to assume that the central hero would have stats above and beyond those expected of a 'normal' PC Cleric. While Cadderly is the central protagonist of the *Cleric Quintet*, Goldmoon's function is as

⁴⁹¹ From the 2nd Edition of *AD&D* onwards until the recently released 4th Edition.

⁴⁹² 'The prohibition in canon law against priests shedding blood was increasingly enforced from the eleventh century onwards, but never entirely succeeded in preventing the clergy from getting involved in fighting' Helen Nicholson, *Medieval Warfare: theory and practice of war in Europe, 300-1500* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) p.64

⁴⁹³ 'It is said that the 'shedding of blood' was taken so literally that martial prelates in the middle ages went into battle with heavy maces, with which they could pound their enemies into pulp without breaking the skin.' W.R.Inge *Christian Ethics and Modern Problems* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930) p.321

⁴⁹⁴ Tracy Hickman *Dragons of Despair* TSR 9130

⁴⁹⁵ Dale Donovan, Paul Culotta *Heroes' Lorebook* (Lake Geneva WI: TSR, Inc., 1996) pp. 28-30

the group healer. During the course of the *Chronicles* Goldmoon is instrumental in re-introducing 'true Clerics' to the world of Krynn. As a consequence, the introductory modules that make up the narrative base for the related novels, end with standard Cleric healers being re-introduced to the gameworld as a playable Class.

Another point to consider is that Cadderly is of a significantly higher level compared to Goldmoon, and it could be expected that he has improved some of his base-line statistics over time through experience, exercise, permanent magical effects and so forth. Most significantly, the Dragonlance characters are starting level PCs for the Dragonlance Campaign setting and were therefore designed in exactly the same way that a gamer would construct a new character. Salvatore's characters, on the other hand, were literary inventions and not PCs. The statistical breakdown was a retrospective assignation of value based on what the characters did and could do in the novels, thereby working the characters into the game-system rather than creating them from the system. Due to this, a common gamer complaint about Salvatore's characters is that they are 'overpowered', or too powerful, given who they are meant to be in the 'game world'.⁴⁹⁶ The statistics are then viewed as 'unrealistically' high. A second point to consider is that Salvatore's characters were given statistics so that they could be used in games as NPCs or Non-Playing characters, which the gamers' PCs could meet and interact with. This creates a sense of the game being part of the literary world and the literary world being part of the game increasing the potential immersion in both as deeper, consistent existing worlds.

Literary characters comparable to the playable Cleric Class are rarer than the other basic classes in GF, perhaps due to the focus of their function as healers, which as noted can be accomplished in other ways, however the character of Vintar, the Abbot, from David Gemmell's *Legend* provides an example of this character type in non-RPG fantasy. Vintar, as the Abbot of the order, is a guiding force for the young monks and fulfils the role of spiritual leader and wise counsellor. When the priests form the order of The Thirty, Vintar is assigned the role of The Soul of the Thirty, the conscience and spiritual centre, while Serbitar is named Voice of the Thirty and the

⁴⁹⁶ For instance see the giant in the playground forum discussion 'D&D Class and Level Demography in the *Forgotten Realms*' <http://www.giantitp.com/forums/archive/index.php?t-91714.html> (last accessed 20/09/2010) and 'Will someone please explain *Forgotten Realms*' on the RPG net forum <http://www.giantitp.com/forums/archive/index.php?t-91714.html> (last accessed 20/09/2010).

leader. Vintar thus assumes a role as a supporting character to the ‘hero’ Serbitar, rather than taking his place as leader or first-tier position. When The Thirty combine their astral forms to construct the warrior Temple, it is Vintar who keeps a sense of himself and guides the others forth, preventing them from being consumed by the group mind. Thus, despite the lack of magical healing powers commonly attributed to RPG Clerics, Vintar possess the main characteristic that dominates the character Class stats, Wisdom.

While the function of the Cleric as healer is not emphasised in much GF literature, the concept of Cleric as spiritual guide and mentor does appear. In fact, it seems that because the Mage role is now heavily conceptualised as an active participant in the quest, and their function is to cast destructive magic, much of the traditional role of guide and mentor associated with wizards has passed to the more passive Cleric characters or non-active Mages. Conceptually this is not a large leap, as it essentially recognises the primary attribute of the Mage as Intelligence, useful in terms of knowledge-based guidance, but focuses on the Wisdom of the Cleric as essential to mentor/mentee relationships. It appears that the traditional literary role of the wizard mentor has been taken over by the Cleric as mage characters have a new function as spell-wielders, while the healing function of a Cleric can be easily replaced. An example of this can be seen in the characters of Kulgan and Father Tully in Feist’s *Magician*.

Kulgan is an adviser to the Duke of Crydee and initially enters the story as something of a benevolent noble, taking pity on Pug’s plight in a storm. Over the course of the first few chapters he becomes a mentor and friend to the young keep lad and ultimately takes him as an apprentice. Kulgan is of course a magician, but his role as magic-wielding Mage is never truly established, and it is his position as mentor to Pug that dominates his narrative:

Next to the fireplace a table sat, behind which a heavysset, yellow-robed figure rested on a bench. His grey hair and beard nearly covered his entire head, except for a pair of vivid blue eyes that twinkled in the firelight. A long pipe emerged from the beard, producing heroic clouds of pale smoke.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁷ Raymond E. Feist *Magician* Chapter 1p.8

Clearly the twinkling eyes, the beard and white hair as well as the reference to robes all correspond to the traditional wizard mentor associated with Gandalf and Merlin. Indeed, the description is especially reminiscent of Tolkien's Gandalf, even down to the pipe smoking. Yet Father Tully is also a guiding figure for the young Pug:

The magician was deep in conversation with Father Tully, a priest of Astalon the Builder and one of the Duke's oldest aides. Tully had been adviser to the Duke's father and had seemed old then. He now appeared ancient — at least to Pug's youthful perspective — but his eyes betrayed no sign of senility. Many a keep boy had been impaled upon the pointed gaze of those clear grey eyes. His wit and tongue were equally youthful, and more than once a keep boy had wished for a session with Horsemaster Algon's leather strap rather than a tongue-lashing from Father Tully. The white-haired priest could nearly strip the skin from a miscreant's back with his caustic words.⁴⁹⁸

As can be seen, the age of both characters has been emphasised and yet their eyes, or at least the quality of their gaze, have been made to seem more youthful or in some way timeless. This corresponds to the idea of the soul being visible through the eyes and someone who possesses enormous power and wisdom must then obviously evidence this through their gaze. Tully's white hair, piercing gaze and 'youthful' wit and tongue clearly illustrate his position as a mentor and wise man, yet the description seems slightly critical of his relationship with the young men of the keep. Where Kulgan is seen as a wise and avuncular figure, Tully is seen as a harsher task master and stern teacher. Interestingly, while both Kulgan and Tully perform minor spells and magics, neither is a particularly active spell-hurler or quest member and both perform the function of mentor at various stages in Pug's education. Conversely, Macros the Black, an active and powerful Mage character, while certainly Machiavellian in his machinations, and a guiding force of the actions, does not act as a true mentor to Pug in the main narrative. While the RPG Cleric may not act as healer in GF, it seems their wisdom is required to fill the void left by the shift of the Mage toward active participant in the adventure.

Hybrid Classes

Hybrid classes are generally blends of two or more of the four 'pure' skills Character Classes' above. An excellent example of a hybrid class is the Paladin. While essentially a Warrior Class character, Paladins also have some characteristics of the religiously magical Cleric Class. The Paladin is loosely modelled on the Knights

⁴⁹⁸ Raymond E. Feist *Magician* Chapter 2 p.25

Templar and the Chivalric Knight. As Paladins gain XP and levels, they acquire a small number of religious spells usually only available to Clerics, in addition to gaining many of the Warrior skills. The Paladin has none of the weapon restrictions traditionally placed on the Cleric and can therefore wield a sword, gain HP as if they were a Warrior class, but can never wield as many or as powerful clerical spells as the Cleric, and is not quite as specialised in melee combat as a 'pure' Warrior.

The Druid Class, on the other hand, is a Cleric blended with a Warrior, or a fighting Priest. This slight nuance can be seen in the similar clerical restrictions on armour and weapons applied to Druid characters, and the greater range of combat oriented 'spells' available to them beyond that of their clerical counterparts. The Druid is nature aspected and many of their spells are associated with the balance between nature and 'civilisation'. They are also less concerned with fighting spiritual battles against 'undead' or supernatural monsters like their Clerical counterparts, and more focussed on confronting natural and unnatural beasts, such as rogue bears and trolls.

Another hybrid class is the Ranger. Initially modelled on Aragorn from *LotR* the Ranger is a rogue/melee class that is able to dual-wield weapons like a Thief (due to the high levels of Dexterity), has similar limitations on armour, but is a more physical class with a greater specialisation in melee combat. They tend to be accomplished with ranged weapons, like the long bow, and are associated with wilderness locales, rather than the urban setting common to the Thief. In effect the Class represents a stealthy hunter who can move silently and undetected through the wilds, just as their urban counterpart the Thief can move through cities. The outdoor nature of their profession means that they usually have slightly higher Constitutional values and their combat focus means that they tend to cause more damage in melee than Thieves. The Hybrid class is further expanded by direct confluences of Character Classes such as Warrior-Thief, Thief-Mage and Cleric-Mage, in addition to character 'kits' which are nuanced and detail specific examples of the broader Classes. For example, the Assassin kit is a version of the Thief Class, but with a greater focus on stealth combat abilities and a reduction in lock picking, pick pocketing and other thief-like activities.

The idea of basic classes is useful shorthand for describing character types within GF in addition to RPGs. These character Classes have been distilled and adapted from

the core fantasy texts that Gygax outlined in ‘Appendix N’ and can be viewed as a structuralist approach to the foundational concepts at the heart of fantasy character types. These basic classes can be adapted, combined and developed to form many of the distinctive characters found in GF. By isolating core functions of character, fighting, thieving, spell-casting and healing, Gygax and Arneson identified the main narrative functions of quest characters and codified them into an endlessly adaptable system.

Class, Character and Attributes

Class not only defines the in-game profession of the character which usually demarcates the role the character will play in the group, but it also defines which weapons, armour and other items the character can use. This is done through the same process of rationalisation. Warriors can be expected to be familiar with all forms of weaponry and armour and will tend to favour the strongest and most powerful as they will aid them in their role as damage-dealer and damage absorber, whereas Thieves are aware of the different types of light armour and weapons that play to the strengths of their Class but do not impinge on their nature as a stealthy individual. The game therefore has codified the reasons and rationales for why characters and types of characters have stereotypical appearances and follow apparent conventions. Mages do not wield powerful weapons and dress in plate-mail because as characters they have researched and studied magical alternatives to such things, have not practiced using swords and shields, and as they have had little physical exercise, trapped in scriptoria studying scrolls for hours on end, lack the physique to comfortably accommodate heavy plate-mail or chainmail. As religious characters, Clerics have worked with the poor and the impoverished, performing physically demeaning tasks as part of their training in humility, and therefore they have a physical hardiness that Mages do not have. As a result of this physical hardiness Clerics may use the heavier, more substantial armour, whereas the physically weaker and less physical Mage classes make do with magically empowered robes that act almost as effectively as armour without any of the weight or cumbersome, uncomfortable bulk. The Cleric’s holy orders may forbid them from using bladed weapons, and so, like the Mage, have found alternatives to swords to use in combat.

The Class system demonstrates the RPG's need to explain and rationalise why and how gameworlds and fantasylands function, its need to rationalise the fantastic. This is not to say that every fantasyland or gameworld obeys the same rules, or that there are not exceptions to these rules within the same settings; rather these are examples of how the RPG conceives of fantasy worlds and has adapted existing conventions into a rule-based system. The external reason for these characteristics is to promote distinct playable character classes that each possess strengths, weaknesses and unique abilities and items. An obvious advantage in a co-operative game, it ensures that the players do not end up fighting over the one powerful sword found in a trove.

A specific RPG may adapt or re-conceptualise these basic Classes into more detailed or specific character types or kits, but they remain based on the general concepts outlined above:

The Character Kits are not new character classes. At the core of each, the character is still basically a fighter, wizard, thief or whatever. However, the kits allow characters, identical in class but from different cultures, to have special abilities and knowledge appropriate to their background. Thus, characters from the Uigan people are assumed to be skilled riders, while those of the Payan Mako can handle small boats. The Uigan would favor the short bow and lance; the Payan Mako the spear and club. These are only some of the minor differences that distinguish background. More significant abilities are also possible.⁴⁹⁹

What is consistent is that the character Classes form the basic building blocks of fantasy characters in the RPG which can then be adapted, altered and built upon, leading to a multitude of variation. This attitude toward character design is integral to the RPG concept of fantasy and quest groups. By divining what has been considered the essential nature of the different character types present in earlier GF, the RPG has created a codified form of character that can be added to the general definitions of hero-type found in the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* such as the Childe, the Lost Prince, etc. As a result, RPG Character Class can be used to deconstruct GF characters into function oriented constructs and to analyse their specific character traits, strengths and weaknesses. If fantasy characters directly correspond to these base Classes then we can identify their functions as core or generic traits, however, should characters prove

⁴⁹⁹ David Cook *Rule Book of Taladas* (Lake Geneva WI: TSR, 1989) p.8

exceptions to the standards then this reveals something of note about the character and text being analysed.

One nuanced point about character generation, however, that needs brief discussion is the potential conflict between the creation of a powerful character who will be adept at monster slaying and treasure looting, and a character who may be interesting to play. That is to say that the most powerful and ‘successful’ character may not be the aim of the gamer. As Fine explains:

The strain between role-playing and game playing is particularly evident in convention tournaments, where success is determined by the number of creatures killed and goals accomplished. This contrasts to many private games, in which success is connected to how one plays, not just how many enemies one defeats.⁵⁰⁰

A player may deliberately create a flawed character such as a weak Warrior, a stupid Mage, or an inept Thief, and enjoy the challenge of gaming such a character. This does not alter the reliance on the mechanics of character generation, nor does it change the fundamental attitude of function and mechanics dictating much character development. As such, even in the case of a deliberately flawed character, the concept of Class and the rules of character generation can still be usefully applied to discern why and how the character functions.

Statistical attributes, the mechanistic approach to character generation is an important part of the concept of the RPG and as a structuralist model has direct ramifications for the analysis of GF. The main attributes are generally variations of physical attributes and mental attributes; Strength, Constitution, and Dexterity form the physical characteristics, while; Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma are the mental attributes. Every character Class is defined by their core attributes, so physical Classes such as the Warrior depend on having high values assigned to physical stats in order to be powerful Warriors, while Mages are dependent on mental characteristics, in particular Intelligence, in order to be effective Mages. Characters with high Constitution will be hardy and have high hit points, while characters with high Charisma may be beautiful, compelling, persuasive, likeable and any of a multitude of interpretations. Conversely a character with low Constitution may be sickly or frail, either due to age or illness, and a low Charisma could be gamed as arrogance, an annoying voice or simply ugly

⁵⁰⁰ Fine *Shared Fantasy* p.212

features. The Stats are a way of mechanistically codifying important factors for in-game conflict resolution and character interaction, but it is how they are used, explained and developed as character traits that make them of interest in the study of GF characters. By combining the concept of Class derived from character function, with the qualifying statistical model of core attributes, we can construct an analytic frame with which to approach character analysis. As a result we can conceptualise complex characters as statistical models that exhibit patterns and therefore evaluate which characters fit standard statistical distributions and generic concepts, as well as provide data to prove innovation and originality in character function, design and role or highlight narrative inconsistencies and flaws.

As a group of individuals co-operating to achieve a goal, the model that the RPG quest group most resembles is that of Clute's Seven Samurai. However unlike the Seven Samurai, there is not one single problem to be solved, but rather a series of adventures to be experienced, and the adventurers may be entirely self-motivated by the desire to gain more experience and acquire better and more powerful equipment for their characters rather than the altruistic motivation that Clute ascribes to the Seven Samurai. Similarly, as the PCs are controlled by the gamers, and gamers are people, they are unlikely to continually follow one person as leader or hero without disagreeing or attempting to become the leader themselves. So while the co-operative nature of the band may initially mimic the Seven Samurai, the RPG quest group may change leader, focus and disposition on a regular basis. With any group there will always be those that assume command, those that follow and those that chafe to lead themselves. Added to this dynamic are the stats and attributes of the PCs which may cause players to role-play situations that they would not necessarily agree with. For instance if a Thief has an exceptionally high charisma and intelligence, and the Warrior character has low charisma, low intelligence, it would be hard to conceive of a group following the Warrior rather than the Thief character in terms of game reality. However, the gamer playing the warrior may be the most experienced gamer in the room and have an assertive personality and so the game dynamic can mirror the room dynamic. The interaction between game reality and player reality is discussed in depth in Fine's *Shared Fantasy* in which he discusses and analyses the different narrative and social frames employed by gamers to rationalise or explain inconsistent

game behaviour, character behaviour and the discrepancy between character knowledge and gamer knowledge.⁵⁰¹

In addition to this dispersal of leader and support roles throughout the group, an important consideration is the actual composition of the group in terms of Class. RPG gaming groups will often try to include at least one of each of the four major classes, Warrior, Thief, Mage and Cleric. The reason why these four classes form the core group in gaming is simple; with each class represented the group will be flexible enough to deal with almost any scenario and will have several options in how to resolve the situation. This is what Hickman refers to in terms of the 'balanced party'.⁵⁰²

A group made up of a band of Warriors has little option but to attack an enemy head on, they are susceptible to magical attack and, should one of them be injured or killed, there would be no-one available to heal them. If the group consists solely of a party of Mages without anyone to shield them from physical attack, they might not be able to cast any spells, as casting requires both concentration and time. A simple barrage of stones from slings might disrupt their concentration long enough for a single enemy to run among them with a sword and dispatch them with little, if any difficulty. A party of Clerics might be able to last for hours in battle against a mighty foe by continually praying for healing and armour spells, but their inability to cause massive amounts of damage would limit their effectiveness and potentially allow an enemy to call for reinforcements. A party of Thieves might be able to succeed due to the versatile nature of their Class but once again the lack of magic and healing at their disposal in combination with their limited choices in armour would result in greater chances of serious injury and therefore long periods of recuperation and the increased likelihood of death.

A balanced party is thus essential in order to deal with all narrative eventualities in game terms and aspects of this can be seen in fantasy literature. By choosing a group to be the focus of the narrative, either an author or a GM creates a mechanism by which several resolutions to any given problem are not only available but also

⁵⁰¹ Fine *Shared Fantasy* Chapter 6 'Frames and Games' pp.181-204

⁵⁰² Hickman *Annotated Chronicles* p.20

feasible. It has the added effect of allowing the author to utilise a wide variety of narrative situations secure in the knowledge that the group can deal with them, keeping the narrative flowing and interesting, and allowing for an exploration of the fantastic elements of the gameworld. The presence of a Mage allows for the inclusion of magic in the tale, a Warrior allows for combat and direct physical confrontations, the Thief brings in elements of stealth, covert action and subterfuge and the Cleric permits shorter healing and resting periods, all of which put together allows the action to flow without any great lulls being necessary while the characters, and readers, wait for a broken arm to heal. The statistics and Class system do not dictate every facet of the character, but they do allow for close comparisons and encourage a 'rational' approach to character creation and analysis.

While these basic characteristics may seem too reductive to adequately conceptualise the complexities of a literary character, these are the bare bones of the fuller character generation mechanism. An edited version of Drizzt Do'Urden's character sheet from the 3rd Edition *D&D* rules is included below:

Drizzt Do'Urden

Male Drow (Dark Elf), 16th-Level Ranger

Strength	13 (+1)
Dexterity	21 (+5)
Constitution	15 (+2)
Intelligence	17 (+3)
Wisdom	17 (+3)
Charisma	14 (+2)

Fortitude Save +12

Reflex Save +12

Will Save +8

Alignment: Chaotic good

Speed 30 ft.

Size M

Initiative +9 (Improved Initiative)

Armor Class 24 (+5 Dex, +9 armor)

Hit Points 92

Attack Bonus +16/+11/+6/+1 (primary weapon), +17/+12 (secondary weapon).

Ranger Spells (3/3/2/1): Drizzt is a follower of Mielikki, the goddess of the forest. Ranger spells he typically has prepared include: 1st--*animal friendship, entangle, pass without trace*; 2nd--*detect evil, hold animal, protection from elements*; 3rd --*control plants, neutralize poison*; 4th--*nondetection*.

Special: As a ranger, Drizzt gains a bonus to Bluff, Listen, Spot, and Track, as well as damage rolls against the following types of creatures: goblinoids (+4), magical beasts (+3), evil outsiders (+2), and vermin (+1). As a drow, he can use the following spell-like abilities, each once per day, as a sorcerer of his level: *dancing lights*, *faerie fire*, and *darkness*. He has darkvision and +2 to saving throws against spells and spell-like effects; he's lost his normal spell resistance, as he's been on the surface too long.

Languages: Drizzt speaks Common, Elven, Dwarven, and Undercommon (the language of the Underdark).

Possessions: mithral *chain mail* +4, a *frostbrand* +3 scimitar (named Icingdeath), a *defender* +5 scimitar (named Twinkle), and a *figurine of wondrous power*, an onyx panther named Guenhwyvar (see the end of this entry for more information). Drizzt carries a mix of adventuring gear, including some drow and dwarven equipment.

Appearance: Somewhat larger than a typical dark elf, Drizzt stands 5'4" and weighs about 130 lbs. His handsome features are sharp and well proportioned; his white hair is long, flowing, and smooth. His violet eyes are windows to his passionate soul. He normally wears a fur-collared forest-green cloak and high black boots. It has been more than 70 years since he first ventured into the surface world and at present he is in the neighbourhood of 140 years old—still a young adult by elven standards.⁵⁰³

Drizzt's full character sheet contains even more information and background detail, but this example should illustrate the complexity of the character mechanism when fully implemented. The base stats, when combined with the character kit and the Class modifiers create a representative picture of the character. By then adding supplemental information, such as against which monsters Drizzt gains a 'bonus' when fighting, we can extrapolate character history and motivation.

As a worshipper of Mielikki Drizzt will protect 'innocent' animals and oppose evil creatures and monsters such as orcs and goblins. His bonuses against 'goblinoids' can be read as specialisation in fighting these creatures and as a desire to destroy them. As his alignment is Chaotic Good, we know that he will try to engage in heroic acts, rather than villainous ones, but also that he is willing to break laws if he feels they are unjust.⁵⁰⁴ That one of the spells he typically prepares is 'Detect Evil' suggests that he uses it frequently and that knowing whether something or someone is evil or good is an important factor for him. These aspects fit with his class as a Ranger who lives in

⁵⁰³ This is taken from the official 3rd Edition Rules available at http://www.wizards.com/forgottenrealms/FR_3E_Drizzt.asp [last accessed 29/11/10]

⁵⁰⁴ Alignment is outlined in Appendix One – Glossary, but essentially it is a gaming construction that determines the ethical model for a PC arranged in a grid formation with Lawful, Neutral and Chaotic combined with Good, Neutral and Evil, thus allowing nine basic alignments.

the wilderness far from civilised rule, but is attempting to make the wild less dangerous.

His loss of the natural Drow spell resistance ‘because he has been on the surface too long’ tells us that he has long since abandoned the Underdark and that he has survived above ground for a significant period of time. This gains additional significance when one considers the suspicion and fear with which Drow are often viewed by surface dwellers. His knowledge of Elven suggests that he has come into contact with surface Elves and has not only survived the encounter but has engaged in sufficient conversation to master the language. His knowledge of Dwarven, in addition to his use of Dwarven equipment, indicates a close relationship with at least one Dwarven clan. Given that the Dwarves of *Forgotten Realms* traditionally dislike Elves in general, and hate Drow in particular, this fact implies that Drizzt is an impressive and notable character and has led an interesting life.

This knowledge of the character is derived from elements created through the mechanistic character generation system employed by *D&D*. The character generation system was constructed by taking a structuralist perspective of the elements that make up fantasy characters as was discussed in relation to ‘Appendix N’. Of academic treatment of character and characters Schlobin notes ‘Vladimir Propp’s stock characters reduce them to functions in plot’ and that ‘for French narratologists, characters are means and not ends’.⁵⁰⁵ While Schlobin’s article argues against this structuralist approach, the balanced party as a concept necessitates treating quest companions and characters from a structuralist perspective examining their talents and functions. Despite this Schlobin’s point is well taken as the principle of the RPG was to systematise and mechanise the creation of characters, while the game-play or narrativisation of the characters was to address characterisation and build upon the structural formulae. Therefore, the basic stats and class of characters is just the starting point for the development and characterisation. For example, although Eddings’ Silk, Salvatore’s Artemis Entreri and Erikson’s Kalam Mekhar each perform the function of Rogue and Assassin within their texts, how they fulfil that function and how that role is utilised and adapted is radically different in terms of

⁵⁰⁵ Roger C. Schlobin ‘Character, the Fantastic, and the Failure of Contemporary Literature’ *JFA* Vol.13 No.3 (2003) pp.258-270.

characterisation. Silk, the humorous cynic, combines supporting thief and rogue characteristics with the function of comic-relief; Artemis, the evil, cold enemy is an implacable enemy and a dark mirror of the hero Drizzt; and Kalam is powerful and darkly heroic but also an efficient killing machine who apparently paradoxically is intensely protective of his friends. Yet, by using the *D&D* Class model we can compare these disparate characters and note similarities in terms of their functions, strengths, defining characteristics and behaviour.

While the specific game mechanics and the use of arbitrary statistics to represent characters traits may seem superfluous to existing techniques already employed in character analysis, the conventions highlighted by these techniques remain useful and practical. The function of dictating physical characteristics, descriptions, weapons and arms, as well as influencing characterisation has been codified in well defined and specific terms, yet remains flexible enough to be used to begin any more complex analysis of non-gaming based GF.

Companions and Character Classes

The concepts of companions and the idea of the hero-centric narrative are perhaps two of the most useful and accurate models that investigate the quest group. Clute's discussion of the companions highlights two inter-related terms, 'Seven Samurai'⁵⁰⁶ and 'Dirty Dozen',⁵⁰⁷ which he uses describe how companions in GF can be grouped. A different focus and approach to the companions can be found in 'Crowning the King' where Mendlesohn's Prince and Courtier designation analyses group power dynamics in hero-centric quest narratives.⁵⁰⁸ These critical approaches are representative of the analytical frame deployed to examine fantasy quest groups in modern literary analysis. The Seven Samurai, applicable to groups of quest heroes, while originally taken from the iconic samurai film of the same name, is primarily understood as a convention from the film Western.⁵⁰⁹ The Dirty Dozen, an adaptation

⁵⁰⁶ John Clute *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* p. 272

⁵⁰⁷ John Clute *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* p. 853

⁵⁰⁸ Farah Mendlesohn 'Crowning the King: Harry Potter and the Construction of Authority' *JFA* Vol. 12 no. 3, Fall 2001 pp. 287-308.

⁵⁰⁹ The film *Seven Samurai*, (Toho Company, 1954) was co-written by the director Akira Kurosawa and was loosely based on an historical anecdote he had found in his research of the Samurai, but it is

of the Seven Samurai concept into a more military setting and frame, again is associated with the classic film of the same name. Both of Clute's descriptors reference how their respective groups are constituted, and allude to the individual members' roles and functions within the group.⁵¹⁰ Mendlesohn's Prince and the Courtier is directed at the analysis of group dynamics in hero-centric texts, paying particular attention to how the companions are subordinate to and part of the hero. Mendlesohn's approach highlights the concepts of central hero and supporting companions, rather than the group of heroes suggested by the Seven Samurai or Dirty Dozen.

The combination of these approaches creates an accurate frame for the analysis of quest groups, but both approaches can be enhanced by taking into account the balanced party found in RPGs and RPGFs. By adapting these approaches, blending them with the nuances and terminology taken from RPG quest groups, the combined framework is much more durable and fantasy specific. For this to be proven, the concept of the balanced party will be considered and the RPG quest group will be offered as a mediation between Clute's and Mendlesohn's techniques as it builds on their existing architecture and assimilates them into a more flexible and accurate conceptual framework. Before the RPG can be shown to enhance these approaches, a more developed analysis of Clute's and Mendlesohn's approaches is necessary.

Seven Samurai and Dirty Dozen

Jones, in the *Tough Guide*, makes the following observation, 'companions are chosen for you by the Management. You will normally meet them for the first time at the outset of the adventure'.⁵¹¹ Jones' reference to 'companions' is a direct notation of the common construction within GF of quest groups, bands of heroes and the supporting heroes who accompany the central protagonist on their quest. In his list of the 'items' necessary for an epic fantasy Eddings notes:

the film's relationship to *The Magnificent Seven*, dir. by John Sturges, (Mirisch-Alpha Production, 1960) and subsequent Westerns that popularised the term in English.

⁵¹⁰ *The Seven Samurai* was adapted as *The Magnificent Seven* 1960 dir John Sturges. *The Dirty Dozen* 1967 dir. Robert Aldrich was based on E.M. Nathanson's novel, *The Dirty Dozen* 1965 and while the book was a bestseller, it was the film that achieved a wider impact and spawned several sequels.

⁵¹¹ Wynne Jones *The Tough Guide* p.46

Item eight is the obligatory group of ‘companions’, that supporting cast of assorted muscular types from various cultures who handle most of the killing and mayhem until the hero grows up to the point where he can do his own violence on the bad guys.⁵¹²

While Clute in the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* defines companions as:

Heroes and heroines who embark upon quests, as is normal in Genre Fantasy, almost always either set off with companions or acquire them along the way. [...] Two subcategories are used in this encyclopedia to help describe the various groupings characteristic of Heroic Fantasy as it has developed over the last half-century. They are The Dirty Dozen, a group brought together by force, and most often found in Military Fantasy; and the Seven Samurai, a voluntary association (like those in Tolkien) commonly found throughout adventure fantasy.⁵¹³

Clute, Eddings and Jones all recognise the common convention of groups and parties of heroes within GF and Clute suggests that there are in fact two main group constructs commonly found in GF: Seven Samurai and Dirty Dozen.

It is interesting to note that although Tolkien’s *LotR* was published contemporaneously to *The Seven Samurai* and predates the *The Dirty Dozen* film, Clute uses the frames of reference adapted from these films to describe the quest group formations found in GF.⁵¹⁴ Clute’s use of a commonly known and understood cultural description, instead of a literary derived term, or even the term ‘Fellowship’ from Tolkien’s novels,⁵¹⁵ as well as the use of a later modern term instead of the one identified earlier, creates a strong precedent for the use of RPG terms and concepts as accurate descriptors for the analysis of GF. As long as they prove useful and accurate, it does not matter that they approach fantasy from a different perspective and are not ‘literary’. As mentioned, Clute’s definition acknowledges the prevalence of the quest group in GF and proposes two main aspects of each group:

Dirty Dozen:

A group of companions gathered together by force, and which normally functions as some kind of military unit. Hierarchy is enforced, the top of the triangle normally occupied by the original recruiter [...] DDs are normally recruited to gain

⁵¹² David Eddings *The Rivan Codex* (London: voyager, 1999) introduction p.8

⁵¹³ Clute, ‘Companions’ in Clute and Grant eds, *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* pp.220-221

⁵¹⁴ Admittedly the story of *The Seven Samurai* was developed after Tolkien had written much of *LotR*, but the publication of *LotR* was in 1954 and 1955 and therefore it is safe to assume that *The Seven Samurai* reached a larger audience initially.

⁵¹⁵ The *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* does list ‘Fellowships’ but directs the reader to the entry on ‘Companions’.

a specific goal, the attainment of which almost certainly involves physical conflict and which exploits the combat skills of the team.⁵¹⁶

Seven Samurai:

A term used here to designate a gathering of companions, usually in a heroic fantasy venue, who have come together voluntarily in order to further a goal, and who frequently stay together after that goal has been accomplished. [...] The essence of the SS grouping is that it is *voluntary*, that its goals are not simply self-concerned; unlike the case with a Dirty Dozen, there is no hierarchy [...] They have probably come together at the behest of a central figure, who himself or herself has a quest to obey, or a polder (perhaps a village) to defend; or they may unite to defend some other person – or perhaps the land itself – from a plight.⁵¹⁷

Although they are inter-related terms, the specifics of each will be dealt with in turn. In a Dirty Dozen quest group, Clute identifies several main conceptual traits; a military focus, a strict hierarchy, and a definite mission or goal accepted under duress or threat. A recent example of this type of group and narrative construction can be found in Sturges' *Midwinter* (Pyr, 2009), in which specific prisoners are offered a pardon should they undertake a dangerous clandestine mission for the queen, but a prominent example in GF can be found in Feist's *Serpentwar Saga*, part of the *Riftwar Saga*, in particular the first book of the tetralogy, *Shadows of a Dark Queen* (1994). In this book, the characters of Erik and Roo are forcibly drafted into an elite army unit. They are asked to choose between a certain death sentence in prison or the possibility of a pardon if they serve as 'desperate men' in a military 'suicide squad'.

The parallels to the original Dirty Dozen are quite clear, and at least the militaristic aspect of the book neatly fits Clute's definition. As the *Serpentwar Saga* develops, however, the military aspect becomes more about the camaraderie between soldiers and less about the specific goal oriented mission outlined in the first book, and therefore the parallels to the Dirty Dozen become fewer and less specific. In particular, as Erik becomes a commander in the force, and it is combined with the traditional military of the realm, the military focus is retained, as is the strict hierarchy and loyalty to Calis as the original recruiter, but the plot focuses more on the military campaign and less on the individual unit structure. So while the Dirty Dozen is initially a very useful and accurate label for the structure, the focus of the series soon moves away from this model to a more traditional heroic military tale.

⁵¹⁶ Clute, 'Dirty Dozen', in Clute and Grant eds, *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, p.272

⁵¹⁷ Clute, 'Seven Samurai' in Clute and Grant eds, *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, p.853

Additionally, though a useful descriptor for the general formation of the group, the appellation Dirty Dozen does not attempt to describe the type of characters who generally appear in the group, such as a mage, thief, cleric or warrior in GF. If anything, the Dirty Dozen label would suggest that every member of the group is a warrior of some kind, given the military connotation. This does not, however, quite encapsulate the fantastic ‘reality’ of GF in which squad mages, martial clerics, paladins and similar could be common place in military squads, thus leading to a more divergent dynamic than the strictly enforced hierarchy suggested by Clute. Steven Erikson’s ‘Bridgeburner’ soldiers, in the *Malazan Book of the Fallen*, encapsulate this blend of military hierarchy and character anarchy with the interactions between captains, sergeants, squad mages, and assassin characters. In particular the relationship between Quick Ben, a mage, Kalam, an assassin, and their commanding officer, Whiskeyjack, illustrate the casual relationship to military hierarchy, but a deferral according to expertise.⁵¹⁸

Clute notes that his proposed classification is commonly found in Military Fantasy specifically, rather than in GF more generally, and thus it is an unfair criticism to then say it does not apply to a great number of GF texts. Yet, the specificity of this label, while clearly illustrative, is also a limitation, as the specific focus on the militaristic association and the strict hierarchy limits the flexibility of the approach to define groups with less obvious parallels to the Dirty Dozen.

At this juncture, then, that Clute’s identification of the Seven Samurai model merits discussion. As a concept the Seven Samurai encapsulates a more egalitarian grouping, moving away from the strict military hierarchy. This does not preclude a Seven Samurai group having a ‘leader’, but rather the group has coalesced around a central figure who may or may not be the agreed upon leader. In Gemmell’s *The Quest for Lost Heroes* (1990), the grouping is instigated by the young point of view character, Kiall, who recruits the famed heroes of Bel-azar: Chareos the veteran blademaker, Beltzer the brutish axe-man, and the hunters, Finn and Maggrig. The quest group, when constituted, primarily consists of an older military unit of veterans who have been brought back together to help Kiall rescue a young girl, Ravenna,

⁵¹⁸ See in particular Steven Erikson, *Gardens of the Moon*, (London: Bantam, 1999). Although published in 1999 the book was written in 1991-1992.

captured by slavers. Here the distinction that Clute highlights in the Seven Samurai becomes apparent. Had Kiall not been present it would have been easier to categorise the heroes of Bel-azar as a Dirty Dozen, particularly if an old commander had ordered them to rescue the girl. However, the group are not ordered to help Kiall, they do not have to join the quest, and they decide to let Chareos lead, rather than the 'recruiter' Kiall, due to the veteran blademaker's experience and hidden noble heritage. Decisions as to where and how they will pursue the 'quest' are decided through discussion and an agreed upon plan of action. As a result, this group appears to fall into the Seven Samurai category, despite the military nature and structure of the group.

The Seven Samurai appears to be the clearest and most accurate form of labelling quest groups within GF. It seems an appropriate term to describe the quest group from Tolkien's *LotR* for example. Yet as a concept Clute has adapted a pre-existing label and thus there are nuances to the label not explicitly outlined in his definition. The Seven Samurai are generally external to the goal, threat or mission. That is, if the mission or quest is to protect a polder, the Seven Samurai group are external to the polder, and the focus is from the perspective of the internal group awaiting rescue or heroes to fix the problem rather than on the group itself. In the case of the Heroes of Bel-azar, there is a clearly defined mission external to the group, but for the majority of the text the mission remains a nebulous goal rather than the specific task of the Seven Samurai. That is not to say that the narrative will ignore the group, but rather the focus of the narrative will be drawn to the conflict, the problem or the mission, and how the group rectifies the situation, rather than focusing on the group and how they grow, change and encounter new adventures. It is the goal as Macguffin that drives the plot, rather than the evolving relationships in the group and the growth of characters. So while the rescue of Ravenna is a goal or mission, it acts as Macguffin for the plot, rather than being a specific focus of the plot.

The initial mission to rescue the young girl is therefore not central to the novel, and the narrative soon moves to focus on the history of the band, their place in the world and, most importantly, their fate, rather than remaining focused on their quest. The narrative then intertwines the initial quest with a prophecy from the band's history and the story diverges heavily from the initially straightforward mission suggested by

the Seven Samurai grouping. In fact, the quest is used as a narrative tool in order to explore the history and fate of the heroes of Bel-azar, and therefore this seems to challenge the narrative implications suggested by Clute's label. The resolution of the story treats the rescue of Ravenna as almost incidental to the central narrative concerning the fate of the heroes of Bel-azar, despite the initial importance of Ravenna's rescue. The Seven Samurai, as a concept borrowed from film Westerns, leans more heavily toward the image of a group of strangers riding into town, the formation of a posse to deal with trouble, or a lone gunslinger recruiting allies to take out an opponent. There are clear parallels between this sort of grouping and the fantasy quest group, but the Seven Samurai is a description through analogy and parallel, rather than the RPG quest group which is formed from the genre, and is perhaps textually closer to the fantasy quest group. In the instance of the Heroes of Bel-azar, much like Tolkien's Fellowship, there is a general quest and goal of the group, but the focus remains on the journey and the development of characters along the way, not on the end-game or resolution of the mission. As a result, the designation of Seven Samurai is not completely accurate in its depiction of the quest group or the focus of the narrative.

The Seven Samurai group from the film each possess specific character traits and abilities or 'talents' that to some extent define them: Kanbei Shimada is the leader and is a war weary veteran, much like Athos the musketeer; Shichiroji is the serious lieutenant and could be comparable to Sulu Katsushiro from *Star Trek* and is a young, enthusiastic but 'green' warrior, and therefore possibly the d'Artagnan or Chekhov of the group; Gorobei is the archer and expert marksman, and while there is no simple parallel, the character of the expert archer can be seen in Tolkien's Legolas and Eddings' Lelldorin; Heihachi is the amiable, comic relief and is perhaps comparable to Porthos; Kyuzo is the master swordsman and parallels Aramis; Kikuchiyo is the peasant dreaming of being a noble and trying to live by the samurai code and, like Katsushiro, could be compared to d'Artagnan. Although each is ostensibly a samurai, they are somewhat defined by their specific abilities, beyond their personalities and physical appearances. In this respect they appear to correspond to how Class and function are defined in RPG groups. This same approach can be seen in *The Magnificent Seven*, the Western remake of *The Seven Samurai*, in that the characters have roles depicted by function, but not as obviously or to the same extent. Chris is

the leader and veteran, while Chico is the young, inexperienced gun fighter. Britt is the knife expert, and Bernardo is a crack shot. Harry is one of Chris' old friends, and the group is rounded out with Vin, a mercenary and opportunistic fighter, and Lee, an outlaw. While it is not new to describe characters through function, the Class system of the RPG and its importance during character generation formalise the emphasis on function and 'talent' as the most fundamental aspects of the character, even to the extent of affecting characterisation and plot.

A clear advantage the Balanced Party has over these other formulations of quest groups is that the RPG party is fantasy specific and acknowledges the 'talents' and character types of the genre, rather than referring to them by analogy. Due to the RPG's focus on group co-operation, it also succinctly encapsulates the egalitarian and voluntary nature of the Seven Samurai grouping. As the Balanced Party is predicated on the character generation system of RPGs, which were distilled from the genre itself, the character types, their functions and appearance and their place in the group, are all more accurately reflected in the Balanced Party concept, than in the terms proposed by Clute which by definition and construction are analogous rather than descriptive.

Prince and Courtier found in 'Crowning the King'

A second approach to quest group dynamics can be found in Mendlesohn's 'Crowning the King'.⁵¹⁹ Although the focus of Mendlesohn's article is a close analysis of the first four of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* books, Mendlesohn highlights an exceptionally useful framework for exploring the power hierarchy within quest groups, the idea of a Prince and his courtiers. The group dynamic that Mendlesohn discusses is one comprised of a central hero and supporting companions. Where the Dirty Dozen and the Seven Samurai may be primarily group based, the Prince and Courtier model focuses on the hero:

First, these companions function as courtiers: their talents are, by extension, their prince's talents, and their deeds reflect his glory (one of the best manipulations of this trope can be found in John Barnes' witty novel, *One for the Morning Glory*,

⁵¹⁹ Mendlesohn, 'Crowning the King' pp. 287-308

1996). But secondly, the role of the companions, combined with the hereditary nature of Potter's own intrinsic qualities, create a peculiarly passive hero to whom things happen, which he suffers and bears, but who rarely proceeds in a proactive manner. Potter does not search out trouble, nor does he willingly enter upon quests, yet he is presented at various times as a shining prince.⁵²⁰

Mendlesohn's concept can be easily mapped onto the heroes of Jordan or Goodkind's series, with both Rand al'Thor and Richard Cypher/Rahl assuming the role of point-of-view character and reader avatar, supported by a cast of heroes. In the case of Rand, he is initially accompanied by the roguish Matt and the strong Perrin. In Goodkind's series, Richard is aided by the magical priestess Kahlan, the wizard Zeddicus and, at times, the magical Mord Sith and Sisters of Light. This form of analysis is applicable to study of the various *Star Trek* command officers and the numerous shows and films that have used this popular model. In both cases, SF and Fantasy, the powers and abilities or 'talents' of the companions are utilised to further the hero's journey and help him accomplish his goals, just as Mendlesohn notes the use of Ron and Hermione as extensions of Harry as hero:

Where Harry's success does not rest on inheritance (whether material or genetic) it rests instead on the attributes of his companions. Repeatedly in the Potter books, it is not Potter who displays ingenuity, intelligence, or bravery, but his companions: the redoubtable and brilliant Hermione; the kind, reckless and incredibly strong Hagrid; the faithful and dogged Ron. This is no coincidence, nor is it simply a children's author attempting to demonstrate that friendship makes one strong. Traditionally, fairy tale and fantasy have surrounded the hero with companions (some of whom, like Cedric Diggory in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* have proved expendable) but the role of the companions has been twofold. First, they provide their skills to enable the hero to achieve specific things for which the hero and not they, take the credit and the prize.⁵²¹

In this analysis Mendlesohn highlights the power dynamic at the centre of the narrative construction, that the hero is all. Therefore, when considering the hero-centric GF tale Mendlesohn's approach clearly dissects the group dynamic and explains how it functions. In an analysis of Goodkind or Jordan's series, this approach is clearly essential in order to discuss the power dynamic and the construction of the wider narrative as a supporting structure for the hero's adventures. However, as the focus is on the power dynamic and narrative impact, Mendlesohn does not attempt to analyse the specific powers and types of characters that support the hero beyond an initial labelling of core traits. These stereotypical character

⁵²⁰ Mendlesohn 'Crowning the King'

⁵²¹ Mendlesohn, 'Crowning the King' pp. 287-308

focuses, such as the loyal Ron, the strong Hagrid and the intelligent Hermione, are an aspect of function and RPG Class-driven characters. Class in this sense being RPG Class rather than the social class dynamic Mendlesohn interrogates. The RPG quest group is based around character function, ability and specific talents and attributes that are summarised by Class. If Mendlesohn's Prince and Courtier approach is combined with an awareness of RPG character design then the applicability and flexibility of her analysis increases and applies to a larger sample set beyond the hero-centric tale.

The combination of Clute's Seven Samurai and Mendlesohn's Prince and Courtier creates an accurate frame for the analysis of many quest groups, but both approaches can be enhanced by taking account of the balanced party model and concept of RPGs and RPGFs. If we adapt these approaches, blending them with the nuances and terminology taken from RPG quest groups, the combined framework is much more durable and fantasy specific.

The Balanced Party

The concept of the balanced party finds its literary roots in the construction of the Fellowship, from *LotR*. At the Council of Elrond several characters step forward to join Frodo on his perilous quest to destroy the Ring. Aragorn offers his sword, Gimli his axe and Legolas his bow. These symbolic gestures are the essential kernel of the function-driven Character Class system of RPGs and the inspiration for the balanced party, characters defined by their 'talent' and function, associations with specific weapons, and a blend of character types and traits so that the group is flexible enough to deal with any eventuality. As Erikson remarks concerning his own authorial experience with RPGs:

We [...] assemble those teams on the basis of various talents to make the group well-rounded and capable of meeting any threat, a 'balanced party'. In other words, [...] [Gygax] systematized *LotR* and that system has extended through numerous forms of entertainment [...], and for all its initial strictures, it is malleable, adaptable beyond belief. It has, in fact, moved far beyond fantasy itself.⁵²²

⁵²² Steven Erikson 'The World of the Malazan Empire and Role-Playing Games' www.stevenerikson.com [last accessed 21/11/10].

The malleability of the balanced party as a concept, both in terms of narrative and as a meta-textual commentary on quest groups, forms the substance of this section. Two examples are given below which illustrate how the concept of the balanced party can enhance the current approaches to quest groups in GF. The first is from the *Dragonlance Chronicles*, and the second from David Eddings' *Belgariad*.

The party of adventurers constructed in the first book of the *Dragonlance Chronicles* is modelled on the gaming group that play-tested the associated RPG. Therefore, as a straightforward illustration of the balanced party in fantasy literature, Weis and Hickman's trilogy seems apt. The core group consists of: Tanis Half-Elven (Half-Elf Fighter), Caramon Majerie (Human Fighter), Sturm Brightblade (Human Fighter), Flint Fireforge (Dwarf Fighter), Riverwind (Human Ranger), Goldmoon (Human Cleric), Raistlin Majerie (Human Mage) and Tasslehoff Burrfoot (Kender Thief).⁵²³

The first thing to note is that the group does not need to consist of only one of each basic class, and that the group can of course be as large or as small as the GM or author wishes in game or novel respectively. The *Dragonlance* group consists of four primary melee classes, a secondary melee class, a cleric, a mage and a rogue class. This represents a combat oriented, but flexible, group, with each 'talent' or special skill catered for. Weis and Hickman make separate notations about this construction in the *Annotated Dragonlance Chronicles*:

Well, it's time to tally up. We've got a barbarian, a paladin-wanna-be, a half-elf bowman, a diminutive thief, a dwarf, a magic-user, and now a female cleric healer. A typical *AD&D* group. – TRH

Putting the game aside, I think it is the diverse nature of the party that people can relate to. In most groups of friends, each person contributes something unique. The whole is stronger than its separate parts. – MW⁵²⁴

While there are clear parallels between the game version of the party and the novelised version, there are a number of discrepancies. For instance, while in the novels Sturm is described as wearing 'full plate armour and chain mail' the game

⁵²³ This is the original party as given in the *Dragonlance* module *Dragons of Despair* DL1, and as appears in the first book of *The Dragonlance Chronicles: Dragons of Autumn Twilight*. References to character stats and equipment have been taken from the module unless noted otherwise.

⁵²⁴ Weis and Hickman *Annotated Chronicles* p.54

module equips him only with chain mail.⁵²⁵ Hickman notes in the *Annotated Dragonlance Chronicles* that Sturm's archetypal place in the party is that of 'the obligatory paladin',⁵²⁶ yet in the game he is described as a '6th Level Human Fighter' and not a paladin.⁵²⁷ On balance, the overall constructions and deployment of the party remains much the same, regardless of the minor details. The emphasis remains on a flexible and dynamic group which contains at least one of each of the *D&D* character types.

Mendlesohn's Prince and Courtier argument works well with hero-centric groups, but there is no central hero in the original *Dragonlance* group. Initially Tanis is portrayed as the group leader, at least in general terms, but the group frequently turns to other members for guidance and wisdom as the situation demands. When captured by Draconians, it is Tas who plans and then orchestrates the plan that sets them free. When walking through Darken Wood it is Raistlin whose advice is followed given his knowledge of the arcane and the experience he has with magic. Sturm guides them to the heart of the forest by following a white hart only he can see, due to his purity and nobility of heart, and perhaps his head wound. This shifting emphasis of 'leader' mimics the structure of the RPG in which PCs are often given specific tasks or chances to take a more central role, in order that the players do not get bored.

As with the RPG itself, the balanced party operates on two different levels, in this case: the player dynamic and the PC dynamic. Fine notes how the group dynamic can be affected by social hierarchies, such as 'seniority' of the gamer within the group or society, age of the gamer, and pre-existing friendship groups.⁵²⁸ In particular he suggests that while players in all groups vie for attention, the GM will respond 'to players depending on his evaluation of them' and discusses how this evaluation could be based on gaming skill, seniority within the gaming club, and friendship or familial bonds.⁵²⁹

⁵²⁵ Weis and Hickman *The Annotated Chronicles* p.39

⁵²⁶ *The Annotated Chronicles* p.39

⁵²⁷ Hickman *Dragons of Despair* (DL 1) p.15

⁵²⁸ Fine *Shared Fantasy* Chapters 5 and 7 in particular.

⁵²⁹ Fine *Shared Fantasy* p.156

Fine observes that as each player controls a PC, the communal constructed narrative is seen from both that character's perspective, as well as the individual gamer's perspective. He argues that 'players have personal orientations to the game which are reflected in the group's perspective'.⁵³⁰ By this, each player views the game from the perspective of their PC as central hero, but as part of the wider group, in addition to perceiving the gamer dynamic and their place within it. Fine discusses this in reference to 'frames'. This can be seen in the shifting dynamic between players and Gamesmaster and the related shifting dynamics in PC orientation and focus. The construction of the group in terms of leadership dynamic may also radically shift during the game and can be dependent on a number of factors beyond narrative constructions. If a player feels that their PC has been neglected and has little to do, they can easily become bored causing them to leave early, act out against the group or disrupt play:

George, Barry and I were having our characters learn magical spells. Ted's character, a fighter with no magical abilities, had nothing to do while this happening, and complained to Jerry (the referee) that this wasn't fair. After a while, Jerry told Ted "OK, you learned Froginese, so you can talk to frogs." Ted took this comment seriously, and his character found a frog to talk with. Jerry thought this was rather foolish, and said that Ted's character would have to get rid of the frog, but Ted insisted that his character wanted the frog. Finally Barry's character turned Ted's frog into one-twentieth its normal size, so Ted's character could carry it on the ship.⁵³¹

As a consequence, good GMs often structure games so that every player has a chance to 'lead', be important and become central to the co-operative narrative being formed, or at the very least not neglect the skills and focus of the various PCs. Fine discusses this in relation to leader hierarchies within gaming groups and outlines some of the strategies employed to create co-operative play comprising four basic models; Single leader; task specialisation; group consensus; and anarchy.⁵³² Single leader is usually utilised when there is a large gaming group or a dominant or experienced player. Task specialisation is based on the division of labour within the group and will occur when GMs include in the scenario a specific instance or sequence in which certain PCs and their skills become essential, before shifting the narrative or sequence to

⁵³⁰ Fine *Shared Fantasy* p.145

⁵³¹ Fine *Shared Fantasy* p.140 Incidentally, a character from the *Balder's Gate* series of games by Bioware carries a miniature, giant space hamster, Boo, in one of his equipment slots, and it cannot be removed. There are several text responses from the character, Minsc, if you try to remove Boo. It would appear that the programmers in Bioware were aware of this particular anecdote.

⁵³² Fine *Shared Fantasy* pp.172-179

focus on other members of the group. So while Tanis may appear as the erstwhile hero leading the group, other characters take charge and assume leading roles during the adventure. The use of character specific incidents and sequences to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the group is a common technique to keep the group working together and engaged in the game. The third form, group consensus, effectively mirrors the egalitarian nature of Clute's Seven Samurai, in that each member of the group gets a vote in what the group is to do. As a consequence of this structure, rotation of leadership and responsibility can happen frequently, each character can at times act as leader, even if the group usually defers to one character or another, as the game tests PCs' particular areas of expertise. This shift of focus to the PC skills and attributes highlights the importance of PCs to the quest group dynamic formed, but the consideration of the players behind the PCs should not be forgotten when the PC group is analysed. A combination of task specialisation and group consensus is probably the most common form of group organisation within established gaming groups, particularly if they are experienced or know each other well. Fine's last category of anarchy appears to be the default when other forms have failed, 'a consequence of the single leader [failing] to take command, coupled with the failure of the consensus model of leadership' led to anarchy in a group Fine was observing.⁵³³

As a consequence of these various factors, a more complicated dynamic has evolved in which elements of both Mendlesohn's Prince and Courtier and Clute's Seven Samurai can be seen. In the PC specific visualisation of the communal narrative the PC assumes the role of Prince with the other PCs performing the role of Courtier and supporting the PC's quest to succeed. Of course the other PCs are also taking this approach to the game dynamic, as each is the hero of their own story, and as the game brings focus on different players at different times, this allows for a steady cycle of central hero through each of the players in turn. The concept of consensual play and the general group dynamic also bears parallels to Clute's Seven Samurai, in that the actions of the group are agreed upon through debate and there is no one specific person who is always the hero.

⁵³³ Fine *Shared Fantasy* p.176

Despite the *Dragonlance* group lacking a central ‘Prince’ figure, Tanis is the ostensible leader, and as the series develops he assumes more characteristics of the hero. The story begins to investigate the love triangle between Tanis, Kitiara and Laurana, focussing more on the complicated backstory and history of the Half-Elf. Hickman notes:

Tanis’ troubled background grew out of what seemed, in the beginning, to be relatively basic choices. When the design group came up with the initial ‘party of adventurers’, we wanted a mix of *AD&D* racial types – humans, dwarves, kender etc. At some point in an effort to balance the capabilities of the game personae for play, it was determined we needed a half-elf character. What was a simple choice for the game, however, had large implications for the character. It was not enough simply to say he was half-elf: we had to know why. The result of answering this ‘why’ made Tanis into the central figure of the story – and a complex character with depth. Such large consequences from such a simple game.⁵³⁴

This comment highlights the fact that the Character Class and construction is only a simple building block that can be adapted and developed through narrative. Tanis’ back-story, implied by his unusual heritage, requires little development in terms of game mechanic, but in narrative terms became hugely important. As the product of rape, Tanis has a complicated relationship with the human half of his heritage, but equally he was never fully accepted by his mother’s Elven kin. The tensions developed through the investigation of his back-story, in particular the relationship with Laurana, an Elven Princess, bring an added dimension to the narrative that has been built directly out of game mechanics and an attempt to integrate those into the fantasy narrative.

Despite this focus on and construction of Tanis as hero, he never assumes the role of Prince within the group. The rewards, praise and accomplishments of the group are shared equally among the surviving members, and Tanis is not credited as the leader or the hero. A result of this is that neither the Seven Samurai model nor the Prince and Courtier approach accurately reflects the power dynamics of the group, nor the narrative rewards and conclusion of the story. The continual and recurring shifts of focus toward other party members such as Tas, Flint and Caramon, emphasises the co-operative nature of the RPG balanced party, rather than the traditional hero and companions. But the balanced party can also be seen in hero-centric mythic fantasy such as Eddings’ *Belgariad*.

⁵³⁴ Hickman *Annotated Chronicles* p.316

The full group developed in Eddings' narrative consists of: Belgarath the Sorcerer, Polgara the Sorceress, Garion (the young hero), Prince Kheldar/Silk (a roguish thief and assassin), Barak (a Viking warrior), Hettar (cavalry swordsman), Lelldorin (young archer), Mandorallen (medieval knight), Relg (religious mystic with a magical ability), Ce'Nedra (love interest) and Durnik (the honest blacksmith).⁵³⁵ Ignoring the presence of Garion and Ce'Nedra for a moment, the group can be constructed as: two Mages, five Warriors, a Thief and a Cleric, a remarkably similar construction to that of the *Dragonlance* group given that Eddings' series has no direct relationship to RPGs. Since Relg is forced into joining the group by his God, his unwillingness to join would negate the Seven Samurai construction. Additionally, the common purpose of the group is nebulous and far ranging, so the specific goal-oriented nature of the Seven Samurai group also appears to be inapplicable. The lack of the military framework and setting clearly differentiates this group from the Dirty Dozen conception of the quest group.

When Garion is re-introduced into consideration, it is clear that the party conforms to the power dynamic described by Mendlesohn's Prince and Courtier model. Garion is credited with destroying Torak, even though the confrontation was decided by Polgara's refusal of Torak's offer of marriage. From that point of the confrontation on the result is not in question and Garion is effectively a puppet of the Necessity/Prophecy and therefore not truly heroic as he controls nothing. Despite this, Garion is the hero, Garion is awarded the credit for slaying Torak, and the accomplishments of his companions are thus subsumed under the auspices of his victory. Yet Mendlesohn's argument does not encompass the entire dynamic of the group. Belgarath is the initial leader in addition to being the Gandalf/Merlin-esque mentor to the young Garion, and thus many of the early accomplishments are credited to him rather than to Garion. Silk takes the role of leader and hero in terms of trade negotiations, breaking other characters out of cells and gathering intelligence, as well as fighting the duel against the Dagashi Brill/Kordoch. Relg's rescue of Silk from the pit prison of Taur Urgas features Relg as hero and Polgara's defeat of Salmissra and rescuing Garion places her in primacy. In fact, the shifting of perspective, leadership

⁵³⁵ Though Taiba is one of the characters singled out by prophecy she is not part of the adventure group.

roles, and primacy of hero resembles the structuring of the narrative around PCs in RPGs more than it does traditional narrative concerns. While this could be argued to be simple narrative efficacy and an attempt to create an interesting and engaging balance of perspectives, the fact remains that the balanced party models this both implicitly and explicitly.

In terms of Character Classes, Barak and Mandorallen typify the standard Warrior types discussed above. Both characters are massively muscled, wield large impressive blades and bear a striking resemblance to Caramon and Sturm from the *Dragonlance* party. They act as physical protectors for the group and frequently engage multiple enemies simultaneously in order to give the others time to flee or to ready additional attacks. The two excerpts below are taken from the first descriptions of Barak and Mandorallen respectively:

[...] a man so huge that Garion's mind simply refused to accept the possibility that he was real. His tree-trunk sized legs were wrapped in furs cross-tied with leather thongs, and he wore a chain-mail shirt that reached to his knees, belted at the waist. From the belt hung a ponderous sword on one side and a short-handled axe on the other. His hair was in braids, and he had a vast, bristling red beard.⁵³⁶

And then a huge horse bearing a man in full armor burst out of the trees and thundered down upon the attacking creatures. The armored man crouched over his lance and plunged directly into the midst of the startled Algoths. The great horse screamed as he charged, and his ironshod hoofs churned up big clots of mud. The lance crashed through the chest of one of the largest Algoths and splintered from the force of the blow. The splintered end took another full in the face. The knight discarded the shattered lance and drew his broadsword with a single sweep of his arm. With wide swings to the right and left he chopped his way through the pack, his warhorse trampling the living and the dead alike into the mud of the road. At the end of his charge he whirled and plunged back again, once more opening a path with his sword. The Algoths turned and fled howling into the woods.⁵³⁷

These descriptions of Barak and Mandorallen illustrate their position as 'warrior protector' or guardian. Barak obviously assumes the role of burly barbarian with his 'Viking' flavoured description. He is immensely powerful, strong and is so large as to make Garion initially believe him to be a fictional giant. His use of both a large sword and an axe confirm that he is powerful, if unsubtle. The sword is described as 'ponderous', suggesting slow but also powerful and heavy. It is a weapon that will hammer at opponents ruthlessly and relentlessly and will require a great deal of

⁵³⁶ Eddings *Pawn of Prophecy* p.100 The first description of Barak.

⁵³⁷ Eddings *Queen of Sorcery* p.97 The entrance of Mandorallen, the Baron of Vo Ebor.

strength to wield. While ponderous is not an overtly evil or pejorative term, it is certainly not flattering and thus seems strange when used in conjunction with Barak's initial description. This, however, is when Garion is under a spell that makes him distrust those near him. The darker nuances of the description can thus be excused if we take into account Garion's twisted perception of the scene. The axe confirms that Barak is a powerful and at times 'brutish' warrior. As it is short-handled this suggests that it is a secondary weapon to be used with the sword, although this would more commonly be a dagger or long-bladed knife. The fact that Barak uses an axe in place of a duelling dagger again reaffirms his strength, size and lack of nuance, as only an exceptionally strong man could effectively wield an axe as a secondary weapon.

His use of chainmail suggests that he is a warrior or fighter rather than a traditional knight. Even the specific terms used in the physical description support this perception of Barak. His legs are described as being 'tree-trunk' sized, implying solid strength and massive muscle. Barak's projection of unrefined power and strength is reinforced by the extraordinary length and weight of his chainmail. The fact that his armour is accompanied by furs and leather thongs emphasises his position as burly barbarian, with his 'vast bristling beard' and braided hair reaffirming his apparently barbaric Viking heritage and raw masculinity.

Conversely, Mandorallen's entrance to the story clearly defines him as the consummate medieval knight. He is a powerful warrior and conforms to the chivalric stereotype. His broad sword and heavy platemail indicate his role as a protective warrior and guardian as well as indicating that his character is of the noble tradition. Eddings paints Mandorallen in a heroic and brave light by him single-handedly charging a group of monsters in order to protect the quest group.

The preponderance of metal described in the passage also relays the sense of power, strength and physical substance intrinsic to his character. The use of the lance in the opening of the passage, itself a readily identifiable weapon of chivalric romance, coupled with the 'broadsword' emphasise the noble masculinity of the character. The descriptions of Mandorallen's horse further reinforce this image as it is 'huge', 'great' and powerful. The fact that it is a stallion can be seen as a further indication of the virility and powerful masculinity of Mandorallen. The repetition of words such as

‘splintered’, ‘shattered’ and ‘chopped’ emphasise the physical violence and power that Mandorallen commands. When combined these different aspects give the reader a nuanced and specific description of Mandorallen’s character and role long before the hero, Garion, comes to realise these facts.

Silk, the spy assassin character in Eddings’ *Belgariad*, is armed with numerous daggers and knives in addition to a short sword that he uses when he is initially called upon as a protector character. However as the series progresses and other characters step forward to act as warrior protectors, Silk falls back on various daggers and knives as his primary weapons of choice. Thus, his role as the rogue and thief takes precedence over his role as martial protector.

He was a small man, scarcely taller than Garion himself, and his face was dominated by a long pointed nose. His eyes were small and squinted, and his straight, black hair was raggedly cut. The face was not the sort to inspire confidence, and the man’s stained and patched tunic and short, wicked-looking sword did little to contradict the implications of the face.⁵³⁸

This is a revealing description of Silk, who, unlike Barak, is not wearing any obvious armour. Silk is wielding a short sword, as is consistent with the descriptions and tropes associated with the Rogue class. What is of greater interest in this particular instance is that the sword is described as ‘wicked looking’. This pejorative description is reinforced by the unflattering physical description of Silk as diminutive and sinister looking. The combination of the raggedly cut hair, the stained and patched tunic, the dark colouring and hair colour in addition to his choice of weapon suggest that Silk is an evil or at least untrustworthy character. Even with this ‘evil’ description there is room within the narrative for the reader to discover that Silk is actually going to turn out to be a hero. The descriptions, although negative, are not damning and Eddings even includes the implication that all is not as it seems. The phrase ‘did little to contradict the implications of the face’ has a two-fold purpose. The first is that it implies that contradiction of the impression is possible, even if it is unlikely. The second point is that the facial features, the choice of weapon and the type of character Silk is, are all intrinsically linked. This proves that there is an expectation that physical characteristics, when combined with choice of arms and type

⁵³⁸ Eddings *Pawn of Prophecy*, p.101 the first description of Silk.

of dress, will allow the observer to accurately gauge the moral compass of the character in question.

Yet it is the later descriptions of Silk that confirm his status as a rogue, as demonstrated by Eddings removing Silk's short sword from the narrative. An example of this is the fight with the monstrous 'Grul' in *Magician's Gambit*.⁵³⁹ While Hettar, Barak and Mandorallen attempt to hold the monster back with their swords, Silk looks for an opportunity to use his throwing knives and daggers.

Then Silk, who had lurked just at the edge of the fight, darted in, set the point of his dagger against the back of Grul's neck and smashed a large rock against the dagger's pommel.⁵⁴⁰

While this is not an act of cowardice, Silk refrains from charging to the fore like the other warrior characters. He bides his time to make a stealthy, yet devastating, attack. Curiously, he never once considers using his short sword, which seems inexplicably to appear and disappear from the narrative. However, even this short description of Silk's definitive involvement in the fight emphasises his status as a dextrous and athletic rogue. Silk lurks, quickly darts in and uses an unorthodox dagger technique to vanquish the monstrous foe. Silk does not confront Grul or attempt to best him in the fight, but rather waits for an opportunity to perform a devious but decisive attack that dispatches the beast by any means necessary. Silk clearly values winning the conflict more than adhering to the convention of a fair fight or a contest of arms. This is at odds with Eddings' construction of Silk as hero, and yet fits perfectly with the techniques employed by the rogue Thief in *D&D*.

The parallels between *Dragonlance* and the *Belgariad* are striking, all the more so because Eddings denies Tolkien as an influence and has no known connection to RPGs.⁵⁴¹ But given that the RPG attempts to mimic the structures and conventions of genre fantasy stories, and given that it has codified these conventions into game rules and settings, there is a clear indication that the relationship between the RPG and the literary genre bears further examination. We can use the balanced party as descriptor for the power dynamics of quest parties as well as a notation for the types of

⁵³⁹ Eddings *Magician's Gambit*, (London: Corgi, 1984; repr. 1994) p. 202.

⁵⁴⁰ Eddings *Magician's Gambit*, p.206

⁵⁴¹ David Eddings *The Rivan Codex* (London: Voyager, 1999) Introduction pp.1-24

companions likely to be on a quest. We can use the rules and mechanisms of Character Classes in RPGs to discuss archetype and stereotype in terms of character and function within narrative. By taking into account magic systems and the concepts of gameworlds we can analyse fantasyland settings without pejorative preconceived notions and address the innovation and originality that is driving the genre.

Conclusion

As this thesis demonstrates, the RPG is essential to understanding the evolution of Genre Fantasy that can be modelled on the essential concepts of the RPG, namely that take account of micro-adventures of defined party members in re-useable worlds and settings utilising defined and limited magic-systems. The explosion of *D&D*-based and linked fantasy in the 1980s and 1990s demonstrates the importance of the RPG in terms of fantasy literature in general, and GF in particular. Fantasy has evolved, and continues to evolve, as a genre. It is distinct from myth, legend and epic. It is not Horror, SF or Magic Realism. While Fantasy remains part of the wider oeuvre of Fantastic fiction, Fantasy is a category and genre in its own right. A result of this, scholarship of the Fantastic, and of Fantasy in particular, must take account of the changes modern society and economics have wrought in literature. The popularity of the RPG, and the increasing influence of the marketplace has had a marked impact on Fantasy and the authors engaged in its creation. As a genre, Fantasy is often considered as part of an evolution of mythic and epic storytelling. Indeed, the reliance on Joseph Campbell's monomyth, and Vladimir Propp's morphology emphasises our need as academics to see Fantasy as part of a greater literary historical tradition. However, in recent years, technology, publishers and marketing decisions have had an increasing effect on how we perceive Fantasy. This movement of fantasy toward a more market-driven product is not a devolution of the genre, but an evolution toward a fantasy specific model. Rather than Fantasy being reliant upon the mythic and epic traditions an increasing body of work now exists that forms the corpus of the genre.

While the work of Robert E. Howard remains a seminal influence on the adventure story in a fantastic setting, and J.R.R. Tolkien's *LotR* created grand mythic world building in Fantasy, it was with the advent of *D&D* in the 1970s, and its continuing development as a mode, model and adaptation of fantasy storytelling in the 1980s and 1990s, that modern GF has been formed. While the great fantasy writers of the early and mid-20th Century were writing in a nebulous literary space, unencumbered by precedent and convention, modern writers now have a substantial catalogue of Fantasy to draw upon. This means that although early fantasy stories relied heavily

upon Medieval Romance, Anglo-Saxon epic, and Norse and Celtic legends, these ideas have been adapted and assimilated into the modern genre. Therefore, modern authors use many of these concepts second- or third-hand. While Tolkien clearly used earlier literary and storytelling models, modern authors look to his work for inspiration, and, in effect, they are adapting his adaptation. The modern genre of fantasy is thus an evolution that is building on earlier works *within the genre* rather than continuing the creative tradition of Tolkien. Conventions and formula for story have evolved in the period since Tolkien, and it is these that the RPG articulates.

The world has changed radically from the 1960s and 1970s. The invasion of television and computer consoles into the home and the plethora of games and TV series is unprecedented. As a result we must recognise that literature is part of a multi-media story machine, and that influences, inspiration and structures of storytelling will come from a variety of non-traditional sources. It is thus appropriate to integrate the analysis of Fantasy literature into a broader multi-disciplinary framework and acknowledge that focusing solely on classic novels limits research in this area. We must look beyond Tolkien's *LotR*, toward new 'texts' and fantasy products to find the source of innovation and codification within the genre. The ludic nature of *D&D* should not preclude it from the study of fantasy narrative, and the large number of texts published in association with *D&D*-based games, the popularity of the game in the 1970s and 1980s, the spin-offs and adaptations of the game in various formats and media in the 1980s and 1990s, should at the very least highlight *D&D* as a formative influence on Fantasy, and one thus worthy of investigation.

Just as Donaldson's *Thomas Covenant* responded to Tolkien's *LotR*, so too can we see contemporary GF writers and authors such as Joe Abercrombie, R. Scott Bakker, Steven Erikson, Ian C. Esslemont and China Miéville writing responses to RPGF and reacting against the perceived limitations of the RPG as a medium, a mode and a model. Contemporary GF has pushed beyond the models proposed by the RPG, but it has most certainly learned from them, and if we do not acknowledge the role of the RPG then locating developments, evolutions and innovations within current GF becomes that much more difficult. Erikson and Esslemont were influenced by the military Vietnam-inspired fantasy of Glen Cook, taking from Cook the close narrative perspective of the grunts in the field and the soldiers on the ground. However, both

Erikson and Esslemont admit their debt to the RPG roots of the *Malazan* world in their character designs, squad and group formations, the structures and lands within the world, the magic systems and creatures. If we deny the impact of the RPG on the Malazan world, to what do we attribute these innovations? When Erikson railed against the limitations he felt with *D&D*'s moral alignment rules he set about creating something that addressed that deficiency, and thus added deeper and further moral complexity to the world he wished to explore.⁵⁴² When Esslemont decried the 'great old man' model of history and how small groups couldn't single-handedly save the world, history would keep on going and adventures would continue, he was acknowledging the RPG micro-adventure in the mythic world setting.⁵⁴³ Neither of these two aspects fully articulates the complexity of the *Malazan* series and world, but to deny the importance of the RPG would be to overlook these developments and fail to understand a significant aspect of their origins.

Modern GF does not *fail* to fulfil Clute's Full Fantasy or Campbell's Monomyth, and the narrative conclusion it often reaches does not *fail* to reach Westfahl's Edenic Pastoral. The RPG and the RPGF explain that GF is conforming to a different narrative model, and although fantasy narrative continues to use the same building blocks identified by these previous scholars, this does not negate the fact that GF utilises them to create a distinct narrative structure that deserves recognition and study. Analysis of the construction of Secondary Worlds and fantasy settings in terms of authenticity and rules, acknowledges mimesis but differentiates between fantasy settings without falling afoul of questions of reality, realism, plausibility and possibility. With the consideration of the language and rules of magic systems, rather than simply taking magic in fantasy for granted, the analysis can be extended beyond labels of impossible, arbitrary and whimsical. The use of the RPG balanced party formulation to analyse quest groups, instead of adapting descriptive film concepts like the Seven Samurai and the Dirty Dozen, grounds the analysis in the genre as well as forming a more accurate description of group dynamics. Fantasylands and gameworlds, therefore, should not be dismissed as derivative, pseudo-medieval European pastiches, but rather scholars should engage with the innovation and

⁵⁴² Steven Erikson 'The World of the Malazan Empire and Role-Playing Games' www.stevenrikson.com [last accessed 21/11/10].

⁵⁴³ Ian C. Esslemont interview 'The Minimal and Finely Focused Fantasy of Ian C. Esslemont' http://clarkesworldmagazine.com/esslemont_interview/ [last accessed 15/10/10]

originality of each individual setting, assessing it on its originality, its consistency, and its authenticity. In order to do this, the concepts and conventions that form the norms of the genre/sub-genre must first be isolated and then investigated regarding the manner in which it is original, innovative, subversive or ground-breaking.

Like the SF pulps, the penny dreadfuls, bodice-rippers and murder mysteries, RPGFs may not be the most inspiring or well written literature, but they represent a popular form of fantasy that adheres to a discernable formula and structure that can be analysed and used in the analysis of other fantasy. Academics may not like them, may not enjoy reading them, and may view them as derivative, but they should not be dismissed and their literary merit should not be confused with their critical value. It is this structured and formalised approach to fantasy that needs to be central to future research. The pervasive dissemination of RPG conventions has permeated the genre on multiple levels. Consequently, the framework investigated here is necessary to further understanding of the genre as it stands, as the RPG is an articulation of the conventions of fantasy that have developed post-Tolkien. While it can be specifically mapped onto RPG-related fictions (not insignificant in and of itself), it has a much broader application. The RPG represents an approach to how fantasy worlds are constructed, an explanation of the conventions of character generation and party formation as well as a rationale for the shift in narrative focus towards a series of micro-adventures.

By reconstructing the genre to take account of the substantial body of Role-playing-related fictions, including those texts considered derivative and unoriginal, we can create a more representative model of the genre as it developed in the 1980s and 1990s. Then, by using this new conception we can map and track the evolution of the genre, and reliably identify patterns as they have emerged in more recent years. As a result, analysis of specific fantasy texts can be more easily integrated into a broader generic context. This new conception of the genre allows us to include consideration of the RPG, as well as its example fictions, as influential and important texts in relation to how the genre has evolved post-Tolkien. The close relationship between the RPG and the genre encouraged a cross-pollination of ideas and concepts, and as a result created a recursive feedback loop. It is evident, therefore, that we should study the development of the RPG, not only as a form of ludic/narrative Fantasy, but as a

cultural adaptation of the genre and as an articulation of what were perceived as defining elements of Fantasy.

The RPG gameworld, by amalgamating various fantasy settings, created a template for fantasy world design. By emphasising the construction of discrete and distinct gaming zones, the RPG propagated a conception of the Fantasy world visible in Robert E. Howard's Hyborian Age to a new generation of readers, who have more likely played a *Conan* game or watched a *Conan* film, than read Howard's work. The ludic requirement for a re-usable setting, rather than being a flaw in the conception of the land or a poor imitation of Tolkien's Middle Earth, is a conceptually different approach to fantasy narrative structure. The significance of the setting is tied not to the story, but rather to the wealth of stories that the setting can support. This illustrates the movement of the genre away from closed narrative structures in which land, hero and story are inherently tied in a 'constant metamorphic meaning-drenched interplay between setting and tale',⁵⁴⁴ and toward a new Fantasy norm of the adventure as part of a continuing history of a fantasy world. As a result, the gameworld explains the trend in modern Fantasy toward serial adventures and extended supernarratives which explore the full extent and potential of the setting. The inherent stability of the gameworld setting has also shifted narrative focus onto heroes and companions, placing them at the centre of the narrative, and following their development over time. The shift of emphasis onto character development de-emphasises the previous need for a resolvable world and closed narrative at the heart of the fantasy story.

By raising the importance of individual characters above the need for story, the RPG formalised common character types found in the genre. This identification and codification of generic character types systemised perceived genre norms as they appeared in the literature. When this approach is combined with existing critical theories which incorporate mythological and psychoanalytical archetypes, a more accurate reflection of how the characters are used and portrayed in the modern genre can be achieved. This can then form the basis for character analysis in the wider genre of fantasy. Additionally, the ludic nature of the RPG as a group activity

⁵⁴⁴ John Clute *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* 'Fantasyland' p.341.

necessitated consensual play amongst individuals and this led to a codified approach to character design, and party dynamics. The balanced party, based on attempting to make available common character types from the genre, necessitated an artificial and structured means to create a parity of strengths, skills and talents amongst the players. This also emphasised the role of the group and reduced focus on the sole hero. Part of this process of creating parity of abilities was, of course, the limitation and systemisation of magic. By creating a discernable, predictable and codified framework for magic within the game, the RPG raised awareness of the need for magic to make sense in order for the world to appear authentic.

In all, the RPG can be seen at the heart of the evolution of the genre, and the structures it supports, the conventions that it promotes, form part of the framework routinely utilised by fantasy authors. The combination of RPG concepts with existing critical approaches is essential to the further analysis of Genre Fantasy. This thesis adds to the debate over genre, over fantasy, as well as to the conversation about fantasy literature, and is a step towards an integrated analytical approach. That step, of course, is limited in scope and time due to the nature of a thesis. What is clear is that the RPG and the rise of the RPGF in the 1980s and 1990s is only part of the evolving nature of Fantasy. Fantasy will continue to change, evolve, act and react, and if we are going to continue to explore and map the genre of the Fantastic we cannot leave blank spaces labelled ‘Here be dragons’.

Appendix One – Glossary of Terms

Buffer

A ‘Buffer’ is a magical class that augments the abilities of others, for instance a Cleric who bestows temporary greater strength or agility on another character via a magical spell will ‘buff’ them.

Campaign

A campaign is a linked series of missions, events and scenarios utilising the same PCs over time. Thus, the players have a chance to develop their PCs allowing them to gain in power and experience. This generally means that the threat levels faced by the PCs increase, as do the applicable rewards, and is referred to as ‘escalation’. Campaigns are usually conducted over several gaming sessions and the GM usually links previous scenarios and missions together to form a single large narrative arc. Quite often early scenarios are subtly linked to later developments to give the players a sense of a greater arc and a sense of a connected world.

Character Alignment

Alignment refers to the moral compass of a character and is a tool to help develop character identity within game. Alignment is a basic description of the morality of an intelligent creature.

	Lawful	Neutral	Chaotic
Good	Lawful Good	Neutral Good	Chaotic Good
Neutral	Lawful Neutral	True Neutral	Chaotic Neutral
Evil	Lawful Evil	Neutral Evil	Chaotic Evil

Lawful – Characters are bound to uphold laws, personal codes and standards of behaviour associated with their racial and social background.

Chaotic – Characters believe in individual freedom above all and that rules and laws can be broken if common sense or individual goals are better served by discounting them.

Good – Characters are generally altruistic and willing to make personal sacrifices to help others.

Evil – Characters are free to hurt and kill others if it suits them. They can lack compassion or empathy, or can venerate evil gods, or can simply enjoy being evil.

Neutral – Morally neutral means that the character may believe that the end justifies the means and is willing to do evil to accomplish good and vice versa. Ethically neutral characters have a normal respect for authority but do not feel any particular compulsion to follow or break laws.

Character Class

Character Class refers to the character's profession or vocation. Abilities, skills and the types of equipment a character can use are dictated by Class. While the concept of Class has become increasingly nuanced over time, essentially there remain four basic Classes; Fighter (eg. Warrior), Rogue (eg. Thief), Cleric (eg. Healer) and Mage (eg. Wizard).

Game Mechanics

Combat resolution and actions will remain tested by dice rolling against the relevant statistical attributes, but to facilitate the interactive gaming experience as many activities and encounters as possible will be resolved through roleplay and improvised dialogue. For example, to obtain information from a source 'perception rolls' and 'coercion rolls' (dice checks based on probability) can be made against strength and intimidation values. If successful, these rolls would lead to the GM revealing further information. However, if the players act out the questioning and get involved in the scene then mechanical dice rolling will be kept to a minimum and this should improve the flow of the game. Should the players miss what the GM considers vital information they can be prompted by the GM to make various skill checks with dice, with successful rolls leading to a revelation of the information.

Gameplay

Although the game utilises maps, representative icons, diagrams, and various other props, the majority of the gameplay is through dynamic dialogue between players and interaction with the GM via their respective characters (PCs and NPCs). Many events

and conflicts within the game are resolved using random number generation through the use of polyhedral dice. The random chance element reflects the general chaos of the world in which even the most simple action can go wrong. Detailed rules exist in each setting for how the dice are used to determine if characters are hit, wounded, pass tests or succeed in specific actions based on the statistics and skill values of the PCs.

Gameworld or Setting

The setting or gameworld forms the background of the game. Various published gameworlds exist within *D&D* products such as Toril/ Faerûn in *Forgotten Realms* and Krynn/Ansalon in *Dragonlance*. The setting dictates which races are playable, which monsters roam the land and the various physical and political landscapes that form the background for the adventures. The setting may also influence the type of game played, the style of play and player strategies. For example, the *Dragonlance* setting is rife with war, leading to possible military entanglements, whereas the *Forgotten Realms* setting is militarily more stable and thus may lead to more ‘adventure’ based missions. Though the GM is free to create any scenario they wish as long as it is consistent with the world.

GM – Game Master (sometimes DM or Dungeon Master)

The GM ‘runs’ the game. S/He is responsible for either the authoring and running of an overall scenario, or the management of a pre-written ‘module’ or adventure narrative. The GM controls all NPCs in the game and is responsible for the behaviour of enemies, monsters and villains in the game. In general, the GM will ‘play’ the NPCs in a way comparable to the players ‘playing’ their PCs although the role is more akin to direction rather than performance. The GM functions as a guiding force within the game as well as an oppositional force by controlling and shaping the narrative in response to player actions. The GM should prepare the scenario in advance of the gaming session, and the constructed scenario should be flexible enough to cope with unexpected player actions as well as be linear enough to provide an interesting plot for the players to discover through play. As players are unpredictable the GM should build in multiple contingencies and plot connections to ensure that the game flows smoothly in response to the dynamic and fluid movement

of player actions. A good GM can anticipate and adapt to player actions and use these to make the scenario a more entertaining and interesting experience for the players.

Meatshield

A Melee class character, such as warrior, whose primary function is to be the focus of enemy attacks as they can absorb greater amounts of damage than other characters in the group is often referred to as a meatshield.

Modules

Unlike GM crafted scenarios, modules are published gaming scenarios which can be used as designed or adapted by the GM for gaming sessions. Modules can be stand alone adventures or specifically linked to be joined together in a ‘super module’ or larger narrative. Many modules are published by specific gaming companies, but additional player-designed modules are available on-line and in fanzines.

NPC – Non-Player Character

NPCs are additional characters necessary for the game that are controlled by the GM and not a player. NPCs can range from fully developed characters intended to be recurring characters within the GM scenario, such as contacts, helpers and key plot characters. Conversely, they can be simplistic disposable manifestations of the GM possessing only the barest of details and statistical information to act as minor killable adversaries. NPCs are ‘played’ (performed or enacted) by the GM using similar techniques to those of the players. NPCs are often used to advance a particular game’s plot, but they are roleplayed as free agents within the game who will ‘react’ to what the PCs do and say.

Nuker

A term for a spell hurling character who can cause huge amounts of damage from a distance. This is an out of character (OOC) term for powerful damage casting mages.

PC – Player Character

Using various polyhedral dice (D6 being a 6 sided die, D20 being a 20 sided die) and modifier tables, each player creates an in-game avatar (sometimes referred to as 'rolling a character'). The player decides a Class to play, rolls dice to create the statistical attributes pool or 'stat pool' by totalling the dice values. The pool is then divided between the six main attributes of Strength, Constitution, Dexterity, Intelligence, Wisdom and Charisma. How the pool is divided amongst the attributes is at the player's discretion and need not necessarily be an equal division. This allows for certain attributes to become favoured and also creates a more individual character. Alternatively the player may roll specifically for each stat in turn and the GM may allow some re-rolls. Once class and attributes are decided the player then creates the remaining details for their PC such as gender, appearance, back story and relevant equipment (referred to as gear). This added level of customisation allows for individual traits, personalities and idiosyncrasies to be incorporated into the PC design making the PC a more rounded and playable character rather than a simple avatar of the player. These details are recorded on a 'Character Sheet' creating a definite record of the character that can be examined to refresh memory of specific details or to help arbitrate disputes. The avatar interacts with the imagined environment, scenarios and other characters. Players invent personalities and individual traits to customise their PCs and role-play (perform or enact) them as unique characters. While dice rolling is used to mechanically resolve some actions, conflicts and results, players are allowed to improvise most actions and dialogue in order to avoid scenarios becoming exercises in mechanical dice rolling.

Scenario

A scenario is a short series of missions and events designed by the GM or from pre-published modules, which form the narrative arc for the game. Scenarios may be short, straightforward missions and encounters played over a single session or extended and combined with other scenarios over multiple sessions to form a campaign.

Stats

A reference to the statistical composition of specific character attributes such as; Strength, Constitution, Dexterity, Intelligence, Wisdom and Charisma. Stats are

usually divided into physical and mental stats, emphasising the skill specific qualities of each character class.

Tank

A ‘Tank’ is usually a physical melee class character such as a warrior. They can inflict large amounts of physical damage and are generally utilised as focal point for the group’s attack, can also be referred to as a meatshield, although tanks tend to dispense large quantities of physical damage in addition to absorbing them.

XP – Experience Points

Intelligent role-playing (puzzle solving, character performance, innovative or lateral thinking) and the successful completion of modules/missions results in PCs being rewarded with XP (experience points). XP is cumulative and when a certain amount of XP is accumulated, the PC gains a ‘level’ and has access to new abilities and powers. The GM may reward more or less XP at their discretion; to encourage or discourage certain behaviour amongst the players. PCs may also be awarded material wealth in lieu of XP.

Appendix Two – Practical Example of a *D&D* Game

A *D&D* game is played by several players and a GM. The players create PCs (player characters) while the GM (gamemaster) creates a scenario or series of adventures populated by NPCs (Non-player character) and monsters. The players then use dialogue, improvisation and dice rolling to negotiate the scenario in order to complete the tasks and gain experience and rewards for their PCs. The GM acts as referee, arbiter, storyteller and adversary to the players. The adventure can be played over multiple sessions or the adventure can be extended into a campaign through linking multiple scenarios over multiple sessions. Below is an example taken from a *Forgotten Realms* set *D&D* game.

‘A Plague on Both Your Houses’ – Conflict Between Two Noble Houses #4 (of projected 7)

Difficulty: Beginner/Intermediate (Levels 3-7)

This is a sample extract from a gaming campaign. This extract occurs part way through the GM designed scenario and the PCs have gained several levels in the previous 3 sessions.

Setting and Background Notes:

Forgotten Realms, Faerûn and the city of Waterdeep, pre-Time of Troubles.

Adaptation of Setting:

Two noble houses (House of Davros and the House of Illiander) within the city of Waterdeep have become embroiled in a tense rivalry and are on the brink of open hostilities. Both sides wish to hire bravos and adventurers in order to conduct clandestine and deniable attacks on one another. The player characters will begin as new/inexperienced adventurers contacted by an agent of one of the Houses and will be manipulated into taking sides and become embroiled in the House war.

House Davros is led by Countess Galatea Davros. A long established noble house that in recent years has suffered a loss of favour at court and resents the influence of

the mages within the city. Galatea is arrogant but becoming increasingly desperate. She feels she must keep up appearances or become irrelevant.

House Illiander is led by the Marquis Sin Corbal Illiander. Sin is a second generation nobleman. The house was formed due to the mercantile success of his father. He is looked down upon by many because of his 'humble' origins, despite his wealth. Consequently, he is paranoid, insecure and resentful.

Additionally, the Guild of Thieves has become split between two rival guildmasters following the death of the self styled 'King of Thieves':

The Wreckers are based by the docks and are heavily involved in smuggling, press-ganging, mugging and extortion rackets. They are led by Bulgar the Bloody, now known as The Butcher, a violent, but canny, bull of a man who used to be the chief enforcer for the previous Guildmaster.

The Shadow Sneaks are led by a mysterious woman known only as 'Mistress'. She was a beautiful courtesan called Amaryllis DeVaincourt until a lover scarred her face in a drunken rage and now she has taken control of the pick pockets, sneak thieves, burglars and con-artists in the city. She exploits her knowledge of Waterdavian society to pull off elaborate scams and cons on nobles and merchants alike. She was the previous Guildmaster's mistress.

A point of contention of the two rival guilds is over the ownership of the various bawdy houses and brothels. Mistress feels she is the natural choice to run the guild and with her society contacts run the up-scale brothels. The Butcher, as controller of the enforcers, wants the money the brothels can generate and has the muscle to protect them.

At present neither the guild hostilities or the House war have attracted the notice of the Lords of Waterdeep, but it could escalate sufficiently for Khelben Blackstaff to make a cameo NPC appearance.

Characters:

GM: AP

Players:

1. P PC: Rufus Wildmane (Male, Human, Mage, Chaotic Neutral)
2. G PC: Garrett Eldson (Male, Human, Cleric of Selune, Chaotic Good)
3. D PC: Ronin (Male, Human, Torm Paladin, Lawful Good)
4. S PC: Mika (Female, Human, Thief, Chaotic Good)

Plot NPCs:

House Davros:

Countess Galatea Davros

Seneschal Jason Conquist

Lady Vivien (Galatea's Niece)

Cook: Tara Tellan

Molly the Maid

House Illiander:

Marquis Sin Corbal Illiander

Major Domo: Algernon Tarquin

Cook: Mistress Katerina Ballae

Petra the Maid

The Wreckers:

The Butcher/ Bulgar the Bloody (Human, Male, Warrior, Level 10, Chaotic Neutral)

Marconi the Mouth (Human, Male, Thief, Level 3, Chaotic Good)

Brok the Enforcer (Human, Male, Warrior, Level 3, Lawful Neutral)

Timmay (Human, Male, Mage, Level 3, Lawful Evil)

Random generated toughs as needed. Usually thieves/brawler types, daggers and clubs as standard, 5% chance low level mage, 5% chance warrior.

The Shadow Sneaks:

Mistress/Amaryllis DeVaincourt (Human, Female, Mage/Thief, Level 9, Chaotic Good)

Alric (Human, Male, Thief, Level 4, True Neutral)

Sinesta (Human, Female, Thief, Level 3, True Neutral)

Pincer (Human, Female, Warrior, Level 3, Chaotic Good)

Random generated toughs as needed. Usually thieves/brawlers with 10% chance of low level mage. Daggers and clubs as standard.

Neutral NPCs:

Ribald Barterman – Human, Ex-adventurer, Shop Keeper and Rumourmonger (Shop known as ‘No Solicitation’ as all the previous signs have long since disappeared)

Bit Fishy Bob – Human, Ex-sailor, Rundown Tavern Owner by Dockfront (‘The Mermaid’s Shells’)

Grom – Blacksmith and Armourer (Half Orc ‘Grom Its’)

Jimmy Lock – Local Rogue (Human, Male, Thief, Level 6, True Neutral, Independent Thief and ‘Fixer’ works from the outskirts of the dock area)

NPC Bravos:

Kiall (Elven Assassin, Level 5, True Neutral)

Brok (Half-Orc Warrior, Level 5, Lawful Neutral)

Mayar the Magnificent (Human, Mage, Level 5, True Neutral)

Lee Roy (Human, Cleric of Kossuth, Level 5, True Neutral)

(This group of adventurers can be used by the GM as *deus ex machina* should the Players run into trouble with the scenario, or to sow seeds of further plot intrigues, can also potentially be rivals should the scenario progress.)

Further Notes: Utilise *Waterdeep* Module and NPCs, shops etc therein as templates and as additional sites/characters as needed.)

Maps:

Waterdeep City Plan

Waterdeep Surrounding Area Map

2 x Noble Estates

2 x Bars/Taverns

2 x Thieves’ Hideouts (One ‘Dock Ward’ and one ‘North Ward’)

2 x Sewer Sections

3 x General Houses

Overall Objectives of Game Scenario:

Introduce players to game world.

Introduce players to game concepts.

Introduce players to basic game mechanics.

Introduce players to the concepts of teamwork within the game.

Introduce players to the concepts of consequences and repercussions within the game world.

To create a base platform of interconnected missions (forming the game's plot) that can lead to additional missions involving a corporate war, an organised crime war and a gang war (an expanding plot).

To allow players to familiarise themselves with their characters and give the characters a chance to gain experience and a few levels.

Preparation:

Following on from the last session the PCs have been introduced to the conflict between House Davros and House Illiander. The PCs are also aware of the on-going Thieves Guild war. At present PCs are acquainted with the 'Shadow Sneaks' and have had two minor violent encounters with 'Wrecker' press-gangs. In terms of the house war, the PCs are tentatively on the side of House Davros. This is the thread to be developed at this point. Retool rescue mission to be associated with House Davros and begin scenario.

Last session ended with the PCs returning the missing jewellery to Jason (although they claimed that the small bag of un-cut stones was 'not with the rest' and it is still in Mika's pack). Should the others find out that Mika stole the un-cut gems, when she goes to sell them, there may be problems. They have already received their reward and are currently standing in House Davros' 'Servants Area'. Present are Jason, Mika, Rufus, Garrett and Ronin.

PC notes: Rufus has a full complement of spells minus 1x Magic Missiles and 1 x Detect Traps and has 15hp left.

Ronin has only 1 Quiver of arrows left and is at 23hp.

Mika has no throwing daggers because she forgot to retrieve them but is fully healed.

Garrett has no prepared healing spells left but still has the full complement of other spells and is fully healed.

Players have not rested or eaten for 10 hours.

Scenario: Rescue the Niece

Notes:

[In italics denotes GM only notes, Bold denotes description for players, [] denotes commentary after the fact or explanation]

Galatea's niece (Vivian) has been captured by bandits and they are holding her hostage. They are asking for a sizable ransom for her safe return. Their camp is in the forest near a kobold cave (Kobold cave is to the North of the camp). There are 1xD10 bandits in the camp plus four archer sentries. The camp is in a clearing in the forest about two hours ride from the North Gate. PCs will have a chance to either pay the ransom or attempt a rescue. The ransom is set at 5000 silver. Unbeknownst to the PCs the bandits have been hired by House Illiander to kidnap Vivien and are attempting to sweeten the deal by getting paid twice. They have no intention of returning Vivien but figured they can use the extra ransom money as a bonus.

Objective:

Rescue Vivien by any means necessary.

Reward:

If ransom is delivered then 1/4 XP of mission as bonus and no money, but will further relationship with House Davros. Will increase their reputation with Davros by 1 point.

If PCs offer to pay the ransom themselves then reward will be 1/4 the ransom money back (1250 silver) plus 1/2 XP for the mission as bonus. Will increase reputation with Davros by 2 points.

If they rescue Vivien without paying the ransom then full XP reward, 1/2 ransom amount as a bonus (2500), and reputation with House Davros increases 4 points.

If they turn down the monetary reward then they will receive an extra general reputation point but Jason will insist they still receive the money.

Scenario Start:

Jason: Once again you have my thanks and the thanks of House Davros. To have recovered so much of what was stolen was more than I could hope for...

Flustered and injured the House Guard rushes in, he has a nasty cut to his head and is cradling his arm to his chest.

Guard: Sir! Thank Helm I found you. The Lady Vivian has been kidnapped.

Jason: What? What has happened?

Guard: We were set upon only an hour's ride from the gates. The North Road, near the Old Mill. They killed Xen and Mellor and dragged Lady Vivien from her horse. I tried to fight them but they knocked me out. When I came to I was in their camp. They laughed at me. They told me they would hurt her if I don't get them 5000 silver for her safe return.

Jason: 5000 silver? They are holding her for ransom?

Guard: Yes sir. I am so sorry. I tried to stop them. I did. But there were too many of them.

Jason: Yes, yes I am sure you did. But where are they? What did they say?

Guard: They gave me this note sir.

Guard passes Jason a rolled up scrap of parchment and then notices the group. He looks at them in surprise.

Jason: It says that we have until dawn to get the money to the 5 mile marker stone on the North Road. We have to leave it behind the stone and they will retrieve it. If they see the city guard they will kill her. Dear gods, what can we do?

Have characters roll a D20 for perception:

If Mika rolls 15+ she notices that the guard still has his money pouch.

If Garrett rolls 15+ he notices that the guard is more nervous than upset or angry.

If Ronin rolls 17+ he notices that the wound on the guard's head doesn't look like a combat injury and more like a self-inflicted wound.

If Rufus rolls 18+ he notices an odd stress in the guard's voice that would seem to indicate he is hiding something. If they all fail then carry on.

[All fail roll]

Guard was actually complicit in the abduction and can't be trusted. If the group don't notice this then have the guard betray them if he goes with them. If they do notice this then they can pressure him for a better location of the camp and the information that the mile stone drop will be an ambush.

[Play out scenario and see what the players do. After much bickering they decide to help... apparently their plan is to take the ransom as if to pay it, but keep it... D/Ronin has gone along with this which is an alignment violation... GM not penalising him straight away and allowing time to make up for the lapse]

Guard: Let me go with you. I can show you where they attacked us and where they brought me out of the forest.

Let players decide if he can go with them or point out the locations on a map. Guard will attempt to mislead them if they ask for map directions. He will also tell them there were 20 men not 15. If he goes with them he will attempt to 'accidentally' give away their position when they creep up on the camp.

[They decline his offer of help on the grounds he is injured and will slow them down, but do accept his help with the map... GM/Guard points to the 'wrong' location]

Guard gives them the wrong location of where he rejoined road. It is past the 5 mile mark, whereas he actually rejoined the road near the 2 mile mark by a grove of aspens. Ambush happened where he said and the bodies are still there, stripped of anything useful.

Jason: So what are we doing about the ransom? You have to help me.

Depending on what way they play the ransom option:

1. Jason: Here is the ransom. Please bring her back to us. Is there anything else you need?
2. Jason: Thank you for this. I only wish I had the money on hand to pay the ransom. You are so kind to offer to do this. Please bring her back to us. Is there anything else you need before you leave?
3. Jason: While you do that, I will organise for the ransom to be dropped at dawn. Get word to me if you are successful and we can deal with these brigands once and for all.

[Option 1 taken]

[Unexpectedly players went to Ribald's 'No Solicitation' to restock supplies. S/Mika has still not remembered about the jewels in the pack. Purchases paid for with ransom money. 5 x Minor Healing Potions, 2 x Throwing Knives (S/Mika), 1 x Quiver of Arrows (D/Ronin), 10 x Flaming Arrows (D/Ronin), 1 x Scroll of Haste (P/Rufus), 1 x Scroll of Identify (P/Rufus)]

When they are on the road the chance that they meet a 'helpful farmer' will increase as follows. Every half mile roll a d20. At ½ mile 19 or 20 they meet a farmer who says he saw something. At 1 mile 18+, at 1.5 miles 17+, at 2 miles 16+, at 2.5 miles 15+, at 3 miles and further 14+. If they reach the Old Mill have the Farmer resting in the shade of the boundary wall.

If Guard is present he tries to dissuade them from listening to the farmer.

If Guard is absent and the party asks, then the Farmer provides the following information:

A middle aged man is walking slowly toward you along the road. He has a small cart hitched to a mule, loaded with what smells like turnips, but there is a loose canvas covering them. He is singing softly, but off-key and is drinking regularly from a flask

Farmer: I heard a ruckus this morning down the road (x point on the road). Some scruffy bastards were dragging a woman off through the forest heading (depends on where they meet the farmer). Weird thing was about 30 mins later I saw some guard come skulking out of the forest down near that grove of aspens.

[Succeeded after 3rd roll. D/Ronin just about managed to talk others out of killing the farmer. Decided to go Aspen Grove to track the guard's route]

Appendix Three – Character Sheets

Appendix Four - Character Gaming Statistics

Example of NPC Character Stats from D&D 3rd Edition Rules

Drizzt Do'Urden

Male Drow (Dark Elf), 16th-Level Ranger

Strength	13 (+1)
Dexterity	21 (+5)
Constitution	15 (+2)
Intelligence	17 (+3)
Wisdom	17 (+3)
Charisma	14 (+2)

Fortitude Save +12	Alignment: Chaotic Good
Reflex Save +12	Speed 30 ft.
Will Save +8	Size M
Initiative +9 (Improved Initiative)	Armor Class 24 (+5 Dex, +9 armor)
Hit Points 92	
Attack Bonus +16/+11/+6/+1 (primary weapon), +17/+12 (secondary weapon).	

Ranger Spells (3/3/2/1): Drizzt is a follower of Mielikki, the goddess of the forest. Ranger spells he typically has prepared include: 1st--*animal friendship*, *entangle*, *pass without trace*; 2nd--*detect evil*, *hold animal*, *protection from elements*; 3rd --*control plants*, *neutralize poison*; 4th--*nondetection*.

Special: As a ranger, Drizzt gains a bonus to Bluff, Listen, Spot, and Track, as well as damage rolls against the following types of creatures: goblinoids (+4), magical beasts (+3), evil outsiders (+2), and vermin (+1). As a drow, he can use the following spell-like abilities, each once per day, as a sorcerer of his level: *dancing lights*, *faerie fire*, and *darkness*. He has darkvision and +2 to saving throws against spells and spell-like effects; he's lost his normal spell resistance, as he's been on the surface too long.

Languages: Drizzt speaks Common, Elven, Dwarven, and Undercommon (the language of the Underdark).

Possessions: mithral *chain mail* +4, a *frostbrand* +3 scimitar (named Icingdeath), a *defender* +5 scimitar (named Twinkle), and a *figurine of wondrous power*, an onyx panther named Guenhwyvar (see the end of this entry for more information). Drizzt carries a mix of adventuring gear, including some drow and dwarven equipment.

Appearance: Somewhat larger than a typical dark elf, Drizzt stands 5'4" and weighs about 130 lbs. His handsome features are sharp and well proportioned; his white hair is long, flowing, and smooth. His violet eyes are windows to his passionate soul. He normally wears a fur-collared forest-green cloak and high black boots. It has been more than 70 years since he first ventured into the surface world and at present he is in the neighborhood of 140 years old—still a young adult by elven standards.⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴⁵ This is taken from the official 3rd Edition Rules available at http://www.wizards.com/forgottenrealms/FR_3E_Drizzt.asp [last accessed 29/11/10]

Basic Character Statistics for R.A. Salvatore's Companions of the Hall

Catti Brie Battlehammer – Archer, Human⁵⁴⁶

Chaotic Good

Strength	12
Dexterity	16
Constitution	15
Intelligence	14
Wisdom	16
Charisma	17

Bruenor Battlehammer – Warrior, Dwarf⁵⁴⁷

Neutral Good

Strength	17
Dexterity	15
Constitution	19
Intelligence	12
Wisdom	15
Charisma	15

Wulfgar – Barbarian, Human⁵⁴⁸

Chaotic Good

Strength	19
Dexterity	16
Constitution	18
Intelligence	15
Wisdom	14
Charisma	15

Regis – Thief, Halfling⁵⁴⁹

True Neutral

Strength	10
Dexterity	17
Constitution	15
Intelligence	13
Wisdom	15
Charisma	15

Drizzt Do'Urden – Ranger, Dwarf⁵⁵⁰

Chaotic Good

Strength	13
Dexterity	20
Constitution	15
Intelligence	17
Wisdom	17
Charisma	14

⁵⁴⁶ <http://www.candlekeep.com/library/articles/drizzt-35.htm> *D&D* 3.5 ed. [last accessed 11/11/10]

⁵⁴⁷ www.candlekeep.com/library/articles/wulfgar-35 *D&D* 3.5 Ed. [last accessed 11/11/10].

⁵⁴⁸ <http://www.candlekeep.com/library/articles/drizzt-35.htm> *D&D* 3.5 ed. [last accessed 11/11/10]

⁵⁴⁹ <http://www.candlekeep.com/library/articles/drizzt-35.htm> *D&D* 3.5 ed. [last accessed 11/11/10]

⁵⁵⁰ Ed Greenwood, Sean K. Reynolds, Skip Williams and Rob Heinsoo *Dungeons and Dragons Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting 3.5 Ed.* (Renton: Wizards of the Coast, 2001) p.177

Heroes of the Lance Official Game Stats

Tracy Hickman *Dragons of Despair AD&D Core Rules* (Lake Geneva WI: TSR, 1984)

Tanis Half-Elven

5th Level Half Elf Fighter

Strength	16
Constitution	12
Dexterity	16
Intelligence	12
Wisdom	13
Charisma	15
Alignment:	Neutral Good
Armour Class	4
Hit Points	35

Caramon Majerie

6th Level Human Fighter

STR	18/63
CON	17
DEX	11
INT	12
WIS	10
CHA	15
Alignment:	Lawful Good
AC	6
H P	36

Sturm Brightblade

6th Level Human Fighter

STR	17
CON	16
DEX	12
INT	14
WIS	11
CHA	12
Alignment:	Lawful Good
AC	5
HP	29

Raistlin Majerie

3rd Level Human Magic-user

STR	10
CON	10
DEX	16
INT	17
WIS	14
CHA	10
Alignment:	Lawful Neutral
AC	5
HP	8

Flint Fireforge

4th Level Dwarf Fighter

STR	16
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CON 18
DEX 10
INT 7
WIS 12
CHA 13
Alignment: Neutral Good
AC 6
HP 42

Goldmoon

5th Level Human Cleric

STR 12
CON 12
DEX 14
INT 12
WIS 16
CHA 17
Alignment: Lawful Good
AC 6
HP 19

Taslehoff Burrfoot

4th Level Kender Thief

STR 13
CON 14
DEX 16
INT 9
WIS 12
CHA 11
Alignment True Neutral
AC 5
HP 15
Pocts 50% Locks 47% Traps 40% Quiet 43% Hides 40% Hears 20% Climb 73% Reads 15%

Riverwind

5th Level Human Ranger

STR 18/35
CON 13
DEX 16
INT 13
WIS 14
CHA 13
Alignment: Lawful Good
AC 5
HP 34

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