

ORIGINS OF A WORLD



Having been unable to threaten, bribe, cajole, or brainwash Wiggy into writing a Making of Hellfrost download, something we know you've been after, we decided to play on his willingness to answer fan questions instead. Fans were invited to ask TAG's lead author questions about the design of his popular fantasy setting. Their questions and Wiggy's answers are now presented for your enjoyment. The questioners forum name is included after the question.

• *What was the first spark of inspiration for Hellfrost as a whole?* [Amaril]

There wasn't really one definitive spark, so this will be a rather long answer, I'm afraid

The very first spark was undoubtedly my personal love of winter. A lot of my games back in the day involved winter as a backdrop. Winter brought up thoughts of isolation, of communities cut off from the outside world and at the mercy of vile beasts and marauding raiders. I'd always wanted a wintry setting, but no one ever wrote one for me.

Many moons ago Dave Blewer and I began work on a setting idea called *Hall of Valballa*. It never technically existed, and it no longer exists, so beans can be spilled. The plan was you'd make Viking characters and then be killed in the first encounter. Loki had escaped his imprisonment and Ragnarok was looming, so Odin sends you back to Earth as undead with a range of cool powers to foil Loki's plot. That project died a rapid death (I think *Solomon Kane* landed on my desk), but the idea of a wintry fantasy setting never went away. (A lot of the character generation material and bestiary, the parts I always write first, ended up in the *Hellfrost* books and freebies.)

Then *Hellfrost* came unbidden into my mind, though not the version you know today. In its original form *Hellfrost* was a single-story Plot Point campaign. Trying to think how to write the Plot Point caused the project to stall and other things came along to hamper progress.

Then the gods of gaming answered my call and de-

livered unto me the D&D tome *Frostburn*. That's what ignited the final spark, the one that set me on the frantic path to creating an open world you could explore endlessly, with the encroaching winter becoming the backdrop rather than the sole focus.

• *How old is Hellfrost?* [Sadric]

At the time of writing this the *Hellfrost* name is about five years old. The core manuscript in the books is about four years old now, though some parts are much newer.

• *What were your "sources" for Hellfrost, despite your own imagination?* [Enno]

Quite a few sources played their part, though the most used one is probably *The 13th Warrior* (and the book, *Eaters of the Dead*). The old crone from *The Vikings* (reused in the aforementioned movie) became my template for a typical seer of the Norns.

Other sources of inspiration included *The Lord of the Rings* movies and books, *The Real Middle Earth* by Brian Bates (explores Anglo-Saxon religion and superstition), the *Oxford Concise Dictionary of English Etymology*, the *Saga of Grettir the Strong*, and about a dozen books on the Vikings that are now well-thumbed. In terms of RPGs, WotC's *Frostburn*, the *DMGR Vikings* book, *RuneQuest Vikings*, and *The Northern Reaches D&D Gazetteer* were all helpful in one way or another.

• *Are there any other (fantasy) settings you gave a cameo or a tip to the bat in your world?* [Enno]

Not intentionally. There are some sly nods to friends and former colleagues, though. There's a reference to PEG hidden away in the *Gazetteer*. Not the easiest reference to find, but obvious once you know it exists. Piotr also makes an appearance as a barbarian king, and one of Ron Blessing's old characters lurks around, when his one good arm allows.

• *Did you reuse older material of yourself, which never got published in the other works of yours?* [Enno]

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The only unpublished material was from *Hall of Valhalla*, which is mentioned above. That was mainly the kinship rules, which appeared as a free supplement for *Hellfrost*, a few Edges and Hindrances (again, mainly familial ones), and the bestiary section, which had stats for huscarls and so on.

- *What was the inspiration and objective of Hellfrost's cosmology?* [Amaril]

Keeping it simple was the core objective.

The Viking world offered some inspiration, though the *Hellfrost* cosmology has a more Christian feel. For example, the Viking Hel wasn't a place where evil souls went, but rather a general afterlife for the masses. Chosen heroes went to Valhalla or Fólkvangr, instead. *Hellfrost* offers a more traditional Christian view that the Abyss awaits the damned while those who lead good lives get to spend eternity somewhere more pleasant.

Certain aspects were also borrowed from other mythologies. Scaetha's Hall and the whole judging of souls, for instance, actually stems from my days as an Egyptology student. The auction for unclaimed souls was added to account for those the gods didn't want, but who weren't necessarily damned automatically.

- *Frostborn are an interesting concept. Were they your solution to the ubiquitous desire for a frost-themed template for all races (i.e. - frost elves, frost dwarves, frost humans, frost engro, etc.)?* [Amaril]

In a word, no. There are frost dwarves yet no "normal" dwarves, and taiga elves already exist as a unique race, so it wasn't intended to be a catchall wintry race. Their existence came later in the development phase and tied in to the overarching history that was developing.

- *Why Engros instead of Half-folk?* [Amaril]

I know it's just another way of describing halflings (aka Hobbits), but calling someone a "half-race" or "half-person" seems a bit rude. Someone did comment that the name engro reminded them of an impolite ethnic term, but there is no racial connotation behind the name. I just chalk that one up to cultural differences.

As an aside, I did originally use Old English names for elves and dwarves, but I swapped them back to avoid too much confusion through overuse of the old language.

Insider Information: *Jym Ivens, the engro pictured on page 112 of the Gazetteer, is actually based loosely on Jimbo from the TAG forums. Jimbo does own a fishing tackle shop, though to the best of my knowledge he was never a tomb raider in his youth. The peg-leg engro is also based on a friend of mine. At the time of writing he'd broken his leg quite badly, so the decision was taken to immortalize him.*

- *How did you determine the Hellfrost pantheon?* [Amaril]

Wikipedia provided suitable lists of Germanic deities. Some of the pantheon corresponds almost exactly to their mythical counterparts, such as Eostre and Thunor,

while others (such as Vali) received a change of aspect while keeping the name. Picking the number of deities wasn't really a conscious choice—the list just ended when there were enough gods.

Of course, it since transpires there are 24 greater gods and 24 runes in the Elder Futhark (the Viking alphabet). Strangely that went totally unnoticed until I started thinking using the runes and how to use them in the setting, so I guess the Norns had plans.

- *You once stated on the forums that psionics didn't have a place in Hellfrost, but you included a sidebar for psionics associated with a puppeteer. Was that simply for the sake of story as an exception to the rule or did you have a change of heart?* [Amaril]

There's definitely no change of heart. I'm not a fan of settings (regardless of system) where every rules (Arcane Backgrounds in this instance) is included purely because it's part of the core rules. If it definitely fits your vision of the world then of course it should be included. Otherwise, stand by your convictions and don't be afraid to exclude something. Psionics in the hands of *heroes* just doesn't suit *Hellfrost* as written.

Being a sensible chap I wrote *Hellfrost* to include a lot of potential hooks should it prove popular enough to warrant expansions. Even if TAG didn't expand the setting, the hooks exist for GMs to use and abuse as they wished. The Puppeteers and their psionic powers is one such hook.

- *It seems we have a co-author in Hellfrost. The famous Snowy (see credits). Who is Snowy?* [Kaltorak]

Snowy is a reclusive Armenian goatherd I adopted through the "Adopt an Armenian Goatherd Scheme." Naturally his name was changed to protect his identity, as he didn't want gamers turning up at his hut asking for his autograph. His English isn't very good and he can't type, but he had some interesting ideas.

- *Did you intend to have a world which followed something approaching an apocalypse? Is it just to have prior-history plot threads or what was behind the long history?* [Shadd4d]

Hellfrost sits somewhere between a previous apocalypse (the Liche-Priest and the Blizzard War coming close together) and an impending fate. The freezing of the world has some strong ties to the Viking notion of Fimbulvint, an age of wolves when brother will fight brother, but it isn't an imminent disaster about to engulf the world.

To some degree it does exist to provide prior-history plot threads, but there's also the option for future plot threads and expansion built in. Only the north may be actually ice bound, but the effect of the *Hellfrost* is felt across the globe.

- *How did you go from having a nice list of places to arranging them on the map? What sort of inspirations and general cartography did you use/access in order*

to come up with the shape and countries of Rassilon? [Shadd4d]

Maps are something I absolutely love and totally hate simultaneously. I *love* a good map; I'll buy a book a book just because it has one decent map in. Just looking at a map, whether it's of a world, a continent, or a single village or dungeon, just gets the creative juices flowing. I *hate* drawing maps, though. I'm just not good at it. Just looking at other people's work causes me to despair at my meager attempts. Thankfully Justin managed to turn a crappy line drawing into a work of art I'm extremely proud of. In truth it's now more his creation than mine.

The continent has little in the way of geographic accuracy—features were placed where I wanted them, not because the laws of geography said they had to exist there. I know that will offend some readers, but it's always funny to see fans who fail to question the existence of dragons and magic and gods who grant miracles complain that a fantasy world isn't geographically accurate.

As for the countries and their placement, they came about organically. I wanted certain places, like an undead realm and a land of wizards, but their placement was more a matter of where they wanted to exist rather than a truly conscious decision. Originally there was something like five major lands, although the adventuring area was much smaller then. As the setting switched to an open one and the size of the continent grew, so other ideas came into my head and, in one way or another, became incorporated into the world. Since I vowed to make honest replies, places like the Barony of Cul and Heldalund, as examples, came to the game very late and were added to fill voids in the map.

- *What steps or considerations led you to leave Hellfrost as a low tech setting as opposed to something a la Evernight/WHFRP or something of that relatively advanced tech level? Was that ever a question or did it not fit your vision of Hellfrost? [Shadd4d]*

That was purely down to the Viking/Saxon feel already entrenched in stone. Sure, Vikings with blackpowder pistols can be cool, but it wasn't how my vision for the setting. Also, adding guns implies a technological level equivalent to the Renaissance, so then you have to start thinking about the printing press, early banking, and so on, and where and if they might fit in. That would have taken the game in a direction I didn't want to go.

- *How satisfied are you with Hellfrost as it is available to us, customers? Something vital missing/stories untold or something? [Cursed]*

Very satisfied, to be honest. TAG managed to get *Hellfrost* out in its entirety, allowing you to see the northern continent as I always wanted it to be seen.

There's nothing vital missing, though some stories are left untold. What causes the Siphoning and how can it be stopped? What lies at the heart of the Hellfrost? Is the Liche-Priest going to return and when? The root of these questions stems from my ideas, but those are the epic stories you get to create. If I created the answers for

you you'd just be playing in my campaign, and where's the fun in that?

Is *Hellfrost* complete? Well, yes and no. It is **most definitely** a complete game, in that you have everything you need to run an exciting campaign for many years. But it's also incomplete, and likely always will be, because new ideas are always coming along.

- *What is the part/thing of Hellfrost you're most proud of? Thing(s) you would like to change? [Cursed]*

First off, I'm proud that you guys and gals are enjoying it. With regard more specific things I think I'm most pleased with the gods. Although the page count limited what I could write, even with a smaller font we used to cram more information per page, the details that were included mean they aren't just a list of faceless deities who exist solely to hand out spells.

Making changes is one of those things I'd always like to do, not because anything is necessarily wrong, but because, as I mentioned above, new ideas are continually forming and evolving. The day I stop having new ideas is basically the day I stop caring about the setting.

- *How do you feel about this baby of yours? Are you done with it, or you think it's just coming alive? (I mean, you're still in love with it, or is it a thing of yesterday, most of the fire burned out?) [Cursed]*

Pride ranks high on the list. Pride in getting my dream to you, pride in the way the artists brought the world to life in images, pride that Rob did a stunning job on the layout. There's also excitement, though that's always tinged with a degree of fear when something is released. Will the fans like it? Will they care enough to buy the books and play in the world?

Hellfrost is something everyone at TAG is still very much in love with; that's why TAG continues to put out regular freebies that expand the game and give you new options, and offers a wide choice of adventures. In the **very near** future you'll see a new range of e-book *Hellfrost* products designed to expand the setting without taxing your wallet or printer.

The fire is very much alight and burning brightly, Kenaz be praised!