

## The Dark God: Historical Content, Developer Commentary, and an Ode to the Dark God

by Robert J. Kuntz

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When the "Temple of Tharizdun" was published by my good friend Gary Gygax he thanked me in the credits for inspiration regarding some of that module's conceptual content. To clarify that point, and to expound upon it, is the intent of this article, specifically written with all of Canonfire's readers in mind.

In 1982 I created a fictional, evil subterranean god, an alien being of dimensional bent, not of the world, who was captured by the gods soon after his arrival upon it. His titles were many: Dark One, Lord of Nightmares, Eldest from the Outer Void, and others. His name, as conceived then, was simply Tharzdu'un (Tharz-du-Un).

He existed as a prisoner from the outset, gaining his worshippers, his servants and his other followers through coercive dreams, which the gods then were not capable of stopping. Over time his adherents formed about his prison tomb deep beneath the earth where "The Lord of Magic had shackled him, using all of the known substances of the World, all of its known magics, to create the fetters which held him as an eternal prisoner, a sleeping and forgotten god."<sup>1</sup>

With the advent of Tharizdun in WG4 I ceased expanding upon my Dark God. His initial mythical purpose had been served and moreover propagated by Gary's own imagination, and with sound steps carried forward into the published light of day, so to speak.

With the publication of my **Dark Druids** module (Troll Lord Games, 2002) I revisited the Myth of the Dark God, outlining his extended history as carried forward from where I left off. It is in no large way different from what Gary saw and expanded on in 1984, something I felt then was a great treatment of the matter by himself.

What I offer hereafter is my point of view on the Dark God, his forming history and future activities within the ever-changing milieu which has nurtured him. It is not a retrospective, merely a continuing effort to expand upon this interesting topic which, when all is said and done, was

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<sup>1</sup>From my previous, equally ancient, notes--RJK.

started by my humble self.

## **The Advent of the Tarrasque as Part of the Myth Cycle**

Reference: ***Dark Druids***, Page 15.

“Past the Twain in Depths Unplumbed,  
Lies in sleep an evil one.

Wherefrom roams his spiked pet.  
As often as his dreams do let,  
Past yapping, snarling things which crawl,  
And at its heels do wail.

That is where the spike did ring,  
Did at last prevail.  
When plucked so mightily from its hind,  
A gift, a bane, his hand to mine...”

The tarrasque is seen here, as insinuated by the poem, as a servant of the Dark God. It is his “pet” which defers to him and which is much like his master. For it sleeps, much of it is unconquerable, it resists magic (a key to its continued association with the Dark God, as I shall expand upon), it is subterranean, feared, and considered by many to be the worst possible threat to civilization due to it rampaging the upper world before returning to its subterranean slumber.

The tarrasque's reasons for doing what it does, the destruction it causes, are here-to-fore unknown. They are as mysterious as the Dark God and his own dreams. Does the Dark God instigate this creature? For surely it seems a nightmare become reality in such instances where it is between hibernations. In the above poem fragment, 3rd and 4th lines, that question is answered for the positive:

*Wherefrom roams his spiked pet.  
As often as his dreams do let...*

So the tarrasque is seen as a physical extension of the Dark God. A subterranean pet and servant which is linked with this god and his purpose, but which can only be awakened from its own deep slumber by a stronger willed being such as his Master.

## The Tarrasque in Relation to Tharzadu'un's Imprisonment

In a prefatory/back matter note to the upcoming "The Dark God Arises" I expound on Tharzduu'un's imprisonment:

"Through the barrier he came. And he beheld a world of light as something he would absorb. Being to nothingness is what he begot, for he was the Void.

"Quailing, the gods did rally to each other, even as the Underworld bowed to him. And the World and everything in it spoke rejection; and the Lord of Magic heard. He took a little from each which had spoken so as to fashion a mighty spell therefrom to defeat the Lord of the Void. *But the spiked one would not be swayed to join in this union against the darkness. Thus one part always remained: a key to the lock, a danger in the darkness.*"

In deciding upon the continuation of the course of a myth it is good to ground oneself at its beginning. The tarrasque's own association with Tharzdu'un is seen as immediate. It naturally gravitated to him even as the course of events surrounding the Dark God's imprisonment were taking shape. Then too it was young, and its carapace resilient, and from this the Dark God fashioned the "key" to his future lock, for the tarrasque had not lent part of itself to form the shackles of his prison, which the Dark God knew was near at hand.

*"That is where the spike did ring,  
Did at last prevail.  
When plucked so mightily from its hind,  
A gift, a bane, his hand to mine..."*

And this is where the future hierophant of the Dark Druids, then a elven man of no consequence, and in fact one of the first of human-kind to be summoned upon the Dark God's arrival, takes shape.<sup>2</sup> He is the forerunner of a sect which will go wildly astray while attempting to interpret and serve its unknown master, as detailed in the last line: *"A gift, a bane, his hand to mine..."*

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<sup>2</sup>Mahzrat was the name given to him by the Dark God. In elven his name means "Maze-rat." This also alludes, in total, to what will become of a nearby elven colony which over time is summoned and physically changed by the Dark God's dreams. This is touched upon briefly in DD, in two lines of the poem on page 15:

***Past yapping, snarling things which crawl,  
And at its heels do wail.***

The former elven colony, now deserted, is also noted at the end of Part 1; and the whole history of this mysterious event is fully detailed in Part 2, "Claws in the Dark."

He is commanded to take the tarrasque spike, but for what reasons, these are left a mystery. That the god needn't inform him of the spike's purpose is all too correct. This is the key to Tharzdu'un's freedom which in a desperate moment he gives into the keeping of a servant. For all intents and purposes it is a symbol of their new-born relationship and likewise a relic of a future sect which will eventually grow nearer to the Master, and that is all. But on page 14 of DD it is noted that "Those wielding the spike will have its *other powers and functions revealed to them by the Dark God at "appropriate" times.*" [Emphasis mine.] And this is reiterated in the artifact's description on page 51: "It has both innate powers and those imparted by the Dark God for specific reasons and/or at specific times."

The following fragment from "*Ode to the Dark God*"<sup>3</sup> also hints at the tarrasque's intimate tie with the Dark God, which he manipulates to break his bonds.<sup>4</sup> This situation is fully explored in the "Dark Quest"<sup>5</sup> series of adventures.

"Let it be known that,  
No Chains,  
No Element,  
No Magic,  
No Strength,  
Holds its sinews,  
From its appointed destiny.

When the Dark Time comes,  
It shall move,  
Towards and for the Void,  
Bellowing for its Master.

Shackles shall fly;  
And sparks shall sunder,  
That which the Lord of Magic,  
Once made unyielding..."

<sup>3</sup>The complete ode appears in the unpublished work, "The Dark God Arises!"

<sup>4</sup>As the only living thing to defy the Lord of Magic, it is by comparison noteworthy that the tarrasque is also a highly magical being. The tarrasque's anti-magic power, as well as its newly defined position, are key to it serving as the Dark God's instrument. Thus, "*a key to the lock, a danger in the darkness,*" as previously noted. Through its siding with Tharzdu'un against the gods does its legend obtain true mythical proportions.

<sup>5</sup>Part 1 of the "Dark Quest" series, *Dark Druids*, was published by Troll Lord Games, 2002. Note page 43 of that work for capsule descriptions of each part of the series.

Mahzrat is the author of the “Ode,” but only many hundred years later. This clues us in on what has become of the relationship as the details are made known to him (by association and dream sendings). Mahzrat knows at this point his master’s will and plans and he openly writes about them.

### **The Dark God Arises**

The latter part of the ode expands upon Tharzdu’un being freed and what this means.

“...Darkness will fall,  
Upon the awakening brood.  
And the Black Heart will come forth,  
And his dreams will be real again.”

Nightmares will walk sleepless.  
The Darkness will chatter,  
Evil beyond recognition.  
Necromancers will cower.  
Dread priests will falter,  
Knives to their own breasts,  
Prostrating their husks to his will.

A deeper shade of Night,  
Will obscure The Sun God’s ray.  
All will cry and flee,  
Unrelenting to the Void,  
To bow to and kiss,  
Darkness eternal.

None will escape,  
His withering grasp.  
Even Fairy shall recoil,  
Its King, his dreams, smitten.

Darkness will merge with Darkness.  
The sun shall squint, blinded.  
The beckoning moons will disappear,  
Leaving all of their ken,  
Wrapped in a dark shawl,  
Howling without purpose. ...

## **A World Of Darkness**

The World thereafter becomes an apocalyptic battleground; and the gods are either victorious in defeating Tharzdu'un or are not. The negative consequences of not doing so cast an eternal darkness upon the earth, and all is changed. Good elements fractionalize into power struggles as the chaos takes hold, neutrals turn upon themselves and others, and evil passes or is absorbed for the Dark God's purpose.

Tharzdu'un is an alien god who views humans and their kind as mere puppets and tools, instruments of his will and rulership. There is no such thing as "followers" in his view--every being is a slave to his purpose or is just as easily discarded as inconsequential to his scheme of things. The former actions of the once all-powerful gods are seen, in retrospect, as forgiving by comparison.

The last desperate attempt to free the World from its fall into darkness and despair is related in the adventure, "The Darkest Day," a prelude to the "The Dark God Arises," where the surviving Gods (of *all* alignments) via their champions actually work together to dethrone Tharzdu'un, the "Dread Usurper."

## **Afterward**

I will continue crafting more material on the Dark God, his myth, and will hopefully finish designing the related adventures soon enough so as not to leave those interested waiting for too long a period. His is a myth which has been in hiding for too long; and one which has strong roots in the epics of fantasy gaming. The Dark God's mysteries beckon to be uncovered, as well as rediscovered, to the death of us all!

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