

FOREWORD

Early in my game design career, I lucked into the best assignment you can hope to get. Back in the early '90s, TSR Inc. was committed to expanding the D&D universe with bold new visions of fantasy settings. Amazing new worlds like *Dark Sun*, *Al-Qadim*, and *Planescape* debuted in each new product year. In the fall of 1993, Colin McComb and I were picked to create the next fantasy world for the *Dungeons & Dragons* game. We had only one directive: This will be the setting where your character is a king.

Naturally, this presented two gigantic challenges. Not only did we need to invent a new world, we also needed to invent a whole new way to play D&D. I took the lead on that part of the job; I'd grown up as a fan of strategy games, and I realized that commanding a kingdom required "tech" from the wargame roots of the RPG hobby. (*SPI's Empires of the Middle Ages* was one of our office favorites at TSR; we played it every few months.) We understood from the outset that the game-within-a-game of running kingdoms was important, but it couldn't overshadow the traditional RPG—people play the game to be *heroes*, not pencil-pushers. Ideally, the kingdom-running decisions should actually generate adventure opportunities for the player characters to strap on their armor, grab their magic tomes, and go fight monsters. We hoped that those adventures would carry extra significance because the players were choosing what to do and when to do it, instead of waiting for NPC patrons to hand them quests. Finally, Jeff Grubb offered a key suggestion about making the divine right of kings something real and tangible in the setting. If you're reading this foreword, you're probably familiar with the result: the *Birthright Campaign Setting*.

Twenty-five years after *Birthright* was published, I still hear from fans who loved what we tried to do. Clearly, we got something right. Thanks to the efforts of Nicolas Nayaert and his team, a whole new generation of RPG fans has the opportunity to explore the challenges offered by a game that casts you as both a hero and a king. Even more impressively, they've anchored this unique style of RPG play in a world with an epic story . . . one that may have new chapters in the future.

The throne is yours. What will you do with it?

Richard Baker

Being called into the boss's office doesn't usually end well. This is true even when you work for TSR, the developer and publisher of *Dungeons & Dragons*.

But when Rich Baker and I were called into the boss's office that day in 1993, we walked out with an incredible new assignment, straight from the top: We were to build TSR's new campaign setting from the ground up, and we were to make kings of our players.

Not a small order. Daunting, even. But with the help of artist Tony Szczudlo and editor Anne Brown, we got right to work constructing histories, cultures, nations, and provinces, along with intrigues, rivalries, bitter feuds, and rebellions. We'd have to figure out how our realms worked: trade, power centers, and roles for those who didn't want to be lords but still wanted to rule. We constructed ley-lines for mages, churches and religions for our priests, thieves' guilds for our rogues, mercantile houses and trade routes...

It was a lot of work, is what I'm saying. We had endless hours of discussion, playtests with victims we plucked from around the company to find the holes in our rules, and of course months of design, writing, and preparation. By the end of the process, we delivered the campaign setting called *Birthright*, and it won us an Origins Award for the Best Role-Playing Supplement of 1995.

TSR rolled out a number of supplements – explorations into new parts of the world, adventures, monsters, even books designed for players to get a better grasp on the realms they could rule. It was a sales strategy that was exhaustive, daring, and – ultimately – unprofitable. TSR wound up competing against its own game lines, and sold rights to its campaign worlds and intellectual property to Wizards of the Coast. *Birthright* vanished into the archives, and into the memories of its players.

Still, it was a good run. Not everything can live forever.

But now Mr. Nayaert and his team have delivered *Seeds of Wars*. I've spent a month looking over their work, and I have to say I like what I've seen. It's an ambitious reimagining, an evolution of the genre, and a new chance for players to take a shot at the rewards, challenges, and perils of rulership.

It's about time. Time the genre was revived, and time to pass the crown to a new generation.

Here's to the future kings and queens, emperors and empresses – rule wisely and rule well. May your lineage continue unbroken.

Colin McComb