
Nithogar stared at the giant in silence, without the twitch of a draconic muscle. Eventually, he spoke. "The ancient pacts made between your people and my own lord Erixalimar, the dragon king, forbade you from even coming to this land. Yet here you stand."

"We came here," Re-Magul said, "because this land was in peril. A peril you had wrought, then fled from."

The muscles around Nithogar's wide mouth twitched.

"Oh yes," the giant continued. "Perhaps you thought that such lore had been lost, but I know who you are, Nithogar the Wicked. Nithogar the Hated. Nithogar the Despoiler."

"These are epithets I must have earned after I left."

"Then how about this one, dragon: Nithogar, creator of the dramojb." Out of habit, Re-Magul spat as he said "dramojb."

Nithogar flexed his wings. "You know nothing of it, Hu-Charad."

"Nothing?" Re-Magul's eyes flared. "You are ancient, it is true, but I am no mere youth. I was there when the stone ships arrived on these shores. I remember the battles with the dramojb—the so-called 'dragon scions.' I saw friends and relatives die in their claws and teeth. They scuttled out of the shadows and raped this land like nothing before them or—thank all the singers in the Houses of the Eternal—since."

"So your kind dealt with the dramojb. I am aware of that," the dragon said. "And you were some kind of leader in your campaign against them. What do you want from me? Gratitude? So be it. Thanks to you, giant, and to all your kind."

And with a sneer, he added quickly: "Now be on your way."





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RETURN**

**TALES FROM THE LAND
OF THE DIAMOND THRONE**

BY

MONTE COOK

ED GREENWOOD

KRISTINE KATHRYN RUSCH

JEFF GRUBB

AND OTHERS

EDITED BY SUE WEINLEIN COOK



MONTE COOK'S ARCANAE EVOLVED:
THE DRAGONS' RETURN

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Cover art by J. P. Targete
Interior art by Patrick Keith
Cover design by Lisa Chido
Interior design by Peter Whitley
Cartography by Ed Bourelle

ISBN: 1-58846-883-6
Stock #WW16147
First Printing: March 2005
Printed in Canada

Distributed for Malhavoc Press by
White Wolf Publishing
1554 Litton Drive
Stone Mountain, GA 30083

www.montecook.com

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THE DRAGONS' RETURN

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SUE WEINLEIN COOK
INTRODUCTION



Six thousand years ago, the dragons dwelled in peace. But in the absence of their mighty liege, Erixalimar, they dabbled in dark experiments that led to the birth of the dramojh: foul demon-dragons whose unchecked battle-lust and powerful magic threatened to wipe out their creators. Returning from an exploration of the western lands, Erixalimar found his realm awash in blood, his people near death. He did the only thing he could do: sought the help of the gods to rid the world of the dramojh. And once the bloodthirsty creatures were gone, he took his people away to the west, leaving their homeland to heal in the hands of mortals.

But the power of the dramojh surpassed all expectations. After more than four thousand years, the demon-dragons returned to plague the land once more. This time, the intercession of the Hu-Charad—noble giants from across the eastern sea—exterminated them once and for all and saved the mortal races

from further centuries of enslavement. A long-forgotten treaty forbade the giants from entering the dragons' home, but the wyrms were no longer there to uphold the ancient pact.

And now, seventeen hundred years later, the dragons finally return to find that the Hu-Charad have made the realm their own, rebuilding the draconic homeland into a place they called Dor-Erthenos, the Lands of the Diamond Throne.

Ferocious or friendly, grand or grisly, dragons always make intriguing and complex characters. And a short story anthology is the perfect venue to explore the complexity of the draconic character, as well as the complexity of the circumstances surrounding their return.

The twelve talented authors in this book all see the arrival of the wyrms in a slightly different light: Some of the dragons seek power, some thirst for blood, some want to reconnect with ancestors, and some just want a place to call home. Whatever their inclinations, these dragons bring with them unique ancient magic tied to the land, arcane skills to help creatures evolve into more powerful versions of themselves, and a new client race of dragon-men: the dracha.

The response of the Diamond Throne residents to the dragons' return is just as interesting and complex as the dragons themselves. The giants see the creatures as a new threat to the land. The reptilian mojh view the return as a much-prophesied answer to their prayers. And the descendents of the dramojh, such as the slassans and squamous lir, have reason to tremble, for the dragons want no reminders of the evil demon-dragons. Other mortal races see the dragons' presence here as a cause for fear, an opportunity for profit, or a call for great courage.

Much of this story is yet unwritten. Why did the dragons choose to return now after so long? Will they drive the Hu-Charad back across the sea or work with them to reshape the realm once more? These are questions that only your own imaginations can answer. For now, enjoy the story as it evolves.

WILL MCDERMOTT
ESSENCE OF THE
DRAGON



Scarathar's knees ached. Not from walking—though there had been plenty of that this past week. The apprentice's thighs and calves had tingled as if pricked by a thousand needles the entire second day, and then throbbed for two more as the needles worked their way down to the bone. But that pain had become no more than a permeating twinge at the threshold of awareness.

This new pain came from standing. Different joints and muscles were being tested by an interminable vigil at the edge of a boulder-strewn field. Scarathar shifted his weight from one foot to the other in an attempt to ease the load on his knees.

His weight. His knees. Scarathar still found it hard to think of himself as anything but male. But it wasn't. Neither was it female. Scarathar was *mogh*. The apprentice gazed down at his . . . its . . . body, recently transformed during an agonizing, monthlong ritual. Scarathar's gangly body had elongated by more than a foot—most of that in the legs—and was now covered in green scales.