

**THE CRYSTAL POMMEL
BY EDGEWORTH ROMMEL**

I. A WIZARD IN HIS TOWER

IN THE LANDS WEST OF PALADIUM STOOD A TOWER AND WITHIN THIS TOWER STOOD A WIZARD. AND IN THE MIDDLE OF HIS STUDY STOOD A PLINTH AND UPON THIS PLINTH SAT THE POMMEL OF A SWORD. BUT THIS WAS NO ORDINARY POMMEL - FOR WITHIN ITS MULTI-FACETED SIDES LAY SECRETS, ETCHED IN CRYSTAL, BY THE WIZARD PREVIOUSLY MENTIONED IN THE STORY.

WHAT IS A WIZARD? WELL, THE WORDSMITH'S TOME OF GREATER DITION DESCRIBES A WIZARD AS "A PERSON WITH THE CAPACITY TO MANIPULATE THE VARIOUS MAGIC SYSTEMS OF THE WORLD" AND THAT "ELVES, GNOMES AND A FEW OTHER RACES ARE SO NATURALLY INCLINED TOWARDS THESE ABILITIES THAT THEY ARE NOT CONSIDERED DIFFERENT ENOUGH FROM A NORMAL PERSON TO WARRANT A DISTINCTION." - WHICH IS ALL A FANCY WAY TO SAY THAT FOR SOME RACES, USING MAGIC IS PRETTY UNREMARKABLE. THIS WIZARD, HOWEVER, WAS HUMAN - AND THEREFORE STOOD AMONG HIS PEERS AS QUITE TALENTED AND WORTHY OF OWNING A TOWER WITH A PLINTH IN IT.

"I'VE REALLY OUTDONE MYSELF THIS TIME." SHEA MUTTERED TO HIMSELF, OBSERVING THE CRYSTAL POMMEL. HE WAS USED TO UNDERESTIMATING HIS ABILITIES AND SO, AS FAR AS FIRST IMPRESSIONS GO, YOU MIGHT THINK SAYING THIS MADE HIM CONCEITED - BUT IN FACT THIS EXCEPTIONAL CRAFTSMANSHIP WARRANTED SELF-PRAISE.
"NOW WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO WITH IT...?"

IT WAS QUITE COMMON PRACTICE IN THIS ERA FOR WIZARDS TO CREATE POWERFUL MAGICAL SWORDS AND THEN ABANDON THEM IN CAVES THROUGHOUT THE WORLD, FOR AN ADVENTURER TO FIND. IT GAVE THEM THE FREEDOM TO RESEARCH AND EXPERIMENT IN THEIR FIELD, BUT ABSOLVED THEM OF LIABILITY WHEN SOMEONE USED THAT SWORD TO WRECK HAVOC. ALTERNATIVELY, SWORDS ON THE SAFER SIDE WERE OFTEN SOLD TO SHOPS, WHO ALWAYS HAD A NEED FOR MORE STOCK. OCCASSIONALLY A WIZARD WOULD HAND OUT A SWORD AS A REWARD FOR A QUEST, IF THEIR NEED FOR A SPECIFIC TASK TO BE COMPLETED OUTWEIGHED THE POSSIBILITY OF THAT MAGIC SWORD MAKING THEM LOOK BAD IN THE LONG RUN.

ULTIMATELY, THE CRYSTAL POMMEL WAS TOO POWERFUL TO TAKE LIGHTLY. BOUND WITHIN ITS HARD EXTERIOR WAS A MYSTERIOUS POWER - THE ABILITY TO TURN ANYONE INTO A WIZARD! SHEA ALSO EXPECTED THAT THIS ABILITY COULD BE TAKEN A STEP FURTHER AND TURN AN EXISTING WIZARD INTO A "DOUBLE WIZARD" - SOMETHING THAT UNTIL THIS POINT WAS ONLY THEORY.

WHAT WOULD A DOUBLE WIZARD MEAN FOR THIS WORLD? THEY WOULD CERTAINLY BE POWERFUL - MORE POWERFUL THAN ANY SINGULAR WIZARD OF THE AGE. BUT IT WAS MORE THAN THAT. A DOUBLE WIZARD WOULD HAVE THE POWER TO TRAVEL THE 8 REALMS : FROM THE DREAM WORLD THAT WE ALL VISIT WITH OUR SLEEPING THOUGHTS, TO THE SACRED REALM THAT POWERS THE MAGICAL RUNES OF SWORDS EVERYWHERE. SUCH A DOUBLE WIZARD WOULD HAVE MASTERY OVER REALITY ITSELF!

"PERHAPS I SHOULD SEEK OUT THE SWORCERER?" SHEA WONDERED ALOUD. SURELY THE SWORCERER, AN OLD MASTER WHO FOUGHT THE DEMON SWORDS, WAS THE MOST WORTHY OF THIS GIFT.

"...BUT WHAT IF HE DOESN'T APPROVE?" A DISTRESSING THOUGHT. IN THE EYES OF SOME WIZARDS, THIS POMMEL COULD VERY WELL BE A CRIME. AN ITEM THAT BESTOWS MAGICAL PROFICIENCY TO JUST ANYONE WOULD BE A BYPASS OF THE SPELLCASTER'S OATH - AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN WIZARDS EVERYWHERE NOT TO BE A TOTAL JERK. THIS WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT INVENTION OF SHEA'S CAREER - WOULD THERE BE A PETITION TO HAVE IT DESTROYED? NO!
NO... BETTER TO KEEP IT SECRET. WHO COULD REALLY SAY FOR SURE THAT THE SWORCERER IS THE MOST WORTHY RECEIPIENT OF SUCH A GIFT? FOR ALL SHEA KNEW, IT COULD VERY WELL MAKE HIM

IMMORTAL - THERE WERE ALREADY THEORIES THAT A PERSON WOULD RANDOMLY AGE BACKWARDS AND FORWARDS IN THE FIFTH REALM. AND CAN YOU REALLY STOP YOURSELF FROM BEING A JERK IF YOU'RE IMMORTAL?

SHEA PEERED INTO THE CRYSTAL POMMEL AS THERE WAS A LOUD KNOCK! KNOCK! AT THE DOOR DOWNSTAIRS.

"AH!" SHEA GASPED.

THE PLINTH TOPPLED OVER. THE POMMEL HIT THE GROUND. THE TOWER... WELL IT WAS FINE. IT WAS A TOWER, AFTERALL.

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