ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

GENERAL

Awakenings: The Racial War Saga, Book 1
A. J. O'Connell
AuthorHouse
978-1-4490-1781-1
Three Stars (out of Five)

Awakenings, a novel based on a role-playing game developed by the author, begins with a long prologue in which a fierce mêlée rages between a group of heroes and ferocious monsters controlled by a practitioner of dark magic. This opening section introduces readers to an inimitable cast of characters: a High Elf; a Jungle Drake (similar to a dragon); a female Dwarf; a Val'Arias Fialt shaman (a "bipedal feline capable of hurling quills from within folds of [his] bird-like wings") who "had long ago forsaken his heritage and bound his wings as a rejection of his race's evolution"; a Deep-Ocean Merloch princess; and a Human. While this group of adventurers engages in a fight with the evil Peotril and his minions, the battle accidentally releases the dreaded demon, Velthanjantle. "Pulling free of the ruined keep the demon stood, spread wide its leathery wings, and roared," A.J. O'Connell writes. "He had much recovering to do before he was prepared to rule this world in the name of his master, but time was something he had plenty of."

Fifteen years later, the six heroes must stop the fully rejuvenated Velthanjantle from finding the "Three Chains of Gold" that will grant his master Kargonis, the dark god, the ability to wreak havoc within the Greater Realm and bring about the destruction of the mortal world. At the same time, the heroes must deal with power grabs by groups of wizards, dragons, and other gods and demons.

When novels are based on role-playing games, it can be easy for readers with no prior knowledge of the game to get lost in numerous names, events, and powers. O'Connell creatively alleviates this problem by providing a Web site, www.racialwar.net, which contains an archive of background material about his role playing game, Realm of Reality, and excerpts from his novel. The Web site contains a wealth of material like the compendiums from other role-playing games like Dungeons and Dragons and Magic: The Gathering.

O'Connell's idea that there is one great reality and many lesser realities is nothing new. Roger Zelazny in the *Chronicles of Amber* and Stephen King and Peter Straub in their novels, *The Talisman*

and *Black House*, have written about the idea with more elegance, depth, and character development. *Awakenings* contains many grammatical errors, typos, and misused words, such as “drug” for “dragged” and pet words and phrases like “resolve” and “abandon.”

Readers who enjoy the swashbuckling and sword and sorcery aspects of such characters as Conan the Barbarian and Kull the Conqueror will like O’Connell’s fight scenes—especially those involving the High Elf, Eldorion.

In the end, reading *Awakenings* is like eavesdropping on a Dungeons and Dragons campaign. The exposition scenes are nothing more than bridges to the next fight scene, and one can almost hear the Dungeon Master shuffling his folder of adventures.

Lee Gooden