
On My Bookshelf: Redhurst Academy of Magic

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In this edition of On My Bookshelf I will be discussing a book that was released in 2004 called Redhurst Academy of Magic. Produced by Human Head Studios, this is a campaign style book that details a magic academy in the style of Hogwarts from the Harry Potter series.

But this book is much more than that in a surprising way. While it does give you everything you need to run a magic school, it is also one of the more fascinating reads that I've had in a long time. It is written in a style that I never would have thought possible and yet succeeds in drawing the reader into the complex setting of magical intrigue and limitless adventures.

Writing style

I ordered this book back in 2003 when it came out because I was running D&D games for a younger group of players. I liked the idea of running some adventures out of a school and this seemed to fit the bill. I was extremely disappointed when I received the book and it wasn't written in the usual campaign style format. Instead, the book was written as if it were to be given to a first-year student who was thinking of joining the school or who had already been accepted.

I saw this as pretty hokey. Worse, there was scribbling in the margins by someone who didn't like the school that contradicted some of the text in a supposedly funny take on behind-the-scenes reality of the school. Double hokey.

First Person Scribbler

It doesn't take long for the book's charm to get to you. Yes it is written as a primer for the school. Class information is provided on the different schools of magic along with teachers and locations. The layout of the school is provided along with everything a first-year student would need to get by in the school.

The true magic of the book is reading the scribbles that appear all around the text. I can relate to them best at DM Tips. They give the inside dirt from the viewpoint of a fifth-year student who knows the ins and outs of the school, giving the cynical lowdown on the promotional text in the book. But these scribbles are more because they develop the hooks and intrigue that make the whole setting believable and playable.

Redhurst Academy of Magic

The details outlined in the book give the best indepth description of a magic school that I've ever read. That's because the whole book is dedicated to the details, as opposed to just a chapter as part of the usual city setting.

Unlike Hogwarts that has Griffindor and Ravenclaw type houses, Redhurst doesn't divide its students. But they are eventually encouraged to join one of the sub-schools of magic along a more natural D&D divide like Abjuration, Conjunction and Transmutation. Even Necromancy has a place here, although it is located in a tower apart from the others. After all, "you must understand death in order to defeat it." A student doesn't choose his specialty until the end of the second year usually, and may choose not to specialize at all.

Planar Travel on a Schedule

One of the interesting aspects of the school as described is its ability to teleport itself to different locations in different planes. Although this ability could be completely ignored, all the details are provided to let you have the school teleport to various cities on your planet or across the planes. The school has a schedule of jumps which opens the door to interesting situations if player characters get left behind. I think this adds an extra dimension to the setting.

Too Much Like Hogwarts?

I don't think this book sold too well based on the after support of the product. My first guess for this is that people thought it was a reworking of Hogwarts and thought it would be cheesy. That thought never crossed my mind when I bought it or read it. It was only recently when I re-read the book that I thought about the comparison. In my opinion the book stands alone. I guess you could call it a D&D Hogwarts but there are plenty of differences that make it unique.

My second guess for it not doing too well most DMs are not going to want to run their players through a magic school as teenagers. This is probably more accurate because my plans were to run it with a younger group that could relate better. Although I never actually ran the campaign I had planned, the characters I was suggesting to the players were a teacher for the magician, a druid gardener, fighter security personnel and new cleric for the pastoral side. Of course the door was open for the players to develop their own characters as students other employees of the academy.

Missing in Action

Although the website for Redhurst does an excellent job of providing hooks for the setting, there are no detailed modules to run. I think this is important to have because of the rather unique setting. I think that one fully developed module would show DMs the potential of the school.

Redhurst Academy of Magic Website

The website for Redhurst is well-done and you can see that it look as if it were being developed to be something big. It's worth looking at the free downloads if you are considering buying the book.

Human Head Studios Website

The above link is for Human Head Studios. I'm posting it because it has to be one of the best visual websites I've seen. The scroll bar and selection buttons fit so well and I just love looking at this page. My compliments go to the developers.

How to Use Redhurst Academy of Magic

To begin with, this a fun and interesting read by itself. There was enough to keep me turning pages to see what the nefarious Mad Scribbler had to say next. The book can also be used as a complete setting, all by itself. There are enough facts and details given in the book to play out numerous adventures.

In my opinion the book is best used as a magic school within an established setting. Its detailed characters and school layout lets you create a believable school environment that can be a central part of your own campaign or just a stopover as part of an ongoing adventure.

dDemonicAngels is the online identity of Bil White, a freelance writer living in Montreal. Redhurst is still on his list of material to use next, more so now that he has just re-read the book.