

Dunklezahn: the mass-media dragon of FASA's SHADOWRUN® world

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Artwork by Robert Walters

The DRAGON PROJECT

Our special miniseries presenting the dragons of other game worlds continues with a very traditional dragon with very nontraditional interests. . .

The streets are dark in the SHADOWRUN® role-playing game, and the masters of those streets are the *shadowrunners*. Deckers, elves, mages, dwarves, riggers, mercenaries, trolls, samurai, orks, and shamans take on the jobs that the megacorporations don't want to dirty their hands with. It's a hard world, and it takes more than strength to survive. It takes *guts*.

In the SHADOWRUN game, magic and technology exist side-by-side in a game made for them both. In the year 2054, megacorporations rule, magic has returned to change the world forever, and nothing is what you'd expect. Remember the street proverb: Shoot straight, conserve ammo, and never, ever, deal with a dragon.

>>>>[Information dissemination being the soul of the Shadowland electronic network, it falls to me as its local controller to post information of interest and watch the fur fly. The following profile is excerpted and abridged from the far-too-hip-for-its-own-good online edition of the infozine *Meta Trends* (January 2054). Some of the information presented in the article has been disputed by various sources. Believe it at your own risk. As always, electronic readers of this file are invited to post their own comments and observations. Believe them at your own risk as well.]

—Captain Chaos 08:21:51/2-23-54

If dragons are beasts of legend, why is it that modern Man can periodically flip a cable channel and find one alternately babbling good-naturedly on some fascinating (to him) facet of human society or having an equally good-natured chat with a celebrity of the moment? Why is it that a dragon, once the bane of Saint George, the near-consumer of darling/annoying Bilbo, and the quarry of knights-gallant has his own talk show? The answer, very simply, is ratings and power.

>>>>[Yeah, when a great dragon asks for his own trideo show, are you gonna be the one to tell him no?]

—X-VP 02:13:1312-25-54

To understand Dunklezahn even somewhat, one must look back to his first appearance. The dragon's arrival in Denver on January 27, 2012, only weeks after the first appearance of others of its kind, was

notable not only for his examination and inspection of that steel-and-concrete sprawl, but for the exuberance he displayed in doing so. The handful of dragons seen to that date had been aloof, elusive, and the subject of fevered and often reactionary public and media debate. Suddenly, there was this great beast of mythology utterly and completely *fascinated* by the concept and workings of a simple automobile. The impact was tremendous.

Quickly, the great media machine sprang into action. While the military tried to seal up the area around Cherry Creek Lake where the great dragon snoozed, reporters from all over the globe battled for an interview with him. The winner was then-neophyte and local second-string, early-evening weekend anchorwoman Holly Brighton. Through not without some technical hitches, the resulting interview, 12 hours and 16 minutes of mind-boggling questions and answers, give and take, banter and blather, between the quasi-intellectual Brighton and the towering dragon Dunklezahn gave humanity its first real clues to the breadth and depth of the Awakening. The kicker was that Dunklezahn, amazed and befuddled at the world in which he had awakened, was still savvy enough to insist on an above-the-line cut of the profits from the sale of the interview tapes. It is estimated that those sales alone netted the dragon over \$13 million dollars, tax-free.

It was also at that time that Dunklezahn began his association with the first of his three "interpreters." Though the dragon was able to quickly learn to communicate in English (with the assistance of magic, he explained), getting his comments recorded onto videotape proved a tremendous task. Dragons, it was discovered, do not "speak" in the way that humans do, expelling air across a constantly changing landscape of tongue, teeth, and lip, but instead through a "thought-voice" clearly understandable by all those to whom the dragon chooses to speak. Unfortunately, microphones are immune to thought-speak.

The solution was found in a local Denver resident, a young black man named John Timmons, who agreed to "speak" for the dragon and relate the words spoken into his head. Together, the unearthly presence of the dragon and the carefully modulated words of the young divinity student captured the imagination of millions. Many sociologists today agree that were it not for the powerful but calming presence of Dunklezahn in the early days of the Awakening, mankind's reaction to the changes to the world and humanity itself might have been far more traumatic.

Dunklezahn maintained an informational-business relationship with Holly Brighton until her retirement from media in 2042, and he allowed her exclusive access for that time. The dragon gave Brighton status and respectability, and she in turn gave him humanity. Timmons remained the voice of the dragon in the media and in public. In

return, Timmons' own words became a major voice in Post-Awakened North American Protestantism, where he preached tolerance and clear-mindedness against a tide of religious reactionism. The exact relationship between the three has been hotly argued, but what is clear is that the three needed and used each other to achieve their individual goals. Brighton and Timmons both wanted notoriety for their own reasons. And Dunklezahn the dragon, like a great mythological Willy Loman, simply wanted to be liked.

Timmons' relationship with the dragon ended in 2022 when he was killed by an assassin with connections to the burgeoning anti-metahuman movement. Police were unable to question the killer because he made the mistake of taking his shot in the presence of Dunklezahn. The dragon, eyewitnesses reported, reduced the gunman to his "component flaming atoms" with a glance. Critics of the dragon were harsh, questioning why with all his power Dunklezahn had been unable to stop the assassination from occurring. Normally verbose, Dunklezahn remains silent on the matter.

>>>>[Of course he has; he arranged for the head-shot. Timmons, though he'd been a valuable mouthpiece, was starting to feel his real power as part of the chaotic Post-Awakened Protestant Church. Word is that he was preparing to end his relationship with the dragon and reveal all.]

—Gossip Hound 08:22:09/2-24-54

>>>>[This is a fraggin' *great dragon* we're talking about! First off, you don't think he could have kept Timmons quiet if he'd wanted to? (Assuming there was a reason in the first place.) Second, if you're one of the most powerful magical beings on the face of the planet, why rely on some goon with a cheap hunting rifle? Timmons nearly survived, you know.]

—Untouchable 11:28:42/3-1-54

>>>>[What, dragons don't know healing magic??]

—Doctor Dave 10:19:27/3-5-54

Dunklezahn remained without a "voice" until 2028 (resulting in some bizarre one-sided interviews between Holly Brighton and the dragon.) In the spring of that year, the dragon began using a young woman named Terri Ann Riberio. Riberio, like Brighton, was a neophyte reporter when "discovered" by the dragon. A perky and personable "voice" for the dragon, Riberio proved popular enough even without Dunklezahn that she moved on to a somewhat successful, if not noteworthy, acting career in 2039.

>>>>[It's also interesting to note that Riberio has to date refused, despite offers of tremendous sums of money, to create a tell-all program about her years with the dragon, let alone be interviewed about the subject. Integrity, or something else?]

—Publisher 03:17:15/2-26-54

>>>>[Yeah, fear of getting on a great dragon's drek list. Makes sense to me.]

—Carnival Barker 10:27:50/3-1 -54

>>>>[Ah, but such a manuscript does exist, I understand. Riberio keeps it as insurance. If she dies "oddy," it goes public. A fairly common and usually successful insurance technique. Of course, should Dunklezahn find it. . . .]

—Winner 12:01:57/3-1-54

During the five years prior to that, Dunklezahn had begun spending vast sums to create his current "lair"—a sprawling retreat on the shores of Lake Louise in the Athabaskan Council, southwest of Edmonton. It serves not only as a tourist attraction and high-technology entertainment resort, but as the dragon's personal feudal domain. Though the legal basis for Dunklezahn's claim to the land is still unclear, there is little doubt that the great dragon is lord and king over all he surveys. (And, considering the phenomenal destructive power displayed by the great eastern dragon Aden when it razed Teheran in 2020, it is doubtful that anyone in the Athabaskan Council has ever seriously considered attempting to reclaim the land, let alone collect taxes.)

The Lake Louise resort is known not only for its quasi-medieval splendor, but for the incredibly sophisticated virtual reality (VR) technology available there. Guests can participate in incredible adventures, witness stunning real and imagined vistas, and generally risk life and limb without leaving the comfort of their recliner. The resort's technology is operated by VisionQuest, the former Ares Macrotechnology VR lab purchased by Dunklezahn in 2037. Today, the continually advancing technology of the VisionQuest hardware is considered state-of-the-art for a direct-feed VR experience. The dragon himself seems fascinated by the concept of virtual reality, its applications and implications. Dragons, he is quoted as saying, have a unique understanding of reality, and anything that claims to create or define reality is of great interest to him.

>>>>[I've heard that Dunklezahn himself has attempted a direct neural-tap VR feed with no success. Guess he's stuck using those stupid archaic helmets and gloves. Quite an image, eh?]

—Bowman 07:26:30/3-1-54

>>>>[VisionQuest is very aggressive about maintaining its technological lead. I understand it's about to begin another expansion and will be looking to increase its staff. Since the wiz-kings with the real skill are as protected as an orbital banking system, you can expect some rather violent recruiting. High on this list: Dr. Michael Denaris of Fuchi, Dr. Ellen Brand Koch of Renra-ku, and Dr. Estaban Wallech of Brilliant Genesis.]

—Insider 10:18:51/3-4-54

The dragon's current "voice" is one Nadja Daviar, an Eastern European elven beauty with a mesmerizing voice and no personal history on record. She has held that position since 2039 and reigns over the Lake Louise resort like its queen. Holly Brighton, who resides in retirement at the resort and still wields considerable power within the dragon's sphere of influence, is frequently at odds with Daviar. Brighton's greatest influ-

ence seems to be over Dunklezahn's periodic talk-commentary trideo program "Wyrn Talk."

>>>>[It's been continually reported that Daviar has some connection to the Polish intelligence community, though no information beyond that has ever surfaced. I'll bet that Brighton would pay mucho dinero for that kind of paydata.]
—Ex-Pat 03:02:09/3-12-54

The dragon began the semi-annual program the year following Brighton's retirement from media and has produced over two dozen editions of the program. Topics range from trite celebrity interviews and profiles to frighteningly insightful commentary on culture and society. The dragon's current program is overdue, and word from

the production studio is that Dunklezahn remains undecided about its scope or subject. However, no one on the production staff even knows the topics the great dragon is considering. Regardless, the choice and result will undoubtedly be fascinating on some level, as well as a ratings bonanza.

>>>>[I'm on the production staff for "Wyrn Talk" (yes, you could see my name on the credits if you knew where to look) and "undecided" is an understatement for the Big D's (as he's referred to in the studio) state of mind these days. Angst-ridden is more like it. At the heart of who and what Dunklezahn is is his fascination with humanity, specifically human interaction. He's amazed by how we relate to each other, or don't. The whole VR setup in Lake Louise is designed so that he can observe people reacting to things

and each other. What's got him upset (though that may be too strong a word for a dragon) is that he knows something he thinks everyone (read: humanity) should know about. Why doesn't he just say? I don't know. Will he say? I don't know either.]

—More Than Best Boy 07:17:16/3-10-64

>>>>[Maybe he's silent because others don't think humanity is ready to know everything and have warned him against it. If so, just who out there is powerful enough to tell a great dragon what to do? Think about it—it'll keep you up at night.]

—Frosty 05:10:12/3-12-54

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Dunklezahn (SHADOWRUN® game statistics)

Body: 22/12

Quickness: 11 × 3

Strength: 48

Initiative: 9 +2D6

Attack Code: 16D, + 3 Reach

Areas of Knowledge: Magic, Media, Technology

Powers: Enhanced Senses (wide-band hearing, low-light vision, thermal sense), Hardened Armor, Influence

Description: Dunklezahn is a silver- and blue-scaled great western dragon (*Draco sapiens (occidentalis)*), approximately 48 meters long including a 17-meter tail. He stands just under 3 meters in height at the shoulder and has a wingspan in excess of 30 meters. His weight has been estimated at approximately 2,000 kilograms.

Charisma: 10

Intelligence: 9

Willpower: 12

Threat Rating: 10

Level of Initiation: 12 +

Essence: 12

Magic: 20

Reaction: 9

Type of Magic: 'shamanic'

(Note: This information is an approximation based on casual observation and limited secondary intelligence.)

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