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ENOUGH!

The Art of Retirement

By John Foody

So there you are, you've been a Templar, Assassin and third level wizard. Currently, you run a small kingdom, fight wars, and hob-nob with the great and good. You've seen, not to mention saved, the World, and your weapon has more magic than the High Wizard of Middenheim. Yet, and here's the good part, you still find time to team up with your equally experienced compadres to infiltrate some little chaos cult and get into bar-room brawls.

OK, so this may be an exaggeration but I have played in (and heard of) games that get this out of hand. This is to the detriment of the whole game. Now, if everybody involved is enjoying the game then there is no problem. However, I feel that huge benefits are being missed by not retiring all the characters off and starting afresh.

Before we go any further I should make a confession. I have been involved in a campaign that got out of hand, and the worse part was - I was the GM. It was some time ago during a Middle-Earth campaign that had gone on for some years, climaxing nicely with the War of the Ring. Or so I thought. The players had different ideas. All were firmly attached to their characters and the world and didn't want to let go. Personally, I had had enough, I was bored with the game and felt it had reached an end on every level. Sad to say, I was talked into continuing. This carried on for a while with super-powered characters and under powered plots until it all became a bit silly.

OK, very silly.

Make that downright stupid.

It was so bad that frankly, I am embarrassed at the level it sunk to. It was of such a level that I have no intention of writing down the gruesome details. Basically, the memories of a classic campaign were to be forever associated with this rubbish. All because I, or they, didn't know when to pull the plug.

Anyway, on with the plot. WFRP has a huge advantage in that it actively discourages such excesses by its very nature. Characters are heroes but relatively powerless and very mortal. Players know their character's place in society and the world. Attempts to better one's self bring the danger of being slapped down for being an uppity peasant. That doesn't mean there isn't anywhere for them to go. Look at *Empire in Flames*, which potentially ends with everyone becoming respectable and holding down positions of responsibility.

This brings about the question: what is your character's motivation? Gathering gold, fighting Chaos and going on a glorified tavern crawl across The Empire is all well and good but shouldn't you have something to aspire to as well? Maybe, the head of your religion, a Lord or a General? Chances are you'll never reach these giddy heights but they are dreams and hopes. Everyone has them; why not characters?

So after many years of campaigning you have been rewarded with positions of power and you settle down to enjoy it. Now, the campaign could take a different direction with

politics coming to the fore or the party meeting up to bash Orcs for old times sake. What I say is... stop it! Retire your characters, give them over to the GM and roll-up some new ones.

But why, you cry. To spawn a cliché, get out while the going's good. Your character has reached a position of power or at the very least become a part of a hundred stories told around camp-fires. They have probably finished a good number of careers and are far tougher than most enemies. They should be allowed to enjoy this and feel they have achieved something. Throwing more and more powerful enemies at them is pointless and self-defeating. What is the point of improving your character if the goal posts are constantly moving. Getting into the situation where you're hacking through Warriors of Chaos like they were snotlings is in the end demoralising and detrimental to the whole (and possibly future) campaigns.

Retiring a character opens a hundred different possibilities for the GM and will make your campaign far richer, with both players and GM having an emotional attachment to the old characters. Imagine playing a character sitting in a tavern and hearing a rumour that Lord Gustav is going to war against Chaos and knowing that this was your Gustav. You can watch from a distance as they progress and rise or fall, perhaps even meeting them.

Even more fun is having an old character turn up as an enemy. I got great mileage from having the son of a prominent character becoming a deadly and important arch-enemy to the party. His rise to power had been due to the character's plans and manipulations, all of which had the roots in the player's development of the character. There was great delight to be had in hearing players mutter "I always knew she was a bad 'un."

The old characters become part of the landscape, through actions or perhaps through legend. Once a character has become successful and passed over into the hands of the GM, their place in history is confirmed. Players will boast about their final achievements for years, "Graf of Middenheim, that's nothing. Now Chancellor of Nuln, that's real responsibility."

A new party allows new ideas to surface. Everyone is back on a level playing field and campaigns can become more low-key (and I think, more interesting) until they too reach the heights of the last one. This keeps everyone interested and allows your campaign to go in new directions. In this way the Campaign world grows and develops and players feel they are part of something ongoing and alive.

To sum up, never carry on going just because you feel you have to. If you are the GM, take a break or give playing a go. If as a player you are tired of your character, retire him permanently or temporarily (go and see the family or something). Retiring a whole party can work for everyone's enjoyment and the art lies in judging the best moment to do so. Of course great mileage can also be got out of killing the whole party, but then that's another story..