

## **JVC Parry: Deconstructing Shore of Dreams**

by loottheroom - Friday, July 06, 2018

<http://loottheroom.uk/jvc-parry-deconstructing-shore-of-dreams/>

Last week my friend (and awesome DMs Guild writer) JVC Parry posted an article on his blog in which he [discussed his process for writing his adventure Beneath The Sands](#). I liked it a lot, and knew I wasn't going to have much time to produce anything of substance for LTR this week (though there will still be a small post from me), so I reached out and asked if he would write something similar for me.

I'm pleased to say he accepted, and he just sent me the post - a look at how he wrote the Platinum-bestselling [Shore of Dreams](#) for Poison Potion Press. I'm always interested in seeing how other people work, and I was doubly interested in this because I've never worked on a project with a budget like the one for Shore of Dreams.

Enjoy!

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### **Deconstructing Dungeons: Shore of Dreams**

*by JVC Parry*

Welcome to Deconstructing Dungeons! This is a blog post in which I take a look at adventures I have previously written for the DMsGuild or a 3<sup>rd</sup> party publisher, talk about how they were made, what inspired me, and what resources I used to help me in the writing process.

In this edition I'm going to take a look at what is arguably my most successful adventure; [Shore of Dreams](#). I wrote *SoD* for a new DMsGuild publisher called [Poison Potion Press](#). They approached me asking for help with adventure writing, as English is not their first language, and they had heard my name from previous clients. I accepted, and got to work! Eventually, the title was published on January 25<sup>th</sup> 2018, although I completed my first draft in August of the previous year.

Writing for someone else is not always easy. In my experience, you're likely to see more money for your work in the short-term, but obviously you're constrained by what the publisher wants for their adventure, and by their work schedule. If I had written *SoD* for myself, it's likely that I would have used only stock art from the DMsGuild or DTRPG, made my own maps, got it edited by my usual editor and had it on the market by September 2017. It would probably have made Copper Bestseller within a month or two, and then would slowly generate sales over the coming years. As it stood, PPP commissioned not only a cover, but also a load of internal art and cartography, professional layout work, as well as teaming up with [Trash Mob Minis](#) to create custom paper minis and doing a huge marketing campaign over all the social media platforms. In addition, *SoD* was one of (if not the) first adventures on the DMsGuild to become Print on Demand. For most writers, this amount of work is almost impossible. For me certainly the funding just isn't there. Because of all this additional work, *SoD* is a platinum best-seller.

So, where do you start when writing for someone else? In my experience, a publisher normally sends me

about a page of text relating to the adventure they would like. It's normally bullet points about major NPCs or locations, and talks mostly about the general themes of the adventure. Working with PPP was different. From the beginning I was provided with an 'adventure bible' which contained nearly every scene of the adventure already written out in some form or another. It was my job to take these notes, weave them into a cohesive storyline, flesh out the mechanics, add some appropriate flavour text and descriptions, and create (roughly) balanced encounters and rewards. Because of the more structured 'bible' I was able to get to work straight away, rather than having a consultation with the publisher (which is often the case). Although this meant the writing was done quickly, it also meant there was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing between myself and the publisher on certain aspects of the adventure, all the time trying to balance the original idea of the piece with the practicalities of running it in 5<sup>th</sup> edition D&D, and writing it in a comprehensive manner.

The adventure itself is a twisting narrative about lost treasure which (SPOILERS) turns out to be a ruse constructed by the owner of a tavern, Pisca Ahlorsath, who aims to lure adventurers into a trap. Pisca needs the adventurers to help her uncover a legendary magic item hidden within a partially submerged tomb not far from the tavern. The first half of the adventure sees the characters arrive at the island, interact with its inhabitants, and get a feel for the place. The publisher was very attached to the 'wuxia' style, a mix of oriental fantasy cultures. After taking the time to investigate possible links to the treasure, they are guided to the Shore of Dreams tavern where Pisca begins her plan to kidnap them. This plan involves the bar staff, all of whom have their own agendas to mind too. Depending on the actions of the characters during their stay at the tavern, they might manage to avoid capture, or awaken in a cell in the cavernous entrance to the temple. Either way, trouble ensues as they try to take out Pisca or uncover the secrets of the littoral cave. Although the adventure is relatively combat-light, I created a new monster, the Tempest Beast, to guard the temple and designed a deadly trap to protect the magic item (which I also created).

One of the biggest challenges in writing the adventure was the timing of everything. There are people already working down in the temple to clear rubble, Pisca has her own plans, several other members of Shore of Dreams staff have things going on, and who knows what the characters will end up doing! Trying to make all of these things mesh together into a consistent timeline wasn't easy. In the end, I ended up having the timeline be mostly narrative driven. Pisca doesn't come looking for the characters, she waits for them to come to her. Her plan only goes ahead if the characters are enraptured by her and stay. The prisoners in the cave only keep digging at the temple if the characters are there to witness it. This goes against a lot of advice about immersion in games, and the suspension of disbelief. It's common practice to try and keep the world moving even when the players aren't watching, but in published adventures, where each group will tackle everything differently, I feel it's best to give a more freeform timeline, and allow DMs to tinker with it at their own tables.

Overall, I was happy with the adventure I wrote, and felt like I'd done the original 'bible' justice, whilst changing enough of what was there to ensure characters weren't railroaded to a final destination, and wouldn't have to endure a huge info dump at any point during the adventure for it all to make sense.

**What I did well:** I think my biggest achievement for this adventure was turning it from a very NPC-centric adventure to one in which the characters have real agency. It was clear from the off that PPP was in love with Pisca, and it was no easy job to keep her as a star NPC without her stealing the show entirely.

**What I did poorly:** More than anything, *SoD* reflects on my ability to produce my own adventures. I think it's a testament to dedication and holistic publishing. It's not enough just to have good writing, you need to do what you can to add that little extra spice. Incredible custom artwork, professional layout and cartography, solid marketing. If you want a platinum best-selling adventure on your first time around, you'll need all of these things to be a success.

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