

FIREBORN™

THE ROLEPLAYING GAME

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Sample file





BORN OF FIRE

He was born ignobly, in an aging hospital, in a decaying neighborhood. His father had gotten back on his battleship eight months earlier and his mother's labor was hard. He came nine days late.

The doctor was worried about his temperature from the beginning—about a degree and a half above normal—so they monitored him closely.

It would be unreasonable to imagine that the fire that raced through the hospital the night he was born had anything to do with the infant John Russell. After a handful of oxygen tanks exploded and the automatic extinguishers malfunctioned, it was a miracle more didn't die—like John's mother did—from the heat and smoke inhalation, trapped in their rooms by curtains of raging flame.

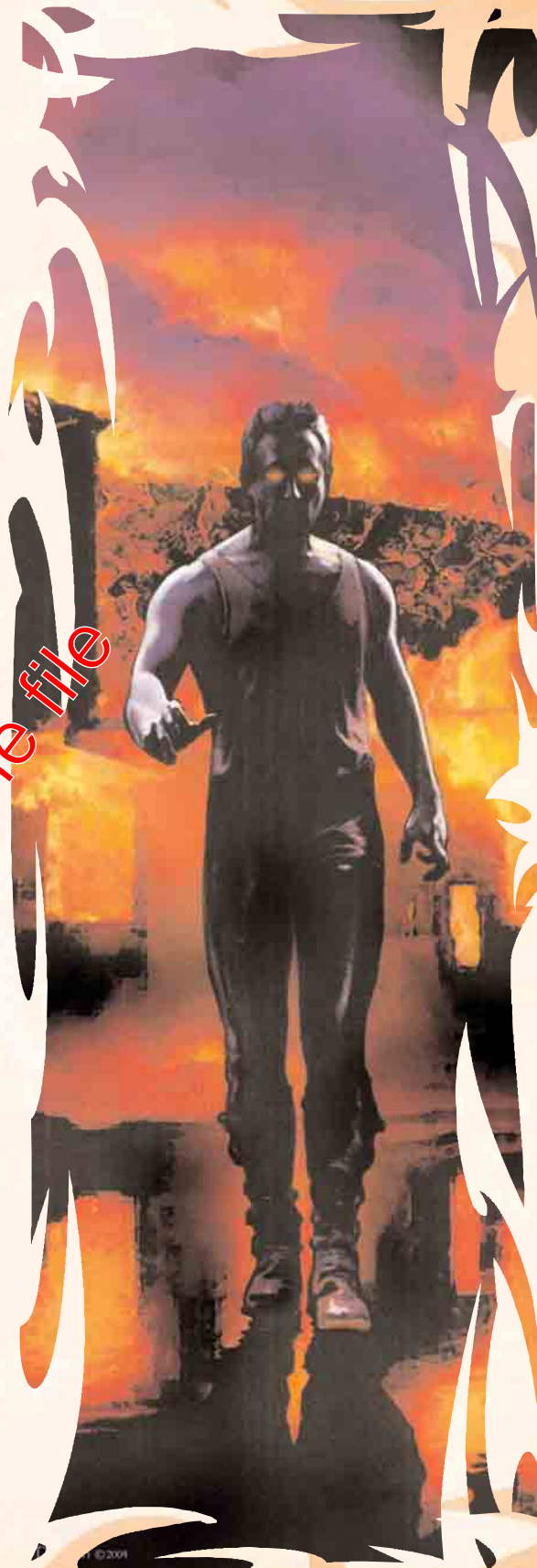
John's adoptive parents, blue collar through and through, knew about the tragedy that had heralded his arrival in the world and claimed his birth mother. Though John was too young to articulate anything about the night terrors that afflicted him as a toddler, they always suspected they had something to do with the hospital conflagration.

It was in fact fire that possessed the boy's sleeping mind, but it didn't have anything to do with the hospital. The horror that woke John every night since he could first remember was a fire a thousand times hotter than the burn of hospital beds and building timbers. It was the fire of the end of the world.

As John grew up, he learned to stop talking about the flames he saw in his nightmares. After a while, when he wasn't afraid of them anymore, the nightmares became dreams. Of flame, and death, but not his. Of power. Eventually they seeped through into his waking musings. A lush, ancient world, treasures piled up for the taking, devoured by heat and hate and lust.

And other images. Giant serpents, all fang and claw and spine. They killed and rampaged, destroyed and commanded, but John wasn't afraid of them in the visions. His waking mind told him they were nasty, brutal, alien. But in the visions, he always looked forward to their coming.

John lost his virginity when he was thirteen, to an older girl whose name he quickly forgot. The event's wet fumbling was eclipsed in his mind by the dream he had that night. As he slept, the torched landscape spread out before him as usual, the flames crowded him everywhere he turned. But for the first time, he realized that the fire was not just a force, a devastating power. It was him. It was his. He could control it at as easily as he controlled his breathing. So he stopped, he held his breath . . . and the flames faded. He saw who he was. What he was. He knew why he wasn't afraid of the beasts of claw and fang, scale and wing. He couldn't be afraid of them . . . not when, in the visions at least, he was one.





WELCOME TO FIREBORN



FIREBORN is a new roleplaying game system in which the players take on the roles of scions, humans in modern London with the souls of immortal dragons. The dragons lived in a mythic age of high fantasy and epic magic, an age that was destroyed by a world-shattering cataclysm. The dragons' spirits slumbered through the ages until the 21st century, when magic began to pool in the world once more. London is ground zero for this mystical resurgence, and the scions have begun to remember who and what they are. As the players experience more and more of their previous lives through dra-

matic flashback scenes to the mythic age, their draconic powers begin to manifest in the modern age as well.

This book is both a GM rules resource and a setting sourcebook. If you're planning on playing in a FIREBORN campaign rather than running one, reading the material herein may make some elements of the game less mysterious and fun for you. If you're a veteran player or are planning on running your own campaign, on the other hand, welcome! You'll find advice on designing and running FIREBORN campaigns and adventures, rules that are necessary to adjudicate the effects of taint and the uses of karmic and enchanted items, setting material for both the mythic and the modern age, and statistics and descriptions of a slew of friends and foes for your players to interact with.

ELEMENTS OF THE STORY

FIREBORN is designed to allow you to run campaigns of all sorts. Players can engage in cinematic action scenes, investigate mysterious conspiracies, become embroiled in narrative self-discovery, seek out high-fantasy adventure, take sides in an epic war, uncover dark realizations about their own pasts, and through it all keep a step ahead of their enemies in a desperate race for knowledge. At the heart of every story, though, are the scions themselves. Each story is ultimately about them: their awakenings to who and what they truly are, their reunification with their broodmates and their continuing discovery of

those bonds with one another through mythic age flashbacks, and eventually about tough decisions by the characters regarding what they're willing to sacrifice for their own, or the world's, best interests.

AWAKENING

By the time he awakened to what he truly was, John spent the hours after school working in the same machine factory as his foster father. It was mind-numbing, body-straining work, sweaty and pitiless, but it





brought a bi-weekly pittance that nevertheless helped his folks keep him clothed and fed.

It was the day after John's new revelation when it happened. He was listening to another verbal spew from his foreman, the greasy bastard that ordered John and his dad around, day after day after godforsaken day. John took his lead from his dad. Stand there and take it, soak in the daily ration of verbal abuse. You don't need to pretend to like it, but you need to deal with it. This time, the night after the vision, the realization, his gut wasn't having it. His insides roiled with impotent anger; his fists clenched, and he could feel a fever building. He felt like he was going to puke, to yell, to kill, and keel over, all at once. He avoided the foreman's eye, because he was afraid of what he'd do if he met it. Instead, he focused his gaze on the drilling press above and behind the bastard's head. The foreman noticed, got in his face, put himself in the way. And what the foreman saw in John's eyes, what John saw as he brought it into the world, was fire.

The factory burned to the ground. The cops never figured anything out. The fire came from nowhere, and spread like a demon. Nobody standing near ground zero of the blast survived, except John, and he pretended to be on break, nowhere nearby, when the cops asked him where he had been. Some ironhide detectives gave him grief for all of 10 seconds, saying they didn't believe him. Then John felt the fever, and saw the fire coming. They must've seen it too, because they backed right the hell down. His mom never said a thing, but she wouldn't look him in the eye anymore. She wouldn't touch him.

Some of the bokes from the factory started to mutter. They weren't sad to lose the bastard that had bossed them around, but the factory was the only work they could get. Now they were hungry. Their families were hungry. The government covered them, barely, but with all the foreigners flocking in, the jobs and the support were getting used up. They were bitter, desperate. There was talk about John, about the blaze. Stories started flying. A few went by his folks' place one night, to "talk" to him. They went home, not a scratch on them, not a word coming out of their mouths. Anyone that talked about going after the Russell kid again, those unlucky pioneers would warn them.

"Stay away. The rags all say that 'strange things' are afoot, 'ya hear? And I tell you, he's strange, he's a thing, and he's 'afoot.' Unless you're crazy, or you got a death-wish, keep away from the Russell boy."

John had burned his connections to everything that he knew, so he pulled the corpse of his old life around him like a blanket against the cold and hunched forward into his new one. This life smelled of ash and blood. With no job, John learned the time-honored arts of delinquency and crime: theft, violence, posturing, fear. Maybe he knew he'd end up in jail. Maybe he didn't care. Regardless, he found more there than he ever could have expected.

REMEMBERING

"John Russell, these are fearful times, and our United Kingdom must stand for law, and for order, or it will stand for nothing at all."

BANG.

The pounding of the judge's gavel was like a gunshot. It was always what ended John's dreams. It always brought him bolting awake.

There were no more dreams of fire and serpents. Each night when they arose, they were snuffed by the gavel as if they were flickering candles.

John languished in prison, and his body and mind putrefied in a house of murderers, thieves, rapists, and drug dealers.

Worthless scum, all of them.

Just like him.

John got a new cell-mate on the third anniversary of his incarceration. He heard the cell door open behind him with a long raaasssssp. He clenched the muscles in his shoulders, turned his head ever so slightly to scowl at the intruder. But in a flash, when their eyes met:

A muddy field under a sky red with blood. Mountains as tall as the heavens. Claws clash and magic rages.

Kreyu's maw rends the enemy's leg, Elihu's tail coils around its neck, choking off the spew of poisonous gas that would have erupted from the creature's maw to engulf his broodmates. Revenin leaps in, biting and shredding and blasting fire into the creature's chest, turning its heart to a lump of ash.

The three dragons howl in triumph, their foe fallen, the field theirs.

And John felt his body twist and burn. He retched, once, heaving bile into his mouth; he turned and spit it into the toilet. The new cell-mate, an African man named Claude, stared and shivered visibly.

The guards sensed that something strange had happened. They exchanged glances and wordlessly agreed that nothing would be said about it. Strange times had come to London, and most of them were best ignored.

The cell door clanged shut. Neither man spoke for long minutes. Then, at once, they named one another:

Revenin.

Elihu.

They would only realize later—after they had come to take for granted the bond they shared—that neither of their mouths had moved. Yet, in the instant that they had named one another, their words had been heard in the other's mind. For the first time since the end of the mythic age, the broodmates had found one another.

Claude had had dreams like John's. His started when he was conscripted into one of the revolutionary armies in war-torn Sierra Leone. He was eight years old. The young soldier fired a thousand rounds through his AK-47, butchered a dozen grown men, before most British kids would've graduated from secondary school.





INTRODUCTION

The dreams had gotten to him as he got older. It got harder to tell the visions from reality. Both were violent. Both were bloody. He could control neither. So he decided it was time to control both.

So Claude smuggled himself to London, where he lived on the street and came by food and money the only way he knew how. It had landed him in prison inside two weeks.

John Russell and Claude Chebue became brothers. Each educated the other. John interpreted the subtleties of "civilized" life for Claude, both as a Londoner as a veteran inmate. Claude gave John a conscience. When necessary, he forced it on him. It wasn't an easy match. But even as the pair re-forged their bonds and discovered depths of humanity and camaraderie they hadn't believed possible, they realized that their circle was incomplete.



THE SCIONS



Scions are the heart of FIREBORN. They are the players' avatars within the game world, the heroes in the drama of the unfolding story.

Scions are at once human and more than human. They are born of man and woman, they are made of flesh and blood like their fellows. But their souls are those of dragons of the mythic age. And those souls bring more than just memories, more than just an outlook on life. They bring power. Once awakened, a scion's soul screams for release, kindles into life at the merest breath.

Scions are born unaware of their heritage. Before the return of magic, scions lived out their lives as capable, driven, but ultimately mundane men and women. Because while the souls of dragons are eternal, they require karma to flourish, as a fire needs oxygen to burn. In the absence of karma, the soul of a dragon is only potential, an embryo of flame in an airless hall.

With the coming of the strange times, as the locals of London call it, that all changed. Scions began to remember. And the more they remember, the more of their past lives they recreate, the more supernatural powers they regain.

Newly awakened scions have their own agendas. They may seek power, survival, kinship, or knowledge. But with each passing day, a scion realizes that there is something more. Something beyond himself, and eventually, beyond his brood. Something that spelled their doom countless lifetimes ago. Something that, just like them, grows stronger every day.



SONG OF THE BROOD

Proud Revenin was hatched in a dim antiquity even he could not recall. Humans worshipped him as a god, and rightfully so, in his draconic eye.

Serene Elihu had always been in love with the rightness of things. Mankind's awe of him was as natural as the warmth of the sun or the pull of gravity.

Striving Kreyu was brave and courageous in all things but worship. The youngest of the three, she could not see herself as worthy of divinity.

These three were different in appearance, in perspective, in experiences lived and triumphs achieved.

Yet they were broodmates, and therefore the same. They were bound and devoted to one another more than to any treasure, lover, place, or thing.

THERE YOU ARE

It was the tone an anxious owner would take with a missing kitten, finally found stuck in a tree.

There you are.

The fourteen-year-old girl pronounced the sentence with equal parts reproach, relief, and realization. It was just this, of course, was the only reasonable place she could have found the objects of her searching. Her life's chronic, subconscious search.

Her name was Allison. She had come to the prison with the Sisters of Mary Magdalene to minister to ungrateful felons. She had lived with the nuns since she had been orphaned as a baby.

She was serving glop to a line of inmates. She was giving them all the same shy, fearful, simple smile. And then she said it. There you are. Looking at John and Claude.

But she hadn't moved her lips. She hadn't broken the smile.

They stared, until someone in line behind them shoved Claude's shoulder. "Move it, blighter."

Allison's face never changed, but they heard the pout in her voice. What, no hello? Then a sense of laughter. Never mind. You move along. I'll be back tonight. She spoke into their minds as the sluggish but inexorable movement of the serving line moved them past her station. Back to set you free.

Allison didn't remember her folks. Didn't remember much of anything from before she had come to live with the Sisters. Ironically, she did remember whole other lifetimes. She always had. And she sensed karma, with the same ease with which she sensed light and dark, hot and cold. She knew how to manipulate it, pulling it in and releasing it, with the same instinct she had for breathing. Men without the benefit of a draconic heart struggled with ancient tomes and forgotten lore. Struggled to breathe even the tiniest spark of karma into their impotent castings. But Allison could manipulate magic with the ease of a spider spinning her web.

