

Lands in ferment – The Border Princes, Slavs, Greeks, and correlation with the real world.

Introduction

One of the less-noted inclusions in the recent Dwarf sourcebook by Alfred Nuñez is a map of the Vaults and Black Mountains, which includes locations and geography of the Border Princes. While it is generally a Good Thing™ to see the addition of detail – especially in the case of the long-neglected Border Princes – it was a surprise to see that many of the new towns had distinctly Greek and Slavic names. The purpose of this article is to explain why I don't believe this should be the case.

A brief history of the Border Princes

As mentioned above, the region sandwiched between the Black Mountains and the Badlands has had a surprisingly vague past. It was the only human-populated region in the Old World to lack any notable level of detail; no cities, very little geographical information, and little if any defining culture. All that we can gather from the short paragraphs in WFRP and 3rd-edition WFB is that it is a fragmented region of petty nations, constantly changing shape due to the numerous conflicts between the various petty princedoms, and the neighbouring goblinoid tribes.

The only official development of the area prior to Hogshead's acquisition of the WFRP license is split across four main sources. In the short story *Wolf Riders* (now reprinted in the *Trollslayer* novel), there is mention of the friestadt of Akendorf and some development of the nature of the region. The novel *Plague Daemon* is set wholly in a small nation called Khypris, but there is little mention given of its precise location. It has also been remarked that the novel lacks any real connection with the Warhammer world – something that I don't totally agree with, but the point has been made. Closer to home, there is the development of the Winter's Teeth Pass in the *Doomstones* campaign. Not quite a part of the Border Princes, but there are some hints in the background as to the nature of the region. Finally, *Death's Dark Shadow* mentions the town of Morthensholm and gives a fairly detailed history of it; at least, in comparison to the rest of the region. We also learn a little about the kind of trade between the southern Empire and the Border Princes, mostly arms and armour flowing south as well as firs, spices and silks coming north.

It is perhaps understandable that the Border Princes have come to be regarded as a blank slate by many gamers; a region for the GM to develop as they see fit, and somewhere that the players can fulfil any dreams of conquest. Whether this was the original intention of the designers I cannot say, but it probably isn't a coincidence that the region was described as being 'settled by exiles and adventurers'. This alone could be regarded as good enough reason to avoid filling in the gaps on our map, but as long as the writers are wise enough to give plenty of unclaimed territory on any resultant map of the area, both camps should be satisfied.

The Slavic Argument

So why has the region been given Greek and Slavic names, and why do I object to them?

It doesn't take a great stretch of the imagination to compare the fragmented, warring nature of the Border Princes, and compare it to the Balkans. It is a common feature of the Warhammer world to have a varying amount of correlation to our own world, both geographically (maps of the Known World are somewhat reminiscent of old mediaeval maps of our world) and culturally. The Old World in particular is probably the closest to our own, with barely-disguised nation-states and of course, the core of the Warhammer setting, the (Holy Roman) Empire. Where Warhammer works for me personally is how it takes these

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somewhat lazy connections, and adds its own spin. Thus we have early renaissance Europe but a fairly unhealthy dose of Tolkien's Middle-Earth transposed. Where there is the typically mediaeval fear of the occult and Satanism, we have the all-to-real threat of Chaos. The Empire's history itself has a smattering of similarities to that of its real-life counterpart; the religious strife between the cults of Ulric and Sigmar in particular remind us of the Thirty Years war.

Saying this, it might seem strange that I disagree with Alfred's vision of the Border Princes. My reasoning comes down to a combination of history and geography. In the Warhammer world, we see an essentially cruder portrait of the various races and tribal groups. Although there is mention of a Classical language, there is no corresponding Classical Human nation to equate to it. The Classical civilisation of the Old World was that of the Dwarfs and Elves. The various provinces of the Empire are almost all of Germanic nature, with the current exception of Marienburg and its more obvious Dutch place-names and people. Likewise with Bretonnia, Estalia, and Tilea. Our sparse information on the Border Princes tells us that the region was first settled by Bretonnian and Imperial people, so why are the names different?

It could be argued that there is some kind of linguistic evolution, except we also have to accept that in the Old World we have the fairly unrealistic notion of a common language, mainly for ease of gameplay. There is also the fact that Slavic and Germanic language groups are fairly distinct and branch away at a much earlier period in time than the 1500 years that the Border Princes were first forged. The Greek-sounding place names are less easy to dismiss, but again there is little prior background to support any Hellenic civilisation existing in the region.

Of course, there *is* a Slavic-using region, that of Kislev. Except according to the history of the Old World, the Gospodars and Ungols and other tribes first arrived in the Old World circa 1750, and they arrived from the north-eastern steppes. This undermines any suggestion that the names of the Border Princes refer back to pre-imperial times. There is only the briefest mention in 3rd edition that the region was settled by any Humans at all prior to the migration of people from the Empire and Bretonnia, and this doesn't give us any details. In the real world the complex and distinct nature of the Balkans came about due to successive migrations of Slavic and Turkic people and their associated language groups and religions. This simply couldn't have happened in the Old World as we understand it, and to try and re-con any such event would cause more complication than its worth, especially given the current state of the Warhammer background due to conflicting editions.

Ultimately it does come down to taste and the personal perspective of the GM. It has been noted on the WFRP Mailing List and other forums that a number of GMs use an Old World more similar to our own. While this is fair and good, it does not take away from the evolution and development of any 'official' Old World as a specific campaign setting. However it is important that as the world is developed, there is at least some attempt to avoid too much personal preference to change the nature of the world away from what has gone before. The Border Princes in many ways do have a correlation with the unfortunate history of the Balkans but only in broad terms; the actual details, peoples, and places wear different colours and bear different names. It would be sad to see too much of the real world sneaking into the Warhammer world, especially if it results in the original world we know and love becoming yet more unoriginal and internally inconsistent.