



Start of Darkness

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From the depths of time comes a story of wicked villains, terrible secrets, and monumental screw-ups! The Order of the Stick: Start of Darkness reveals for the first time the secret origins of Xykon, Redcloak, the Monster in the Darkness, heck, even the demon cockroaches. Containing 112 pages of all-new never-published-online comics in dramatic black-and-white, Start of Darkness is full of villainy goodness for any fan of the OOTS. Learn such secrets as:

How did Xykon and Redcloak meet?

How did Xykon become a lich?

Why did Eugene Greenhilt swear revenge on Xykon?

What ever happened to Lirian's Gate, anyway?

How did Redcloak discover the Monster in the Darkness?

Why on earth does Redcloak put up with Xykon's crap???

The Order of the Stick: Start of Darkness is presented primarily in black-and-white, similar to our bestselling On the Origin of PCs, but features a special full-color insert detailing the Secret Lore of the Crimson Mantle-in the popular crayon format, first seen in No Cure for the Paladin Blues. Featuring introductions by the author and Miko Miyazaki, paladin of the Sapphire Guard, this book is a flat-out must have for fans of the OOTS plotline, as it fills in missing details in the story of who these evildoers are and why they do evil. Wallowing in unrepentant villainy has never been this much fun (legally)!

Start of Darkness Details

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Author : Rich Burlew

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From Reader Review Start of Darkness for online ebook

Patrick says

This is a prequel to one of my favorite webcomics: The Order of the Stick.

It's an interesting thing in terms of narrative: the backstory of the antagonists.

This is a tricky sort of story to write. If you make them sympathetic, they're not a proper villain anymore. But if the reader doesn't feel something for them, then the story isn't engaging.

Suffice to say, this is a nutsy book to write. And despite the trickiness of it, Burlew pulls it off. It's a good story. It's got funny bits. Dark bits. Gaming bits. Ample backstory and worldbuilding. And it shows the underlying motivation for the characters without turning them into good guys.

It's a really interesting piece of story, and folks interested in the craft of storytelling could learn a thing or two by reading it.

Mary Catelli says

Another prequel volume as you may have guessed from the number.

Probably best read after volume 1 and 2.

More unified than the Origin of the PCs, since it's tied more into the plot, and not into the sorts of random backstories that a herd of PCs may present to a DM.

But we see Xykon's childhood and beginning, and Redcloak's, including why that's his name. And how they met, and how Xykon became a liche, and Redcloak's brother leaving to raise a family and what came of that.

Eugene Greenhilt shows up. So do some other characters mentioned in the main story.

As you might guess from a story about villains getting started, the ending is not happy. Still, it explains a lot.

Andre says

The origin story of the villains. A journey through the backstory of characters that I found engaging and that builds up to its conclusion beautifully. How it should be done IMHO.

Mike says

Start of Darkness is a prequel story featuring the villains of the Order of the Stick webcomic. It is the second "print-only" OotS book, featuring material not available on the website.

As with the other print-only collections, this trade is in greyscale due to cost concerns (except for a 9 page section in the middle).

Start of Darkness is 112 pages long, and features background on Xykon and Redcloak. It's got light touches of humor, but is mostly a dark tale, as befits the embodiments of evil plaguing our heroes. Without going into spoilers, there is a TON of information here that gives great insight into the characters and their motivations.

Although I recommend reading all of the OotS books, I found On the Origin of PCs (Start of Darkness's hero analog) enjoyable but not strictly necessary. In contrast, while like with Origin there's nothing here vital to understanding the main story, there is great depth added to our villains here (particularly Redcloak) that shouldn't be missed.

A fantastic side story to the central quest, Start of Darkness really is a must read if you're following the main trades.

While the volume number -1 is appropriate from a "in-comic" time perspective, it doesn't tell you when you should be reading this volume. As the author states in the introduction it can be read after Volume 2 without spoiling anything, but I'd recommend reading it between Volumes 3 and 4 (along with Origin, if you choose).

Rebecca says

When a book tells you that Taco Night is one of 26 unpleasant things that happen in the course of it, then you're right to be skeptical. I was and I knew Rich Burlew's writing. The Order of the Stick is phenomenal. Really it is. It's a ongoing pleasure of a webcomic that has progressed into a behemoth of geekdom. It's made me almost wet myself laughing and it's even made me shed a tear.

But Taco Night. It just sends shivers down my spine.

This book is a print-only prequel to the online comic and therefore comprises content that you will not find online if you only frequent legit sites. Therefore an OotS completist should stop reading this review as you should either be cursing your mistake and rushing off to buy it, or you'll already own it and my opinion doesn't matter. Not that it does anyway!

However if you don't know OotS, then there is still enough to justify this book. As a story of how pure evil can destroy many lives in many ways, there are few books that can keep up with Start of Darkness. And I'm really not just saying that. The culmination of this book still horrified me now and it is almost 5 years since I first read it.

Do not be put of by the stick figures. There's more emotion in those little guys than in many novels that I

have endured. And kudos to Rich Burlew, because he makes you care about something that is a circle, a rectangle and an assortment of lines. That's how good his writing is.

Terrifyingly first class.

Check out the main story at www.giantitp.com

Joshua says

It's a very inappropriate fun read for Lord of the Rings fans. I like it because it's a funny, inappropriate graphic novel that holds the information for the introduction of The Order of the Stick. It's also a very quick read, although hopefully you will enjoy it.

Ville-markus Nevalainen says

I picked up this comic after reading Patrick Rothfuss praising it here on Goodreads. I wasn't sure where to start as two prequels had been released for the story. I ended up picking one of the prequels which might've been a slight mistake as it seemed to be made for those who are already familiar with the story and the characters. But even though this was my first touch with Order of the Stick, it worked quite well!

The Order of the STick is an odd series. Sure, it's a web comic, but still. The artstyle looks like it's made with Windows Paint and the story is ALL over the place with random jokes that don't make any sense.

So I think it is even more unbelievable to see how well it all works.

Sure the art is very crude and simple, but it works. Damn, it even manages to make the reader emotional at few points of the story. Perhaps it is only the eyes that slightly change from scene to scene but it is enough. It is beautiful how well you can do something so simple.

And the story is fun. It does tell the backstory of some more major characters of the series (or so I believe). And these crude stick figures, a human sorcerer and... goblins?, have real stories. It is the goblins who are the highlight of the story and really have an emotional journey that, surprisingly, makes you feel bad for them. It is actually a pretty good story.

In addition there's jokes. Lot of them. The fourth wall is constantly being pummeled down, there's references to popculture and, well, to everything you can imagine, and then there are ninja clowns coming out of shoes and they are being stopped by - cotton candy?

Yeah. It makes absolutely no sense and that might be the biggest thing: you either love it or probably hate it. For me it works so well.

I did not even mention that it's actually a parody of D&D games, which is hilarious when it is embraced fully, for example by saying that these monsters aren't in the Monster Manual or "see you in two turns".

Yeah, I kinda need to read more of this.

Phil says

This is some of Burlew's best writing. The ending is fantastic.

Benjamin says

Mr. Burlew has a definite dark place in his inner psyche. I gotta say I really like the complexity that is Xykon far more than he appears to be in the comics at first. He does a really good job of looking like a blundering madman, but yet he's actually quite calculating. His method of enslaving the goblins (particularly Redcloak) into absolute tyrannical underlings is impressive and utterly devastating. You do start to feel for the goblins and their plight. And Redcloak's descending spiral in his ever increasing desperation to vindicate the loss of his own personal morals is something that is both wonderful and terrible to watch. All in all, this is truly a great read, but be warned that it is a dark story in which the bad guys win...

Lissibith says

[showing how guilt and fanatical drive can utterly ruin a person... er, goblin (hide spoiler)]

Kathryn says

Rich Burlew, author of The Order of the Stick (a webcomic), has, besides his comic strip compilations, also written two companion books. Book -1, Start of Darkness, explains how the bad guys – Redcloak, Xykon, the Creature in the Darkness – got together. Everyone who reads the comic faithfully needs to read this book. The background information about the Crimson Mantle (Redcloak's...um...red cloak), Roy's dad's blood oath of vengeance, and Xykon fills in a lot of gaps in the series mythology as a whole. It explains a lot of characters' motivations, and as the story begins to draw closer to the end, the plot threads in this book are getting picked up in the comic (for example, Redcloak's plan for Azure City).

I'm really looking forward to seeing the comic tie up all its loose ends...

Matt says

Holy crap, I feel dirty for having read about how the bad guys got so bad. As always, Burlew is a master at storytelling and humor, and turning cliches on their heads.

My favorite quote from the main Evil guy: "I know people think I'm stupid. Because [I didn't earn my power:]. Because I get bored easily. Because I have no interest in strategy or tactics or contingency planning....Only two things matter: Force in as great a concentration as you can manage, and style. And in a pinch, style can slide."

Also, I really enjoyed the moral tainting of the second in command. He starts off as a defender of his people and the power behind the throne, and is eventually confronted with his betrayal of his people: "You're willing to throw good lives after bad so that you don't have to admit that we were wrong... in the first place..." (Sound familiar?)

All this couched in between a scene in Taco Night and continual breaking of the fourth wall and jokes about the hero's absent father: "Did you say 'childREN'?".

Thomas says

Start of Darkness is lengthier than On the Origin of PCs, not just due to its page count, but also because he only focuses on two characters instead of six. In addition, while Burlew has already taken pains to give us the back stories of the protagonists, the antagonists appear to be evil for the sake of being evil. Here, he gives us an understanding of why they're the way they are. Xykon has never been a complex character (aside from his ability to stay one step ahead of the heroes and come up with nasty punishments), so his background reflects that, but Redcloak's complexities make him an interesting character, even if we don't like him that much. Here, Burlew gives us why he's a complex character, and gives us more insight into his motivations.

Darth says

I loved this fucking comic. First of all, I love the reference to Heart of Darkness, second the evil dude reminds me SO much of Rick from Rick and Morty, it's amazing.

What I find most interesting about these comics is that though they're about D&D the author sure does make a ton of fun about people who play the game.

Excited to continue reading these!

This Is Not The Michael You're Looking For says

The second released prequel (first chronologically) to the online "The Order of the Stick" comic strip, this book tells the back-story of the major villains. If you're a fan of the comic strip, this is a must read. If you've never read any of the comics, you're better off starting with the standard books and then coming back to this prequel at a later time (some major plot points and twists are given away in the prequel).

It doesn't have quite as much humor as the standard strip, in part because of the darker nature of the material (it is about the villains, after all), although the basic style and satire are still there in full.
