

The president of **Paleo Gaming**, **Dan Prisco-Buxbaum**, recently sat down to interview **Nick Porter** and **Dominic De Duonni**, the co-creators of the currently-in-development tabletop role-playing game (RPG) *Sagas of Midgard*, regarding their soon to launch Kickstarter campaign, and what makes their game unique in the evolving landscape of tabletop RPGs.

Sagas of Midgard is described as “a new cinematic, story-oriented tabletop RPG based in a world of Norse Myth [...] a system that keeps numbers simple and instead lets the players' imagination be the hero.”



"A new cinematic, story-oriented tabletop RPG based in a world of Norse Myth." Image © *Sagas of Midgard* 2018

This is the first tabletop RPG designed by the creators of the game based out of Atlanta, Georgia, Nick Porter and Dominic De Duonni. However, the duo are no strangers to the industry, having participated in and run campaigns from numerous tabletop RPGs for the past twenty years, fifteen of which were spent running game systems together. The seeds for *Sagas of Midgard* were sown approximately two years ago, and since that time the pair have devoted themselves to development and rigorous playtesting to create something new and exciting.

When Nick and Dom approached us to discuss the game, we were instantly intrigued, so Dan decided to sit down for a Q&A session to uncover what makes this new game so unique, and what players can look forward to.

Dan: Thanks for sitting down with us to chat a bit about Sagas of Midgard. I can tell you that I plan on personally backing the Kickstarter campaign, and am excited to see the game get developed. When we first spoke about the system, I was hooked by how story driven the game seems to be, but why don't you describe it again for our readers. How exactly does your game differentiate itself from the multitude of other tabletop RPGs out there, and why should that excite players?

Dom: In our system, players are only limited by their own imagination. Instead of having to worry about experience points and when you gain a level, your players are powerful from character creation.

Nick: Characters start out powerful, but monsters start out powerful as well. Additionally, Character death is an integral part of the system; it keeps combats exciting and fresh. In other RPG systems we've played, past the first few levels there was no risk of death, which made combat a transaction rather than an experience.

Dom: In Sagas of Midgard, a few bad rolls can mean the difference between a character living and dying, and a character can choose to sacrifice themselves to save their party by using the universal skill "With Joy I Cease", allowing them to kill any enemy they're facing at the cost of their own life. That, along with the raiding mechanic are two things in particular we haven't really seen out of tabletop RPGs.

Dan: A cinematic, and/or story driven game is a really great idea- as a DM/GM myself I love when games include freedom for me to shape the world and mechanics as I see fit, without the rules lawyer at the table (everyone has one) citing reference books to defend why something should have happened differently. However, there are also potential pitfalls to having a lack of structure- especially for less experienced DMs who may not have any frame of reference to facilitate things like impromptu skill rolls. How do you reconcile the story-driven nature of the game with the necessity of some form of structure? Will this game be accessible to less experienced game runners, or will it more or less cater to a veteran tabletop audience?

Nick: We had that question as well, so we gave the game over to one of our play testers who had never run a game before in any system, and she did a great job. She felt that she didn't have to worry about mastering complex rules inside and out on her first foray, which let her spend her time on creating a story. What we're trying to emphasize in Sagas of Midgard is that it's a *collaborative* storytelling experience; players for whom the only goal of a tabletop RPG is to "win" will probably come away disappointed.

Dom: We don't give a ton of ammo to rules lawyers, and although we do have rules for most situations, we emphasize that at the table, what the Game Master says at the time goes. Our character skills allow for huge, sweeping battles that are still over in a matter of rounds. Success and failure is still determined by rolling; but the thing that's most impressed us in playtesting is how the players and the Game Master work together to create a memorable battle together.



The art of *Sagas of Midgard* pays homage to the rich heritage of Norse Mythology. Image © *Sagas of Midgard* 2018

Dan: *Sagas of Midgard* is obviously set in a world of Norse Mythology. What led to that decision? Vikings and Norse Myths seem to be surging in popularity lately, leading to the creating of numerous games for both tabletop (i.e., *Trudvang Chronicles*) and video game consoles (i.e., *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice*). Why do you think this current surge in interest is occurring, and did you anticipate this growth in interest two years ago when you started producing the game?

Dom: We noticed the growing popularity, but I'm a longtime fan of classic fantasy, and we decided to go to the source material. If you read Tolkien, almost everything is inspired by Norse Mythology, so we wanted to go back to the starter.

Nick: It's also interesting because in forty years of tabletop RPGs, it's established its own certain mythos based off of Tolkien and then supplemented by Gary Gygax, Monte Cook, etc. If you've played fantasy games for long enough, there's a certain "way" different characters and races are supposed to react. Norse Mythology predates all of that, and one of the things I love about the stories is that it shows all of the Heroes and Gods as flawed characters who are ultimately powerless; even Odin knows how he'll die at Ragnarok. It makes the world a little more relatable that these flawed characters are still striving for great things even in the face of existential hopelessness.

Dan: With regard to your Kickstarter campaign, what made you specifically choose Kickstarter to fund the game, and what sort of stretch goals do you have planned, if any? Are there plans for additional material down the road for *Sagas of Midgard*?

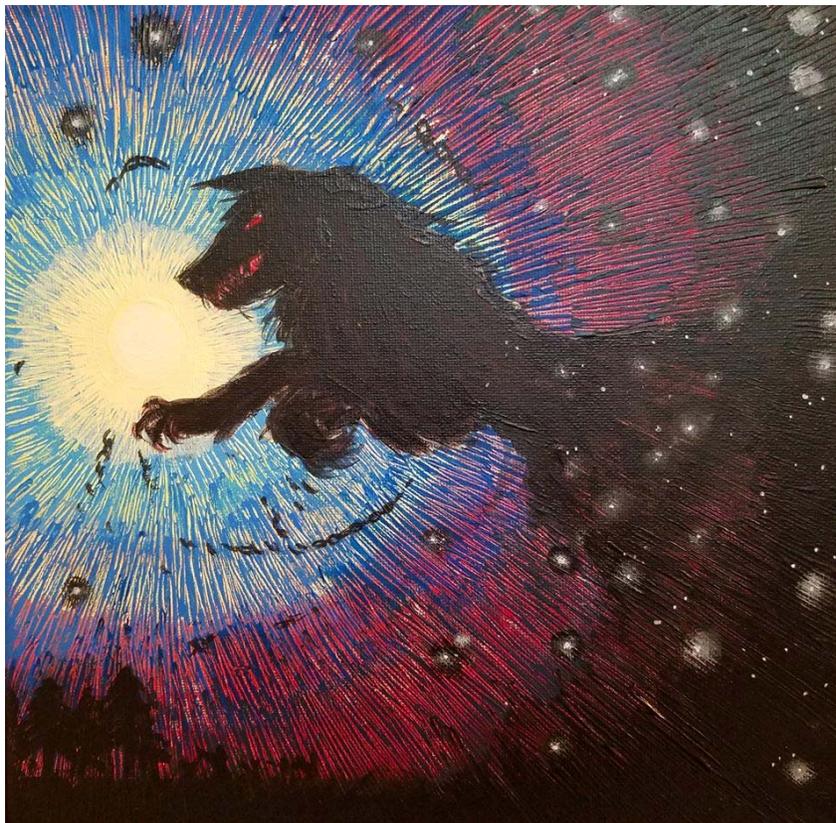
Nick: Kickstarter is great because it allows creators not only the opportunity to receive funding for a good idea up front, but it also helps to create interest in the game. Under an older business model, we'd have to take out a small business loan, make the book, and hope there's demand for it once we put it out. Kickstarter lets us capitalize on that demand while making the book without going into debt.

Dom: We've got a *ton* of stretch goals planned. We don't want to give too much away, but we're looking at additional art, illustrated maps, new adventures (Spoilers: Nick is sketching out a Ragnarok adventure), and other additions to the game and the game experience.

Dan: Lets talk about the art for a minute. We recently interviewed Riotminds about their game, *Trudvang Chronicles*. In that interview we discussed the importance of art in tabletop RPGs, especially with regard to selling hard copies of the books, because people are much more willing to invest in a product if they are getting more than just reference tables, but also a piece of art they are proud to display. Your wife, Leah Porter, does the art for the game, correct? She seems immensely talented, but what intrigues me so much is how fluid her style can be. The range of art found in your book looks like it belongs in a gallery. What led to the decision to use these particular fine art styles, as opposed to the commonly used highly stylized concept art/vignettes and/or illustrations?

Nick: The easy answer is that we used fine art because Leah is trained in fine art and an excellent painter. But for a better answer, let me turn it over to her!

Leah: This is the part of the world that regularly gets to experience the Northern Lights; they're no stranger to fantastical displays of color. What we wanted to emphasize was that the Nine Worlds of Norse Cosmology itself are not drab, grey places, but rather a colorful, vibrant set of worlds and that emphasizing that would help establish the Worlds within the minds of the players. I tried to stay away from a lot of "standard fantasy" character illustration and focused more on the worlds themselves; individual characters will look how the players see them, but we wanted to focus more on creating a rich, colorful set of worlds in which the characters can live.



"The Nine Worlds of Norse Cosmology itself are not drab, grey places, but rather a colorful, vibrant set of worlds".
Image © *Sagas of Midgard* 2018

Dan: Assuming that the Kickstarter campaign is successfully funded, which is a likely scenario, what are your long term goals with this project? Are you looking to just continue developing this one game further, or are there plans to potentially branch out into other projects, maybe producing other games? Tabletop RPGs have been a part of your life for so long, is it your dream to build a career from this venture?

Nick: Down the road, expansion is easy: new Domains and powers from different Gods, new territories (the Vikings were also famous explorers, sailing anywhere from North America to the Byzantine Empire) and, if the demand holds out, entire new Pantheons from different peoples of the Viking Age. I'd love to make a career out of this, but I guess I'll see how the Kickstarter does before I quit my day job (laughs).

Dom: I told Nick earlier today that I'm quitting my job the day the Kickstarter goes live **SO IT HAD BETTER DO WELL!**

Dan: No pressure, Nick! (laughs) I truly hope you can both retire from your other pursuits to focus on producing more game content!

Dom: We've got no lack of ideas. There are dozens of histories, mythologies, and pantheons to draw from either to expand Sagas of Midgard or to create new standalone projects.

Nick: There's never been a lack of stories to tell. My job as a game designer is not to tell those stories myself; it's to give players the tools to create engaging, memorable stories with their friends that will last a lifetime.

Dan: Thank you for taking the time to speak with me about your exciting new game. I look forward to seeing the game get funded, and everyone at Paleo Gaming wishes you both the best of success!

Nick and Dom: Thanks much!

Sagas of Midgard is currently available via Kickstarter (https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/991523106/sagas-of-midgard-a-cinematic-norse-tabletop-rpg?ref=nav_search&result=project&term=sagas) or visit their website at <http://www.sagasofmidgard.com>



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