

# Exclusive !

## Meeting with Rémi Dromnelle, the author of the Ryzom book “*The Sacred War*”

Welcome to *Behind the Scenes*, the magazine that reveals the hidden side of Ryzom by allowing you to meet the volunteers and players who, day after day, contribute to the improvement of this game that is the passion of us all.

Today, I have the pleasure to interview Rémi Dromnelle, the talented author of the book *The Sacred War*.



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**Tamarea:** Hello Rémi! To begin, can you introduce yourself in a few words?

Rémi Dromnelle: Hi Tam! If I had to summarize myself in a few words, I would say that I am first and foremost a fan of fictional worlds. As far back as I can remember, I have always been very attracted by everything that touches the imaginary. Through reading, writing, movies, games and art. As I grew up, this

passion led me to become interested in the many and various mysteries of science, each one more inspiring than the last. One thing led to another and I began studying biology, bioinformatics, cognitive neuroscience, artificial intelligence and robotics. More recently, I also wrote the novel for which I am being interviewed today.

**T: Can you tell us more about your links with Ryzom?**

R: I'm a former French Ryzom player, having started playing in 2009 before the server merge. I was very active for about five years, then I gradually moved away from the game. I was a RP player who enjoyed PvP a lot.

**T: What characters did you play?**

R: That's a bit complicated, haha.

I played two characters both suffering from dissociative personality disorder: Kiriga / Ki'yumé and Vao / Ki'gan. I'll talk about them more in details. For those who are not interested, you can skip to the next question!

Kiriga was a young Zoraï in search of meaning who was seduced by the apocryphal Kamic precepts preached by the Atys Prowlers. In short, the Atys Prowlers revered the Kamis and Ma-Duk, but refuted the writings of Hoi-Cho about the Kamism of Revelations. They followed their own writings: the Black Cult of Ma-Duk. Like all members of his guild, Kiriga was a religious fanatic who waged a permanent war against the Karavan and its supporters, and was also very critical of other Kamists whom he considered too limp.

The years passed, and gradually the Atys Prowlers guild fell apart. Mad with anger and sadness at seeing his comrades desert one by one, some even joining the ranks of the Karavan, Kiriga fell into a deep depression. He began to consume toxic psychotropic drugs and learned to create them himself.

This is how he created the Black Sap (or rather the different types of Black Sap), of which he was the first guinea pig. Little by little, the drug destroyed him and gave birth to a monstrous personality: Ki'yumé. A horrible being whose only ambition was to create a maximum of chaos.

To reach his delirious objectives, Ki'yumé answered the call for the Marauders launched by Akilia. An Akilia who had, according to him, sunk in a murderous madness for already a long time. Accompanied by comrades to whom he offered his stimulating psychotropic drugs, he co-founded the Marauder Clan of the Black Sap.

Over the next few years, Ki'yumé wreaked havoc on the New Lands, carrying out several attacks and capturing the Awakened Ki'atal. He finally died under mysterious circumstances during the Second Great Swarm, as did many other homins.

Vao Lu-Hoo, also a Zoraï, was one of the emissaries of the Clan of the Black Sap, who was captured by the Zoraï Theocracy while on a diplomatic mission to Zora. What the Theocracy did not know at the time was that Vao was also one of Ki'yumé's disciples. A disciple who had been chosen not without reason. Indeed, Vao was suffering from dissociative identity disorder caused by severe childhood trauma. For Ki'yumé, he was a perfect testing ground.

Locked in Zora's jails during the Second Great Swarm, Vao survived the Kitins' attack and fled when the

attack subsided. Unable to face the mountain of challenges ahead, he gradually let his second personality take over. This one was called Ki'gan and never gave back control to Vao. For several years, Ki'gan searched for his master, in vain, but found nevertheless some of his fellow Marauders. As the last of them to know the secrets of Ki'yumé's drug production, he finally replaced him as the Clan's alchemist.

During the long years that followed, Ki'gan, like his late mentor, carried out numerous attacks against the various Atysian nations. However, unlike Ki'yumé who seemed to be driven only by madness, Ki'gan was a true political activist, wishing for the abolition of governments and the rebellion of homins against the Powers.

One day, and without anyone knowing why, Ki'gan disappeared. When he reappeared a few decades later, it was not Ki'gan who showed up, but Vao. An amnesic Vao, unaware of his criminal past and from whom 30 years of life had been stolen.

**T: Can you explain us the genesis of your novel?**

R: A few months after I started Ryzom, I discovered the Atys Prowlers guild. I was instantly fascinated by the menacing aura that emanated from its members. I still remember the initiation rite they gave me and the ceremony that followed, during which my PC crashed! When I reconnected, they had killed me, considering that my avatar had fallen asleep during the ceremony.

Once I was recruited, I immediately understood that this martial atmosphere was actually the RP facade of a very welcoming and warm group. I also discovered an original guild lore based on a dark and cryptic mythology, imagined by its members, especially two of them: Kalchek and Damakian. If I had to retain only one of the ideas that made an impression on me, it would be the existence, in the past, of a Black Masked Zoraï who lived in the Old Lands.

In the years that followed, I became very interested in the Marauders and the Old Lands. Thus, I began to imagine the story of the Black Masked Zoraï and the crusade he might have led.

It was only in 2018, when I was coming back to Ryzom after a break of several years, that I got the idea to put this story in writing. Encouraged by Lai'Suki, then by Nilstilar, I started to work on it, at a rate of about 3 chapters per year published on the official forum.

Everything changed at the end of 2020 when you contacted me: you said you had read and loved the draft of my story and wanted to know if writing Ryzom-labeled short stories would appeal to me. I was interested in the idea, but didn't want to give up my story. That's why we finally decided to take it back and make it into a more elaborated project. If I'm not mistaken, the idea was more or less given to you by Nilstilar.

Incidentally, it is worth noting that my novel is and will remain a fanfiction. Of course, I try to stick as much as possible to the Ryzom Lore and its History. However, I don't want my vision of the Ryzom universe to be authoritative, nor do I want certain points of the Lore to prevent me from expressing myself fully.

**T: How did you work on a daily basis?**

R: In the first few years, when the project was still a mere draft, nothing was really organized. I would write a chapter and then Lai'Suki would give me feedback. Then Nilstilar joined us.

Things changed when you came to me in November 2020 to offer me a partnership. At the time, I was focused on finishing my PhD, and didn't feel like I could handle both projects at once. So I decided to put the novel aside for a while.

Then came August 2021, when all my time could now be devoted to writing the novel. From then on, I wrote one chapter per month. During this period, I was in close contact with the Lore Team, who helped me to deepen my knowledge of the Ryzom universe and who allowed me to modify a certain number of elements to make them "Lore compatible".

More concretely, on a daily basis, I worked from home or in bars. In order to move forward without getting discouraged, I set myself goals in terms of chapters: each of them had to tell its own story. So, even though the mountain of work that remained to be done often seemed enormous, finishing that piece of story was an accomplishment in itself. By the way, all but one have been written in chronological order.

Many times, I would pause the writing of the chapter, and go back to the previous ones to change some of the outlines. If I've learned anything in the last two years, it's that writing is first and foremost a rewriting process! Another potentially notable element was that I would systematically recite my text orally when I was writing it. This allowed me to better define the emotions I wanted to convey, to find the words that sounded best and the most appropriate punctuation.

Once a chapter was finished, I would copy it to a shared document so that Nistilar, who was always by my side, could read it over, correct it, and give me his opinion. After that, I usually had a two-week break during which I thought about the next chapter and took a few days off.

Well... The truth is, there wasn't a day that went by that I didn't think about the book. I could be inspired by anything. Armed with my phone, I took daily notes. Simple ideas ended up in the "Sacred War - ideas" file and more accomplished thoughts in the "Sacred War - plot" file, made up of a succession of chapter summaries.

**T: You just said that the slightest thing can inspire you. Can you tell us more? What are your sources of inspiration?**

R: To begin with, I will perhaps break a "taboo" by revealing that I am not a great reader. While I may have been in my youth, I now read two novels a year at most. This year, I haven't finished any of them yet... Otherwise, I often read tabletop roleplaying game manuals, especially when they have a very dense lore... I love reading fictional universe bibles.

All this to say that you don't have to be a big reader, or have read all the "classics" of fantasy or science fiction, to write fantasy yourself. That should never stop people from getting started!

Since I don't read much, my cultural references are mostly movies, TV shows, anime and games. This explains why I often put the emphasis on descriptions: I visualize absolutely everything I write. Ideally, I would have a good level of drawing... I often think that my inability to draw the scenes I imagined when I was a child is what brought me to writing.

Sometimes, too, a news story, a discussion, or a piece of art will inspire me to do something powerful. Again, taking notes on my phone keeps me from forgetting the ideas I may have in those moments.

Oh, and I can't write without headphones on! Indeed, listening to certain music allows me to be closer to the emotions I want to convey in my texts (sadness, epic feeling, tension, etc.). Besides, we come back to this, these musics are often soundtracks of films or games.

**T: In addition to writing the book, you had to manage its publication and communication. Can you tell us more about that?**

R: Indeed, having decided to self-publish, I had to manage a greater workload: spelling correction, cover, back cover, layout, etc.

Why did I choose self-publishing? As I write primarily for my own pleasure and that of my readers, I didn't want to face the rejection of the publishing industry and spend weeks or months trying to find a publisher who would publish my work. I didn't want to spend weeks or months trying to find a publisher who would publish my work, or who would ask me to change this or that. So self-publishing seemed to be the most appropriate choice.

To do so, I chose Librinova, a French self-publishing platform offering a number of publishing services and founded by two women from the industry. In truth, the most optimal solution in terms of cost and exposure would have been to use Amazon's self-publishing service (KDP). But for the French version of this first book, at least, I wanted to use a national solution. Note that the digital version of my book has however been automatically referenced in the Amazon library by Librinova.

**T: Your novel was published in French. Are translations planned for those who do not read this language?**

R: Yes, absolutely! An English and a German version of the book are currently being translated by volunteers from the Ryzom community. Incidentally, I would like to say that these people offered themselves. I didn't go looking for them. The truth is, I'm not very comfortable with the idea of making people work without paying them. So again, thank you for your extreme generosity!

**T: *The Sacred War* is your first novel. How does it feel to hold your first book in your hands and to read the comments of your readers?**

R: Getting to the end of this project gave me a lot of joy! It's a real accomplishment. But more than anything, it is the feedback from the people who have read it that delights me. I managed, with this first volume, to touch some people, whether they know the Ryzom universe or not. And I have to say that I'm proud of it. To write all by yourself and to feel emotions while making the characters you have invented come alive, that's already powerful. To succeed in transmitting these emotions is on a whole other level...

**T: What has been your greatest satisfaction in this adventure?**

R: Finishing a chapter always provided me with a lot of satisfaction! Again, setting goals for each chapter helped me tremendously to move forward, both practically and psychologically.

Otherwise, I would say that my greatest satisfaction has been the feedbacks of some loved ones, as mentioned above.

**T: And your most difficult problem to solve?**

R: Korect spailing! It's a hell to be as bad at that as I am! Of course, there are plenty of tools to help us today.

However, it is clearly not enough. Fortunately, Nilstilar and you were there to read that I wrote!

Scenaristically speaking, otherwise, everything went pretty smoothly for this first volume. It remains to be seen if this will be the case for the following ones.

In the end, the hardest part was probably to make this book accessible to someone who doesn't know the Ryzom universe (presenting the important elements in a way other than a history lesson, not saying too much, saying enough, etc.) while at the same time making sure that my vision of this fictional universe appeals to experienced players.

**T: This first volume is exciting, when will we have the pleasure to read the sequel ? Do you already have the scenario in mind ?**

R: The plot of volume 2 is finished and summarized chapter by chapter in a document. As for the following volumes, it's much more vague at the moment: I have the main ideas and the key moments of the narrative in mind, but the story and the details still need to be worked out.

Oh, and I say "next volumes" in the plural because I think there will be four. Initially, I was more like three, but I don't think that will be enough. Well, we'll see. It's possible that it will change, to the more or the less.

As for the release date of volume 2, I'd rather not say. Not before 2024 anyway, that's for sure. All I can say for now is that I plan to start writing it this winter. I can hardly wait!

**T: What are your upcoming projects?**

R: At the time of writing this: to find a job! That would be nice enough.

Then, I've got some tabletop RPG scenarios I'd like to play with friends, such as the continuation of my *Vampire: The Masquerade* campaign that I've been running for five years now.

On the Ryzom side, there is the second volume of *The Sacred War*, of course. But besides that, I'm also planning to get a map of the Old Lands to be made by an artist-cartographer. A map that could be used to illustrate my novels. But for that, I still have to discuss a lot of details with the Lore Team.

**T: Thanks to you, Rémi, for this fascinating interview!**

R: Thank you for offering me this interview Tam! I take advantage of this last message to thank all the people who have read me and given me constructive feedback, and all those who have accompanied me in the making of this first volume. You can count on me to make the second one even better!

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This concludes, dear readers, this issue of *Behind the Scenes*, which we had a lot of pleasure making for you. See you soon for the next one!