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The Tékumel™  
Foundation

# Press Release

## **Retired University of Minnesota Professor and Department Chair, author, and Tékumel creator Professor M. A. R. Barker dead at 83**

### **Fulbright Scholar, linguist, and accomplished academic was also a popular science fiction author who helped inspire the creators of Dungeons and Dragons**

Minneapolis, Minnesota, March 16, 2012: Professor Muhammad Abd-al-Rahman (MAR) Barker, known to his friends as “Phil,” died peacefully in home hospice on March 16, 2012 with his wife Ambereen Barker at his side.

A Fulbright Scholar (1951) of vast accomplishment, Professor Barker is probably best known for his creation of the world of Tékumel which he developed for over 70 years and which has been compared to Tolkein’s ‘Middle Earth’ in its scope, sophistication, and complexity. Barker was a Professor of Urdu and South Asian Studies at the University of Minnesota during the period when Dave Arneson and Gary Gygax were developing Tactical Studies Rules’ (TSR) first role-playing games in the Twin Cities and Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. In 1975 Barker’s game “Empire of the Petal Throne” was the first role playing game published by TSR, Inc following the release of “Dungeons and Dragons.”

Role playing games set in Tékumel, have been published every decade since the 1970’s, including the 1983 ‘Swords and Glory,’ 1994’s ‘Gardásiyal,’ and 2005’s ‘Tékumel: Empire of the Petal Throne.’ Beginning with “Man of Gold” in 1985 Barker published five novels, several game supplements, and a number of short stories set in Tékumel. In 2008 Barker established the Tékumel Foundation as his literary executor to protect and promote his intellectual property.

Born in 1929, Barker graduated Magna cum Laude and Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Washington with a BA in Linguistics in 1951. He traveled on Fulbright Scholarship to India where he studied the Koraku, Korwa, Uraon and Jaunsauri languages of rural India and the Himalayas, and while on this trip converted to Islam. Upon his return to the United States, Barker was elected to the California chapter of the Sigma Xi Society for the promotion of research in science.

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In 1959 he completed his Ph. D. by publishing the grammar and dictionary of the Klamath Indians of southwestern Oregon, which was used as reference material for Native American languages by the producers of the 'Northern Exposure' TV series during the 1990's.

He traveled again to Pakistan in 1959 on a Ford Foundation grant where he studied the Urdu, Punjabi, Pashto, Baluchi, and Brahui languages. In 1961 he published an anthology of Urdu poetry. From 1961 until 1969 Professor Barker taught Arabic, Urdu-Hindi and linguistics at McGill University in Canada, and in 1970 spent a year sabbatical in Lucknow and Hyderabad where he worked on an advanced reader of classical Urdu poetry.

In 1972 the Barkers moved to Minneapolis, where Professor Barker chaired the Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies. He continued to teach at the University of Minnesota until his retirement in 1992.

In addition to Tékumel, Professor Barker was an avid student of Meso-American cultures including the Inca, Maya, and Aztec peoples. His creation of Tékumel includes elements of Central American and southeast Asian cultures, including religious pantheons, ornate pyramidal temples, and elaborate costuming.

Professor Barker is survived by his wife of 53 years, Ambereen. Details on memorial services will follow. In lieu of flowers, memorials to the Tékumel Foundation are preferred, visit <http://www.tekumelfoundation.org>.