

EDITORIAL

I write this prior to the publication of the much awaited **WFRP2**. I have no idea when I will actually publish this fanzine, so I do not know if the new material will be with us yet. Still, I wish to commence this column by speculating upon Games Workshop, Warhammer and the development of games in the certainty that I am (sadly) unlikely to be proven wrong by any release once I have written this. The point that occurred to me whilst looking over my old Warhammer games is the complete lack of innovation within the game, which (of course) led to me considering the new edition of WFRP. Warhammer as both an idea and a mechanism when it was first launched was innovative, impressive and a damned good thing. Building upon the original work in Bryan Ansell's **Reaper**, Warhammer has developed along six editions with WFRP as an off-shoot. Actually, I usually regard it as the other way around. The success of WFB derives from the detailed world background, but this was mostly actually developed by and for WFRP in the first place. Anyway, back to the argument under construction: the world as we know it came to fruition in WFB2 and WFRP, but nothing really changed over the next 15 years. The Old World remains essentially the same and the WFB mechanism is identical to two decades ago. Equally, the various campaign modules and other GW sponsored events are effectively the same as might be found within Bloodbath at Orc's Drift or Macbeth. With WFRP, **The Enemy Within** was neither matched nor copied. Hogshead's excellent **Marienburg** sourcebook was based on work that appeared within White Dwarf a decade before, and Anthony Ragan was not asked to repeat his efforts. Instead, despite wide acclaim and purportedly excellent sales, we either got nothing or - frankly - dross like **Dying of the Light** and **Doomstones**. (Actually, both had good points, but these *were* overwhelmed by the bad). What makes this worse is that there have been so many innovations in both wargaming and role-playing elsewhere - some good, some not so good - and which appear to have been completely ignored by Games Workshop and Hogshead. I remain doubtful that Green Ronin will change the trend, although I genuinely hope that I am wrong. Mind you, for a hobby that relies on GMs and their ability to write (good) adventures/ background and players to involve themselves (imaginatively) along the plot, the state of innovation generally seems rather poor within the wider professional gaming community. I am prepared to accept that creativity takes second place to the required "product churn" to make money, but there must be a better economic model to create an adequate yield for a game. Both wargaming and boardgames can do it (to varying degrees of commercial success).

The fact is that we get hundreds (no, thousands) of bland unimaginative d20 products and most of the better material is simply repackaged 'revised' editions of proven classics. I do tend to get depressed at the lack of quality. However, it does seem that the name of the game is disposability. There is no intention to write good games, just the need to produce something to catch the eye, prove worthy of its five minutes of fame, and then be discarded so that we move on to the next 'thing'. This is why games are frequently glossy in colour with hard covers. It is true that, to some extent, gamers have always been extensive rather than intensive, but I think this is now taken to be the norm. I recently played in a **Slaine** (Mongoose) game, and we had fun. The game is broken, much of it is poorly edited and written, and there is no chance we will go back - but we had 10 sessions and then moved on. It was fun, and that is the point. However, I worry that it was fun despite the game, rather than because of it and that we drew upon our collective decades of gaming experience to pull something from the mess.

Anyway and back to GW, the latest of their efforts, **Storm of Chaos**, is discussed within, but falls within the 'nothing new' category in terms of mechanics, background and ideas. The repercussions for WFRP are that the results of the campaign as were played out are apparently to be the brave new world setting for WFRP2. The fact that they are the same (tired) old ideas does not make them inherently bad. Change for its own sake is no good. However, I am surprised at the limited knowledge of supposedly full time and professional game designers and writers. I suppose that this derives from the GW employment model, whereby they employ gamers as employees, and GW gamers in particular. This has the undoubted benefit of commitment and is cheap, but it seems to me that the original development of the Warhammer World was so successful because the likes of Davis, Halliwell and Priestley had intellectual backgrounds and varied interests. Most current GW staff play GW games and were recruited because they played GW games. This leaves them embedded within a specific paradigm and isolated from what is happening elsewhere. There are exceptions, of course, and Warmaster borrows its rules directly from other wargames. Unfortunately, the likes of Rick Priestley and Jervis Johnson are not involved with WFRP.

Continuing the theme of the future of WFRP2, it is very evident that the new edition will be American. Now, before I start I have nothing (necessarily) against America or Americans, in general. I actually have a number of North American friends. However, Americanisation of WFRP does concerns me. On the simplest level, I hate their 'letter' size that everything appears in. We have extremely sensible and rational standard

European sizes, in metric, and yet I am left with Warpstone that does not fit into European folders and books that do not fit on my (metric - and Swedish, you know the ones) bookshelves. And as for the spelling...! Most seriously I really do not believe that Americans, even the most educated, really and truly understand Europe and its 2,000 years of history. I rarely read the pertinent pages, but unless your daily newspaper eulogises over Sophie Anstruther-Gough-Calthorpe and what delights she played at the Eton Ball's Preview Regatta, how can you be expected to portray a 2,500 year old hierarchical and traditional society and game world? You simply cannot. Equally, unless you live in a country where your universities' finance directors are called the 'Secretary of the University Chest' then I simply do not think you can 'get it'.

I read the interviews with Chris Pramas and Simon Butler in the latest Warpstone. Like all these things, a mixture of PR, saying nothing and some interesting titbits. I'll qualify my following comments by admitting that I do not know whether it is feasible to infer the statement that I am going to from such a piece, but I did find it interesting. Since it can be fun to speculate, provided that we recognise that this is what we are doing, I am going to indulge here. Simon talked-the-talk that we oldies want to see - stressing that this is a low fantasy, a new edition based on the old one etc. All good stuff. Chris, on the other hand, referred to his company as writing the "RPG for the Warhammer World". Now, I see that as very different from writing a revised edition of WFRP. The Warhammer World is not WFRP, although WFRP might have formed a part of that once upon a time. Indeed, I would contend that WFRP made the WFB juggernaut. The background that sells WFB and makes a good proportion of GW's money was primarily created in the first place for the RPG. No WFRP, then there would have been no 'deep' WFB background to differentiate the GW game from its many clones. Simon was very honest when he said that WFRP would have to be brought up to date, and I think we can all live with that as a principle; we will wait on the implementation as a separate issue. But Chris' responses were pretty dismissive of WFRP as an entity it seemed to me. Indeed, he was honest enough to admit that they wanted the 40K license, and this was a second choice. In the real world, companies like Green Ronin are obviously going to do what pays the bills. I'm not naïve enough to think that either GR or GW are in it purely for the love of WFRP, but my take on the GR section of the interview was much more disinterested in Warhammer as a first edition and a past than I had anticipated. Simon came over as being really enthusiastic, whilst Chris was 'just another job'. I know that it *is* actually just another job, but I still expected a little more. Did anyone else come away from the interview with this feeling?

As you may be aware I was involved with the play-test of **WFRP2**. As I signed an NDA, I am obviously not going to disclose details of the testing. Playtesting can be rather unrewarding in a gaming sense. It does not matter if your character dies or you do something heroic in a one-off game devised to test particular rules. That said, my group very quickly became less than enthusiastic to play. In the end, they either made excuses not to play or specifically told me to run my existing WFRP campaign rather than run another playtest game. Disillusionment also seemed to be evident in a second group in which I was a player, and so I like to think that it was not the games that I wrote or my GMing. Talking to some other GMs who were testing, they also said that their players were less than keen to continue testing too. Still, taking part in the playtest was a very interesting experience. As I said in **The Origin of Tree Worship 8**, I have nothing but best wishes for the new edition. WFRP2 really needs to do two things: emulate the Warhammer World and be a good set of rules. Let us hope that the end result is a success.

We held a successful TimCon II WFRP convention, although I fell foul of Black Industries. They took exception to my advertising TimCon II on their forum, on "liability" grounds. Since we were playing at a centre operated by the London Borough of Ealing and the club has even been vetted by the police (as must all groups that have minors), I think insurance, health and safety, fire certification and disability access are likely to be as good, if not better, as GW Headquarters! In what I cannot describe as an unfriendly email, Simon Butler explained that the forum was a "non open forum" and that he thought it normal to ask before posting such a post. I must admit that maybe he was right, but it had genuinely never occurred to me that it would be a problem. Anyway I was happy to apologise for the faux pas. I am still not entirely clear what a non open forum is, when it is located in the public domain. With the closing of the Critical Hit forum, WFRP suddenly finds itself in a weaker position electronically just as things otherwise are looking up. The Black Industries forum obviously has the potential of being the primary WFRP online location. However, it seems that GW polices its forums very carefully and no mention of anything "unofficial" is tolerated. If this policy carries forward to WFRP, then there may be problems since RPGs are a very different beast to wargames. RPGs rely at core on GMs to come up with new ideas; if these are to be blocked then dissemination of new material will be very difficult outside the promised GW official release schedule. I recognise that there are some legal implications and commercially I can see the argument, but it seems to me a very narrow viewpoint and one that will not work. WFB players, used to such rules,

might be able to play WFRP in such a manner but I cannot see d20 players flocking to play a game where they can only talk about what they are told to. On the other hand, I could equally argue that opinion is fundamental to wargaming, maybe even particularly that of a fantasy nature, and policing their material in this way has done it no harm. Let's face it - what do I know?! Notwithstanding the BI policy, other GW sites frequently list and endorse fan sites for their games, so I am far from clear what exactly the policy is or will become.

As I was finalising this issue, the following release schedule appeared:

Mar 18: WFRP, Character Pack, Plundered Vaults
April 22: GM Pack, Empire Bestiary
May 20: Paths of the Damned Vol 1: The Ashes of Middenheim
Jun 24: Old World Armoury: Misillania and Miltaria
July 15: Sigmar's Heirs: A Guide to the Empire
August 19: Paths of the Damned Vol 2: The Spires of Altdorf
Oct 21: Karak Azgal: Dragon Krag
Nov 18: Realms of Sorcery

Nothing really surprising, but it continues my concerns. Two supplements are almost "what we should have put into the rulebook, but didn't" and another two are "extra rubbish that probably isn't good enough, but we get paid by the word, and you will buy the books anyway". I always thought that the Hackmaster production of endless supplements was meant as irony, and not as a model! Still, I suppose that this is the price we must pay for GW to obtain acceptable returns on their capital to publish the book. Since Amazon.com and the fall of the US\$ are conspiring to halve the price of the books, I cannot complain too much! (As an aside, WFRP is unusual in this. GW stuff is normally only rarely discounted on Amazon. I hope that this is not a bad sign for its economic future). I will just have to invest in a bigger bag and a new back to heft this lot down to the club. I do wonder how they expect us to play their flagship trilogy, when part 2 is a three months wait and part 3 isn't even scheduled in the first year?

Tim Eccles