

# Editorial

Issue 5 was launched in a blaze of glory at Dragonmeet 2003. Okay, I made my deadline and the issue was available on the UK Fanzine table. Issue 6 was published as a TimCon 01 'special', but is essentially a stand-alone. All the letters etc related to the earlier issue(s) are printed here, and my editorial refers primarily to issue 5 - so I will start with Dragonmeet. I cannot really say much about Dragonmeet, since I saw very little of it. I ran "Return to Grovod Forest" in the morning and played in "Ambassador's Party" in the afternoon. With a little time behind the fanzine table and grabbing a few conversations, I did not even have enough time to visit the traders' stalls. From my perspective it was a good day - playing WFRP all day cannot be too bad! The organisation on the day seemed pretty good; friendly, helpful people were on-hand to answer all queries. I think it only right to pass on congratulations to the organisers, since I was critical of the organisation last year. I missed getting a 'freebie' grab bag and I am not sure whether these are a good idea. I dislike any form of 'limited edition' or 'collectible' tag, and I am not sure how many were given out. I did end up with one as someone simply threw theirs away, so I had a root through. There was a lot of bumpf, an issue of Dungeon (that did nothing to improve my opinion of D20 and D&D games), a collectible D&D miniature (a good move as it might persuade me to consider buying some - although see below) and some EM4 dice. The feeling from the fanzine people was that the table is worth continuing with, although it was pretty unsuccessful commercially. The Cthulhu glossies did good business (quite rightly so), but more general fanzines seem to get very little passing trade.

The highlight for me was definitely "Ambassador's Party". Hopefully, it will find its way into the public domain some time soon as it was great fun - and should do much to debunk the argument that no one writes humorous WFRP material anymore. My amazing balls were quite something! The game was run by Clive Oldfield, who also showed the worth of a floor plan and figures. However much we all love to *role-play*, very little can beat moving wonderful figures around a map board - at least as a change of pace or an aid to a particular part of a game. Humour continues to be a topic of thought for me, something central to tAP. Someone sent me another link to a RPG.net rant, once again criticising the seriousness and loss of humour in published material (in this case fan writing, particularly in Warpstone). The strange thing is that all my games contain a lot of humour, but this is usually in the context of the players and the particular situation. I still am unsure how to transcend culture, age, sex etc and put the humour back into the game. Talking to players from around the world via email reinforces this to my mind, since so many people simply do not 'get it'. Mostly I do not blame them: how

many people can now remember the 1980s, Thatcher and the whole social uproar that is mirrored in WFRP? Why should any American have ever heard of it? Or a 16 year-old? From a personal ideology, I might think that the Empress Margaret Thatcher bringing about the Dark Ages is a nice parody, but a Conservative player might conceivably become agitated at this. (As an aside, on a recent joint writing project I did suggest that one of the quasi-police groups that we were developing had its origins in strike-breakers - I think I used slightly more pejorative language - employed by our dear empress. I was outvoted!) How many Europeans understood the 'Khazalid' joke? I think calling a demon 'Dentist' is excellent, but many German players do not - and were I playing in German then I can see why. Talking this through at Dragonmeet, I am still far from convinced that it is possible; general opinion seemed to support a splatter approach; if one puts in enough jokes, sarcasm and humour then some is bound to find its mark. I wonder that most readers would just see this as poor quality material, since they would not get the point. I am still waiting for comments on this issue. It engenders lots of online debate - so please send some my way!

One article in the Dungeon magazine was about the use of PDF and online purchasing and downloading of material. This is seen as the future due to low overheads and production costs. Maybe. The vast array of titles and mass of material available for the hobby is simply beyond my belief. I cannot fathom how it is commercially viable, even ignoring my views on the poor quality of much of it. Whether we are in a recession or there is one just around the corner, it seems to me that there is going to be a clearout very soon. It really defies belief that we can sustain so many titles, even as online downloads, in such a small hobby – and particularly one where we are supposed to let our own minds run free and create adventures for our players. It may be that I am too old and out of touch with what 'the market' is demanding but I do find it difficult to envisage the death of hardcopy gaming material in favour of this new 'virtual' world. I can see advantages of online material and fan contact and discussion areas, of support for games and extras to published material. I use the computer in my writing and I would never wish to revert to pen and paper or typewriter and correction fluid. That said, until I carry a portable on the bus to work and use one down at the club (both feasible possibilities I will admit) then the paper and print copy is always going to have a market. Not everyone is young and rich and can afford all this new technology, nor are employers going to allow their staff free use of computer access, printers etc indefinitely; I reckon that is going to be stamped upon very hard very soon. Without doubt the Internet has kept WFRP alive and this is an excellent example of how the new technologies can benefit our games. I wonder what the future will bring generally and to WFRP if the likes of the Dungeon article prove correct. If RPGs are

already elitist, how much more so will they be if one has to own a computer to run or play the game?

My own thought is that issue 5 was the best yet, and the fanzine is beginning to take shape and provide the sort of articles that I envisaged it doing. 'The Origin of Tree Worship' clearly cannot compete with 'Warpstone', nor would I wish it to do so. As a small run fanzine, I think it serves the group of what one might describe as 'serious' WFRPers. By this I mean those who see WFRP as their main game, or at least spend a lot of time playing it and are always in need of more and deeper material. This includes speculative and discursive pieces that might contradict 'official' material or cause other concerns to a more mainstream (in that Warpstone is distributed and sold commercially) publication. 'Warpstone' obviously has to cater for a far wider audience in the thousands; 'The Origin of Tree Worship' maybe shifts 100. It is nice to have a reasonable letters page and I am hoping to keep this up. I am still struggling with a few production gripes, particularly with the artwork - but I think these are improving each issue. 'The Origin of Tree Worship 7' continues the trend of short, discursive articles adding to the Warhammer background in what I hope is useful ways. I was asked at Dragonmeet and by a few emails whether I accept articles and the answer is a qualified 'yes'. Any fanzine is an egocentric creation, and so I am looking for work that will fit into my notion of the fanzine. This does not mean that I expect (or want) articles that agree with my view on the Warhammer World, but I do want articles that fit into my publication preferences. I am not terribly interested in new spells, magic items, new monsters and the like unless they have a very interesting and innovative slant. However, interesting developments of old classics - umber hulk, rust monster, carrion crawler, gelatinous cube - and anyone who can tell me how to run a consistent and rational 'dungeon complex' (just how do we manufacture a low fantasy complex of mechanical traps that can last 1,000 years?) would be more than welcome. Whilst I have something of a reputation for producing 'deep' material, I only do so where that material can be used in games - so again the fanzine is here to provide GMs and players with ideas about how to improve our mutual enjoyment. And that's what it is all about. To be completely honest, my wariness about accepting any material is fundamentally concerned with editing of submissions - I know from experience that editing other peoples' work takes far longer than writing one's own. As far as I am concerned there is no WFRP clique here. Alfred Nunez has been printed as he submitted material - and also put up with my editorialising! It is as simple as that, so yes material is welcome (and examples are in this issue). Keep it short and sharp.

I realise that I am beginning to sound like a GW-apologist, but I was ruminating over the criticisms poured upon GW in various fan forums and comparing this with the actions (apparently approved by gamers) of

Wizards of the Coast and Wizz Kids. I was not impressed by the relaunching of the D20 rulebook, an acknowledgement of a fundamentally flawed initial launch - despite the trumpeting at launch that it was the most playtested set ever. I am extremely unhappy that I have to buy the D&D Players Handbook to play any licensed D20 game. If the intention is to sell me a D20 core book, then please sell me a D20 core book, and not a fantasy players manual, whose relevance to many of the D20 games requiring it is very borderline. However, my biggest recent gripe is the production of figures to support the D&D game - the "official D&D" figures. I somehow missed the collectible crazes of the 1990s so I might be missing the point, but collectible RPG miniatures? My club has a number of Clix players, and I can see the attraction - simple rules, everything you need on the base. The concept is excellent. My issue is with the 'collectible' tag. Since I am something of a 2000AD fanboy, I umm-ed and aah-ed and finally decided to get the relevant 2000AD figures from the Heroclix Indy line. After fruitless attempts on ebay, I bought a job lot via a friend. That is 48 packs to you and me, cost over £150. What do I get? It is more a case of what I do not. In those 48 boxes, each with four figures inside, I do not get a single Judge Dredd. Yep, not one. I also fail to get complete sets of the Stixx and Brit Cit cops, plus three of the non-2000AD. That's with nearly 200 figures of a 40 set (and 12 are so-called 'uniques'). Do I not like that? Quite what the point of playing 2000AD without a Dredd is, is beyond me. So, collectible is simply a means of getting me to buy multiple copies of a figure that I have in the hope of getting one that I don't. Brilliant marketing and my respect from a commercial angle, but are we all really so desperately sad or immorally rich? Back to poor GW. D&D miniatures equally have to be bought in this same blind 'booster pack' manner. Want a halfling thief with crossbow, then keep buying boosters until you get lucky. What's that? You now have 34 of skeleton with sword and shield. So has everyone else. I will not even mention about the quality of the sculpting and the painting. Do I hear criticism? Not down my club, I don't. Except of GW, of course...

I am currently working on revisions to **All Quiet in Kislev** in the light of the new material that came with **White Dwarf 288**. Contradictions between WFB and WFRP have never really bothered me. The evolution of WFB has happened for the obvious reason of supporting what they want to do with their figures and armies. GW is all about selling figures and creating fun games with them (notwithstanding my analysis of their accounts last issue). Some of the earlier (4th edition) army books made the mistake of trying to add extra 'colour' material taken from the old (WFRP, second edition) setting, but apparently without bothering to read it properly. At least they *tried* though, to look on the positive, and since it is two editions ago, we can simply ignore all the old material (GW now do) except where it might be in (say) the Dwarf Book. The new Kislev

material is plausible and follows the trend in the **Army Book: Hordes of Chaos**. Sure there are variable bits, but I quite like a 'modern' Kislev as I have written about elsewhere. So, Polish Renaissance figures and material does not concern me. From a selfish perspective, I think that we should be more concerned about what Online Warhammer is doing to the game, since any future WFRP product is likely to be tied to that (in the mould of Everquest).

At the time of writing the first draft of this editorial, I have just finished watching the extended DVD of **The Two Towers**. The film is at least a good image for the hobby generally - and far better than the **Dungeons & Dragons** movie! I am still left puzzled at why the story line had to be changed so fundamentally, since it seems to gain nothing in either time or plot development. To my mind the whole point of Saruman was not his magic per se (Theoden under a spell in the film and how implausible is Wormtongue as an adviser here!) but the plausibility of his lies (appease dictators, join the winning side, do not even try and fight the inevitable), which was a theme that ran through the book at many levels. Other nonsensical changes included the changed roles of Eomer, Gamling and Irkenbrand, the interminable scenes of Aragorn's self doubt cum love interest (never mind his fall at the battle with the wargs - what was that all about?!), the arrival of elves at Helm's Deep (within two days - pretty impressive), the return of the ring to Gondor (and its very woolly characterisation and philosophy). From a wargaming perspective a number of things irritated. These include the whole strategy proposed by Gandalf to fight Saruman (take 300 riders and meet him in a pitched battle) in an attempt to make Theoden look an idiot (and why do they have it in for poor Theoden?). We have the usual Hollywood style where lots die on one side, then lots on another and no one is wounded, they all die) - except for key heroes (and when they die, they take an age). Helm's Deep was odd as I thought Tolkien really developed that well in the text and it should have made a visual impression as was described, so why change it? Again as a wargamer, this bastion upon which armies would break (a Gimli speech sadly missing but I suppose it has no comic relief, which appears to be the poor bloke's only purpose in the film) has neither portcullis nor murder holes through its entrance and a (clearly collapsible) arch to the gate that no one thinks to bring down. I liked the scene, but they lost much of the flavour of the book - it should have been longer, there was no ditch to defend, tactics were ropey, no female Rohirrim warriors (all the women quiver in the caves) and the final stand scene is not well done as once again Theoden is shown to be more coward than king. I also thought they cut some classic speeches, such as Aragorn's parley and the response: "We are the fighting Uruk Hai ... Bring out your skulking King".

Some of the story simply did not make sense and I would not accept some of the leaps of logic in my own games or from GMs I play with. Needless to say I am accused by many to be some sort of Tolkien Nazi! I do, however, accept the need to change story for a film as opposed to a book - honest! I think the alterations in the (much better) BBC Radio adaptation make good sense and are a fairer balance to the original story and the needs to inform and enthrall an audience. The one thing that *has* given me hours of enjoyment is the mixing of Tolkien's language with that of the screenwriters. I could understand an argument that Tolkien's wordy style would be unsuitable for modern (US) audiences. What we get is a hotchpotch of vernacular with prosaic, which surely satisfies no one?

Finally, a number of other authors have made an appearance in this issue. My thanks to them, and for those of you who took the trouble to write a letter to me. All the articles are accordingly authored; those without a name are by me as before. Please let me know what you think.

As I was tidying this up, "the" announcement was made. This is not a terribly good place to speculate on what this means since events will likely rapidly overtake any thoughts that I put here. I still stand broadly by my piece in issue 5 on GW and their strategy. The press release stated that "Green Ronin Publishing is proud to announce that it has concluded a deal to design and develop roleplaying games for BL Publishing", implying to me effectively a joint venture or contract work arrangement rather than Green Ronin simply taking the licence and running with it as happened with Hogshead. The establishment of a specific RPG division is probably hopeful (though maybe optimistic!) for the future, particularly if the rumour concerning GW's obtaining the RPG rights to the Lord of the Rings is true. I was not aware that Chris Pramas had worked on WFRP and can find no credit, but the press release says so. Simon Butler is running Black Industries; I do not know his RPG or WFRP credentials.

"Designing the new edition of Warhammer Fantasy Role-Play will, in many ways, be the culmination of my career as a game designer," says Pramas in the release. We'll see!

Simon Butler also said on Critical Hit that "I love Warpstone and am very much looking forward to talking to the guys about the future of WFRP 2", although within definite (and understandable) qualifications about fan material. On the technical side, I have yet to decide what this means for tOoTW, or even Warpstone. After all, if WFRP is now set after GW's current WFB campaign, everything that we have written and everything that we know is (at best) 10 years out-of-date or (at worst) plain wrong. Nor can I write anything to rules that I do not know. It puts all fan writing in a fix, since with the time from writing to publication, we will be publishing material still about WFRP1 a year after WFRP2 is out. Also,

GW are clearly going to pump out (expensive) material on a regular basis in the form of sourcebooks etc, and is there need/ room for fan material anymore? Will people even have enough money after buying the rulebook and spending £15 a month on the latest sourcebook for 6 months in a row?

Tim Eccles  
May 2004