

# THE ORIGIN OF TREE WORSHIP

## Introduction

**The Origin of Tree Worship** was the title of a fanzine that I produced over a three-year period, roughly 2001 - 2004. This contains a selection of the articles that I wrote for the fanzine during that time. Some are simply reprinted, whilst others have been revised and edited. I was fortunate to be supported by a number of other authors during the fanzine's life, but this site does not reproduce any of those.

I have also culled the material of editorial and polemical content, together with anything that is time-specific. This page can never give a true picture of the vibrancy of the fanzine, but I hope it brings a flavour of what I had intended, together with bringing some of the material to a wider audience.

Tim Eccles  
January 2005

## Weapons In The Old World

A fully developed version of this article can be found in **Carnel 14** and a reference to this idea is made in my Correspondent article in **Warpstone 15**.

In the Old World, there is little doubt that its rulers want a peaceful and stable society, or at the very least a malleable one. This means that they are likely to look upon well-armed individuals wandering around their lands and cities with a distinctly unfavourable eye. On the other hand, the reality of the Old World is far from peaceful, and even ordinary people will likely carry some protection. So, how do the authorities deal with the issue? Middenheim, according to *Warhammer City* makes visitors "check-in" their weapons and heavy armour on entering the city. This might seem to be normal. According to the WFRP rulebook, most Imperial villages have fortifications (page 333), and most farmsteads are fortified to some extent. Those approaching such a place well armed are likely to be dealt with suspiciously, and prevented or restricted in their entry, unless known in the area.

The question then revolves around definitions of armed. It is likely that most Old Worlders will have access to some form of hand weapon, and this follows mediaeval history where daggers and short swords or axes were not uncommon. It is where individuals wear metal armour, carry serious weapons of war (particularly firearms, crossbows and two-handed weapons) or are on barded war horses that problems will arise, and the authorities will likely act. There are two basic exceptions to this rule, although even here over-arming will cause questioning and suspicion. Firstly, the Empire as a bureaucratising society will sell permits to appropriate persons operating in appropriate areas. Devious GMs can always sell their PCs fake permits. Devious players can always buy fake permits, which will likely convince most illiterate bods. Secondly, certain individuals will automatically be permitted use by their station or post. Wearing the livery of nobles or local guild merchants, or being accompanied by their representatives or those of an official cult, puts one above commoners, whilst soldiers, militiamen, watchmen, guardsmen, roadwardens, witch hunters, templars, coachmen and similar public servants are allowed it as part of their jobs. Those in similar positions, but operating as freelances are not automatically excluded.

It is also worth stressing the intense xenophobia of the Old World. People from different regions, and this might mean from as little as a few miles away, will be particularly distrusted. After all, they are probably spies from Bretonnia, Ostland, the Cult of Sigmar or the nephew of the ruling Lord. These people with weapons are even more clearly spies. This level of mistrust also extends to non-humans. Whilst dwarfs and halflings might be respected and ignored, respectively, elves are rare and wondrous creatures whose very presence is frightening.

So, on entering a city, PCs should have a permit, keep items well packed, or hand them over to an official. And, as a GM, have said officials (occasionally) commit a fraud or suffer a robbery. It is worth noting that adventurers should be encouraged to carry a general purpose knife with them for general purpose cutting, eating their food and (of course) protection. This is quite normal, and allowed everywhere. In general PCs entering a city had best keep their weapons packed away, even where permitted, as they will prove to be the first suspects in cases of murder, theft, sedition, and any other plot device a GM can think up. GMs need simply put themselves in the position of some poor guard or roadwarden, who suddenly encounters a group of PCs. What would you think if you rounded the corner, and standing in the street were half a dozen fully armed shady characters?

## Communication

One important part of campaigns, frequently overlooked, but an important source of adventure prospects and game colour, is travel and other means of communication. WFRP has looked in some detail at river travel, but I find road travel much more interesting.

Empire roads are of extremely variable quality, although within the political boundaries of The Empire, the surface is reasonably maintained compared with the likes of Kislev. The road surface when first laid is generally one of cobblestones, laid on a rubble base. Holes are frequently simply made up with rubble and detritus, and have a tendency to become un-repaired quite quickly. Roads are an "official" four yards wide with road edgings. This might be true on major routes, but should be less elsewhere and since road edgings are less maintained, they will frequently become overgrown or have fallen away. Note that road edgings are to prevent traffic leaving the roads to circumnavigate toll-gates.

When travellers are using the road is important. For example, travelling in spring shortly after the ravages of winter, there will have been little opportunity for maintenance to be carried out. The ravages of winter should be visible on the surface. For a coach and the cart, the journey will have a tendency to become rather bumpy; for riders and foot traffic the potholes are dangerous.

In my view, coaching inns will be located every 25-30 miles, which should be seen as a "safe" days travel for coaches, just about achievable in a day's walking and leisurely - but again safe for horses. Toll houses should be located adjacent to the coaching inns, partially for mutual protection and partially to try and discourage evasion. They conform to the typical booth in WFRP [p 330]. A low wall runs from the outer wall of the inn courtyard to the gate and from the gate to the outer wall of the yard. Toll keepers will check with the landlords to confirm all those who stay have paid their toll. In order to avoid the toll, a traveller must not only leave the road and go around the outside of the inn (on one side) or the toll house (on the other side) but must also refrain from staying at the inn; this is highly dangerous. The toll, in principle, is the traditional charge of a *Crown-a-leg*. However, most travellers have some form of exemption based upon guild membership or fealty. Tolls have been successfully avoided by most of the Emperor's subjects, except for wandering adventurers of course!

Those travelling by road in the Empire are used to leisurely travel; the roads and facilities allow little else. The coaching inns are just that, and arranged simply as safe resting points for coach travel. Thus they are located some 30 miles apart. It is quite easy to cover the distance in good conditions in a matter of hours for horsemen, but not for coaches operating on treacherous roads in indifferent weather. Nor would any sane traveller dream of pushing on, either in the hope of making the next inn or with the thought of camping in the open overnight.

If the PCs insist on this course of action, the GM should show them the error of their ways.... Characters attempting to travel more than 30 miles in a day will suffer fatigue, and the GM ought to make appropriate tests for them, and their mounts. Be harsh, as anyone stupid enough to push their mounts this hard deserves thrown shoes, limping, and even broken legs. Even sensible travel is by no means this straightforward, and travellers will frequently shelter a day in the face of awful weather, or rest for a day periodically in order to tend animals and equipment. Certain innkeepers have also been known to manufacture problems to keep travellers in the inn for a further day. These include digging up roads, faking a bandit attack and injuring an animal.

As GM, it is important that you make the PCs aware of the tortuous nature of travel. Aside from the state of the roads, and the short distance they can cover safely in each day's travel, do not forget that the weather is an important part of travel. For example, in early spring the weather will tend to be cold and wet with an odd sunny day thrown in. Make wizards wish they had learnt the useful mundane spell Protection from Rain - and make the other players hate them if they did. In addition, do not forget other travellers to add colour to the journey.

In order to stress the nature of road travel, a GM might reasonably decide to penalise players who insist on travelling too far or too quickly. NPC drivers are knowledgeable in their area and will refuse to act in any manner that will endanger their vehicles under normal circumstances. The GM might also like to consider having the road blocked by a broken cart at some stage during the journey.

Road Wardens maintain the peace along The Empire's roads, protect toll houses, enforce Imperial laws in remote roadside villages and enforce excise duties and import prohibitions as required. In theory, road wardens are Imperial functionaries patrolling Imperial roads, guarding Imperial excisemen and protecting Imperial citizens. In reality, this is not quite true, and there are three types of road warden:

**Imperial Road Wardens**, who act as described. They are technically part of the Imperial armed forces, and own a standard uniform. However, when on duty they are unlikely to wear it, and will simply wear the livery of the current emperor.

**Provincial Road Wardens** act similarly to Imperialists but are the subjects of particular nobles within their lands. They are simply mounted militias who enforce local laws and taxation. As long as travellers stay upon Imperial roads they are safe from such tolls, but even stepping off a road to relieve oneself is probably an act of trespass and subject to a tariff for entry onto land owned by another lord. Such road wardens also patrol the private roads running through individual counties, provinces and other territories. These wardens will wear the livery and colours appropriate to the region and ruler. Whilst road wardens do have uniforms, they will only tend to wear them for parades and other special occasions. On normal patrol, they will probably only wear an armband and patch, perhaps a liveried surcoat.

**Private Road Wardens** are employed by companies - usually the coaching houses - to protect that company's interests. Those employed by the coaching houses for example protect coaches and inns, and patrol routes in order to deter banditry and so encourage land travel as safe. These wardens will likely wear a patch on their tunic, and perhaps an armband, with the company name and logo.

Needless to say, there is rivalry between the different groups. One final group that might fall into all or any of these groups is the occasional patrol of Imperialist, templar or local knights. They might decide to patrol a road to stretch their legs and flex their swords much as they do the forests in the hope of finding some action.

It is also worth noting that toll collection is a monopoly, and like all Imperialist monopolies might be sold to an entrepreneur for a cash sum where an Emperor is in urgent need to raise revenue.

Warden jurisdiction operates only within Imperialist - or provincial - territory. In practice, Wardens will operate outside their jurisdiction if they feel it appropriate. However, it is quite normal to chase bandits into another territory as a means of avoiding a fight; indeed, both sides tend to adopt an informal rule of such behaviour. As Imperialist staff, however, in times of war they function as an Imperial militia and may command other local militia and levy groups. In fact, road wardens are extremely useful paramilitaries.

Wardens are nominally organised in patrols of five; four wardens and a sergeant. In reality numbers vary depending upon economics and injury (reducing the number) or known brigand activity (increasing the number). Patrols are on duty for four weeks and then enjoy a one-week rest period. Road wardens on main routes are organised around an individual coaching house and patrol a half-day around it ensuring that they rest each night within an inn. This is unsustainable on most of the routes. This means that they sometimes have to sleep rough. Coaching inns are required by law to provide private rooms for road wardens. Whilst they appreciate the security, many innkeepers resent the expense and will hire out the rooms. Of course, sometimes guests will find themselves unceremoniously removed.

Coaching inns might be private or owned by coaching companies. Four Seasons are fairly universal, whilst others are more regional, as described in *The Enemy Within*. There is thus likely to be competition between companies, and possibly between inns, especially upon the major routes. Plans for the inns [p328-9] and the way temples [p332] can be found in *WFRP*. Each is also served by an accompanying farmstead that grows additional food and offers extra labour. Many routes offer little profit, and the inns operate on a largely subsistence basis. Visitors will be greeted as both sources of income and of news, entertainment and more.

The inns earn extra revenue from an Imperial stipend that makes them liable for basic road maintenance within their jurisdiction, but the pay is so small that little work is done. The fact that road engineers are a further source of custom hardly engenders efficiency either!

Whilst travelling and staying at inns, it is important that the GM encourages the PCs to set up a routine to enable any plots to develop. Severely penalise those PCs who believe that they are able to stay up on guard all night after a hard day's travel. Travelling on these roads is very wearying, and PCs need a good night's rest.

Whilst *The Empire* is primarily an illiterate society, there is still a large amount of commercial and private post. Much of it is carried by the coaches and riverboats that traverse *The Empire*, and is a source of steady income. Those wishing to send a letter need simply visit their nearest coach or boat office, pay the fee and the letter will be delivered. Letters are sorted by location, and all letters for a particular location are wrapped in a wax envelope and sealed with various marks, including the carrier, the destination and the origin. These are usually pictorial so that illiterate

workers can arrange delivery. The pictures reflect standard representations, such as a coat of arms. Mail is usually contained within a strongbox mounted on the coach or placed in the hold. Each night, they will be unloaded by the driver and guard and placed in the road warden private accommodation at inns. Road transportation of letters is generally quicker than that by river, but the latter tends to be cheaper.

Internal security of the post is fair. Letters are sealed by the sender, and collected by the receiver from the office. Identification is required, usually on the basis that the collector is known. Letters to rural locations without an office will be sent to the nearest inn, whose owner (or manager) acts as their agent. The sealed wax envelope is used to record marks, signatures or seals of those who receive the letter. In practice, the mail is not quite this efficient, but it is reasonably secure. External security problems such as bandits holding up the coach are a different matter, although mail is usually left as it is seen as having little value to most illiterate outlaws.

Official post can be carried by these same sources, but other methods are available. Road wardens carry post as part of their duty, usually to local garrisons. However, on a personal level, they are willing to carry post to supplement their income. In theory, the Imperial Quartermaster Corps can be used to deliver post, but they are notoriously slow. Whilst this may be (officially) acceptable for ordinary post, more urgent correspondence is sent by courier. Couriers are either private firms or members of the particular organisation who specifically carry messages - verbally or by (coded) letter. The military, temples and guilds use their own couriers.

## **Fortifications: Why?**

This article is essentially a two-fold one. Firstly, I want to show why I think that castles, city walls etc are not well developed within the WFRP milieu, and secondly I want to offer a little bit of 'colour' to both illustrate my idea *and* provide something vaguely useful as background material for games. Hopefully, you can take the rest and apply it yourselves to the description quite easily. Since cities and towns are central to WFRP adventuring, I think it is essential that we gave them all the colour and vibrancy that we can. As things stand the archetypal Medieval castle and city wall are mundanely trundled out for just about every settlement. Not only is this boring, but it fails to recognise the nature of fortifications in the gunpowder era that is Warhammer 2512IC.

## **Why Fortifications?**

There are a number of solid works within the fantasy literature querying why magic-based societies continue with low technology castles of very limited practical use. Since WFRP is a very low-magic work, these criticisms are probably less relevant to us. There are not likely to be many enemies on flying steeds that can swoop over walls or druids that can shatter walls at the click of their fingers. However, WFRP has its own version of magic - and that is gunpowder. Gunpowder weapons make city walls and other fortifications effectively redundant. They certainly require defences to undergo serious re-design and strengthening - something palpably not true of Warhammer defences as presented in official (and unofficial) works. What I want to discuss is what these fortifications should look like to visitors. I am not interested in discussions of prosecuting an actual siege, since that is outside the remit of most adventures. I will mention siege processes when they seem relevant, but my primary focus is on describing what a PC would likely see as they approach a city or a fortification (such as a castle).

## **Fortifications in the 'Modern' Age of 2500**

The key to defence is to keep the enemy away from the walls, so that they cannot bring their cannon to bear upon the walls or the people within the city. The primary method of doing this is with a field army. Ideally, your army should beat the other army and win the war! Of course, this is not always possible and generalship should actually be more about avoiding battle and maintaining the integrity of the field army than seeking to destroy them in a grand battle. The loss of your own field army would lose the siege and so the key is to keep the enemy worried about attack at all times and waste its resources guarding against such an event. Therefore, your own army can arguably be best placed well outside the defences, threatening the besieger's rear or supply lines. Sometimes the besiegers themselves might also be besieged! None of this actually affects the infrastructure or what the PCs might see on approaching a town, and so is less relevant to my argument. However, the second alternative is to entrench the entire field army. As armies become less feudal (such as that of The Empire) armies become more a mixture of seasoned professionals and experts, and conscripts. Conscripts need to be treated very carefully, and the simplest way is to use them as defenders of an entrenched position.

In essence cities and fortifications would seek to defend in depth. This keeps the enemy at distance from the walls, can be achieved cheaply and utilises the mass of conscript soldiers and forced labour at your disposal. Put bluntly, all cities and fortresses would be surrounded by earthworks. These are quite easy to build with sufficient labour and would be very complex and very big, subject to resources. A series of trenches, strongpoints and redoubts should be scattered throughout the environs of the city (or fortress), each controlling ground and every one covered by the fire of supporting positions. Cannon and large mounted muskets are then embedded in the emplacements. Indeed, many of these might be in such poor shape that they cannot fire or fakes from wood - what matters (at least initially) is their looks. Make your towns a veritable maze of earthworks - or at the very least have the surrounding countryside retain the scars where such things were dug in battle past.

The next complaint is that Warhammer fortifications are medieval ones. Cannon would blast them away in minutes; literally. Therefore, designs need to be updated. Walls should be reinforced at the base with skirts to reflect cannon balls and other shot. Towers should be rounded for the same reasons. Buttresses should also be used. None of this belies the fact that the walls will not replace a field army and a motivated defence. Really, most cities would dismantle their walls, or allow them to fall down, due to the excessive maintenance costs and the value of the stone in them. Indeed, they would probably have to patrol their own walls to stop people stealing the stone!

Improvements are once again possible with that most wonderful of substances - earth. The walls themselves should be built up by earth in front of the stone, in part held up by wooden framework and in part by additional earth. Walls would have additional wooden support work to help mount the large numbers of heavy muskets and cannon necessary for a defence. In certain places, particularly around entry points, there will be an additional outer wall, built squat and thick. Ideally, if we are to keep walls they should all be built like this - the replacement of pre-gunpowder tall and thin 'medieval' walls by shorter, thicker firing platforms.

To reflect battle long past, places can be named (or incorporate the names) *schans* and *schansen*, the German for earthwork(s).

## **Conclusions**

WFRP is not about wars and battles, except inasmuch as the many internal rifts might occasionally flare up into outright war. However, these are simply the tapestries over which our PCs adventure. WFRP, however, does involve predominantly urban settings over the dungeon environment. To this end, this article simply tries to offer a more 'realistic' interpretation of what parts of those settlements should look like. Our own history provides a clear template for this and I urge GMs to examine this. For those in the UK, the English (British) Civil War(s) offer many examples of makeshift fortifications and urgent remedial work to long disused medieval fortifications. Similarly, in Europe there is the Thirty Years War with similar examples. Those in the Netherlands have the evocative wars Orangist against the Imperialist occupying forces. Even those in the US can plunder the War of Independence and the Civil War for earthworks, trenches and fake guns. The key here is, of course, not to use history as an end in itself but as a rich source to plunder for background colour to our world. It would be wonderful if RPGs could consistently create original thought, but that is simply not plausible. So, dust off the history books and look around your local environment for examples of fortifications - and do not simply regurgitate the medieval stereotype.

## **Fortifications: the Case of Middenheim**

*This is one example of my comments on Warhammer fortifications. Why on earth does a city sitting atop a sheer precipice conceivably need walls?! I developed this into a bit of colour for the city, particularly aimed at use with **Power Behind the Throne**. The irony is that the cover picture is far more evocative than the final city map.*

### **A Report to Marshall Schutzmann**

Recently a pamphlet has been circulating the City denouncing the current taxation proposals, pointing to a number of alternative methods of raising funds and to areas of wasteful expenditure. Whilst the actual paper itself is lurid and aimed at providing maximum impact, it seems to be written by an informed source. Firstly, there are papers within the Collegium Theologica archives criticising the building of the city walls, and, secondly, the particular plans referred to are correct.

There have been a number of debates over the centuries concerning the walls. Primarily, these seem to have fallen into three categories:

- (a) Since the city is built upon a precipice, it is impossible for traditional siege techniques to be employed against the walls or a conventional assault to be attempted in any manner.
- (b) The walls are outdated and could not withstand modern weapons in any event, although how guns could ever be angled to hit them is unclear. However, the lack of skirts, buttresses and smoothing makes the walls redundant today.
- (c) As the chosen city of Ulric, there is no need for a mundane defence. Ulric has provided the city with a natural and impregnable defence. For humans (and dwarfs) to attempt to improve upon these is sacrilege.
- (d) Better use could be made of the rock, so expensively brought up to the top - including public buildings, defensive strongpoints and a reinforced

Central to the discussions was the expense of building and maintaining the walls and the size of force necessary to realistically defend them. Money saved by not building walls or (in later arguments) not maintaining them, could be used to

- (i) Provide the treasury with a store of wealth to buy additional soldiers if required. One recent writer in particular believes the key to holding the city is a strong field army to prevent an army approaching the city at all.
- (ii) Reinforce the passages under the city, a far more likely cause of assault and a major weakness in the city's defences. There was only one reference to this. My investigations into the issue have met with a very strong rebuttal. This in itself is suspicious and I plan to equip a secret expedition to investigate under the city from which I will have returned by the time you receive this, my preliminary report.
- (iii) Build extra granaries and increase the city's store of food. Starvation is believed by all the various writers throughout my researches to be a much more likely offensive tool than assault on the walls.
- (iv) Provide artillery bastions and firing platforms utilising the height of the Fauschlag to bombard any attacker's positions.

The second part of the pamphlet is correct, since apparently Marshall General Schwermutt has indeed been granted authorisation to install siege mortars within the city walls. You are more likely to be aware of the background to the decision, but my information suggests that this is, in part, a political accommodation to garner the General's support for the taxation proposals. It would seem that Marshall von Genscher opposed the implementation as "wasteful" and even presented argument similar to those presented within the pamphlet that you asked me to investigate.

## Low Fantasy Scenario Writing

### Introduction

I was developing what I thought was an extremely nice little scenario idea, full of colour, some humour and a nice little investigation. Having developed the idea, I then considered at what point the PCs should enter and then things came unstuck. What was I expecting and how on earth could it work with my players, who would certainly catch on far too quickly for anything to develop? This, then, set me off onto one of my tangents concerning the nature of scenario writing for low and high fantasy games - and hence this article!

### The Scenario

The adventure revolves around Johann Dietz, a successful businessman, well-respected alderman and senior master in the Futterinnungsmeister (the Guild of Forage Merchants). *As an aside this is another example of how I use my ideas on guilds as general background to flesh out my NPCs and general adventure situations. The guild is responsible for ensuring that the households of local notables are always provided with oats. It is combined with the Rope-makers Guild, although there is an internal power struggle between the two. This is the opportunity to add extra NPCs to muddy the waters and expand the investigation beyond the obvious. It is not relevant to my article here, but the inter-guild struggle shows that the NPCs lead ordinary lives and interact with many people within it. For the GM, it makes the adventure more realistic and the opportunity to quickly write up another half-dozen suspects and colourful geezers that might lead to further adventures.*

Johann is married, to a second wife, who he has learned to loathe as she married him for his wealth and position. *If we make her his ex-maid, this might solicit a variety of reactions from the PCs operated by our modern-day gamers. After all, many dislike her as she is 'the wrong class' and even if she were a money seeker, so are they! Once again, I wonder if this is 'right' since PCs perhaps ought to operate within these social norms too. Then again, if players enjoy siding with a fellow prole, who am I to say that this is 'wrong'? However, PC reactions to her and her plight will fundamentally affect the game.* He is also dying and has sworn that his wife will have none of his money. He buries it secretly and then dies and swears on his deathbed to return from the dead to protect his hoard should it prove necessary. This upsets all his family, some of whom believe that they could grab the money from the wife. *(Again, to add further twists, the PCs might consider this suspicious and interrogate various candidates who would benefit from Johann's death. We would also need to consider the legal implications concerning a wife's right to her husband's property).* Not to be swindled out of her 'dues', the wife hires a diviner to search out the hoard, and is accompanied by other members of the family to keep an eye on her and their share (or lack thereof). *(First thought: are the PCs employed at this point?).*

The diviner finds the hoard after a host of 'colourful' evocations and assorted hocus pocus *(and if players are present how might they react to this?)*, but a series of 'hauntings' take place and everyone flees the site. Hiding in the house that night, the haunting continues as furniture is thrown about, walls rattle and crockery is smashed. The diviner agrees to return the following day to try again, together with exorcism materials. *(Again, are the PCs employed here?)*. The same happens, and what is worse is that the hoard has moved by about 10 feet overnight. Everyone flees again. After some persuasion, the diviner agrees to return again, together with a priest of his acquaintance. He never returns and is found to have left town, and the hoard is discovered missing the following day. *(This might be the best point to appoint PCs, but they lose the whole atmosphere and simply go on a manhunt. One twist, of course, is that the wife has made a deal with the diviner).*

### **The High Fantasy Gung-Ho Approach**

Whilst it should not happen, the traditional Dungeons & Dragons response to this type of scenario would, of course, be to attack the spirit with whatever relevant weapons applied. Simple 'detection' spells would

see right through the diviner if he was a fake, and so the whole scenario would probably have to be real. Given a high fantasy environment ghosts and the like would be well known and appropriate actions could be taken, perhaps even with the body before burial. I have always struggled to comprehend the logic of D&D. If magic is so plentiful then the entire fabric of the world would be different than the traditional low magic romanticised peasant village that is portrayed. For example, a Continual Light spell is so plentiful (second level spell) that no one would use lanterns or oil; simply place the spell on a stone and put a hood over it in daylight. The cost of a second level spell would repay itself over a very few years.

Generally, then, the aim of my adventure would simply not work here. No-one would be afraid of flying clods of earth or broken pots or thrown pans or banging on walls. If it was all a fake, then the simplest spells would reveal it. If it were real, then a fight would immediately ensue. The only possible solution would be to create a new 'monster type' or some sort of deus ex machina to explain events and hinder players. Now, whilst WFRP is portrayed as a low magic world I also wonder how many PCs would also quiver at these scenic, yet ultimately safe, events?

### **Role-Playing Warhammer-style**

For my adventure to work, the players have to be partners in the general theme here, and that is that there is a supernatural, that it is very dangerous and frightening, and that it is beyond their skills to deal with. *Certain parties might reasonably argue that they have the skills to deal with this (which is a reason that any adventure needs care and testing when it is being written). Any group with a priest (particularly of Mórr) would probably render the basic principle untenable.* Rational players are going to see through the pretence very quickly and resolve the whole thing. One reaction is that there is nothing inherently wrong with this. The scenario will still run for a couple of hours, some of the 'colour' will have been played through, and the players can enjoy sleuthing around and be rewarded for satisfactorily uncovering the malefactors (a rare enough occurrence in my game!). Whilst neither plays a major part in my game, I always revert to a bit of monster bashing and a bit of investigation every so often to freshen things up and change the pace.

However, notwithstanding that the players will have enjoyed themselves, I am left with the feeling that they have somehow rushed the denouement, and lost the wonder of how a plot unfolds slowly as they can only react to events that are placed before them. The ability of a NPC diviner to

convince rational players that the supernatural is about is highly unlikely. Whilst he should be able to scare PCs that are already highly paranoid and suffering insecurities. I do not believe that this is a criticism of my players (and it certainly is not meant that way; I actually have a good bunch), but can I realistically expect them to role-play to this extent (I am not sure that I could) and if I do am I strait-jacketing them into being passive watchers whilst I unroll my adventure tapestry in front of them? That would be arrogant and self-interested surely; as GM I should endeavour to allow them to have the fun.

### **WFRP Mis-Balance**

Warhammer FRP has a second problem too, in that there is a lack of balance between the high and low end of fantasy. Some groups are far more powerful than others, but without any game reason for this; it is simply a product of ad hoc game design and lack of testing (that bugbear again). In my own campaign, I needed to create a small wizard order for various in-game purposes. As we are in Kislev, it seemed an excellent opportunity to use the Ice Wizards in Realms of Sorcery. Oh dear! Why a man would even contemplate the career, I have no idea. Surely it is better to award women more powers than simply give men less, since this utterly unbalances male wizards compared with non-shamans. Better still would be to offer women modification to increase their averages, and then no statistical maximisation is broken. Equally, the best that an ice wizard can ever hope for is to have their actual MPs available; most of the year, they lose them. Since Chaos is quite likely to attack during the Summer (it is the military campaigning season after all) then the nation's natural guardians are pretty much uselessly at half power. Things get worse when one examines their available spells. Not only are they pretty useless and expensive, equivalent non-ice shaman spells are far more efficacious. No wonder Kislev is going to the dogs.

At a recent convention, the scenario provided us with a powerful set of elf PCs, each with approximately 3500 experience points. There were two clerics. Mine was a second level Cleric of Kurnous and my ultra powerful character had the following spells: Produce Small Creature, Zone of Silence, Dark Sight, Stealth, Flight, Fleetfoot, Breathe Underwater, Detect Magic, Magical Might, Verdant Tracking and Shape Change. Now before everyone rushes off to check their Realms of Sorcery, most of my spells simply recreated standard skills that as an elf and level 2 cleric I had as standard. My 'best' spells allowed me to change into a normal animal (giant and fantastical creations were excluded) or increase my

Strength characteristics by 1 (at a cost of 5MPs). The second cleric had similarly powerful spells (note that this is sarcasm): Zone of Warmth, Knock Down, Petty Healing, Weaken Poison, Detect Magic, Cure Light Injury, Immunity from Poison, Enthuse, Anger of the Woods, Rally, Bridge of Vines and Mystic Mist. Unsurprisingly we spent most of the adventure being useless, although I did manage to kill a few pesky dwarfs. The sad thing is that if the dwarfs were not already effectively broken men (by hideous tyrannids; the adventure was ultimately to prevent infestation) they could probably have killed me as first career miners.

The game mechanics aside (and it is very difficult to put these aside) our source material is equally confusing. I simply cannot accept that wizards would clean out the latrines, do the dusting and make the beds (Realms of Sorcery) nor that displays of flying wizards (Power Behind the Throne) would be appropriate to rare (feared) users of magic, even at a major carnival.

## **Conclusions**

I am not entirely sure what to conclude, since I am not trying to argue a particular point. Writing adventures is always a difficult mixture of art, skill, science and luck - and many published scenarios fail all or some of these criteria in my experience. Where one is writing for one's own group, one has a decided advantage in being able to estimate reactions and how players role-play the environment. That said, I am still left wondering how we can truly play with all the fear and wonder (and humour) of this low fantasy gothic game.

## **A Work in Progress**

### **Languages in the Old World**

My Correspondent article in Warpstone 19 concerned languages. It is a theme that I have returned to a few times in my games and has caused considerable problems and contradictions, although probably only to me as a perfectionist. I outlined a number of theoretical problems with languages in Warpstone, but I continually hit pragmatic ones in my games. This is, in part, due to my expanding my campaign into the Wheatland Colonies and peopling it with a host of different racial groups and similar groups that originated from a common people approximately

2500 years ago. What languages would these people speak, and how do I fit them into the existing framework? Since the Gospodars did not originate in the Old World, how can they speak it as their mother tongue?

## **Read and Write**

This is the simplest part of the language issue to resolve, at least in part. To my mind, it makes the greatest sense that the skill only covers one language, be that Dwarf, Old Worlder or Slavic. This contradicts the rules, which seem to me to imply that if you have the Read/Write skill and can speak a particular language then you can read and write that language too. I much prefer players to spend extra experience to do this. This limits the widespread use of the skill, which I think better fits the milieu. It can also help higher level campaigns by reining in characters, who will now have to spend additional experience, time and money upon learning these additional languages. To this effect, I would probably add the skill Read/Write Additional language, such that the basic Read/Write skill applies only to one's indigenous language. By this, I would refer to Old Worlder and dialect (but see below). However, in the case of elves and dwarfs, I would limit this further such that they cannot get Read/Write - Old Worlder as a default. They would have Read/Write Khazalid and Eltharin respectively. I would, however, make it relatively easy to learn subject to the experience cost due to their familiarity with the culture and language.

The key problem that I have is whether the written language resides in only the dialect (as WFRP describes them) or also in the generic Old Worlder. This then calls into doubt the entire rationale of this common tongue, what it is and how it came about.

## **Language and Dialect**

The problem with WFRP is its use of the term "Dialect" to describe the national tongues of the Old World, and their origin in the common Old World language.

Pragmatically, I would have written forms of the dialects in WFRP plus the main language Old Worlder. My feeling is that the more realistic is that there is no written form of Old Worlder (which is a lingua franca) but I think that would cause too many in-play issues, and I have never

actually played it that way. There is no doubt that the Old World would have a lingua franca, a language that everyone understands as the language of doing business and generally living alongside one's neighbours. Where one has an empire, then the empire language does this (Latin, Greek, English etc) but otherwise it becomes a patois of many languages (such as in the Middle East during the Middle Ages). In WFRP, this *probably* should have been Classical but they took the (understandable) route of making it a dead language. I think that I'd have used it to fudge the 'common' tongue instead of creating a second artificial language (Old Worlder). The former (as I discussed in Warpstone 19) still relies on an empire, whilst the latter can get a fudge due to good transport and interaction amongst the various peoples - the Valentinas and the implied immigration en masse was something never since developed.

I am thinking of formally developing a better language system that I could adopt myself. My intention is to use lots of languages but also have characters speaks lot too, many dialects but some actually different languages. This would add regional flavour without leading to communication issues to ruin the game - unless I wanted to make that a part of the adventure. In other words, Ostland and northern Ostland (Kislevan influence) would each have their own dialect, but firmly within the Reikspiel language. These people would also speak Old Worlder (if I decide to keep it). Similarly, the League of Ostermark would speak Ostermark, northern Ostermark (Kislevan influenced), eastern Ostermark (dwarf influenced) and Ostland (in western Ostermark, partly due to the political closeness of the two). Any Reikspiel speaker would understand the Ostland dialect, but could lose certain meaning due to some idiosyncratic words, pronunciation etc. An Ostland PC would then speak two dialects, one language and perhaps a second language. The question is would such an evolution be worthwhile? It adds further depth to the particular regions, gives colour and (if Old Worlder is retained) keeps the fudge allowing universal communication. However, it also extends (useless?) skills and has extra paperwork.