



GAMES DAY 96

By John Foody

Five O'clock, Sunday 29th September. Bella Pasta, Birmingham. Six individuals are gathered around a table in silence while the seventh member of the group waits elsewhere for his long, long journey home (Colin was travelling back to Aberdeen on the GW coach - an eight hour journey!). We anticipated the arrival of our food, completely exhausted, our brains winding (shutting?) down in the quietness of the restaurant. And then, we realised: we had survived Games Day 96.

We had spent all day demonstrating WFRP to anybody who had wandered too close to the Hogshead stall and been collared. "Roleplaying at Games Day?", I hear you ask. Yes, there was. Here follows the true tale of that day. Any mistakes are the result of the confusion and mayhem that took place.

It all started (for me) with a letter from James Wallis, Director of Hogshead Publishing. James said that Games Workshop wanted their license holders to demonstrate their products - no selling, just showing the game off, and explaining what it was all about. Hogshead needed a team to run the stall and demonstrate WFRP.

I said I would be happy to help out, and joined the other volunteers (mostly from the WFRP E-mail list). Over the next couple of weeks we received various missives from Hogshead with time, dates and locations. Soon, I was on my way to Games Day, an event which, in truth, I never thought I would see again.

Come the day before (the day after my PC decided to trash the nearly finished Issue 3) I found myself travelling North with James, weighed down by rulebooks and other paraphernalia. Making our way to the National Indoor Arena we attempted to find the Hogshead Setup area. Already the NIA was taking shape; demonstration tables were being put together, and piles and piles of stock was being moved in.

With its imperial eagle banners hanging from the ceiling I wasn't the only person to think the main arena looked like the Nuremberg rally.

Hogshead was in an area called the Black Library. This was the smaller hall where GW's licensees were kept. Things were looking chaotic here, with lots of people armed with walkie talkies trying to make sense. "Is that Andy?" "Yeah! This is Andy." "Have you got those bolts?" "No, that's nothing to do with me. It must be one of the other six Andys" "...Oh, OK then."

However, the overall opinion was that this was one of the best organised conventions/fairs around. All the GW staff knew what they were doing, and most impressively there were no walking egos in charge making things difficult for everyone. There was real teamwork visible amongst the 450 staff, which you don't often see in large organisations.

But that was of no concern to us as we were directed to our corner. Three hours later we had plastered the wall behind the stall with copies of the WFRP rulebook cover, and laid out the sample stock and piles of Hogswash. Hogshead had been placed next to the cinema which was showing "Inquisitor", a 25 minute 40K movie consisting of a lot of

walking down corridors. An awful lot. As they tested this, the sounds of bolter fire and slightly B-Movie dialogue boomed out, washing over our four demonstration tables. They kindly turned it down. A little bit. On the other side of the area were three display cases containing full size replicas of bolters etc. Very, very impressive. WFRP would have its work cut out to interest players.

After we had finished the set-up, we stood back from the area and looked. It was quiet and uncluttered. The calm before the storm.

From out of the window I could see the long queue snaking around the corner of the building. Thousands of people (8,500 -10,000), mostly around 10-14, many of whom we assumed had never heard of Roleplaying or percentile dice. Against this hoard Hogshead's team consisted of myself, Colin Campbell, Hal Eccles, Shawn Briggs, Jonathan Quaife, Ralph Hornsey and (of course) James Wallis. Jonathan is in the process of writing a WFRP module, and Ralph is doing the map for Marienburg. Indeed, he had brought along his work to date, and it looked excellent.

As the punters started to drift in I began by fending questions and showing products. Surprisingly, many people had previously played WFRP but were unaware of it's re-emergence. The trickle began to turn into a river and I headed for a table to begin to GM. Gulp.

This was the first time I had ever GMed in this sort of situation and I was a little unsure of how I would do. Colin had written a good introductory adventure called 'Warband', which consisted of the players rescuing their commander from a Chaos warband and saving a village. This had been commissioned to run between 1.5 -2 hours, but on Saturday Andy Jones of GW had come along and said, "Just keep them flowing. Twenty minutes a game." So, it was up to us to rip through it as quickly as possible.

Most of my first group had Role-played before, and got into the flow pretty quick. The second group hadn't, but we stormed through it nonetheless. After a ten minute lunch break, it was back to the fray. As I returned to the hall, already half stunned and exhausted, Hal greeted me with the words, "The next lot are ready to go." After a bit of trouble finding the dice, adventure, and character sheets, I started again. A fourth session brought me up to the end.

Occasionally I did have to shout over the sound of bolter fire, and for some reason the player at the end of the table always had the quietest voice. "My character will <DIE CHAOS MARINE! BAM! BAM! BAM! BOOM!>. Is that OK?". "Erm, yeah, sure. Roll the dice then." Well, it usually worked.

To be honest, I remember very little about individual sessions. It all just blurs into one mass. It was only when I had rested that I realised I was glad it was all over. Running the adventure had been fun. Most of the players on my table had a real enthusiasm, although my nerves did fray a little with a player who insisted of attacking everything with a spoon. Still, there you go. They approached it with an attitude of, "lets give this a go", instead of "go on, impress me".

So did we convert the hordes to the wonders of WFRP? There was certainly some success. It would be great if someone reading this article had discovered Roleplaying there. Many remembered the game from when GW used to sell it. Hogshead gave out 500 copies of Hogswash by lunch time, and 250 Warpstone leaflets went (only one reply however!!). Over eighty players took part in play-tests and many more looked on with interest, so at the very least we raised the game's profile. It didn't hurt that the players had a solid knowledge of the background, "Is that Chaos warrior Khorne or Nurgle then?" I still haven't answered the question of whether the rest of Games Day was any good. I really haven't got a clue, as I only saw it en route to the canteen (Yes, GW fed us). It all looked good, but how much substance there was I'm not sure. However, everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves. I really must give special mention to the central diorama. Even though I am not fussed by figures, the 200+ Bretonnian cavalry charging the lizard army emerging from the sea was impressive. Can't say I'm overly thrilled by the new Bretonnian background although it could have potential. One end of the area was a stall, selling figures and games. This was very, very busy. GW is often accused of

having overpriced figures, and four pound for a plastic horse and lead rider seemed to bear this out. ('I remember when you could buy ten dwarves and a dragon for 10p and still have change for a chip supper etc. etc.')

As we sat eating our survival meal, we all agreed it had been good fun. I would certainly do it again next year which, in the end, speaks for itself.