

WARPSSTONE

The independent magazine for Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay



WE'RE HERE TO SAVE THE WORLD... AGAIN!

By John Foody

The Dwarf fell to his knees, exhausted by the battle he and his group had been fighting for two hours. His friend, the Noriscan lay heavily wounded, his bleeding body found under a pile of goblins. The healer was unsure if he would live past the hour. It had been worth it though, the threat to the town had been stopped; this time at least. Indeed there were more immediate rewards.

He gazed at the sword clenched tightly in the chief's still hand, lying ten yards from his body. It was beautiful, finely tempered steel inscribed with ancient runes glowing in the shadow. Forged in the belly of a volcano, polished by a master smith, finishing the work of his father and his father before him. At each stage of the process the High Wizards had entwined enchantments into its very fabric and when finished it had been presented to the legendary King of the Norse.

The group's leader, covered in the enemies' blood came and stood at the Dwarf's shoulder.

"The King's legendary sword?"

The Dwarf nodded and leant forward to take it.

"Chuck it on the magic pile then, we'll sell it when we get to town."

As roleplaying has grown older, games have generally moved away from the idea that a good game results from an excess of magic items, treasure and enemy corpses. Constantly throwing a surplus of rewards at the players means that treasure hordes must become larger, magical items more powerful and monsters ever bigger, just to keep alive players interest. This solution tends to work only in the short term as soon there is nowhere left to go.

While most reasonably experienced players recognise the faults in having too many magic items and treasure, fewer recognise the impact of this principle in other facets of games. What it boils down to, is that if you always include exotica too much it will no longer be exotic, therefore losing part of what makes it special. Saving the world every week soon becomes boring.

I decided to write this article for a number of reasons. One, reading DOTL and re-reading SOB reminded me of the biggest problem in published adventures and two, after ten years(ish) of GM'ing this is perhaps the best bit of advice I have to pass on.

This article will hopefully offer some ideas on helping GMs avoid the stagnation of campaigns by simply thinking some personal guidelines through before starting. Build a solid foundation first and then add the flash bits. The WFRP rulebook and background does much of this for you and I believe this is part of what makes WFRP the game I have always come back to. But, as always you know what type of game your group enjoys and that is always the most important point.

Starting with the most obvious area of escalation, magic items. Just to prove what a mean GM I am, players looking through TEW modules tended to find most magic items had been crossed out. The problem with giving villains magic items is that the PCs tend

to get their grubby little paws on them. In time they have a couple each or even worse, one or two have four or five items each.

"But players like magic items!" I hear you cry, and that is true. They will like them even more if you don't give them any. If you do put in a magic item, think through the consequences of putting an item in. A ring of invisibility may allow someone to backstab your PCs but it would also allow your PC virtual access to wherever they wanted.

Make magic rare, something unknown and mystical. Sure, magic users cast spells but the effects are temporary (OK if a fireball kills you, that's permanent, but you know what I mean). Limit your items effects, if you really want to put in a +10WS sword, change to a expertly made sword instead (then it can't be used against undead etc.). Give items charges or restrictions. In time, players will come to look at magic items with awe and fear. This is far more preferable than treating them as a profile bonus.

Magic users should be similarly treated. Most people in Warhammer will never have come across Magic. Therefore magic users tend to inspire fear in the general populace. This attitude leads makes to them heading towards the cities, where they are safer. Also they have better access to research facilities and knowledge. So if all the magic users head to the cities what about those that remain? What secrets do they hide?

A less obvious area to look at is Non Player Characters, including the enemy, most importantly monsters. The Warhammer world mostly concentrates on Humans, followed by Dwarves, Elves and Halflings. This is a good thing which the WFRP background has concentrated. If you make men and women your main NPCs then their motivations and actions will be immediately understandable. There is no shortage of plots to be had from people and you should make full use of this.

When you do include a non-human race or a monster the effect will be greater. Also, modify your monsters to add interest and keep players on their toes. If using goblins use different tactics, or give a couple dodge blow, or a two-handed sword. If a monster has a weakness, change it (include hints on what it is). Don't always use these tactics but do it enough so your players will realise they can't always rely on knowing the Rulebook.

Chaos: As Timothy Eccles pointed out last month, Chaos has got out of control in the official WFRP world. I don't really believe this is a problem, simply chop out abilities and weapons you don't like. Chaos in WFRP is best used to motivate people, whether it be cultists or those that unearth their activities. It doesn't have to be an all prevailing effect but an insidious infection affecting everyone.

Finally, saving the world. If every adventure gives the PC's the chance to save the world then it becomes boring. They may save a village, then a town, city, continent, world, galaxy, universe and then the multiverse. Using this as a plot device is an easy way to generate immediate interest in your PCs but also bear in mind what will happen if they get it wrong. If they are questing to save a city and then decide to run away, do you wipe out the city? If yes, that leaves a big hole in the world. A bad idea given the nature of the Warhammer world. Just as bad is fudging the plot: "Just as Tzeentch is about to devour the city a Templar army turns up. Luckily they were on manoeuvre's nearby."

Magic, monsters and saving the world. Things that make adventuring great. This is true and I am not suggesting changing that. Just be more subtle about it. Use these elements to spice up your campaign and not fill it. You will have a much stronger game for it.

Comments

David Matalon: I've been GMing for umpteen years and I have one thing to say...."Amen!"

A little titbit I've added that goes along way is magic as a living force...

Those who dare to embrace the power given by magic must be aware of the consequences. It is a double-edged sword.

Sure you can pick up that Blade the Chaos Cult priest was wielding but it's a dark blade - it has been wielded in the name of evil and therefore evil energy surrounds it. I introduced Dark Points (not unlike insanity points - using WP test in place of cool - 12 dark points and your alignment shifted one way towards evil - Or some similar bad consequence - curse, mutation, bad smell, etc.)

I had a player who's magical sword "spoke to him" slowly offering new abilities if he would sacrifice D10 of his WP - slowly the player was seduced until the blade consumed him.

On the other side even "good" magic has its price - Wielding the "sword of light" means you may never strike an opponent who is not evil do this and the blade will turn against you.

Another great tactic is description versus naming. It's not a +10 Sword - It's a glowing rune encrusted blade - I don't know what it does, it could curse you to eternal damnation or make you the next saviour of the universe, why don't you pick it up and see?

The final "trick" at a GM's disposal for those items that he wishes players NOT to use is the old WP test - Yes it's a fudge as you roll the test in secret and tell them they cannot master the item but if it saves your campaign it may be worth it.

My players have developed a healthy respect for the mysteries of magic and always think twice before using it for their own purposes.