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Anthony Ragan is the author of *Marienburg: Sold Down The River*. He has long been associated with Marienburg, having penned the original articles in White Dwarf which appeared around 1989/90. This interview was conducted by email in two parts.

Could you give us a brief biography?

I was born in 1958 in San Bernardino, California, and lived there till I was eleven, when we moved to Sacramento. It was while attending a Jesuit high school there that I developed my love of History. This lead me to UCLA, whence I graduated in 1981 with a degree in History in fact, my honors thesis was on the role of Astrology in Renaissance medicine, a rather WFRP-ish topic. I've lived in Los Angeles ever since, working at UCLA and doing freelance writing.

Are you a regular WFRP player?

I wish. I'm more of a regular GM. I'm very picky about how a game is run, so I usually have to run it myself if I want it "done right." I also think GMing is more fun than playing, since I get to know everything that's going on and it lets me put my own stamp on the whole world. (It seems my God-complex is really showing through...)

Did your gaming group influence the development of Marienburg?

I haven't run a game since before I began working on the manuscript, so the short answer would be "no." Now that I have some free time, though, I hope to get a group together and actually play in the city I made!

What attracted you to WFRP?

Lots of things. The late High Gothic/early Renaissance setting struck a resonant chord in me, as you could guess from my educational background. The artwork was compelling, reminding me of Breughel, Archimboldo, and Dòrer, among others John Blanche adapted their styles to the WFRP world wonderfully. The mechanics are simple yet functional. Character professions were a great idea not as restrictive as AD&D classes, but more colorful than the purely skill-based systems of the time. And fate points were brilliant they allow the game to be low fantasy and deadly while still giving the PCs a chance. And it has snotlings.

But the main thing that grabbed me and screamed "BUY THIS BOOK!" was the Old World setting itself. It actually seemed to hold some challenges for PCs without requiring opponents to be demigods dripping with magical gewgaws. Moreover, I love horror, and often try to add a horror flavour to my games my then-current AD&D campaign was rapidly becoming a fantasy-horror game when WFRP hit the stands. That this element was built-in to WFRP made the game that much more attractive. Along with the snotlings, of course.

In short, WFRP gave me a chance to express my ideas of how a fantasy game should be

run more easily than any of the standard systems of the time. It was as if the game had been written specifically for me. Oh, and did I mention the snotlings?

When developing Marienburg, how much historical research did you do? Actually, not much. I was well-schooled in the corresponding period of European History and mostly relied on my sense of what felt "right." I was also more interested in giving players and GMs a fun place to play a slavish adherence to being "in period" doesn't work with WFRP, as it often sacrifices fun for historical verisimilitude. Thus, the city has a well-developed police force; the "Black Caps." While such a force really didn't come along till Bobby Peel in 19th century London. But dealing with an organized Watch often presents players with fun challenges. Well, GMs think they're fun...

Did you use Warhammer City: City of the White Wolf as a template for Marienburg?

No, but it did serve as a handy reminder for me of how a city in the Old World should "feel." There's a certain texture to Middenheim that makes it easier to believe (for me, at least) that people could really live there. I wanted to make sure that readers of Marienburg came away with the same feeling.

Did any city sourcebooks from other game systems provide inspiration? I'm a big fan of the "Citybook" series from Flying Buffalo. The way their authors can create believable characters that have meaningful interactions across even different books in the series is marvellous. And they're very careful to provide hooks a GM can use to introduce one of the "City's" residents into an adventure. Chaosium's "Thieves' World" supplements also treated NPCs as living, breathing residents of an active city. I tried to show that same care with Marienburg.

How did you get involved with writing Marienburg for White Dwarf? It's all Ken Rolston's fault. I played in one of his games at GenCon in the late 80's, a playtest for *Something Rotten in Kislev*. I mentioned that I'd love to write for WFRP and he suggested that I try an article on Marienburg GW was looking to develop the port city. A few months later, I sent him a draft. He liked it, forwarded it to GW, and they liked it, too. That was my first professional sale.

How much has changed in your own view of Marienburg since the first articles were published in White Dwarf?

That's a very good question. Little, if anything, of the basic concept has changed Marienburg is a wealthy and important trade city, a very loose version of late medieval Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Venice. But writing a book is very different from writing a series of articles. I had to think long and hard about Marienburg's place in the Old World what its relationships are with other countries, especially the Empire; what its goals are, and how its own history has affected its present state. If anything, my view has changed to the extent that I realize just how important Marienburg is to the Old World and just how catastrophic it would be if Chaos were to bring it crashing down.

How much input did you have from the other GW designers, both in the WD articles and, eventually, the sourcebook?

A lot. Graeme Davis, Mike Brunton, and quite probably others whom I don't know, added quite a bit to the original articles Potion Square came wholly from the writers at Flame, I think. And I had access to the archives of unpublished material when working on the book. So, while I didn't consult directly with the GW designers, I was certainly influenced by their work it was too good to leave buried.

Did GW or Hogshead place any limitations to your view of the city?

No one's ever come to me and said, "This is how Marienburg must be!" GW and Hogshead were very accommodating to my vision of the city while I was writing. We'll

see what happens during the editing process so far, though, my experience has been thoroughly positive.

Marienburg is the first WFRP supplement to include Saints. Why Saints instead of minor gods?

There's room for both in the Old World, actually. It seemed natural to use saints, given the atmosphere of the rest of the game many of the Old World cults have the look and feel of the 15th century Catholic Church. I can easily see people praying to saints to get them to intercede with a distant and powerful god. A saint represents a particularly devout individual who has essentially become a cult hero, a divine servitor. I thought it had a good fit with the rest of the setting.

Minor gods have their place, too. Some are independent entities that govern a particular region or physical feature, while others were originally the patron deities of minor tribes that evolved into the patron deities of small towns and villages Bögenauer in Bögenhafen, for example. Others might be powerful individuals who ascended to godhood because they filled a role no other deity covered Sigmar and Ranald come to mind.

I'll grant it makes for some confusion, but I like the depth a complex religious background brings to the game.

Did the new Bretonnian background cause you to change anything?

Some. I certainly had to bear it in mind. To say that the new Bretonnian background caused a bit of controversy would be the understatement of the year. I believe I had to take into account the names of some of the kings from that book, but, by and large, I went by the description of Bretonnia presented in the WFRP rulebook.

What do you think of the new Bretonnian background?

Ooooh, put me on the spot! By itself, as a setting for High Medieval fantasy battles, I think it's just fine. A good piece of work. But I don't think it fits well with the Old World setting it completely contradicts the background given in the WFRP rulebook, for example. And that setting, a darker version of pre-Revolutionary France, is much more interesting from a roleplaying viewpoint.

That said, when the subject came up on the WFRP mailing list, the membership there devised a very creative compromise that enabled a GM to make good use of the Bretonnia book. The key is to view the book as a piece of aristocratic propagandathe rose-colored spectacles through which the nobles and churchmen like to see themselves. The truth about life in Bretonnia is what's written in the WFRP "World Guide." The pleasant face hides a rotten heart very fitting for Warhammer.

Now Marienburg is finished, is there anything else that should have been included?

"Should have been?" No. There's a lot that I would like to have included details of the city's financial activities, the plots and schemes of the Ten, the foreign ghettos, details about the regions of the Wasteland outside of the city tons of stuff. But that would make for a huge and expensive book. Maybe this is the kind of material I can present via magazine articles.

You are an active member of the WFRP e-mail list. How much help does this give in writing for the game?

Quite a bit. I've been a member of the list for about five years. In that time, I've met some people who are very knowledgeable about WFRP, and we've had some good discussions mostly about the setting, which is my primary interest. (I'll confess to being put-off by yet another new career.) Often, these discussions have continued off the list, mostly to spare the list members our delvings into the minutiae of Imperial History.

Should WFRP be allowed to go it's own way instead of being tied to GW's WFB5 world?

You're determined to not let me off the hot seat, are you? Honest answer? Yes, I think so. I'm very sympathetic to GW's efforts to make WFB a popular game and I admire their success. But I think the needs of roleplayers and wargamers are very different: wargamers just need an excuse to stage the battle, while roleplayers need a much more developed world in which to create believable stories. For roleplaying, I much prefer the WFRP version of the Old World with its rich background and grey morality. How that would fit in with GW's business plan, though, I can't say.

What is the best part of WFRP?

The Old World setting, hands down.

What is the worst part of WFRP?

It's a tie. The graininess of the advance schemes. Players can max-out their characters far too quickly in a campaign, unless the GM is stingy with the experience points. Also, the orthodox magic system is boring. Thankfully, the forthcoming Realms of Sorcery will fix that.

What is the best WFRP scenario? And why?

It was a close call between *Shadows Over Bögenhafen* and *Something Rotten in Kislev*. At the end, I would pick SOB. Graeme Davis did a marvelous job with that one. It's the only murder mystery that I've ever seen work in a fantasy setting magic doesn't blow the mystery. And, like a good *Call of Cthulhu* adventure, it can scare the pants off the players. I would say the best short scenario is "Grapes of Wrath," by Carl Sargent. Tightly constructed and very moody, it's a great one night adventure.

What is the worst WFRP scenario? And why?

Easy. *The Restless Dead*. The adventures are connected only by the weakest of transitions, and the final episode violates the rule that fate points always save a PC. There are some good individual moments, but, as a whole, it doesn't hold up.

What's next for you? Any more WFRP projects?

I hope so. J

Your readers may know that I oversee a WFRP adventure-writing contest for Hogshead. Eventually, there will be an anthology that presents the winning scenarios from the contests, plus some that have been specially commissioned. The working title is, "Tales from the Laughing Moon," in homage to my favorite collection of Arthur C. Clarke stories. There are a couple of other projects in the works, but it would be premature of me to speak of them right now.

Many thanks to Anthony for his time. Marienburg: Sold Down the River is due for release by Hogshead later this year. His article on the Templars of Manann can be found on page 19. Sadly, the adventure-writing contest is now closed for this year.