

# WARPSTONE

The independent magazine for Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay



## THE WARPSTONE INTERVIEW

GRAEME DAVIS

Questions by John Foody

Graeme Davis was one of WFRP's original authors, and was involved with its development throughout its time with GW. Many thanks to Graeme for his time.

*"I spent the money on beer, and churned out more ravings"*

### Could you give us a brief biography?

Sure. I got into RPG's through acting, in the late 70s. I was a member of the Bracknell Drama Club (plug!!), and some of the other guys worked for ICL in Bracknell (Douglas Brown, if you're reading this, it's all your fault!) and had picked up Caverns and Caterpillars (TM) in college. I went on to college myself, and started sending stuff to White Dwarf, who were in the throes of going monthly at the time, and had put out an appeal for new writers. Amazingly, they printed my ravings, and sent me money. I spent the money on beer, and churned out more ravings. It was a very satisfactory arrangement. I also wrote for TSR UK's magazine Imagine, and for the Fighting Fantasy magazine, Warlock. My first nonmagazine credit was in GW's British Call of Cthulhu supplement, Green and Pleasant Land; I wrote the archaeology section and part of one adventure.

Shortly after GW was taken over by Citadel and the design studio moved to Nottingham, I was offered a job working on the development of the new Warhammer roleplaying game. Shortly afterward, Jim Bambra and Phil Gallagher joined GW from TSR UK, and the three of us were responsible for the Enemy Within adventures, up to Death on the Reik. I stuck with WFRP after that, doing the editing and development (and occasional bits of writing) on everything WFRP up to Castle Drachenfels, the last of the Flame supplements. In fact, the only WFRP publication that I didn't get to work on was Hogshead's Dying of the Light! I also wrote a lot of silly stories for the backs of Citadel Miniatures boxes, and stuck my two penn'orth into the earlier editions of Warhammer 40,000, Adeptus Titanicus, Space Marine, various Talisman supplements, and all sorts of other stuff.

Since leaving GW, I've moved to the USA, got married, moved back to the UK, and moved to the USA again. I've worked as a freelancer on historical sourcebooks for GURPS (Vikings, Middle Ages 1) and AD&D (Celts), on Vampire: the Masquerade (contributions to most of the earlier books, and most recently Clanbook Assamite), and on some mainstream writing (including an article on hedgehogs in the Saturday Telegraph!). Nowadays I make my living in computer games, like my erstwhile GW colleagues Mike Brunton, Jim Bambra and Ken Rolston. I haven't produced anything famous yet, but I'm working on it! Currently I'm working for an online games company called VR 1, based in Boulder Colorado. Check out their Web site at [www.vr1.com](http://www.vr1.com) (another plug!).

### Do you roleplay yourself? What games do you play?

These days, I'm ashamed to admit, I haven't been able to put the time into a regular

roleplaying campaign. Work keeps me pretty busy, and a lot of my spare time (too much, according to my wife!) is spent writing. If I started gaming on top of that, I think I'd be sued for divorce! My favourite games to play are Call of Cthulhu and Bushido, and I ran a rather patchy Space 1889 campaign when the game first came out, which was fun. I still buy and read roleplaying games, and mostly I like fantasy/horror hybrid games in interesting settings. I'm intrigued by Castle Falkenstein, though I haven't read it thoroughly, and right now I'm reading Deadlands, which looks quite promising.

**What other products have you worked on, both inside and outside gaming?**

Apart from the things mentioned in the answer to the first question, I've written a Fighting Fantasy book (No. 29, Midnight Rogue), three or four computer games that never came out for various reasons (usually involving massive redundancies just call me Jonah...), reconstructed rules for an ancient Egyptian boardgame (tau or 20 squares) for a mainstream Egyptology journal, a multimedia nature guide called "One Small Square: Backyard" (which even won a couple of awards), and a lot of proposals that never went anywhere.

*"Here we are ten years later, still with the same flawed magic system!"*

**Was WFRP the game you set out to write, or did GW impose many limitations ?**

WFRP was written to fill a requirement that GW had at the time namely, for a roleplaying game set in the Warhammer world and complementing the battle game! When I came onto the project in May 1986, there was already a fairly extensive first draft by Messrs. Ansell, Priestley and Halliwell, in which concepts like multiple careers, advance schemes and combat mechanics were pretty well established. Obviously it was necessary to ensure that everything remained compatible with WFB (second edition, at that time), and the greatest constraint was time GW needed a Christmas release, so the thing had to be at the printers no later than September! Jim and Phil joined the team shortly after I did, and went over the mechanics and attributes. For a long time, the character stats were identical to WFB2, and things like percentile attributes, Fellowship and what have you were very much lastminute changes. Overall, the whole thing was done in rather too much of a rush, and I think it shows especially in the magic system. The numerous mentions of Realms of Sorcery really amount to an admission that we knew the magic system needed some work, but we didn't have time to do it then, and we really intended that RoS would come out very soon after the rulebook and fix everything! Real life being real life, however, there was always something happening that pushed RoS aside, and here we are ten years later, still with the same flawed magic system!

If the rulebook itself was rushed though, we were determined that we would make the Enemy Within adventures the best we possibly could. Jim and Phil had just written (with Graeme Morris) a superb little campaign module for AD&D, called Night's Dark Terror, and we were all into Call of Cthulhu and other leadingedge games of the time that emphasised roleplaying and character interaction over hack and slay. Bryan Ansell gave me a brief to write, in his words, "a bloodless ... Call of Cthulhu adventure for Warhammer", and the result was Shadows Over Bogenhafen. At the time, I had no idea how much it would set the tone for everything that came after, and in fact the Doomstones adventures were an experiment to see if a more traditional type of FRP adventure would work in WFRP.

**Can you give us the story behind GW's discontinuation of WFRP and the setting up of Flame?**

There are several different points of view on this, but here's mine, for whatever it may be worth. You have to bear in mind that GW was taken over by Citadel, instead of the other way round. Because of this, games were perceived mainly as a means of selling miniatures you'll find ads for miniatures deals in the backs of early printings of the Enemy Within adventures, for example. WFRP disappointed GW's top brass because it did not double miniatures sales overnight in the way that Warhammer 40K did. At the same time, GW's other roleplaying lines, Judge Dredd and Golden Heroes, achieved cult

status rather than becoming blockbusters. Their licensed UK printings of Call of Cthulhu, RuneQuest 2nd edition and Paranoia sold patchily, by comparison to the licensed printings of original D&D, 1st edition AD&D, 1st edition RuneQuest and Traveller which had formed the basis of GW's early success. So from GW's point of view, there was far more to be gained by putting resources into, say, another 40K spinoff game, than by carrying on with a roleplaying product that got good reviews but didn't generate secondary sales of miniatures in any significant quantities, especially since, in GW's experience at the time, roleplaying games in general apart from the AD&D juggernaut that was now handled by TSR UK and out of GW's reach appeared to be in a decline. Flame was a lastditch effort to save WFRP, in many ways. It was a strippeddown operation consisting of just three people, and with overheads kept to a minimum. Though Flame proved very efficient in producing WFRP material, GW was still not satisfied that it could be profitable, and in the end it faded away.

### **With hindsight, could Flame have worked?**

That's a very tough question, and one with many facets. In terms of GW's business strategy, I think not. There's no question that it's done them a power of good to focus on miniatures and miniatures-based games, and I don't honestly think they could have achieved with roleplaying games what they have achieved with miniatures games, either financially or in terms of market domination. Having three full-time staff, a number of freelancers and a whole lot of overhead, printing, warehousing, shipping and marketing expense devoted to a low-growth, low-return offshoot of their main business was a brave experiment to try, and I'm glad to have had the opportunity to put a good amount of WFRP material out in that way, but in the end Flame was swimming against the tide. Roleplaying's brief flirtation with the mass market was coming to an end in the late 80s, and at that time only TSR was really making money at it. It's an open question as to whether Flame could have been developed into a major thing with more backing and commitment from GW, but I think it's unlikely. The only roleplaying company to make it big in the 90s has been White Wolf, and that was because they had an idea that was timely and they were very shrewd in building upon it. By and large, roleplaying has been a shrinking market for the last 5-6 years, and I'm sure that almost nobody apart from TSR and White Wolf is making significant amounts of money from roleplaying games. Personally, I think roleplaying is better off in the hands of smaller companies, who do it for love as much as for money. Alongside the decline of roleplaying in the mass market, we've seen a real explosion of creativity from smaller companies, and I think there's a wider range of roleplaying games on the market than there has been at any time since the early 80s. Smaller companies, with smaller overheads and a less revenue-oriented approach, can afford to take risks, be creative, be provocative, and generally push at the edges of the medium. The larger the market, and the more cash is involved, the more there is to lose and the greater the incentive to play it safe, imitate something that's already successful, try not to offend anyone, and so on. I've seen this to an extent in the computer games industry, and it's certainly a major force in Hollywood. Oops! That turned into more of a lecture than anticipated. Hope you're still awake.

### **At what point did you part company with GW? And Why?**

I left Flame in September 1990, for a mixture of reasons. Some were personal and some were professional. The main personal reason was that I had a girlfriend (now a wife!) in Denver, and it made more financial sense to move out there than to keep on paying phone bills the size of Bolivia's national debt. Professionally, I wanted to keep working on roleplaying material, but I could see that the opportunities to do that at GW were in the process of disappearing. I'd been talking to someone called Mark ReinHagen, who had some intriguing ideas for a modern horror roleplaying game where the players were all vampires. And I had a couple of other leads in to freelance work, all of them based in the States. In short, it seemed like time to move on. I continued to work with Flame in a freelance capacity, and hoped that somehow WFRP would survive, but I can't really say I was surprised when it all died away after the publication of Castle Drachenfels.

### **Should WFRP be allowed to go its own way instead of being tied to GW's Old World?**

Well, as long as it's *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, then it surely has to have a connection with the world of the battle game. And although I know some people hate the way the Warhammer world has developed over the last couple of editions of the battle game, I remain convinced that it's not as bad as all that. Sure, there are a few contradictions that need to be ironed out, but I'm sure it can all be resolved without damaging WFRP in any way. In fact, I'm going to try and approach this in *Apocrypha Too* (or whatever it ends up being called). Watch this space.

### **Do you believe Hogshead are doing a good job?**

Ha, ha I want them to give me lots of money for writing WFRP stuff again, so *of course* they're doing a good job! Seriously, though, I'm still amazed (and a little humbled) that the fans have kept the game alive without oxygen so that it is still a paying proposition to revive it, and that James has put so much time and effort into doing so, under conditions that have often been less than ideal (such as the US distributor problem of a few months ago). A lot of publishers in James' position would bang out reprints and take the money, so I'm very happy that Hogshead is producing original material as well. Obviously the veteran WFRP fans want to see more original stuff and fewer reprints, but reprints help pay Hogshead's bills, and hopefully, they will introduce the game to a new generation of fans as well. I think Hogshead is doing a fantastic job.

### **What is the best part of WFRP?**

To me, the tone of the world. It seems odd to say it now, but at the time there simply wasn't anything like it. Fantasy games were always very clean and heroic; every character had gleaming armour, a bodybuilder physique, perfect teeth and masses of backcombed blonde hair. Moral questions were always black and white, with no real dilemmas. It was very shallow, and I found it unsatisfying. I still love the way WFRP blends horror and humour, and challenges players to deal with complex situations and choices of evils.

### **What is the worst part of WFRP?**

All of the game mechanics are a little shaky, if you ask me, but players seem willing to forgive this because the adventures and the world are appealing and to be fair, it's not a mechanic-intensive game, the way most people play it.

### **What is the best WFRP scenario, and why?**

Wow, that's a tough one. At the risk of blowing my own trumpet, I still like *Shadows Over Bogenhafen* a lot, and I think it's the best thing I've ever written, in any context. But overall, I'd have to say *Power Behind the Throne*. It's so innovative, so deliciously complex and, as someone recently pointed out, such hard work for the GM I still don't think there's anything else to compare it to, even eight years on. But I'm probably the worst person in the world to ask, because I'm so close to all of them. I'd say, ask the fans.

### **What is the worst WFRP scenario, and why?**

Ironically, it's another one by Carl Sargent *Brothers in Blood*, from the *Warhammer Companion*. To me, it has that certain nothing. There's certainly room for bughunts and hackfests in WFRP, but I think they have to make players think, and this one doesn't. I'm not a huge fan of *Lichemaster* or *Death's Dark Shadow*, either, but to be fair to Carl, he was commissioned to convert WEB battle packs into roleplaying adventures, and in so far as it's possible to fit a square peg into a round hole with elegance and style, Carl did.

**A number of "in jokes" contained in the rules have been circulated 'previously' such as the Roland the Rat "Skaven" origins and Slann "Chariots of the Frogs". Is the rulebook full of these and do you have any favourites?**

There are lots of these, and in fact I hope to collect them all together. You can see if you think they make an entertaining article for Warpstone. Chariots of the Frogs is probably my favourite, although I also like the fact that in early editions of WFB the goddess of the Amazons was called Rigg (after Diana Rigg from her Avengers days).

### **What do you think of the new Bretonnian background?**

I haven't had a chance to look at it yet, but I'm looking forward to doing so. I know there have been howls of anguish on the internet mailing list about it, but from what I saw in the writeup of the King of Bretonnia in a recent issue of White Dwarf, there's nothing there that seriously damages the WFRP background. It's all a matter of viewpoint, and while the nobles may see Bretonnia one way (as reflected in the WD article), it's likely that the peasants and commoners may see things more in the way that WFRP presents them. All I'm saying for now is, don't panic.

*"At the moment, the only organised magicians are cultists!"*

### **What do you hope to see in the new Realms of Sorcery?**

Um a better magic system? Okay, okay I have a first draft on disk that James sent me and I still haven't had time to look at, but basically I'd like to see a thorough revision of the spellcasting mechanics, because this part of the book was so rushed in the original design process. I like the fact that magic is rarer in WFRP than in most other fantasy games, and I'd like to see it stay that way, but at the same time, there is always room for more imaginative spells and suchlike. One thing that would be very useful would be some more background on magician's guilds and colleges, to bring them up to a similar level of detail to the temples and religious orders. At the moment, the only organised magicians are cultists!

### **What did you think of Ken Rolston's version of Realms of Sorcery?**

Not a lot, I'm afraid. Ken is a great guy and a personal friend, but I don't think he got the support and feedback he needed from GW until it was too late. I guess I'm partly responsible for that myself, since Ken was writing it at about the time Flame was set up. Ken's version, to me, misses the spirit of WFRP in some intangible way, and feels a lot more like RuneQuest.

### **You regularly contribute to the WFRP Email list and still maintain an active interest in the game. Is this simply because it is a game you helped develop, or more because it's a game you like?**

Both, really. Four years of my life went into WFRP, so I have a great affection for it. And as I've said earlier, I'm so awed by the loyalty of the fans and the dedication James has shown to reviving the game, that I feel almost dutybound to help out. Above all, though, I love the world; it's a place I love to revisit.

### **How should WFRP develop?**

Hmm another tough one. For now, I think it should keep on going exactly as it is. I can't wait to see Marienburg come out, and I'd love to see other areas of the world opened up, although as I think James has explained before me, we have to wait for GW to officially open up an area with a WFB army book, and then go from there. A second edition of the rules would probably be a good idea for some time, as there are quite a few glitches and loose ends, but the first edition seems to work to most people's satisfaction, and I'm a big fan of not fixing it if it ain't broke!

### **James Wallis mentioned that Power Behind the Throne may be dropped and additional episodes added. Do you think this is a good idea?**

James has certainly pointed out to me that there is an uncomfortably large jump in power between DotR and PBtT, and I'm all in favour of Carrion Up the Reik plugging that gap. PBtT is an adventure you either love or hate, I guess, and as I've already said, I

love it. I guess a lot would depend on what replaced it in the newlook Enemy Within campaign. I've always thought that the overarching plot of the campaign gets a bit derailed after PBtT the trail of the Purple Hand goes cold after this, and SRiK and EiF don't somehow feel as though they belong with the rest but I've always thought that PBtT is a worthwhile part of the campaign. James has said that it's not been one of the adventures that people have clamoured for, so maybe there is a business angle I'm not aware of. And of course, you can't publish PBtT without publishing the Middenheim sourcebook first, and I'm sure there's been more demand for Marienburg than for Middenheim, simply because Marienburg will contain new material.

### **Why did the over-arching Purple Hand plot get 'derailed' after Power Behind The Throne?**

The Enemy Within campaign was carefully planned up to PBtT, but after that some real-world forces intervened. Ken Rolston was commissioned to write an adventure, because a big-name American author would hopefully boost US sales, and while Something Rotten in Kislev was never intended to be an integral and vital part of the Enemy Within campaign, it made a lot of commercial sense to stick the logo on the book, and include plot hooks to tie it into all the existing products. SRiK took up a schedule slot and a chunk of budget, of course, and resulting in pushing back the next "pure" Enemy Within adventure. Then a whole lot of other projects came down the pike - things like WFB second edition, Warhammer Siege, Space Hulk, Adeptus Titanicus, Space Marine, Advanced Heroquest - and the pressure increased to get Realm of Chaos finished, since it would cover WFB and 40K as well as WFRP - and what with one thing and another, the Enemy Within campaign got a bit lost in the shuffle. I don't think anyone intended the gap between PBtT and EiF to be as long as it was, but somehow there was always something else with a more urgent demand for our attention. In many ways, that's why Realms of Sorcery never came out, despite being promised in the rulebook. And in hindsight, I think that the awareness of this long delay led to EiF being rather more rushed than it should have been. Also, PBtT offered some kind of closure on the Purple Hand plot, but didn't cut GMs off from developing it further in their own campaigns if they wanted to. That's often a difficult balance to achieve. The action in EiF didn't explicitly call for the participation of the Purple Hand, so their plot was not advanced there. I guess it would have been possible to develop the campaign in a whole different direction with the Purple Hand at the centre of things, but it was never the intention that they should be the only "Enemy Within" - just one of a number of cults. Maybe we could have done more with the cult of the Jade Sceptre and the others, to take the spotlight off the Purple Hand a little so that the abrupt ending of their plot would not have been so noticeable.

*"WFRP is exactly where it needs to be"*

### **Do you believe WFRP has a long term future?**

I certainly would like to think so. After all, it's not every game that could survive a threeyear hiatus and still have loyal fans. Even with continued support, there aren't that many tenyearold games still on the market. Roleplaying games in general are a shrinking market these days, and we've seen things like the disappearance of GDW lately, so it's dangerous to predict. Personally, I have a feeling that roleplaying apart from TSR who make their own rules will go back to where it was in the late 70s, with a lot of garage operations and small companies working on tiny overheads and small margins. The development of PCs and DTP software makes that even easier than it was back then, and I think Hogshead is part of that along with companies like Talsorian, Sanctuary Games, and Pinnacle. In which case, WFRP is exactly where it needs to be.

### **What would you like to see in a WFRP 2nd Edition?**

An index (nice job, by the way). A few organisational changes like putting all the careers in one place. More streamlined mechanics. More details on the cultural background of non-human PC races.

### **What WFRP supplement would you like to see?**

Right now, I can't wait for Marienburg. I love city adventures and city packs. Apart from that, Araby and Nippon are areas I'd like to see explored (even though I was one of the people at GW who rejected Tetsubo), but I think we'll have a while to wait before those areas are opened up in the battle game and Hogshead can do anything official. I know there's an enormous amount of fanwritten material out there, and I can only wish that one day I'll have the time to read it all.

### **You had a WFRP Vampire sourcebook turned down by GW. Considering your work on Vampire the Masquerade, was your view on Vampires very different to GW's view? Is this part of GW's shift towards a more black and white background, moving away from the moral uncertainties and grey areas that makes WFRP so strong?**

My vampire sourcebook (or outline, for that's as far as it got) was actually something I'd started developing at Flame, and really it fell victim to the changes in GW's source material since then. It relied heavily on vampires as portrayed in Drachenfels and the other Genevieve stories, and in the intervening time GW had decided that Warhammer fiction was not to be regarded as canon. Additionally, they had developed vampires in a different direction in the Undead army book. The Karstein vampires owe much more to the Hammer movies of the 70s (even unto the family name) than they do to Genevieve, Anne Rice, or any of the other sources that Vampire: the Masquerade is built upon. Given that GW's concern is for the battle game and its associated miniatures sales, this makes perfect sense, and I can see why they would not want a roleplaying sourcebook that suggested that vampires might not be entirely evil, and even occasionally fought on the side of the Empire, for instance. It would play hell with the balance of the army lists, and the battle game has far less room for the moral uncertainties that make for great roleplaying, because you simply must be sure of who's on what side.

### **What should WFRP magazines, like Warpstone, contain?**

Whatever their contributors want to write, whatever their editors want to print, and whatever their readers want to read. No, seriously. The worst thing in the world that can happen to a roleplaying system or just about any other form of creativity is a single dictatorial voice. It's the quickest way to stagnation. GW and Hogshead obviously have a say over what is "official", but "unofficial" material is just as valuable, and in the end it's up to the individual GM what to use and what to ignore in his or her own games, so the more voices, the more ideas, the more involvement from everyone who cares, the better.

### **Do you believe Roleplaying has a popular future or is it always going to remain at the edges of the mainstream?**

I think that roundthetable roleplaying has been surpassed by computer games as a massmarket hobby or form of entertainment, and I don't see the trend reversing. On the whole, I think that's a healthy thing for roleplaying, though. I remember in the early to mid 80s when there was a feeling in the industry that roleplaying was on the brink of breaking into the mainstream, and so many compromises were made in the interests of chasing the mass market that the whole hobby went a little bland. Nowadays, with smaller companies chasing smaller audiences of like-minded people, everyone can do their thing and be happy. Obviously TSR is a law unto itself, and maybe just maybe White Wolf will get into that position too, but the bulk of the hobby is going to be small and personal.

### **Is the perception of the hobby different in the States to the UK?**

Well, age is less of a factor in the US, I think. Roleplaying is more of a hobby for life, and less of something that you're expected to grow out of once you discover girls, or leave college and get a real job, or at some other arbitrary time in your life. There is more money around, and prices are generally lower, so it's easier for a new game to get a foothold in the market place as people will take a risk and buy the book out of

curiosity. On the other hand, there are still sectors of the population who firmly and seriously believe that roleplaying is a tool of Satan, which is something that I think has died out in Europe.

### **Are GW going to dominate the American industry as they have done the British?**

I don't think anyone not even GW is going to knock TSR off the number one spot. I don't have access to the statistics, but my impression is that GW is either number two or three, depending on where White Wolf is. But in a way, you're comparing apples to oranges. When it comes to tabletop games, GW is by far the biggest, whereas TSR and WW are both based firmly in roleplaying. The US is a huge market, and can support a lot more companies without getting cramped. It's a far bigger proposition to dominate the US market than the British one, and I don't think GW will do that. I don't think they want to. They've staked out their territory as being fantasy and SF miniatures games, and they're doing very nicely, thank you. They haven't annihilated the competition in that area in fact, they've spawned a lot of imitators but nothing else is Warhammer and nothing else is WH40K.

### **What do you think of the latest RPG games?**

I like the recent trend toward mixandmatch backgrounds, like Castle Falkenstein and Deadlands. To be honest, I've been getting rather tired of dark roleplaying it seemed for a while there that noone was doing anything else so these are a refreshing change. I go for worlds rather than systems, personally, and there are one or two quite intriguing ones out there. We're reaching a stage, I think, where just about everything has been done we've had fantasy, we've had science fiction, we've had horror, we've had cyberpunk, and we've had comparatively shortlived fads for superhero roleplaying, oriental roleplaying, swashbucklers, pulps and westerns. There's not a whole heck of a lot left that's completely new, and the challenge to anyone designing a new roleplaying system these days is to come up with a setting that has a strong identity of its own and doesn't get lost in the crowd. Blending genres opens up a lot of possibilities I was impressed with the boldness with which Shadowrun did that, when it first came out, and it's still something that's guaranteed to catch my eye.

### **Will we ever see a new WFRP product by Graeme Davis?**

I really hope so. As I said earlier, I've signed up to edit Apocrypha Too, and I'll be contributing original material to that. I've been talking to James about other ideas, and we're kicking a few things around at the moment. I don't want to give too much away, as nothing is definite at this stage. If only I had more time, he whined.