



ARCANE ISSUE 20

Reviewed by John Foody

And so, twenty issues down the line, Arcane joins the list of RPG magazines that have gone to the great newsagent in the sky. A shame, but perhaps not totally unexpected. Ironically, this last issue is the one that has most appeal to WFRP players.

Containing its usual mix of news, opinion, articles and reviews it had turned into a reasonably solid read. As a decidedly amateur Magic player, I have enjoyed the regular coverage. Also I was glad that the slightly patronising letter replies had gone. On the downside, Gnome-World remained constantly bland until the end, and bar some interesting points (which I'll come to later) the encounters still fail. Trying to hard too be generic, they remained unfocused and unatmospheric. However, this issue showed a continued move towards particular settings, with a WFRP adventure sending them off. The article on roleplaying an Arabian background was interesting, although further research would have to be done to run a game.

I would recommend this issue to WFRP referees for the articles on dark heroes, the encounter and breeding fear through claustrophobia. The dark heroes articles discusses handling PCs who have moral ambiguities, as has the world around them. So while the article is decorated with superhero imagery, the comments within apply directly to WFRP characters. 'No Way Out' looks at trapping players in 'devil and the deep blue sea' situations. It gives good hints on how to set up and run these for the fullest effect.

Although flawed, the most interesting part of this issue is Kirchheim. This is a brief encounter which is heavily Warhammer influenced. It also includes stats for WFRP (& Elric!). The encounter is written by Ken & Jo Walton, the authors of the forthcoming Realms of Sorcery, and includes a creature called a Warrior Familiar, which they say will be fully covered in RoS. From this preview I am not overly impressed, but we shall see. There are two cameo ideas to use Kirchheim and I would personally use the Elric! idea over the WFRP themed plot. Overall, I think it needs work before I would run it. The idea is a bit much, because it's so overstated. With a bit of trimming it would sit nicely in most campaigns.

And so, the last ever review of the last ever Arcane finishes. It's disappearance is a loss. When launched it hit the ground running, with quality paper and full colour all round. Economies appeared, but it became tighter and more interesting as time went on. Perhaps by trying to appeal to everyone, it weakened its message. Did it attract the average AD&D player, who can get everything they need from Dragon? Should it have tried by balancing emphasis on the biggest selling games like this and World of Darkness? Will the next magazine learn from Arcane's mistakes? We shall see.

For nearly two years I have enjoyed Arcane and looked forward to new issues. They have also supported Warpsstone and other Fanzines with reviews and free adverts. Many of you are reading this because of that service.

In a larger context the British gaming community has lost its focal point. Once more the only shop shelf independent games magazine has gone. Perhaps such a venture can never succeed without an overall rise in the profile of gaming. Maybe the Wizards of the Coast buy-out of TSR will start this. Sadly, many gamers seem uninterested in their hobby's future. Without growth it will eventually die. I also get the impression that many people within the gaming community were waiting for it to fall. I doubt that I will see another of its kind for quite a while.

Arcane (November 1995-June 1997) RIP.