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DA BOOK OF GOBLINS

by Ian Ward

Reviewed by John Foody

Recently posted on the Internet, 'Da Book of Goblins' is a similar project to 'The Book of the Rat', reviewed last issue. Ian Ward has put a lot of work into producing this volume, which promises to be vast in scope when completed (DBOG is a work in progress). The first chapter begins with the line, 'OK, hands up those of you have ever thrown a clutch of Goblins at a party of low level PCs as cannon fodder.' Mentally my arm drifted ceilingwards. It's true that Goblinoids have become synonymous with cannon fodder, but this is partly due to the fact they are the stock fantasy baddie, making up in numbers what they lack in intelligence. Was it always so?

To an extent, yes. While ultimately tracing their roots back to the goblins of fairy tales, the real ancestors of the modern Goblinoid are Tolkien's Orcs and Goblins. These were the results of Sauron's experiments, the dark side of Elves. While they were just foot soldiers, they were greatly feared and very evil. They were creatures of the night, cowards who preferred to kill with missile fire, but full of cunning and ambition. In D&D they became just another set of statistics, real low-level cannon fodder. However, they were hardly unique. As this seemed the fate of most creatures in the Bestiary. In my dim recollection, it was a series of articles in White Dwarf that started to put forward the idea that monsters could be interesting in their own right. As far as the Orc was concerned, a piece called 'The Naked Orc' introduced different classes of Orc (Middle Earth style), including Urak Hai (proto-Black Orcs) and Snagga (proto-snotlings). Whilst the Middle Earth RPG returned Orcs to their original design, GW started to take them in a different direction. This became more pronounced as WFB and 40K developed. Their new personality was full of cunning and mayhem, their evil replaced by a dim viciousness. They became more like figures of fun than dangerous adversaries. WFRP came along before this process had gone too far, and they remained in tune with the spirit of the Old World. I have always treated them like the Mongols - a constant threat in the East that could pour into and destroy civilisation.

So where does DBOG fall? Well, its WFB roots are very evident, but they have been balanced to fit WFRP. It concentrates on the various tribes inhabiting the Badlands. Ian covers the differences between the various Goblin species, going into details about their religion, Magic and culture. A bestiary is included which covers the main creatures inhabiting the Badlands. The book also features careers and skills for Goblinoid characters, with NPC's and plot lines promised for the future.

An amazing amount of work has gone into this project, which is full of nice ideas. It would be an excellent sourcebook for those who wished to try their hand at playing a Goblinoid Campaign, although I do think that this would be quite difficult to do well, and I

am looking forward to seeing the promised plot suggestions.

To make Goblins a more interesting race, their structure and politics need to be pushed to the fore. How different tribes interact also needs to be detailed, especially since many players will not be interested in Goblins PCs. More needs to be made of tribes in and around the Empire, or the sourcebook may be of limited appeal. One of my favourite pieces is Arrak: the Spider God, whom Forest dwelling Goblins worship.

DBOG is not as strong as "The Book of the Rat", but this is partly due to the fact the goblin race is not as strong a concept. Currently, the book lacks a connecting thread that will pull it all together, but this is a work in progress with several important chapters still to come. I look forward to seeing the finished version. So if you can, download the files and contribute to the project's direction.

"Da Book of Goblin" can be downloaded by anonymous ftp from the Warhammer archives. In plain English, this means that you need to find the web site at www.warhammer.net where the files are stored, and copy it to disk from there.