

# WARPTONE

The independent magazine for Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay



## **Doomstones II: Wars & Death** **Published by Hogshead Publishing** **Reviewed by John Foody**

Hogshead's second Doomstones supplement brings together the books 'Death Rock' and 'Dwarf Wars', originally published by GW's Flame Publications as parts three and four of the campaign. It is a good sized adventure, standing at 176 pages and including numerous player handouts. Unusually, the artwork is decidedly average and much of it has been used before. The cover is also poor and lacks any real impact.

The Doomstones campaign was originally written for Advanced Dungeons and Dragons, and later converted to WFRP. This was done as part of Flame's attempt to get out as much material as possible to justify WFRP's continued existence within GW. Part of the new material included new monsters and spells.

Death Rock takes the PCs to a monastery deep in The Vaults, a mountain range south of The Empire. Here they find the third Doomstone and fulfil a prophecy, in an adventure which becomes a race against time as a force of Orcs draws nearer. This is the strongest part of the Doomstones campaign, being nicely atmospheric, and is strongly reminiscent of Umberto Eco's 'Name of the Rose'. The adventure builds up nicely, describing the monastery and its inhabitants, together with the threat it faces. There are so many strong elements here and such a good central concept it is disappointing to have to say that it doesn't manage to carry it off with much conviction.

Dwarf Wars takes the PCs to a lost Dwarven hold on the eve of a possible Dwarven civil war. Here two factions search for an artefact to consolidate their right to the throne. The party must deal with one of the groups before descending into the depths of the hold to find the last Doomstone, protected by age old traps and other nasties.

Again this is nicely set-up, and the characters and politics are strong. Sadly, all this is little more than background for a dungeon bash, and a poor one at that. It reminds me of everything that I would consider wrong in an average AD&D adventure. Apart from new monsters, traps and a lack of toilet facilities, there is even a 'Monster and Treasure Roster'. Players will find themselves on the following track: check for traps, kill monsters, search, walk on, check for traps, kill monsters, etc. etc. Perhaps I am being unfair because I have played plenty of dungeon romps myself, but I thought that the hobby as a whole had moved on. As a player, does it matter that one wraith was a prisoner and another a Cleric when no interaction except violent ones occur? I still believe that dungeon scenarios can be made to work, but they need to be livelier and have more depth (sorry!) than this.

Also included in the book are a number of pre-generated NPCs. These are three or four career characters, with brief histories and full profiles. Again highlighting the AD&D flavour that seeps from the book, they are weighed down with magic items, a Sword with Damage +3 and a Robe of +3 Toughness among them.

To my mind this sums up the problem with the whole Doomstones campaign. The atmosphere and background that make WFRP such a good game have little presence here. When background is covered it is strong, but it does not sit well with the main parts of the narrative. There is also a complete lack of any of the moral uncertainties that are found in other WFRP supplements. Perhaps it could be argued that this was the

way Warhammer was going at the time, but I think this more due to the history of this particular product. The suggested experience and fate point rewards are also excessive. A number of these are 'kill' points, even where such combat does not progress the scenario. Perhaps this just highlights the nature of the scenarios, but I thought WFRP was more than this. Also, the Doomstones themselves are admittedly powerful, as they should be, but are an extremely unbalancing presence. Characters that went back into the Empire with them would be overly powerful.

For these reason and also because of the way the book ends the Doomstones needs to be played as a continuous campaign. (I would not recommend this book be played until after 'Book One: Fire and Blood', unless the GM is ready to modify matters freely.) Unfortunately, this is not yet possible as part three, 'The Heart of Chaos,' is still to be published. Until it comes out the campaign cannot be evaluated as a whole, which it really needs to be.

I would be happy to use Death Rock outside the confines of the Doomstones campaign, and perhaps even to adapt the ideas from Dwarf Wars. However, I would not play the Doomstones campaign as it stands: it is just not strong enough. The two Doomstones books to date prove that not everything associated with the WFRP label is a quality product. These weaken the overall strength of the game, as there is little here to distinguish it from AD&D and its clones. From a quality point of view I can't help feeling, especially as there isn't a lot of material available anyway, that reprinting them was a bit of a mistake.