

WARPSTONE

The independent magazine for Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay



GETTING STARTED IN WFRP

By John Foody

So you want to try out *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*? Good Choice! This article looks to offer some advice on getting off to a good start. Before I begin, let me lay my cards on the table. I am no expert in roleplaying but I have played many and my comments are a fan's. I have played WFRP on-and-off for fourteen years. Actually, I like the game so much I decided to start a fanzine for it. This gave birth to Warpstone still going five years on. WFRP itself is owned by Games Workshop and published by Hogshead Publishing. The Warhammer background to be found in WFRP and Warhammer Fantasy Battle is similar but is no longer the same.

WFRP's greatest attraction to me (and many others) is the sheer quality of the background. It is rich, atmospheric and a perfect backdrop for a roleplaying game. The main focus of WFRP is an equivalent to Europe around the medieval/renaissance period. Thus gunpowder is available but is expensive and unreliable (doesn't stop some people using it). This area is known as The Old World, but most campaigns are based in The Empire, a Germanic influenced land of City States, full of political intrigue and wild adventure. Apart from magic and monsters, WFRP has a strong streak of horror running through it. This is balanced by a good sense of humour, usually embodied by bad puns. However, the greatest threat to the Old World is Chaos. It exists as both raiders on the borders of civilisation and as a corrupting influence on mankind, offering easy wealth and power to the weak. Of course, such rewards come with a price...

This background offers a huge canvas for a variety of scenarios, ranging from epic quests, uncovering dark cults, political murder mysteries and orc bashing among others.

So where to start? To begin with you need the rulebook. That's it. Everything needed to play the game, rules, background and introductory scenario is contained within. So if you are ready to write your own scenarios then nothing more is required. No need to buy *Players' Guide* or *Bumper Book of Monsters*. The introductory scenario although linear and designed for novice players and GMs is atmospheric.

However, if you want to expand further, looking for more background and scenarios, I recommend two books: *Apocrypha Now* and *The Enemy Within (Volume One) Shadows Over Bögenhafen*. Volume One is, in part, a sourcebook of the Empire. It gives you enough background to let you flesh out the areas the players explore. Two scenarios are enclosed, both parts of *The Enemy Within* campaign. This is commonly considered one of the greatest roleplaying campaigns ever. I personally count it among the best I have seen, despite some flaws. *Mistaken Identity*, the first, shorter, scene setting scenario is full of nice moments. However, it is just a taster for *Shadows Over Bögenhafen*, perhaps the archetypal WFRP scenario. An investigative scenario set in the town of Bögenhafen, this shows what the game is all about.

After you have played *Shadows Over Bögenhafen*, there are broadly two directions you can go. The first of these is to follow the EW campaign through to its conclusion. This entails *Death on the Reik*, *Power Behind the Throne*, *Something Rotten in Kislev* and *Empire in Flames* (to be revised and soon to be re-released as *Empire in Chaos*). This provides an excellent self-contained campaign. The second option is to let your PCs

wander The Old World, embroiling them in smaller scenarios and encounters. *Apocrypha Now* and *Warpstone* will give you some of these to bolster your own. I would strongly recommend buying *Middenheim: City of Chaos* and *Death on the Reik*. Together they give more information on city life and travel within the Empire. They come complete with numerous encounters and ideas. An alternative to *Middenheim* is the newly released *Marienburg: Sold Down the River*. An excellent city sourcebook, it is better suited for more experienced GMs.

In my opinion, the best path to follow falls somewhere between these two. Using the *The Enemy Within* as a broad outline, you take the PCs (or they take you!) on a long journey. Again *Death on the Reik* is a good place to start, stretching it out by using the scenarios in *Apocrypha Now*. This sourcebook, a collection of articles from *White Dwarf* and the *Warhammer Companion* (now out of print) is a good buy, for in addition to scenarios it offers alternative rule ideas and background. More importantly it gives guidance on aspects of the game sometimes open to difficulties. Just as importantly, it provides solid articles for players to read. *Middenheim: City of Chaos* would be my next purchase and once your players are experienced enough *Power Behind the Throne*. I would then send the PCs off to Marienburg. *Marienburg: Sold Down the River* is a perfect introduction for this. A good scenario introduction to the Marienburg is *Dying of the Light*, a mini campaign based in and around the city. Also recommended is the free scenario (Bad Tidings) available from Hogshead Publishing, in their free publication *Hogswash*.

Once Marienburg is seen, or the PCs are running for their lives (as often happens when you upset powerful people), if they haven't attempted *Power Behind the Throne*, send them back to Middenheim. After this journey to the snowy wastes of Kislev to attempt *Something Rotten in Kislev*. However, I only recommend this if you are really stretching out the campaign. Otherwise I would be inclined to move straight into Empire in *Flames*. This is just a personal opinion as I believe *Something Rotten in Kislev* dilutes the strength of the campaign and is perhaps best played after you have finished *The Enemy Within*.

Using shorter scenarios to develop *The Enemy Within* campaign gives you many, many sessions of play. When it is over it is a good time to retire characters and start with new ones in a new campaign. However, there is another option.

The *Doomstones* campaign is designed for more experienced characters and is perfect for those who prefer more of a magic-heavy, monster-bashing kind of scenario. The Campaign consists of three books, *Fire and Blood*, *Wars and Death*, and the soon to be released *Heart of Chaos*. Although, not to my taste, they show another aspect of Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay. It is the one closer to Warhammer Fantasy Battle. A campaign can be made truly individual by the use of your own scenarios and other non-official material. *Warpstone* is a good source of these as are the numerous websites which can be accessed through the best on-line resource of them all, the Warhammer archives (www.warhammer.net).

If you haven't tried WFRP, give it a go. All you need is the rulebook to get started and see if it appeals. Full reviews of the individual books can be found elsewhere.