

WARPSTONE

The independent magazine for Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay



THE FIGHT AGAINST CHAOS: THE HISTORY OF WARHAMMER by Robert Clark

"He had been searching for the book for two years, braving foul weather and fierce guardians just for a glimpse of this mighty grimoire. His obsession had controlled his life for so long all his friends had deserted him, fearing him mad, but the obsession would finally be sated. Slowly, tentatively, he turned the pages to section seven, the world guide...."

And so it was in February 1996 that I finally got my hands on the WFRP rulebook, in the hope that the Warhammer background would finally be open to me. Sadly, this was not to be the case, and some eighteen months later, I am still not much wiser. A situation that has come about due to GW's constant revision of the Warhammer background. This article looks at the development and changes in this background.

EARLY HISTORY

Warhammer was first released in 1983, but we probably wouldn't have recognised it. It was based largely on Tolkien's Middle Earth, via Dungeons & Dragons, and these influences can still be seen today. Then came a pseudo-historical aspect which was, in hindsight, an obvious, but important step. Next came mythology and legend, some science fiction overtones (thanks to Richard Halliwell, who went off on a tangent and created most of the New World's inhabitants), and finally Chaos, the ultimate nemesis. This unique background was invented by the WFB designers, who created scenarios and wrote as they went along. Richard Priestley, Richard Halliwell and Bryan Ansell did a good job, and in 1986, after second edition WFB, a new product was released. WFRP was initially meant to be a supplement, but grew into a full game. With the development of a greatly detailed background for a roleplay game, third edition WFB prospered, and all was well.

WARHAMMER FICTION

Warhammer fiction first appeared in 1989, and sadly no new books have been released since 1993. They are an invaluable addition to WFRP, as they detail and expand on existing background, as well as truly evoking the Warhammer mythos. Current titles are: Drachenfels; Ignorant Armies (anthology); Wolf Riders (anthology); Red Thirst (anthology); Beasts in Velvet; Zaragoz, Plague Daemon and Storm Warriors (which form the Orfeo trilogy); Genevieve Undead (anthology); and Konrad, Shadowbreed and Warblade (the Konrad trilogy).

Also announced a year ago was a new book featuring Gotrek and Felix, the popular characters created by Bill King. Unreleased fiction was published in White Dwarf, and although there were plans for them to be put into a new anthology, nothing has appeared. The only gripe with the fiction is the statement that Karl-Franz became emperor in 2491, as opposed to 2502, which is stated elsewhere.

Recent information states that Boxtree, the publishers of Warhammer novels, have lost the contract to publish Warhammer novels. Additionally, GW have also begun to publish

Inferno, a new magazine containing Warhammer fiction. GW's opinion on the books is that although the world is the same, it is not the actual world as portrayed in the WFB books. In other words a parallel world, broadly similar, but not quite the same. Could this be done with WFRP?

REALM OF CHAOS

The biggest development that occurred for 3rd edition Warhammer was the infamous Realm of Chaos books (Slaves to Darkness and The Lost and the Damned). The mythos that is at the heart of Chaos first emerged here, in two stylish and impressive hardback books. Before this, Chaos was not as well defined, but now we all knew what was going on. The only snags with these books emerged later on. The rules were supposedly for WFB, WFRP, and WH40K, but this caused major problems as the strength and deadliness of the creatures, weapons and advance scheme meant that the WFRP rules were seriously overpowered. However, this is not a background point, and so is not truly relevant to this article. These books are probably the most sought after in GW history, and essentially created the dark atmosphere all WFRP players know and love.

4th EDITION WARHAMMER

The all-singing, all-dancing boxed edition of Warhammer appeared in 1992, after WFRP had been withdrawn. Changes began at this point, the bestiary ignored moot points, such as Slann, Lizardmen, The New Coast, Malal, Fimir (apparently created solely for WFRP), Zoats, Pygmies and Amazons. Various reasons have been speculated upon for their demise, including personal preference (i.e. someone at GW didn't like them), public feeling (pygmies caused a furore in the states), changes of staff at GW (they moved offices at this time, leaving some staff behind) or anything else. No one knows for sure, except GW.

THE EMPIRE

Rick Priestley and Nigel Stillman

The Empire book was the first to emerge from GW's new policy of 'One army, One book' (a money making exercise). Some of the detail was also fleshed out in WD147. The Empire was already well developed for WFRP, so all that was needed was a little information on military structure. In a cut down background from WFRP & TEW, a drastic mistake was made in using the province map from TEW as a guideline. This map is inaccurate, Sudenland is not even mentioned, and Carroburg becomes a city state. This is probably the worst mistake in 4th edition.

The Emperor is given a more heroic description than in TEW too, but as the army books tend to be slightly biased this is understandable. The electorate system is possibly messed up, and Sigmar is 'officially' dead (killed by a Daemon) and Ghal Maraz had been recovered (clashing with the adventure in EiF).

Also, the Tsar of Kislev Rarii Bokha is dead and succeeded by his daughter Katarin, who is known as the Ice Queen. Tuomas Pirinen details these changes in the Citadel Journal. Luckily for us, with the Empire being so detailed previously, no real changes could be made, and didn't need to be. Except for the massive cock-up this book is OK.

DWARFS

Rick Priestley and Nigel Stillman

The Dwarf book expands considerably on the existing background, giving details on the Dwarf strongholds mentioned in the WFRP rulebook and some new ones. The book gives a full history of the Dwarf race, the rise and fall of the Dwarven empire, and also looks at the Dwarven pantheon (which still includes Grungni). This is possibly the only 4th edition book that does not contradict previously written material.

HIGH ELVES

Andy Chambers and Bill King

This book is co-written by prolific Warhammer fiction author Bill King, and it shows. It

contains a finely crafted history of the High Elves, detailing new gods and the island realm of Ulthuan. However, there are a couple of minor quibbles and one big one. No mention is made of the fact that the Elves started off in the Old World and not Ulthuan, which is what is implied. Also the Elven lifespan is under debate, as the book suggests a far greater lifetime than the current 215 years. The big problem is that of the Sea Elves; no mention of them can be found in this book, and their good traits have been adopted by the High Elves. It is possible that they live in 'the kingdoms' north of Ulthuan, but there is no mention. Apart from these problems, the book is probably the best written in the series.

ORCS AND GOBLINS

Rick Priestley

This Goblinoid sourcebook poses few problems for WFRP, and is mainly WFB rules. The Hobgoblins are not mentioned (cf. Chaos Dwarfs), and Forest & Night Goblins are created, along with two new Troll types. The history section details great Goblinoid warlords, including previously mentioned battles like Black Fire Pass. One of them details the destruction of Solland by the Greenskins, a part of the Empire lost before the time of WFRP. Possible campaign conflicts could exist as a warlord named Azhag the slaughterer leads a campaign from 2512-2515, possibly messing up TEW. The map details mostly the fortresses of the Greenskins in the Worlds Edge Mountains.

CHAOS

Rick Priestley

The Chaos supplement comes as a boxed set, and is essentially a heavily condensed Realms of Chaos. The book doesn't have many differences from the original, but the chaos gifts system has been made simpler for 4th edition WFB.

UNDEAD

Jervis Johnson and Bill King

Thanks to the brilliant tale of Nagash by Bill King, this book adds a great deal to WFRP. Of course, it details an area consisting solely of Undead south of the Badlands, which is a poser for WFRP players. Details are given of the vampire counts of Sylvania too, but the actual description of Sylvania is a little 'high fantasy'. There are few problems with this book.

SKAVEN

Andy chambers

Like the Undead book, this volume is a good addition to Warhammer. It incorporates all of the old information about the Skaven with a considerable expansion on their origins. Many clan Skryre weapons are covered, as well as Rat Ogres and a greater Daemon of the Horned Rat. The only problem with the book is some of the timeline dating. The human city that became Skavenblight predating The Empire by 2,000 years is a little inconsistent (would the humans be advanced enough?). Also the name of the Sultan who initiated the Araby wars has been changed from 'Daryus e qabir' to 'Jaffar'.

DARK ELVES

Jervis Johnson

This book is a big departure from previously published Dark Elf background in WD. The information fits in with that of the High Elf book, but is a little under-developed. Included in this thin volume is a pleasant map of the New World, which is also different from previously published material. I feel it is unwise to map such a large area as it restricts future developments. The topography is samey, but the scale of the map (less than other books) means that it gives only a general picture. The description of the Dark Elf race is especially one-dimensional, waxing lyrical about their blood letting tendencies. Again a little too 'high fantasy'.

CHAOS DWARFS

Rick Priestley

The Chaos Dwarf book originated as a series of articles in WD, and the background has never been fully developed, but the map with the book covers the Dark Lands fully. As with the Dark Elf book, I feel this is not a wise move with so little developed background. The Kislevite region of Farside is missed out on the map, but (according to a Citadel Journal article by Tuomas Pirinen) still exists. Black Orcs are explained as an experiment by the Chaos Dwarfs that went wrong when they caused a rebellion. Hobgoblins are under the Chaos Dwarf's thumb, and the old Hobgoblin hegemony, along with any other Darklands empires, are not mentioned, and most likely don't exist any more.

WOOD ELVES

Nigel Stillman

Before I go into the problems, I'd like to say that this book, and all of the ones following it, are very 'high fantasy', and hopefully this will be amended in WFRP versions. I have noticed that before this point, all books had Brian Ansell's name in as games design consultant. Perhaps when he stopped contributing, the traditional Warhammer feel was lost. The new Wardancer background contradicts the chapter in AN, and also states that there are virtually no Wood Elf communities outside of Loren, opposing details given in the WFRP rulebook concerning the Laurelorn and the New World. The image of the Wood Elves is one of invincibility, as every conflict mentioned in the book is a resounding victory. The text also states that only Elves live in the forest, which is not necessarily the case (as expounded by various novels). The new background provides few points of interest for WFRPers. It does however, incorporate the Lichemaster's invasion of Loren.

5th EDITION WARHAMMER

Released in October 1996, this brand new edition gives no new details on background but also doesn't contradict previous army books (as the books are not to be re-done). The argument about Orc blood is solved, and it is red, not green. There were worries that the new magic system would mess up the forthcoming Realms of Sorcery, as the Colour magic system has been dropped, but since the magic supplement's release it is now known that colour magic is still available in a supplementary form.

BRETONNIA

Nigel Stillman

AARGH! Talk about complete disaster!?! This addition to the Warhammer armies series retains little if any of the original work. Datelines stay constant, as do the names of Gilles le Breton and Guillaume Barbonoire, but this is where the similarity ends. No longer do we have a pseudo-French pre-Revolutionary set-up, but what is essentially Arthurian legends in French! What has been described is quite unfeasible, there is no way that every noble lived in their own castle! Mousillon still lies ruined, although for different reasons than previously. The towns retain little of their old descriptions, and Couronne has been made capital of Bretonnia. The book also suggests that every city is a large castle, and that the rest of the populous live in villages, with no towns. Hopefully Hogshead can do a subtle re-write for WFRP because the country as it now stands gives virtually no plot hooks whatsoever. Every noble is a knight of some kind, with NO impurities. They ride around the land killing everything that isn't human and they always win (with one exception). The only hope is the fact that the book is written as though Bretonnian scholars have penned it, suggesting that this is not the full story. Religion has been shot to hell (excuse the pun), as nearly every Bretonnian worships 'The lady of the lake', a previously unheard of (in Warhammer at least) and terribly bland patron deity. This is not a good sign, and with the blatant Arthurian rip-off there is little hope for Albion ever being developed now (but see below). What a shame. On the plus points, there is now political divisions of the country, but these are merely named and not detailed. The topography is covered lightly as well, with surprisingly decent names as opposed to the recent "use an adjective" style.

LIZARDMEN

Nigel Stillman

Released in early 1997, the Lizardman book treads on relatively new soil. This is especially obvious as GW are pedalling the Lizardmen as 'brand new'. Essentially, the only original background remaining is that of the creation of the world, but now this was performed by the 'old ones' - a needless and quite tacky renaming if ever there was one. The Lizardman army is essentially the Slann but we now have reptiles instead of frogs. The original Slann have become bloated toad-like creatures who can't even walk, and cast all the magic. They rule the Lizardmen, and number about a hundred. There is little left of their old character, and no real hope of the old background being used due to the extensive way that possibilities have been ruled out. It may also be the case that the southern Chaos gate doesn't even exist any more.

Also jiggled about are the Amazons, no longer some genetic experiment of the Slann who reproduce by parthenogenesis, but a bunch of Norse women from one of the colonies who have discovered a fountain of youth. Need I say more. The new map is sparse and retains little original geography, except curiously enough the Culchan plains. The names of the Lizardmen are now 'Saurus', with smaller 'Skinks' and huge 'Kroxigor(?)' joining them. They also have an unhealthy number of dinosaur-like mounts. The Lizardmen have also encroached upon the Southlands, suggesting that both southern continents are tediously similar. The timeline has been extended by about 5,000 years, and has more holes in than a good piece of stilton.

CONCLUSION

In general, the background has changed considerably where it is vague, and niggling inconsistencies have crept in where it is detailed. Some things can be fixed, especially as GW may be working on new editions of their army books (again). The general trend to change seems to be getting more pronounced as time has passed, so the next books may well be even worse for WFRP. On a personal note, I think GW need someone to go through their books and regulate the background, making one consistent product.

COMING SOON

Recently released is a new High Elf book. Apart from a new army list little has changed, but there are a few more details on the Elf gods and a metal called 'ithilmar' (mithril anyone?). It is unlikely that the Sea Elves have been reinstated though.

Also planned is a Mercenaries book, which will cover many human and other lands which GW don't intend to develop as full books. This is good news for WFRPers as it will (hopefully) give Hogshead enough to go on to produce new supplements. I have been assured by Tuomas Pirinen (writer of 'Albion' on the 'net' and now writer for GW) that WFRP fans will be 'pleasantly surprised' by this book, but we shall see. As a later note, this book may have changed direction somewhat and now may be Tilea only. This would obviously mean that other areas would have to wait.

Sometime in the future we may see an Albion book. Tuomas says that some ideas are being thrown about, and the book could have a Celtic feel. More details as they come in. The pygmies may even make a comeback, along with any other races that people ask for. Rick Priestley has stated that what happens next is up to the players of the Warhammer games, so get your pen and paper out and tell them what we want!

THE FUTURE

The drift towards 'high fantasy' and WFRP-incompatible background is a major cause for concern. It could be said that WFB is damaging WFRP, as it does not need a flexible, entertaining and realistic background as WFRP does. WFB also tries to present a 'black and white' divide between the races of Warhammer, which is unrealistic to say the least, and damaging to the game world at the other end of the scale. Would we have ever had such classics as 'Shadows over Bögenhafen' if everything was so polarised? Another, more recent problem that has emerged is that GW have decided to put in even more control on background, meaning that Empire in Flames has to be re-written (Karl-Franz will now not die). This is verging on stupidity, with all senses of realism being lost. One

good piece of news is that those races which exist in WFRP but not in WFB are virtually under Hogshead's control to do with what they like.

The best way to voice your opinions is through Warpstone and also to write to GW. The apathetic actions of many WFRP players certainly has not helped the situation, so get writing and say what you want. Tuomas Pirinen is probably the best person to talk to at GW about this, and is hoping that the dark and gritty style will be in his work, and also the forthcoming mercenaries book. At Games day '96, Rick Priestley told me that the two systems could diverge, but whether this is a good move, or even if GW would allow more leniency, is questionable.

RECOMMENDED

This is a list of Warhammer material sources which you may, or may not, find useful.

Warhammer army books (Chaos £17, Chaos Dwarfs £12, others £15):

Each book covers a different race (see above), but they mainly consist of WFB rules, and are quite thin and ridiculously priced for the content (mostly pictures of miniatures and 75% b/w). Most books will hopefully be developed into WFRP anyway.

Warhammer scenario packs (£12 each, Dwarf/High Elf, Orcs/Empire): A call back to the old packs of yesteryear, the scenario packs will give background and history. Who knows, they may get developed into full WFRP material like Lichemaster did.

Warhammer quest (boxed set £50, character packs £7, adventure packs £20):

GW's latest Heroquest clone is closer to WFRP than you'd think, 'borrowing' the damage system from it. Although background in the main game is virtually non-existent, the overpriced character and adventure packs give a few details which could be adapted for WFRP. What is most annoying about 'Quest is that there is a Chaos Warrior character, and yet GW won't allow chaos PCs for WFRP. It smacks of hypocrisy, and WFRPers should complain.

Citadel Journal (£4 an issue, bi-monthly and unofficial): Although written by amateurs, the Citadel Journal is published by GW. Occasionally articles are written concerning Warhammer, for example Norsca or the recent stuff by Tuomas Pirinen. However, this is no vouch of quality but it is better than nothing. A word of warning: if you feel like contributing to the Journal, any work submitted has its copyright automatically given to GW. You have been warned! Note that in the future there may be some WFRP articles that James Wallis is organising - watch this space.