

WARPSTONE

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Warhammer Armies: Realm of Chaos
Published by Games Workshop (£17)
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One of the biggest surprises to come out of Games Day '97 was the new edition of Realm of Chaos (Written by Tuomas Pirinen and Rick Priestley). Initial comparisons between the new book and its predecessors reveal that the material in the old two volume RoC (*Slaves to Darkness* and *The Lost & the Damned*) is quite clearly of a much greater depth than that in the new book. Well, it would be, given that 580 pages of information, spread over two books, has been condensed to just 128. As you would expect, the book's main aim is to act as an army list for the forces of Chaos (which have been subdivided into Chaos Warriors, Beastmen and Daemons), but this does not mean that it is light on "fluff" (as members of the WFB mailing list call the background). In fact, there is quite a bit more background material than the average WFB army book - 31 pages, in fact. There is also a smattering of evocative stories and assorted colour text throughout the book, and whilst they are not as dark and chaotic as those in the original RoC, they do manage to convey the atmosphere fairly well. The rules themselves are very heavily stripped down, but since the original RoC was meant as a separate game as well as a WFB army, this is understandable. For better or for worse, you shouldn't expect even a fraction of the numerous mutations & Chaos gifts that were in the old books.

Looking at the background section in more detail, there are several differences between the new book and the old. Of the descriptions of the four Chaos gods, most of these are with Khorne and Slaanesh; Nurgle and Tzeentch remain basically the same. Khorne is no longer portrayed as a bloodthirsty god whose only want is the blood of others, but instead as a god of martial pride and honour. This diminishes the background a lot, and is in itself a rather strange thought. Khorne derives his power from the war that continues across the Warhammer world and beyond, yet even the naive could not say that all warriors look to martial skills and honour. Take the Goblinoids, for example, whose constant battles have little to do with honour.

Slaanesh is a different story. It can easily be understood why GW would want to lessen the rather graphic imagery in the older books (remember that *Slaves to Darkness* bore the warning, "Suggested for mature readers"). I do not blame them for this, although it is rather interesting that large amounts of blood and violence are considered acceptable. The timeline is little more than a list of battles. I haven't noticed any glaring clashes, but it is uninspired stuff when compared to other WFB timelines. It is certainly of little use for WFRP.

The images of Daemons have also changed somewhat. Bloodletters are perhaps the best example of this. Instead of being twisted, leering nightmares they are now large muscular brutes who are not really scary at all. The Slaaneshi Daemons have also been toned down (a scrap of cloth here and there, for example). One thing that may surprise people is that the power of Daemons has been scaled down. Hellblades are a shade of what they used to be, and Bloodthirsters no longer come with Chaos armour as standard. This can only be a boost to those who agree with Tim Eccles comments [That Chaos was destroying the balance of the game world - Ed.] in issue 3 (Fighting Chaos - why bother?).

The greatest changes, though, are with the Beastmen and Chaos warriors. Whilst a lot of the background has been retained (copied verbatim - which is not necessarily a bad thing), there have been several changes here. The general feel is that they are not as chaotic as before. Most Beastmen are now goat-featured, rather than exhibiting the range of mutations commonly featured in WFRP. If Beastmen truly are the 'Children of Chaos', they should show much more variety (in looks if not in stats). Again details have been lost due to space restrictions. One thing that I did find laughable was the notion that Beastmen may actually outnumber the other races of the Old world. Should this be the case, the Empire would have fallen long ago.

One area that could be seen as an improvement is in the explanation of the Chaos Warriors. In his designer's notes, Tuomas Pirinen says, "The background of the Chaos Warriors has always been unclear. Where did these renegades come from?" He continues by surmising that not all the Chaos Warriors could have come from the Old world. To this end are introduced the Marauders, who are essentially northern barbarians who worship the Chaos gods in their own savage way. The idea appeals to me, as it conjures up images of 'Conan the Barbarian' style tribes in the far north. It also raises the question of whether the worship of Chaos always leads to damnation. In the manner that these Marauders worship, Chaos is broken down into different aspects attributable to different gods, something which might make for some interesting WFRP scenarios. How would Old Worlders treat those who worship a form of what they fear most? Don't all gods have aspects that the Chaos gods can feed off?

As a WFRP sourcebook, I cannot recommend this release unless you are hopelessly rich. It may give you ideas for the violent relentlessness of Chaos, but as a WFB book it will not help too much for those who prefer conspiracy scenarios. Some of the background material is interesting, but if you have the original books then there isn't enough to justify spending £17 on.

Overall, I liked this book, and it grew on me over a week or so. [Surely a sign of the power of Chaos - Ed.] The original books are definitely superior, but there are ideas here that could interest WFB fans. The artwork is, unfortunately, all new, and the same-y styles lacks the 'twisted spikiness' and style of the old material. More variation needs to be reintroduced, as the in-house art is becoming very staid and boring.

Tuomas has done a good job given the necessities of working for a WFB market, and even manages to mention "The Enemy Within", including the Purple Hand! Perhaps not the best purchase for a WFRP player, but worth a look, especially now that the original books are so hard to get hold of. Also, look out for the supplement to this book, *Champions of Chaos*. It will have more stories and background, as well as a pile of over-powered special characters that couldn't be squeezed into the book. If this is the future of WFB, there may still be hope.