



## **WFRP2**

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**Reviewed by Frank Dube**

At last WFRP2 is in our hands. For many, the update has been wanted for many years to replace dozens of pages of home rules and to bring a new boost to our favourite game. For others, the news that WFRP2 was coming created fear and we read in forums endless pages about how terrible it would be to see Karl Franz riding a griffon or to see something different from 'The Enemy Within' campaign. Then there were the new players, those who heard about this grim world of perilous adventure and wondered if they should jump in to taste its magic. To all, welcome to this review of the new rulebook.

We now have the result of years of roleplaying and many months of play tests for us to discover and taste. Will WFRP2 satisfy all the hopes both old and new players had? Or is the new edition only a proof that many were right to fear the worst? Here is my review of the core rulebook of this new edition of WFRP. I will highlight some of the good and the bad aspects of this new beginning.

### **A Few Words about Me**

I threw my first ten-sided dice in 1984. It was to roll the damage of my two-handed sword against a group of kobolds. I did not know it then, but it was the beginning of a passion that would follow me for many years. I played and I Game Mastered many years in worlds that I created or along the paths of Web of the Spider Queen, and the Ravenloft and Dark Sun settings. Then I paused for a few years, until, with a group of friends, we sat and began to talk about the old days when we roleplayed clerics, barbarians and wizards. We had this weird idea to play a few game sessions again, just to bring back some memories. One suggested showing us WFRP. We agreed, played and since then we have never stopped. We have played for many years in The Empire, Marienburg, Tilea, Sartosa, Mordheim and worlds of our own, keeping close to the official WFRP rules. We slowly included Warhammer Fantasy Battle in our campaigns and found the mix of the two game systems was great. In parallel, I started a second group, changing every year, to test new rules, new background and new ways of playing. I played with a few other game systems too and I started to write in forums to promote the idea that a second edition of WFRP was needed. Still, I was not a play tester during the writing of WFRP2, so when my hands finally grabbed the new book, I took time to enjoy the colour, the art and slowly I began to read the rule book, one chapter at a time, hoping to put aside my home rules for an optimised game system. I sought a wonderful balance between simplicity and efficiency: a system for creating great skirmishes while being light enough to focus on roleplaying and storytelling.

### **Hope and Fear**

My greatest hope for the rulebook was to receive a new set of optimized rules to replace home rules needed to patch many weaknesses in WFRP1's game mechanics. I wanted those rules to stay simple while being more efficient and believable, solving for instance

the Naked Dwarf Syndrome. I also wanted WFRP to be in line with WFB6, allowing easier use of both systems in the same campaign.

Among the few aspects needing improvement were the starting characteristics for Elves and Dwarfs, the rules for weapons and armour, and arcane and divine magic (both background and rules). The bestiary also needed a complete review since some creatures were not strong enough to face a character with some advancement.

I feared complex game mechanics that would be bad for roleplaying and storytelling. I also feared a divine magic system giving too much room for divine actions, somehow reducing the feeling of fighting against all odds. I also feared not enough changes in rules and background would be set in place to please old WFRP fans.

### **Cover Page, Art and The Introduction**

One of the first tasks of a rulebook is to inspire. Rules and background information are the key to a roleplaying game. However, art, colour, layout are part of the beauty and pleasure of playing or leading a roleplaying campaign. In WFRP2, the art is simply great! The cover page gives us the taste of the amazing battles to come and the hard cover brings quality one step higher. Inside, as you let your eyes run through the pages, the colours and images are just perfect. Just enough of them to inspire, while giving room to the most needed rules and background.

The introduction sets the mood of this grim world of perilous adventure. It starts with an inspiring short story written by Dan Abnett (Gaunt's Ghosts) in the ruins of Wolfenburg in Ostland, giving us the mood of the Warhammer world after Storm of Chaos (a war that destroyed part of The Empire). Then it takes a few pages to welcome us, explain what roleplaying is and about the Warhammer world. It is short and well written, just enough to know where we are going and help new players to step into the game. The chapter leaves us with an inspiring lecture by Fra Albus Dominus, Priest of Sigmar, again setting the mood of a dangerous but exiting world.

So far, WFRP2 is right on track. Thirteen pages to set the mood and 243 pages more to give us the rules and tools needed to play the game.

### **Character Creation**

Chapter Two deals with character creation. The creation process is straight forward. All you have to decide is your race (Human, Dwarf, Elf or Halfling), then you build your character step by step from one random table to another. There is now only one random table for the starting careers. Both new players and old ones will discover the interesting Distinguishing Marks Table, another tool to shape a starting character into something more than a token with characteristics attached to it. I found this character creation process one of WFRP2's strengths compared to other game systems where creating a character can be a painful and slow process, especially when you are new to the game.

In general, the character creation process makes a number of small improvements to the game, just enough to build a stronger system while keeping the game simple. Among the few changes from WFRP1, the Leadership and Coolness Characteristics have disappeared from the character profile, Initiative is replaced by Agility and there is a different way of presenting the profile, on two lines, including the number of Fate Points and Insanity Points. Another improvement is the change of the starting profile for Elves and Dwarfs, who have been toned down. This makes sense to me because PCs start at a young age and the characters are all in their starting career (still far away from the veteran fighters we see in the armies of the Warhammer World). The starting careers are also a fairer, offering roughly the same number of starting talents and skills for all careers. There are also random tables for names, a good thing for players like me who have a lot of troubles with names (the 'character pack' sold separately gives even more choices and is very useful for GMs like me). Skills are now totally up-dated and split into Talents and Skills. I

discuss this later in the review. In general, character creation makes plenty of small improvements that, for me, make the game stronger.

The first weakness I see is the lack of rules for ageing (not covered elsewhere in the book either) that you would expect from a rulebook. This will require home rules and GMs are left without guidelines for developing their old NPCs.

The second weakness that I see is the sentence: 'All Player Characters have one thing in common: they are adventurers.' This is often the case but this is not the only way to play the game! Adventurers can deal with Chaos cultists but there are other characters who can, and are in fact more likely to do so: for instance a group of Witch hunters, Templars, priests of Sigmar and flagellants. Adventurers can go from place to place trading goods while fighting with Beastmen and thieves along the way, but so can real merchants with boatmen, scribes and marines. Similarly, in city adventures all PCs can have a real job and have to face extraordinary events once in a while without being adventurers. WFRP2 has all the necessary careers for creating sea-going adventures or adventures in the imperial armies where PCs are not simply adventurers but part of life of The Empire. This aspect of creating scenarios for groups of careers was not developed in the first edition and hopefully will not be ignored the second edition.

### **Careers**

A good roleplaying game must give to the players exciting characters to roleplay. WFRP1 succeeded in giving us very interesting starting careers. They were often unusual careers like Beggars, Rat Catchers or Watchmen. These careers allowed us to create strong backgrounds for the characters we played. This, along with the permanent injuries and insanities, kept our characters colourful. In this regards, WFRP2 does not fail. It offers most of the basic careers we had in WFRP1, but sometimes grouping similar careers into one template - which is a good thing - and offering us many new interesting careers like Envoy, Hedge Wizard, Kislevite Kossar, Zealot and many others.

Immediately following the starting careers are the advanced careers. They offer many new careers and include six different templates for the three advanced levels of wizardry and the three levels of priesthood. Among the new careers presented, I loved Veteran Fighter, Flagellant, Ghost Strider and Vampire Hunter. There are also Crime Lords, Cat Burglars, Courtiers, Guild Masters, Noble Lords, Politicians and Stewards, filling some interesting blanks in the fabric of the Warhammer World.

Globally, the careers in WFRP2 keep the spirit of WFRP1, adding a few careers and deleting some others (like Druids). They come with a wider range of skills and talents and in many cases they bring us closer to the spirit and careers we see in WFB.

I love Dwarf characters and was pleased to see some careers fitting this race such as Miners, Runebearers and Shieldbreakers (replacing the Tunnel Fighter career). On the other hand, seeing the Troll Slayer career as a starting career is a bit sad. I prefer Slayers to have a more defined past.

The character sheet given in the rulebook is fine for starting careers, but soon won't be enough for advance careers. Hopefully, BI will develop other optional character sheets that will be available for download or in the improved character pack.

One change in the advancement rules is to use characteristic advances in steps of 5% instead of 10%. This is an interesting way to give more diversity between the careers while keeping the fun of seeing your character getting better every game without the need of huge characteristic advances. Sadly, WFRP2 still proposes many of these very high advances (up to +40%) further increased by skills and talents. This will create unnecessary and ultra-powerful advanced characters. On the other hand, it gives more value to gunpowder weapons to kill those characters who won't be able to use their high

dodging, parrying and striking skills against powerful ranged weapons.

In line with the philosophy of creating scenarios for adventurers, we have a few strange results like the background for battle wizards. You would expect battle wizards to be trained to work for The Empire and you see them required to 'adventure to repay their debt' to a college of magic. Again, this is sad to see that on one side we have an amazing career system providing great roleplaying opportunities and on the other side we have a game philosophy to build scenarios for adventurers working outside their career.

### **Skills and Talents**

Part of the success of WFRP1 was to use skills to give extra backgrounds and resources to the characters. WFRP2 builds on that, proposing more skills, splitting skills into Skills and Talents, proposing a test difficulty table to apply modifiers when facing different levels of challenge. WFRP2 also adds the possibility of getting two extra levels of mastery for skills, giving +10 or +20% to Skill Tests. Talents do not have this option: they cannot be improved. This is really, the only real difference between Talents and Skills. For many old timers, this was already part of our home rules, but WFRP2 updated it and enlarged the number of skills and talents. Many tests are also simplified. For instance, tests like Strike to Stun and Concealment now involve one test from the attacker and sometimes a counter test for the defender, and the GM always has the opportunity to apply +/- 30% modifiers to the attacker and/or defender depending on various situation. Also, a few tests are made differently in WFRP2. For example, Search now depends on Intelligence and not Initiative. For new players, they start with an improved and more developed skill system while keeping the simple game mechanics used in WFRP1.

Another change that we see in WFRP2 is the language spoken by people in the Old World; there is no more such thing as 'Old Worlder'. Now every nation has its own language and there are different levels of language mastery. This can give interesting challenges to PCs travelling the world.

Another aspect that captured my attention is the rules for healing. I would have preferred more detailed rules like the ones presented in Apocrypha Now (first edition) and I feel the rulebook is the place to put such optional rules. On the other hand, it is all part of a philosophy to keep the rules simple and I understand that if the rulebook had to satisfy every specific need of every GM we would fail in this goal. Consequently, for healing we can still rely on the test difficulty table for modifiers or refer to Apocrypha Now for optional rules. Eventually, a book on optional rules detailing examples of modifiers to apply to various tests would be a good thing for the GM preferring to have more guidelines (and less freedom).

### **Equipment**

WFRP2 took its chance to improve all the monetary systems of the Warhammer World. We still have 1 gold crown = 20 shillings = 240 pennies, but the value of the coins now has a better use. For instance, the 'Food per day (average)' for one person now costs 10p compared to the 2gc/day recommended in WFRP1. A mercenary's yearly income is now 20-50gc. The cost of weapons has stayed high, as they should, 5gc for a sword for instance, but the cost of clothing has decreased: common attire costs 1gc, while a soldier's uniform costs 15gc. This means people no longer have to carry trunks of gold to live in the Warhammer World. If you sell a magic weapon for a thousand gold crowns this is a lot of money, justifying a small expedition to find it.

Together, with an updated list of prices, WFRP2 details the effect of quality on items. For instance, an excellent sword (costing 5 gc) gives +5% on weapon skill and is 10% lighter, while a sword of poor quality, costing 5gc, gives a negative modifier of -5% on weapon skill. The weapons and armours also come with a new list of interesting properties and damage modifiers. The armours are also up-dated giving a protection ranging from 1 armour point to 5. Negative side effects of wearing armours are kept low,

but are included in the new rules. Wearing heavy armour (chain mail) gives a -10% to Agility Tests and full plate armour also decreases your Movement by one.

There are a few very expensive items and services like firearms and the cost of travel by coach. These two can have a strong impact on background and roleplaying. Long distance travelling by coach will be limited to very rich characters of the Old World as well as firearms. However, seeing many basic careers with firearms does not seem in line with the new price list of these items.

The total list of equipment and services is long enough to give the basic information to start playing and gives interesting improvements over WFRP1 (mainly weapons, armours and food). On the other hand, the supplement on weapons, armours and equipment to be published during the year will be wanted by most GM to deal with a wider range of needs of both PCs and GMs.

### **Combat, Damage and Movement**

With regard to combat, WFRP2 brings us closer to tabletop games and the D20 system in terms of how rounds are divided and how movement during combat is controlled. WFRP2 brings in concepts like 'free actions', 'half actions', 'full actions' and 'extended actions', with more choices of attack and defence modes like the 'all out attack' giving +20% to weapon skill but removing chances to parry or dodge, to the 'defensive stance' where the defender chooses not to attack but reduces his chances of being hit by 20%. Damage is now decided with a ten-sided dice allowing pretty high damage if you throw multiple '10s' in a row. We still have the Critical Hit Tables with some interesting results like the 'damage to armour' indicating a need for repairs. On the other hand, it is still as deadly to hit a leg as to hit the head. Hopefully, the future GM's pack (not published when I wrote the review) will give us the option of a system where you do not get an instantaneous death with an arrow in the leg.

The chapter also covers many topics like parrying, dodging, healing, Fate Points and 'fortune points'. The latter is a new concept giving to PCs chances to re-roll dice, to parry more than once in a round or even gain extra actions during a round. PCs get as many 'fortune points per day' as they have Fate Points. This is an interesting way to promote the idea that you should do all you can to keep your Fate Points. Also, with the new game mechanics and games where skirmishes occur often this is perhaps required to keep the characters alive.

The rules are very interesting and are a clear improvement to the game. On the other hand, I found the chapter unclear in many parts, having to read many sentences a few times and even to read the Black Industry website for clarification. Some secondary rules for fire, falling and jumping are clearly not the best rules we have seen on the topic. Also, in WFRP1 many players could play without reading the book. With WFRP2, players need to read and understand the chapter on Combat to survive a few battles. A few more pages (and I mean two or three - skipping some short stories and reducing equipment description, for instance, to keep the limit of 256 pages) or more precise descriptions to make things really clear for GMs and players would have been great. Still, I definitively prefer these new rules to the ones used in the first edition.

### **Magic**

Along with many new careers, the second edition brings WFRP into line with WFB6. This is seen by the eight Colleges of Magic, the possible negative side effects of casting spells and the possible impact of the Winds of Magic on the casting. The game mechanics have been totally updated with new spells and rules, including Casting Numbers (difficulty), casting time and optional ingredients.

The game mechanics now includes a Magic Characteristic for every spell caster. This magical power is equal to the number of dices the spell caster can use to beat the

Casting Number of the spell he wants to cast. In the same game mechanics, throwing multiple ones or doubles, triples or quadruples is linked to spell failures, Insanity Points, Chaos manifestations or the Wrath of Gods.

There are many interesting and simple rules for casting while wearing armour, using protective circles, using proper spell ingredients or with a 'channelling' period before the casting. Also, there are now no limit to the number of spells that can be cast during a day (except the higher risk of bad side effects). Old WFRP1 players will also be happy to learn that when they complete their training as Journeyman Wizard they have access to all the spells of their field at no extra Experience Point cost. On the other hand, it is clear that the most powerful spells require a Master wizard or Wizard lord to cast. The same applies for Priests.

WFRP2 also splits magic into various fields specific to the spell casters. These include Petty Arcane spells, Petty Divine spells, Petty Hedge spells, spells specific to every College of Magic, to every Divine Lore, to the Lore of Chaos and to the Lore of Necromancy. Other fields of magic will come with future supplements: lores specific to every Chaos god for instance. Sadly, there is nothing on rune smithing which was one the very interesting aspects of the WFRP1 in Dwarfs: Stone & Steel.

A sad lacking are rules for counter magic. This is part of the fun of WFB and it is sad that we do not see it in WFRP2. In the same way dodging and parrying really brings battle to life, counter magic fills the battles of Wizards with action and surprise. It also gives more reasons to have Wizards and Priests in a team.

Nevertheless, WFRP2 makes a wonderfully good job of bringing in new game mechanics that are stronger and more interesting, while keeping this game mechanics simple and fast.

### **Religion and Belief**

The chapter on religion is the first chapter of the rulebook where background is the main issue covered. Besides the skills and talents that Priests of a given order receive, there are practically no other rules. On the other hand, the chapter presents much useful information for roleplaying in The Empire.

The chapter describes the gods of The Empire, talks about the temples, the religious festivals and about The Empire's inhabitants' beliefs and way of life. The most interesting part deals with religious orders. It gives us the update on how the main religious orders of The Empire work, where the leadership of these orders is and who are the prominent figures of the orders.

The chapter is well written and is a good reference for characters roleplaying Initiates and Priests.

### **The Game Master**

Needed for all Game Masters new to the WFRP world and useful for old ones too, the GM chapter introduces us to the art of game mastering. It gives us golden rules on how to run campaigns as well as describing classical plots for WFRP scenarios. The chapter also gives Game Masters advice on how to use Fate Points, roleplay magic and give experience points.

A very interesting part of the chapter is on insanity. The new edition presents possible disorders that may be gained by PCs, with all the stress and trauma they will most likely experience during scenarios. Different from the previous edition, these disorders are more oriented towards roleplaying and go far beyond modifiers to the starting profile. Many of these disorders will be a real challenge to roleplay. On the other hand, the rulebook strongly recommends the GM chooses the disorder he gives a PC to match the

trauma experienced by the PC and the roleplaying capabilities of the player. A random table is still available for GMs who prefer to use this method.

The Game Master chapter is a fine addition to the rulebook. WFRP is very different from many other game systems on the market and must be played differently by both the GM and the players. The Game Master chapter gives useful tools to help new GMs to step in the Warhammer World.

### **The Empire**

The chapter on The Empire is well written and starts with the story of Sigmar, then moves to the description of the province and politics of The Empire. It describes the four main cities (Altdorf, Nuln, Talabheim and Middenheim), the electoral system and of a few insidious threats menacing the empire (Dark Powers of Chaos, Beastmen, Skaven and the Undead). Then it moves to descriptions of the neighbours and allies of The Empire namely the Border Princes, Bretonnia, the Estalian Kingdoms, Kislev and the Tilean City-States.

I believe this chapter gives a comprehensive update of the new background for The Empire and its neighbours. It can inspire GMs to run many campaigns set in one of these nations or provinces. On the other hand, the chapter does not give enough information for GMs to actually play in these (including The Empire) without creating their own material. It also does not give a lot of information on Storm of Chaos and its impact on The Empire. In WFRP1, this prompted many GMs, not interested by scenarios, to simply design their own maps, background and scenarios either in the Old World or simply in something totally different. WFRP2 promises us a future source book on The Empire, hopefully filled with province and city maps, with distances and things as simple as the general weather during the year and its impact on transportation and trade.

### **The Bestiary**

The bestiary is a small sample of the creatures we can meet in the Warhammer World. It covers some basic creatures like Orcs, Skaven and Beastmen. It also covers common animals and, a new addition compared to the previous edition, a small sample of NPCs like beggars, footpads and town guards.

The bestiary included in the rulebook has only nine pages and the range of creatures covered is much smaller than in WFRP1. This will not satisfy the thirst of fans looking forward to meeting all the monsters the Warhammer world offers. On the other hand, a complete bestiary is now available for WFRP2 and I am among the ones who prefer one book for rules and one book for monsters.

For me, this small bestiary is just perfect. As mentioned, I prefer to have rules and beasts in two separate books. The bestiary nicely complements the core rulebook giving more background to the beasts and more of them for PCs to meet in battle.

Also worth mentioning is a really good improvement with regard to the beasts themselves. This improvement is the systematic use of many skills and talents for beasts. This gives them more background and GMs more tools when beasts are required to test for various actions like climbing, hiding or intimidating.

### **Through the Drakwald**

Through the Drakwald is a small scenario to introduce players and Game Masters to the Warhammer World after Storm of Chaos. PCs have to journey with a group of refugees from the ruins of a small town to the city of Middenheim. During the scenario they will travel through a devastated land that suffered much from the war against Archeon, Lord of the End of Times. Telling more would give away some of the surprises during the scenario.

As a general critic of the scenario, I can say it is a simple and well written scenario, perfect for getting familiar with the game mechanics and the new background at the same time. The context of refugees getting together after the war to travel to a safer place is also perfect to bring together different characters with potentially very different background and careers. It is left to them, after the scenario, to find reasons to stay together and perhaps enter the Path of the Damned campaign trilogy.

The challenge level of the scenario is low. Since this is an introduction scenario for a wide range of players with new rules to learn and absorb, a simple scenario is surely the best way to start. Still, I did not like the main plot and the background of the main major NPC. Telling what and why would give away the plot so I will let GMs and players make their own opinion on the scenario.

### **Conclusion**

WFRP2 does an amazing job building game mechanics that are complete, strong and simple. The careers, the skills, the combat mechanics and the magic system are all wonderful improvements that will work side by side with the new background to give us amazing gaming sessions.

The second edition also succeeds in bringing WFRP into line with WFB, creating easier and wonderful opportunities to mix the two game system.

I believe WFRP2 has all it takes to stand tall in the RPG world and be a serious alternative for the D20 system.

Consequently, my past home rules will have a valuable place in my heart, but will be replaced with pleasure during my game sessions by this improved, strong and simple new game mechanics.

The only major weakness I see has more to do with the future scenarios than the rules themselves. As discussed, it is sad to see the rulebook clearly suggesting a philosophy where player characters are adventurers, a philosophy working against a career system so brilliantly built. On the other hand, since this has nothing to do with rules, Game Masters will be able to build scenarios fitting specifically to the careers of their players and, let us hope, it is also a philosophy that can be changed in the future published scenarios.

Long life to WFRP2. It is the end of all hope and fears for the fans, but only the beginning for the player characters.