



WFRP2

Published by Black Industries

Reviewed by John Foody

Just short of WFRP's twentieth anniversary, the second edition arrives. WFRP's rich heritage and diverse background, including WFB and Warhammer fiction, was a dream starting point for Green Ronin. However, it was also a potential burden. It was always going to be interesting to see what happened.

A review of WFRP2 has to treat it as a game in its own right. However, it would be wrong to ignore what has gone on before. A second edition should always be an improvement on the first.

It is also fair to say that I come to the review with preconceptions, as anyone does. WFRP1 had its weaknesses but its strengths drew me in. What I hoped for from a new review was twofold. Firstly, I hoped for an improvement in the rules. The original rules evoked the game's world brilliantly. No RPG can be perfect - what you want is a spirit, style and template to allow you to enjoy the game, whichever way you choose to play. Secondly, I hoped the background would be more Enemy Within rather than Warhammer Fantasy Battle.

The 256 page rulebook is well laid out and clear, with a lot of text squeezed in. The art is a real mixed bunch. Some is good, the career pictures being particularly strong. However, some of the illustrations are amongst the worst in WFRP. It is competent fantasy art but has nothing that makes it WFRP. Others are just poor.

Introduction

Dan Abnett's initial short story is atmospheric and generally works in introducing a post-Storm of Chaos world. It does also seem a little long. There follows a standard "What is Roleplaying?" section, which seems okay, but half-hearted. Much more interesting is in-game background on the Empire.

Character Creation

Character creation is the same as WFRP1. There have been changes to the profile, the main ones being the division into primary and secondary Profiles and loss of Cool and Leadership.

There is certainly much more equality in the races, with the racial advantages of Elves and Dwarfs largely removed. Only Humans and Halflings have random starting skills, meaning Dwarfs and Elf characters always have the same starting skills.

The Ten Questions (What is your family like? etc.) you are asked to think about for your character are pretty good.

The name generator is pointless, a waste of space for what is. There are also no

suggested surnames. There does seem to be a fondness for tables. We have a Weight table, when we could have a Dwarf: 1d100+90 lbs kind of rule. One table which is interesting is the Star Sign table, especially the associated sayings. This is the first of a number of places where the Old World is brought to life through the rules.

Careers

The rules for changing careers and the like are all nice and clear, as are the career details themselves. The different paths work much better now. The basic careers have largely been balanced out in terms of advances and skills. I can understand why this was done - it helps balance the game and keep PCs and NPCs on more equal footing. However, from a background point of view it doesn't evoke the random feel of the world. I'm not sure why every career should get +2 Wounds either.

Some of the new careers are worthwhile. Those like Bailiffs and Barber Surgeons help build the background of the Old World. However, the loss of certain careers is a shame. Container careers, like Burgher, are largely flavourless. The loss of individual careers, although mentioned in passing in the text, removes some of the Old World feel. The careers were always more than careers, they helped fill out and bring the world alive. Half the world's peasants are now Bowyers, and the other half can drive a cart. Some careers also seem a little odd. For example, we have "Bone Pickers", which seems like a sort of (now defunct) beggar. Rather we are later told beggars should use the Bone Picker career. We also have a Valet and a Servant career, when they are pretty much the same thing.

Overall, the careers are pretty good and there are a few nice touches like the fact that Journeyman Wizard's have to pay back their training fees.

That is not to say there are no problems. The advanced career of Champion is terribly bland. It just feels like a power career without any real place in the background. Torturers are now called Interrogators. Priests remain much too generic. The advances here are unsuitable for a Priest of Shallya.

It is also clear from trappings that Firearms are more prevalent. However, the prices of these don't reflect this. Some basic careers, especially those with firearms, start with a hugely expensive set of trappings. A Roadwarden gets near 600 gc worth of equipment; more than the yearly pay of a noble. One oddity in the trapping is that everyone starts with 2D10GCs. It would have been better to have varied this based on career.

One thing that niggles is the use of "%" in the advance profiles. So a Bounty Hunter gets a +10% advance to BS. Which isn't really +10%, but rather +10.

Skills & Talents Skills have been divided into Skills and Talents, with Skills subdivided into Basic and Advanced skills. Skills can be taken multiple times, which is a good thing. The effectiveness of this is tempered by the fact that to do so you are likely to have to enter another career. Works well for PCs, but not so for NPCs. Basic skills are those everyone has some chance of using, for example Swim. Talents are natural aptitudes or special abilities. Good in principle, it isn't really carried through. So while it makes sense that you could learn Rapid Reload should you suddenly be able to become lucky?

The chapter contains descriptions of what the Skills and Talents do and it is clearly laid out and simple to follow. Night Vision hasn't been sorted out from first edition, so your friendly Skaven and others still need a torch to get around their tunnels. There is also a number of monster-only talents. For example, Undead is a talent, which sounds odd at first, but makes a lot of sense. Forming part of the creature profile it is a simple way of understanding what rules affect it.

Equipment

Nominally, the equipment chapter, you can also find various rules here, including some needed for combat. It is all a bit of a mess. I liked the table of average incomes for the Empire's population which is followed by rules for finding items dependent on population size of a town and like. Not bad generally, but needs to be used with some common sense. The list of slang for various coins is a very nice touch.

The concept of Basic Armour has also been approached. Aimed at new players, it is actually simplifies the rules and works well for opponents and the like. Advanced Armour rules are the same as first edition, although they are clearer.

Buried in the equipment tables is a couple of items that really do not sit well. Firstly we have the Lucky Charm - as common as a Crossbow and potentially as useful as a Fate Point. Secondly there is a Religious Relic. Cheap, they give a bonus to dealing with others, but there is little indication of whether they could be faked, whether that matters, how others know, if you can wear one for each god.

Everything has been given a clear description. Prosthetics are done well, as are rules for buying items of quality other than average.

Combat, Damage & Movement

Combat remains largely the same in principle. There are two important changes. The first is that the concept of actions has been introduced. One action or two half actions, can be taken in a round. For example, an archer could Aim his bow (half Action) and then fire (half Action) or else Fire and Reload.

In principle this works, but as always needs to be approached with a bit of common sense. One area where the designers have got things confused is where multiple attacks are involved, especially when a character is also parrying. It isn't intuitive and makes things far more complicated than they should be.

The second major change is that a D10 rather than a D6 is rolled when damage is done. This is reflected somewhat by the increased Wounds characters now have. Combat does seem slightly more dangerous before, although there is less chance of additional damage (now called Ulric's Fury). However, there are a number of factors to parry this. Firstly characters can, if they choose, Parry each round. Healing is much more accessible than previously and Fortune Points have been introduced. Fortune Points, allow those with Fate Points to roll certain rolls again. I can understand the reasoning behind this but I disagree with it. Fate Points already make PCs different.

Combat has become more tactical and more complicated. This results in longer combats than in WFRP1.

Magic

The most derided element of WFRP1 gets a thorough overhaul. As in WFRP1's Realms of Sorcery, we now have The Winds of Magic. Magic Points have been replaced by casting numbers. For each point of the Magic Characteristic, the character gets to roll 1D10 to reach a casting number. Fireball, for example, needs a 12 to be cast successfully. In effect Wizards and Priests can cast unlimited spells. However, if they roll 1 they may gain an insanity point. Worse, if they roll doubles or trebles they can suffer Tzeentch's Curse. This can produce a number of effects from bleeding noses to death.

While I like Tzeentch's curse, I don't like the Clerical equivalent. Wrath of the Gods is far too arbitrary. It should have been at least partly based on faith and service to a god.

Ingredients are no longer needed to cast spells. Instead they add a bonus to the casting. This is a much better way of using ingredients.

The spells themselves are divided into different areas. Mainly combat related, they appear to be generally balanced. I don't like the fact we now have, for all intents and purposes, a Detect Lie spell.

Religion & Belief

This is one of the strongest sections in the book. Again, the incidental background material is strong. The material on the gods themselves is pretty good, although it would have made more sense to keep information on the gods and their earthly temples together.

The information on the Chaos Gods is too brief. As Chaos has taken more of a centre stage, these should have been presented as the other gods.

One major loss is the disappearance of Khaine, outside a brief Elf-related mention. Khaine was the only real evil god WFRP had and as Mórr's brother sat in an interesting theological position. Another loss is the Old Faith. This had an important part to play in the background of the Old World.

The GM This section contains a range of advice and rules, from getting the atmosphere right to insanity. Many of the ideas and advice is okay, and will be useful to those new to WFRP. The advice on the game mechanics is better and would like to have seen more of this.

All the insanities have been replaced by a selection more in keeping with the flavour of the Old World. In themselves they are okay. However, I think there needed to be much more advice on how to integrate them into the game. There is a danger that as soon as an insanity is gained the PC will take on the full effects. Mechanics or strong advice on a descent into a madness would have been a better approach.

More interesting than Tzeentch's curse is the advice in the GM section on what happens when things go wrong. This gives some solid roleplaying advice on the issue. At the same time it feels like the designers suddenly worries that Tzeentch's curse wasn't enough to balance spells.

The Empire

This chapter offers background on The Empire, the threats it faces and its neighbours. The information on the Empire is a broad overview, covering history and politics. However, it doesn't provide much of a feel for the Empire and there is little for GMs to get their teeth into. It would have been better to expand this and lose the even briefer details we get on the countries. The map of the Old World is terrible. Atmospheric, but next to useless, with Marienburg lost between pages.

The Bestiary

The Bestiary is very skimpy indeed. There are only a number of common opponents for fighting, with little information to flesh them out. One nice touch is that we are given a number of common NPCs like Beggars and Gamblers. These are ideal for using as a quick reference.

Despite the scarcity of creatures there are a number of signs that the approach to creatures has changed for the better. Having skills and talents for creatures is a large improvement. It makes clear what creatures can and can't do and rounds them out, making them easier to customise.

Through the Drakwald

TtD is an introductory scenario to both the game and the post Storm of Chaos background. It starts out well enough, but the central plot is pretty poor. It doesn't really know what it wants to be. As an introductory scenario it fails to introduce many of the

rules and concepts of the game.

Others

Chris Pramas' designer's notes are interesting and provide an insight to the design of the game and why certain decisions were made. The Index is very useful, although certainly not complete. The spell templates are just laughable. Again, why? These could and should have been given as free downloads. The character sheet is also pretty poorly designed, with the fact that there is nowhere to write current wounds as the worst part.

Conclusion

I remain unsure about the new rulebook. Rules are improved from the first edition, but still heavily flawed. This is an acceptable update of the core WFRP1 rulebook, but book does not feel complete. Across the chapters it feels like samples of sourcebooks to come. This is balanced by the fact that we will see these sourcebooks.

The feel and background of the game is poorer. There appears to be a simplification of the world and firm move towards a more heroic game. It isn't WFB: The RPG, however. The game is much more combat orientated, from careers to artwork. Chaos and the supernatural are much more prevalent now. In some ways this is good, as it recognises the fact that these things affect the world. In other ways, it just means the game is awash with these elements and they become the focus of the game.

There are some excellent bits of background in this book. These are usually in the sidebars of articles, and give an insight into the Old World. Sadly, there are not enough of these.

There are a lot of good ideas here, but they often aren't carried through. It will be interesting to see how the game develops in the supplements.