



Something Rotten in Kislev
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Reviewed by John Foody

Something Rotten in Kislev, the fourth part of *The Enemy Within* campaign, takes the PCs away from the Empire and previous plots. Indeed, it has been accused by many of breaking the flow of the whole campaign. Hogshead have defended this aspect of the scenario, saying, "It shows what's going on in the rest of the World...and it lets things develop in the Empire, out of sight of the characters."¹

Therefore, in many ways, it sets itself up as a standalone adventure. Thus it should be considered on two levels: as a standalone scenario and as part of *The Enemy Within*. Ken Rolston was bought in by Games Workshop as a 'big-name-writer' to appeal to the American market. Graeme Davis, one of the game's original authors, joined him. Rolston was also the writer of *Realms of Sorcery* and *Realms of Divine Magick* (both of which were rejected by Games Workshop, but are currently available unofficially on the Internet). I had GM'ed *Something Rotten in Kislev* some years back and my players and I considered it to be the weakest part of the *Enemy Within*. Re-reading it, I was looking to give it another chance and perhaps see where it had gone wrong.

This reprint keeps the same cover and internal art as the original. I don't like the cover picture but the interior art is some of the strongest in the campaign.

The book starts with notes on how to introduce PCs, both within and outside the context of *The Enemy Within*. However, the campaign notes are somewhat lacklustre and most GMs will end up having to change them. This is especially true if you're not playing the campaign straight through. However, the device used to get the PCs involved (membership of a certain organisation) is nice and players enjoy it no end.

An overview of the geography, people and history of Kislev follows. Far more could have been made of this although as it stands, there is just enough for GMs to work with. Let's be clear about this: the book clearly isn't a Kislev sourcebook. Most players, however, will want *Something Rotten in Kislev* for the scenarios. There are three in the book, the last two being linked.

The first finds the PCs on the trail of a group of marauding beastmen. The scenario introduces the concept of spirit (not the Vodka type) worship to the players. These encounters are quite atmospheric, but the scenario is let down by a poor ending including some badly thought out NPCs and situations. Yes, GMs can tweak as they see fit, but it's a real shame that they need to in order to salvage the adventure.

The second scenario introduces the Hobgoblin Hegemony, providing an interesting slant on goblinoids. They are given motivations and personality other than that of psychotic children, as so often shown in other Games Workshop literature. The PCs find themselves thrown into a Mexican stand-off and must play off the opposing sides to achieve their goal. However, there is little opportunity for interaction: players are given little to do except observe the scenery. Again, the climax is a let down, and relies upon the introduction of the second of the book's two 'gimmicks'. This one works better than the one in the last scenario but both remain just that: gimmicks. However, to an extent, weaknesses in this scenario can be forgiven as it is intended as a scene-setter for the final part.

The third and largest scenario involves sending the PCs on a spying message to the rogue town of Bolgasgrad, which has declared itself independent from Kislev. The central idea is strong but it is poorly executed. More could have been made of the various dilemmas that face the players, but is all sacrificed in favour of a poor dungeon bash. Indeed, once more, the ending is very weak. There are elements in this scenario that really should not have been allowed past the editors. There is only one realistic outcome to the scenario, despite the writers' notes, and it will leave players distinctly annoyed. The book finishes with some recommended experience rewards, some pregenerated characters and the player handouts. The characters aren't too bad and could be quite useable as NPCs. The player handouts are adequate, and fulfil their purpose. However, these are mixed up with 'GM's reference sheets'. A pointless idea - these should just have been placed in the main text of the book.

Overall, *Something Rotten in Kislev* is a disappointment. It has lots of good ideas, but too few are carried through well enough to really work. Reading the scenario brought to mind a comment made by Phil Gallagher, described the author as "Ken 'Way-Too-Many-Ideas' Rolston."²

A number of interesting and well set-up moral ambiguities are raised, but the PCs only get to watch; there's little opportunity to get involved. Indeed, players are likely to feel somewhat helpless and dragooned if the GM isn't careful. Feeling like tourists does not make players happy. The Russian storytelling tradition of immortals is alluded to, but it's not made to fit within the scenario itself. This highlights another problem. There is also far too much exotica for my tastes. Among some overpowered magic items, there are even truth potions. Ugh!

If you intend to run *Something Rotten in Kislev*, you will need to be willing to work on it. It is not a scenario that should be run without considerable deliberation as to the outcome of certain situations. This is especially true if it is being run as part of an ongoing campaign, not least because the inevitable outcome for the PCs will involve follow-on adventures or high-powered, specialist support to avoid making the remainder of the campaign unplayable.

In summary, re-reading *Something Rotten in Kislev* has not changed my opinion of it much. It stands better as a standalone scenario. Certainly, it remains the poorest of *The Enemy Within* adventures, and there seems little reason to count it as part of the campaign. With the planned rewrite of the Empire in Flames, we can only ask why *Something Rotten in Kislev* wasn't given the same treatment.

¹ Hogwash 4 "What's up with *The Enemy Within*?"

² Warpstone 10 "Interview with Phil Gallagher".