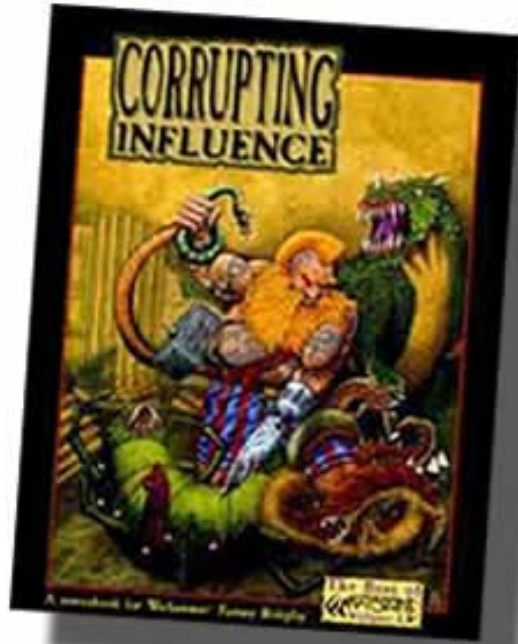


Corrupting Influence

There are a number of Warhammer worlds. The ever-changing world of WFB, the 'traditional' world of wfrp, a subject of some controversy among many wfrp enthusiasts, and a myriad different worlds in wfrp campaigns across the world. The Warhammer world of the fanzine Warpstone is one that has influenced many of these. Although the magazine is officially unofficial, being published by Hogshead gives it some authority.



Corrupting Influence is a compilation of the best bits from issues 1 to 9 of the magazine, spanning two and a half years or so from 1996 to 1998. In my collection, I only have Warpstones from issue 10 onwards; therefore, this book is pitched perfectly for me. The steady growth in popularity of the magazine has led to these older issues being difficult to find and expensive to pick up second hand. This is presumably why someone thought it might be a good idea to produce this sourcebook.

The volume is 128 pages, perfect bound. It looks just like any other wfrp product from Hogshead. But, it seems that this is not a wfrp product. The famous logo appears nowhere, and the words 'Games Workshop' only make an appearance where it is explained, in the small print, that the wfrp trademark is used without permission. This seems to me to be a tangled web that requires some sort of explanation. You won't find one here.

The cover features a troll slayer slaying a variety of nasties, none of which are trolls. The picture has grown on me. When I first saw it, I wasn't too impressed, but familiarity had bred the opposite of contempt. Perhaps the composition is slightly strange, but it is well drawn and depicts an exciting scene that is iconic of a Warhammer world, if not my impression of the Warpstone Warhammer world.

The internal artwork is mixed. Some of it is excellent, some good, and to my mind, a few of the pieces are just poor. There are typos throughout the book, and the impression I got, while not keeping count, was that they average about one per page. I spotted none that were ludicrous or intrusive, and were mostly a missed word here, or a misplaced one there. These things annoy some people. The general quality of the writing is excellent, throughout.

Warpstone magazine has a certain feel, it's dark and it's dirty, and I am glad to say that that feel has been carried over to this compilation. Whatever page you are reading, you know you are reading Warpstone. This is appropriate because you are certainly not reading a wfrp product licensed by Games Workshop. I, for one, will be photocopying the Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay logo and gluing it to the front of my copy.

Corrupting Influence is divided into several sections, 'The Game' offers advice on GMing and role-playing and adds a bit of gossip. 'Background' deals with rules, general and specific, and

some other stuff. Fiction comprises of a single short story. Scenarios covers traditional scenario formats and also brief hooks and other stuff. It seems that some of the background, 'Low-Life on the Highway' for example could have been included in the Scenarios section, or some of the Scenarios, 'The Greys' for example, could have been included in the Background section. This only serves to illustrate the diverse nature of the articles in the book. Finally Miscellany includes player handouts from the Scenarios and a very useful index of all the articles of Warpstone 1-9. Many of which can be found on the web. As you have found this article, I am presuming, you do not need to be told where to find those. It seems that some of the articles have been slightly revised to take into account some of changes made to some of the Warhammer worlds since they were written.

The Game

The first article is entitled 'Fighting Chaos: Why Bother?' This sounds flippant but is a very good question, fundamental to any wfrp campaign, and belongs at the start of the book. I was naively expecting this to be answered here. But instead the question is discovered to be rhetorical, and the answer is therefore, 'don't bother'. Still, the article brings up worthy points that need to be considered.

'To Fight or not to Fight?' is another good question. Nearly every player of nearly every role-playing game needs to read something like this. The article spells out some other options to the ubiquitous RPG massacre, though, for me, does not go into quite enough depth.

'Volatile Magick' explains that "To put one's faith in Magic is to put one's faith in Chaos". This is clearly good advice and this short article begins to discuss some good ways of making sure that wfrp players do not take their magic weapons lightly. The 'golf bag' syndrome of other role-playing games should never materialise in wfrp.

If the first three articles can be summed up simply then 'Be careful, avoid conflict and don't trust magic' might work. This, which is surely not coincidental, is the philosophy that separates wfrp from some other fantasy role-playing games. I like the way Corrupting Influence has set its stall out in this regard, and is a feature of the Warpstone Warhammer world, if not most Warhammer worlds.

'The Secrets of the Warhammer Artists' is a small piece describing some of the in-jokes made by artists in the pre Hogshead days of the wfrp. Gossip like this is always a good thing, but sits oddly in a sourcebook, somehow.

Background

A series of Templar articles appeared in Warpstone and these have been compiled into the 'Holy Knights, Pagan Days' section. The Templars is a subject close to the hearts of many mediaevalists and its omission from wfrp canon was begging to be filled. Corrupting Influence does this beautifully and no campaign should now not include at least some of the ideas set out here. Included are rules and background for Sigmarite Fiery Hearts, White Wolves, Myrmidian and Manann Templars. The article starts off with a brief history of Templars in the real world. As well as meaty background, the temples mentioned above are given full career profiles. Finally there is a section covering Temples from minor cults and non-human Templars. I believe this was the most popular series in the original Warpstone magazine, and the 28 pages given over to the subject here, might (unless you are a poor student, perhaps) be worth the purchase price of the book alone.

'Low-Life on the Highway' discusses road travel in The Empire, intending to give the foundations for making every journey interesting in and of itself, sometimes a difficult trick to pull off in RPGs. Inns, way temples, shrines, toll booths, coaches, entertainers, caravans, vagrants, pedlars, highwaymen. the list goes on, are discussed. The ideas can easily be used for river travel, too. This is a very good article for those requiring a bit of inspiration to brighten up (darken?) those tedious days on the road.

'Disease in warhammer' sets up Shallya and Nurgle for their endless conflict waged across the human immune system. It starts with a history of the study of disease, through Araby and Remas, (and even further afield) to the empire. It also includes a comparison chart for the four cardinal fluids, which acts as a handy buzzword generator, and is a small good thing. After discussing treatments and cures it gives a huge five page listing of diseases, ready to be inflicted on your players. Being slightly squeamish, I felt better skipping some of this section. It's nasty stuff.

'A gentleman's guide to Marienburg' is a player's guide originally designed as an eight page, A5 pamphlet. This could be recreated with careful use of the scanner/photocopier. Though I generally don't like giving the spines of my books that sort of treatment. Most of the information can be found in the Marienburg sourcebook, which is what you would expect, but the pamphlet, is given colour as it is written from the point of view of an Imperial and scrawled upon by an outraged Wastelander. Any GM bringing his payers to Marienburg should give his players the opportunity to discover a copy.

'Prosthetics' gives rules and descriptions for all sorts of artificial limbs and other prosthetics, eyes, noses and teeth. Included here is, hopefully, more than anyone will ever need to know on the subject.

'Mankind's Last best chance?' deals with witch hunters. It is argued that the stereotype given them in the real world should not apply in a fantasy setting where witches do, in fact, exist. This is a point often overlooked throughout the Warhammer worlds. Ideas for playing rational and sympathetic witch hunters and a discussion of various fraternities and organisations are given.

Fiction

Although Warpstone features some fiction in almost every issue, only one short story is included here, 'The Final Adventure of Ursula Urjingraad'. It is just four pages, and sits uncomfortably, alone in the middle of the book. As fiction is a matter of taste, I will not review it here, and I might actually read it one day.

The Scenarios

The scenarios section comprises eight articles that run to over 50 pages. Not all are straight adventures, in the traditional mould.

'A Hundred Years of Trade' is not an adventure but an introduction, with history and background, to a wealthy and influential trading house. The company is run by a deliciously evil NPC. Though only two cameos are given, the piece works so well that you'll have a dozen more ideas of how to use it, before you've even finished reading.

'The Greys' deals with an interesting band of outsiders dedicated to protecting mutants and others suffering the whims of the Chaos gods. Ideas are given for introducing the PCs to the organisation, but the strength of this idea is that the premise can easily drive an entire campaign and give meaning to the life of the average wandering adventurer. A short adventure hook is given but this article, for me, was all too brief, given the excellent conceit.

'Cameos' is 5 short adventure hooks. It seems they were designed to give the players moral dilemmas or at least something to think about. 'Rough Justice' has the PCs stumble across some over zealous witch hunters (a stereotype that may have been discredited earlier in the book). 'You Make Your Own Luck' involves one of those pains in the backside NPCs that tempt the PCs to leave them in the middle of nowhere and be well rid of them. 'AWOL' involves tracking down a missing soldier with a good excuse to be missing.

'Save the Village' involves protecting pacifist Half-Orcs, of all things, and was not my cup of tea. But, I might use the same idea with mutants, perhaps, or say a leper colony. This Cameo could also work well as an introduction to 'The Greys' mentioned earlier. 'Flea Circus' brings the PCs into contact with a travelling circus that seems to be the cause of an outbreak of disease. Unlike the other cameos, I cannot envisage how this one might not end in carnage, even with PCs with the best of intentions, unless they are members of 'The Greys', perhaps.

The Eternal Guard

'The Eternal Guard' is an adventure wherein two ancient Arabyan mummified lovers get brought to Marienburg by some explorer archaeologists and separated. The pain of separation causes one of the mummies to go on a killing spree in the great port. The PCs are placed in the middle of this as bodyguard to one of the explorers' lovely, young Arabyan wife. And the adventure admits that its inspiration might come from beyond the 'Warhammer'

House of Horror.

The intro and many other aspects of this adventure are quite linear (although linear can be a good way to present the elements of an adventure and need not necessarily make the adventure so). Strange happenings occur and the clues are not easy to put together. The key to the adventure is probably in the imaginations of the players. Whatever happens a scrap with the mummy is almost inevitable.

I had a real problem with a mummy shambling around a bustling city like Marienburg, without getting noticed. And, as the mummy in the adventure is slightly different to the standard, if I were to run the adventure, I would likely have the physical presence of the spirit of the dead manifest in some other, equally spooky, but perhaps more subtle way.

One hour (to) Morr

This is an adventure set in Nuln, which involves a mad dash across town. The conceit is that a demon has been charged with hunting down the bearer of a paper, that has just fallen into one of the PCs hands. Because the summoning goes wrong, the demon disappears but not before revealing to the party that they have one hour before he returns, how he knows that and why he should tell the players is beyond me, but necessary to the adventure.

The mad dash would probably take some preparation to run smoothly, as it is up to the GM, at least partially, to keep the pace brisk. Some leading of the PCs might be required, but I find

the overall conceit of this adventure to be a bit much? Anyway, the actual chaos cult involved can be used whenever one might be needed.

The adventure also includes the NPC cultist Herr Hintz, who, you may be relieved to know, has no information to give the party.

The Cannon Ball Run

This adventure involves the kidnapping of the wife of an employee of a coach company and the subsequent blackmailing. Although, with the initial clues, the party is given a helpful hand, the scenario is structured in a way that allows them scope and the opportunity to thwart the kidnapers in a number of ways. This is a very nice adventure.

The Missing Children of Regensdorf

In this adventure, a chaotic artefact has found its way to a secluded village with connection to the cult of Taal. Many mysterious and gruesome happenings have begun to occur and it is up to the PCs to piece together the common threads of the weirdness. They should lead nicely, and quite cleverly back to this artefact. The problem presented is immediate, but its solution vague (the clues lots and little), which gives this adventure an interesting pace.

A Buried Past

A Buried Past is a ghost story adventure. One of the PCs (therefore the party) while on a visit to the opera is chosen by the ghost of a young lady to put her soul to rest. A bit of detective work and interviewing will be required to lead to those responsible for her death. Even then, it might not be clear, exactly how to rid the PC of his ghostly nightmares.

Miscellany

The final short section contains the various player handouts and an Index of all articles that appeared in WS 1-9. The Index indicates which issue they appear in and whether they appear in this book, on the Warpstone website or are lost to the mists of time.

Conclusion

This sourcebook, it could be said, is a bit unfocussed. This is not a criticism, but probably unavoidable, given the nature of the compilation. And in many ways, I find Corrupting Influence to be more orderly and consistently themed and styled than Hogshead's two Apocrypha supplements. Given a choice between the three, and despite its unofficial status, I would buy this book first. This tome is a worthy addition to anyone's bookshelf. It supplies food for thought, a myriad of ideas to bring to your own campaigns and lots of meaty adventures and hooks, in the best traditions of certain Warhammer worlds.

Clive