

A Warhammer for a New Millennium: A Manifesto!

by Rev. Garrett Lepper

The purpose of this column is to advocate for a new edition of Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay - not necessarily an entirely new version of the game, but at least a revised and updated version. WFRP has been out for around fifteen years, and the role play industry has changed, I believe for the better, and its important for WFRP to capitalize upon these changes.

A WFRP Second Edition Manifesto

When I first raised the idea of revising WFRP I danced around the subject matter a bit, but the time has come to lay out a manifesto for a new and improved version of WFRP as I had earlier promised. So what I've done is outline some of the changes that I would like to see done for a new WFRP. The following are merely my suggestions of how the game could be improved. Let's start with...

The Cover

Madness! Change the cover? Yes, that cover did generate 95% of WFRP sales. That cover defined (is there any other word for it?) WFRP's *attitude*. It set it apart from the other D&D clones at the time. It captured people's imagination, got them to pick up the book and look inside.

And its time to say goodbye to our friend now. The market has moved on, WFRP has changed, the feel and atmosphere of the game has altered subtly over the years, its time to *refine*, to *redefine* WFRP's attitude. Something dark, something occult, something sophisticated. Not something hack 'n slash but something that hints or suggests of something wicked just below the surface.

Oh, and go ahead and stick the dwarf with the 'hawk on the back of the book if you need to.

Background First – Mechanics Second!

Reverse the order of the book! Put the background first. Bring the world alive, and *then* show them how to live in it. Putting rules first can suggest what seems important in the game – the world shouldn't be an afterthought.

That said, I'm arguing for the book to be divided into background and then rules, but I do not want it so clean cut – I want the background to be present throughout the rules so that no matter what page the GM turns to there will be something there to evoke

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the sense of the world. The book can include pictures that convey a feel of the world, little snippets of prayers, a sample menu at an inn, the price of cattle at a country fair, legends and myths, superstitions, adventure seeds on every page – every page using the opportunity at further fleshing out and developing the world.

Scrapbook Approach

Once again games have grown, and they no longer lay their information out like encyclopedias, but they experiment with different ways of conveying information – and GW has recently adopted this approach with their books – turning the way that the information is conveyed into background itself. The information is presented as adventurer’s notes, maps, myths, and literature of the era.

Career Rewrite

Every career needs to be rewritten – the advances for all the careers are out of kilter. We can all come up with examples of Artisans and Wizards that are better warriors than your average mercenary or soldier, and its time to look at each career and give them more unique and distinctive schemes. Some are simply erroneous but others can use a bit of revision.

Task Resolution

The mechanics of WFRP are woefully behind. When a character attempts an action, there is no distinction between degree of success and degree of failure. A character with a Dex of 30 rolls a 01 and a 29 and the game does not distinguish between that success. When it comes to failure it does however distinguish failure, a roll of 31 and 100 have different effects (Success and Failure WFRP p. 64). Now some rolls in the game provide for shades of distinction but I’m arguing that for all skill and task resolution the game should take into account the degree of success and failure. This has been implemented recently in the Apocrypha 2: Chart of Darkness in the Divination chapter. For an example of what I propose, merely look at the resolution for “Construct Tests” or “Loyalty”. I’m not proposing introducing new rules but rather adapting and extending existing rules to cover the entire game, and drawing the distinctions between failures to successes.

Edit!

This game is partly a D&D clone and it shows. Career Classes, Alignments, and a few other things are part of WFRP and can be excised if necessary, but I see more odious elements more deserving of editing. I suspect that few people make use of “The Random Treasure Table” or the “Wandering Creatures” section. What is redundant is the section on careers at the back of the book, career entries and exits should have been integrated into the career section and the space at the book turned over to some other use.

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Templates

WFRP pioneered this idea, but didn't explore it to its fullest. Its time that WFRP more fully employed its own concepts to the fullest. The champion, minor and major heroes, and in particular the Vampire profile all created the possibility of profiles that could be stacked on top of existing profiles yet this was never fully realized: it could have been extended to skeletons, zombies, and other entities.

Magic Needs Fixing

The magic system needs to be reassessed. The grievances are many, but I'll touch upon a handful. Most egregious is the absurd experience points necessary for wizards, and in particular specialists, to advance up levels. The experience point costs therefore need to be adjusted.

The magic point test rules are quirky and unnecessary and add little to the feel of magic in WFRP. They also penalize the lower level wizards who are often quite underpowered.

Specialists should perhaps be removed, they are after all relics of earlier WFB systems where every wizard was able to at least call upon some battle magic. I think however that Wizard's Apprentices should be allowed to move into other level one careers without ever becoming Wizards.

Advance profile changes should be created, there is little reason for all the various wizards to have the same profiles.

Fix the Bloody Naked Dwarf

The breakdown in game mechanics is nowhere more important than in the relative dominance of the Toughness trait in the game. Through fate or design it is possible for player's to acquire Toughness scores that literally make the character well nigh invincible to nearly any harm, hence the term that has been coined for this phenomenon where Dwarfs wearing naught but their birthday suits are able to sustain more damage than heavily armored ogres, trolls, or even dragons.

Scale

The WFRP system relies partly upon a 1-10 scale that provides a pretty limited range. Thus bears are as strong and tough as many humans and dwarfs, a snottling as weak as an owl, and a 10 to 15 foot dragon turtle as strong as an orc (the same black orc is as strong as a troglodyte).

To address this issue WFRP needs to institute some sort of scale rule that allows larger creatures a small advantage of creatures with the same stats but less size.

Art

As much as I love a book's art, rarely do I think any element of a book requires full page art. You may disagree with me, but I think a half page piece or quarter page piece is a more efficient use of space and full-page pictures rarely have the detail necessary for that size an image.

Furthermore WFRP needs to distinguish itself as a separate entity of sorts – yes it is part of the Warhammer world but its time for all new art. By “new” I don't mean “new” to WFRP, but “new” and unique to all the WFRP line.

Conclusion

WFRP has aged and it shows. Sure it can still keep up with the pack, but I think WFRP should be defining trends and new approaches, not struggling to keep up! I'm not arguing for WFRP to be like other games, but for WFRP to take full advantage of some of the trends that it started, such as its attention to background, its flexibility for character development, and of course its atmosphere. All of these can be served by reexamining and redeveloping the game to fully attain the potential that it has defined for itself.

-- by Rev. Lepper