

WFRP: D20

Its War! WFRP vs d20; Career vs. Class

Let me say something controversial: the d20 character is more flexible and better at conveying the feel of the WFRP world than the clunky WFRP mechanic itself. That's right! I said that d20 does WFRP better than WFRP.

Maybe this column wasn't generating enough debate. Maybe I only partly believe the above position. Whatever the point, having said it I'll now defend it.

Remember d20 doesn't mean Dnd. Remember that while WFRP has classes d20 doesn't *have* to. Remember that both games have level based systems. The two tier career system, basic/advanced, have parallels in the d20 class system, base/prestige.

One thing that the d20 system does have is a leveled system where benefits are distributed upon reaching a certain plateau at which at once all the benefits of experience are rewarded upon attainment. This does differ from the WFRP system which is a gradual increase of experience, but the effect is much the same – over time in both systems characters may change careers/classes, learn skills, increase in their ability to sustain damage, increase attributes/profile stats and open access to new professions and experiences.

So why say that the d20 system is potentially better than the existing WFRP system? First, the WFRP system relies upon a class system: Warrior, Ranger, Rogue, and Academic that are artificial distinctions, for example, why is “servant” placed in the “warrior” class? A d20 game can be “classless”. You have one chart that tells which benefits are awarded at which experience point level but beyond that there is no need for any kind of distinction, so the d20 game is not dependant upon an arbitrary system to decide experience point costs.

WFRP also has peculiar requirements: the character's starting career must be completed, but then all later adventuring careers need not be completely purchased, unless one is taking a multi-level career (Druidic Priest, Mercenary Captain, Sea Captain, and Wizard). While seeming flexible, it actually serves as a flowchart where characters enter a career in name only merely to exit into the desired career or to pick up a coveted skill or advance. The consequences is that the career changes are not so much role play opportunities but obstacles to a desired skill, advance, or career exit.

This is not to say that the WFRP career system isn't valuable, but it does however reduce a character's life time experience not to a host of factors but rather one factor: their career. Factors directly ignored by WFRP are the environment they are in, the companions that they travel with, the people they encounter, or the skills and professions of their family and friends. All of these should prove a factor in what skills one has but these are neglected in WFRP. A “labourer” who sails on a ship need not enter the

“seaman” career to pick up a skill or advance that they may have picked up at sea, but the WFRP career seems to require this. A d20 system allows for players to spend a few points here for skills or pick up a feat to reflect their experiences. The WFRP experience system only effectively works within the strict and limited confines within a particular career until another career is embraced.

D20 is a fluid and open system open to various possibilities and recently in the d20 conversion notes for Godlike by Mike Mearls even the d20 combat system is turned into a skill based system for players to invest in rather than a level dependent system. It shouldn't be too difficult for a GM to structure the experience point system so that players can gradually increase in experience so that the strength of the WFRP experience system is integrated into the d20 system.

How could this be done? Well assume that all first level characters have completed their first level and are now buying their way through the second level. As they gain experience point towards completing their next level they gain incremental benefits of their next level, skill points at different increments and hit points or vitality points as the character increases, and as they finally purchase enough experience points to “buy” off the second level they finally gain their feats or other benefits as the culmination of their training.

Even better is porting the entire WFRP experience point system over to D20. Experience systems are not necessarily dependent upon the game system. Award 100 to 200 experience points per level – after every 500 experience points they gain a new level, with every 100 points gained between the levels they gain their incremental perks: skill points, vitality points or fractions of their hit points and upon the attaining the full amount of points to complete the level they finally gain all their new magic points or feats or stat advances requisite to their level.

In the end what you have is a incremental experience point system that responds better to the realities of the world and is less contingent upon the awkward mechanics of the WFRP career system which is the primary mechanism for learning – a fallacy in regards to how real characters experience and interact within the world.

Enough talk about careers – over the last couple of columns I've discussed the career and class system. In the next column I'll demonstrate how the d20 system can duplicate the dirty and dark atmosphere of the WFRP world – perhaps maybe even better than WFRP does!

-- by Rev. Lepper