

Warpstone 19

Reviewed by Rev. Garrett Lepper

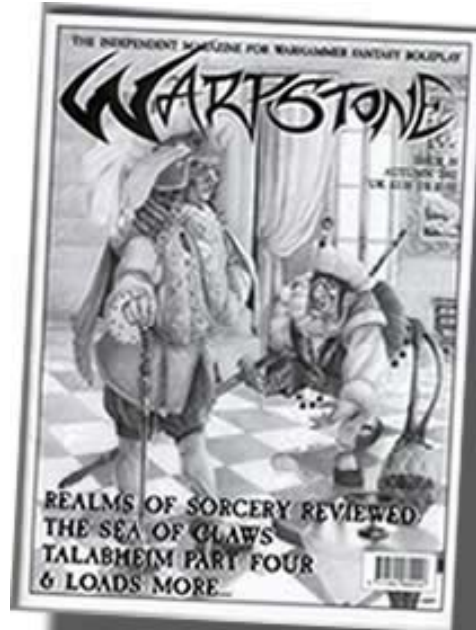
This month's *Warpstone* has a slight 'Dwarf' theme, featuring two articles on Dwarfs as well as the usual: The Correspondent, reviews, Warpstone Fragments, and the continuing Talabheim articles.

Review: Realms of Sorcery

Warpstone begins with a review of *Realms of Sorcery*, and a mixed one at that. The review is measured and comprehensive and worth reading.

Review: A Private War

This article is a welcome addition as there has been a lot of discussion about Tim Eccles' *A Private War*, a self-published non-licensed *WFRP* product. There's been little firm detail regarding this product previously, but this is another excellent review that helps inform the reader. Ordering details are provided as well.



Warpstone Fragments

The usual *Warpstone* blurb for their new release *Corrupting Influence*, mini-reviews for marginally applicable products, and an unnecessary superficial review of the *Lord of the Rings* movie. Sadly, any mention of *Strike to Stun* is absent from Warpstone Fragments, quite an oversight on their part.

The Correspondent

In my opinion, this issue's column is a good example of how 'The Correspondent' should be. Tim Eccles' column tackles the issue of language in the Warhammer World and proves to easily be the most rewarding of "The Correspondent" columns. While the article is somewhat casual in style, this is perfectly acceptable in this format and he looks at a number of issues that we have all thought about but never really addressed more fully.

What makes this column excellent is the author's willingness to offer a number of alternatives to the reader and open it up for greater dissection. But I get ahead of myself! The article really begins with the use of accents in the game proper, an interesting discussion although my opinion sometimes differs with the author's. Thought provoking and a useful read for any GM or player.

The article then covers Old Worlder and Classical, covering a number of options and reiterating what little information has already been written upon this officially, a very welcome touch. From there, it progresses into a range of topics, dialects, arcane languages, and the WFRP languages in respect to the real world. The only stumbling point is the “Linguistics” part that seems a bit unfocused and the author’s intent unclear, but maybe I just got hung up on the subtitle. The section on literacy I found particularly illuminating, even learning to my surprise that Humans didn’t develop written script until quite recently. The last thing about the article I would like to applaud is the inclusion of town criers, which is a thoughtful if somewhat surprising addition to an article on languages.

I like the subject, tone, and methodology of the article, and if future articles continue this trend, ‘The Correspondent’ will become one of the most interesting and provocative parts of Warpstone.

Fire in the Hole

The first problem with this article is its title, which I assume was intended to be humorous but really has little to do with the actual article. Setting that aside, ‘Fire in the Hole’ is an interesting concept, bungled in execution: “What of the Humans who live in areas controlled by dwarves?”.

Firstly, this piece is dry and scholarly, filled with an elaborate yet tedious pseudo-history. The “Dawikoni” - Humans under Dwarven reign - are insipid, simply a blend of Dwarven and Human cultures with little complexity beyond that. Rather than focus on cultural details, the article continually resorts to the aforementioned pseudo-history. It seems to me what is missing is a dynamic and contemporary overview of a group of conflicting sets of cultural values. The potential for divided loyalty and culture clash is great, yet this is simply overlooked and instead we have a predictable and uninspired amalgamation. Essentially, this article is for playing Dwarven characters with a Human profile.

A Dawikoni NPC is provided, but rather than tell much of the character’s personality or experiences, most of the description is the NPC’s typical response to meeting a group of PCs. The article improves somewhat in the Adventure Ideas, but the intriguing elements in these adventures, religion differences and heresy, land disputes, and divided loyalties are all things that *should* have been developed to greater extent in the article proper.

Overall this is a disappointing article, focusing more on a needlessly fabricated history and less on culture. Superstitions of these folks, their belief systems, text boxes describing aspects of their culture like the ones in the Talabheim article, and exploring the complexities of the blending of Dwarven and Human culture would have all been welcome improvements. Fortunately this is the worst article in this issue, and the others are considerable improvements.

The Sea of Claws

Once again, *Warpstone* manages to surprise me with an article I never would have thought of, and I should note, a pleasant surprise at that. This is an exceptionally well-written, detailed, and creative yet canny article. The author does an excellent job of drawing upon a number of sources and blending them into a coherent and entertaining whole. Elements of the much-ignored *Man o' War* and its supplement *Seas of Blood* have been cunningly drawn upon and integrated into the document, taking things that would displease the average *WFRP* fan, and by shrouding them in myth and superstition, make them more plausible. Even the dichotomy of *WFRP* and *WFB* Bretonnia is cleverly dealt with, drawing upon and improving both with a well-executed synthesis of the two.

Where should I continue in my praise? I would start with the art, but the map itself of the Sea of Claws is very beautiful and I constantly found myself consulting it as I read along. The art is good, but the article itself is more remarkable for its breadth and depth, covering the physical and climatic features, wildlife, trade, and history. While I am not all that interested in pseudo-history it is very general for the most part and provides a summarised timeline that may have been drawn in part from *Man o' War*, but since I do not own it I cannot confirm this.

Deserving special mention is the bulk of the article on the geography of the Sea of Claws. A bit of an epic undertaking, it covers the coastline from Bretonnia, to the Wasteland, through the Empire, to Kislev and the Troll Country, all the way to the Norse Coast. An ambitious effort to cover so much territory, but to the author's credit the whole area is carefully rendered with particular attention to detail. Rumours, superstition, history, anecdotes, are all given for the various points of interest making for an enjoyable and enlightening read. My only criticism is that the sections of coastline could have been broken up by location thus making for an easier read, or having the locations italicised or emphasized. The article concludes with an example campaign for the Sea of Claws.

I can think of few things written about the Warhammer world as enriching for the setting as this carefully written and artful article.

The Order of the Ram

This continues the 'Dwarf' theme of the issue and this piece is a rather simple and unassuming article on a militant order of Dwarfs that defend the mountain passes and other above-ground Dwarf holdings. While some might be taken aback by the 'goat' companions of some of the Dwarven members of the order, I found the author to be refreshingly unpretentious and merely eager to share his ideas.

I did wonder about a handful of things, such as how the inaccessibility of the lodges created problems for construction, supply, and maintenance, but overall the article was useful.

Talabheim

The Talabheim series continues with instalment four 'A Small Piece of Kislev'. The articles have all been excellent, although the last one was a bit disorganised, but this article is as good, if not better than the previous ones. First and foremost, it is quite evocative and enriching, detailed and compelling. Text boxes abound with elements about local culture and law, and descriptions are offered for local characters.

The article is wonderfully done with one exception; there is a long digression halfway through the article about 'The Vory', a Kislevite crime gang. Its long and extensive treatment midway through the article was very jarring and probably should have been better integrated into the article, or better yet, set off in a text box.

I was a little disappointed in the short treatment of two other districts: Ostenfled and Federhof, each given a paragraph of detail. I would like to see these areas rendered in greater detail, since the *Warpstone* team has proven so talented in its treatment of Talabheim.

This series isn't finished, but already Talabheim has become the most intriguing city in the Old World, even more so than Marienburg and Middenheim - high praise indeed! Talabheim once seemed to have little to offer, but the *Warpstone* team has really endowed this city with deeply rich background, interesting NPCs and locales, and most importantly, an air of mystery.

Making the Cut

The first thing this article has going for it is its clever name, but before I proceed I'll have to remind you of what I thought in my review of the last issue's "Guilds Within the Empire": there was plenty of breadth but not enough depth in that initial column. It was my stated hope that later articles would provide greater detail.

Was the problem of depth remedied? Very much so! It seems to have taken only one issue to get warmed up, and Tim has produced a very informative article on the Medical Guilds of the Empire. One thing that may turn the reader off is the author's digression at the beginning of the article. The first point to be made is excellent: the dilemma of professional surgeons in a world of magic healing. The second point is needlessly distracting, although I found it interesting and agreed with the author's argument. The digressive second point costs the article some of its focus. Transparency and a stating of the author's premise are entirely acceptable, but this seemed to stray too far from the topic.

From that shaky start, the article recovers admirably and pursues some interesting points, most importantly the dichotomy of physician and barber-surgeon and the responsibilities of each. The role of nurses is touched upon, as

well as some details on the interaction of the Medical Guilds and the religious authorities.

The article also clearly outlines the means of joining the guild, how much Guild fees are and a few other topics. Sadly, the services that a Guild provides for its membership, the leadership of the Guild, and the relationship between guild members are sorely lacking. I hope future articles on guilds cover these details. Overall, the article is a success. Some articles are instructive, others inspiring, and this one was both.

The Profit of War

I don't generally read scenarios, I don't GM them and I don't want to read them in case someone else decide to play them, however this one I read due to its placement in Talabheim.

I regretted my decision at the start with its rather brief yet convoluted back-story, although the plot itself becomes readily apparent as one reads the scenario. The adventure revolves around an illegal arms shipment to Orcs, a subject I found mildly implausible although the author wisely provides an alternative.

The above criticism aside, the adventure is a good one, heavily investigative and I found that the author broke from normal conventions and created a dark and open-ended conclusion to the adventure. I heartily recommend this adventure to any that use these adventures and is interested in introducing the players to Talabheim. Lastly, I particularly enjoyed the inclusion of the 'Talabheim Street Life' in the adventure.

The Charge

For me, the worst thing about the fantasy genre is its "literature". I am notoriously critical of fantasy literature, so keep my bias (perhaps, prejudice) in mind when I discuss any kind of fantasy writing.

I was looking forward to this story written by Jody MacGregor, author of some entertaining reviews on *rpg.net*. I didn't enjoy this story: little attention to detail, vague characters making empathizing with them a moot point, and a rather context-less narrative, with no real grounding in the Old World.

Conclusion

This issue of *Warpstone* is definitely worth picking up. No article in it is as great as 'The Trust' in *Warpstone* 18, but overall I found the material in this issue to be better. The reviews were useful, 'The Correspondent' at its best, and 'The Sea of Claws' was a refreshing and wonderful addition. The 'Talabheim' article is as detailed as 'The Sea of Claws' and I found it surpassing even its remarkable predecessors. The first guilds article was not very rewarding, yet 'Making the Cut' is an excellent part of what I hope to be an engaging series. Lastly, there is a

good scenario that fits in well with the Talabheim project. This *Warpstone* issue is as good a purchase as anything published officially by Hogshead.

Stun Factor 7 of 10