Wfrp d20

D20 Deadlier than WFRP
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Overrated: The Lethality of WFRP

Last time, I mentioned that the d20 system can do just as good a job, or even better, of duplicating the WFRP career system, and then I suggested that combat can be just as deadly using the d20 system. Let's see if I can make the point.

First of all, let's put it in its context, and when I mean that, I'm suggesting that the WFRP combat system is not as deadly as it is reputed to be. In fact, combat in WFRP can be quite farcical rather than deadly. Allow me to illustrate:

Start with two humans, angry with each other and drawing their swords. Two typical, standard humans from the bestiary, bitter at each other over some long running dispute. Facing each other, they have a measly 33 percent chance to hit, that is only one out of every three swings. Combat starts. They each miss. And they miss again. And again. And again. Every one in three rounds, one connects, driving their weapon through the others torso... Damage: S3 (d6) - T, so we end up with 3-4 Wounds caused per hit. Later, rather than sooner, odds are both of them will have taken two sword wounds each, both will still be fighting with the same (in)effectiveness, never mind the fact that one has taken a sword wound to the head and sword arm and the other, hit both times in the right leg have no penalties despite their wounds. Its only after the third successful attack that one will bring the other crashing down.

This system gets uglier with unarmed combat. The two have been drinking, dispute, and start punching at each other. If we use the new unarmed combat rules from Restless Dead or Apocrypha Now, they have a -20 penalty to their Weapon skill, so now they hit each other only on a 13 or less. Combat takes even longer, and when a hit does succeed, it does S + d6 - T (-3) damage, so the average damage per successful hit is 0-1.

The two examples above are loaded, but in a deadly game, shouldn't even commoners be able to kill each other relatively easy? Instead, it becomes a bumbling series of misses and critical failures. Of course, characters are able to become more powerful, but when they do so, they often become too powerful. Your average PC should be more powerful and dangerous than a bear - there is no way that a human should be as strong, or stronger, than a ten foot tall bear! And Toughness does much to make the game quite absurd, when a Dwarf or any other for that matter can soak up wound after wound with no repercussions at all.

When a character does fall victim to an attack and is killed, they have a stock of fate points to prevent their untimely death. Thus even this deadly combat takes place with the players knowing that they can weasel out of it should combat turn afoul. A game that

prides itself on its deadliness is curious giving players a deux ex machina to avoid any real repercussions.

Lethality in d20 Games

Alright, so with that in mind, let's look at the d20 system. First count against it is its hit point system. The Wound and Toughness problem that WFRP has pales in comparison to characters with 100 hit points, as characters will have in D&D3e. But remember, D&D3e is not the same as d20! Thus hit points can be reduced in number per level, turned into a Vitality and Wound system like Star Wars for example, or completely done away with: the character's hit points is equal to its Constitution score, and never goes higher (except for the addition of Toughness feats for example).

Thus there are a number of ways around the Hit Point problem. The next problem would be the old Armor Class problem - the fact that a person in plate mail is sometimes impossible to hit, and that armor should instead reduce damage. With the d20 system, we can use a damage reduction system instead - turn the Armor Class bonus into amount reduced by each hit, and this has already been done in some d20 games, like Star Wars 2nd edition for example.

I would imagine the loudest complaints would be about the absence of WFRP Critical Charts. Let's be honest, WFRP didn't pioneer these ghoulish charts, Rolemaster did. And after a while, rolling the same 15 and 16 results over, and over, and over again got tedious. The charts are unnecessary.

Critical hits, or "additional damage" is a neat mechanic in WFRP and it works well. While D&D3e and other d20 games do have a critical hit system, they do not have the elegant "endlessly rolling d6" mechanic that WFRP has. There's no real reason to duplicate this since the d20 system uses a variety of dice.

The D20 system does have something potentially deadlier and worse than any single WFRP rule: the Massive Damage rule (The Player's Handbook p. 129) that states should an entity receive more than 50 points of damage they must make a Fortitude Save (similar to a Toughness test) or *instantly die*. Now 50 points of damage is a lot of damage. But the Dungeon Master's Guide (p. 66) states that as an optional rule, the Massive Death can be made variable based upon size. d20 Call of Cthulhu goes one step further, it makes the threshold 10 - any attack causing ten or more hit points may cause instant death. This variant makes the d20 system far more deadlier than even the WFRP system. After all, damage over ten is quite easy to cause in the d20 system. For those who want a less deadly system, the number could be raised to 15 or 20. Personally, I set the Massive Damage rule equal to the Creature's Constitution.

Making combat just as deadly is another rule from the Dungeon Master's Guide (p. 64) where all Critical Hits will kill. Although there are a few issues with this rule, it can make a game even deadlier. After all, WFRP still requires that a character be reduced to less that zero wounds, be struck again, and get a fatal critical on a table, whereas the

d20 system can arrange that death happens in combat outside the bean counting hit point system.

So what are the ways that the game can be made more deadly through a d20 variant?

Reduce the number of hit points, or remove the hit point increases by level entirely.

Make all criticals instant death criticals.

Reduce the Massive Damage rule to between 10 and 20 or equal to the creature's constitution (and potentially increase the number needed to pass the Fortitude save by).

With these adjustments, the d20 system turns out to be even deadlier than the WFRP's system! So now that I've argued that the d20 system can do a better job at career development and combat, two of the sacred cows of the WFRP community, the arguments against the d20 system are much reduced. After all, the WFRP system's magic system is quite poor and background can be divorced to some degree from the rules or easily duplicated.

What's the Point?

The importance in lethality is not so that a GM can kill the players' off at whim, but to create a sense of fear and significance around violence. Senseless bloodshed is dangerous and to not consider the repercussions of resorting to violence should result in serious consequences. In games where players act out psychotic fantasies with little concern for their own welfare, part of the spirit of the Warhammer World is lost. It is a dangerous place, where horrid and tragic things occur everyday, and to make the player characters above and beyond this robs the game of one of its critical elements.