

FICTIONAL REALITY

Issue 12

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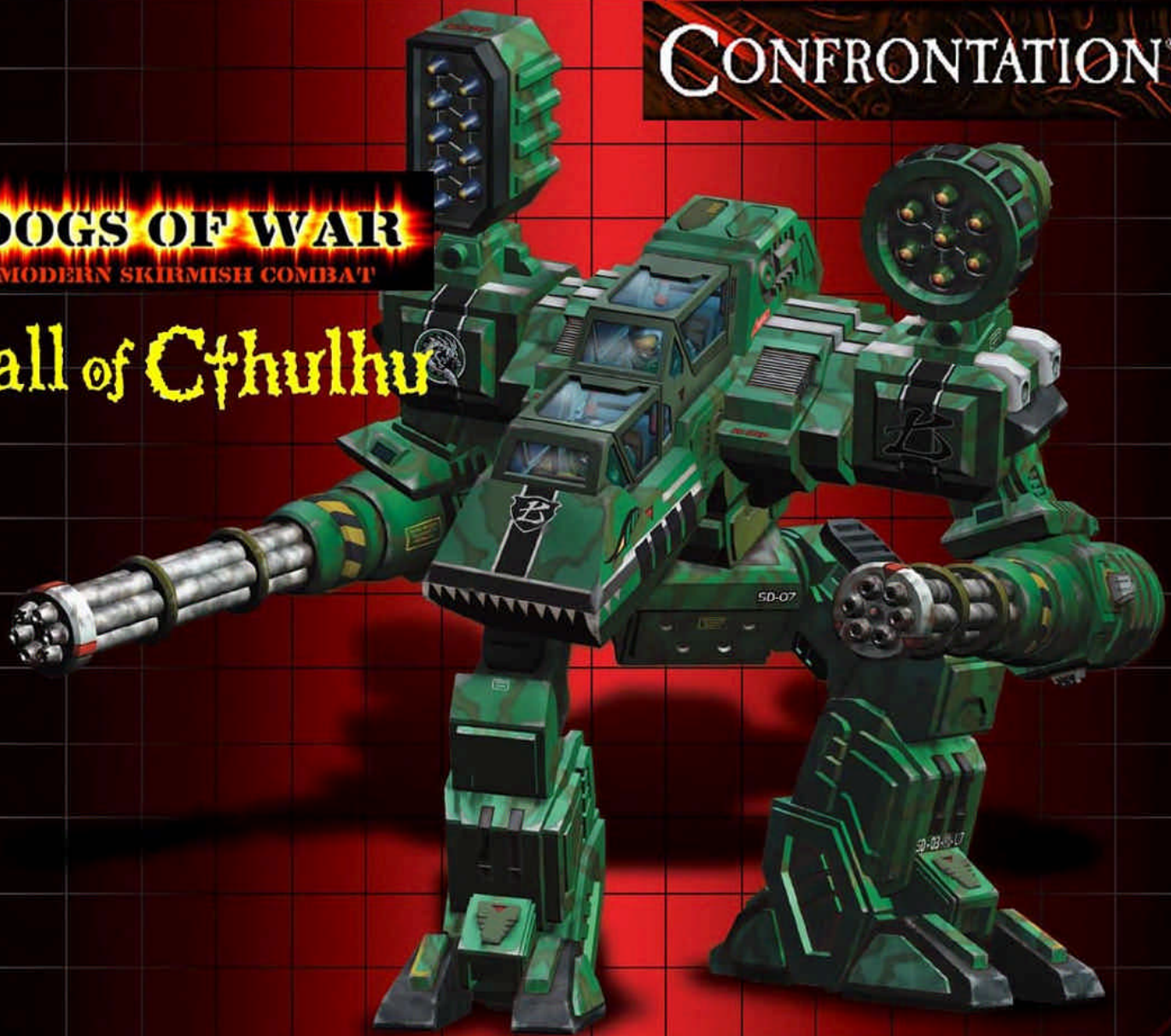
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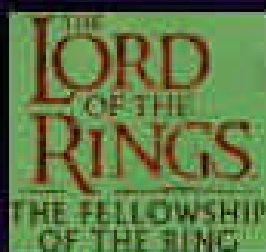
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FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome everyone to the June 2003 edition of Fictional Reality. Right away you'll notice a small difference in the magazine as we've gone to a slightly (and it is really just slightly) smaller font size. We did this to reduce the page count and file size to make Fictional Reality easier for you to get your hands on. We printed out some test pages and found that they were still very readable. If you are reading Fictional Reality on your monitor instead of printing it out and want a larger font size it should be no problem for you to just up the zoom a little bit. Either way, if you'd rather us go back to the font size that's just a bit bigger than this please let us know and we'll take care of it for the very next issue. After all, we're here to put out a 'zine that you want to read. Also, along the same lines, if there is something that you'd like to see more of in Fictional Reality please drop us a line and let us know. The other change is in the Table of Contents. We've listed the article in question, the manufacturers website, and the author of the article all on the same page.

Well, our convention plans are past the decision stage and into some actual planning. If everything goes according to plan we'll be able to meet and hopefully throw some dice with a bunch of you at GenCon when it's held in Southern California in December. Hope to see you there!

Ok, so what have we been up to lately? Well, on the non-Fictional Reality side we've been continuing with our rotating role-playing games. Feng Shui has turned out to be a very enjoyable game and is well worth checking out if you're into the kung-fu action movie kicking ass kind of thing. We're about to start up Mutants & Masterminds and also a one-shot Call of Cthulhu adventure which will likely end up with us dead or insane, but somebody has to keep the body-bag and straight-jacket manufacturers in business, right?

On the miniatures side of things we're still eagerly awaiting new cool miniatures for Warmachine Prime and I'm having a Pavlovian-type reaction any time I hear something new about Ultimate Warzone. I'm toying with the idea of building a 28mm scale version of the intersection of Hollywood & Vine and fighting it out with a ton of figures using the d20 Modern rules, feats, skills, classes and all. Ok, where's my straight-jacket again?

So, what are we looking forward to? Well, personally I'm on the lookout for the Shadowrun action figure game. I didn't like Mage Knight too much at all, but did have quite a bit of fun with Mech Warrior: Dark Age. I'm figuring that I have at least a 50/50 chance of liking it and the large scale figures and ability to kit out your fighters with different weapons really interests me, along with the fact that I can use my living room as a battlefield.

Also, Dogs of War is piquing my interests and you'll see a battle report in the September issue of Fictional Reality. Speaking of my interests increasing, Warlord, Reaper Miniatures upcoming skirmish fantasy game definitely has my attention and it hasn't even come out yet. I haven't seen one bad figure in the releases so far and from what we've heard from the guys at Reaper it should allow you to use any figures that you might have collected over the years. For more insight into Reaper Miniatures be sure to read the Meet and Greet articles that starts off this issue.

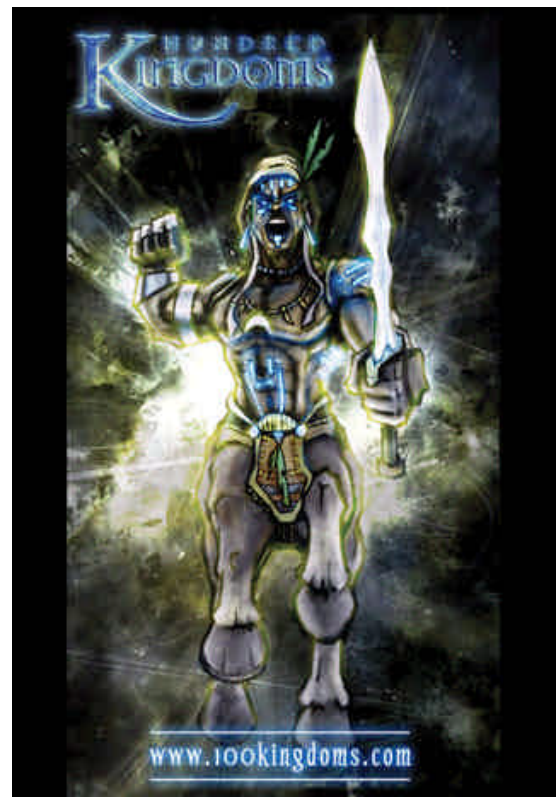
On the role-playing side I'm looking forward to playing some Savage Worlds. It looks like a very open system and could be a lot of fun. Check out Michael's review of the game later in this issue. Also, Armageddon 2089 looks like it could be a lot of war-torn fun in the not too distant future of a world not far off from ours.

Well, hope you all have a great Summer and we'll see you back here in September for another installment of Fictional Reality. What are you waiting for? Turn the stinkin' page and start reading.

Mark Theurer
and
J. Michael Tisdell

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Meet & Greet



On a recent Saturday morning we (myself, my oldest son Bradley and co-Editor J. Michael Tisdell) made the 45-minute trek to the home of the second largest miniature company in the world, Reaper Miniatures. We had been invited by Ed Pugh, Reaper head honcho, to come down and ask question, take pictures and hopefully not make too much of pests of ourselves. On the next several pages we hope to bring you some insight into a real success story in the miniature gaming industry.

Reaper Miniatures is located in Lewisville, Texas (yet another great thing about living in the Lone Star State!) and was a pretty easy drive. The offices and foundry are located behind a non-descript row of offices and stores and takes up several thousand square feet of office and manufacturing space. We were greeted by Ed while wandering around the parking lot and had actually wandered into the foundry instead of the offices by accident. We then headed into where a lot of design work is done (top picture) and sat down with Ed for a good hour or so and talked about the past, present, and future of Reaper miniatures.



Around ten years ago Reaper figures were sold in plastic baggies and were comprised of some old miniature lines that they owned the rights to, such as the Dungeon Dwellers line. Reaper was also doing lots of work casting awards and medals for schools and other organizations, but that could not always be counted on for business. Additionally, Ed and his brother had also put in several years as CPA's in their family's accounting firm. Several years ago when the bulk of the miniatures industry was switching from lead to pewter Ed and company decided to stay with a more lead-based metal (as the switch was not mandatory) and move into casting miniatures exclusively and moving away from the awards business. Of course, now they are all-pewter.

Reaper's star really began to shine with the production of Magic Stry (the magazine) counters and Magic life counters. These were made using the same manufacturing techniques as other awards, which they had long since perfected. These counters used fantasy figures as a focal point and some of them later became part of the Dark Heaven line of figures, which continues to grow with new figures being added to the line on a consistent basis and those that don't sell as well being rotated out of the regular production line. This cap on the production line allows retailers to stock the entire line of figures without having to devote an ever-increasing amount of shelf space to just one manufacturer. This cap also allows Reaper to maintain an order turnaround time of approximately two weeks if specific product is not in stock and immediately available.



The other two pictures on this page are of (center) just a tiny taste of the painted figures that have taken over the Reaper offices. There's about a bazillion (ok, maybe not quite that many) figures there and all of them are painted to a great standard. I was on pins and needles not wanting to touch anything out of fear of breaking it. Of course, to Ed and the rest of the crew it's all old hat and they're picking up figures and moving them around without a worry in the world. Sheesh! Pretty much everything you've ever seen in a Reaper color ad, and lots of stuff you haven't, sits somewhere in their offices.

The bottom picture is a snapshot of Ed's office and yes that's a container of artificial butter flavor popcorn topping. Either Ed really likes popcorn or Reaper figures taste better all buttery tasting. A R. Lee Emery doll, oops action figure, also graces his office, but I'd have to say that Ed has a decidedly different attitude and motivational style. I got the sense of two things during our time at Reaper:

- 1) They run this place like a business, a real business, and it shows just from talking to them. They've been at this for around ten years now and have turned it into what was essentially a tiny speck on the map to a true industry leader.
- 2) They are also a family of sorts. That doesn't mean that they let old drunk Uncle Joe run the spincaster to keep him off the streets, but I just got a really good and friendly feeling from the place.

Ok, back to business...



When Ral Partha made their exit from the industry this left Reaper second only to Games Workshop. We talked to Ed about how many figures are produced at the Reaper foundry and found out that they go through a ton, I mean literally a ton as in 2000 pounds, of metal in an average week and for the month of February they sold approximately 81,000 Dark Heaven blisters of figures. According to Ed, miniature games are stronger now than ten years ago and I'm inclined to believe him. We also talked a bit about what might be a lesser known line of Reaper miniatures from the Doom computer game. When the guys at Id software hit it huge and were buying Ferraris like you and I buy Hot Wheels they contacted Reaper about casting up some figures based on the Doom game for them to have around the Id offices because they thought it would be cool and to use for gift-giving. This also blossomed into the figures being released for retail sale. Ed also had an observation that guys in the gaming industry spend a lot of their off-time playing computer games and guys in the video game industry relax by playing role-playing and miniature games.



The first two pictures on this page are just part of the huge number of miniature molds that we saw while we were there. They just went on and on, lining shelf after shelf after shelf. Oh, to have a day free to pull down and cast whatever you want! The bottom picture is what a mold looks like when not sandwiched together. These two halves line up and fit together only one way and after being run in a spincaster and having molten metal shot into them, presto chango, little metal men! The molds are made out of basically the same thing as car tires and while they will suffer from some wear and tear from the figure making process are virtually indestructible.

In addition to the Dark Heaven line of fantasy figures, which could maybe be thought of as a classic Dungeons and Dragons line of miniatures, Reaper has recently started production on the Warlord line of fantasy figures. Warlord follows a more dynamic or 'larger than life' style of figure that does not shy away from multi-part figures that all come with separate metal bases, unlike the Dark Heaven line. Also, the release of the game CAV brought out Reaper's first set of science-fiction miniatures in the form of giant mecha-ish weapon platforms, tanks, infantry and jet fighters. Right now there are no set plans to manufacture a line of figures for a modern setting as a dominant campaign setting has not really emerged yet. Modern day spy and modern fantasy are probably the two most likely candidates, but modern is just not as viable as fantasy right now. Another science-fiction line is also pretty equally unlikely right now. With a fantasy line of figures anyone can make a dragon, chimera, medusa, troll, or whatever and nobody can really get too frumpy about it unless you blatantly copy their design. Just about all of the monsters and character types that we run around with are the stuff of legend and myth and are there for the making. Now, create a Wookiee, Dalek, Klingon, or Zerg and just watch the fur fly and the subpoenas arrive at your doorstep. It's harder to make 'generic' science-fiction miniatures that will have a wide enough audience to be profitable. Ah, that old business sense creeping into things again.



Outside of their own lines Reaper does do casting work for other game companies that need bulk orders of a handful of figures. Right now a good example of this would be the new figures for the Silver Age Sentinels super hero role-playing game produced by Guardians of Order. Occasionally, a game company will start off wanting a select number of figures but will then decide to jump into the miniature game industry with both feet. In these cases Reaper will invite some of the other companies people down and teach them the ropes (sculpting, casting, etc) so they can return home and teach the rest of their people. Kind of like a train the trainer thing. That's a pretty cool thing to do and while you could look at it as Reaper is aiding in the training of their competition I think they look at it more as increasing the miniatures industry as a whole.

Another thing that I found out that I had been completely unaware of before is what happens to the vast number of miniatures that are left behind when a game, or company, goes under. Ok, some of them are sold on eBay, some find their way to conventions and are sold in auctions or in the dealer room, some end up in half-price bins at local stores, but some are bought back by Reaper (can't say for sure if other miniature manufacturers do the same thing) and are melted down to be used in the creation of more Reaper figures. Reaper takes all of the metal and send it off to be assayed and brought up to their regular standards and then into the spincasters it goes. This ends up costing around the same as buying their metal in bulk as they normally would and it also accomplishes something else. It helps take old stock off of wholesaler's hands which frees up room for it to be replaced with new stock. And I'd be willing to bet that taking it off of their hands in the first place goes a long way to building some good feelings with the wholesalers. It must be working because on the day that we were there we saw four pallets of boxes, each about four feet high, all filled with boxes of figures from various lines. Want to know where all of the Vor Growlers are, I mean were, right there in Lewisville on that Saturday morning ready to be turned into something from the Reaper lines.



The top picture on this page is where more of the magic happens. There are five spincasters at the Reaper foundry and since we caught them on a Saturday they had a crew doing packaging but there was no casting going on. The fans are in there because you would have lots of molten metal in there and hot would be just one way to describe the room. During the week these would be running, and running, and running. If you're going to crank out 80,000+ figures in a month (that's just Dark Heaven and doesn't include Warlord or CAV figures) there's a lot of work being done here. Finished figures are sorted into plastic bins and then the blister packs are put together. Each pack has a code associated with it that tells the packer all of the information needed to complete the item. This information consists of the base size, number of pieces in the blister, etc. The middle picture is one of two machines at Reaper that seals up the blister pack with the backing card and from there they pretty much complete. Of course, box sets are filled and closed up by hand. The bottom picture is one of Reaper's most recent endeavors, paints. There are now over 100 colors, including inks and metallics, in the Pro Paint line and they are also assembled on-site. There are also high quality brushes in the works to go along with their excellent line of paints.

Ok, so what's next for Reaper?

The Warlord skirmish fantasy game will come out around August and will be build around an open system that will allow gamers, and presumably other publishers, to build armies using the Warlord build engine. This will make it easy for role-playing game companies to enter the miniature market with a working game already on the table. Reaper plans to lead the 'conversions' by porting over figures from the Dark Haven line. Warlord will also ship with a campaign system. There is also a skirmish science-fiction game in the works that will use the background and world of CAV, but with 28mm scale miniatures. The name of the game has not been set in stone yet, but you can expect CAV's and other vehicles in proper scale with 'standard' size 28mm infantry. There is also talk of a spaceship combat game floating around but that is considerably farther off in the future. Negotiations are taking place between Reaper and White Wolf create miniatures from the Exalted game. Additionally, creating figures that would represent the creatures found in various Sword & Sorcery Studios books, namely the Creature Collections, is being discussed. More figures for Guardians of Order's Silver Age Sentinels are planned as are a re-release of figures that had been part of the Clan War mass combat game as single figure blisters for use in the Rokugan Dungeons and Dragons campaign setting.

I wonder if they feel at all like ZZTop? You know, that little band from Texas, the one that ain't so little!



Miniature reviews from 100 Kingdoms for this issue start off with the massive, and I mean massive, Minotauran from the Wildlings army. The picture to the right is pretty much at 1:1 scale and the model itself is about approximately 4.5" tall and 5.5" long. Yes, that's a Mamluk Thunderer standing next to it. It comes in thirteen pieces (not including a metal base), but eight of those are little spikey bits that are glued onto its shoulders. The body comes as two halves that are each mostly hollow, which helps to reduce the weight of the figure, but it's not light by any stretch of the imagination. This is one hefty game piece. Each piece did need some cleaning as the mold line was visible and there was a little flash here and there, but I expected at least some cleaning on a model this big. Once it was all cleaned I began to assemble the beast and found that all of the pieces went together quite easily, but there were some gaps where the two halves of the body come together that will require some putty work.

The arms are a bit longer than the legs which makes the body look a bit stocky. Stocky, hell, I'm talking about a 5.5" tall model of a mythical creature that weighs in at over a pound of metal. I didn't invent the creature, maybe his arms are supposed to be longer to reach your puny ass.

The figure has lots of large body areas that an enterprising, and talented, painter could exploit with branding or tattoos to really make their Minotauran a one of a kind model. To be honest, for \$20.00 USD I was expecting a much smaller model. When I opened up the box that it came in and saw the size of the pieces I was astounded. I didn't have a problem with the cleaning that was needed and ultimately I can live with needing a bit of putty work to close a few gaps and complete the figure. You could forego the putty, but then it would be quite noticeable. I certainly cannot say that every model pulled out of the mold will have these gaps though. This is much more of a model than a simple figure and probably should not be your first foray into miniatures. It's not difficult to assemble, but to get the full effect of The Minotauran in all its glory you'll need to do a little work. To me, it will be worth it.

Also over on the right (bottom) is the Bushido Ogre, a Noxious Ogre to be specific. It comes in three pieces (Ogre, sword in scabbard, and horns) which went together very easily once a little cleaning was done. The mold line was barely visible and flash was almost non-existent. He's wearing lots of traditional-looking armor and is holding a polearm at the ready. Around his belt you'll find a couple of severed heads. Since most of the figure is covered in armor or clothes there's not a lot of muscle detail to get a look at, but the face is done well with bushy eyebrows, big teeth and a long fumanchu mustache. The little skull poking out over his head is attached to a banner that is tied to his back.

At \$7.00 USD he is very reasonably priced and his look fits in perfectly with a Bushido army. Outside of 100 Kingdoms I'd have no problem using him as an ogre in any other fantasy game and he could make a great ogre player character in Dungeons and Dragons. Personally, I think that I'll paint him up with blue-ish skin and use him as an Ogre Mage.

Starting on the next page we have our first look at the Outkast army. When I saw the greens for these figures my jaw just dropped and my reaction was just as good when I got them into my hot little hands. The Outkast are a race of humanoid dinosaurs and they are another example of the guys at Black



Orc Games taking the armies of 100 Kingdoms in some non-standard directions. If you've seen the Walt Disney animated version of Robin Hood you get a pretty good idea of some of the stuff that I hope to see in future armies for 100 Kingdoms. Bears, and alligators, and Rhinos...ok, back to the Outkast.

The first two figures are Ankylon Brawlers that come two (identical miniatures) to a blister for \$7.50 USD. They are carrying a sword that looks like it was carved out of a large bone and what looks like a giant tortoise shell for a shield. The sword-arm could be carefully moved into another position to add a bit of variety to a unit of 6 of these dinos.





I'm not sure how these guys ended up on 40mm bases but I'm glad they did. They could have probably have fit on standard 25mm bases, but they would have had trouble ranking up. Larger bases will also give you super-artistic types an excuse to dress up their bases with other decorations.

Each figure did have a bit of flash and the mold line was faint, but needed a little cleaning. Each figure took maybe a minute of cleanup before it was ready to be primed. They definitely look like a humanoid version of an Ankylosaurus and you can see a front and rear view above.

Below are the Avimon Archers, which come two to a blister pack for \$6.00 USD. As with the Ankylon Brawlers the two miniatures in the blister pack are identical, but moving the tail or bow-arm is possible if you're careful and can result in a little variance from model to model in the unit.

The archers stand quite a bit taller than a normal human model and six dollars for two of them is really not bad at all. These guys had less flash than the Ankylons and the mold line was only visible in a couple of places. Cleanup was quick and easy.

They are wearing several pieces of jewelry and some kind of cloak or coat. It's kind of hard to make out at first, but it's definitely different than their reptilian skin and has a clasp around the neck and the torso. Looks to be some kind of fur. Their extended neck ends in a beak-like head topped by a small helmet with a crest. A full quiver of arrows and a pouch are strapped to their backs also.

Good models at a good price that fit well into the overall look of the Outkast army.



The Brachan Soulcaller is based on a Brachiosaurus and looks very cool. It is a single-piece model that stands about 3" tall from the soles of its feet to the top of its head. There was a little flash, but not too much and the mold line was faint at its worst. This is an awesome rendition of a bipedal brachiosaurus. It's dressed as a spellcaster and is carrying a staff in one hand and what looks like a crystal ball in the other. A couple of pouches and lots of jewelry finish him off. The tail could be moved a bit, but it's pretty thick so you'll want to be careful if you try. I'd stay away from moving the head/neck as I'd be afraid of snapping it off. The Brachan Soul-caller comes in at \$7.00 USD and is well worth the price.

Below is definitely my favorite of all of the Outkast that I've seen so far. It's a Ceran Champion and is an amazing rendition of a humanoid Triceratops that comes one to a blister for \$7.50 USD.

The bulk of the Ceran Champion comes as one piece but it also has two large horns and several small ones that come as separate pieces that need to be glued into place. The small ones are small so you'd be better off using some tweezers and not glue your fingers to the model.

There's no 'armor' on the Ceran, other than his naturally thick and knobby hide. He (I think it's a he) is wearing a large ceremonial necklace and non-descript bracelets though. His rather large axe is held in one hand and he's in a pose that suggests he's striding forth to engage the enemy.

The Ceran Champion is a very cool model that would not only make a great addition to an Outkast army but would also serve very well as a bipedal dinosaur-humanoid player character in Dungeons and Dragons.



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EXCELSIOR Miniature Reviews EXCELSIOR

With the release of Ultimate Warzone coming closer we're seeing more figures for various armies being released and this issue we'll look at two for the Mishima army, a pair of Doomtroopers. Doomtroopers are paired into two man teams, one specializes in close combat while their partner specializes in ranged combat. The Mishima Doomtroopers are the pinnacle of this paradigm.



First (right) is a Kanada the Dragon who is carrying an auto-cannon with both hands and has a long sword, I mean long, on his back. The sword comes as a separate piece and fits on easily. When I say long I mean long. If you stood it up next to him it would be taller than he is. Makes me think of 'Samurai Delicatessen' from Saturday Night Live. There are two other distinguishing features of his gun. One is a flame thrower attachment and the second is a belt of rounds that comes as a separate piece. It fits into place fine and adds a lot of dimension to the model. An excellent add-on by the guys at Excelsior.

Most of Kanada is covered in heavy armor but his upper arms are mostly bare. The armor looks very good and has lots of already etched-in detail that will really help any painter make it look very nice. Inside his helmet you can still make out his eyes and the bridge of his nose.



Izumi the Whirlwind, the close combat specialist is carrying five, yes five, swords on her person and a sub machinegun. I guess she considers the swords disposable and if one gets stuck in some guy's skull she just grabs the next one that's handy.

She's in a combat-ready pose, but if you're careful you can add even more animation to the model by moving one or both wrists. You can carefully bend them or saw them off at the wrist and reposition them. It's not a terribly

hard conversion but you'll want to be careful anyway. That's not to say that you can't leave it as-is because you certainly can. She's wearing some armor plates on top of a bodysuit and you can also see her eyes inside her helmet.

All of her gear fits into place just fine but I would suggest painting it all individually and then gluing it into place.

Each figure needed a bit of cleaning, but it was mostly on the mold line and there was not a lot of flash to be seen.

The set of two retails for \$9.95 USD and are worth it. Obvious uses are in Ultimate Warzone, but I'd also be ok seeing them in sci-fi role-playing games or even in a modern game either as some kind of corporate enforcers or assassins.



If I said that the Desert Crawler was large I would be lying. It's frickin' massive and has a very respectable weight to it. Damn, it could be used as prop in the board game Clue. "I accuse Mr. Talamini, with the Desert Crawler, in the Dealer's Room!"

The crawler has four main pieces (body, head, lower jaw, and base) and sixteen little claws that remind me of those little baby hands that a T-Rex has only I think these are a bit more functional. The little claws fit nicely into rounded 'pockets' on the body that have been pre-drilled for pins if you so desire. It's very cool that Excelsior took the time to do this for all of the pin-fanatics out there, but I'd be that mine will be ok without them. There is also another piece to the figure that is completely separate from the rest of the model. It's part of the crawler that has broken through the surface while on the way to its intended target. Kind of like when you see the shark fin coming towards you and you know that you're screwed. After it surfaces it can still be left on the table as part of the crawler that is still underground.

Each piece did need some cleaning, but on a model this size I'd be very surprised if it didn't. Most of the cleanup consisted of working on the mold line as there really was not too much in the way of flash. The head and jaw fit together easily and there is even enough room in there to put a victim if you're up to a bit of conversion work, which I think I'll be up to myself. Now, just to decide who draws the shortest straw.

As I see it there are two main uses for the Desert Crawler. First, and most obvious, is as part of a Stygian army. If you thought the Sisters of Tiamat was impressive then you'll be blown away by this model. Second is as a Purple Worm in Dungeons and Dragons, or even as a Frost Worm if you like. Either way, it's going to be enough to make your PC's jaws drop open when you place it on the table. Other uses include as a bug bad wyrm in Call of Cthulhu that will make your investigators run for cover or even used in a modern setting as some kind of freak of nature or summoned monstrosity.

At \$29.99 the Desert Crawler may seem on the high side but really it's not when you consider that it's a massive model made entirely of metal. For me, it has several uses and place in more than one game. It continues in the line of excellent all-metal large models from Excelsior and making more big stuff like this will be welcomed.



Sir Conlan, Templar Lightbringer (Catalog #14037, \$3.99 USD)

This miniature is from Reaper's **Warlord** line. It is a 28mm sized figure that is cast as a single piece with a tab to insert into a separate base. The figure has very little flash and a faint mold line is on the back of the cape just below the shield. The miniature itself is very dynamic with the cape billowing around the figure to the left. There are a lot of details on the figure, including a pendant with a pentagram and a Celtic cross suspended from the model's belt. The armor is quite detailed as well. The banding on the models chest is clearly defined, including small rivets down the right side. The face and sword are both cleanly sculpted. The cape dominates the back of the model. The shield with its high relief heraldry adds character to the back of the model. The amount of real estate on the cape indicates to me that the sculptor intended this to be used by the painter to add ornate decorations. Maybe not a still life, but it certainly begs for some trimming and detail work. As with all of the **Warlord** line, this model comes with a metal textured base. It took me a little work with the model to get it to stand flat on the base. The base is designed to fit the model; so a little fiddling with the model will allow it to stand flat. This high quality model would work well as a champion for a unit of knights.

Clawed Devil (Catalog #02672, \$3.99 USD)

This miniature is from Reaper's **Dark Heaven** line. It is a 28mm sized figure cast in a single piece, including a "broccoli" base. The figure has very little flash and no few visible mold lines. The later is probably due to the spiky structure of the model. This figure has lots of indentations and texture that just beg for a dry-brush treatment. Though not readily visible in the photograph, the left-hand claws have a ribbed texture. The face also has quite a bit of detail, including horns, fangs, and high cheekbones that would make any model jealous. The sculpting is fairly dynamic, though there is pronounced two-dimensional feel. This is engendered by the fact that the tail is molded to the back of the right leg. However, a slight bending of the arms and tail will take care of this. However, be careful as the fine detail of the arms makes them very breakable. This figure is obviously something that characters would run into in an infernal realm. I was struck by the similarities to the Bone devil of the original **Dungeons and Dragons** game.



James St Johnson, Knight of the Ivy Crown (#02663, \$2.99 USD)

This is another miniature from Reaper's **Dark Heaven** line. It is also a 28mm figure cast as a single piece with its base. There is a little flash on the lance and at the end of the pennant, but there are no visible mold lines. There is quite a bit of detail on this figure – including the heraldry on the pennant and chest as well as the face and head. The sculpting on the sword and tunic is very clean and neat. The top of the spear is slightly bent – as can be seen in the photo – but slight pressure realigned to the top with the bottom.

Unlike the Clawed Devil, this figure does not have the pronounced two-dimensional feel. I attribute this to its more natural pose – as well as the lack of a tail! The sculptor put a lot of work into this figure – and it shows in its character. The model reminds me of Sir Kay from **Excalibur** – an older knight who's still tough enough to hand with the boys. This would be an exceptional figure for a warrior priest or for a captain of the palace guard. It would also work well as a standard bearer for a unit of knights on foot – preferably Crusaders or Charlemagne's Paladins.

Malek Blackmarrow, Necromancer (#14040, \$3.99 USD)

Any Necromancer named Blackmarrow deserves respect, and this figure does the name justice. It is from the **Warlord** line and comes with a separate textured base.

The figure itself is a single piece with little flash and few mold lines. The model's torso is a very intricate breastplate with a skeleton motif. The helmet under the cowl continues this motif – it reminds me of Skeleton. The sword and the staff both are adorned with decorative details. The staff includes a streamer wrapped loosely around its length. The ragged cape not only has holes in it, but has a ribbed texture on the inside. The figure is standing on a pile of skulls. The figure is most definitely not a skeleton, as the exposed legs and arms show. The base of the model, like the base for Sir Conlan, is sculpted specifically for this model. And like Sir Conlan, you need to take the time to make sure that it fits squarely on the base. The base includes more skulls, which makes me happy. This model is an exceptional necromancer for either an RPG or an undead horde.



Oberon, Half-Orc Fighter (#02669, \$2.99 USD)

This figure from the **Dark Heaven** line is an excellent model of a half-orc fighter. The figure is cast as a single piece with the "broccoli" base and has little flash and slight mold lines on his left leg and right arm. The detail on this model is not as great as on the Necromancer, but it suffices for this kind of figure. The face is well sculpted with a large scar running down over his left eye and two pronounced lower incisors. This model is wearing a tabard made of leather strips below a solid metal breastplate and has an armored left arm. The right arm and thighs are bare. But my favorite detail has to be Oberon's Mohawk! It hangs down to the center of his back and is curly. Must come from his mother's side!

The model is posed in a readied stance that would make this a very good swordsman trooper for a half-orc regiment – it would be easy to have many of them rank up. In such a case, one would need to adapt the broccoli base to a regular square base. It is equally suited for an RPG character – for it could serve as either a fighter or a rogue character – though it is definitely not the charming debonair rake!



Amanthas Grayleaf, Elven Hero (Catalog # 02662, \$2.99) *Left*

This figure is from the **Dark Heaven** line of 28mm fantasy figures. It is cast as a single piece with an integral “broccoli” base. The figure has some flash, most noticeably at the tip of the sword and between the decorative guard and blade. There are slight mold lines along the outside edge of the figure’s right leg and left edge of the cloak. This model is sculpted with a very dynamic pose. It flows from the up-raised sword down and left to the edge of the cloak. The swaying of the cloak and tabard enhance the effect – the sculptor has caught the elven amazon as she has raised her sword. The sculpting of the face only adds to this drama. It’s obvious that she sees someone off to her left desecrating a sacred grove or something. The figure also has a good amount of detail – especially the braided lock of hair on the right side of her face and the thorn relief on the sword. In contrast, the tabard and cloak are very plain – both can be used as canvases for painting decoration. I would consider continuing the thorn motif. This is a very good model for a female elf adventurer – especially for a ranger-type warrior.



KDM Fenri Gunship (Catalog # 07053, \$8.99) *Right*

These figures are from Reaper’s **CAV** line. The blister includes two plane models, two metal flying stands, and two hexagonal bases. Both planes have a little flash at the end of their boom tails and engine cowlings. There are some slight mold lines along the leading edges of the wings and around the cockpits.

These models are the first planes I have seen from the CAV line. Like the rest of the CAV line, these models are quite detail – including many panels raised less than a millimeter. The planes balance well on their flying stands, either by themselves or in the hex bases. These models are a good addition to the CAV line. They are uniquely styled – they are a cross between a P38 Lightning and an A-10 Warthog – and mean trouble for any CAV they find.



Hughes Marietta Duelist (Catalog # 07054, \$9.99) *Left*

This model is from Reaper’s **CAV** line. The blister includes four pieces for the model itself – legs, torso, and two guns – as well as a hexagonal base. The guns are mounted on a sprue while the other pieces are separate. There is some flash along the top of the legs, where the torso is to be mounted. There is also a mold line along the front edge of the torso.

The model fits together easily – the joints are fairly loose. It is sculpted so that it balances either on the hex base or just standing by itself. The detail of the model is up to the CAV standards – I especially like the detail on the sides of the torso, just below the guns. The Duelist is a Battlefield Superiority CAV and with its twin gauss cannons and ability to take damage, it will stand up to a Dictator on the battlefield. I will definitely be included two of these in my next CAV force.

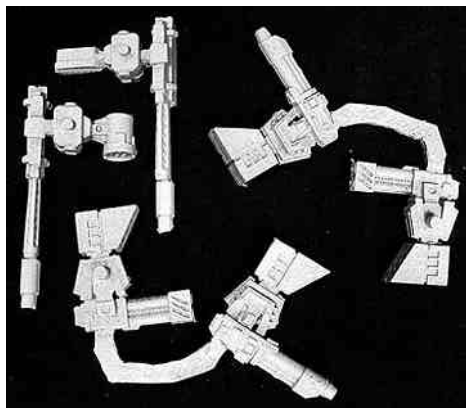
Borgsig Spline Spider (Catalog # 07038, \$9.99) *Right*

This model is also from Reaper’s **CAV** line. The blister includes two leg pieces, a body and a hex base. The legs have some flash at the extreme ends but no mold lines. The body has some flash and mold lines only on the rear.

Like it’s bigger brother, the Scorpion, this model sits on its two leg pieces. Assembly can be rather tricky as the legs are round and the body has half round indentations to receive them. I’ve found it easiest to use a super glue accelerant to assemble this model –but be careful not to get any on your hands. The chemical reaction that speeds up the superglue liberates quite a bit of heat!



The Spider is a Support Fire CAV and is equipped with two indirect fire missile packs and one direct fire pack. Its multiple legs allow it to treat difficult ground as open terrain – just the thing for setting up sniping positions. The only question I have is why is it called a Spider when it has only four legs?



CAV Weapons Pack II (Catalog # 07031, \$7.99) *Left*

One of the interesting aspects of the CAV game is that you can design your own CAV mechs. For instance, you can trade the twin gauss cannons of a Duelist for the indirect fire missile arms of a Specter – just pay the appropriate points for the change in systems. The CAV Weapons packs allow you to buy various weapons to “garage kit” your mech. The CAV mech models were designed from the beginning to be able to swap bits like this. The CAV Weapons Pack II includes one set of left and right arms from the Koda Works Dictator (#07002) and two sets from the Hughes-Marietta Knight (#07014). All the guns are two to a sprue; one sprue for each left and right pair. The castings are very good with little flash and no visible mold lines. These are a kit-basher’s dream.

WARLORD

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On the right is Tolzar, an adventuring Cleric (2681) by Sandy Garrity that is a little work of art. Ok, just about anything coming from the talented hands of Ms. Garrity is a work of art, but this cleric is really good. It comes as a single piece model with a crossbow that needs to be separated from the base and attached to the back of the model. The cleric is dressed in scale armor that is mostly covered, including a hood, by a heavy coat. He's also wearing a backpack with a bedroll and a pouch of bolts at his side. As an added bit of character for the model there is also a tankard on his belt so I would think that this might be the Friar Tuck kind of cleric that might indulge in a bit of an adult beverage from time to time. He is armed with the aforementioned crossbow that fits over the backpack and a mace that is tied around his waste. Maybe to make sure that he doesn't lose it when he's a bit tipsy? His shoulder pads are detailed to look like a face, probably the visage of his deity and his facial features are great without being overly done. The shield has a nicely decorated edge that will keep you from having to detail it yourself and the scale armor is a nice change of pace. With a retail price of \$2.99 this is a great figure that could be used as a player character or also as a champion of a unit of human warriors.



Ulric Bloodclub (2670), on the left, has a retail price of \$2.99 USD and he looks somewhat like a barbarian gladiator that is carrying a hefty club (hence his name) and a chain net in his left hand. The best feature of this miniature is the face and it's awesome! Great detail, even down to the veins on his neck standing out. Most of Ulric's upper torso is bare but what might be a bearskin, including the claw, is draped over one shoulder. There are bits of plate armor on his other shoulder and legs, but the bulk of the figure is either bare or wearing a leather skirt. There was some flash that needed to be trimmed, but it was not excessive and the mold line was barely visible. I'm not sure that I'd have gone with a club as my first weapon of choice, but I guess it's something good to bonk your enemies over the head with after you've tangled them up in your net. The animation of this figure is also really good as it's pose really gives you a sense of movement, with his right hand ready to come down with a hearty swing. The muscle texture on the exposed part of his torso is excellent, but also very subtle. Inking and highlighting here will bring out some excellent definition without being exaggerated. I might end up ditching the club for an axe, which would be a pretty easy conversion, and I expect it will end up looking just fine. In fact, it gives me a reason to play around a bit with the Warlord weapons that you'll see on the next page.



The Bat Swarm (2668) to the left has a retail price of \$3.99 USD and comes in two pieces, the headstone with 6 bats (3 large and 3 small) and two other large ones that fit nicely onto the headstone. There was some flash to be cleaned but the figure went together very well and each individual bat has really nice detail and will stand out well when painted. This would be excellent for a diorama or as, well, for a swarm of bats pestering a single character.



Above (right) is Dern Ironfist (2661) is a dwarven adventurer that would make a marvelous player character model. It did require a bit more cleaning than most of the other figures, but the detail is great and the amount of gear that he is carrying is awesome. In addition to the obvious (axe, shield, and helmet) he's also carrying a short sword a small hammer and several bags and pouches. He's wearing a mix of chain, some plate and leathers but the assortment looks good on him. He has an abundance of hair, including a braided beard, but it really does not take away from the rest of the facial detail of the figure. At \$2.99 this is a great figure that would also do well as a champion in a dwarf regiment.

On the right are some staples of low-level D&D adventures, Stirges. For the uninitiated they are basically giant monstrous mosquito-like creatures that will suck out more blood than you have to spare. This blister (2691) comes with two of the creatures, each sitting on a perch, for \$3.99 USD. Most encounters with Stirges will have many of them and for that price you can afford to get several. In the future some alternate poses, maybe usable with the flying bases from CAV, would be very nice and add some variety.



The Killer Frogs (2665) on the left come two (one sitting and one lunging forward) to a blister for \$5.99 USD. They look like, well, really big frogs except I've never seen a frog with massive teeth like the lunging one. It's ready to take a piece off!



They are marvelously detailed and I expect that they will paint up nicely. I have a 'thing' about frogs so I'll probably try to get my wife to paint these as taking them out of the blister gave me the willies. Flash was basically non-existent and the mold line was just about impossible to detect. Great figures, but their usability is kind of limited to subterranean or swamp encounters. Well, duh, they are giant frickin' frogs!

Wow, that's the first thing that came to mind when I saw the Ogre with Pole-Axe to the right. I'd have really said wow if he was carrying a polecat, but that's another story entirely! The ogre (14054) is part of the Warlord line from Reaper and has a regular retail price of \$7.99 which is simply great for a miniature of this size. He is wearing a very heavy plate breastplate, metal shin guards, and leather over his forearms. He's highly muscled and warty but he looks much more like a disciplined warrior than a dull-witted brute. His face is scarred in places and he has a nasty gash above his right eye where an opponent must have caught him with a lucky blow, right before he was cut in half no doubt. His hair is pulled back tight and tied up.

I found no flash on the figure and the mold line was pretty faint but did need to be cleaned. The pole-axe and hands come as a separate piece and his right arm needed just a tiny bit of bending to get the sockets to line up perfectly. Nothing of too much consequence though. His base is also nicely detailed with some broken crockery, a dagger and a bag of spilled coins. An excellent model that will help round out the forces that I'll be needing to run Steading of the Hill Giant Chief for my Dungeons and Dragons group.



The River Troll in the center (14044) will ring up at the register for \$5.99 USD and comes as a gangly and twisted one-piece model. It is carrying two large clubs that end in huge hooks that look very much like the horns of some beast, probably one that ventured too close to the water. There's very little in the way of clothing or armor except for a loincloth and a few metal plates tied to his arms and one shoulder. I think that we can all count ourselves lucky that he's wearing something and not wandering around the swamps all nekkid like some Jerry Springer guest, yikes!

His head is sunk low and turned to bellow at whatever must be his next meal and his skin is warty and has what looks like some kind of swamp fungus growing on it in places. Added details include the skeleton of some small creature and half a fish tied to his belt, great stuff. There's also a stitched up wound and webbing under his arms, for better swimming I suppose. I did find just a tiny bit of flash that needed cleaning along with a little attention needed on the mold line. Unlike the ogre above, though, the River Troll's base was not detailed, but is still a great buy and well worth adding to any DM's collection of monsters or I could also see him in a unit of trolls in various Warhammer Fantasy Battle armies.



Marcus Gideon, a Paladin, (14055) to the right comes as a single piece model with a nicely detailed metal base and is resting on a rune-encrusted longsword in his right hand and is holding aloft a holy symbol in his left hand. He's wearing a mix of plate and chain armor that looks just about impenetrable. The collar of his breastplate comes up past his neck but does not obscure the facial detail. He's definitely in a pose that says, "turning undead" and he has two (what look like) zombie heads tied to the back of his belt. This struck me as a little odd, but maybe there is a deeper significance to them. There is also a helmet back there for when he has to go back to head-chopping and get into the thick of it. He's also wearing a small backpack and it looks like there are four potions and a scroll case among his gear, nice touch. There was a little bit of flash on the figure but overall quality and detail are magnificent and he's well worth the \$3.99 USD price tag.



The Warlord Weapons Pack I above (14056) costs \$4.99 USD and comes with twelve unique weapons with which to customize your figures. You get three swords, a dagger, two axes, a crossbow, a mace, a hammer, one military pick, and two staves, one of which looks like the spinal column of some poor sap. You'll do a little bit of cleaning due to some flash but this is a very nice set of alternate weapons that will help you add some individuality to your figures, Warlord or otherwise.



Over on the right we have the first of two halflings that we'll take a look at. The first is a male thief, or Rogue for you politically correct types out there, and he's carrying two short swords and assorted gear used to gain entry to places that he's not supposed to be. Detail on Reaper's little guys is not lacking at all and is up to the same high quality of the rest of their sculpts. He'd make an outstanding player character model.





The 'Phase Cat' (2664) to the left comes as a single-piece body with four tentacles that come two to a sprue. Each one needs to be clipped off and requires a bit of cleaning around where it was connected to the sprue. The mold lines on the tentacles was visible but was pretty faint and was taken care of easily. While thin and easily bendable, the tentacles do not seem flimsy and you can achieve pretty much any pose you like with them. I was very pleased with their apparent durability. I wouldn't recommend tying them in knots or anything but, well, you get the point. All you DM's out there are probably immediately thinking to use the 'Phase Cat' as a Displacer Beast in your D&D campaign and that was my first thought also. It has a more cat-like, or maybe saber-tooth tiger, appearance than you might normally expect, but it will work just fine. Excellent model and well worth the \$4.99 USD price tag.



Elia Shadowfeet (2676) retails for \$2.99 USD and is the second of the halflings for us to take a look at. Like the male halfling above she would also make a great player character model and has a very "happy-go-lucky" look to her. The model comes with a crossbow as a separate piece that's almost as big as she is, ok maybe half her size but still hefty for a halfling. It fits onto her back perfectly though. Being a thief she's wearing leather armor to keep from slowing her down too much and has pouches all over the place in which to stick things she just happens to pick up. Additionally, she is wearing a backpack with a bedroll and has a sword at her side. Facial detail is amazing on this model and is really what will stick out when it's painted. There was really no flash but the mold line did need a bit of attention. Also, be careful when removing the crossbow from the base just so you don't damage it. Super model that is easily worth its price tag.

To the right we have the first of two new Warlord dwarves. Let all of the vertically challenged rejoice! He is actually a Dwarf King and is a spectacular single piece model. He has a great Nordic look to him and is carrying an axe in his right hand and has a hunting bird perched on his left hand. He's wearing a mixture of scale and

plate armor with an open-top winged helmet that cannot contain all of his long hair. Facial detail is excellent and includes some bushy eyebrows. Over his shoulders is a long bearskin cloak, with the front paws still attached. I found zero flash and really no significant hint of a mold line at all. He was ready to attach to his base and prime right out of the blister. An outstanding figure that not only belongs in a Warlord army, but will also serve faithfully in a Warhammer Fantasy or Chronopia army of short ale-drinkers.



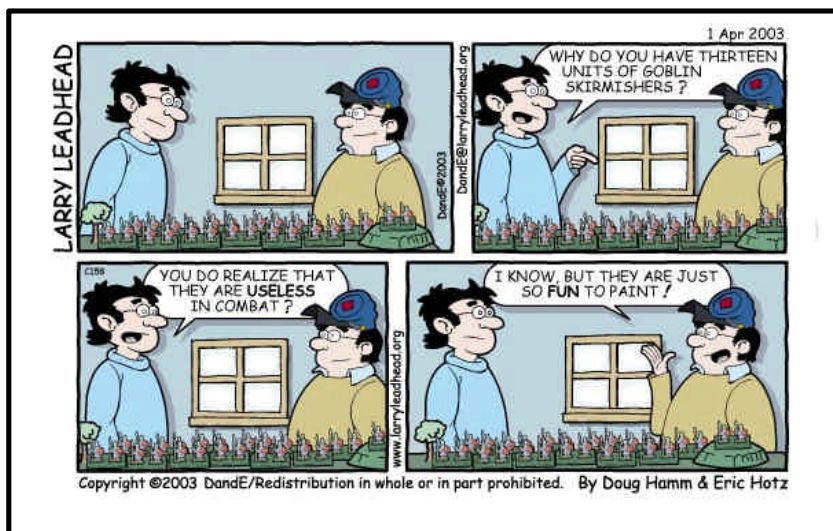
To accompany the Dwarf King we also find a loyal Dwarf Priest. He comes with the standard Warlord metal slotta-base and two other pieces, the Priest and his backpack. Well, it's sort of a backpack and sort of a huge holy symbol. It's a large wooden carving that has his gear tied to it and also bears a symbol at the top. This was a pretty cool idea and he's virtually guaranteed never to forget it. It has the standard gear tied to it, like a bedroll and tankard but there is also an anvil on it. Oh, wait. On even closer examination it looks like four of the points sticking out (top half of the picture) are meant to fold down when he's in camp to form a table with the anvil on it. Geez, even cooler. He's a walking forge! The Priest is wearing chain and plate armor and is armed with a hammer and pointing a finger and someone that he's intent on bonking with said hammer. He's got a long flowing beard under two hoods and only one foot is visible under his outer cloak. There was a bit of flash that needed to be cleaned and the mold line was visible and needed some attention. Neither were really bad and this is just one terribly cool figure that also has uses outside of Warlord in other fantasy game armies.

Last on the Warlord list for now is a Half-Orc Assassin. I'm not sure yet which faction he'll fit into but whichever it is he looks like he can be counted on to deal out a potent, but sneaky, whoopin'. He's a single piece figure and like the Dwarf Priest had a bit of flash and mold line to deal with but nothing that any of us are not ready to deal with. Head and facial detail are great. He's sporting long dreadlocks that come down past his shoulders and has nicely detailed pointed ears and teeth

that can barely be seen. The rest of the face is awesome and there is no doubt whatsoever that he's a half-orc. Super job on the face. His arms are spread wide, ready to strike with either a clawed hand (a la Wolverine) or a long sword that's held by his right hand and across his back. He definitely looks like he just he snuck up out of the shadows or jumped off of a roof to take out his target. As an assassin he's wearing



pretty light armor in the form of studded leather and has a long sash which adds a bit of drama and movement to the figure. Another superb addition to the Warlord line. If we're lucky we'll have some rules to play with soon.





And finally, in this issue's hit parade of Reaper figures comes a 72mm version of Sophie, the Succubus. Above you can see the four pieces that make up the figure and over to the right we were fortunate to have Reaper supply us with a picture of Sophie painted by Anne Foerster, one of their remarkable staff painters.

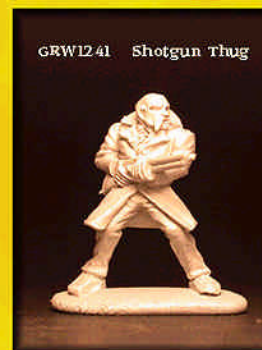
The wings fit nicely into two holes in her back and the scabbard glued into place easily. In addition to the four pieces there is also a separate metal base for her to stand on. There was not a lot of flash at all on Sophie but the mold line did need some attention, more so than with the smaller figures. The body itself had a more significant line than the wings but it was not thick and the figure was not marred at all by its cleaning, which took a few minutes.

As you can see she's not wearing much but as a Succubus, a giant one at that, she's not really supposed to be wearing much now is she? Ok, on to uses for Sophie. Well in Dungeons and Dragons as a giant-sized she-devil smacking

your party of PC's around or simply as a collector's piece or as part of a diorama. Also, you could drop her into a game of Inquisitor as a Daemonhost or, and here's my favorite, ditch the wings (or use them on another model) and use a bit of putty to fill in the holes in her back and paint her up as one fiiiiiiiiine female frost giant. Ok, so she'll be a frost giant with pointy ears, get over it. Will she be cold in that tiny bikini? Hell no! Frost giants are immune to cold silly. She'll be just fine and your PC's will wonder why they don't mind getting their ass kicked by her.



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Miniature Reviews



Our look at the world of the Iron Kingdoms for this issue starts with Asphyxious, the Iron Lich (and ends with a review of IK: Warmachine Prime later in this issue) who comes as a three-piece model for \$8.99 USD. The pieces that make up Asphyxious consist of a large body piece with both arms, his head, and smoke pipes that fit onto his back.

The body is a great sculpture and in addition to his flowing robes he has bits of plate armor on the bottom half of his torso

along with what look like scroll tubes or incense burners. His top half is a cross between a standard undead creature spliced with some sort of bio-mechanical creation, which results in a very cool and unique figure.

Be careful of the top end of his staff, however. Mine was bent over in the blister pack and while it was not broken some care was needed to get it bent back into shape safely. I'd say that it's more how this particular miniature was packed than a flaw with the figure. He's just all big and cool and needed some more elbow room.

The head is a skull with some kind of mechanical eyepiece on the right socket and it fit perfectly into the void between his shoulder plates. Just be careful you don't drop it off your work table, like I did, and have to spend 15 minutes looking for it. My wife would say that if my desk and painting area was not such a mess I wouldn't have problems like these. She does have a point.

The smoke pipes also fit into place just fine and complete the look of the model. There was a mold line on each piece that needed cleaning, but it ranged from barely visible to 'not-too-bad' and there was no appreciable flash. Asphyxious will obviously fit into any Cryx army for Warmachine, but if you have picked up the Monsternomicon (also by Privateer Press) you'll surely want to use him as an Iron Lich in Dungeons and Dragons. Hell, even if you haven't picked up that book you'll probably want to drop him on the table as a lich or necromancer to menace your poor PC's. Whatever way you decide to use him this is a model worth picking up.

To the right is Captain Victoria Haley of the Cygnar faction. She comes as a single-piece model that is holding a Vortex Spear in one hand and a Hand Cannon in the other. She has a retail price of \$6.99 USD.

She's wearing plates of metal armor and a heavy cloak. There's a lot of detail to be seen on the body and while Haley is clearly a female she's not joined the silicone army like many other female miniatures that you might see. Unfortunately, quite a bit of her facial detail is obscured by her head being turned down the line of her pistol. You can make out her glasses, part of her nose and some hair, but that's about it.

This is a good figure but I do have a few minor issues with it. The pose is a bit two-dimensional. Yes, she's taking aim at a target but she's just kind of 'there'. Not nearly as dynamic as Commander Stryker who was looked at in the previous issue of Fictional Reality. Maybe I've just been spoiled by how cool of a figure Stryker is. Anyway, back to Haley. Where she's holding the Vortex Spear her hand doesn't fit all the way around. I'm not saying that I'd rather her have 'man-hands' or anything, just a less obvious lack of a fit.

The mold line was visible all the way around the figure and did need some attention, but there was no flash to be found on the figure. Captain Victoria Haley is a good figure and is one that any Cygnar general is likely to pick up to complete his army and she could also serve well as a PC model.



This issue our VOID reviews start off in spectacular fashion with the Junker Desert Marauder (center). Anyone that grew up watching 'Rat Patrol' on television will instantly become nostalgic upon viewing the model. Ok, so maybe it's not an exact copy of what you watched roaring through the desert as a kid, but it's close enough for me.

The Desert Marauder comes as a whopping 20-piece kit, including a resin jeep body. Let's get this next part out of the way. This is much more than a simple infantry trooper model that you'd add to your army. This is much more along the lines of a model kit and it will take a bit of time on your part to get it ready for the battlefield. Personally, I have no problem with that at all, but just wanted to make sure you knew.



Each piece did need some attention when it came to cleaning. Bits of flash was about it as the mold line on the metal parts was either very faint or just not visible. The resin body came out very well and needed work with a hobby knife to smooth up the bottom edges. With everything cleaned up my biggest worry became the thin pieces that made up the roll cage and supports for the gunners cage. In the past I've just not had great luck with thin pieces. I was glad when my concerns were turned away as both cages went together easily and the final model came out quite sturdy. In fact, everything fit together pretty much perfectly and I had no trouble at all with assembly. I do have one tiny peeve with the figure though. The roll cage around the driver leaves no room to get the driver out if you glue it down. After the model is painted this is really not a problem, but be careful not to glue the roll cage to the main body unless you are prepared to try and paint the driver through the bars of the roll cage. Is this a big deal? No, not at all, but I didn't want anyone to make that mistake, and no I didn't figure it out by gluing it down. At \$xx.xx USD I am all over this model. If you don't play Junkers in VOID then find a reason to drop one, or more than one if you really want to see them sweat, down on the game table. I would have no problem dropping them in as marauding bad guys in a semi-futuristic game of d20 Modern.

VASA Suppressors set 3 (Catalog # 11460, \$7.95) Below

For a change of pace, this blister contains three multi-part models and slotted bases. The models include a sergeant with club, shield, and back banner; a trooper with club, shield, and back banner, and a heavy weapon trooper with a back banner. The shield on the sergeant is a separate piece while the trooper's shield is molded to his body. On all three models, the back banner is attached to the back of the figure by a lug that fits into a square indentation. The fit is tight and appears easy to glue. All three figures are cleanly sculpted and have minimal flash. The heavy weapon trooper has no flash at all. There are faint mold lines along the outside of each model's leg. In addition, all three models stand straight when placed in the bases.

The tab on the heavy weapon trooper is slightly larger than the others and fits snugly. These three models are well sculpted. The helmets resemble samurai helmets we've all seen in Kurosawa films. The armor, by Body Glove®, fits well – and the boots look like they were taken off Judge Dredd®! How many more non-game references can I cram into one paragraph? These three models make wonderful police – specifically New Tokyo Riot Police. These are just the kind of guys who would go up against the Sigma gang we've already seen. Of course, they would work wonderfully with **Void** as well.



Syntha Male Sigma Biomech (Catalog # 11338, \$3.95) Left

This blister contains a single figure and plastic slotted base. The figure is clean with slight mold lines on the outside and inside of the right leg. There is a small amount of flash on the right elbow; the middle left knuckle, and the bottom right corner of the tab. The figure is well sculpted with lots of detail. He is wearing a visor with a left ear protector and a short boom microphone. This feature does not obscure the facial details. The model's left hand is in a powered glove with electronic detail on the forearm. In the model's right hand is the I-Kore signature large pistol. The model has a static pose, but the slight turn of the head to the left gives the impression that he is simply watching and waiting.

The figure is slightly off-balance. When he is placed in the slotted base, he rocks forward on his toes. This is a minor problem that will be fixed when the model is glued to the base. In addition to its use in **Void**, this figure would make an excellent gang leader or a freelance hit man for a science fiction RPG.



Syntha Female Sigma Biomech (Catalog # 11337, \$3.95) Left

This blister contains a single figure and plastic slotted base. The figure is clean with slight mold lines on the outside of the right leg and arm. There is a small amount of flash at the end of the right hand and on the magazine of the pistol. The figure is as well sculpted as the male. She also has the visor and boom microphone combination. In fact, this model appears to be a slightly smaller copy of the male figure – except for the obvious features emphasized by a open-cut blouse. In the model's left hand is the I-Kore sized pistol. Her right hand is a fist. The model has the same pose as the male, but is looking forward rather than to the side. This slight change makes the model appear much more two-dimensional.

This model is well balanced. She stands flat on her feet when inserted into the slotted base. I guess the difference is that the male has more material in his barrel chest. When painting this figure, pay close attention to the chest. The figure is sculpted with a high-neck blouse with a circle cut out to show the model's cleavage. A careful painting hand is required to finish this blouse off. In addition to its use in **Void**, this figure is an excellent gang sidekick (moll?) for the Male Biomech.

Syntha Delta Biomech (Catalog # 11334, \$3.95)

Right

This figure is larger than the two Sigma Biomechs already mentioned. This model is as well sculpted, but has much more flash. It has flash at the end of the gun, the knuckle of its left hand, and at the bottom right of the tab. In addition, there is a tab connecting the gun's magazine to the model's right leg. There is a mold line running along the outsides of both arms. The surface of the model is also pitted in different areas. All of the models I have seen from I-Kore to date have been very well made. This appears just to be a bad cast. That being said, the pits are small enough that a primer coat will cover them. The model is posed with his arms and legs spread out and his head turned slightly to the right. This pose emphasizes the sculpting on his bare chest, but makes the model appear to be posing for a muscle magazine - albeit one that features Very Large Hand Guns. If you're not using this model for **Void**, he'll make an excellent heavy for the gang lead by your other Sigma's.



Below are three Prosthene Marines and their Sergeant (leftmost figure). All are carrying pulse rifles and are armored in what appears to be heavy carapace armor. The three marines are also wearing two-part helmets (no extra assembly required, it's just for looks) that consist of a breathing mask and a proper helmet. The Sergeant has decided to forego the helmet and is just wearing the breathing apparatus. You can make out his eyes, ears and some kind of implants that plug into the back of his skull.

The Sergeant is the only one that carries a backup weapon, in the form of a holstered pistol. He's in a pose ready to direct the other three towards their objective. To me, the highlight of all four of these figures is the guns. The pulse rifles look amazingly cool and if you want to get picky about it they might be a bit large when compared to the rest of the figure I think they are awesome.

Flash and the mold lines were minimal here and these guys will be based and ready to be primed in no time at all. These guys will set you back \$x.xx USD for the group of three marines and \$x.xx USD for the Sergeant.

Your first obvious use for them is as part of a Syntha army for VOID. Ok, that's a no-brainer. Marines in Warhammer 40K? Absolutely. They will also be equally at home when used in any sci-fi role-playing game (Star Wars, Dragonstar, Traveller²⁰, etc) but I plan to use them as either suped-up security or police in d20 Modern and eventually d20 Future. I was extremely happy with these four figures which come in at a reasonable price and have huge versatility.



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Grimbold (Catalog # LT15, €3.99)*Top Left*

This blister contains a single 32mm figure with a separate shield. The figure and its base are forged as a single piece. The figure is clean with no flash and a very faint mold line on the left side of the helmet. The shield has no flash or mold lines at all – its device of a running horse is very clear.

This figure is very well sculpted. There is quite a lot of detail on the model and base. There are distinct layers of mail, leather and cloth on the figure. The pants and sleeves of the models shirt are nicely textured with small folds of cloth. The face features a full beard and open mouth. The base itself is mostly covered in a cobbles pattern with some small rocks near the model's feet. The model's pose is interesting – he faces right, toward his extended sword arm, but the sword is pointed down as if at the end of a parry. His left arm, where the shield attaches is held out in the opposite direction.

This model is a unique piece and would work well for a RPG character. However, its unusual base would make it unsuitable for a miniatures game that requires models in ranks. Oh, and who is Grimbold? He's from Grimslade and distinguished himself at the Battle of the Fords of Isen and fell at the Battle of Pelennor Fields.



Hama (Catalog # LT11, €3.99)*Middle Left*

This blister contains a single figure with a separate sword. The figure and its base are forged as a single piece. The sword and right hand are designed to fit into a notch in the model. Though a small piece, there is enough area to glue easily. Like Grimbold, this figure has no flash and just a minor mold line along the model's head. The sword has no flash or mold line. The detail on this model is the same as on Grimbold. The pose of the model has him holding his right arm like it is wounded. The face is sculpted with a look of pain. The model is bare headed and his helmet is part of the base – on the left side.

Like Grimbold, this is an excellent model for an RPG character, but because of its base and its characterful sculpt, it is not suited for a rank-and-file member of a regiment. Hama was the doorward of King Theoden and captain of the King's guard. He fell defending the Gate at the Battle of the Hornburg.



Dunland Chieftain (Catalog # LT12, €3.99)*Bottom Left*

This blister contains a single figure with a separate shield and sword arm. The figure and its base are forged as a single piece. The sword and right arm are designed to on the shoulder of the model. The shield fits onto the left arm. The model has no flash and only a minor mold line on his helmet. Gosh, is there a pattern emerging?

Where the Rohirrim models have a definite Norse look to them, this model features a helmet and an intricate breastplate that look very much like the equipment of an ancient Hittite soldier. This distinctive difference in models shows that the designer was at pains to differentiate the models. In fact, the coffin shield is drastically different from the round shield of Grimbold – though the white hand emblem is very pronounced.

The model is sculpted in a dynamic pose, and his flowing cape only accents this. When attaching the arm, I would be tempted to place the sword point up, to give him an "en guard" pose worthy of Errol Flynn! The detail in the models' armor and clothing is very well done. He even has a handlebar mustache! Once again, this would make a great warrior model for an RPG, but the keyhole base makes it not easily "rankable".



Dunlendings (Catalog # LT12, €6.99)*Right*

This blister contains two Dunlending warriors. Both are forged with their base as a single piece. One is holding a standard while the other hefts a spear in his right hand. The spearman comes with a coffin shield with the emblem of the white hand on it. Both models are well forged; neither has flash or mold lines. The casting quality of the Mithril miniatures continues.

These models have the same Hittite styling as the Chieftain. The standard, with its image of a bull and crescents, add to this impression. Both models are detailed on the body and base. The spearman is not wearing a shirt. Thankfully his bare chest is not of Conan proportions. This type of sculpting is rarely seen in the fantasy genre – where the over the top body builder frame is more normal.

On the whole, the Mithril miniatures resemble like historical models. Though the subject is fantastic, the designer has taken pains to make his figures look more like real warriors from history than is the norm in this genre.

Isengard Orc Archer (Catalog # LT10, €3.99)*Right*

This blister contains a single 32mm figure with a separate quiver. The figure and its base are forged as a single piece. The figure is clean no mold lines. There is a bit of flash connecting the lower end of the bow with the base. The quiver has no flash or mold lines at all.

This figure is very well sculpted. It has a very dynamic pose with right arm drawn back. From the shape of the bow, it appears that this archer has just left fly with his arrow. There is not the level of detail present on the human figures since the orc is wearing only a tabard, leather straps, and bracers. The facial features of the orc are very simian but with out fur. In fact, the whole body is smooth and plain.

The quiver is well done – it appears as a leather bag with arrows sticking out of it. However, its placement on the back of the archer is not initially evident. I had to go to Mithril's web site (<http://www.mithril.ie>) and examine the rear view of the model to figure it out. Once I found out, the piece fit snugly. After the high quality of the Rohirrim and Dunlendings, the plainness of this figure was a bit of a disappointment. The model does look like it will paint up well – the amount of skin gives the opportunity for some excellent shading.



Half-orcs (Catalog # LT13, €6.99)*Left*

This blister contains two half-orc warriors. Both are forged with their base as a single piece with a separate right arm and coffin shield. One is running with his spear while the other is about to swing his sword down on his foe.

Both models have the level of detail I've come to expect of the Mithril line. The layers of armor and clothing are well sculpted and the simian features under the Persian style helmets link these models to their dubious parentage.

The attention to detail that marks the Mithril line can be found in how the shields are forged. One is designed with its lug parallel to the long axis of the shield. This one is to fit on the arm of the running model so his shield is close to his left side. The other has its lug perpendicular to the long axis so it can fit on the swordsman's raised arm. Once again, these would make excellent RPG figures, but are not suited to ranking troops.

War Gaming with Mithril Miniatures

The Mithril line of miniatures is a collectable line rather than a gaming line. The package reads "collectable metal miniatures" and the sculpting of the base reinforces this. They can be readily used in RPG's, but what about general war gaming? The judicious use of a razor saw can make these into rank and file miniatures. There are a limited number of poses available, but the models are very detailed. They would make a striking unit on the table top for use with a published rule set – either fantastic or historical.



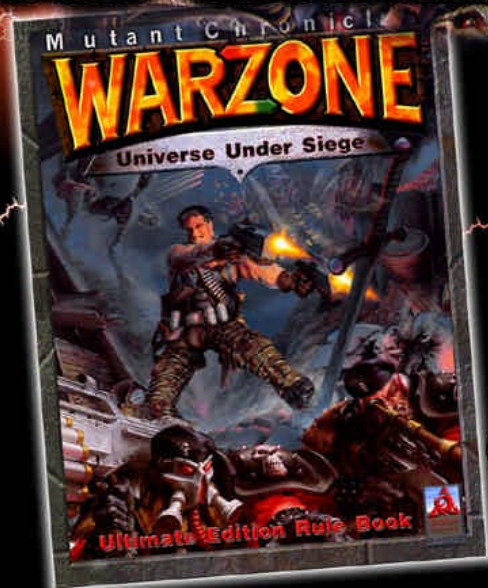
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Bob Naismith's Cobalt-1 figures may not be exactly new to the scene, but new enough to me, and hopefully to you also, to warrant picking some up and doing a review so here some are.

To the right are a group of three Mercenaries that come in a single blister for \$6.00 USD. I have to admit that the first thing that caught my eye was the price. At \$2.00 each they are really on the affordable side of things.

This is actually a command blister and they are wearing space suits, which is certainly not power armor, but could be painted up to pass for it. The three of them are armed with a pair of Cobalt Pistols, a Defender Gun, and a Plasma Bombard (from left to right) and also bear holsters for other pistols and a knife. Each pack of mercenaries also comes with a set of three clear plastic domes for their helmets so you can see their bald heads (all of them are follically challenged). The middle figure has its gun as a separate piece and you'll want to dry fit the gun and helmet dome before gluing anything so you don't start using all sorts of foul language if they don't fit perfectly. All three also come with backpacks that fit easily on to their backs (duh).

There was a bit of flash on each figure, which needed attention, but it was not excessive and it was just about impossible to detect the mold line on any of them. You will need to be extra careful when cutting the clear plastic domes away from the rest of the plastic. Take your time and do it right because you don't want to end up with just one or two out of the three with the proper looking helmets. I shouldn't have to say that you need to get the whole figure fully painted before doing anything with the clear pieces other than cutting them out to dry fit, but I will anyway.

All three of the specimens above are males and facial detail on two of them was great and the third was ok.. They have sort of a retro sci-fi look to them but not in a goofy or campy way. They look very different and are quite cool. The concept of the clear helmet is just outstanding and while it will require a bit more skill and time on your part to pull off it's well worth the effort, especially if you end up using a large number of them because they will simply be stunning to look at. They definitely have a Buzz Lightyear feel to them, and seeing an army of them might just be enough to make your opponent run screaming from the table and, you win! All of them come on hexagonal plastic slotta-bases.

There is a set of rules that goes along with the Cobalt-1 miniatures but we've not been able to take a look at a copy of it yet, but it's definitely on our list of games to review for an upcoming issue of Fictional Reality. Outside of the Cobalt-1 game I could see these mercenaries being used as Space Marines in Warhammer 40K or in the Star Wars d20 role-playing game whose own miniature line is not exactly bursting at the seams. I'm sure that they would also be very much at home in games like Dragonstar or Traveller²⁰ also.

Very nice figures at an outstanding price!



The second group of Cobalt-1 miniatures that we'll be taking a look at is an Armen (sort of like foxes or dogs in space) Command Blister, which also has a retail price of \$6.00 USD for three figures. Right off the bat another bargain.

These three are all single piece miniatures with one being a pretty obvious leader that is carrying a polearm and pistol with another pistol in a holster. The other two are both carrying pretty hefty weapons, one looking like some kind of huge flame cannon with an accompanying fuel canister on his back and the other looks like a gatling cannon or some kind of rapid fire blaster.

All three are wearing significantly less armor than the mercenaries and they are definitely not bald. The two with the heavy weapons are really wearing more in the way of harnesses, but also have armored shoulder pads and pouches here and there. The leader-type also has another smaller blade on his belt and a high armored collar that probably doubles as some kind of communications device, or could simply be ornamental in nature.

Cleanup on the Armen was about the same as with the mercenaries. They needed a bit of work on some flash that was present but the mold line was just a tiny bit visible and required just a minute to clean up. There is a lot of bare fur on them and they should paint up both quickly, nicely and easily. These guys have a bit of a pirate feel to them and could look really cool done up in that manner.

The second that I saw these in the blister one word echoed in my head over and over again, Vargr, the canine based race from Traveller²⁰. Their tails may be a tad on the bushy side but they will work great just the same. Of course, they're nowhere near being official in their use in that capacity but I don't think that anyone in your Traveller²⁰ group is going to worry about it. Other uses would be similar to those for the mercenaries. If you're planning on playing in a d20 Future (when it comes out) campaign then these, and the mercenaries, would fit in perfectly as PC's and adversaries.

There are three other 'races' of figures available in the Cobalt-1 universe and we'll try to bring you reviews of those as well as more in these two lines in a future issue of Fictional Reality. I am already smitten with these figures and can't wait to get my hands on some more, great stuff!



First up in this issue's look at Confrontation miniatures are two brave fighters, one lad and one lass, from the Barbarians. Drac Mac Syro is below and he comes as a single piece miniature with no assembly required other than gluing him down to the base. He's wearing armor only from the waist down in the form of a chain or scale skirt. He also has a bit of plate on his right forearm but that's all. He's only carrying one weapon, a sword, probably because that's all he needs to separate you from the rest of your life. Muscle detail is great without being overblown and the face is great! Flash was relatively minor, confined mostly to the sword, and the mold line was faint but did need just a bit of work. As with most of the Barbarian line there's a lot of exposed flesh on this model which could either turn out looking very good or, well, not so good. Taking your time here will provide you with the best results.



Drac is not exactly on the cheap side as he'll set you back \$8.99 USD, but he was an absolute 'must have' for me as I run a Barbarian army in Confrontation and even if I didn't I'd still give him a thumbs up as it's a very cool figure and is a versatile model that would do great as a barbarian or fighter PC in Dungeons and Dragons or could also pull double-duty in a Sons of Kronos army for Chronopia.

To the right you'll see Gwenlaen the Ever-Proud who comes as the main body of the figure and two sword-arms

attached to a single metal sprue. Since her weapons are still attached to the sprue you'll need to take care when separating them and preparing them for placement. Also, there is a tab of metal below her sash that connects to the base-tab and you'll need to be careful when removing that also as you could mar the sash accidentally.



Gwenlaen is wearing pieces of plate armor but it's scattered over her body which leaves a lot of exposed flesh. Her hair is tied up into two pony tails and the facial detail is slight, not rugged like Drac, and very well done. Once the swords were cut free and cleaned on their mold lines they fit onto the upper part of the arms perfectly, but the joints could turn out to be very weak and it looks very hard to pin them as her elbows (where the pieces connect) are pretty thin. Gwenlaen is also not on the cheap side, at \$7.99 USD, but it is an outstanding model that has uses similar to Drac.

On to the Griffons (next page) and Sered, Templar Commander. Sered comes as the main body piece and a metal sprue that holds his head, his hammer and attached hand, and his holy symbol and hand. Definitely take your time when getting all of the pieces ready for assembly. This is an awesome figure and it would be a shame to rush through putting it together and break or mess up one of the pieces. Once you have Sered in his four pieces, and they are cleaned which will also take you just a bit of time as he had more flash and mold lines than either

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Drac or Gwenlaen, you'll find that he gets put together with minimal effort or trouble. You'll have the same potential weak joint issue with Sered as with Gwenlaen as both of his hands attach to a somewhat small point on the arms. They are larger than Gwenlaen's though and could be pinned if you really wanted to. Sered is wearing nice big plates of ornamental armor accentuated by flowing robes. Instead of a helmet he appears to be relying on the protective powers of his deity in the form of a symbol that looks a bit like a halo, except it's mounted vertically instead of horizontal and is also inscribed with lots of runes



Being a right-proper priest, Sered is armed with a hammer, but it also serves as a military pick so he can bash or pierce the enemy all the way to the netherworld. What I would call his holy symbol could also be used as a scroll with some cherubs and a censer attached to it with a length of chain.

Sered's head has good facial detail and fit into place perfectly. He looks to be awfully pissed at whomever he's yelling at and I expect that he'll be bringing 'that old time religion' down upon them. He's also devoted enough to scribe the Griffon symbol into his forehead. Would I call him a zealot, hell yeah, just not to his face.

Sered is a great figure and one that I picked up even though I don't play, or plan to play, a Griffon army in Confrontation. I picked him up for use in Dungeons and Dragons as either a Cleric or Paladin. Unfortunately, Michael Tisdell (Fictional Reality co-editor) already nabbed that idea and is currently running Sir Albrecht in my campaign. Oh, Sered will set you back a cool \$9.99 USD which might be a turn-off as he's very much not on the cheap side of things, but for me he's all good.

Our last Confrontation figures this time around come from the Wolfen box set that recently came out. Let's get the sticker shock out of the way first, shall we. You'll be shelling out \$49.99 USD for four figures, three Wolfen and one Elf. Yes, I said elf. If you're already a Wolfen player you know that they are not a cheap (money-wise) army to play and this box set definitely doesn't stray from that path. There's also about twenty cards in the box along with the figs.



Taking a look at the elf first (Kaeliss the Silencer) who comes in two pieces (body and bow/left arm). The first thing that I noticed was that Kaeliss is barefoot. Ok, pretty cool for what could definitely pass for a wood elf. I'll go ahead and call Kaeliss a female even though I have not translated any background text for the miniature. She has excellent facial features and what looks like a female leg line underneath her robes. She's a bit light on top, if you know what I mean, but it's not an unwelcome change from all of the "blessed" female figures that I'm sure most of us have become accustomed to.

She comes as a two-piece model with her bow and left arm needing to be attached to her body. The joint glued together easily and could be pinned if you like. The bow is made out of a gnarled piece of wood and just by itself has a lot of character. She wears nothing in the way of armor, except for a light set of robes which won't stop much unless it's magic. Facial features are very fair and clean. Her hair is very wispy and she's wearing a piece of jewelry on her forehead that looks like a beetle or large spider. Other than her bow she's not carrying any weapons, but does have a quiver of arrows tied to her belt.

There was no flash at all on Kaeliss but the mold line was pretty clearly

visible and needed to be cleaned. It extends down into the folds of her robes so a little care should be taken so you don't mar the figure. Great start to the set.



Lykai (above) is something that you don't see every day, a Wolfen with a gun. A big frickin' gun at that! It's probably over 12 scale feet in length and its game stats bear that out. Lykai comes as a 2-piece miniature, which is kind of low for a Wolfen model, and needed very little in way of cleaning as there was really no flash and just a little hint of a mold line. Initial assembly was easy, but I will need (you may not) some putty for each of the joints as both ended up having a small gap.

The gun has a very nicely detailed wood grain to the stock. Lykai himself is not wearing much in the way of armor, mostly leathers and cloth and has somewhat of a "Grizzly Adams" look to him, which I found to be pretty cool. In addition to his rifle he's carrying four daggers on his back and has a few charms on a chain around his neck. Overall detail was excellent and he should paint up nicely.

Below (left) is Agyar the Inflexible who comes as a body, head and a metal sprue that bears his shield and sword/arm. A bit of care is needed when separating the pieces on the sprue but once that is done he puts together easily. The mold line was just slightly visible and the majority of any cleaning that you'll need to do will come from the sword/arm and shield.

He's in a fairly static pose, which supports his name of being inflexible or maybe more of a defender. Most of his armor comes in the form of heavy studded leather and his sword is as tall as the model itself. His head is mostly covered in a leather helmet that is actually more like a mask and has small armored pieces covering his eyes to keep them from getting poked out. The few bits of metal armor on his front bear runes that could easily be painted to stand out and draw attention to the model.

The last model in the box set, and also the one that will require the most attention in terms of assembly, is Saphyr who is a Wolfen Solitaire. Saphyr is a six-piece model (legs, upper torso, head, a long sword, a really long sword with a familiar sitting on it, and a set of little wings for the familiar).

On its own this would be a very nice model and the inclusion of a familiar is really



nothing new, but his, a winged cat (as can be seen on the cover of the box) is just too cool. It's a very short-haired cat and boy oh boy is it every pissed off. The wings of the cat are at the very top of the model and you'll need to pay attention to the model every time it's out on the table to make sure that they don't get broken off.

He's wearing very little in the way of armor, but being a warrior-mage that's not very surprising at all. The tilt of the upper body in respect to the legs and his left sword being per-pendicular to his body gives the model a very nice sense of motion. He also has a few other items tied to his belt and a very nice tablet or some kind of Wolfen artifact tied up in a bundle on his back. Of all of the pieces that go into putting Saphyr together only the little cat wings required no cleaning. Each of the rest had either a tiny bit of flash or a visible mold line. Just about every piece can also be pinned and that might not be a terrible idea with this figure.



The box set is an obvious thumbs-up for any Wolfen player and might be just the thing to pull you into building a Wolfen army if you haven't already. It takes care of ranged combat, close up fighting and magic between the four models that you get. It's absolutely on the expensive side if you're looking at dollar cost alone, but there are no 'scrubs' in this set. What I mean is that each model is great and can stand on its own merits. There were no extras thrown in here just because they needed some place to go. Another easy 'plus' is the elf. That alone will bring a lot of attention to the set. There's also a ton of cards in the box, including Incarnation stuff, which brings me to the only downside of the set and that is that it's all in French. If you want to translate the cards or don't really care about playing with the Incarnation stuff then this won't be a problem for you, but I know that there are some sticklers out there that only want to play with English cards.

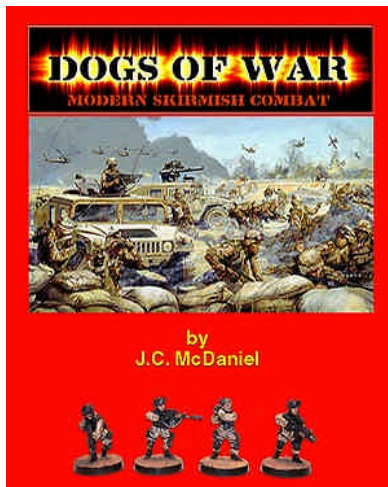
NEW MOG RANGERS



WWW.DEVILDOGDDESIGN.COM



Game Preview



Below you'll find an introduction to the new modern 28mm wargame, Dogs of War. Following the introduction you'll see some basic information on the game itself. Miniatures have already been released, and reviewed in the pages of Fictional Reality. This information is presented with thanks to, and the permission of, Jeff Valent at Devil Dog Designs.

These rules are not meant to be a complete set encompassing all aspects of modern warfare. To give thought to such a feat

is too mind-boggling to comprehend. DOGS OF WAR has been developed primarily to focus on a four-man fire team's existence in modern day war. DOGS OF WAR is a realistic small unit action war game that is easy to learn and relatively quick to play, while providing the depth needed to meet the players' needs for a realistic tactical tabletop miniatures game.

Where and when does DOGS OF WAR take place? It is present day, and where in the world you take your fire team and fight is up to you and your imagination. Collecting a large army is not necessary in order to play DOGS OF WAR. All it takes is a minimum of four soldiers to enter the firefight of your life. The standard fire team is derived from the U.S. Military Infantry Squad. For every squad there are three fire teams. In each fire team there are four soldiers: a fire team leader and three riflemen. An example of this would be the U.S. Marine Corps fire team consisting of the fire team leader carrying the M16A2/M203 Grenade Launcher, a rifleman with an M16A2 assault rifle, a Marine with a squad automatic weapon also known as a "SAW", and another Marine with a M16A2 assault rifle as an assistant to the SAW gunner.

That's it!!! Four, lean, mean fighting machines ready to spread some death and destruction all over the field of battle. Seriously though, the games you decide to play can be as small as two fire teams fighting against each other, or several fire teams placed together in order to form squads. Not every country is similar to the United States in the way it breaks down its squads into fire teams. Players wishing to play a terrorist faction such as the Al Qaeda or lead a Russian Spetznaz team will have the appropriate configuration of troops and equipment assigned to their fire team.

The game is based on a D10 system, and is played under random initiative rules. DOGS OF WAR is based on a point system. Each soldier in your fire team is worth so many points based on his ability scores, weapons, and profession. A typical game is roughly five hundred points per side. There is a setup phase determining who places their troops first and where. Scenario-based games will determine terrain and objectives. Otherwise these two factors are left up to player discretion. The game is won when either player successfully completes the objectives stated or destroys his opponent's ability to fight another turn.

Realism is at the root of these rules. Too often war games diminish into dice rolling contests just to see how fast each player can pull his opponent's pieces off the table. You have little regard for your own army, as long as it means removing more of your opponent's models. You might as well just roll dice all night, and forget the miniatures. The objective here is for the player to want to keep his troops alive and understand the value of each member of his team.

In the future you will see the addition of many things. Advanced rules will allow more experienced gamers several more layers of realism. Rules for air strikes and helicopter assaults, vehicles, and call for fire are just some of

the additions for our future supplements. Most importantly are campaign rules and a sample campaign covering the War Against Terrorism.

Things you will need

Here is all you will need in addition to the rules to play DOGS OF WAR!

- Dice: D10 and D6
- Measuring tape/stick marked in inches for measuring movement and fire distances
- Modern Miniatures
- Terrain

MODERN MINIATURES/ MODELS

Models are the miniatures and/or vehicles that are used to represent your forces during a game. Each model has statistics, which govern its capabilities in and out of battle. The most important of these is its Action Point pool. Every model has a certain number of action points that are expended each turn. Models operating vehicles use their action points to use and maneuver the vehicle. The miniatures designed for DOGS OF WAR are sculpted by Devil Dog Design. There will be a continued series of miniatures produced and released on a periodic basis. Specific rules for these miniatures will be posted on the Devil Dog Design website.

BATTLEFIELD/TERRAIN

As for where to play the game, anywhere from a kitchen table to a large elaborate gaming table with all the trimmings is fine. As mentioned earlier, DOGS OF WAR is based on small unit actions. A game is typically played on a four foot by four foot gaming area.

In that these rules are for small unit actions where typical weapons can cover most of the board, a lot of terrain is usually preferable.

THE GOLDEN RULE

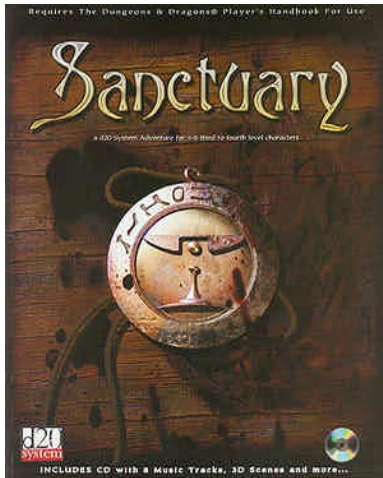
The most important aspect about DOGS OF WAR is its fluid ability to allow players to effectively determine the fate of each one of their models through the use of action points. Because of this there will be games where players will have a discrepancy or will be in a stalemate because the rules may not cover every situation that may arise. In order to resolve such a case the players must let the roll of a die decide and press on with the game. The players may want to decide an effective way to treat any problems met during a game by establishing house rules. The best time to resolve any conflicts not covered by the rules is before or after the game, but not during the game.

ABILITIES

Every member of your fire team has ability scores that are used to measure his or her capabilities. Some of these scores can be improved at a cost by obtaining special abilities during the building phase. During the building phase you select a fire team and outfit it. You may customize it to your liking as long as you stay within the parameters of your given soldier's profession. Each score is between one and ten with ten being the best or highest in each category.



D20 Product Reviews



The Plea:

'Sanctuary is a role-playing module for 4-6 characters of levels 4-5. It includes a detailed local setting, maps and core plotline that can be used with most d20 fantasy games and comes with a bonus CD containing Music Tracks, key scenes, and buildings rendered in 3D.' (Sic). MSRP \$19.95

The Evidence:

We begin with a simple, uncluttered cover design, nicely done in limp-back format, with an eggshell finish. The reverse side fields quite an amount of information and some,

gorgeously teasing, screenshots. Opening up, the first thing to notice, are the lack of credits. They are there, but reside towards the end of the offerings, nestled in with the license agreements. I feel this worthy of mention because, to my mind at least, it is a refreshing indication of the humility, of the Auran production staff.

The introduction is well written and informative but, worryingly, it contradicts the cover, stating the adventure is for 4-6 characters, of levels 3-4. Although the cover states the Players' Handbook is a requirement for delivering this scenario to players, specific page and passage references, from the Dungeon Masters' Guide and the Monster Manual, are repeatedly referred to. The internal design is very pleasing and well ordered; the artwork is of a consistently high standard throughout. Worthy of particular mention are the portrayals of the major NPC's, greatly enhancing the DM's ability to get to grips with the relative personalities of each.

The contents are marred, visually, only by the 'in-house magazine' styled self-advertising, ranging from a third of a page to a full page, although the full page is forgivable as it is at the back of the booklet and is advertising a free, downloadable bonus scenario. All maps are centralised and are presented in a very high quality, glorious full colour PC screenshot format. For some bizarre reason, reference is made to legends from the Cherrishire map, which do not appear on said map, nor any other map!!? Handouts, of significant documents, are provided for the players but, again bizarrely, the handouts are not readily removable and cutting them out is not a viable option, as important DM information appears on the reverse side of some!!!!? A solution to this problem is actually provided but whether the provision is deliberate or not, is indeterminable.

Which brings us to the multi-media CD provided. Here you will find music and sound effects, NPC narratives and a whole host of visuals. There are animated sequences of significant historical events and items, providing the players with more than hints of information and some navigable stills of important map areas.

The party are invited into the storyline in a not unfamiliar fashion, there is ample background to familiarize themselves with and enough intrigue to allow for plot development. There are a great deal of preparatory encounters and events, to draw the players in to the storyline, all carried out to a precise timeline, which the characters are unaware of. The level of detail in each of the 'dungeon' encounter locations is astounding. Each building, floor and even roof-beam is beautifully described and it's history lovingly recalled. There is a plentiful cast of characters, for this tale, all with full statistics, many having illustrations and most having thoroughly thrashed out motivations and personal histories, even some with completed NPC character sheets.

The Findings:

I was hoping to forego the 'usual' complaint regarding poor proofreading but alas, we once again have visited upon us, a congregation of contradictions,

typos, incorrect usage of terms, lack of punctuation and bizarre spacing, the latter seemingly occurring when wrapping text around illustration. There were so many apparent, I gave up scoring by the time I had marked twenty. This problem is apparently endemic, which is a shame because, in my very un-humble opinion, it truly detracts from the quality of the product.

I don't know why, but d20 product producers seem intent upon alluding to the necessity of one D&D Core Rulebook. What, I ask, is wrong with letting purchasers know exactly what will be required to successfully deliver these scenarios. Perhaps d20 products should all state something along the lines of 'enhanced by access to the D&D Core Rulebooks'. What is the point of being specific, if you are then inaccurate or misleading?

What a boon the CD is! If you can think of some way to display a screen to the players, without ruining any ambience you may have carefully created, you will find this a useful tool. The room views are not of great use to the players but there is a wonderful, rotating, birds-eye view of Tharlan Keep, ideal to be used as the result of scrying actions. The animated sequences and the narration portions are very useful for mood setting and as results of clairvoyance/clairaudience/augury activity. Best of all, there is an entire, searchable, PDF version of the scenario. Now you can physically hand out those handouts, without slicing up your booklet, a wonderful idea adding significantly to the value of the product, competitors take note! And, there is a free, downloadable, campaign-related scenario, which isn't just an empty promise.

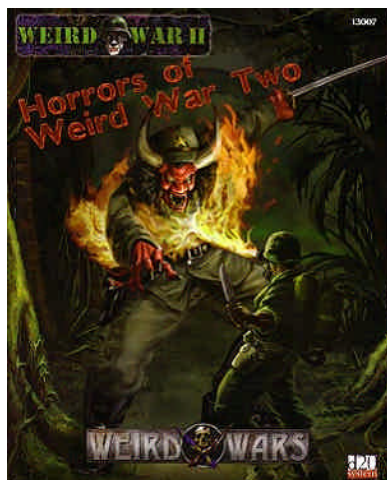
Although descriptions are beautifully written, due to the repetition and the unnecessary level of detail, I cannot help but feel they are acting as filler, thinly veiling the distinct lack of 'action'. Repeating the, substantial, story background three times and the Main players' personal history and motivations is, to say the least, unnecessary. Make sure there is someone of significant strength present in the party, because the Dungeon portion of this scenario begins with the party needing to escape and escaping, in this instance, requires a not insubstantial amount of muscle.

Alignment and character class could greatly affect the proceedings here, but that is no bad thing and could prove interesting, especially for campaign settings. The actual action events are thinly spread throughout the scenario and, depending upon the style of the players and the skills of the characters, could be quite brief. The lead protagonist is a very interesting character and, depending upon which contradiction of her statistics you use, could be a tall order for a small party. The overall alignment leanings of the party could make this an extremely intriguing encounter, especially for those characters for which this is a campaign setting. Timing is all-important for this scenario and keeping track of it doubly so. Major events are greatly affected by where and, more critically, when the PC's are, throughout the scenario, but especially toward its conclusion.

The Summing Up:

As a campaign expansion, Sanctuary is definitely a little diamond, with or without access to a PC. As a 'stand alone' adventure however, I'm afraid it's no more than a cubic zirconium.

D20 Product Reviews



BASICS

Horrors of Weird War II is an expanded collection of monsters for use in Pinnacle's alternate history role-playing game. It is a 144-page softcover book with color cover and black & white interior artwork and a retail price of \$24.99 USD.

INSIDE

A very short (half-page) introduction gets you started with Horrors of Weird War II and then it's right into the meat and bones of the uglies. All of the monsters are listed and sorted alphabetically and take up roughly the first 130 pages

of the book. The balance is taken up by a short, but very welcome, adventure. On average, the monster entries take up a page (some more, some less) and include the standard block of stats that you would expect, but also their combat strategies and adventure seed on how you can build an adventure with the monster in question taking a pretty prominent role.

Challenge Ratings range from 1 to 13 with very few of CR 10 or higher so there will be lots of monsters to threaten parties of a low-medium power level. There are a lot of undead packed in here and the guys at Pinnacle have come up with a variety of zombie-like monsters to keep things from getting stale. Some of my personal favorites (with zombies being one of my favorite monsters regardless of game genre) are the Animated Dead (clockwork zombies), Asphyxiation Zombies (chemical warfare zombies), and Flagellants (pretty serious customers with a CR of 4 that use their exposed guts as whips).

The adventure seeds are each a paragraph or two long and add some punch to the book and increase its usefulness quite a bit. These can be used to build an entire adventure, but are also suited to single encounters that could be tied together through a common theme.

The mini-adventure (The Secret of the Caves) is broken up into eight chapters, each of which is listed as taking about 30-45 minutes to play through so you could easily use it as a 4+/- hour sit-down for a group of players that have already been through at least some experiences of what the Weird War will throw at them. It will take the party into enemy-occupied territory in France to find out about something strange and new that the Nazi's have found and keep them from using it. There's room for enough combat present to keep your gung-ho players pretty happy and with a group of moderately experienced role-players, and as is suggested a group that has played Weird War II before, I suspect that the adventure could be wrapped up in under 4 hours. It would definitely make a really good convention game.

VALUE

Players of Weird War II will find this to be a great resource, one that will certainly add to the monsters that are presented in each of the sourcebooks that have come out and to the monsters that they've no doubt ported over from Dungeons and Dragons. Players of Pulp (Forbidden Kingdoms), Horror (Call of Cthulhu) and Modern (d20 Modern or Spycraft) genre games could also find lots of new adversaries for their players. I love the inclusion of a mini-adventure and overall the artwork is good. I would have really liked to see organization along Challenge Rating lines, instead of alphabetically, or at least a chart breaking everything down by CR. I think this would be a welcome bit of help to WarMasters. Overall, a good addition to the Weird War II line.

BASICS

The Epitaph, issue 4, is a 128-page collection of material for all of the Deadlands lines of games by Pinnacle Entertainment Group. It has a color cover and everything on the inside is in black and white. It has a retail price of \$19.95 USD.

INSIDE

The book starts off with an update on each of the game worlds and also a few words about d20 and 'regular' Deadlands games and rules on how to give

the d20 versions more of an old-school feel without actually using the other rule sets. With this, the guys at Pinnacle are trying to satisfy both camps of players.

The next two entries are adventures, one for Deadlands (classic and d20 stats are provided to keep everyone happy) and one for Deadlands: Lost Colony (ditto on the dual stats). The Deadlands adventure comes in at 20 pages and the Lost Colony offering has 10. By itself, the first adventure comes close to making up half of the cover price of the whole book.

Next up is a d20 conversion for 'The Great Maze' which was originally published for the classic version of Deadlands. While you'll still need to get a hold of the original material, all of the conversion work has been done for you and your stock of d20 Deadlands usable stuff has just increased a whole bunch.

Great Rail Wars players get a bump in the form of rules for fighting ships which require the use of the GRW rules and those in the Derailed! supplement. Another Deadlands: Lost Colony adventure follows (12 pages this time) whose main bad-un has a very unique name that's not too dissimilar from a Mr. Chris Pramas of Green Ronin fame, nice!

The book rounds out with a nice selection of new spells and spell bonuses, called Manitous (for classic Deadlands), some alternate rules for Deadlands: Hell on Earth, and then solo rules for the Deadlands: Range Wars collectible card game.

VALUE

All of the text in issue 4 of Epitaph was easy to read and the updates on the game worlds will help GM's keep their campaigns fresh. The artwork is pretty standard and is as good as in other Deadlands products. It's printed on heavy paper, like most of their other products, and will hold up well.

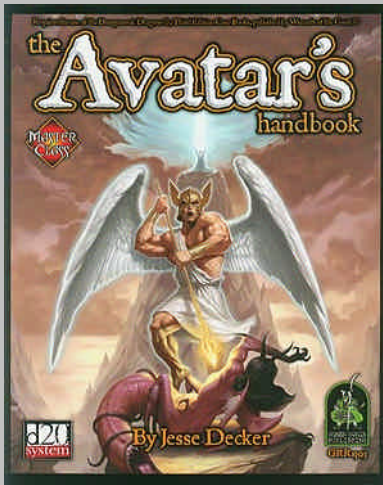
Material for Deadlands: Hell on Earth and Lost Colony are certainly in the minority here and this material alone is not likely to get you to drop your money on this issue of Epitaph.

If you're a die-hard player of all (or most of) the Deadlands line of games then picking up Epitaph, issue 4, is really a no-brainer and gives you a nice volume of material. If you're just a player of Deadlands d20 then I'd still recommend it's purchase, but it would have been very nice to get d20 versions of both the Manitou rules and the new spells that were made available for classic Deadlands.

I would venture a guess that most players of the spin-off Deadlands games are players of either the classic or d20 version of the regular game and therefor will find quite a bit of use out of Epitaph, issue 4.



D20 Product Reviews



At first glance...

The Avatar's Handbook is a soft back resource guide that sells for \$16.95 and is published by Green Ronin Publishing. The full color gloss cover has a picture of an angel slaying a demonic creature that is writhing in pain. In the background is a magic user calling down the righteous retribution of the angel. Well illustrated, it is not until I read the book that I realized that the character class is the magic user in the background. The 80 pages inside are black and white, with wonderful illustration of the denizens of the heavenly planes.

Okay what's really in it?

This book is a resource book to playing an avatar of the gods. It gives a background on what an avatar is, what their special abilities are, and appendixes full of divine creatures. The Avatar's Handbook has new spells for clerics to use, as well as some suggestions for running campaigns with summoned creatures. The quality of the writing and the artwork is all that you have come to expect from Green Ronin Publishing.

What impressed me...

Jesse Decker has done a great job defining the Avatar class. It has a heavy emphasis on summoning spells, as the avatar is a leader of the heavenly hosts. As a character class the avatar is a second tier character, much like the bard. The avatar's magic is divine in nature and is not overly aggressive so he is not intended to be a walking artillery platform, but rather a focal point of divine creatures that heed his call to arms. The banner spells are nice and very visual. They lend themselves to a true story-like roleplaying experience, "follow me boys" can easily become character catch phrases. Avatars also receive "boons" from the gods. These are a selection of abilities that the Avatar gets to choose from. Mr. Decker has given a fairly comprehensive list of celestial creatures from minor animal-like minions to the powerful Glory Dragon. Each of these celestial creatures is a variation of some type of virtue. From the wrath filled Arimath to the free loving Seraphyl. Even stats for the Archangels Mika'il and Gabriel are included. The Avatar's Handbook also does a wonderful job of creating templates for "redeemed" characters. Many a player wants to play an evil monster class, only to be told that it was not appropriate in this campaign. The redeemed templates allow for "good" evil characters. The Avatar's Handbook also contains suggestions for both GM's and PC's to use when playing with characters that have an emphasis on summoned creatures.

Nothing is perfect...

I think the problem with this book is how obscure this character class is. Even with good descriptions and interesting special rules, the actual avatar class only takes up five pages in this book. This seems to be rather odd for a handbook devoted to avatars. Playing an avatar in a campaign that has no real religious themes in it really seems to detract from the background of the class. All of the creatures here are good aligned and almost all of them can be summoned by the avatar, but with a little imagination each of these can be used in any campaign as a celestial fallen from grace.

And the overall impression is...

My biggest complaint about this book continues to be its need for more information about avatars. I think the picture truly embodies the entire book, a fierce angel with a small avatar summoning him in the background. Anyone picking up the book should take from the title the fact that there are religious undertones in this book, and anyone bothered by this should avoid it. This book is one of the cheaper sourcebooks on the market, which I feel is a redeeming factor, for although it is well laid out and well written, I feel it is a very narrow book, and unless you feel drawn to the character class naturally spend you money elsewhere. I recommend this book to players and game masters who love playing roleplaying games with a touch of religious tension thrown in.

BASICS

Guess what, the picture to the right is from the Mutants and Masterminds recently released Gamemaster screen. Guess what else, it's designed to be used with Mutants and Masterminds to cut down on book flipping by the GM and allow him to focus more on running the game. Ok, enough with being a smart-ass. For \$9.95 USD you get a four-panel GM screen with oodles of charts on one side and some brilliant super-action artwork on the other. There is also a single-page reference document detailing all of the conditions that you may find your particular hero, or villain, in.

INSIDE

The screen is sold with the promise of providing 32 charts. Well, the guys at Green Ronin lie! There are 35 charts and stat blocks for eight supporting characters like cops, reporters, scientists, etc packed into the four panels of text on this screen. All of the charts are very easy to read with shading on every other line and text that is not too small at all. The text for the supporting character blocks is smaller than that used on the charts, but it's certainly not unreadable.

Not every single chart could be included, but major ones that are most relevant to the genre are. Stuff like Climb and Jump checks as an example. Combat modifiers are nicely laid out on one of the two center panels and are right next to Damage Saves, Combat Actions, and Cover information. Book flipping should be significantly reduced, even for beginning GM's.

The supporting character stat blocks are all complete, including equipment with damage rating. A list of around ten melee and ranged weapons, along with armor, and a few power check tables can be found on the third panel. The powers here are stuff like Postcognition, Precognition, and Telepathy that might not be used quite as much as some other power, but would certainly send you scrambling for your rulebook to find out.

The art on the PC side features characters from the Mutants and Masterminds world beating the hell out of each other.

VALUE

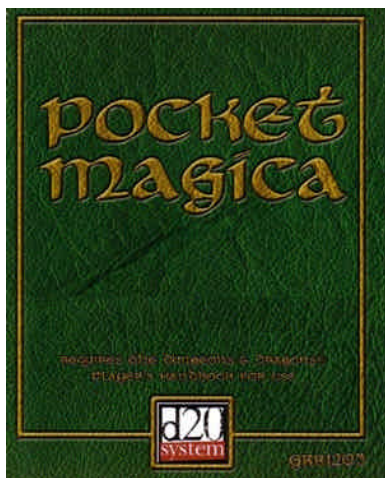
For about ten bucks you get a very respectable GM screen. In fact, it's really useful and, like the Mutants and Masterminds rulebook, the artwork is top-notch! It's printed on glossy cardstock that should hold up very well, even with lots of use.

The text on the 'condition' sheet might have been more useful as part of the screen itself, but that would have taken away from one-quarter of what could have been presented on the GM side of the sheet. I guess it could have replaced one panel on the art side as there is no reason that players can't see this information. Less art, more text??? Ah, it's fine the way it is.

I think that the only thing that could have made it more useful, bear in mind that it's a great buy as is, would be a mini-adventure like the one found in the rulebook. I think that the addition of a short eight-page adventure would have been stupendous and would have easily netted fifteen bucks at the sales counter. But, I digress, it's a great screen with tons of useful information and is an easy 'yes' for any Mutants and Masterminds GM.



D20 Product Reviews



BASICS

Pocket Magica is a \$14.95 USD, 240 page softcover book of magic items published by Green Ronin. The last 3 pages are advertisements. It presents a complete catalog of magic items released from the following publishers: Wizards of the Coast (SRD only), Bastion, Fantasy Flight, Green Ronin, S.K. Reynolds, Brennan and Maliszewski, Thunderhead, Mystic Eye, Peterson, and Trident. Artwork is non-existent if you exclude ads and the pseudo-celtic border pattern on each page.

INSIDE

This is an extremely simple book. It begins with an index to prices of all magic items in the book, the body of the book is magic item descriptions, and then there are 2 short appendices.

The foremost use of the Pocket Magica is as a reference work. This is immediately obvious, as it is the closest that we are likely to see to a complete volume of all magic items in the d20 system. It is necessarily limited by the profusion of copyrighted settings, and it will, of course, become increasingly incomplete as time passes.

Each item description is complete, with text description, original sourcebook, item creation details, and (when necessary) relevant tables for each item. Artifacts are not detailed (usually being setting specific and non-Open material), and distinctions between different rarities of magic items is made chiefly through price.

The book is useful in this sense alone by describing a tremendous range of wildly different items. Some potions I like include the Three-Part Poison, and the Strange Brews section, which describes a variety of possible odd effects reminiscent of the Potion Miscibility Table in the 1st Ed. DMG.

Its secondary use is for both players and DM's: a tool for equipping characters of greater than 1st level with magic items. Before the main body of text is reached there are several pages of tables, breaking down the encyclopedia of items into type, then listed by cost from lowest to highest. This format is simple to use, and facilitates rapid choices. This is the prime attraction of this book: convenience.

Appendix 1 consists of spells referenced by the magic items of the book. None of the detailed spells are from the 3E Players Handbook. A single template is offered in Appendix 2: Iron-souled. Based on the material in Hammer & Helm, this template is for those special creatures born into "Iron", and may be applied to most non-extraplanar creature types.

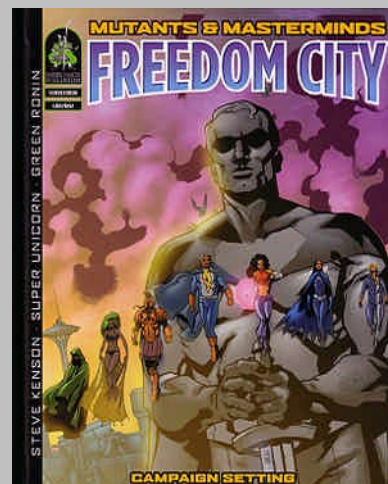
VALUE

The value for something like this is highly subjective. It is a compilation of previously published material. As such, it could be completely redundant, and a "waste of money". However, it compiles and organizes material from more than a dozen sources into a single convenient handbook. As such it is extremely convenient, and handy for equipping NPC's and playing groups, and is a highly comprehensive collection of magic items.

The likeliest scenario I see is one or two copies owned by a playing group, to usually be used by the DM, and to be used and passed around a group when making a party of greater than first level.

BASICS

Freedom City is the first full-blown supplement for the Mutants & Masterminds super-hero rpg. It follows the recent release of the M&M GM Screen (reviewed in the next column). Freedom City is a full color (inside and out) hardback publication from the guys at Green Ronin and Super Unicorn. It checks in at 192-pages and will set you back \$32.95 USD. It promises to detail the major city for the M&M universe as well as provide several new heroes, villains, and more.



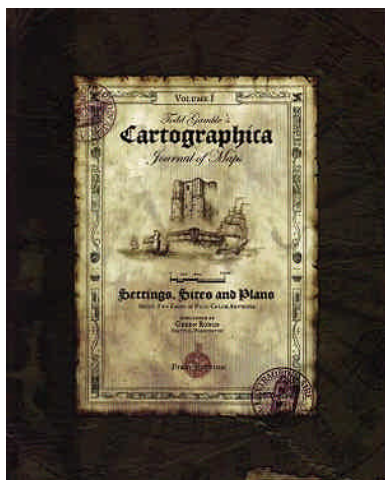
INSIDE

As soon as you open up Freedom City for the first time you'll see that the guys at Green Ronin / Super Unicorn are serious about putting out the highest quality material possible. Everything is in color and on slick paper, very nice. The book is broken up into seven chapters and a rogues gallery of heroes and villains (that alone takes up almost 100 pages!). Chapter one (Welcome to Freedom City) gives you some history and also some additional ways to use it. Throughout the introduction you also get several timelines that can be used to get players up to speed regarding when things happened in their new surroundings or could be used to toss them around in time as part of a time-travel adventure or campaign. In chapter 2 (Overview of Freedom City) you'll read about the various parts of town and specific locations to visit along with articles torn from local newspapers and magazines which add local flavor and real-ness to Freedom City. Curiously, there is a restaurant named Champions in Freedom City. Chapters 3-6 (Government, Public Safety, Life in Freedom City, and The Underworld) give the GM a huge amount of information to bring the city to life and build a livable world for their characters. Chapter seven (Beyond Freedom City) gives you a plethora of material to take your campaign outside the city limits. Great information on other earthbound locales, like The Lost World and Atlantis, places beyond earth and even outside our own dimension is presented in enough detail to use without overshadowing Freedom City. Even though this is a book about Freedom City I was very glad to see all of the great heroes and villains for you to ally with or kick in the teeth. Teams and individuals are presented along with excellent background information, a quote (excellent soliloquy material), stat blocks, and villain options for the heroes. Awesome section of the book!

VALUE

Freedom City is a magnificent supplement. It serves as a great resource, not only for Mutants & Masterminds, but the whole super hero genre also. I found the characters well thought out and defined and while the city itself was wonderful but the suburban area could have been built out just a tad more. Even with that said plenty of time was taken to build it as a living place to adventure in. The only thing that could further increase my high recommendation of this product would be the inclusion of a mini-adventure. There are plenty of seeds strewn all over the book, but an actual 8-16 pages devoted to this end would have had me in hog heaven. As it stands I'm still supremely happy with the book and it could serve in non-M&M super hero games as a great background and porting it over to d20 Modern could also work fairly easily, but you'd lose the use of the very cool super hero and villain stuff contained therein. Production values are among the best I've seen in the industry. There are different styles of art in the book and all of them work great. Everything is crisp and clean and easy to read and digest. Bottom line, two thumbs way up...would be three thumbs if I had that many. An excellent book worthy of use in any 'supers' game. I absolutely cannot wait to see their next book for Mutants & Masterminds, Crooks!

D20 Product Reviews



BASICS

Todd Gamble's *Cartographica Journal of Maps, Volume 1* (wheh, what a name!) is the first book in what looks to be a series on maps of various typical (and maybe some not) fantasy game locations. It is a 62-page softcover book with color cover and full color interior on nice paper with a retail price of \$16.95 USD.

INSIDE

Upon opening and flipping through the book you'll notice that all of the maps are just stunning. They are all of absolutely superior quality and except for a very few which are kind of dark

are all easy to read and navigate. Chris Pramas (head Green Ronin guy) points out in a short introduction that the inspiration for them doing this book was to give DM's pre-made maps to use in their home-brew adventures.

The first eight maps are in a section called 'Behind Castle Walls' and they represent some fairly standard layouts and also some that are nice and different. In general, the scales are easy to measure, but not all of the maps have the standard 5' square that many of us have become accustomed to with *Dungeons and Dragons*. The next six maps lead us to a wizard's Tower and Power House that is build into a dam which generates power through a large

turbine and is right next door to a dragon's cave. This multi-story, but kind of small, dwelling then leads to a series of cave under the river for you to explore which take up another 5 pages of maps.

Next we move on to several Sacred Tombs that could be scattered throughout the Overland Maps, Exotic Islands or Small Hamlets that also populate the book. There are five pages of dungeon levels and while each of them, taken individually, might be a tad small for a single adventure, you could connect them all and have a five layer deep dungeon that just needs you to stock it with all sorts of nasties.

The Mining Passages could make for a great raid into a goblin or dwarf mine and the Underground Sewers are just waiting to be populated with beggars, rats, and maybe even were-rats.

VALUE

This book will be of questionable value to some people and here's why. If you're not a DM or interested in building adventures around pre-generated maps then you'll probably look at it and say, "Wow, what great looking maps" and walk off. Granted, not everyone is a DM with those desires and Green Ronin certainly knew this when they put the book together. You could easily build several adventures around the maps in this book and to anyone that is artistically challenged (yes, I'll raise my hand). How hard is it to draw a map, you ask? Well, not too hard if you want it to look like a bunch of squiggly lines. If you're ok with that, then you'll keep walking, but considering that these maps come out to just over \$0.25 per page I'd say that they are worthy of a spot on your bookshelf and can assist you in pulling together at least a handful of adventures. My only wish for the series would be to maybe do larger foldable maps that could be used directly on the game table along with miniatures.



25mm Figures

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15mm Figures

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Huge Battles in an
Afternoon

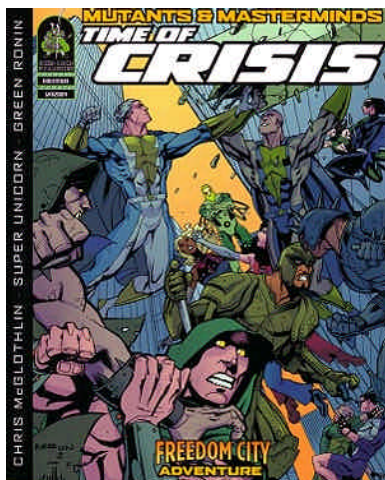


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D20 Product Reviews



BASICS

Time of Crisis is the first adventure module published by Green Ronin / Super Unicorn for the Mutants and Masterminds superhero rpg. It's a 64-page perfect-bound full color (inside and out) softcover book whose back cover indicates that, "The Omniverse is Exploding...One Earth at a Time!" Right away that reminded me of the old DC series 'Crisis on Infinite Earths' which I liked a whole lot. We'll see how this turns out. Time of Crisis has a regular retail price of \$16.95 USD.

INSIDE

The adventure is broken up into five chapters and an introduction to give the GM a basic overview of what is going on. The adventure is set up for 6 PC's with PL 10 characters, but can be tailored up or down. Also, while the authors obviously wrote the module for Mutants and Masterminds they don't shy away from the fact that with some conversions it could be used for any other 'hero' game out there.

There are some lead-ins presented in Time of Crisis that you can sprinkle in your game before actually running this module, but you'll either need to start your campaign below PL 10 or adjust up the encounters in ToC to make up for the fact that you'll probably have more experienced PC's running through it.

In Chapter 1 the PC's will encounter a team of bad guys that would be more of a challenge if they were more organized and while the fight may tax the heroes a bit they should come out of it fine. A nice 6 on 6 fight to start things off and then the *real* story of what's going on begins to unfold. As you can guess by the teaser above the heroes are on a mission to save all of reality, oh please don't hit me up for anything easy or mundane. Save the universe, I mean, save all of reality, sure we'll get right on it ;)

Chapters 2-4 each see the party being sent off to different parallel Earths where they must not only fight some bad guys, but also achieve a mission objective and can also effect some positive change while they are passing through. While none of these stops along adventure route are our own familiar stomping grounds, none of them are so foreign that they are unplayable. Each is different from the previous and presents their own problems and perils. There are also ample opportunities to role-play between the tearing up of city blocks and the thumping of melons. PL 10 is about the norm for many the super-baddies (there's a few a little higher and even some significantly higher) that you'll run up against, but of course there are scrubs that are down in the single digits for you to smack around like movie extras. The climax fight is going to be a doozy to say the least and could result in several dead heroes. The authors have taken this into account and present the GM with options if things go too badly too quickly.

VALUE

I found Time of Crisis to be a great first full-blown module to add to the already super line of Mutants and Masterminds products from Green Ronin and Super Unicorn. The adventure is going to be easy for a new 'super' GM to run and will present enough roll and role-playing options for rookie and veteran players of the genre. The price is right and the only thing that I might have added would be maybe a handful of new sample characters, but that's really more a wish of mine than any kind of necessity. Can't wait to see more.

BASICS

Bastards & Bloodlines is the most recent addition in the line of d20 racial specialty books from Green Ronin Publishing. It's a 112-page tome that, as the cover points out, is a guidebook to half-breeds which provides Dungeons & Dragons players with a huge number of new playable PC races, a dozen templates and new feats. It has a color cover and black and white interior artwork and has a retail price of \$19.95 USD.

INSIDE

The book starts off with an introduction and advice on how to introduce half-breeds into your campaign. I enjoyed this quite a bit as they didn't just dump a whole new set of PC races on you with no reasonable explanation for their existence. Some of the races can come about through magical experimentation with others coming the old-fashioned (bon-chicka-bon-bon) way. If you have to ask, you're too young to know! Societal reactions to half-breeds are also presented here and will help a GM in building their NPC's reactions to these new races.

The campaign possibilities, specifically the "family game", are quite interesting. Building a party around an extended family, of say Grendles (Dwarf/Troll or Human/Troll) or Wendigos (Dwarf/Winter Wolf) could really be a lot of fun to play in. The over two dozen half-breeds presented all have a standard PHB presentation that will be easy for any player to follow and build a character around. All of them, except for three, have a level adjustment of at least +1, with the average being +3.

If you're familiar with the existing templates that are available then you'll already be up to speed with these. If not, the templates modify an existing character, or NPC or monster, by (sort of) merging it with another creature (Half-Rakshasa or Half-Medusa, for example). The result is a set of altered attributes and a level adjustment.

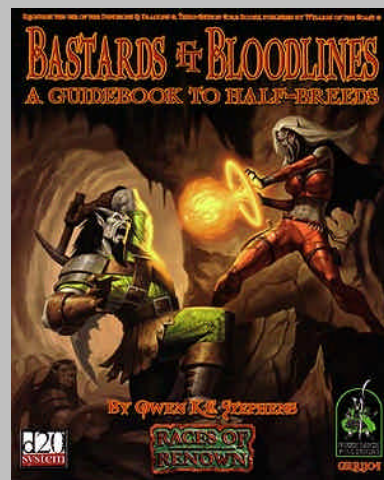
One-third of the new feats fall into a new category, Bloodline, that are only available to certain races. Of the 'standard' feats I'd say that Throwback (General) is probably the most significant for players that want to build a hard-ass. It provides bonuses to both Str and Con, while reducing your Int, Wis and Cha. No, I won't tell you by how much.

Four Prestige Classes are also included, all of which require a PC to be a half-breed or monstrous humanoid, and they are all suitably cool, but even considering how much of fan of PC's that I am I found all of the new races to overshadow them. Were they cool? Yeah, but just not as much as the rest of the book.

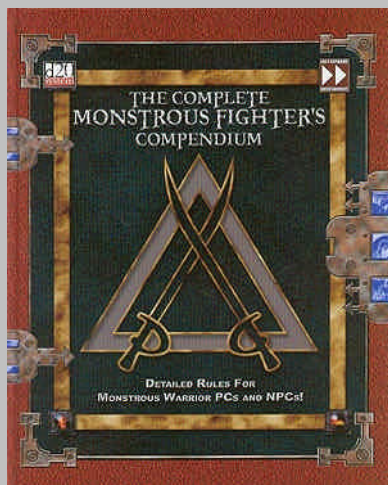
VALUE

All of the artwork is good, with a lot of it actually being very good. The book was an easy and interesting read and I would have no qualms about allowing a player in my Dungeons & Dragons campaign use one of them. Each new race is nicely fleshed out with about two pages being devoted to it which helps to build a clear picture and most, but not all, are given an illustration.

I'd say that Bastards & Bloodlines is more of a DM's book than one that a lot of (strictly) players will pick up, but if you've already bought into the idea of monster-race PC's and are big on giving players lots of racial choices then I'd absolutely recommend you grabbing this book also. It matches the quality of the others in the line and is another really, really good book from Green Ronin.



D20 Product Reviews



BASICS

Fast Forward Entertainment has published an interesting supplement to accompany their *Green Races* source book. This supplement is *The Complete Monstrous Fighter's Compendium*. This tome is for those folks that are tired of hunting down and slaying one more band of goblins or orcs. Well, this book allows players to reverse the roles and become the players of these same goblins or orcs. Instead of killing these foul humanoids you'll be compelled to keep them alive just as you would a beloved player character fighter or cleric. Being on the other end of the

spectrum will allow you to do battle with marauding bands of elves and dwarves that are determined to eradicate you and your kin. No matter what type of "evil" critter you might like to play, this book might have it. From a sly, subterranean drow to a very powerful, but sharp-as-a-sack-of-wet-hair ogre, this book has something to tickle your fancy...or possibly your sadistic side that you keep hidden in the furthest corner of your soul.

PRESENTATION

The Complete Monstrous Fighter's Compendium is a 128 page, hardback book, perfect for decorating any self-respecting gamer's shelf. It is a D20-based supplement for the *Dungeons & Dragons* 3rd edition system, produced under the open gaming license. The book is laid out in easy-to-read black on white text with an adequate supply of black and white artwork. Each green races described in this guide comes with a better-than-average drawing depicting an example of each race's appearance.

The Compendium is well edited. The chapters are concise and supply plenty of detail for monstrous races presented therein, but also descriptions of the "bad guy" races, the races of demi-humans. Besides the chapter devoted to the myriad races described in the book there are chapters for new classes and prestige classes, new skills, new feats, new equipment (magical as well as non-magical) and one for new spells. Finally there is a chapter on how to go about playing the green races, Fast Forward Entertainment's term for their monstrous player character races.

VALUE

For a MSRP of \$24.99 a buyer gets a pretty good value for his money spent on *The Complete Monstrous Fighter's Compendium*. Besides receiving a nicely constructed book the buyer gets enough bells and whistles to make the outlay of hard-earned money worthwhile. This book contains fifteen green races as well as five good races. Also, there are four new class included. My personal favorite is the Freak.

As for prestige classes there are a whopping twelve of them and a half dozen new spells. These go along with the new skills and feats with which to customize your monstrous killer.

There is one slight drawback to *The Complete Monstrous Fighter's Compendium*. It really does not fit well with other, more traditional *D&D* campaign settings. More conventional *Dungeons and Dragons* games take into account the inherent toughness of some monstrous races and impose a level penalty is someone is wanting to field one in a *D&D* game. *The Complete Monstrous Fighter's Compendium* does not include this type of penalty in the descriptions of its player races. It seems that this compendium is meant to be used with Fast Forward's own campaign world and not with "normal" *D&D* gaming world. But, if a dungeon master wanted to include the information in this volume with his/her own campaign it would not take a whole lot of work to find a way to make this information compatible to a particular d.m.'s taste.

BASICS

"Enchanted Locations: Crypts and Tombs" is a 128-page hard cover book published by Fast Forward Entertainment. The front and back covers are full color, while the internal illustrations are all black and white. This volume provides outlines for quests in a fantasy d20 campaign. The retail price is \$24.99.

INSIDE

The purpose of this volume is to provide the referee with a set of outlines for quests. Each quest description includes one or more magical artifacts, a description and map of the areas where the artifacts can be found, and information on the inhabitants of the area. These are not full encounters or adventures, but outlines and sketches for the referee to fill out and use in an existing campaign – or to start a new one. The first section covers quests and how to setup and run them. This includes a discussion of the elements of the quest – the motivations of the characters, the hardships they will encounter, and what makes it more than just a dungeon crawl. In addition, this section covers artifacts. Topics include artifact legends, the nature of artifacts, resistance, attention and glory associated with them.

The final section of this book covers treasure. The author presents his thoughts on awarding treasure – how to do it and what to do with it. He provides some insight into various levels of treasure awards – from a standard DMG treasure to an involved horde – for encounter levels one to twenty. In between, the majority of the book consists of the tomb and crypt quests. Each set of quests begins first with a large-scale map of the environment of the quest. This is followed by a detailed description of the artifacts. These descriptions include legends, reactions, special effects that arise when multiple artifacts work together. For each artifact, there is an initial power that manifests itself when found and well as multiple hidden powers that only manifest themselves under certain conditions.

After the artifacts are maps of some of the areas detailed in the general map. Each map includes a numbered key for interesting locations, though these locations are only named. For each of the detailed area maps a list of denizens is provided. This list consists of both NPC's and creatures that inhabit the area. These entries are not tied to any specific area on the detail map. The quests are organized thematically. There are quests for wizard artifacts, clerical artifacts, rouge artifacts, fighter artifacts, elf artifacts, orc artifacts, and dwarf artifacts.

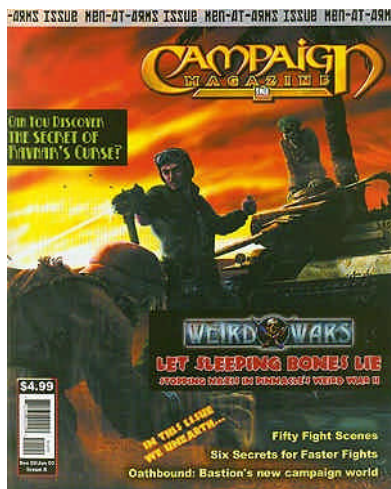
VALUE

Quite a bit of thought went into this volume. The numerous artifacts are well thought out and unique. It appears that this is where most of the work was spent on this volume. And for these artifacts alone, this volume is worth the cover price. That being said, ownership of these nice trinkets is only part of the story. Powerful magic should only be gained by extreme effort. Any set of these artifacts could be the subject of a very involved adventure. The author realizes this and, therefore, does not try to provide them. Instead, he presents outlines and hints for the referee to create his own epic adventures.

For those referees who delight in creating their own world and designing the adventures themselves, this book is a great source of inspiration. Even if you decide not to quest for the Wizard's Ring of Immortality, the suggested encounter areas and inhabitants can be used in other adventures. However, if you've not embarked on creating your own world, then this volume is a great way to start. Within the framework provided, you can fill in the details and start your group on their grand quest. Once you've done this, it will be much easier to create an adventure or quest on your own.



D20 Product Reviews



BASICS

Campaign Magazine and **Games Unplugged** are both gaming periodicals published by Fast Forward Entertainment (www.fastforwardgames.com). Each has a retail price of \$4.99 USD.

INSIDE

Issue 6 of **Campaign Magazine** is 80 b/w pages of d20 gaming material consisting of Previews, Features, Columns, and Fiction. There is a nice preview of Oathbound from Bastion Press and an interview with a member of their crew. D&D players will also find a selection of new feats for fighters and a nice article on GM'ing (hey, we can all get a little better, can't we?). You'll also discover an adventure for D&D and, of heavens yes, one for Weird War II. The reviews are generally several paragraphs in length and cover the appearance, usefulness, content, and value of a product along with a cover picture.

Games Unplugged #24 comes in at 60 pages of full color glossy paper, but it's looking to reach a more diverse audience than its counterpart above. There is a very nice article and 'closed' (GURPS) game

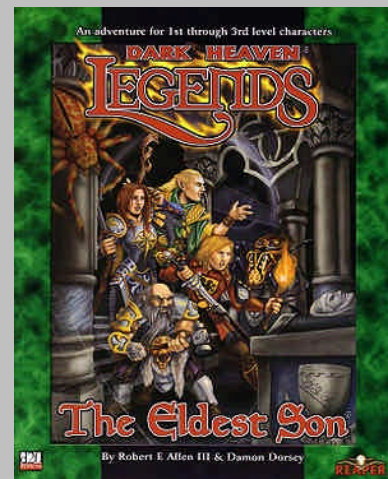
discussing the merits of both 'open' (d20) game systems without passing judgement on which one you should go with. I found it an interesting read. Also, for gamers of the 'super' genre you'll find a nice lengthy interview with Steve Long of Hero Games and Jesse Scoble of Guardians of Order, and what makes it really interesting is that they are interviewing each other. There are also articles about game design, board games, card games, and other stuff that you're not too likely to find inside **Campaign Magazine**. The reviews in **Games Unplugged** also tended to be a bit longer and they use a letter grade instead of a numbering system. They also cover material beyond the standard d20 fare.

VALUE

At around five bucks each both **Campaign Magazine** and **Games Unplugged** make great additional reading for gamers. If I had to pick between them I'd go with **Campaign Magazine**, but that's probably because I have a d20 itch right now that it scratches really well. **Games Unplugged** covers a lot of ground and I find it to be more of an industry overview that covers some things that you might not have otherwise seen. All in all, a very nice reference for gamers who enjoy playing a broad spectrum of games. I like **Campaign Magazine** quite a bit because it's pretty well packed with usable material. For instance, take the article '50 Fight Scenes' by Owen K.C. Stephens. It nicely details fifty locations or situations that will spice up your fights and make sure your players take a moment to at least think of their surroundings. Try fighting on a rope bridge with the enemy goons on one side that you know you can't trust and some hired hands on your side that you're not exactly sure if you can trust or not. So, right now I'd go with **Campaign Magazine** if I had to pick between the two, but if you don't have to pick then both make excellent reading and are definitely worth the price of admission.

BASICS

The Eldest Son is a fantasy adventure for a 1st to 3rd level party of characters using the Dungeons and Dragons rules. It is a 62-page perfect-bound book with maps on the inside of the front and back covers. It sports a full color cover with black and white interior art. It is the first d20 adventure from Reaper, known primarily as a miniature manufacturer, and is meant to work nicely with their figures. The blurb from the back cover reads, "When the eldest son of a noble family disappears, the task of finding him falls to his brother, Felix, and his comrades. But in the city of Astoria, finding a wayward heir is a difficult and dangerous task. The search will lead the characters from the prestigious University of Astoria, to a nearby convent, through several seedy taverns, into a chilling and deadly finale. Will the characters be able to save The Eldest Son?"



INSIDE

The introduction gives you some background on the Einen family, the motivation of the various NPC's and the city of Astoria that will get a GM up to speed in short order. It is recommended that one party member take the role of Felix, the youngest Einen son, but it is not required.

Essentially, the adventure is in three parts. The city of Astoria, the Maze (the seedier dock area of town), and finally the catacombs under Astoria. There is a fairly significant amount of role-playing to be done in Astoria and while trouble can be found to get into, avoiding the City Watch when possible is probably best. A map of the city would have been nice and would have eased walking around, but any decent city map will do, but maps of significant building would have been welcome.

The Maze will provide the characters with more information and a chance for a fistfight fight or two if they look cross-eyed at the wrong people. Down in the catacombs characters will get a chance at more deadly combat, but when they emerge things get a bit more complicate in the search for The Eldest Son, Jonas. More fighting is to be found, along with more role-playing and there is one encounter in particular that can spell defeat for the entire party if care is not taken.

VALUE

For \$12.95 you get yourself a nice rescue mission with some nice twists and great opportunities for role-playing, character development, and building of alliances that your party can use later in their careers.

The interior artwork is all very good and the slightly larger font size makes sure that the text is easy on the eyes. I liked very much the addition of a miniature roster at the end of the module. This made me remember back to the days when Games Workshop published Warhammer Fantasy Role-play modules with figure rosters. The only thing that would have made the one in The Eldest Son better would have been a way to order all of them, maybe at a package discount. Anyway, that's not a gripe just a "wouldn't it be cool" thing. Experience point rewards for the role-playing section would have been extremely welcome, but an industrious DM can come up with them on his own.

Overall, The Eldest Son would make a great first adventure for a group that is looking for pretty equal parts role-playing and combat.



FAST. FURIOUS. FUN.

Savage Worlds™ is the brand spankin' new roleplaying game from Pinnacle, for use with dozens of new Savage Settings, including the upcoming **Evernight**—the darkest fantasy setting of all—featuring characters like that beautiful Ranger to the right!

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We wanted a game that satisfied both hardcore munchkins as well as newbies who've never played an RPG before.

We wanted a game where followers, hiring, and allies weren't forgotten or ignored by an overworked Game Master. Where the player characters could actually *use* the alliances they forge and the troops they lead.

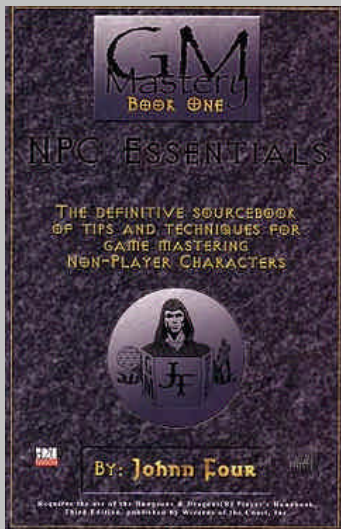
We wanted a game built from the ground up to handle vehicles, from an M1 tank to a hoverbike. A game that could handle intergalactic broadsides from star ships as well as aerial duels with Sopwith Camels and F-15s.

Did we succeed? Download the completely free, fully-playable Test Drive Rules from WWW.PEGINC.COM and decide for yourself. You'll also find adventures you can print and play, as well as conversions for dozens of your favorite settings.



Coming in 2003 From Pinnacle Entertainment Group. See our website for a special preorder card you can take to your local retailer!

D20 Product Reviews



BASICS

GM Mastery Book One, NPC Essentials, is a 189-page digest-sized soft cover book from RPG Objects that bills itself as, "The definitive sourcebook of tips and techniques for game mastering non-player characters." Definitive, huh? Well, that's setting the bar fairly high right off the bat isn't it? It has a retail price of \$14.95 USD.

INSIDE

Inside you'll find seven chapters (Introduction, NPC Design, NPC Role-playing, Campaign Management,

NPC Archetypes, a Mini-Adventure, and a section of Charts and Tables). The intro is only a couple of pages long but nicely sets the objective for the book, to run NPC's (just one part of GM'ing) more effectively in your role-playing games and make those games more enjoyable.

NPC Design goes into great detail in its 35 pages on thinking of NPC's are more than just a set of stats for the barkeep or city watchman. These characters can, and should, matter and be more than just a prop or a way to move the characters in a particular direction. Are you going to spend all of your time on designing NPC's? Probably not as that would take away from the rest of your game, but their importance cannot be denied. NPC Role-playing takes up about as much space and really hasn't got much to do with stats, except that they will play a role in how you play the character. It's almost like a short primer on acting and isn't that mostly what you're doing when running an NPC.

Chapter 4 has great information on keeping your NPC's part of the game as your campaign progresses. Very good stuff. NPC Archetypes lays out ten standard NPC's that you would run across (Clergy, Craftsman, etc...) and provides different roles for them than the ones that you might immediately think of and plot hooks for their use.

The Mini-Adventure comes in at just over 20 pages (digest size pages so figure around 15 or so with full size maps) which is pretty close to a standard one-sitting adventure. It's an adventure for a party of levels 3-5 and will serve as a good rp'ing exercise for both players and GM's but is not shy of combat either. All of the charts and tables in Chapter 7 were all clear and easy to read.

VALUE

Simply an outstanding book that will do nothing but enhance your fantasy game, d20 or otherwise really. Now, if you're running a mostly hack-n-slash brand of game then you probably won't find a ton of useful information here, but then you're probably not looking to enhance the role-playing side of your game. That's fine too. My only gripe is that the table of contents is off by four pages, which is something that could be fixed in future printings. Other than that, this is a great book and if the rest in the series turn out as well as this first entry then DM's are in for a real treat.

OK, so is GM Mastery Book 1, NPC Essentials the "definitive" book on running NPC's in a fantasy role-playing game? If it's not then I'm really not sure what is. This book deserves a place right next to the Dungeon Masters Guide on your bookshelf if you're at all serious about running a role-playing game that includes, well, role-playing. You don't have to go all out and turn your game into a weekly Shakespearean arts festival, but anything you pick up from this book will serve your campaign well.

BASICS

The d20 Mecha Compendium is published by Dream Pod 9, primarily known for their game Heavy Gear, and is meant to be used to bring giant fighting robots to life in your d20 campaign, regardless of the setting. It is a 160-page softcover book with color covers and black & white interior art that has a retail price of \$24.99.

INSIDE

There are four chapters (Basics, Fantasy Worlds, Modern Worlds, Future Worlds) and several appendices presented here. The first takes up only about a dozen pages but gives great beginning information on the mecha genre and how to incorporate it with various other themes and the basics behind these giant war machines. Each 'world' chapter also gives several choices on backgrounds to use. As an example, the modern world gives you stats and brief campaign background for Gear Krieg, Phoenix Rising, and the Great Machine Decander. You could even mix & match or toss them all in together if you like. The future settings are similar and also push some of DP9's own game lines like Heavy Gear and Jovian Chronicles. I saw this as a good thing because who better than the guys at DP9 to write up the d20 conversions of their stuff from their own games.

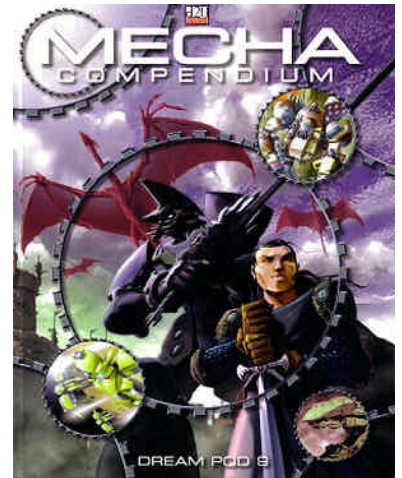
One thing to be aware of, if you're planning on dropping one of these mecha into a vanilla game be sure that your players have either a darn good escape route or massive firepower handy because they can dish out (even the WWII era Gear Krieg mecha) a massive amount of firepower. I'm all for players/characters having a moment that makes them fill their pants with brown stuff, but it wouldn't be a whole lot of fun if they just got torn apart with no chance of survival. All of the text was very easy on the eyes and charts were equally easy to read.

VALUE

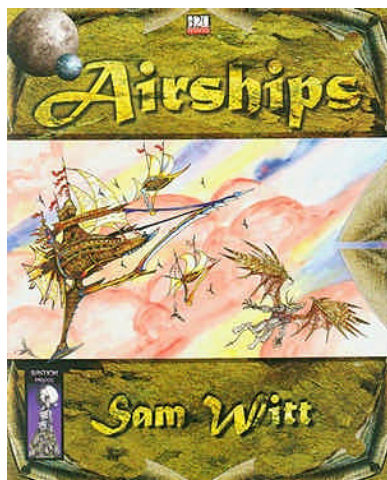
As you should expect, you'll need a D&D (or d20 Modern or Call of Cthulhu) core rule book to make use of the d20 Compendium, but that's no big deal as it pretty much goes without saying about any d20 product. You would also benefit from, but by no means are required to have, the d20 Mecha rulebook published by Guardians of Order. In fact, if you just want to use the stock mecha stats in here then you're all set. If you want to run a full-blown mecha campaign then I'd advise picking up the Guardians of Order rulebook also. I was very pleased with this book. The artwork is top-notch, which is pretty standard for the guys at Dream Pod 9.

Personally, I see the most use coming from using the mecha in modern, alternate history, or future based campaigns. The fantasy mecha just didn't do too much for me, but that's probably personal preference. The campaign suggestions are great and can be used to build an entire campaign around, to use as part of a one-off adventure or side-treks, or just as a branch in your current campaign. The extra mecha stats are easy to understand and they can be dropped into your games without much trouble but if you want to build them or get detailed combat rules, again, back to the Guardians of Order rulebook, which isn't really a bad thing. The d20 Mecha Compendium can stand on its own and looks like it would benefit from other material, but not require it.

If you're not wanting giant robots in your game then this is an easy pass, but for lots of campaigns this book will provide you with what is somewhat like a mecha monster manual with seriously good campaign information thrown in. Hmm, now I need to find some 25-28mm scale Heavy Gear models.



D20 Product Reviews



BASICS

"Airships" is a 96-page soft cover book published by Bastion Press. The front and back covers are full color as is the inside of the book. This volume provides rules for using flying ships in a fantasy d20 campaign. The retail price is \$24.95 USD.

INSIDE

"Airships" provides rules and information for using airships in a d20 fantasy setting. Included in this volume are rules for airship construction, crews, aerial movement, combat, equipment, trade, prestige classes, and magic. In addition

the book provides five example airships. This volume goes into great detail about airship construction. Information is provided for ship tonnage, construction yards, construction berth rentals, labor rates, and artisan fees.

There are many options for building the airships. Different hull types are described with their pros and cons. Do you want wood or copper or, for those of a necromantic persuasion, bone? Engine types include Arcane, which require no fuel but do require an arcane spell caster, as well as Elemental, Necrotic, and wood burning. One disturbing engine type is Vampiric. Various airship templates are provided that describe the different basic types, from dirigible to aquatic. Then follows ten pages of airship equipment covering weapons, piloting components, and rigging. Then finally we come to the crew and its requirements.

After the detail of the ship construction rules, this volume provides expanded aerial movement rules to cover flying the airship. With the same level of detail, aerial combat is presented along with actions for aerial combat. Rules are provided for ramming and boarding actions. Other information covered by this book includes navigating the airship, weather effects, terrain effects, trade, and piracy. There is also a list of special aerial equipment.

The aerial character section describes new aerial feats and prestige classes. The prestige classes include aerial saboteur, ship's mage, ship's theurge, and sky slayer. The magic section covers the effects of different spells in the aerial environment, how they function differently when not cast on the surface. There are also eight new spells and three new magical items.

VALUE

First off, the production quality of this book is very high. Each page includes full color margin illustrations and the headings are printed in color. There are many in-line illustrations and the ship diagrams are full-page illustrations themselves. This volume was obviously a labor of love on the part of the author. He has provided a wealth of detail on not only the ships themselves, but also their place in the world. From my reading, it appears that he has based this volume on historical information on ships and shipping. Parts of the volume, especially the Trade section, remind me of Traveller T20.

The only thing missing from this volume is a set of new creatures. Though there are plenty of aerial monsters in the various monster tomes, I felt that some new creatures should have been included. This, of course, could be in store for a subsequent volume.

This is an exceptional volume, well worth its price. Everything a player or a referee would want to know, and some things that they haven't thought of, are in this volume. If you are looking to sail the boundless sea of air, then this volume is for you.

I have never found a place for faeries in my gaming worlds, apart from the typical 'Dryad' woodland encounters and the occasional 'Sprite in the pool', I'm afraid I have always found them a little too lightweight to be taken seriously, their psyche too ephemeral and their world all but impenetrable. That was my position, prior to receiving this d20 sourcebook.

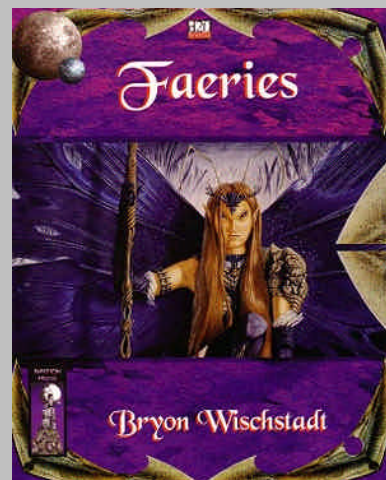
The cover is a colourful, vibrant and glossy presentation, with enough hint of both the exotic and the enigmatic, one would

expect to associate with all things Faerie, or Fae as we are informed, is the appropriate term. This internal illustrations and incidental graphics continue this theme through every page. One minor, initial gripe is with the choice of paper used. It falls somewhere between gift-wrap and that used for some, full-colour, graphic novels and brochures. Yes it suffers from the seemingly endemic problems of d20 products, typos, strange spacing and text wrapping around illustration anomalies and even partially overlaying text. It also continues the d20 tradition, of stating the need for one Core Rulebook on the cover and then referring to others, within its pages. In this instance, these errors do not greatly detract from the excellent work done by Bryon Wischstadt and Bastion Press.

Although gleaned its core material largely from the inevitable North European and particularly, Celtic mythos, there is enough original and new material here to interest even the staunchest of sceptics. We are treated to detailed descriptions of the denizens of Faerieland and those of Between, the Fey. Both new races and new creatures are covered in detail, with possible character classes discussed and not only that but all the major NPC's are mentioned in detail. How delighted I was to discover I could encounter such luminaries as Jack Frost, The Green Man, Rumpelstiltskin and even Baba Yaga. New skills, spells and artefacts are listed, alongside new character classes and specialised variations. The, abstract, geography of Faerieland is described in all its splendour, with social, political and mercantile interactions all thoroughly discussed. Even the likely reactions of the Fey, to visiting adventurers, are strenuously investigated. In fact, all aspects of Fey culture and interaction with the 'real' world are exhaustively discussed. The most interesting aspect, from a gaming point of view, for me, was the possible effect to the characters, from visiting Faerieland or being affected by its touch in some other way. The concept of the Fey and the magic of Faerieland, its existence and interaction with the gaming multiverse are convincingly explained. All this information is delivered in and indeed, complimented by, an easily accessible writing style. I no longer consider the Fey to be lightweight; instead I now view them with awe and with more than a modicum of trepidation.

It is a little disappointing and not a little annoying to refer to passages from other, related, Bastion Press products, without re-printing the relevant information. Surely for an asking price of \$27.95 and purporting to be the definitive guide, one would not expect to need consult further tomes. I would also have preferred the inclusion of a Glossary, for quick reference purposes. Keeping track of new terms and concepts, such as Fae, Fey, Feeorin, Faerdath, Half-fey, High fey, Fey-born and Shadow-born, was not an insubstantial task to an initiate.

Yes it is a little over-priced, well, perhaps more than a little but this is a quality product. If the Fey play any part in your campaign world, this is a useful guide. If however, your campaign setting significantly involves Faeries, Sylvars or Planar travel, this is a valuable reference source. I now know where I will be setting my next campaign.



D20 Product Reviews



BASICS

Friends and Familiars is a 30-page full color softcover book from Bastion Press that is done in the same style as 'Allies and Enemies' (reviewed in the previous issue of Fictional Reality). It includes full stat blocks, background information, an illustration, and game hooks for characters that are designed to be used as cohorts and a selection of familiars / animal companions. There are fifteen such entries in Friends and Familiars and it has a retail price of \$14.95 USD.

INSIDE

The book is visually stunning and is easily up to the same standard as 'Allies and Enemies' and ranks way up in the top of any game books that I've had the pleasure of looking at. The book is broken up into entries of 'friends', characters that can be used as intended, meaning as a cohort for an existing PC that has the Leadership feat, or they could also serve very well as NPC's (seeing as they are all given a very nice background section) or as drop-in PC's for players that might not have time to write up a character from scratch. There are six humanoid entries with levels ranging from 2 to 8 (average is just under 5) and the most intriguing is a Chaotic Good Skeletal Cleric. All of them would make respectable PC's. Those suitable for companions number 7 and range from a Clockwork Automaton to a Nightmare to a Stone Golem. Some could be in search of a new master, working to avenge the death of their previous master, or whatever you like. Of the last two entries one is a dedicated familiar, an owl, and the other is an Imp that could be used as a familiar, follower, or even a PC if you wanted to drop a couple of levels on it. All of the entries were very easy to read and the only thing that I would add would be to have a smaller version of the character picture on the same page as the stats and background so a single page could be photocopied (for personal use only!) to hand out as a character sheet.

VALUE

Like 'Allies and Enemies' this book also brought back thoughts of the old original Rogue's Gallery, and that's a good thing. This is a great looking book with some very original characters presented within. Players and DM's can both find use in Friends and Familiars, but if you're not in need of a cohort, companion, or familiar keep walking. From a DM's perspective I also looked at the book as a great source for NPC's or quick PC's.

I would have rather seen more entries on the 'friends' side of things, maybe one of each level of 1st through 10th and then just a handful of animal-type companions and familiars. That's not to say that I was disappointed with what was in here because I wasn't. I would just get more use out of it this way. Even though it has uses for both players and DM's I think that the price will restrict it more to DM's use or maybe as a party-purchase if they are looking for a nice spread of pre-generated and very usable characters. At about a dollar per character it's not exactly the most wallet-friendly book out there, but you do get awesome quality for that price. It's absolutely worth a look and very much worth picking up if it fits the needs for your game. I found ways to use it beyond the whole 'Friends and Familiars' roles, but if you can't then its usability becomes limited. For me though, I found it to be very useful and actually plan to make use of it in my current Dungeons and Dragons campaign.

BASICS

Gaming Frontiers, Volume 4 follows the example of its previous issues of providing d20 gamers briefs that come from a large number of publishers for several different d20 role-playing genres. Gaming Frontiers is a quarterly periodical with color cover and black & white interior art with a page count coming in at 144 with a retail price of \$19.95 USD.

INSIDE

There are about twenty publishers that contributed material to the current issue and while you don't get anything huge (in terms of one single really large article or adventure) you do get a lot of content. I'd say that fantasy players make off the best in this issue with three mini or side-trek adventures plus other material like a very nice collection of dinosaurs, which could actually serve double or triple duty in several genres outside of fantasy (Pulp, Modern, Horror) without much conversion work on the GM's part.

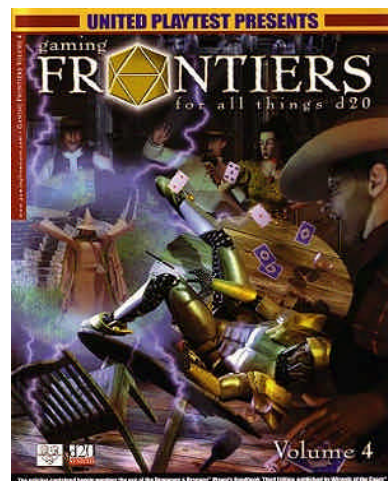
The preview section gives you a look at upcoming products from Mongoose, Bastion Press, Atlas Games, Malhavoc Press, Inner Circle Games, and Paradigm Concepts and these previews are not just press copy to sell the product but also include game material that could help you decide to pick up the product or not, or you could pretty easily incorporate what you're given for free, with some work on your part of course, into your campaign 'as-is'.

Out of this issue I had a couple of personal favorites and the list has to start with 'The City of Kuching' from Otherworld Creations, publishers of the Pulp d20 game Forbidden Kingdoms. Anything new for FK just makes my ears perk up with anticipation and this 7-page article gives players and GM's a very nice Asian city to tear up with car chases and blazing guns. Other than the dinosaurs, my next top pick for this issue would have to be the article on castles by Monte Cook. It's an excellent look at his travels in real-world castles and how they differ from those that we go adventuring in, with some suggestions on how to add some realistic flavor without sacrificing the gaming fun that really forms the basis for us playing a fantasy game. Good stuff.

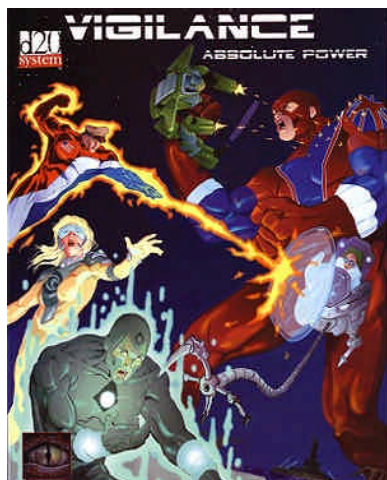
VALUE

Gaming Frontiers is of the most value to a GM that runs (or just plain wants to read about) multiple d20 games in different genres. For them, it's great. For players and GM's in a single genre it's still very good, but it's just not quite as useful. One very nice thing is that with Gaming Frontiers you're find articles and previews from some d20 companies that you may not have seen before. Yes, plenty of the better-known companies (Malhavoc, Bastion Press, Mongoose) are in there too, but I like to see new stuff also. The \$19.95 price, every quarter, might make you wonder whether it's cost prohibitive, but I would suggest checking out their website for some of the outstanding subscription offers that United Playtest has negotiated. They range from 30% off the cover price for a 1-year subscription to getting a couple hundred dollars of free d20 swag (and not scrubs either).

If you're looking to pick up a d20 gaming periodical that presents a brief, but varied, look at lots of products, along with some mini-adventures and a very decent amount of usable material, and the possibility of increasing your d20 library significantly then check 'em out. In fact, I would even bet lunch that you could recoup your entire subscription cost if you wanted to sell off the d20 books that you pick up for free.



D20 Product Reviews



BASICS

Vigilance: Absolute Power is a super-hero role-playing game from Mystic Eye Games based on the d20 system. The book is 128 pages long and features a colour cover. Black and white illustrations can be found inside. The retail price is \$19.99. The third edition Dungeons & Dragons Player's Handbook is required.

BETWEEN THE COVERS

The Basics starts with four pages covering a brief

introduction and a discussion of the additional rules Vigilance uses on top of the base d20 provides. The bulk of the chapter is taken up by a timeline. This is an in-game version of history, mostly covering the last one hundred years or so. This was easily my favourite part of the book. The history appears well researched and it helps set the mood by throwing super-heroes and villains into the world's history.

Chapter 2, **Origins**, presents a selection of background choices. These work very much like the races of Dungeons & Dragons but can have a much greater effect on a character as they gain levels. The origins consist of advanced training, alien, artificial life, cybernetic enhancement, normal, mutant, mystic encounter, and scientific experiment. Each choice gives bonuses such as extra feats or powers, some favoured classes and often a drawback. For example, a cybernetic character can start with a low level of damage resistance but might be vulnerable to magnetic attacks.

Next comes **Classes**. An interesting selection of archetypes from the super-hero genre can be found here. Some, like the Brick and Energy Projector, are quite generic and cover a range of character concepts. Others like the Detective and Vigilante are quite specific. Overall there is good coverage of the typical sort of characters you see in the genre. The classes themselves are fairly typical to d20, one addition is that each class has a number of power points which work very much like skill points, being split between the various powers the character has available to them.

The next thing to be introduced is the **New Skills**. These come in two broad categories – manoeuvres and modern skills. Combat manoeuvres provide a range of options. Many of them can be used to improve an attack; some provide access to tactics provided for by feats in standard d20. Vehicle manoeuvres separate various clever things you can do in vehicles into separate skills. For example, the Corner skill is necessary for taking corners at speed without causing too much mischief. Teamwork manoeuvres are an interesting addition. These allow multiple characters to combine their efforts for greater effect, as long as each co-operating character has a suitable Teamwork feat. My favourite is the Target Practice manoeuvre. This involves one character grabbing an enemy and throwing them into the air so that their buddy energy projector can get a nice clean shot. The modern skills include driving and piloting, and various knowledge skills such as dynamics, physics, and hydraulics. These are particularly useful for the Gadgeteer class that is limited in some respects by their rating in some key knowledge skills.

Feats gives a dozen pages of new and varied feats. Some of the feats provide new, low-level, abilities. Amphibious, as an example, allows the character to breathe in water. Other feats develop the variety and usefulness of certain powers, especially mental powers and the generic Blast power. Arc Blast provides a blasting character the potential to damage more than one opponent in a single attack (like Cleave). Posthypnotic Suggestion can

be used to plant a suggestion in the mind of a hapless victim but requires the Domination power. Other feats are included for general combat, high-speed combat, gadget creation and various social benefits.

Powers are possibly the most important aspect of the super-hero genre and there are plenty (about 50) to be found in this chapter. One interesting design decision was to make certain powerful abilities only useable a set number of times per game session, so be aware if you have long sessions with lots of combat! Most of the common powers are represented as well as some less common ones. Some powers may be less powerful than expected however. For example, Time Manipulation allows a character to manipulate time to effectively teleport behind an opponent. But once you are there the power as written sets time back to normal. So this can be used to backstab someone but not to go about slitting throats (as if a hero would...). Each attribute has a superhuman power to go with it. These provide extra points to the attribute and have some handy extras. For example, the Superhuman Presence power can be used to cast charm person and Superhuman Strength can be used to generate a shockwave to knock people over.

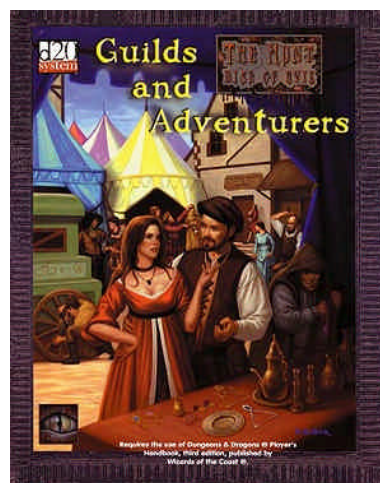
Disadvantages contains some extras that can both give a character depth and make them more effective by giving them a boost on starting experience or increasing the strength of a power. **Vehicles and Equipment** provides rules for the various toys heroes and villains will likely be wanting in their arsenal.

Prestige Classes presents a dozen advanced classes. Some are suitable for heroes (the paladin-like Paragon), others for villains (Arch Villain anyone?), but most are suitable across the board. These help fill in some of the gaps in the basic classes, introducing classics like the Speed Demon and Mastermind.

The final chapter, **Syndicate City**, provides background to the central city of the campaign world. This information is provided in the form of a collection of significant characters of the city with game stats and adventure hooks.

VALUE

This book gives you all the rules you need to play super-heroes in the d20 system. The coverage seems good, providing rules for most situations you would tend to encounter. I did find that the rules were sometimes unclear and feel that they could be better presented and organized. For that reason I would not recommend the book to a novice role-player. But for someone with some experience of role-playing, wishing to purchase a super-hero RPG, this may well be the book to buy.



BASICS

Guilds and Adventurers is a 128-page softcover book (perfect bound) that retails for \$19.99 USD. It is produced by Mystic Eye Games and details guilds that would be common to an urban fantasy setting, but is set in their Hunt: Rise of Evil Dungeons and Dragons campaign setting. It has a color cover, which shows many of the artisans at work that you'll find inside, and black and white interior artwork. It requires the use of the Dungeons and Dragons Player's Handbook.

INSIDE

Guilds and Adventurers is divided into two sections, one devoted to guilds and the other to associations, societies and what are called specialty guilds. The guild section starts off with a quick introduction and also gives us a new

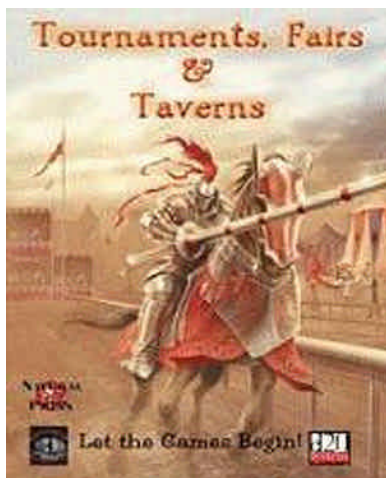
Prestige (Guildsman) and regular (Guild Expert) class. To be honest, the only place I see either of these getting a lot of use is in a *VERY* role-playing centered game. Not a bad thing, just not a very likely thing in my mind.

The guilds, thirty of them, are a DM's dream come true if you are designing a city for your party to use as a center of operations. They range from the expected Adventurer's and Thieves' guilds to the less expected Chirurgeons' (surgeon types) and Viniculturists' (grape growers and wine makers) guilds, and just about everything in between. Associate memberships, which come with some benefits, are pretty easy to come by and generally involve an annual payment, but you don't get full access to the guild's secrets without being a Guildsman or Guild Expert.

The second part of the book (about one-third of the page count) concentrates on highly specialized organizations like The Baile Street Market Urchin's Pod that the PC's are not likely to be a part of but could benefit immensely from being associated with. There's also another Prestige Class in this section, one that is more suited to adventuring than the Guildsman. There's also something called, 'The Lottery' and trust me, you don't want to win it. It's a way of (possibly) rubbing out someone you hate while keeping you hands (relatively) clean and could set up a good adventure. There are also new items, spells, monsters, and NPC's scattered throughout the book that give the guilds more of a 'real' feel to them.

VALUE

You really have to need this book to want this book. To a casual player or DM that is not worried about fleshing out a city you'll definitely get some good reading out of Guilds and Adventurers, but maybe not much else. However, any DM that is serious about presenting his players with new avenues for adventure and doors that open into places never before seen Guilds and Adventurers is well worth its price tag. This was a very easily read book in which I found lots of adventure ideas. Couple this book with *Bluffside, City on the Edge* for a truly amazing city experience.



BASICS

Tournaments, Fairs, and Taverns is a 96-page softcover (perfect bound) book with a color cover and black and white interior from Mystic Eye Games and Natural d20 Press. It has a retail price of \$19.99 USD and sets out to provide DM's with rules for playing tavern games, running tournaments, and the like.

INSIDE

The book is broken up into an intro and 8 chapters (Rules of the Game, Classic Games, Martial Games, Tavern Games, Magical Competitions, Festival Games, Running Games and Festival Encounters, and A Tourney, Two Fairs and a Tavern), which are all easy to read and understand. Chapter 1 brings out some general rules for determining success or failure in the games that follow and also bring out some new feats, skills, and spells.

Chapters 2 through 6 each detail several games of each type listed above in enough detail to make them interesting but not too much to make you wonder why you aren't just playing the tavern game instead of D&D. There's even a game called 'Stageless Play' where your characters take the roles of characters within an imaginary story.

The Festival games were probably my favorite out of the group and lead themselves well to inclusion of a whole party and/or some NPC's and will add some lighthearted fun to a festival where the PC's could be passing through in search of further adventures or even find some there. 'Crazy Ernie's Bear Wrasslin' for Crazy Folk' is certainly one of my favorites and could be used as a set-up for a much more involved encounter.

The last chapter is the single most informative one of the book as it details the running of an entire 3-day tournament, a list of specific locations to visit, and encounters that can draw the players into a bit of trouble and some NPC's for them to interact with.

VALUE

This is one of the very few times that I've ever had to question the value of a Mystic Eye Games product for my campaign. *Tournaments, Fairs, and Taverns* is a quality product, that's for sure, but my issue is much more in regards to its usability. It's a very niche product that will likely sit on your book shelf after its initial read unless you are really of the mind to run lots of games within your game. It succeeds in what it set out to do though, which is provide us with a source for running those games and for that I can recommend it, if that's what you've set out to find. The information on running of tournaments is good, but alone would not justify the purchase. Bottom line is that if you took the time to seek out *Tournaments, Fairs, and Taverns* it's likely that you were looking for such a book. In that case you'll find what you're looking for within its pages, especially if you're looking to run an annual tournament and fair for your players.

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D20 Product Reviews



BASICS

Tarot Magic is another in the d20 magic series from Mystic Eye Games. It is an 88-page soft cover book with full color covers. Inside, the book is black and white. The book retails for \$16.99 USD.

CONTENTS

Tarot Magic consists of 5 chapters dealing with various game aspects of Tarot cards. Chapter 1 focuses on using Tarot cards in a d20 game. It provides game mechanics for various traditional readings. Each reading type is given a base difficulty ranging from 12 – 20.

The player or NPC makes a *Knowledge (Tarot)* skill check to accomplish the readings. Each of the reading types is describe to help in role-playing the reading. In addition, this chapter includes a table to randomly generate which cards are drawn – based on rolling 2d20. While the first chapter focuses on including Tarot cards in a classic sense, the rest of the volume deals with Tarot magic in more detail.

Chapter 2 describes a new character class – the Tarot Mage. A character of this class is a spell-slinger, but he does not memorize or “grok” spells like a Wizard or Sorcerer. Rather, he uses his tarot deck to “cast” or “play” his spells. Each card has one or more spells associated with it. As long as the Tarot Mage has the appropriate card and is of the required level, he can cast any of the associated spells. As an alternative to a full class, the Tarot Mage is also presented as a prestige class. The prestige class can work in one of two ways – as listed for the Tarot Mage class, or as a modification of the existing mage classes. The former requires the introduction of a new magical system, Tarot Magic, while the later does not. In addition to the classes, this chapter includes new feats to craft tarot cards. There are also new skills related to tarot reading and knowledge of tarot cards. Chapter two ends with two NPC examples– one a Tarot Mage and one a Tarot Mage Prestige class.

Chapter 3 describes the Tarot Magic and its associated spells. Unlike magic in the Core Rulebooks, Tarot magic works through the cards. The two arcana (the types of cards) provide foci for different spells. The Major Arcana, composed of the character cards not part of a suite, are more powerful than the Minor Arcana – the suits of swords, cups, wands, and pentacles. There are 21 cards in the Major Arcana and each has its sphere of influence. A Tarot Mage can tap into one of these cards to gain a +2 enhancement bonus that lasts for a period of time based on his level. In the first system of magic – the one that introduces Tarot Magic as a new magic system, there are 9 levels of spells and each is associated with a specific card. In the second system, tarot cards are used to cast wizard spells. The tarot mage must have two cards to cast each spell. The first card allows gives the mage the ability to cast a spell of the associated level. The second card gives the mage the ability to cast the particular spell. The mapping of cards to spells is provided in the book.

Chapter 4 covers new magic items concerning tarot cards. The list includes magical tools to craft the cards, special variant cards created by legendary tarot mages, and very powerful tarot decks of antiquity. There are also potions, rings, and wands based on Tarot Magic spells. The last chapter is a location that can be dropped into an existing campaign to introduce and use Tarot Magic.

VALUE

The magic series from Mystic Eye has added a great deal to the d20 magic system. *Tarot Magic* continues this fine tradition. This provides a new mechanic for casting spells and, for those of us with Tarot Decks, it gives us a great prop to help role play a different sort of wizard.

BASICS

Dry Lands: Empire of the Dragon Sands is a 144-page soft cover book with a full color cover. Inside, the book has black and white illustrations. This volume covers the Dragon Sands region from the Bluffsides Campaign setting. It has a retail price of \$22.95 USD.

INSIDE

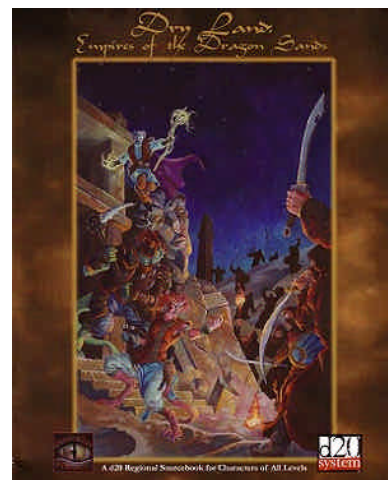
Dry Lands consists of four chapters and twelve appendices. Each of the chapters covers one part of the Dry Lands area. Each chapter has sections that cover history of the area, the land itself, the inhabitants, and places of interest such as taverns, inns, and shops, as well as other important places. Each entry includes a general description, information about the usual denizens, such as the owner, as well as entries for the regulars. Each place of interest also includes short story hooks that can be used to bring the characters into local events. In addition, the chapters include illustrations tied to the entries as well as sidebars that provide more information on things such as general village information, local legends and myths, as well as nomadic tribes.

Chapter one covers No Man’s Land – the northern border of the Dragon Sands. This is the border area where the cultures of the south and north mingle. As such, it serves as the gateway to the lands to the south through which a party would enter the Dry Lands. Chapter two covers the Granite Kingdom, a dwarven realm that dominates the face of the western mountain range south of No Man’s Land. Chapter three covers the Burning Sands. This is a great expanse of shifting sands and dunes inhabited by nomads with few permanent settlements. Chapter four covers the Dragori Empire – the largest political entity in the area and the most southern. As such, this is the largest section of the volume. Much of the chapter provides general information on Dragori society and culture.

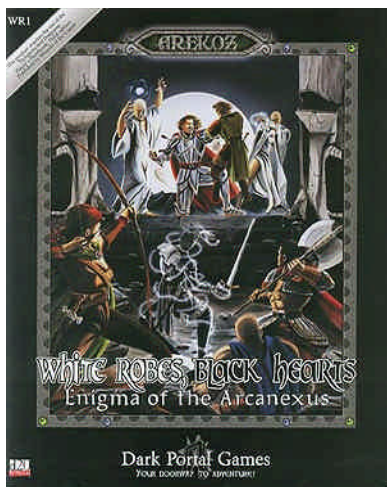
The rest of the volume includes appendices that flesh out the area described in the chapters. These range from NPC’s to the environment in which your players will adventure to new character classes, like the Bisaakir Zaari, those who server genies and demons; Shaman, tribal mystics; Slave, usually from the Dragori Empire and more. In all there are fifteen character classes. There are also stats for creatures of the region. In this list are quite a few genies and paraelementals. There are also templates for creating “sand creature”, “spirit” and “true mummy” variants of existing creatures and new equipment (mundane and magical). Of course, there are new feats (desert related) and two races: the Dragori (also seen in Bluffsides) and the Hukhamet – a humanoid jackal.

VALUE

Dry Lands: Empires of the Dragon Sands is a complete campaign setting on its own. It can be used with the Bluffsides Campaign setting, an existing campaign setting, or it can stand on its own. Quite a bit of thought has gone into this volume. The authors have captured the essence of the arid region and used this as the foundation for their races, cultures, and empire. I get thirsty just reading this book! As benefits a new campaign setting, there is a wealth of information on new races, classes, spells, artifacts, and equipment. Some of these are better realized than others. It is in the exercise of fleshing out the campaign that brings it to life. The folks at Mystic Eye have done quite well with this volume. They have distilled the essence of an arid world and presented for your d20 game. Parts of this book remind me of prior attempts to bring this genre to a fantasy setting – but this is not “A Thousand and One Arabian Dungeons”. It is its own world that appears to draw as much from Edgar Rice Burroughs’ *Barsoom* as it does from the tales of Scheherazade! Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have to go water the camels...



D20 Product Reviews



BASICS

White Robes, Black Heart: Enigma of the Arcanexus is a 110 page softbound D&D supplement put out by Dark Portal Games. It's written for their campaign setting of Arekoz, but with only a few name changes for the deities, it's easily adaptable to any campaign setting. The series of adventures it lays out is supposed to be for characters level 3-5, and a party size of 4-6 (the target party level being about 5). They also highly recommend that an arcane spell-caster and a rogue be included in the party. Included in the book

are half a dozen new monsters, plus a new spell and even a new weapon. They also introduce a new prestige class, but don't give you the write up for it since it's apparently only for NPC's.

In addition to getting the all the material included in the book, Dark Portal Games sweetens the deal by offering several free goodies available on their website. Things like the background and history of Arekoz, a full color map of Arekoz and more. There are several places in the book where they refer you to their web site where they say you can get free downloads of things like maps and charts. But alas, all the URLs they give are wrong. With a little work I found that the main page is now at darkportalgames.biz rather than (.com) and then from there you can get to most of the other promised sites. But even here I ran into a problem accessing the goodies specific to *White Robes, Black Heart*. In the book they give you a user name and a password, but these don't seem to work. I emailed Dark Portal Games, but after six weeks have yet to hear back from them so who knows what's up with that.

Finally one of the best things about the book, are the dozen or so "player handouts" provided in the back of the book. I have always considered player handouts a great, and sometimes vital, addition to the game, and still wonder why more "pre-fabs" don't come with them. The book's retail price is \$14.95 USD.

INSIDE

There are five chapters in the book, with each chapter being a mini-adventure. The first mini-adventure takes place in town with lots of opportunity for role-playing, while the other four mini-adventures require the party to visit a remote site and do a little bit of dungeon crawling. Throughout the book there are very in-depth histories, and storylines. These are all well done, and fun to read, but I have to say that it might actually be overdone. I'm always a fan of good fluff, but it just seems to me that there is more fluff than adventure in this particular case.

There are also some good chuckles in the book (my favorite being a benevolent ghoul with a pet zombie dog that likes to "play dead") that add some flavor to the adventure. At the end of each chapter there are ideas given for side-line adventures that tie into the overall scheme. Some of these ideas sounded pretty cool, but of course it's left up to the GM to implement them as desired.

The layout of the book is pretty good making it usable by GMs even with limited experience, and the Table of Contents is detailed enough to help cut down on the page flipping. For encounters, the book is a little varied in how they give the stats for the monsters. Some of the monsters and NPC's have their write-ups given in what I call the "trash compactor" format inside the mini-adventure where they are encountered (ugh). Some of the monster write-ups are given in the back of the book, in the standard Monster Manual format, and only referred to in the encounter (good), and some are done both

ways (best). Most of the encounter levels of the significant encounters fall in EL6 to EL8 range, with the final two encounters being a little tougher (EL9 and EL10). The real "got ya" though are some of the traps. There are some places where I can see this easily becoming a party killer through no particular fault of the PC's. The first thing that struck me when I was reading this book was "This is for third level characters?" I would have to recommend that either you have a party larger than they recommend, or the PC's had better be a tough group (even then that might not help with some of the traps). Though third level characters might be able to handle the initial stages of the adventure, the GM had better get them up a couple levels before the end, or else in all likelihood your players will be rolling up new characters. You just gotta know that things can get nasty when on the very first page there is a disclaimer saying that "it is not designed to kill parties". Not a comment designed to make you feel warm and fuzzy all over.

One thing I found a little odd when I first started this book was that it seemed to have echoes of Robert Jordan's *The Wheel of Time* series (like having a group called "White Robes", and a historical figure with the name of "Kinslayer"). And then there is one trap/encounter that is reminiscent of the chess game in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. After reading through the entire book, I have decided that the similarities are in name only since after you get past the names, the similarities mostly end, but it was enough for me to initially raise an eyebrow.

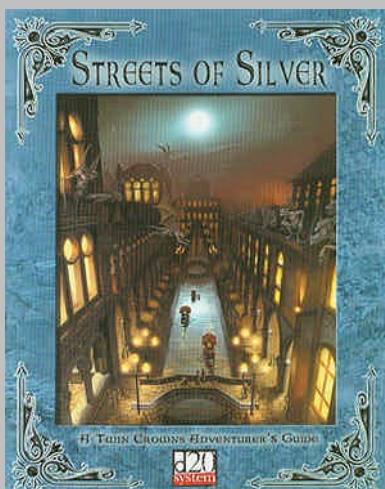
The primary weakness of the book has to be the maps. Generally, the maps are not nearly as detailed as they should be to fit their descriptions. It seemed I spent an inordinate amount of time going back and forth between the maps and descriptions trying to figure them out. There are also minor instances where the map does not even match the write-up, or is missing annotations discussed in the write-up. Prospective GMs will likely have to do their homework and spend some time annotating and/or drawing their own maps to help things run smoothly at game time.

VALUE

Overall, I give the book high marks for fluff (background, history, character descriptions etc), organization (to include story flow and being GM friendly), role-playing potential, and creativity. Medium marks for the adventure itself (would be nice to have a little bit more steak to go with all that sizzle) and low marks for maps. I would also give extra credit for the player handouts which are far too rare in pre-fabs (don't ask me why, seems like a no-brainer to me).

Although it's not required to make the series of adventures in this book usable, there is a prequel available that introduces the Arekoz campaign setting, and presumably gets the characters up to a high enough level to tackle this adventure. The authors also hint that a follow-on adventure is coming, and will use some of the NPC's introduced in *White Robes, Black Heart: Enigma of the Arcanexus*. This along with what is available on their web site (especially when they get it all running correctly), makes me think that a starting GM running a campaign for the first time would be well set, and even an experienced GM will find some good material here.

D20 Product Reviews



BASICS

Streets of Silver is put out by Living Imagination Inc and is their first published Adventure Guide. It is a softbound book of 311 pages and comes with a 17" x 22" color map. It is written for is the "Twin Crowns" campaign setting which is also put out by Living Imagination. The entire book covers in minute detail the city of Parma, which is purported to be one of the largest (if not the largest) port city in their campaign world of Ptalmanar. The book's retail price is \$29.95 USD

The Twin Crowns Campaign setting strays from the standard D&D campaign setting a little farther than most, but not so far that this book cannot be easily used for any campaign setting. The primary differences being the deities (and their involvement with us mere mortals), some of the races (gnomes and halflings don't exist, and there are several new races), and a concept called "gifts" which is a way to give each mortal five lives (and no more, no matter what), and an added dimension to magic that is called Rituals. All these differences are fairly easy to get around if not using the Twin Crowns campaign setting, but I did find it useful to read their Twin Crowns Primer (a six page overview available at no cost on their web site at: <http://www.livingimagination.com/pdf/TCPrimer.pdf>) to get an understand some of the things I was reading about.

I have to say that my hat comes off to the authors of this book for a job well done. The imagination and attention to detail that went onto the creation of this book is just outstanding. I grant that a large portion of the stuff found in this book you will never be able to use in a standard everyday role-playing game (I mean they even tell you the proper way to set a table in Parma), but the material that you won't use is still useful in setting the flavor of the place. Did you know for instance that losing your virginity in Parma is cause for a public party? And not only that, but it appears acceptable to celebrate this wondrous occasion more than once?

INSIDE

The book is divided into three main parts. The first six chapters (or 53 pages) is common knowledge stuff. This is stuff that anyone and their brother can have access to, and would generally be expected to know after only a short stay in Parma. Players and GM's alike are welcome to read this part to their heart's content. In addition to the general knowledge stuff, they give you four new prestige classes (if you want to know what one of them are I give you a hint, "Pillow Talk" is one of the class features), eleven new rituals (which are essentially useless if you don't have the core rules for the Twin Crowns Campaign setting), a couple new creatures and a couple new magic items. They also go so far as to give you the crests for each of the half dozen or so more important families. As far as artwork goes for the book, in general it's nothing to get excited over. But I'm very happy to report that they put their priorities in the right spot and where it needs to be good it's very good. The crests and neighborhood maps are several orders of magnitude higher quality than everything else.

The second part of the book is only one chapter, but covers over half the book. This chapter is a building-by-building description of the entire city. They give you enough detail for each and every building to run an encounter there without needing to do too much homework. It is organized by neighborhoods, and there is a neighborhood map that is a blow up of the neighborhood in question from the larger color map (except these are in black and white of course). This chapter is semi-common knowledge stuff which means that players are able to uncover this information with a little bit of work, or if they get to know the proper people. Players are not supposed to

read this without the GM's permission. Presumably sections of this chapter are doled out as the circumstances dictate.

The last three chapters (90+ pages) cover the really good stuff that is for GM's eyes only. This section gives eleven major plot lines, nineteen minor plot lines, A building by building listing of the city giving who and what might be encountered in each of the buildings, and the descriptions for over 100 NPC's (OK... 3 over). I might add that these NPC's at the back are in addition to the 40 or so NPC's sprinkled throughout the previous chapter of what might be encountered in the specific buildings. All these NPC's are done in the "trash compactor" style, but seeing the sheer number involved, I have to admit that I think doing it that way is better than forcing me to by another book just for the NPC's. This section alone would make the book a nice addition to any DM's collection.

Overall I think the book is very well organized and easy to follow. But since it is specifically targeted to be a reference book, I would personally like to have seen an index in the back. To be fair, the Table of Contents is pretty detailed, but for building names or NPC names (the ones not in the last chapter) you are going to spend a month of Sundays flipping pages if you didn't put in your notes the page number where you got them from.

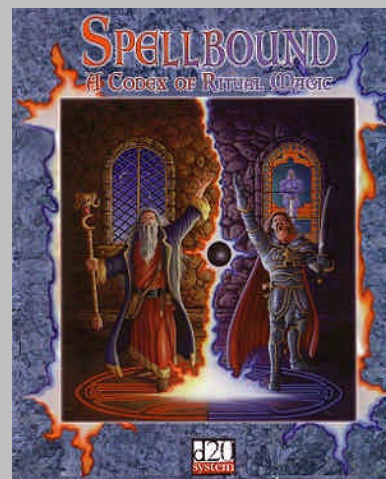
VALUE

This book is not for beginners or the faint of heart. Nor is it for GM's that want quick or canned campaigns. If you don't fall in any of those categories, then this book is a treasure trove. The book is not only busting at the seams with great ideas for adventures of all sizes; it's a lot of fun just to sit down and read.

For me, I liked the style, detail, and ideas enough to give the book high marks. So much so in fact that I'll be checking out some of their other products (including the Twin Crowns campaign setting, they just might have something there).

BASICS

Spellbound: A Codex of Ritual Magic is a 128-page soft cover book with a full color cover. Inside, the book has black and white illustrations. *Spellbound* is from Living Imagination, Inc who also publish *Broadsides!*, *Naval Adventuring* and *Streets of Silver Adventurer's Guide* – all of these are d20 system books. It has a retail price of \$19.95 USD.



INSIDE

Spellbound consists of five chapters and two appendices. Chapter one introduces the concept of ritual magic. This is a new kind of magic for the d20 system. Ritual magic is very different from the normal magic.

The ability to cast rituals depends on the caster's skill level in ritual skills rather than his level. There are both divine and arcane rituals – and spell casters of the appropriate type with the ritual skills may cast the rituals. There are two new skills, Arcane Ritual and Divine Ritual. Rituals are more involved than normal spells. They take time to set up and to cast – they are extremely difficult to memorize, and they are much more powerful than a normal spell.

The game mechanism for casting a ritual is involved as well. A caster must first prepare any required material components and then begin the cast. The caster must make a Ritual check against the DC of the ritual; if the caster



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D20 Product Reviews

rolls the DC or higher, the ritual is a success. A roll of 1 is always a failure, but a 20 is not always a success. There are situational modifiers that can be applied, both positive and negative. Ritual circles can also be created to help increase or decrease probabilities associated with rituals. If he rolls a 20, there is a chance of a success without flaw. The 20 must be followed up with a second roll. If the second roll equals or exceeds the DC, then the ritual is cast with a critical success. All rituals have a “flaw” property. This is the probability that the ritual will complete but be only partially successful. A ritual that succeeds in casting a ritual by a value equal or less than the flaw rating has cast a flawed ritual. Tables are included to cover the various types of flaws. The chance of a flawed cast cannot be removed no matter the skill of the caster.

The first chapter also includes information on how rituals fit into the wider world – specifically the interaction of them with other types of magic. There are three methods to handling material components of rituals. The first requires that the rare element “korba” be used in each ritual. The amount of korba required is determined by the power of the ritual. The second method does not require korba, but instead uses other extremely rare components – such as “green juniper berry paste made by an 80-year old crone”. Finally, you can use a combination of both these methods. Chapter one ends with a discussion about adding rituals to a campaign and balancing them.

Chapter two presents two prestige classes – an Arcane Ritualist and a Divine Ritualist – both of which have certain abilities to help in casting rituals. However, you don’t have to be one of these classes to cast a ritual – it just helps.

Chapter three introduces ritual-specific feats such as “Arcane Ritual Focus”, “Ritual Stability”, and “Scribe Divine Ritual Scroll”.

Chapter four presents ritual magic items. These cover the range from the Amulet of Ritual Skill which gives a +2 enhancement bonus to skill checks, to the Staff of the Onyx Skull which allows the wielder to cast 6 ritual effects without going through the rituals.

Chapter five, the largest in the book, lists all the rituals. The chapter starts with a table of the rituals with their type, DC, flaw rating and the amount of korba required. After that the rituals are listed in alphabetical order. After a short survey of the rituals, it is obvious why they are more difficult to cast – they are exceptionally powerful. For example, you have “Recharge Wand” and “Recharge Staff” which can bring your favorite dungeoning tool back up to snuff. Another example: “Tectonic Shift” is the “Earthquake” spell on steroids – its area of effect is 1,000 ft with a range of 1 mile. This ritual has a DC of 40 and a flaw of 5 – but a critical success doubles the area of affect.

The book ends with two appendices. The first includes the stats for creatures summoned by certain rituals and the second includes the OGL.

VALUE

Spellbound introduces a magical H-bomb into d20 games. Be very careful before you add it. However, with that warning, rituals add an excellent dynamic to a fantasy campaign. Now players and NPC’s can truly wield earth-shaking powers and change the world. That appeals to the Merlin in all of us. But rituals also introduce great game ideas. For example, the “Undead Army” ritual is a necromancer’s dream – it animates all corpses within a 1-mile radius. However, it takes 15 drams (30 ounces) of korba to cast! So, the aspiring necromancer will have to trick the party into acquiring significant amounts of korba so he can summon his unholy horde – plus they might need to go fetch the Ritual Scroll for him. Then, once they’ve determined that they’ve been duped, it’s a race against time to stop Ignatz the Bone Lover from calling forth his daisy-pusher army and marching on the Village of Innocent Bystanders.

Man, I can’t wait to try this out – my 9th level cleric is going to learn rituals later this summer!

BASICS

FACTORY is the second book of technomagic d20 rules from Perpetrated Press. It is a soft cover book that comes in at 192-pages (including character sheets) with a price tag of \$24.95 USD. It has a full-color cover and black & white interior art.

INSIDE

FACTORY takes over where **ARSENAL** (Guns and Armor) left off and heads into new territory with Robots, Computers, and more. There are 18 chapters, an Index, plenty of tables and character sheets inside **FACTORY**. The first three (Introduction, Balance Issues, and Campaigns) are all quite short, but they will really help a high fantasy technomagic game get started on the right foot. There are new Skills, Feats and Spells, with each chapter taking up just a few pages. As you would expect they all deal with the advanced technology that your players will encounter and use in this type of game. Computers get their own chapter and made sense without becoming too ‘geeky’ and cumbersome.

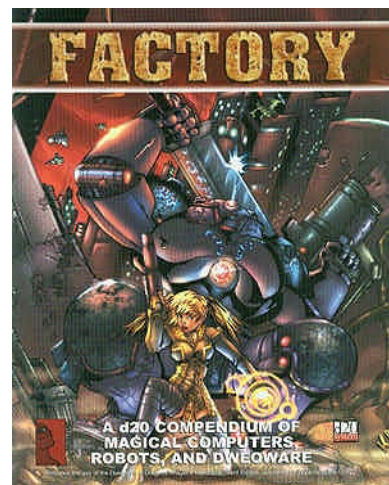
The next four chapters (Robotics, Robots, Powered Exosuits, and PC Robots) take up a very sizable chunk of the book and are probably my favorite section of **FACTORY**. The robot construction rules allow you to do many different things and build ‘bots from lowly workers to war machines. Powered Exosuits are awesome suits of armor that can range in size from one that would fit a goblin to monstrous mechs. They also have custom building rules. The chapter on Robot PC’s is not overly complex, but building a robot character is different than a regular character. First, robot characters are given a baseline of stats that corresponds to their model (companion, domestic, service, sports, security, industrial, and military) and size (small, medium, or large). Remember the ABC-Robot from Judge Dredd (comics and movie)? It would be considered, to start off with, a large military robot with a 24 STR, 12 DEX, 10 INT, 14 WIS, an 8 CHA. Robots don’t have CON scores. From there you would choose upgrades, select a class, buy gear and get to work.

Dweonetics and Dweoware are the next chapters and deal with technomagic upgrades to your characters so you can turn them into cybernetic studs, or studettes I guess. There are several things that keep dweo-stuff in check. The first that really stuck out for me was that, unlike magic items, the XP cost for dweoware is paid for by the character that is getting it, not the creator. Dweoware cannot be ‘moved’ from one character to another like a suit of armor could. It cannot be repaired via regeneration. And it’s risky to implant. So, why get any? Well, you can kick lots of ass with it! There are 10 pages of pre-generated dweoware items and building more is really as simple as making new magic items in *Dungeons & Dragons*.

There is a small section on equipment and weapons, but for a comprehensive list you’ll really want to dive into **ARSENAL**. Character sheets are provided for Robot PC’s, Powered Exosuit wearing PC’s, regular PC’s, Robots, and PC’s jacked up with dweoware.

VALUE

FACTORY is an excellent follow-up to **ARSENAL** and is well worth the cost. If you want to play *Shadowrun* d20 then you’re set. If you want to play *Warhammer 40K* d20 then you’re set. If you want to play [insert favorite high fantasy sci-fi type of game, movie, book, etc here] then you’re set. Basically, you’re set. The interior artwork ranges from pretty good to extremely good, with a few being a little fuzzy or grainy. I did miss the comics that were in **ARSENAL** though. There is also a short chapter on d20 Modern conversion that comes in helpful to those of us that want to supercharge that game. The Perpetrated Press website also features another free downloadable document for d20 Modern conversion purposes.



D20 Product Reviews



BASICS

Armageddon: 2089 Total War is Mongoose Publishing's foray into the world of d20 Mecha rpg's. It is a 304-page hardback book with a color cover printed on slick glossy paper that is also full color throughout. It requires that you have the Dungeons & Dragons Players Handbook and has a retail price of \$44.95 USD.

INSIDE

Before digging into the meat of the book you'll

notice that just from your initial flipping through of the book that it's a very nice looking tome and a lot of time was spent making it such. The text is easy to read and all of the War Meks have a very realistic look to them. Regarding the presentation of the material my only wince was at some of the tables. They have a black background with white (so far, so good) and green (not great) text. The green gets difficult to read and red or yellow might have been a better choice in the tables.

The background of Armageddon: 2089 starts with the crashing of two hijacked civilian planes into the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 (The authors list it as taking place in 2002. I'm not sure if they meant to offset it by a year or not though.) and the state of affairs for pretty much everyone around the globe declines from there. Isolationism, greed, global warming, consolidation of nations, and more all play a part in shaping the new world that is not post-apocalyptic (not yet anyway) but sees nations warring with each other and making prolific use of mercenaries piloting giant waking tanks called War Meks. I read through the background twice and still felt less than thrilled about how things shake out for not only the USA but also the UK, which is embroiled in its own civil war and is not exactly on the best of terms with the rest of Europe. I flipped back to the designer's notes and saw that us, the readers, maybe getting a little disjointed at how things turned out in this fictional setting is exactly what they were shooting for. You know what, they succeeded and after reading through those notes I took a step back and didn't really think about it in that first light again. Maybe I was just thinking too close to the source when I initially read through it. There are also 'news' clips scattered throughout the book that continue to fill you in on the background of the game world. You come to realize that there are really no classic 'good-guys' in Armageddon: 2089. None of the national players have clean hands. It's like someone said, "Sh*t soup is for dinner and here's your bowl!" Now, go out and kick some ass and make some money. Capitalism is still alive and well you see!

Character creation is standard for a d20 game and will be familiar to any previous d20 system player. PC's are human and have a handful of Mek-oriented classes to choose from and there are a couple of non-Mek classes that would mostly see service as NPC's but could also pass for PC's. Many, but not all, Skills and Feats from the PHB are available to your PC's and these are added to by new ones specific to the futuristic world you find yourself in.

There are two types of combat that you'll be concerned with, man (personnel) scale and War Mek scale. Trust me, you don't want to get caught outside of some kind of 'hard' armored protection when the big guns start firing. Heroes, your characters, are afforded a bit more leniency when it comes to being turned into a greasy spot on the ground when being fired at by the massive armament of the War Meks, but just a bit. You'll end up dead too unless you have a seriously hardcore plan of action in place. The solution? Well, like I said there are two types of combat to be worried about and each has its place in the game with some crossing over being not

only possible, but quite exciting. Imagine your group of characters, each in a War Mek (very likely) battling an enemy group in a large city, dodging behind buildings and even bringing some down in the process of trying to get to a location where you need to retrieve some objective. Said objective requires that at least part of the party dismount and head into an underground garage on foot while the rest keep a lookout. Combat ensues in the garage and at the same time new 'hard' targets emerge to muck things up above ground. Two fights going on and when (if) the guys below are victorious they still have to get safely back to their Meks up topside. Yeah, that could work quite well.

The rules for Mek combat are detailed enough to the point that you could use them exclusively for a tabletop wargame if you wanted. A huge selection of Meks are presented, each with nice computer generated artwork and full stats, as are rules for constructing your own for you number crunchers out there. While the stars of the battlefield are definitely the War Meks conventional armor has not gone by the wayside and still plays a vital role in combat. Mongoose is really good about providing useful downloads on their website and I'm hoping to see a Mek construction utility there at some point.

Combat centers around trying to avoid getting hit (duh!) by way of your Defense Value replacing AC and armor soaking up points of damage when you do get nailed. Hit Points are as you're used to and one way that combat stays fast moving is that *all* characters get the 'Shot on the Run' feat for free. Running and shooting from cover to cover will become a staple of your combats and should generally help to keep your PC's alive a bit longer providing they don't decide to run straight at a tank wearing just a jock-strap. Oh yeah, stray shots can suck so be careful where you point that thing!

The Campaign section of the book continues, with the help of all of the background, to prepare the GM to run the game. Things for those living in the year 2089 are in a very bad place most of the time. The initial background section that I alluded to earlier takes up just a couple of pages but the world is greatly detailed later on and while the world has not taken a turn for the better at the back of the book it's a very interesting read to see how the authors took events of the modern age and extrapolated them (in their own way) into the world of Armageddon: 2089. The main players are the USA and its allies (not necessarily who you'd think of), the European Federation and its allies, The Tiger Combine (Southeast Asia), and the Nordic League with plenty of neutral bodies all over the place. Of course, the threat of mutually assured destruction hangs over the heads of pretty much everyone, but nobody is going to pay you to sit around and watch cartoons all day. There are several campaign types presented (Mercenary, Corporate, Special Forces, and Tanker/Infantry) and each can present its own challenges or if your up to it as a GM you can splice a couple of them together.

VALUE

This is not an inexpensive book at nearly \$45, but don't be taken aback by the price. You certainly get what you pay for here. The presentation is among the highest I've seen and it's a quality production. The setting is rather pessimistic, but offers plenty of opportunities for role-playing, adventure and combat. An introductory adventure would have been nice to see, but there are plenty of campaign suggestions to help your GM jump start things. The index is a wonderful addition, especially in a book of this size. Armageddon: 2089 reminded me of several other games (MechWarrior and Traveller mostly) but is really it's own creation. Being set solely on Earth and less than a century in the future means that even with political, temperate, and social changes that take place in the background it can still be familiar to your players without having to learn the history of a whole new universe. I liked the economic aspect of the game and operating as a bunch of mercenaries is fun, but becoming filthy rich mercenaries is even better. All in all I found that I liked Armageddon: 2089 very much and while it's a bleak world that you'll be heading into it's a very interesting one that offers plenty of role-playing opportunity and many chances to blow big bloody holes in those bastards just over that next ridge.



Game Update



In addition to working hard on the upcoming release of Ultimate Warzone, Thom Talamini and the crew at Excelsior Entertainment are also moving ahead with the expansion of the Chronopia universe.

Here you'll see four pieces of updated information for Chronopia that coincided with the release of new figures. The material has been made available on the Excelsior Entertainment website and Thom has also been gracious enough to allow us the opportunity to re-print them here in Fictional Reality.

The Tatterdemalion spell was released along with the new Elven Yellow Lotus Eater and it is an amazingly effective spell that will give the normally fragile Yellow Lotus Eater a bit less to worry about and might forego what has become a fairly standard bodyguard of either Elven swordsmen or axemen.

The Giant Skeleton model sees the release of two optional items, but both only usable by the Giant Skeleton itself. Non-Devout players will be glad of that fact as you'd probably want to deal with these foul artifacts in one place rather than spread out. The Banner of Darkness Rising has a very affordable points cost and will deny your opponent their DEF modifier unless they have the *Blind Fighting* special ability and chances are better than not that they don't have it. The Horn of Nar'gahresh will set you back a few more points and will take two actions to use, but it's a pretty devastating punch. Any models that's at least half under the flaming lance template will get nailed for a DAM 15 hit, and it can be used in close combat to boot!

Tatterdemalion

Cost: 20
Range: Self
Level: 3
Actions: 1
Save: N/A

Effect: Perfected by the Lotus Eaters of the Jade House, this new enchantment animates the thin, often worn ribbons that decorate their Staves of Channeling. These ribbons will whirl about the staff and attack any models in Close Combat with the Lotus Eater. This spell, while powerful, is simple to cast taking only a word to activate and hence may actually be cast in close combat or from WAIT.

Once cast, the ribbons attack every model in base-to-base contact with the Lotus Eater. Each model must be attacked with the Lotus Eater's CC value. Should the Lotus Eater hit, the ribbons have bound that model and entangled it. Once entangled it may take no actions other than to attempt to break free from the bindings (roll ST x2 or under). Thus a Tree Devil bound by the ribbons must roll a 8 or less to break free. This test takes an action. An entangled model does not get the benefits of any negative DEF modifier against subsequent attacks. Thus, a bound Black Sister would lose the -6 DEF modifier should she be attacked by the Lotus Eater's sword or from another model seeking to take advantage of the situation. There is no limit to the number of models in base to base contact that may be bound this way, though this will not work against models of SZ 4 or better.

Yellow Lotus Spell

Banner of Darkness Rising (Optional Item)

Cost: 15

A tattered standard is often strapped to the back of the Giant Skeleton and carried aloft into battle. Sometimes this standard is replaced with the Banner of Darkness Rising. This seemingly ruined standard conveys a veil of shadow that surrounds the Giant Skeleton and billows about him like churning smoke. Opponents caught under the thrall of this banner report an overwhelming disorientation.

When the Giant Skeleton attacks any model without the Special Ability of Blind Fighting, that model does not gain the benefit of a Defensive Modifier. Attacks made by the Giant Skeleton occur unadjusted by the opponent's DEF.

Models with Blind Fighting defend as normal against this weapon.

Below is a new character for the Firstborn army and I hope that this marks the beginning of new specialty characters for each army in the game. The Swordmaster might be a task to get onto the table, as he has a prerequisite of 16 Swordsmen or Desert Crusaders in your army, but once there he is not only a commanding presence, but can also beat the living hell out of his opponents. He has an ability that increases the damage cause by a successful hit by how much 'extra' hit his opponent by. He also boasts a very respectable DEF and a very reasonable point cost. If your Firstborn army is already centered around his prerequisite troops then taking the Swordmaster should be pretty close to automatic for you.

Firstborn Earl Swordmaster Nobleman

INDIVIDUAL

CC	RC	PW	LD	AC	WD	ST	MV	AR	DEF	PC
13	8	-	14	2	2	4	3	15	-5	46

SPECIAL RULES

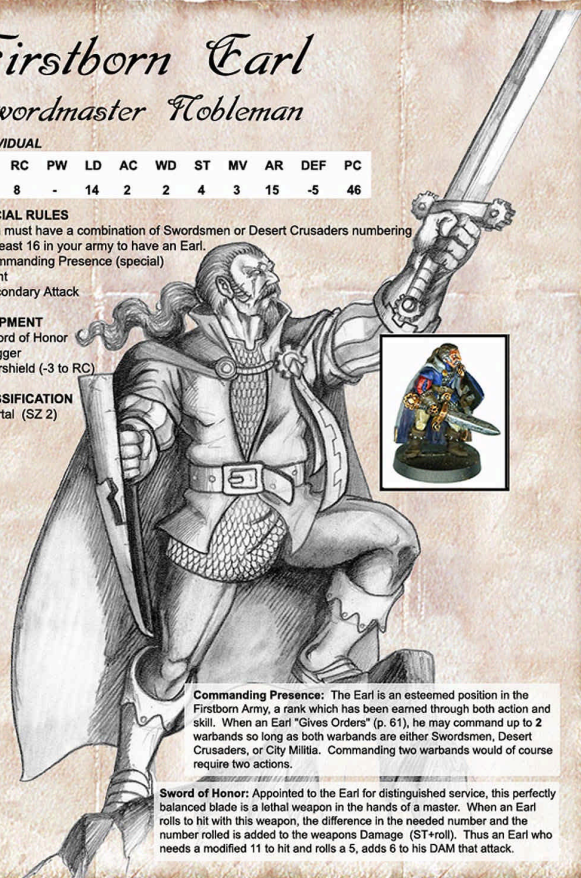
- * You must have a combination of Swordsmen or Desert Crusaders numbering at least 16 in your army to have an Earl.
- * Commanding Presence (special)
- * Feint
- * Secondary Attack

EQUIPMENT

- * Sword of Honor
- * Dagger
- * Warshield (-3 to RC)

CLASSIFICATION

- * Mortal (SZ 2)



Commanding Presence: The Earl is an esteemed position in the Firstborn Army, a rank which has been earned through both action and skill. When an Earl 'Gives Orders' (p. 61), he may command up to 2 warbands so long as both warbands are either Swordsmen, Desert Crusaders, or City Militia. Commanding two warbands would of course require two actions.

Sword of Honor: Appointed to the Earl for distinguished service, this perfectly balanced blade is a lethal weapon in the hands of a master. When an Earl rolls to hit with this weapon, the difference in the needed number and the number rolled is added to the weapons Damage (ST+roll). Thus an Earl who needs a modified 11 to hit and rolls a 5, adds 6 to his DAM that attack.

Horn of Nar'gahresh (Optional Item)

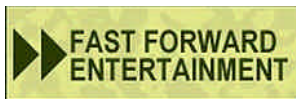
Cost: 18

The Horn of Nar'gahresh is an artifact fashioned from the vile writings of the Arch Necromancer of the same name. By removing the horn from a Bale Demon and performing dark rituals upon it, the Arch Necromancer has created a disgusting weapon that has become a common sight amongst the Devout Army. Fortunately for the mortal races only the Giant Skeleton, a summoned creature infused with great darkness, seems capable of wielding it.

By using two actions, the Horn may disgorge torrents of boiling filth and demonic waste. Use the Flame Lance Template for its attack and range. Any model caught (by more than half) under this foul spray must defend against a DAM 15 attack.

The Horn of Filth, as the Firstborn refers to it, may be used even if the Skeleton is in close combat.

Press Releases



Demon Wars Comes to d20!

The Demon Awakens, *The Demon Spirit*, and *The Demon Apostle* are three amazing fantasy novels by R. A. Salvatore presenting a new fantasy world filled with magic, war and adventure. When Fast Forward's new series of d20 sourcebooks based on R. A. Salvatore's Demon Wars novels hit the streets, fans of the novels will be able to walk in the forests and cities of the Demon Wars saga and fight right alongside Elbryan and Pony against the terrible dactyl demon.

It all begins with an introduction to the world. The first hardbound presents the world in all its glory. In those pages, readers will learn how to create their own heroes so that they, too, can adventure through the Demon Wars saga. Fast Forward will publish four different d20 hardbound sourcebooks a year, presenting the entirety of the Demon Wars saga in role-playing form. This is not your typical d20 campaign setting, though. Not everything works the same in the world of the Demon Wars. Magic, in particular, does not course through the world as it does elsewhere. Instead, it is focused through gemstones that fall from the skies and are collected by the clerics of the world. The magic found in these stones is extremely powerful, even when used by merchants who haven't the slightest idea how to truly manipulate the workings of the stones. A trained user can get amazing effects from every type of gem. Sorcery most foul is also found in these books, especially in those who use sorcery to summon up demons and raise the dead.

Creatures and magic items are the meat and drink of fantasy, and there are amazing monsters and items of power to be found in this saga. This first book presents just the briefest of tastes of the fun to be had. Future volumes will provide a great deal more information on the world, and the people and creatures that inhabit it. The most important places, cities, temple forts and battlefields will all be detailed in future volume for fans and gamers to enjoy. Each is covered in enough detail to play out entire campaigns within their confines, giving players a perfect point to begin their adventures. Of course, fans of the series will love the maps and background information on these locations. The characters of the story are all detailed in d20 System stats, enabling fans to actually play their favorite characters and referees to fill their Demon Wars campaigns with the excitement and adventure taken directly from the novels. Who wouldn't want to adventure with their favorite fantasy hero? This Fast Forward book will allow fans and gamers alike a chance to do just that.

CrossGen is producing a monthly comic line based on this exciting world with a whole new story line and amazing fantasy art. Fast Forward will further add to the Demon Wars universe by designing a new d20 fantasy world based on these novels and comic books.

Release Schedule:

Demon Wars Campaign Setting	FAF2700	\$24.99	May 2003
Demon Wars Player's Guide	FAF2701	\$24.99	July 2003
Demon Wars Enchanted Locations	FAF2702	\$24.99	September 2003
Demon Wars Gazetteer	FAF2703	\$24.99	November 2003



GAMES UNPLUGGED CHANGES FORMAT, FOCUS

Fast Forward Entertainment announced today that Games Unplugged magazine is changing its format and focus. No longer will it be a general gaming magazine, rather Games Unplugged will focus on specific games in the adventure game industry. Beginning with issue number 26, Games Unplugged will feature dedicated articles from Fast Forward Entertainment

and its partner companies, FanPro US, Sovereign Press, Pinnacle Entertainment Group, Human Head, and Noble Miniatures.

"We have been very happy with and received many complements on the content of Games Unplugged in the past, but we just weren't getting a consistent readership," stated Sean Everette, Director of Periodicals for Fast Forward. "With this change, we're hoping to attract fans of the various properties Fast Forward and our partner companies produce, and give them articles on their favorite game systems each and every month."

Publisher Timothy Brown commented, "One of the most frequent comments we received with Games Unplugged was that we were running features on games that either really interested someone, or really didn't interest them, and it differed from reader to reader. With this change we hope to put a consistent product in the hands of some of the largest gaming communities in our industry with inside information, exclusive content, adventures, variants, and special game bonuses for their favorite game."

John Danovich, VP of Sales & Marketing for Fast Forward added, "We think that this format change will help stand sales for retailers right away. With a magazine that retailers can rack right next to each of these games every month, they should see significant increases in their sales for both the magazine and the games that this periodical supports."

With its new format and focus, Games Unplugged is going to feature regular monthly articles for *Dragonlance*, *Classic BattleTech*, *Shadowrun*, *Deadlands*, *Sovereign Stone*, *R.A. Salvatore's DemonWars*, the CrossGen RPG and CCG, *Weird Wars*, and various other games produced by Fast Forward and its partners.

Games Unplugged will be the Official Magazine for *Classic BattleTech*, *Shadowrun*, *The Dark Eye RPG*, *Deadlands*, *Savage Worlds*, *Weird Wars*, *Sovereign Stone*, all pen-and-paper, card, and boardgames from Human Head, and all games written and produced by Fast Forward. Anything that appears in Games Unplugged on these lines will be fully endorsed as official news or game material by the parent company of each property.

Please direct all ad sales inquiries directly to Fast Forward Entertainment: (262) 374-0298, (262) 348-0499 Fax, sales@fastforwardgames.com



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Back in the day, a young company by the name of Tactical Studies Rules offered a lifetime subscription for \$450 (not being a lifetime subscriber, I can't tell you the amount for sure), and people I personally know, to this day, are still receiving products from TSR! For that small investment, they have received thousands of dollars worth of product (not to mention the collector value).

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Here's where you need to send your cash to get your games:

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Or you can call us directly at 262-348-0440 and we'll get all your information over the phone (and you get to talk to the stunning Fast Forward crew directly).

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Announcing: Savage Tales!

Dozens of you have been asking how you can make and sell your own Savage Worlds adventures and settings.

The bad news--we have NO intention of doing an Open Gaming License.

The good news--we've finalized the details of our own Savage Tales, a book that will come out three times a year featuring articles, settings, and adventures by established authors AND guys and gals just like you.

This isn't "fan" work. If your work is accepted, you'll be contracted and treated just like any one of our regular freelancers. The work will be edited by a professional, you'll do rewrites as required, and when all is said and done, you'll be paid and published as a professional author! Those concepts that would make great stand-alones might even get their own book depending on the schedule and our needs at the time.

The Darkest Roleplaying Game of All

Evernight is a revolutionary new kind of RPG using the Savage Worlds roleplaying system. Players start at the beginning of a fantastic tale of war and betrayal in a world of elves, dwarves, orcs, and men.

The 144-page hardback book provides a complete campaign from the peaceful start to the bloody finish. You've never seen anything like this. It's a game where all of the work is done for you and each night's adventure is ready to go in minutes.

The World of Evernight

The world of Tarth is a bright and shining jewel. The wars of the races are long over, the people are free, and true evil has been scattered to the dark bowels of the earth. The King of Valusia sits upon his ivory throne and rules his peaceful valley and its honest citizens with a firm yet fair grip.

Until they came. The Miniatures

That's right! Official Evernight miniatures are on the way as well! Check out this official release from Jeff Valent Studios for the details, as well as a sneak peak at the character types you can play in the game! (3.5MB Adobe Acrobat Document)

Check back each week for more details, as well as previews of characters and ...darker...things...

Pinnacle Forums!

Pinnacle now has official forums! Check them out by clicking below. We'll have a minor redesign of the website next week to make it more convenient to get to, as well as re-organizing our massive library of downloads.

Pinnacle Entertainment Group
<http://www.peginc.com>

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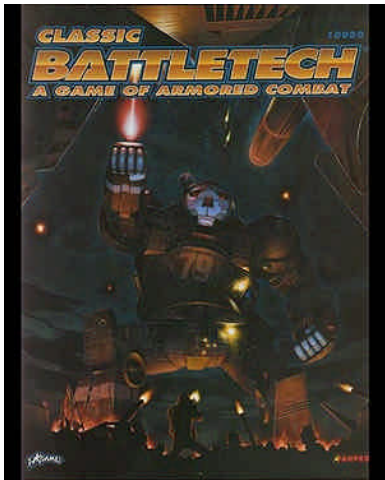
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Game Review



Basics

Classic BattleTech is the WizKids re-issue of the original BattleTech game. This version updates the original game to match the *BattleTech Master Rules, Revised* - the standard set of rules. **Classic BattleTech** is a stand-alone game that serves as an introduction to the Master Rules. **Classic BattleTech** retails for \$34.99 (€ 34.99).

Contents

Classic BattleTech comes in a full-colored box that is packed with everything you need to start playing the game. It includes the 64-page rulebook, a 16-page quick start rulebook, a 48-page background book, 24

staple bound BattleMech record sheets, two full-color map sheets, a color poster-sized map of the Inner Sphere in 3067, 48 stand-up card mechs with 12 stands, and two six-sided dice.

The quick-start rulebook is printed in full color. The cover is designed to be removed and be used to play the quick start rules. The inside cover of the book has a map printed on it, as well as 4 mech counters to cut out and stand up. This map is smaller than the standard maps and the cutout mechs are sized to fit the map.

The mechs used in the quick start rules are the CDA-2A Cicada, ENF-4R Enforcer, HER-25 Hermes II, and the HBK-4g Hunchback. The stand up mechs are designed to cut out and folded so that they stand up. As the cover is a glossy paper, you might want to strengthen the mechs with some note cards cut to size. Another piece of card can be used to make a base for the mech.

Just inside the front and back covers is a player aid sheet. One side has two record sheets and the other side includes basic charts and tables. These sheets can be removed from the book and cut up to provide four data cards for the mechs.

The rest of the quick start guide includes a quick overview of the rules and how to play. Rules for maneuver and fire combat are included. Obviously, most optional and advanced rules are left out. The guide also includes a training scenario that has the Cicada and Hunchback defending against the Hermes II and the Enforcer.

The **Classic BattleTech** rulebook has a full color cover but is black and white on the inside. This book provides all the rules necessary to play Level One BattleTech using the technology available in 3025. Specifically, **Classic BattleTech** is set in the year 3049. Other levels are covered in expansions: Level Two adds the Clans as well as infantry and vehicles up to 3067. Level Three is everything else.

The rulebook is divided into seven sections that cover the basic sequence of play, movement, combat, scenarios, rudimentary tactics, construction, and equipment. The rules are liberally illustrated with diagrams and tables, and well as plenty of play examples. The scenarios section includes three basic scenarios pitting a single lance on each side. The tactics section provides a good introduction to basic mech tactics as well as describes the various types of mechs. The construction rules provide a limited ability to customize the mechs while the equipment section covers the bare minimum. The last page of the rulebook is a standard data sheet for copying.

The **Classic BattleTech Universe** book provides the background of the BattleTech universe in full color. This volume includes some short stories and essays on the universe up through 3067. Each major power is described in its own section and information on the smaller powers and

mercenaries is also included. The remaining part of the book includes short descriptions of the 24 mechs provided with the game.

Two sheets of full-color punch-out mech silhouettes are included in **Classic BattleTech**. These punch out easily and fit snugly into the plastic bases. Pre-printed record sheets for the 24 provided mechs are staple bound in a single volume. These are meant to be photocopied and are so marked.

The two game maps are printed on both sides. One side is a full color game map including standard terrain. Terrain is labeled as to type (light, heavy or rough) and/or height (WL1, L1 or L2). The other side of the map is hexagons on a white background.

The poster map of the Inner Sphere shows all the major political entities and their sub entities as well as all the stars.

Value

With the release of **Classic BattleTech**, WizKids is showing that they are interested in keeping the original BattleTech game alive and going. Rather than re-vamping the entire universe, WizKids appears to be simply repackaging the older information. This is good for both the experienced BattleTech player, as he can keep using what he already owns, and for the new player, who can get everything he needs to start in once package.

The quality of the components in the box is very high. The print quality and editing are very good. If there was one disappointment, it was in the punch-out mechs. I would have preferred either plastic or metal miniatures. However, including the miniatures would have required adding a painting guide and either raising the price of the box or reducing the quality of the printed products. Given those options, I think WizKids chose correctly in going for the all-paper product.

My recommendation is simply this – if you're interested in getting started in BattleTech or have been playing **MechWarrior: Dark Age** and want to move up, then this is definitely the correct first step. It is an excellent introduction to the BattleTech universe.

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Game Review



BASICS

Classic BattleTech Miniatures Rules is an 80-page soft cover book published by WizKids. The cover and inside of the book are full colors. This volume provides rules for playing **Classic BattleTech**, **MechWarrior: Dark Age**, the large scale BattleTech miniatures made by Armormeat. on non-hex table top terrain. The cover price is \$19.99.

BETWEEN THE COVERS

Classic BattleTech Miniature Rules starts off with a BattleTech short story. After this is the first of many pages

of well painted miniatures on a gaming table. The rulebook is liberally illustrated with these pictures.

The first part of the book deals with the rules for Classic BattleTech. It first covers the basics of terrain and provides a quick survey of the various general types of terrain – water, hills, trees, and such. After this, the rules for converting from the hex-based game to the tape measure system are provided. These rules include converting hex area to circular areas, movement, stacking, piloting, and combat. The next thirteen pages consist of pictures of mechs and vehicles from the various powers and clans.

The next part of the book deals with the conversion of the miniature rules for use with the large scale BattleMechs. These rules are based on those for **Classic BattleTech** given in the first part.

Between the Large-Scale miniature rules and the **MechWarrior: Dark Age** rules is another short story, more mech pictures of both Classic BattleTech and Dark Age miniatures, and an introduction to the **MechWarrior Dark Age** background. The miniature rules for **Dark Age** add firing arc templates and rules for using them to the rules given for **Classic BattleTech** miniatures. Then follows a large section covering Industrial Mechs.

Now that all the basic rules for miniatures have been presented, the next section gives rules for massive battles. These rules are for games that are larger than lance on lance. A section follows this on assembling and painting miniatures – the Classic BattleTech, Large Scale, and **Dark Age** ones.

The rest of the volume consists of eight pages of advertisements for miniatures, terrain, and other products for the various flavors of BattleTech.

VALUE

First off, this is a well-made book. The printing and binding is top notch. The volume also includes all the necessary rules for playing on a non-hex gaming table. This book is essential for those wanting to play on such a table. For novice players, the painting guide and color pictures provide a good reference.

That being said, much of this book that has no direct bearing on open-table miniatures. I would have preferred a smaller volume with out the short stories and advertisements. I found it interesting that GeoHex was still mentioned, given that that company closed its doors on February 14 of this year – and has been taken over by Monday Knight Productions.

In the end, this is a good volume. The conversion rules are well done and the painting guide is a good introduction. If you're a BattleTech player who already has a stash of table terrain without hexes, then you should strongly consider purchasing this volume.

BASICS

The Junkers Force Book for Void is a 48-page perfect-bound book in full color (inside and out), printed on A4 size paper, with a retail cost of \$x.xx USD.

INSIDE

A little bit less than the book is devoted to the background of the Junker army. It's a fairly quick, but informative, read with lots of pictures sprinkled throughout. Some of the artwork has is a mixture of hand-drawn and computer generated and it actually works pretty well. The computer generated parts are huge ranks of Junker troops in massed formations and they do look like blocks of identical, and basically nameless, fodder ready to charge down the enemy's guns.

The Junker army is based around the thought that if I get as many of my guys as close to you as quickly as possible and make your guys dead I will win the game. Ok, I can buy that. This is accomplished with lots of very cheap, and highly expendable, troops which are supported by specialty units that will probably see a lot of 'cleaning-up' action once the inevitable 'wall-of-flesh' hits the enemy line.

Convict Legionnaires and Suicide Bombers will likely make up a lot of your Junker army and they are really looked at, by the Junkers and their enemies, sort of like Doritos chips. You know, "crunch all you want, we'll make more", well in this case it's more like, "kill all you want, we'll just throw more at you". These are fine and will help to achieve your objective of closing with the enemy, but the specialty units are the ones that will really catch your eye. There are three motorized units in the Junker army; Suicide Bikers (similar to the Suicide Bombers, but they ride bikes that are not entirely reliable), Dune Raiders (units of armed ATV's) and finally Desert Marauders (Jeeps that come in four variations that are my personal favorite unit in the army and will bring a smile to the face of anyone that ever watched Rat Patrol on television as a kid, outstanding stuff!).

The army also boasts Sandrunners (giant lizard riders), other hand-to-hand specialty squads, power armor-ish troops, some artillery and characters, but the main focus of the army seems very centered around an all-out sledgehammer assault. You could go against this and create a fast attack mechanized force that would be a frightful sight to behold if you're on the receiving end of things.

VALUE

The cost of the Junkers army book, in fact all of the VOID army books, makes it very conducive to picking it up and starting to put together an army. There are some wickedly cool motorized units in the Junker army that would certainly bend my ear in their direction.

The book is very well put together and should hold together very well. The artwork is really good and everything was easy to read and understand. The book was very well put together and will hold up nicely even under less than tender care.

Bottom line is that if you're a Junker player then this is already on your 'to purchase' list. It's inexpensive enough for most VOID players to pick up just to have in-depth knowledge of their opponent's forces and if you're not a VOID player flipping through it could give you some interest in the game.



Game Review



THE PREMISE

The basic principle of this chunky space domination/combat card game is that after a totally unreasonable amount of hubris mankind finally screwed up big time and the galaxy is dying; the very energy of life itself is being drained away by rifts in the fabric of reality. Bummer. Of course, your job is to take on one of the warring factions (aren't they always?), each have advantages and disadvantages, and win.

QUALITY

The game itself is, as already mentioned, quite chunky. According to Dave, "You could kill somebody with that!" However, Dave does profess to be able to kill somebody with just about anything so that is no real guide. That said it does contain 220 cards with rulebook and as a result is quite hefty. Opening the box reveals that the cards as expected are indeed quite nice and although the artwork is fairly basic and quite dark it does suit the ambience of the game. The cards are non-collectable and the one box gives you all the cards you need for 2 to 6 players although "GhazPORK Industrial", yes that really is their name, assures us that you only need three boxes for any possible combination of decks. Fine, but ninety bucks worth of non-collectable cards strikes me as a lot. Sure it does pale into insignificance when compared to what I've (and quite possibly a lot of you guys) spent on collectable cards but you don't get that buzz or kudos from your opponent when you zap him with that ultra-rare. While the cards are very nice the 64 page rulebook is poor. No, no, it's not poor, it's *really* poor... There are no other words for it and while a nice nostalgic touch harking back to very early days of Magic, the Gathering, it obviously wasn't printed in India for the quality. Very disappointing considering the expected production standards of games today. This is a shame because the rules themselves are actually quite well laid out and there are a reasonable number of examples given to explain points certain aspects but the poor black and white illustrations make it very difficult to see any detail. I didn't actually notice that the picture of a ship card on page 16 had counters on it. After reading through the text I do now, just. Having digested the rules and rummaging through the cards I'm coming out of my rulebook quality shock and round to more of a "well at least I don't need a magnifying glass to read it," sort of way and the rules do seem reasonably practicable and well thought out.

THE PLAYING AND WINNING OR NOT

Of course, the object is winning, none of this taking part rubbish, winning! So, how do you win? With great difficulty actually. There are several strategies that can be adopted. One, you can build up twelve points of Psi (life energy) before anybody else and your guys will

basically live forever; job done. Or two, you can attempt to heal the galaxy through sealing those rifts in reality; very altruistic and self sacrificing but quite hard really especially since the other players may well have adopted option three, you just resort to good old fashioned violence and beat the other guy's fleets to a pulp. Setup is simple and involves the players placing territory cards (all twenty five as far as I can see) to form a map of space. These aren't random, the player gets to choose which one of the remaining cards he wants to place where. When they've all been placed the players select their base by putting their faction card on one of the cards on the map. There are of course one or two restrictions about how cards and home bases can be placed but this semi-random way of designing the galaxy does give a unique feel to each game since initial battlefield setup and choice of location can be crucial.

It's the fleets though that are the crux of the game. Each fleet consists of several battlegroups attached to a flagship. You get to construct three from a pre-defined number of points and from there it's a tactical job of balancing your strategic assets and attacking. Fleets can be enhanced with various technological edges and the outcome of battles can be affected by various tactical cards. The battles are fought with battlegroups against battlegroups so fleets tend to get worn down rather than destroyed outright although with the wrong decisions and bad luck that wearing down can be alarmingly quick. Final ship combat losses are determined by a dice roll.

Just to complicate it all there's a time limit (theoretically). You lose psi every turn equal to the turn number. When you get to zero it's game over for your team. Since you only start with 5 points, if you sit on your hands and no nought you'll be dead in three turns. Needless to say this is not a winning strategy unless that is you're going to get to zero *after* everybody else. In which case you win. Huzzah! It's a good concept that obviously designed to prevent players from just doing nothing. I don't think it actually speeds up play since there are ways of getting more psi but it certainly focuses your attention on things other than the battles and you're always keeping an eye on the other player's psi totals. Very much along the lines of you can win all the battles but still lose if you don't keep your eye on the ball. For a simpler game there is pure battle mode. Forget the psi part, forget the rifts, it's just war. Sort of like the arcade version rather than simulation mode if you like.

OVERALL

My only real niggle is the rule book quality but that doesn't really detract from the game play which is quite good. I can see the way the cards fit into their box (two decks side by side) damaging them quite quickly and would recommend putting them in a collectable card box rather than the box they come in but then I do that with all card games. Dying Lights does look quite good and there has obviously been a fair amount of thought put into the mechanics but I'm a science fiction, gaming guy, I desperately wanted to like it, but I just can't fire up any great excitement. Would I buy it? I'd pick it up read the description on the box; hmmm... Feel the weight; heavy. Look at the price; a lot. And, unless I had money burning a hole in my pocket, put it back on the shelf

DARWIN'S WORLD

POST APOCALYPTIC ADVENTURES

"I do not know what weapons will be used in World War III, but I assure you that World War IV will be fought with stones."

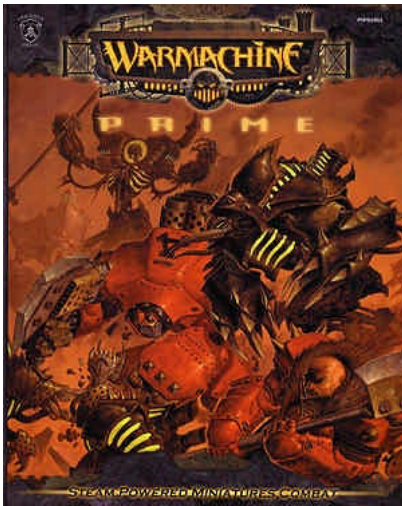
-Albert Einstein

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RPG OBJECTS

Game Review



BASICS

IK: Warmachine Prime is Privateer Press' entry into the tabletop miniature warfare, specifically skirmish level, genre. The rulebook is a 200-page soft-cover manual that details the background of the world, combat rules, army lists for four factions, scenarios and more. It has a full color cover with an interior on high quality glossy paper with black & white artwork and some color photographs. The game of Warmachine pits bands of giant clockwork, coal, and steam driven mechanical monstrosities, called Warjacks, along with their

commanders, spell casting warriors called Warcasters, units of troopers and other specialized individuals against their enemies on (usually) 4' x 4' battlefields. It's a rough and tumble game where you can stop your opponent's advance cold in its tracks or plow right through the enemy lines like they were barely even there.

INSIDE

The interior of the book is visually stunning. Even though most of the interior is black and white it just looks magnificent. The color photographs (of IK: Warmachine figures painted by the talented hand of Mike McVey and others) are clear and they are a great guide for painting your own figures. All of the text is easy on the eyes, charts and diagrams are easy to follow, and the art is great. Oh, I said that already.

The background presented paints a great picture of the Iron Kingdoms world and if you've played Dungeons and Dragons using either the Monsternomicon or any of the Iron Kingdoms adventures it's the same world and will only serve to make you want the full-blown Iron Kingdoms campaign guide to come out.

ARMY LISTS

The four factions presented inside (Cygnar, Menoth, Cryx, and Khador) each benefit from unique specialty troops and each has strengths and weaknesses, but none of them is left out in the cold.

Cryx are the bad undead mo-fo's of the game and while they are lacking in ranged combat when compared to the others their heavy Warjacks (Helljacks) are just unholy terrors and the army has the ability to raise mechanical-undead from the ruins of trashed 'jacks.

Khador come from frozen wastelands and excel at brutal up-close and personal combat and massively armored 'jacks, and even some troops. Longer ranged capabilities than *Cryx*, but not overwhelming.

Menoth are religious zealots with a decent balance of melee to missile troops, including guys that throw firebombs (Ah, a holy hand grenade!) and have the most powerful magic user in the game, so far.

Cygnar has a very nice compliment of ranged troops, but they are not slackers when it comes to hand-to-hand combat. Probably the easiest army for a brand new player to start off with.

There are also independent troops that will hire themselves out to various armies (not all of them will work for anyone though) but curiously missing is the Mercenary Light Irregular Warjack that was available for purchase before the book came out. I wonder what happened to it. Hopefully, it will be available again soon and dropped into the game.

GAME PLAY

After assembling your forces it's time to beat some ass. Every roll of the game revolves around d6's and an occasional d3. Each round, or turn, is broken up into phases (Maintenance, Control, and Activation) where each player resolves all of his phases before play moves to the other player(s). Rounds are "all my stuff" then "all your stuff".

In the maintenance phase you resolve any spells or effects that wear off and make the pansies that are running away run farther. During the Control phase your Warcaster receives a new allotment of focus points which he or she can then distribute to the Warjacks within his control area, use them to power spells that require upkeep, or increase his resilience to damage (always a good thing). During the activation phase everything comes to life and lays into the enemy. Warjacks and independent characters activate individually, but units must be activated as a group, but while each squad member can perform their own actions there are benefits to be had by having a unit perform a special action (often unique to that specific unit type) from which they will all benefit.

Movement is pretty straightforward with advancing, running, and charging being normal options (You can get into hand-to-hand combat without charging, but you get bonuses for slamming into your opponent while on the run. Units need to receive an order to charge from their leader so if he gets greased their combat effectiveness drops, but does not evaporate.). Line of sight is resolved in an easy manner with 'normal' sized models not giving away their position just because the model might have a honkin' big sword, but the big burly Warjacks will have a line drawn to them much more easily. Movement for units is also a bit different from individuals in that they have formations (Skirmish, Open, and Closed) which can all have an affect on how you will use them on the field of battle and which special abilities you can use. As an example, the monstrous Khador Man-O-War Shocktroopers have a special ability called 'Shield Wall' that gives them a bonus to their armor if they are in Closed (base to base contact) formation. It's a very cool ability but will limit their mobility somewhat and it must come in the form of an order from the unit leader and if he gets killed, well you know the drill.

Combat (missile and melee) is taken care of by first rolling to hit ($2d6 +$ the relevant stat) and comparing the result to your target's Defense value. If you meet or exceed it you have hit. Now you roll for damage ($2d6 +$ a variable depending on what weapon you are using) and if you exceed, not just meet, their Armor stat you cause one point of damage for each point you're over their Armor. Now, to take the hit. Models either have no Damage rating (regular troops that are dead on their first hit so there's nothing to keep track of), a simple number (characters that can take multiple hits) or a damage grid (Warjacks) whose systems slowly (or sometimes quickly) degrade as they take a pounding. All in all, it's really not too much to keep track of.

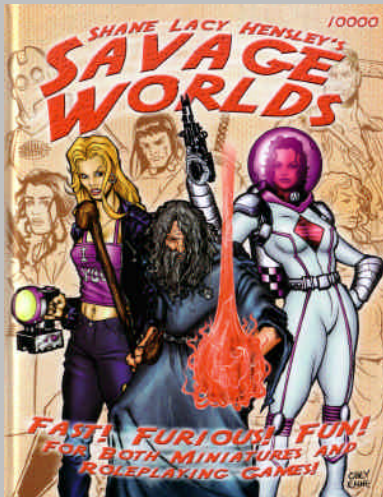
Characters are very special for a couple of reasons. First, they can take significantly more damage than grunt troops, but many of them are Warcasters with spell-casting abilities. Warcasters each also have a unique *Feat* which they can perform once per battle and it is equivalent to opening the whole can of whoop-ass! On the down side to Warcasters is that if they become incapacitated all of the Warjacks under their control just kind of sit there and do an awesome impression of a statue. Bottom line is that a Warcaster is man enough to get into the thick of thing but you need to make damn sure that he'll be walking out.

VALUE

At just twenty bucks IK: Warmachine Prime is not only an outstanding value, but it's also a great game for the price. The production quality of the book is absolutely top-notch and I was surprised that it did not cost at least a few dollars more, which it could pretty easily command. The game mechanics are simple and easy to pick up and the game itself will lead to brutal conflicts soon into the game with huge clashes of metal giants and brave warriors.

If I was looking for something in the way of an improvement it would be to have the templates on cardstock (and in color) instead of the glossy paper that the rest of the book is printed on. Will I get over it? Oh hell yeah, right when I'm putting the boots to my opponent as I have a feeling that I'll be getting a lot of mileage out of IK: Warmachine Prime. Absolute top recommendation here, go forth and purchase!

Game Review



Basics

Savage Worlds is a role-playing game that thinks it's a miniatures combat game. No, it's a miniatures combat game with RPG elements. Heck – it's both! From the wonderful people who brought you **Great Rail Wars** comes *Savage Worlds* – and RPG/miniatures skirmish game hybrid. It has a regular retail price of \$29.95 USD.

Layout

The *Savage Worlds* rulebook consists of seven chapters covering the basics of the RPG and miniatures combat game. In the introductory material is

a Test Drive section that quickly explains the mechanics of the game. The rest of the rules flesh out this introduction; but you can start playing with just the Test drive. The hardcover book is lavishly illustrated in black and white, with plenty of charts and tables. There are also explanatory sidebars introduced by Smiling Jack – a rather demonic clown. The book has the look and feel of a 1930's pulp magazine – which is good as the game has the same feel.

First off, let's look at the RPG part of SW.

Mechanics

As in most Role-Playing Games, a *Savage World* character has some primary characteristics and some derived characteristics. The difference is in what these are. Where most characteristics are numbers in a given range such as 3-18 for d20 games or a percentile rating in others, *Savage Worlds* characters are rated by die type: d4 through d20.

For example, a mundane human has d4 for all his characteristics. A legendary hero, such as Doc Savage, has d20 characteristic ratings. The characteristic lets you know what type of die to roll for a characteristic test. Each test has a target number to achieve success with the basic target number (TN) being 4. There are, of course, situational modifiers, which can make things easier or harder to do.

As you can see, an average 'Joe' has a 25% chance to successfully pull off any given 'average' skill test. If you had a d6 in that ability and needed a 4+ to succeed then you would have a 50% chance of success and a d8 would give you a 63% chance. So, as you can see, getting higher die ratings gives you a better chance of success, but also leaves an ever-narrowing window of failure as a possibility.

In addition, the game system provides for Aces – you're allowed subsequent rolls when you max out a die. If you roll an 8 on a d8, you get roll again and add the results together. This allows anyone at least a chance to achieve a success when faced with a situation that would otherwise be insurmountable.

Character Creation

Right, so how do you generate your character? No, you don't reach into your \$19.95 *Dice Bag of Holding* and pull out the first 5 dice. Rather, you start with a d4 in each characteristic and 5 points. Each point can be spent to raise one of your characteristics by one die type. The sequence is d4 -> d6 -> d8 -> d10 -> d12. You can't start with a d20; that's for your legendary characters. The d20's have to be earned.

Your basic characteristics are Agility, Smarts, Spirit, Strength, and Vigor and from these you get the derived characteristics of Pace, Parry, Charisma, and Toughness. You can also spend points to upgrade the derived characteristics.

SW is a skill-based system – so there are lots of skills. Not as many as your normal d20 game, but then the SW skills are more general. For example, the Shooting skill applies to all types of missile weapons – from bow and arrow to gun.

Characters also have edges and hindrances – these are things in which the character excels (edges) or suffers from (hindrances). The hindrances act like disadvantages in the Hero system and you get points to spend on character creation by taking hindrances.

The rules include races other than humans – the most common archetypes are included –but there is no class system. You build your character up with his skills, edges, and hindrances. The closest thing to a "class" is a professional edge – a set of abilities for a certain profession.

Advancement is handled by gaining 1-3 experience points per adventure – depending on how well you did. For every 5 points, you can 'level up' – gain a new edge, increase a skill by one die type or buy a new skill, or even increase a characteristic by a die type.

Combat

Okay, that's most of the RPG aspect, but *Savage Worlds* is also a miniatures game. It is based on the **Great Rail Wars** game system and uses many of the same mechanics. The table scale of the game is 1" equals 2 yards and each model represents a single figure.

Initiative is determined with a deck of regular playing cards – including jokers. Each player is dealt a single card and each group of GM controlled NPC's or bad guys get one card. Any player-allied NPC's are activated with the character's card. Initiative order is determined by the value of the card – Ace goes first followed by King and so on down to deuce. Ties are resolved in suite order – Spaces, Hearts, Diamonds, and Clubs.

On your initiative round, you perform your action or hold. If you hold, you can interrupt a player at a lower initiative level and blast away once you've really determined that they're out to get you. Okay, so what about the Jokers? Well, if you're dealt a Joker you can take your turn whenever you want in the round. Plus, you get a +2 to all characteristic and damage rolls for the round. Jokes basically mean that it's your turn to whoop ass. Take advantage of it because you don't want too many of the bad guys walking around when it comes up for them. There are quite a few actions to take such as running and shooting. Heroes can also take multiple actions with a –2 test penalty for each action beyond the first one. You can't take the same action twice in one round, though.

Playability

As an RPG, *Savage Worlds* is a fast playing and entertaining way of experiencing pulp adventures – anything from Conan or Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser to the Man with No Name or the Lone Ranger to the Phantom, the Shadow, or even a Lensman! The game is best suited for this kind of genre. It's not as detailed as the **Hero** or **d20** systems, but then its not as serious. At the same time, it's not just a story telling game like **Feng Shui**. The character creation process is not too involved for an RPG, but it is a bit much for a tabletop game. This puts an effective limit on the number of models to less than 10 per side. I would place it somewhere between **Inquisitor** and **Confrontation** for number of models used in an average tabletop encounter.

Since *Savage Worlds* is trying to be both an RPG and a miniatures game each side suffers a bit for the betterment of the other. However, if you want more than just a "line up and kill 'em" approach to a game, but you don't want to spend the hours creating a character and fighting goblins, then *Savage Worlds* is for you. On that note, it's also for me!

Who wouldn't want to be Doc Savage on the trail of the Gang of Four through the crowded streets of Shanghai trying to rescue the British Ambassador's daughter? Find out in our next thrill packed issue!

Product Review



Skirmishpack

Charon Productions
\$56.00 USD / \$86.00 CAN

At some point, anyone who plays miniature games must transport his figures. It could be across the house, across the city, or across the nation. No matter the destination, the models must all get there in one piece. There have been quite a few solutions to this problem – both homemade and professional. Some are more successful than others, depending on where the models are to be carried. The hard-shell gun case is always a favorite, but it does tend to cause problems if you happen to be traveling by air. These days, airport security is not to be trifled with, and they pay close attention to anyone with a gun case as a carry-aboard item. To address the figure transport problem, enter Charon's Skirmishpack – a smaller version of their Battlepack.

BASICS

The Skirmishpack measures 15 cm x 36 cm x 53 cm (6" x 14" x 21" for those on the Imperial system). The case is made of a heavy nylon fabric. The four edges of the case are rigid while the two large panels are not. This is the same as most soft-side luggage.

When standing on its end, there is a flat handle and rings for an included shoulder strap on the top along with a pocket for an address card. The bottom has a large zippered pocket for books and manuals. The other side has Charon's logo and "Skirmishpack" embroidered in red. When laid on this pocket, the other side unzips to provide access to the two compartments inside.

A zippered fishnet pocket takes up the entire area of the lid. Stacked in one of the two compartments are 4 soft foam trays with thirty-two compartments. These are sized to hold standard 25-30mm figures. A soft foam sheet covers the top tray. The other compartment contains two interlocking egg-carton sheets of foam. A rigid divider separates the two compartments and keeps the foam from sliding from one side to the other.

PROS

Finally, some one has designed a figure case that not only addresses the two kinds of models (troopers and vehicles) but also can travel by car or plane with ease. It is not much larger than a normal traveling case.

The standard case can carry 128 figures, 4 medium vehicles, dice, templates, and books. I was able to fit my 1,500 point Flesh Tearers® force into this case with room to spare. Spare inserts are available from Charon if you need a different internal configuration.

The hard sides that surround four of the six sides protect the figures inside from damage by things sliding into it. The case is comfortable to carry and stylish. Everything goes with black! The case easily fits in the overhead bin of an airplane and it doesn't get the interesting looks from Airport Security

when you walk up to the scanners. Now, explaining to the officer what is in the case that the x-ray machine can't quite make out can't be helped by any case at all. All in all, this is a very well designed and manufactured figure case.

CONS

The Skirmishpack is designed for travel, either in the car or on a plane. However, it is missing some small features that would make the case itself more durable. First off, the case has no "feet" so when you set it down, the bottom of the case rests on the ground. You can easily wide up putting your case into muck or water if you're not careful. Also, when placed in the overhead bin of the plane, the side bag will bump rather than the feet. The hoops for the shoulder strap are attached only to the top of the case. If the case is full of metal figures and books, this puts quite a bit of strain on these hoops. Moving these to the side would do a lot to reduce the strain. The soft foam compartment trays protect figures from getting scratched, but heavy metal figures do tend to "flow down" when the case is stood on its end. Stiffer compartment foam would address this. Finally, the compartment trays work well for standard figures. However, it would be nice to have a pinch-out foam tray available to accommodate larger figures. Charon does offer smaller egg-carton foam trays to address this.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For attending conventions or tournaments, this is just what a player needs. Everything can fit in the case except terrain. I would guess that Charon is probably working on a Terrainpack for just such a situation. Charon has made an exceptional case – not as large as the Battlepack but with all the features in a smaller volume. If you have need of traveling with standard sized miniature forces, the Skirmishpack is an exceptional buy. If you travel regularly, I suggest investigating the Deluxe Skirmishpack. It is designed to be more durable for about the same weight for \$8.00 US/ \$10.00 CAN more. Just don't check your Skirmishpack – I don't think even it could protect your figures from the perils of checked luggage.



Game Review

Dark Age is a Skirmish Miniature Game that takes the haunting and stylistic artwork of Gerald Brom and drops it's players on a World that few of us would like to visit, let alone be abandoned on. The fact that the designers could transfer Brom's artistic style to miniatures is pretty impressive in itself, they have also managed to create a Miniature Game that gives a rich life to those creations in which to battle over and against.

The Forces In Play

The background of Dark Age doesn't revolve around the battle of Good and Evil, but on the struggle for survival on a planet that is in itself hostile to the humans that have been abandoned to it. There are no "Good Guys" or "Bad Guys"; instead each race has, because of circumstance and evolution, created a philosophy that it deems to be true and just. Whether you believe it, is entirely up to how you empathize with each race, as nothing is implied one way or the other.

Factions

The Forsaken: The transplanted inhabitants to this Planet (ATTR), were abandoned and left to fend for themselves over 150 Generations ago and have over time had to adapt to a life whose technological base continued to dwindle with each passing year and a social structure that was never meant to be self sustaining. Without Technology to ease the burden and calm the masses, religion, in a twisted form of Catholicism became the focal point. Cardinal's and Saints, Shepard and corral the meager Forsaken population along and against an increasingly hostile environment.

The Dragyri: The indigenous inhabitants of ATTR, the Alien Dragyri are a proud and ritualistic race, which had kept to a solitary existence until their first contact with the Forsaken. Honor bound and skilled in the craft of personal warfare, the Dragyri are quick to take offence for even the smallest of slights. They are a Caste society of Slaves and Trueborns and will stop at nothing until a dishonor has been avenged. Butted against the fanatic nature of the Forsaken, neither side has attempted an understanding.

The Skaard: If the Forsaken were the first 'Outcasts' then the Skaard are the 'Outcasts' of the 'Outcast'. Pushed out of the Forsaken settlements, the Outcasts found refuge in the long abandoned toxic and blighted remains of ATTR's Chemical and Biological Research installations and factories. Toxic and Biological fumes killed the majority and changed the remaining into mutated forms. Their lot only became worse when a Forsaken Heretic Saint found and used them as experiments for grafting crude cybernetic implants. Twisted in body and a few enhanced with psychic minds, the Outcasts renamed themselves the Skaard and take their revenge on those that first abandoned them, the Forsaken.

The Game

Dark Age, like a lot of the 'New Style' Miniature Skirmish Games, uses a system of Alternating Unit Activation and Action Points to resolve movement and combat. The system has a lot of 'Meat' to it, so it offers players lots of tactical choices. The rules are well written, with lots of examples of how each action or activation is performed.

The Average army size for a Dark Age game is around 750 points; this will usually give you a good 90-minute game. The number of figures you need really depends on your choice of faction. The Forsaken tend to have higher end troop types so their force tends to be smaller than, the Dragyri who have a lot of cheap slave units that act as a screening force for the more expensive Trueborns.

Each unit or character has a set of stats that determines how well it does in battle, these include Combat Abilities, Intelligence, Armor, Courage, Health, Mass (Size of the unit or character), Defense, Health Points, Movement and Point Value. Each of these abilities come into play depending on the type of combat and morale tests that need to be made.

Dark Age also uses a d20 to resolve Combat and other tests, with the lower the number rolled the better the chance of success. This can take some getting used to, especially when you roll a 1 for the first time and suddenly



realize that you scored a critical hit, instead of a critical miss. So for those of you that have always complained that you could never roll high on a d20, well, here's a game that finally rewards that. Another twist to Dark Age is that it uses Centimeters instead of Inches to measure movement and range distances. This gives a better feel for ranged combat, without hampering the movement aspect of the game.

Both Ranged and Close Combat are well balanced in Dark Age, while ranged combat is deadly, it is prone to malfunctions, and you will really want to make those ranged attacks count because it's easy to get swarmed and find your units being ganged up on by more numerous Close Combat troops.

In Dark Age, Ranged or Close combat are resolved by the attacker using either his Ranged (RA) or Close Combat (CA) Ability and adding the Defenders Defense Ability (DF) to get the base target number. Modifiers are added for range, cover, unit and character special abilities etc. There sounds like a lot of rule checking, but most modifiers are fairly straightforward and easy to remember. And a lot of the information required is on the unit's ability card for easy reference. All and all the combat system works smoothly and effortlessly.

The use of Action Points is the life blood of this game, each unit or character has a set under of action points to spend in a turn. So you can spend points on just moving, moving and shooting or just all out attack. You can also place units on hold, which allows you to hold action points so your can react to your opponents movement. There are lots of tactical and strategic options to keep players on both sides on their toes.

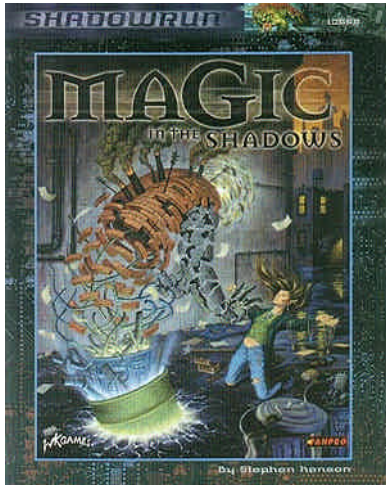
Magic or Mutated Psonics also have a part to play in the Dark Age World, all the Spell or Foci are pretty balanced, and most have some interesting results both when they work and especially when they don't. The magic system adds an interesting layer to the game by enhancing the overall style and uniqueness of the forces that have this ability, rather than being an all-destructive force.

The only draw back to Dark Age is the background is still in its early stages, so it is going to take some time before it gets fleshed out, but the look and feel is certainly striking enough and the Rule Book does contain quite a few interesting scenarios, plus a terrain and effects generator to give it enough of a kick until more background starts to emerge.

Dark Age has quite a few plans for the rest of the year, including a new Faction called the Brood, which will prove both interesting as well as deadly to the already beleaguered forces of ATTR, plus the Dark Age guys are going to be starting a monthly campaign scenario on their website that will allow players the chance to play a part in the continuing storyline, while detailing more of the Dark Age background with this narrative style.

With some outstanding miniatures already created and Dark Age offering their Rules and Force Books free for download, it's a hard deal to beat.

Product Review



BASICS

Magic in the Shadows is a 176 page soft-cover book. It features coloured cover illustrations with black and white interior art. The book develops the rules mechanics and background material for magic found in Shadowrun 3rd Ed., which is required. The retail price is \$24.99 USD.

INSIDE

After a brief introduction from the developer we dive straight into the world of Shadow-

run. **The Awakened World** devotes a few pages to clarifying the way that magic fits in with the more 'realistic' side of the way of life in the 2060s. The way magic use is governed and policed is touched on, as are the attitudes of various major religious groups. The role of magic in business, medicine, and even on the city streets is also discussed. **The Paths of Magic** introduces several new flavours of magicians. These range from twists on existing paths such as the elemental mage – a hermetic variant – to completely new beliefs such as Wuxing and Voodoo. This chapter opens up more options for PCs and NPCs alike. You never know if the next magician you bump into will summon elementals, the loa of voodoo, or the spirits of their dead ancestors.

The Awakened Character has rules and advice for creating and running magical characters. This includes the use of geasa, a voluntary limitation taken on magical abilities, which turn up again and again throughout the book. **Magical Skills** covers the use of ritual sorcery, used to cast spells on targets out of sight, enchanting to create magical items such as foci, and spell design, a tool for creating new spells.

Initiation and Metamagic gives guidelines for magicians wishing to develop their personal power. New abilities added include reflecting and quickening. These allow a magician to bounce harmful spells back at their caster or make certain spells permanent. **The Planes** expands the rules for astral activities and introduces the metaplanes. These are planes of existence outside of the reach of all but the most experienced, brave and driven. These are dangerous places to visit but the rewards can be worth the effort.

Ghosts, zombies, and ancestors appear in the **Spirits** chapter. There are more rules for using spirits in games, including how to heal them or bind them to a particular place to act as a guard. Ally spirits are a powerful addition to a magician's armoury. These willful creatures have a mind of their own. Treat them well or they may leave you, or worse.

Magical Threats shows some of the ways that magic can go wrong or be twisted to evil purposes. Be very careful around the toxic shamans, blood spirits, and insect totems introduced here. They are dangerous and capable beings (and maybe a little mad). The book draws to a finish with **The Grimoire**, **Adept Powers**, and **Totems**. These chapters cover over 20 pages building on the spells, powers, and totems presented in the main book. Finally **Arcane Lore** is a handy summary of all spells, powers, and gear from both books.

VALUE

Magic in the Shadows is a seriously substantial addition to Shadowrun's magic rules. I would say that is a must for any GM that can afford it. Players with magical characters should consider buying the book too – there is not much material that that seems to be restricted for the GM only.

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Free Game

Below you will find a quick little game sent in by one of our readers, Alex Hernandez. We hope you enjoy it.

GOLEM RACES

Ruparstein is a land that didn't stand out from the rest of the world until their rulers decided to export their national entertainment: the golem races. Nowadays it's a very widespread sport with lots of racers and an anxious and unconditional audience. Skilful gnomes prepare their iron golems, necromancers stitch up bodies together to create their ultimate flesh golem, dwarven conjurers sculpt stone to give birth a solid runner, and a hundred other participants wait for their call to the start line. The best runners have been called. It is now the time to make your coach a rich man and to catapult him to golem's glory.

The Golem

Those great machines have all the shapes you can imagine, because the great variety of participants, come from the whole world, makes possible to see the most diverse designs. According to GRL's (Golem Race League) rules a golem has the following basic stats:

Movement 1D6+10
Breakdown roll 5+

The Track

You can build the track any which way you want, but the basic track is a straight 100cm line with a breadth of 10cm for every golem in the race.

The turn

A golem race is divided in turns, and every turn is split in the four phases:

Phase 1 – Initiative
Phase 2 – The race
Phase 3 – Breakdown roll
Phase 4 – Referee's phase

The first turn

The first step is to place the miniatures. Put the golems behind the start line and their mechanics touching the back of their base. There must be 10cm between each golem. Place the referee in the centre of the track facing the start line.

Phase 1 – Initiative

In this phase each player rolls a 1D6. He who gets the higher result has the initiative.

Phase 2 – The race

There is a lot that will be going on during this phase. First of all, the player who has the initiative moves his golem first 1D6+10cm. The player with the next result goes second, the player with the next result goes third, and so on until the player with the lowest score has taken his movement. If a player gets a 6 result on his die roll he can move and then throw again, then add the result on the die to the amount moved. If you get another 6 then you can move the extra distance and roll again till you don't roll a 6. You don't have to move the extra distance and throw again the dice if you don't want to though. Have in mind this is dangerous, because you're forcing your golem to exert itself beyond its normal threshold, and he may come crashing down. You have to take an additional breakdown roll for every time you throw the dice again. We will explain this in detail later.

Hitting an opponent

While moving the golems can hit the other racers if they want. Throw the movement dice normally and then decide if you want to hit someone's golem. Once you select a golem move yours base to base. Subtract from your movement roll the distance you've covered. Then compare the result with the next table. You have to throw again 1D6 and get the result shown in the table. If you manage to hit your target it will break down instantly. We will explain it later in detail.

Cm	Result	Cm	Result
1	6+	4	3+
2	5+	5	2+
3	4+		

Example – You throw your movement die and get a 4. This results in a Movement of 14cm. Let's say it takes 12cm to get your golem in base to base contact with your potential victim and now you try to hit him. You moved 12cm, so you have 2cm left to punch him. Looking to the table you see you need a 5+ result. You get a 6, so the proud golem stands at your feet with his head dented while his mechanic cries desperately and yours laugh like a movie maniac.

Phase 3 – Breakdown roll

Once all golems have been moved all players throw a dice. If they get a 5+ their golem starts to steam alarmingly and to loose nuts and screws while your mechanic starts to look desperate. The golem halts immediately. Turn the miniature backwards to indicate it is broken. He won't move until his mechanic touches his base. A hit golem is broken too and needs the same amends. Remember a golem that moved extra distance due to 6 results has to make several breakdown rolls. One for every time he moved that turn.

Phase 4 – Referees phase

To break another player's golem intentionally is a "not very legal" maneuver, but don't worry too much. Most referees bribed or are so silly they won't realise the first stamp in the opposite golem's chest. The referee moves 1D6+5cm in a random direction. To choose a direction simply spin a pencil over the table. The direction the lead is pointing to is the direction where the referee will move. The referee only sees what happens in his 90° frontal arc. If a golem hits another the referee will give the fault with a result of 3 or more in 1D6. If the referee gives the fault the golem won't move the next turn.

The mechanics

The mechanics are those who have to repair the golem during the race. Those creatures start to run with their toolbox when they see their golem tumble and fall, so they are always very, very nervous. A mechanic moves 1D6+10cm, like a golem. The mechanic will move the next turn his golem breaks down. If the mechanic gets a 6 in the movement dice he will be able to throw the dice again and move the extra length, but don't worry, mechanics doesn't crash down like golems. Once a mechanic reaches his golem it will stand up and will be able to move the next turn. The mechanic will stay in the place he touched the golem till he crashes down again, but not before.

Killing a mechanic

A golem can run the risk of hitting a mechanic. To do this he has to move and hit the mechanic as if he were hitting another golem, but adding 3 to the difficulty. Example: A golem tries to hit a mechanic. After moving he has 5cm left so he has to get a 2+. Very easy, but mechanics are used to dodging blows, so the golem adds 3 to the difficulty. He has now to get a 5+ to hit the mechanic. If the golem manages to hit the mechanic he is dead, and if the referee gives the foul the golem is out of the race and looses automatically.

The end of the race. A champion

The first golem to cross the finish line is the winner, being the next second, the next third and so on. The first one receives 300 gold coins, the next receives 200gc and the third receives 100gc. The fourth and next golems receive nothing.

The miniatures

You can play this game with the miniatures you want. Some good miniatures could be those from IK: Warmachine or various fantasy miniatures from companies like Reaper miniatures.

We hope you like it

I suppose you have won lots of gold coins and your golem is now a hundred races' veteran. Next time we will tell you what you can do with the money you win buying like better golems, more mechanics and some dirty tricks from the black market. Until then try to cover your trainer in gold and fame.

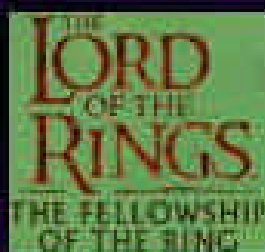
If you have any comment, question or want some rules clarification, please let me know sending by me an e mail at: droppod40@hotmail.com



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Order of the Stone**Introduction**

This adventure is the climax of the search of the Order of the Ancient Stone. The story is designed to pick up after the events in **War Buddy**¹ (<http://www.chaosium.com/cthu/lu/celaeno-coc/warbuddy.pdf>), **General Hospital**, and **Celestia Maria**. Alternatively, it can be brought in at a later time.

This adventure is set in England and Wales in the early 1930's. With minor modifications, the story could be moved to the 1920's or to the modern day.

***Note:** The Ancient Stone in this adventure appears much like Maen Llïa in Brecknock, Powys, Wales. (<http://www.stonepages.com/wales/maenllia.html>).*

Adventure Summary

After being marooned on Bermuda by the events on the Celestia Maria, the investigators make their way to Plymouth, following Lance Blake who murdered Jack Meredith. But Plymouth is only another waypoint. Following the cold trail of Lance Blake, the investigators reach the Welsh village of Hobbs Hollow and the secret of the Order of the Ancient Stone.

Background Information**Background**

See **War Buddy**, **General Hospital**, and **Celestia Maria** for background information. Lance Blake attended Eaton with William Carter Acres, heir to the Acres fortune. During holiday, Lance often came home with William. One night during his stay, Lance was not able to sleep and he began wandering the grounds of the manor. He soon came to the ancient stone on a hill behind the manor house. A single, central stone, known locally as "the Ancient stone", dominates this hill. When Lance arrived at the stone, Aldebaran just rose above the horizon. In its baleful light, Lance had an epiphany and the history of the Ancient Stone was revealed to him. From that day forward, Lance set about forming the Cult of Hastur known as "the Order of the Ancient Stone". Over the years, Lance moved into the manor and assumed control of the Acres family. He supplanted William and finally killed him.

Dramatis Personae**Lance Blake**

Lance Blake is the head of the Order of the Stone in Texas. He is the friend who met up with Jack Meredith and had him killed. He is the one who sent Karl LeBlanc after Father Henesey. Lance Blake arranged for the *Spectral Hunter* to guard the offices of the Order in San Antonio as well as ordered José Dominguez to take care of anyone who might be following Lance.

Lance Blake (Grand Master, 10th Level)

S: 12; D: 8; C: 15; I: 14; W: 13; Ch: 15

HD: 10d6 (58); Initiative: +3; AC: 14 (-1 Dex, +5 armor); Attack: Pistol @ +6 (1d10); Fort: +9, Reflex: +2, Will: +8.

Bluff +8, Cthulhu Mythos +10, Gather Info +9, innuendo +8, Intimidate +9, Knowledge (biology) +15, Knowledge (occult) +10, Knowledge (history) +9, Knowledge (religion) +9, Listen +8, Move Silently +6, search +9, Sense Motive +9, Spot +11.

Point Blank Shot (+1 within 30'), Precise Shot (shoot into melee w/o penalty) Improved Initiative (+4 Initiative), Iron Will (+2 Will save).

¹ War Buddy, its characters, organizations, and places are copyright 1998 by Michael C. LaBossiere (Ontologist@aol.com). They are used in this work without permission. This is not a challenge to the copyright.

Spell	Cost	Cast	Range	Dur.	Effect
Raise Night Fog	3 Int, 1d6 San	1a	150'	5 hrs	Pg. 147
Red Sign of Shudde M'Eil	2 Str/target, 1d8 San	1a	35'	Conc.	1d6+5/rnd
Power of Nyambie	1 Con (perm.)	1h	Self	Inst.	2d6 ability
Black Binding	3 Int, 1d6 San	1a	Touch	Inst.	Pg. 131
Suggestion	3 Wis, 1d4 San	1a	50'	10 hrs	Pg. 149
Spectral Razor	2 str, 1d3 San	1a	50'	Conc.	2d6

In addition to being the head of the Order, Lance is also a Chosen of Hastur (pg 190). Once Lance changes, he loses his spells.

Lance Blake (Chosen of Hastur)

S: 12; D: 8; C: 15; I: 14; W: 13; Ch: 15

HD: 10d12 (116/+80 Frenzy), Initiative: +3; AC: 20 (+6 natural, +5 armor, -1 Dex), Attack: +8/+3 (1d3+1/+6 Frenzy); Fort: +7; Reflex: +5; Will: NA.

Frenzy (7 rounds); Death Touch (successful grapple, Fort DC 25 or death); Draining Touch (touch attack; 1d10 hp & 1d6 permanent Con per round; Chosen gains +5 HP for each 5 HP lost; loose 10 HP each time Aldebaran sets); Dark vision 60'; fast healing 5; intuit direction; fire resistance 5; cold resistance 20; force resistance 20; sonic resistance 20; immunity to critical hits; immunity to death from massive damage; immune to anything requiring a Will save.

Hide +9; Listen +13; Move Silently +9; Spot +13; Wilderness Lore +13; Climb +6; Jump +6; Swim +6.

Endurance (+4 to Str skill over time); Power Attack (n/a); Track (follow); Whirlwind Attack while Frenzied (1 attack versus each opponent within 5').

SAN loss: 1/1d6 (witnessing the transformation: 1d6/2d6; full damage if the player knew the victim).

Dame Elizabeth Mary Anne Acres

Dame Elizabeth Mary Anne Acres is the reigning matriarch of the Acres family. Elizabeth runs the family business from Acres Manor. The Acres Manor is located in a remote area of Wales; near the village of Hobbs Hollow. Dame Acres has not been seen in two years; though it is known she still lives at the manor. Most people agree that she had a breakdown after her son disappeared and has been living as a recluse ever since.

William Carter Acres

William Carter Acres was the last Lord Acres. He mysteriously disappeared during the middle of his last term at Eaton. His erstwhile friend, Lance Blake, to close the bargain with Hastur, sacrificed him.

Bert I. Gordon

Bert, originally from London, drives a hire car in Bristol. He is the only one who will take passengers to Hobbs Hollow. Bert is an outgoing man and very friendly. Bert speaks in a Cockney accent. He can talk at length on a great many subjects, but he is tight lipped about the Hollow.

Bert has a bad elbow, which kept him out of front-line service during the war. He was stationed in Hobbs Hollow as part of the Home Guard. Bert always had wanderlust and used to be a "rambler" (one who walks for miles in the country side). During his time in Hobbs Hollow, he would talk daylong walks around the countryside. Once Sunday afternoon, he chanced upon the stone behind the Acres Manor. As he stood in front of the ancient stone, he began to have visions of strange, far away places. Well, this scared him so much that he returned to the barracks and never went wandering again.

After the war, Bert began his hire business. He has always driven to Hobbs Hollow, and he has seen how the village came under the evil spell of Lance Blake over the years. Many of his friends from the War are different now; most don't remember him. Bert has tried to tell the authorities that something strange is going on, but no one listens. So he tries on his own to help. But so far, he's not succeeded.

Richard Burroughs

Richard Burroughs is a reporter for the London Observer. He has been with the paper for fifty years; and was a foreign correspondent during the War. Three years ago, he moved to the travel desk. He has since traveled all over Europe and the British Isles.

Richard has always had an interest in the stone circle and standing stones that dot the English countryside. Ten years ago, he came to Hobbs Hollow and found the Ancient Stone. The stone attempted to contact him by showing him the Yellow Sign, but for some reason, Richard wasn't completely enthralled like Lance was. The stone did make an impression, and he has been searching for years for what the Yellow Sign means.

Richard, on his latest trip to Hobbs Hollow, went to the stone again, but this time he met up with Lance. Now he is being held captive by Lance – to be used as the sacrifice to summon Hastur.

Visions

The shards of the Ancient Stone reveal images to whoever holds them. If a player holds a shard for longer than 30 seconds, he will receive a vision. Such a vision is a confusing mass of images and impressions, the first time someone receives the visions, they must make a Sanity Check (0/1d8).

In the last volume of this adventure, the party had the chance to acquire a copy of *The King in Yellow*. If any members of the party have researched his volume, they will be susceptible to the visions under certain conditions. These conditions are noted in the text of the adventure. Roll on the table below for a vision. Note that no player will ever experience the same vision more than once.

D6	Vision
1	There area is dark, with only a small rectangle of light about eye level. There are sounds of stones or bricks being mortared into place. Over this, can be heard the quiet sobs of a woman. This vision is of Dame Acres being walled up in the wine cellar of the manor. The vision reveals that there is a key clutched in her right hand.
2	A Viking long ship is sailing in a storm tossed sea. The waves are higher than the furred mast of the ship. The crew is all pulling hard on their oars, while a white-haired Viking stands at the tiller. Amidships is a large stone that, between flashes of lightning, illuminates the whole ship in a strange yellow light.
3	During a moonless night, a solitary figure approaches a large, single stone. The figure steps forward and places his hands on the stone and is immediately enshrouded in a yellow light. High up on the stone, a yellow rune begins to glow. This vision is of Lance Blake as he first encounters Hastur. The red star, Aldebaran, can be seen just over the central stone.
4	In a dark paneled room with a roaring fire, a small dinner party is underway. Three couples are sitting a long table enjoying after dinner drinks. Opposite the fire, a man has been nailed to the wall by his hands and feet. An iron mast obscures his features, but he is moaning quietly. A figure at the head of the table stands up; it is Lance Blake. He makes a toast to the Order of the Ancient Stone. All the guests participate in the toast.
5	In the galley of the <i>Celestia Marie</i> , two seamen sit hunched over a chessboard, intently watching the game. As one man reaches to move his piece, he freezes. Both men sit immobile except for their eyes. It is obvious that they are alarmed at their predicament. A third figure enters the galley carrying a large butcher knife. As he repeatedly plunges the knife into the two men, their eyes communicate their silent screams. This is a vision of the murders of the crew that occurred in the last adventure.
6	Lance Blake enters a library and goes to the astronomical stacks. He looks through some old books and finally pulls out a volume entitled "Stellar Timings, Royal Observatory, Greenwich, Volume XXII". He takes this to a table and quickly leafs through it. After a while, he stops on a page. He then searches his pocket for a piece of paper. He finds an old manifest and quickly scribbles something on the back. Then he returns the book to the stacks and leaves.

Events

The following is a rough outline of events that can occur. The events occur in the order given. The pacing of the events should be handled by the Keeper to keep the game moving but **do not overpower the players**. They should have time to investigate.

The sequence is set such that the events will happen in the order listed if the investigators do nothing to move the story along. Their actions may change how things happen.

Bermuda

The survivors from the *Celestia Maria* are subjected to quite a bit of questioning by the Bermuda authorities. Their story is, to say the least, a bit far-fetched, but it fits the facts and there is no evidence against it. Grudgingly, the authorities close the case and invite the investigators to enjoy the island – and to leave as quickly as they can.

Before they leave Bermuda, the character that read *The Yellow King* has a vision. If more than one character has read the play, randomly determine who has the vision.

Note: The Bermuda setting is a gold mine for **Call of Cthulhu**. A side adventure involving voodoo and the Old Ones is an obvious choice.

Plymouth

The Offices of Longfellow and Acres are just off Warf 4. The office is closed and there is a sign nailed to the door. The door is locked (**Disable Device** DC 17).

Attention

This office of Longfellow and Acres is closed. Please direct all inquiries to the home office in Hobbs Hollow, Wales.
We look forward to your custom.

An eligible character has a vision upon seeing the door.

Office Building

The layout of the Plymouth office is the same as the Galveston office. It has a single wooden desk against the west wall with two filing cabinets behind it. Hanging on the south wall are photographs of the company's four steamers. The desk and filing cabinets have been cleared out.

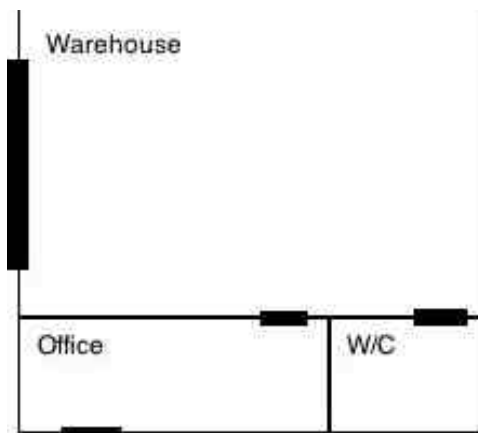
A chalkboard on the east wall lists information about each of the ships (arrival times, sailing times, cargo, captain, etc). A quick glance (**Spot** DC 5) at the chalkboard shows that the *Celestia Maria* is currently listed as missing.

Water Closet

The water closet is clean. It has the normal fixtures and a small bureau on the south wall. Stuck in the bureau, behind the top drawer, is a single piece of paper. The paper is a page from a ship's manifest. On the back is scrawled in a shaky hand the following:

V 22, p 133
Thursday, 4 February – 8:25 to 12:25
Friday, 5 February – 9:37 to 1:04
Tuesday, 17 May – 1:04 to 4:55
Wednesday, 18 May – 1:23 to 4:31

The first line is an abbreviation for "volume 22, page 133" – see #6 in the rumor table. The times given are the rising and setting of Aldebaran. A **Knowledge (occult)** check (DC 20), a **Cthulhu Mythos check** (DC 17), or a **Knowledge (astronomy)** check (DC 20) will reveal this fact. Investigation at a library (see below) or observatory will reveal that the next rising of Aldebaran is in two days time.



Warehouse

The warehouse is empty. It appears to have been swept clean.

Plymouth Library

The Plymouth library has a complete set of The Stellar Timings. This was the library where Lance did his research. If asked, the librarian remembers Lance – a well-dressed young man who came in often to look at the Stellar Timings. Few people refer to the books, and they are mostly professors or ships navigators. None, however, referred to them as often as Lance did. The last time Lance was in was three days ago.

Travel to Hobbs Hollow

There is no direct service to Hobbs Hollow from Plymouth, but the party can hire a car in Bristol. There is rail service from Plymouth to Bristol twice a day. The trip takes 4 hours.

Bristol

The trip to Bristol is uneventful, except for another vision.

In Bristol, there are a few cars for hire, but most won't take a fare to Hobbs Hollow. No reason is given or lame excuses. A successful **Sense Motive** (DC 15) check will reveal that the drivers are afraid of Hobbs Hollow. Eventually, the investigators will find Bert I. Gordon. He has a small bus (6 passenger) and will make the run to Hobbs Hollow. The trip takes about 5 hours along the small roads. The party will arrive at about 8:00 pm in front of "The Ring of Stones" pub. The Steeple of St. Timothy's can be seen for miles around. As the investigators arrive, they might notice (**Spot** DC 15) a slight yellow glow around the steeple.

The Hollow

When the party arrives in the Hollow, it is evening. They can get rooms at the Inn cheaply. From here, there are a few things that they could do:

1. **Sleep the Night.** If the party decides to bed down for the night, they will all dream the same dream – one of the visions from the table.
2. **Explore the Village.** If the party decides to look around the village, they will encounter one or two villagers. These will be reserved and not too talkative. If pressed, they will suggest that the party should go talk to the Innkeeper or the Lord. While exploring the village, the party will definitely have another vision.
3. **Head for the Manor.** If the party visits the manor house the butler, James, will meet them. He will say that the lady is not receiving visitors at this late an hour and ask them to please return the following day. If they persist, the butler will close the door in their face and have the groundskeeper whistle up the dogs (4-6).
4. **Head for the Ancient Stone.** If the party visits the ancient stone, they will all experience a vision. Then the groundskeeper will appear and whistle up the dogs.

Dog

HP: 13 (2d8+4); Initiative: +2 (Dex); MV: 40; AC 16 (+2 Dex, +4 Natural); Bite +3 (1d6+3); Scent; Fort +5; Will +2; Ref +5; Listen +5; Spot +5; Swim +5.

In general, the party will have to wait until the next day before doing anything constructive.

Day 1

The first day offers the investigator the similar options:

1. **Explore the Village.** If the party decides to look around the village, they will encounter one or two villagers. These will be reserved and not too talkative. If pressed, they will suggest that the party should go talk to the Innkeeper or the Lord. While exploring the village, the party will definitely have another vision.
2. **Head for the Manor.** If the party visits the manor house the butler, James, will meet them. He will say that the lady is not receiving visitors at this hour and ask them to please return for tea. If they persist, the butler will close the door in their face and have the groundskeeper whistle up the dogs (4-6).
3. **Head for the Ancient Stone.** If the party visits the ancient stone, they will all experience a vision. Then the groundskeeper will appear and whistle up the dogs.

Tea Time

Tea Time at the manor is a formal affair – the investigators will need to get appropriate attire. At the manor, they will be escorted into the parlor where

Richard Burroughs will be waiting. Richard will be talkative but hesitant to speak of the Ancient Stone. If pressed, he will refuse. A successful **Sense Motive** check (DC 15) will show that he is under a compulsion not to talk. After a short time, Dame Acres will appear. She is nicely dressed and will be the consummate host. A successful **Spot** check (DC 20) or a "true sight" spell will reveal that Dame Acres is actually Lance Blake. Dame Acres will invite the investigators to stay at the manor and will send a servant to get their things. After about an hour, Dame Acres will quickly depart and say she'll see everyone at dinner.

Dinner

Dinner is a sumptuous affair, but Dame Acres will not appear. James, the butler, will say she is down with a migraine. At dinner, Richard will be no longer under the compulsion, but will not remember visiting the Stone.

Midnight

In the middle of the night, one of the investigators is woken by the sounds of movement outside. Looking through the window, the investigator will see the villagers carrying torches and walking past the manor toward the stone.

At The Stone

The villagers have been summoned to the Ancient Stone for the Summoning Ritual. They are standing in a ring around the Ancient Stone. In the center of the ring, are 8 stones formed into a V with the Ancient Stone at the apex. Strapped to the ancient stone is Richard Williams. He is wrapped in a white robe with his chest bare. Standing in front of him is a man wearing a yellow robe. He holds a black knife (obsidian) in his left hand. As the group chants, the stone begins to glow yellow. The figure with the black knife plunges it into Richard's chest. As the blood washes the figure, it begins to change. The figure in yellow (Lance Blake) begins to turn into the Chosen of Hastur. As a chosen, he will attempt to kill everyone around him.

At this point, it should be pretty obvious what the party should do...

Locations

Hobbs Hollow

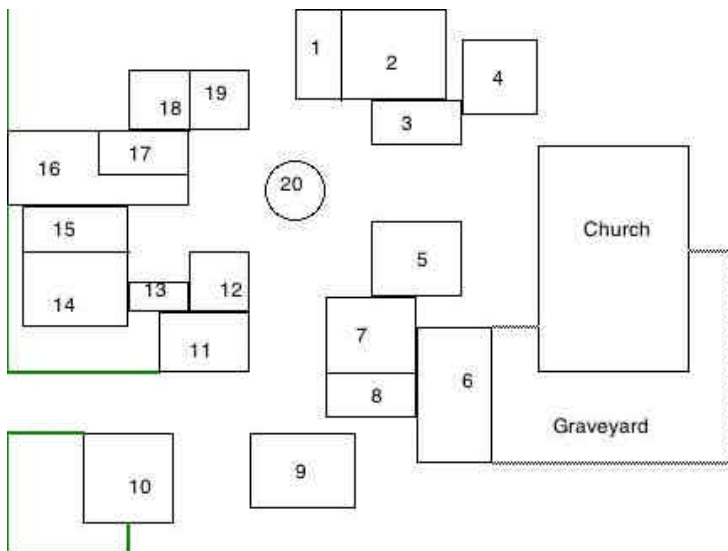
Hobbs Hollow is a small village in Wales; about 5 hours drive from Bristol. The town is in a hollow below the Acres Manor. The town has seen better days and is now almost a ghost town. Most buildings are abandoned or boarded up. The others are run down.

There are villagers in the Hollow, most work in the fields outside the village. The villagers are very quiet and do not speak to strangers. Anyone that hasn't been in the village for about 10 years is a "stranger". Some facts about the villagers are:

- There is no native that is younger than forty.
- The villagers often look up to manor as if expecting something.
- None of the villagers will go near the manor.

Below is a map of the village. Buildings and fences are outlined in black; hedges are in green. Following the map is a key for each of the buildings in the village. The key does not cover the boarded up or broken down buildings – these are left to you to fill in if you are so inclined.

On this map, the manor is north of the village by a half of a mile and the stone is a mile beyond that.



Church - St. Timothy is the local Anglican Church. It is a medium sized building in the gothic style. A close examination of the outside architecture (**Spot** DC 15) reveals that there are stone circles included in the normal Christian carvings. Inside, the church appears disused. Dust coats the floor and it appears it hasn't been disturbed in years. Spider webs and other signs of disuse are apparent. The great stained glass window at the far end of the church is a picture of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus, however, is standing in the center of a stone circle with a single large yellow stone behind him.

Graveyard - The graveyard of St. Timothy's is as unkempt as the rest of the village. The grass and bushes have grown wild, covering tombstones and monuments. A search of the graveyard will reveal the following facts:

- The most recent grave is dated 1916.
- The oldest graves, from the 1200's include a strange rune (the Yellow Sign) on their carving.

Arkwright's Grocers (#1)- The grocer's is open, but it is not well stocked. The proprietor is a large and rather ruff man with a bit of a stutter. He is surly and not inclined to talk much. If he thinks some one is not buying, he will strongly hint about a purchase and, finally, go into the back room and lock the door.

Ring of Stones Pub (#5) - The only public house in the village is the Ring of Stones. Brin Dwner owns it. Brin is an older, thin gentleman who tries to keep a neat inn. He is not a native of the Hollow, having inherited the Inn from his aunt about five years ago. Business is good but not great. Mostly locals frequent the pub with a few travelers. Currently, the party is the only guests. Bert Gordon, who is a close friend of Brin, brings all the guests.

The last guest, Richard Boroughs, was a travel reporter from the London Observer. He was in the area working on an article "the less traveled ways of Wales". He checked out two days ago to hike across country. He was especially interested in the Ancient Stone, the single stone behind the manor. When Richard checked out, he left a notebook.

Most of the notebook consists of notes for a travelogue. However, on page 35 is a notation about the yellow sign (see the handout section).

Welsh Historical Society (# 15) - Brin's wife, Abagale, has always been interested in history and after moving to the Hollow, she focused her energies into the local history. She has collected quite a bit of information about the area and the manor. She has some information about the Ancient Stone.

- Local legend has it that Vikings brought the stone here. They were led by Arnie Wulfesen who, the story goes, sacrificed his crew to the stone once it was erected.
- There are tales that during certain times of the year, the stone glows yellow. During these times, the wolves that normally howl out in the fields are silent.
- An early resident of the manor tried to have the stone removed to make farming easier. He disappeared after hiring the work gang to remove the stone.
- The villagers burned the original manor house, a medieval shell keep, to the ground when it was thought to be home to a coven of witches.
- A book written by the second Earl of Acres that covers the history of the Ancient Stone, *Menhir d' Acres*, is reportedly in the manor.

Statue of the Earl of Acres (#20) - The fifth Earl of Acres fought with Wellington at Waterloo. He is memorialized on his horse by this statue. The figure faces the manor with his left arm extended. His horse stands upon a large stone. An inspection of the stone (**Search** DC 15) will show the Yellow Sign carved in it just below the rider.

Acres Manor

The manor is a typical Elizabethan style manor with a significant number of rooms. Most of these rooms are mundane and have no bearing on the story. Those that do are listed below.

Wine cellar

The wine cellar is accessed through a trap door in the kitchen. There are many racks of wine bottles in the room. One wall is blank. A search of this wall (DC 15) will reveal that the construction is more recent than the surrounding area. Behind this wall are the remains of Dame Acres. She has been dead for about a year. Before she died, she had time to gouge out her eyes, pull out her hair, and bite off her tongue.

Sitting Room

The sitting room has paintings of all seventeen of the Earls. In each, they are wearing something yellow and close inspection of the paintings (**Search** DC 15) will reveal the Yellow Sign in each painting. On a table in the middle of the room is a sculpture of the first Earl. This is carved from a shard of the original stone. As such, it promotes visions.

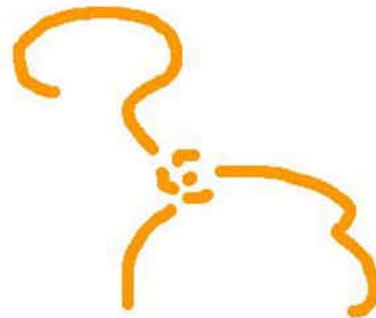
Library

The library has many volumes. A **search** (DC 15) will reveal the following books:

Menhir d' Acres - This manuscript is an exhaustive treatment of the Ancient Stone. This book documents the connection between the stone and the King in Yellow. It also includes the ritual for summoning Hastur. Examination Period: 1d4 hours (DC 10); contains 1 spell, Sanity Loss: 0 initial, 1d3 upon completion. Cthulhu Mythos: +1 rank.

The King in Yellow - See page 122.

People of the Monolith - See page 122.

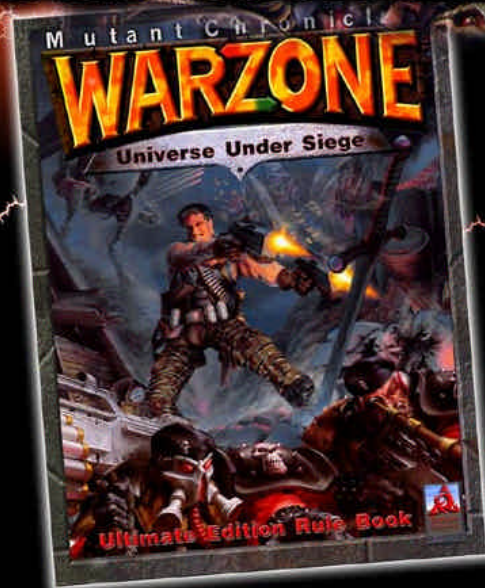


And as I sat in the field the stone took on an eerie yellow cast. In the center of the stone, about ten feet up, a yellow symbol glowed and throbbed. I have reproduced it here on this page. In the subsequent years, I have examined most collections and histories of the Druids and I've found no mention of this sign.

The local legend, that the stone was brought here by the Vikings, has not helped either. None of the Nordic collections document such a sign.

So, I am no nearer knowing what this means ten years after I first saw it. It remains clear to my mind's eye even now; and it still unnerves me to write of it.

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Greetings everyone. The following is a quick twenty question interview that I conducted with Thom Talamini, head honcho over at Excelsior Entertainment. It's all about the upcoming release of **Ultimate Warzone** and hopefully sheds a bit of light on the changes in store for the game and its players.

1. Why an 'Ultimate' edition of Warzone? Couldn't you have just picked up where 2nd edition left off?

In reviewing the IP we felt that the Second Edition of Warzone, while a balanced and good game on its own, was not the game it should have been. The key-missing factor was the omission and amendment of its extensive, rich background. The background of the Mutant Chronicles is one of very dark techno-fantasy extensively developed over years of work and one that we did not feel was accurately portrayed in the second edition of the game. The direction of the new design studio in Scotland at the time seemed to have a different vision for the game; one that we feel did not capture the original IP. In the Mutant Chronicles we have a wonderful RPG with great depth that spawned mass-market games, comic books, a series of novels, a hugely popular CCG and a variety of supplements that all served to develop the concepts and backgrounds of this unique setting. I have had the privilege of knowing some of the games original designers and consider our role as more akin to stewardship than revision.

Our number one concern and focus has been to stay true to the setting as it was developed. While we will of course add to this IP, we felt that we needed a solid foundation before we could even undertake such an endeavor. To that end we had to assemble all references from this setting into one concrete "bible", which did not exist before and once armed with this, update and polish the setting of the Mutant Chronicles. The Ultimate Edition then is one where we have painstakingly researched all prior setting background and blended it with a more enjoyable game mechanic.

2. Will Ultimate Warzone be as massive of a tome as the 2nd edition Chronopia rulebook? Hardback or Softback?

Yes, it will easily be Chronopia's size. It needs to be considering the depth of material and the fact that there are over fifteen army lists available. It is softback.

3. I've heard rumors that every miniature produced for Warzone, either edition, will have a place and rules in the ultimate edition. Is this the case?

Yes, it is, though let me preface this by stating that some models need to be resculpted before they are released again. If however you have an older version of the model that you painted and liked, you may of course use it.

4. How will hand-to-hand combat change in the ultimate edition? In 2nd edition it was a rarity to get even dedicated hand-to-hand troops into a position for them to go to work.

Fair question. In Ultimate, there are several issues that make a CC trooper effective. The first is speed.

- CC troopers often tend to be faster on the field (often with lesser armor though).
- CC weapons are quite effective now as well, with excellent damages and special features. Like Chronopia you also add your strength to the weapons damage rating.
- In Chronopia we have a DEF score that simulates a CC troops parrying ability while in Warzone we have a Special Ability called Close Combat Training that effectively does the same thing in Warzone.
- In addition to transports for moving troops, we also have the return of smoke grenades that allow for CC troops to move with better survivability.
- Lastly, there are spells (both in Art, Dark Symmetry and KI) again that can help relocate troops quickly. In some respects CC is every bit a real threat now. Sure you can shoot them (maybe), but God save you if they close and now they will.

5. What's the status of the Cartel in Ultimate Warzone? In 1st edition you could field Doomtrooper pairs, Agent Squads and squads from other Corporations, but they all but disappeared from 2nd edition?

For us the Cartel has evolved into a capable and sinister entity, able to field small forces and draw support from the Megacorporations yet treading a thin line between functionality and obsolescence. In Ultimate you will be able to take Cartel squads and individuals to fill Consultant/Advisor slots in your army. If you opted for a Cartel only force, you would have some access to certain Grunt Units from the Megacorporations as well as the Doomtroopers within each.

6. What's the status of the Dark Eden armies in Ultimate Warzone? They seemed to be second fiddles in 1st and 2nd edition, especially since their mounts never materialized.

Well, I can certainly see why you would say that. We do not feel this is the way to incorporate these troops either. They are rich and interesting on their own and with the storyline focus on Dark Eden, they have become more prominent. Their stats and powers have been amended and will make them viable options for both filling Consultant slots or for fielding on their own with Megacorporations in the Consultant position.

7. We've seen pictures and read text relating to new races in Chronopia. Are there plans for any new Corporations or Dark Powers for Ultimate Warzone?

While we are not adding new Megacorporations, we will expand the presence of smaller subsidiaries on the game by developing their units and specialists. An example of this would be House Salvatore for Bauhaus, Kogami Kieretsu for Mishima, and such. In addition we set the stage for Freelancers, Independent Corporations to be useful in the game.

One of the exciting aspects for me is the introduction of the Apostate, disenfranchised former Brotherhood members of various ranks and power who have fled the ranks of the faithful and seek to discredit their former comrades as evil and corrupted. Being a Brotherhood groupie, examining small cracks in their sterling armor with rumor and innuendo has been very exciting.

There are new forces under Valpurgius' command as he sets up bases on Dark Eden in a bid to curry the favors of the Dark Soul and perhaps become the next Apostle, and the return of former Capitol War hero Lt. General Robert Johnson who has resurfaced on Dark Eden allied with Valpurgius. We have also added many personalities for the other Apostles as well.

8. Will Ultimate Warzone support large armored vehicles like the Bauhaus Bully and Grizzly or does the scope of the game really not go beyond stuff like the Bauhaus Skimmer and the Cybertronic TA-6500?

The main focus of the game is skirmish level combat. We have however introduced vehicle rules that allow for progressively larger vehicles to be fielded. Some of the larger items are sub licensed to Armorcast, but they are fully usable in the game. The books focus though is smaller vehicles.

9. Will 'Forces of War' (2nd edition style) where one army is features or '... of War' (1st edition style) where each army gets some new stuff be coming out after the Ultimate Warzone rulebook or will it stand alone with no expansions?

We will continue with supplements as there is a lot we could not print, but the format will be a more cosmopolitan style where we focus on an "issue" or planet and present the forces that are there, both dominant and otherwise and new options for each Megacorporation. By doing supplements in this manner we make a product that is useful for each player and maintains a balance of power amongst the gamers.

10. Some of the older Brotherhood miniatures have, well how can I be delicate about it, rather large somewhat bulbous heads. Any plans for re-sculpts of them or any other figures?

I suspect you are referring to the Elite Trooper Sgts. Not too subtle Mark, though I don't think this vagueness fooled any old timer. Yes, these will be redone though the first priority is to fill holes.

- 11. 1st and 2nd edition Warzone both had a plethora of special abilities, but 2nd edition lost a bit of the custom army feel, like being able to buy a Hero a Gehenna Puker or Nimrod Autocannon just because you wanted to being some extra special lovin' to your enemy, as you could do in 1st edition.**

Customization is a tricky issue. It has been my experience that allowing customization even with good rules simply breaks down the inherent strengths and weaknesses of troops. I have developed open-ended games before, even played a few others, and the min/max abuse I see even in a well-designed game is staggering. We could not return to this in UWZ.

Knowing this however, I like the idea of tweaking your models in some way. What we have done is strike a balance between open ended and closed by creating Load Outs that are available for certain troops and for certain weapons. By closely regulating small option packets, we could be assured that the units in the end would retain their designed flavor.

What's the status on special abilities and custom character load-outs in Ultimate Warzone?

As for Special Abilities, we have added many more than there are in Second Edition, lost some others that were there and set up special character load-outs for certain models.

Also, there were some metal figures, like the Ducal Militia and Ducal HMG team that were produced in very limited quantities a few years ago. Any chance of them coming back soon?

Actually these are both back out and have been available in March, April and May respectively.

- 12. Will the core units of the 2nd edition box game (Imperial Regulars and Bauhaus Ducal Militia) be available for Ultimate Warzone in plastic or are they being re-sculpted in metal?**

Both are being redone in metal though we will keep offering them in plastic.

- 13. For someone looking at Ultimate Warzone as his or her very first foray into Warzone why would someone want to jump in with both feet?**

I can conceive of four reasons why a player would want to jump into UWZ with both feet. The first is the game itself. I am confident they will find this game to be an amazing amount of fun that simply keeps showing new levels of play time and again. It is easy to learn, complex to master and unravels a seemingly endless series of ideas.

Secondly, I consider the background and "fluff" to be a major issue every bit as important as the game mechanics. The setting will draw players in and captivate them with a rich tapestry of detail and personality rarely seen elsewhere. Of course, it has had a decade of development.

Thirdly, a player will find a massive breadth of figures available to support their hobby with newer ones coming all the time. The history of this game has put Excelsior ahead of the production curve from a player perspective and affords them.

Lastly, you can't beat our pricing. You can collect multiple armies and still have a social life, feed your family and go to the movies.

- 14. How has the background of Ultimate Warzone changed or evolved since the release of 2nd edition Warzone?**

The second edition took some liberties in terms of history that we felt was unnecessary and have removed these. The background we have cultivated is one that is drawn from all the previous resources and tied together into one nice packet. We have also added some additions to the background to fill in some logical issues and provide launch points for others. One of the pivot points in the new edition is the role of Dark Eden in the system. It has been brought into prominence because of its strategic position to Luna and the activities of both Valpurgius and the Overlord Mishima. We have explained space travel and expanded mans penetration of space as well.

We have evolved the story to a point where the Dark Legion has only just resurfaced to a universe that had largely begun to doubt its existence. We find the Brotherhood being proven correct and the Megacorporations faced with a threat they had hoped long since removed.

- 15. Could we get a new sculpt of the Venusian Marshall, please? The current one is ok if you don't mind him riding around on a pony. ;)**

Ouch. If you look carefully at Paul's concept art you will notice that the horse he is on is in fact fairly small. The reason for this is the type of horse the Venusian Marshall's use, an offshoot of the Albanian Mountain Horse noted for its surefootedness (if not stunted) over rugged mountain terrain. That said, not anytime soon though we will eventually provide an alternate mount.

- 16. What army (or armies) do you favor/play in Warzone?**

I prefer to play Brotherhood or Mishima most. This is based purely on fluff and personal likings. I also very much like the Tribes now, who have a fair amount of options and expanded powers.

Most of the time I play an army that no one else at a tourney or demo wants to play so I have developed a fondness for all of them to some point.

If I ever play the DL, I have found I really like armies of Semai and Demnogonis.

- 17. Have the rules from the many issues of 'Chronicles from the Warzone' be integrated into Ultimate Warzone?**

Actually I think they are, though they have been amended to fit the EGS. So much has been done I can't remember which ones right off the top of my head.

- 18. Will a campaign system be included with the Ultimate Warzone rules?**

A limited one will be included. A full campaign system would easily be another book (hint) so we have given the reader some guidelines to starting out.

- 19. Are any new large monster-types on the horizon for the various Dark Legion forces?**

Since you qualified this to "larger" I will say yes. The first is a resculpt of the Behemoth, who I always felt could be done differently. Additionally we have concepts for the Algeroth Juggernaut, the Violator of Demnogonis, the Pschotron of Muwahje, and the Soul Mirror of Ilian (not quite a monster but a large model). We can't talk about what Semai has coming though; I could be killed.

- 20. If you had to sum up in one sentence, what's the most significant improvement and reason to play Ultimate Warzone?**

You're kidding right? Seriously, the most significant improvement to the game is the return of its unique flavor combined with a superior game mechanic. Wow, I can't believe I actually answered that question in a sentence.



Battle Report



Tensions on the Rise on Notus IV Ellen Glamour, IGS News

The hastily called peace conference between representatives of the Ritterlich-back government and the local rebels broke down shortly after noon today. The sticking point was the claim by the rebels that the Notus government had no intention of backing up the concessions made before today's conference.

"We have evidence that the government has been bringing in off-world combat units to supplement their own forces in the disputed areas," said Colonel Kipling, of the Monastic Rebel Alliance. "They have been landing CAVs at the central space port. But, we are not without our own resources and off-world friends." The Colonel wouldn't elaborate more and was whisked away from the conference in a heavily armed motorcade.

When asked about the Colonel's claims, Media Minister Samosa simply replied "No comment".

IGS has been informed by an anonymous source that mercenary units begun been landing in the rebel controlled areas last night.

Scenario:

This is a small (1,500-point) meeting engagement type scenario. Rebel and governmental forces are both conducting recon in force mission in a mountainous area when they encounter each other. The objective is simple, try to damage the enemy more than he damages you and get out before reinforcements can arrive.

Michael's Pre-Game Prose

well, since this is the first CAV battle report for FR, we decided to try something simple: a low point meeting engagement. So, I've got 1,500 points to build a force for a Recon in Force in the mountains.

Brian and I have played CAV before, but not since the publication of the Journal of Recognition. So, there are new toys to play with and new points for some. Looking at what models I have - I try to build a good starting force. The first six times I wound up being way over the 1,500-point limit. But on try seven, I got it. Here's my force, its' only one section, but it's fast:

- Tyrant w/ Veteran WSO, +2 movement, +1 repair, chain lock, and ECCM @ 399 points
- Vanquisher w/ Veteran WSO, +2 movement, +1 repair, chain lock, and ECCM @ 418 points
- Puma w/ veteran WSO and ECCM @ 245 points
- Specter w/ Elite WSO and ECCM @ 439 points

So, here's the plan: The Tyrant and Vanquisher are the pointed end of the sword. The extra move and veteran WSOs are there to let these guys hit hard. ECCM and repair are for survivability. The Chain Lock is to let the Specter double team the target of the Tyrant and Vanquisher. The Puma is along to add support and take out all those nasty soft targets - infantry and whisper missiles mainly.

My tactics will be simple, isolate one of his CAVs and bring all my fire to bear. Once that one is destroyed, move to the next. Use maneuver, ECCM, and cover to protect my own forces.

So, off to battle!

And Brian's Pre-Game Thoughts

When I Mark asked me if I wanted to do a CAV battle report for F.R. I was quite enthused. A couple of years ago I had the fortune of playing in a couple of CAV play-test games and a few regular games with Michael. I thought that this game had a certain charm and playability that I did not find with other mech-type games. I began acquiring the models as soon as they started arriving on scene and now I'm going to get a chance to use some of the ones that I have painted up.

Since I am still a novice at this game I decided to keep my 1500 point force as simple as possible. I'm a big fan of hitting the bad guys before they hit you so I will be fielding Specter and a Whisper Missile. These bad boys will lead off by (ideally) softening Michael's force up so my other CAVs, a Starhawk V (Ace pilot and wso, +1 movement), a Tyrant (Ace pilot and wso) and a Scorpion (Ace pilot and wso), can move in and finish the job when the time is right.

Set Up

A 6' by 4' board was set up with just bare hills to represent the high mountain pass where the engagement would take place. The north end of the battlefield consisted of three peaks with alleys in between. The south end of the battlefield was full of low hills and berms - a badlands setting. For the number of models involved, Brian and Michael reduced the battlefield to 4' by 4'. The players ignored the hills and the alleys section. The board did not have a hex grid on it, so the players used the free-form movement and targeting rules. These rules can be found spread through out the CAV rulebook.



Deployment

Brian's force (below) consisted of two sections - his four CAV and his missile launcher. Therefore, he had two black cards in the deployment deck. I had one section of CAV, so Michael had one red card in the deck. The first card drawn was a black one. Brian deployed his Scorpion, Tyrant, Starhawk, and Specter along the back of his deployment zone behind the low hills and berms. The next card drawn was a red one. Michael (above) deployed his Tyrant, Vanquisher, Puma, and Specter at the rear of his deployment zone behind a low hill. The last



card drawn was a black one. Brian deployed his Whisper Missile behind his Specter on his right flank.

Turn One

Brian drew the first card – a black one. He activated his Specter. The Specter targeted Michael's Tyrant. Michael had deployed his CAV in a line with the Tyrant in the middle. A successful hit would mean that two other CAV would be caught in the Shriek II Indirect Fire Missile pack (IFM). Brian first rolled for Target Lock (TL). The Specter has a Target Lock Modifier of +3. Brian had an Ace Weapon Systems Officer (WSO), which gave him an additional +3, and he got an additional +1 circumstance bonus for the Specter not moving. The total of the TL modifiers was +7. Brian rolled a 10 for a total Target Lock number of 17. Michael had a +3 Electronic Counter Measures (ECM) and a veteran WSO for +1. The total of his TL modifiers was +4. Michael rolled a 4 on a d10 for a total of 8. Since this was less than Brian's 17, Brian achieved Target Lock. Brian's to hit modifiers were: +2 for the Shriek II IFM (hard target) and +3 for TL. He rolled a d10 and scored a 7, which with modifiers totaled 12. Michael's defense modifiers were: +3 for his CAV's armor, and +1 for being Hull Down (HD). Michael rolled a 4 for a total of 8. The difference between the two rolls was +4, so Michael's Tyrant suffered one damage point.

With the 4" blast radius, Michael's Specter and Vanquisher were also hit. Against the Specter, Brian scored a 6 (4 +2 for Shriek II IFM). Michael's defensive score was 12 (10 +1 for armor and +1 for HD). Since Michael's score was larger, the Specter suffered no damage. Against the Vanquisher, Brian scored a 9 (7 +2 for Shriek II IFM). Michael scored an 8 (5 +2 armor, +1 HD). Brian's total was higher than Michael's, but the score was too low to do any damage. Brian then activated his Tyrant. It advanced 16" forward behind a low berm and targeted Michael's Specter. Brian was unable to secure TL on the Specter. His twin LL21 Laser Bolt Guns (LBG) and his Mkw 21c Direct Fire Missile pack (DFM) did no damage.



Since the Tyrant was in Line of Sight (LOS) of the Specter, Michael returned fire with his twin Type 77 Heavy DFM. He was unable to damage the Tyrant. Brian then advanced his Starhawk behind the same berm as the Tyrant. His positioned the Starhawk far enough away from the Tyrant so that both couldn't be hit with a single IFM attack. The Starhawk targets Michael's Specter and achieves TL. The Tower DFM had no effect, but the twin Charvel Mk II Gattling Guns do three points of damage to the Specter.

Finally, Brian advances the Scorpion toward Michael's line and fires at the Tyrant. Brian gains TL and fires all his weapons. The main gun, Naftan 66 Gauss Cannon, does no damage, but the twin DFM cause two wounds and force Michael to make a suppression check. The Tyrant passes.

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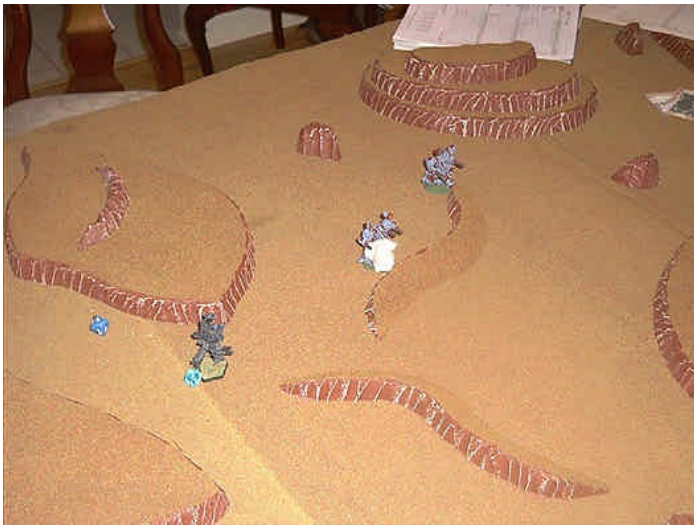
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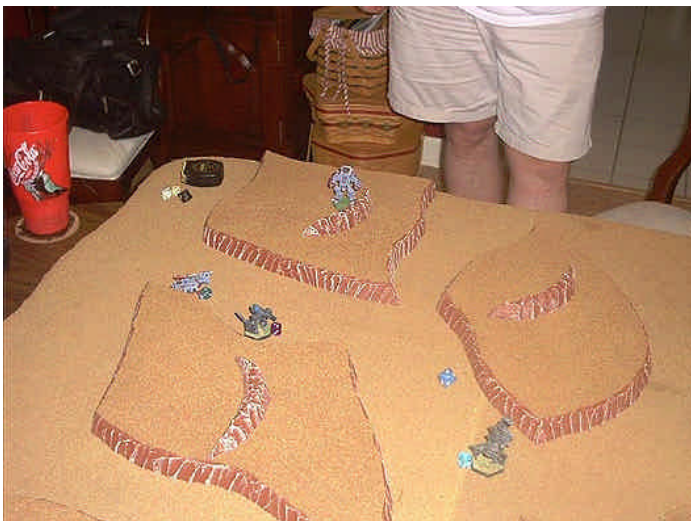


Michael's Tyrant returns fire and scores one point of damage against the Scorpion with his twin LBG's.

Brian then retreats the Scorpion out of sight behind the hill. With all the CAV's of Brian's section activated, Michael draws the next card. It's a black one. Brian activates the Whisper Missile Launcher and launches the missile. The missile loiters around Brian's deployment zone in preparation for striking next turn. At this point, the players discover that they aren't playing with the same version of models. Both players used Army Builder to construct their forces, but Michael used version 1.2 – which uses the newer point values from the Journal of Recognition. The effect of this is that Brian's CAV's average about 100 points less than they should. As a quick fix, Brian removes the Whisper missile and Launcher from the game, as well as one black card from the deck.

Brian draws the final card - the red one – and Michael activates his section. Michael advances the Vanquisher to flank Brian's Tyrant. Michael achieves TL and scores 4 damage points with his twin Gattling Gauss Cannons (GGC). The DFM does no damage. The Tyrant returns fire and scores 2 damage on the Vanquisher with his twin LBG's.

Michael then advances his Specter behind a boulder, obscuring it from most fire, and targets Brian's Tyrant with the Shriek II IFM. The Specter scores two more damage points. Brian's Tyrant is destroyed. Michael activates his tyrant and attempts to repair it. He fails. Finally, Michael activates his Puma and sends it after the Brian's Scorpion. He fails to achieve target lock and the Puma's light weapons do no damage. Brian returns fire with the Scorpion and scores 2 damage points and forces the Puma to make a suppression check. The puma passes. At the end of turn one, three of Michael's CAV's are damaged while Brian lost one. The rest of Brian's force is unscratched.



Turn Two

Michael drew the first card of turn two: it was red. Michael activated his Specter



Notice the Whisper Missile crashing and exploding off-board, down on the bottom left. Ok, so it's just excessive flash from the camera :(

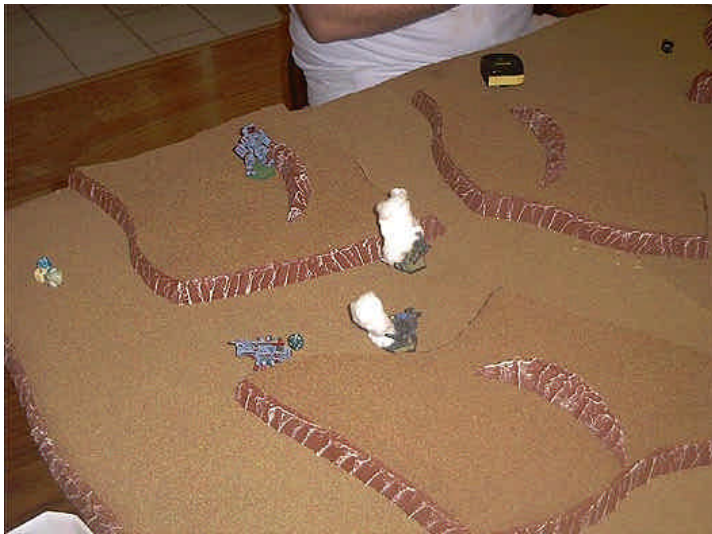
and targeted the Starhawk with the IFM. He failed to achieve TL and the missiles drifted off-target, hitting nothing but rocks. Michael then activated his Vanquisher and advanced it to attack the Scorpion. The Vanquisher achieved target lock and scored 1 more damage point with the twin GCC's. The DFM missed. Brian returned fire with the Scorpion but missed. Michael's Puma attacked the Scorpion and scored one damage point with its flamer. Finally, Michael's Tyrant succeeded in making its repair roll, reducing its damage to 3. It was now Brian's half of turn two. He first activated the Scorpion and targeted the Puma. The Scorpion achieves TL and destroys the Puma with hits from all its weapons. Before it blows up, Michael has the Puma return fire, causing another damage point to the Scorpion and forcing it to take a suppression check. The Scorpion passes.

Brian then activated the Specter and targeted Michael's Vanquisher. He achieved TL and scored 1 damage point with its DFM. The Vanquisher's return fire was ineffective. Finally, Brian activated his Starhawk and climbed up the hill to directly engage Michael's Tyrant. The Starhawk's attack and the Tyrant's response were both ineffective. At the end of turn three, Michael had lost his Puma and all his remaining CAV's were damaged. Brian had taken damage on his Scorpion only.



Turn Three

Brian drew the black card to start turn 3. He first activated his Specter to fire at Michael's Vanquisher. The Specter scored one damage point. Michael did not retaliate, saying he would hold his shot for the Scorpion if it attacked. Brian then activated his Starhawk and fired on Michael's Tyrant again. As last time, neither CAV damaged the other. Finally, Brian activated the Scorpion and fired on Michael's Vanquisher. He achieved TL and scored 3 more damage points, destroying the Vanquisher. In its last act, the Vanquisher returned fire and man-



aged to score a single point of damage against the Scorpion.

It was now Michael's half of turn three. He activated his Specter and brought indirect fire down on Brian's Scorpion. He achieved TL and chain locked in the Tyrant's IDM pack. The missiles of the two CAV's did not damage the Scorpion.

Michael moved the Tyrant toward the cover of the large hill on his right flank. At the end of turn three, Michael has lost two CAV and the others are seriously wounded. Brian has lost one CAV and had one damaged with two unscratched.



Turn Four

Michael drew the black card and Brian started the fourth turn. He first activates his Specter to target Michael's Tyrant. It is just within range. Brian achieves TL and scores 1 damage point on the CAV. Next, Brian advances the Starhawk up the hill and fires upon Michael's Specter. He gains TL and destroys the Specter with two damage points. The Specter's return fire is ineffective. Brian then withdraws the Starhawk back behind the hill. Finally, Brian fails the Scorpion's repair roll. Michael activates his last CAV, and sends the Tyrant up the hill. Due to power restrictions, he is only able to fire one LBG at the Starhawk. Michael does no damage. The return fire of the Starhawk fails to damage the Tyrant.

At this point Michael concedes the game.

And the award for taking it in the shorts...goes to Michael!

Well, that could have gone better. There are two points to discuss about this battle, and the first is what I did wrong. Looking back, I should have brought more Suppression CAV's. The Vanquisher did all right, but a Dictator or even another Tyrant would have increased my chances to kill Brian's mechs. With the Puma and the Vanquisher, I was not able to bring enough firepower to bear to pull down the Scorpion.

Other than that, I think my force list was good for a very small point game. The Specter provided support and the Puma was there for "soft targets" – like the disappearing Whisper missile.

I flubbed my setup – deploying my CAV such that (1) they could be caught in the area of effect of Brian's Specter and (2) Brian could focus on a small frontage. Through good dice rolls, I avoided #1 but #2 lead to two of my CAV getting damaged early on.

So much for what I did wrong – now let's talk about the other part. The game was unbalanced from the outset. This was because Brian purchased his models from the point in the CAV rulebook while I used the points in the Journal of Recognition.

We both used Army Builder. This is a great program and makes force building very easy. I love using it to tweak my forces before battles. However, AB is only as good as its data files. As of now, the official data file available from Lone Wolf development is based on the CAV rulebook. There is a second version floating around, but I had to and ask for it on Mil-Net (<http://www.mil-net.net/>). The only reason I knew to ask for it was I originally wanted to include a Duelist – which is only available in the JOR version of the file.

As nice as AB is, it's still not the official rulebook. When using it, remember to double check what it creates. The folks who do the data files do a great service to the hobby at large, but they're still human.

Now, all that being said, I still had a great time. Yes, sometimes I did feel like Polish cavalry in the fall of 1939, but hey, not all scenarios are balanced – this is the norm for historical games. When you play a lot of point-based games, this fact tends to be forgotten.

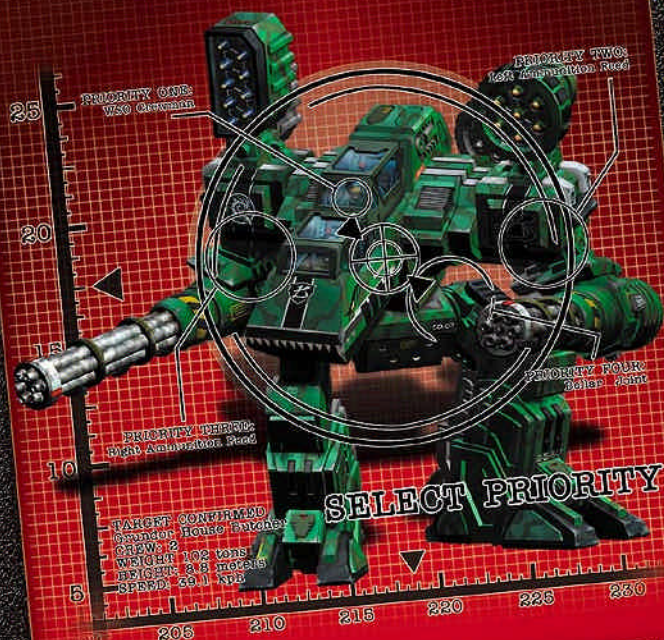


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It's the same old story. You wait nervously in the pre-dawn chill. Quietly at first, you hear the enemy advance: the distant thunder of their progress crescendoes into a bone-rattling roar. Then comes the decisive moment. As the opposing CAVs, aircraft, and armor crest the nearest ridge, you shout the command to fire.

Suddenly, your ECM indicators shriek. Your best foot forward stumbles as the enemy swarms toward you. You thought you knew everything about fighting anything, but these... You've never seen anything like these before...

Through the thunderclap of incoming fire, your old Sarge's words echo in your head...

"First rule of war, soldier.
Evolve, or die."

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This scenario was fun – but I have to say it was too small. At 1,500 points there aren't a lot of models on the table. It does lend itself to 2 hour games, but with just one card of each color in the activation deck, a double turn can be devastating. In our game, it happened to both of us. Whenever our opponent got the double turn, we really got beat up. Oh, and finally, I would have to give the Puma the Mech of the Match award. For a fast anti-personnel Mech, he charged out there and bloodied the Scorpion's nose. He even went down swinging. CAV is a great game – it plays fast and there are some great models. I really like the competitive dice rolls and simple damage charts. Now, if I could only finish painting my other three Specters, I'll be ready for a real game. Brian, I want a chance to redeem my honor!

Brian Emerges Victorious

Despite the balance issues in our forces the game was still entertaining. Removing my Whisper from the game when we realized our problem helped to balance things...a little. My Starhawk V was the bit of brute force that I expected it to be. It dealt out quite a bit of damage over the course of the game. The Tyrant was a bit of a disappointment from an offensive standpoint, but it was a respectable damage magnet. And in the middle of the spectrum was my Scorpion. It took a lickin' and kept on tickin'. It dealt out as well as took damage. This very small game makes me think that Specters are best used in multiples and in a separate fire-support group. In spite of this theory, I believe it was my Specter that drew first blood in the game. Luck? Neither Michael nor I had much of it. Both of us rolled in the extremes; lots of 1s and 10s.

Overall I was impressed with the speed of our game. We had eight models on the table and we finished up in around 3.5 hours. This included stopping for the taking of pictures and for Michael to scribe what actions we were taking in our turns. Michael and I are both novices at CAV so it was surprising that we had to refer to the rulebook only a handful of times over the course of our match. I had a good time (well, I did win). In fact, playing this battle report has increased the likelihood of me getting to the 20+ unpainted CAV that I have in various places around the house and putting pigment to metal. They have definitely moved up the list of things to be painted. Next time I'll be sure that I'm using the same Army Builder file to construct my force as my opponent will be using.



The ever-studious Brian, no doubt studying up on how to beat his next opponent into mush.



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The Lion army is a difficult army to learn to play. Point for point their fighting skills normally leave a lot to be desired. Instead of impressive stats several of their troops are blessed with skills that will only be useful in particular situations. The Dwarves' toughness ability, the Wolfen's natural born killer, and the Alchemist's mutagen dice are skills that are used quite often in the game. Let's take a look at some of the strengths of the Lions and then examine each troop individually to try and understand how they should play on the battlefield.

Strengths of the Lions:

1. Cheap troops: The Lions currently have four troop choices under fifteen points. While not as numerous as the Goblins or the Undead, the Lions can still pack them deep and sell them cheap. Using cheap troops as a delaying tactic or a support for your elite troops or characters is highly effective.
2. The Bravery Skill: Against fear causing armies the bravery skill is wonderful. It is against these armies that the Lion truly shine. The ability of the Lions not to count a 1 as a failure on fear rolls means that with a full command staff most of the time you will not even need to roll. A courage of 7 with the roll of a 1 still beats a fear of 7. Any other living army will fail 16.67% of the time. Even the great Wolfen can be forced to flee in terror from a single Morbid Puppet.
3. Magic: With two affordable magicians with a power of 5 and their Warrior Mages with a power of 4, the Lions have a definite edge in the magic field. Their mages are cheap compared to other armies (The Wolfen have to pay 129 points for a power 5 to the Lion 35). Light magic is very subtle, and if you want to play aggressive damage deal spells, you may have to choose from the Primagic spells.
4. Sacred Weapons: The Lion army has several troops that have access to weapons blessed by the light. These weapons will kill outright on any critical hit. The roll of a double one to wound is normally no effect, but when caused by a sacred weapon even the great Killyox will fall to snake eyes.
5. Combos: The Lion army is one that is interconnected. Their tactics rely on timing and interconnected troops. A Bard running behind a character allows it to re-roll one die per turn. The Vision Prémonitoire allows you place the card you need in reserve before cards get drawn. The Banner of Urland magic item turns one model per turn into a character, allowing anybody in your army with some preplanning to utilize the bard and her spells.

Troops of the Lions:

Spearman: For ten points you get what you pay for. These guys are the bottom of the barrel when it comes to Lion troops. Their weakness is their defense and initiative of 2. Looking simply at fighting stats these guys are inferior to most other 10-point troops in the game. Do not expect these guys to do a whole lot other than slowing down the enemy. Even three of these guys surrounding a character will probably not drag him down. When a spearman gets charged leave him be. It's ten points, if it dies no big loss. Use your other troops to attack and gang up on the rest of your opponent's army.

Guards of Alahan: These guys are two points more than the Spearman and have +1 courage to the lowly spearman prior to selecting their weapons. This blister includes 3 different ways to arm you Guardsmen, and each weapon has a different effect on their stats. I recommend either the spear or the sword as these effect single die rolls (Initiative and Defense) rather than the double dice roll of the to wound chart. I prefer to arm them with spears as the initiative roll continues to dominate the games in our area. Just as important as the +1 initiative and courage, is the fact that these models look great. I would pay the two points to keep the spearman sculpts off the board.



Sword Players of Alahan: Complete averageness for 14 points. No major strong points to these guys. A toughness of 6 and

courage of 5 is a little above average, but 3's for their fighting skills (Ini, Ata, and Def) means they remain mediocre. It is important to note that they have no drawback. In fact these sculpts are so good that many of my opponents will be wary of them by looks alone. Charge these guys when needed, but they really come into their own when combined with Paladins. They have the same Def, so the Sword Players can defend while the Paladins attack. Always bring at least 3 of these guys.

Valkyries: These beautiful models are blessed with a high Ata and Def ability of 4. They have the Duelist ability, but with a higher Ata than usual I find this ability hard to use. I really fear they did not do these troops justice in the current edition. The only two uses for these warrior women is to run them with Paladin and defend them (Like the above mentioned Sword Players) or to combine them with the Banner of Urland to turn them into characters and take advantage of their Duelist ability. Please note my discussion on Agonn the Flame's 2nd incarnation for more on this used. Honestly, these stay in my miniature case since Confrontation 2 has come out.

Archers: Well, for a ranged combat unit they are rather cheap. Their range is respectable (up to 60 cm), but when compared to the Griffon fusiliers they are woefully inadequate. They do a meager 3 damage so take advantage of their cheap costs to bring at least 3 or of them. You get four archers for the cost of three fusiliers.

Alahan Reapers: For 20 points a pop these guys are truly finesse troops. They have the scout ability allowing them to set up outside of the deployment zone. Reapers are armed with pistols that pack quite a punch with a very short range. They really come into their element if you have their card in reserve when they are charged. With their shooting ability of 4 they hit any charging unit on a 2 or better. Combine these troops with the use of the Vision Prémonitoire spell to ensure this occurrence. They also have an above average initiative that allows them to disengage if they survive their first turn of combat. Their major weakness is their defense of 2. I wish Rackham had inverted the Ata and Def stats. They improved on the Reaper for the Griffons and gave them the Thallions.

Paladins: The wielders of the Sacred Blades. These guys truly bother my opponents when I line them up against their expensive troops. Their ability to cleave a trooper in two 16.67% of the time makes Wolfen and Mounted troops think twice about not defending versus a Paladin, whereas Goblins and cheap Undead laugh at the use of these weapons. They always have more where those guys came from. One note of caution, their stats are not spectacular. Without the critical kill they only do 5 damage. With their Def of 3 they are not blocking a whole lot. The best way of thinking of the Paladins is to consider them average troops with spectacular weapons.



Royal Guardsmen: The cream of the foot troops. These guys are brick walls. Not only do these guys have a Sacred Halberd, but they are also armored in Sacred Armor that ignores critical hits. This means that statistically 16.67% of the time they are hit, it does no damage. Combine this awesome ability with a toughness of 10 with the Tough ability and these guys are going nowhere fast, you need to hit them with a damage 25 point attack to the head to kill them in one shot. They have a respectable Def stat of a 4 so they can block shots with some confidence. To top it all off they have the fanatic ability to make sure they

do not run away. These guys are rather cheap considering their plethora of abilities, coming in at a mere 40 points.

Alahan Knights on Horseback: Mounted troops extraordinaire! These guys charge 40 cm, and hit for 15 with bestial charge. Toss in the ability of masterstroke and if you want something dead, it is going to die. (Well not exactly, it is a d6-based system.) These guys have great stats, are immune to fear, and have the Warhorse ability allowing them to dodge while approaching. The only drawback to these mounted beauties is their points. Although I believe they are well worth their 64 points be aware that bringing these will cut in on your numbers. When souped up with a Guardian Angel spell these guys

just keep on going.

Command Pieces of the Lions:

Alahan Musician: A standard musician, use this guy only when you plan on using a full command.

Alahan Standard Bearer: Gorgeous model with great rules. Use this model when fighting against fear causing armies. In smaller points game you can use the standard bearer instead of using a character saving you points. Combined with the musician and a character for a full command, the Lion are capable of courage rating of 8+ with little or no fuss. One of the most important aspects of the standard bearer is the Rallying Cry ability. At the beginning of the turn in which the armies are going to charge fear-causing creatures use this ability and make your ENTIRE army IMMUNE to fear for the turn. Nothing is more entertaining than watching an Archer charge Killyox to tie him down and not have to roll to do it.

The Standard of Urland can be taken by the standard bearer. It has two effects: 1. All of your troops in a 25-cm radius gain the ability fanatic. 2. Once per turn at the beginning of the movement phase you can nominate one figure within 25 cm and consider it a character. This means it can heroic charge, counter attack, and obtain extra dice in hand to hand. Combine this with the bard and this model can re-roll one die if he is within 10 cm.

The Mounted Musician and Standard Bearer: For eight points more than the mounted Knights these guys have 1 extra point in their related skill (Cou or Dis) and the command skill with a 15cm range. Combine a full staff of these guys with one of the three major commanders and they give that commander additional abilities. Given the points of these characters and the command staff, I think this ability will see more use in RagNarok. Still a 15-cm command is nice.

Characters and Mages:

Bards: Cheap warrior mages with a power of 4, Bards would be useful before factoring in their special abilities. Bards make characters better by allowing a character within 10 cm to re-roll one die per turn. This ability is accumulative; so two bards would allow two re-rolls. Of the two bards the female one is more useful in my opinion. Although it does less damage and has a lower Ata stat, the Def of 5 and shooting of 4 make it well worth the loss of offensive hand to hand ability. Do not forget their ability to shoot into hand to hand without randomizing the hit. I have successfully used my female bard to finish off Killyox in two games. Run them behind your lines up close to lob spells and daggers into hand to hand. The spells Arc du Mana and Vision Prémonitoire are the two most common and useful spells to give the Bard. The spells that come with the bard can only be used on characters, so combine these spells with a character heavy army or the use of the Banner of Urland.

Agonn the Flame 1st Incarnation: When they named this guy they should have called him the Agonn the Flaccid. When you choose to pay 42 point for Agonn you better be doing so to include him in a command. With a full command your army has courage of 8, but you better hide him as long as possible as his stats are very poor for a character. He can be made marginally better with the addition of a magic item or two, but for those points you can simply buy a better character.

Agonn the Flame 2nd Incarnation: A 22-point upgrade makes for a very nice leader. With a full command your courage boosts to a 9 and his high combat stats make him useful in hand to hand. His duelist ability is where he really shines. In a one on one situation if you win initiative you can take 2 extra dice for a total of four. Use the Duelist skill to set the mark where you hit on anything but a 1, and watch you opponent try to block them all. In a many on one situation this skill is not as important as your opponent can sustain his defense right through your low marks. At 64 point he is worth it.

Alahel the Messenger (above-right): If you are not worried about fear this is the character to bring. He has a fast movement rate and the ability to shoot when not in hand to hand. His Marksman ability means he doesn't fail shooting rolls on a 1 meaning he automatically hits in short range. Alahel has the ambidextrous ability allow him to attack with every single successful defense. Toss a guardian angel on him and he has a Def of 7. He will light a up pack of goblins like a Jackie Chan movie. Use a bard to increase his chances of defending. I like his magic items, but Deliverance does not work with his counter attack so I have a hard time paying the points for it.



Arakan the Duelist: A limited edition miniature, if you have a copy of him you are lucky. He has a shooting ability of 6...yes 6! He is the champion of the Reapers, so he has scout and a very high initiative. Interestingly enough he also has decent combat stats for a scout. With an Ata of 5 and a Def of 4 he can hold his own in a fight. Do not expect him to do wonders though. His strength lies in being a good shot.

Sardar the Pure: A mage with a power of 5 for a mere 34 points. Wow! Use Sardar to cast spells that have a reasonably high difficulty like guardian angel or Faisceaux de Lumière. Combine him with a Bard and his spell rolls will get a re-roll. He is a character and benefits from the Bard ability. He also casts the combo spell Vision Prémonitoire on a 3 or better.

Migail the Selenite: Another level 5 mage for a decent price, Migail's points go up to 44 as he has access to both light and water spells. He also has a random chart that you roll on at the beginning of the game to see if you gain any extra abilities. If you use him have an extra spell ready because you can get a "free" spell if you roll correctly. Use of the Nymphe spell allows you to heal one model during the game with a tabletop range. Try not to mix light and water spells, as you will run the risk of not having the proper gems. Remember that the Arc of Mana spell uses any type of mana. Migail has a decent Def and Ini so he can run pretty close to combat and even jump in to help when needed.

Misan the Clairvoyant: At 30 points Misan is a pretty affordable priest. Priests rely on the proximity of their faithful so do not bring Misan if you plan to spread out. If you are favoring the numbers game and plan to "clump" up then Misan is not too bad of a choice. Misan can allow you to cut points costs by using Adoubement Occulte to give troops Sacred Weapons. His miracle Auspices Favorables allows you to choose a stat on a figure and it will not longer fail on a one with regards to that stat. Now you can auto hit is you choose the attack stat. I think the strength of the Lion is in its magicians not its priests, but Misan can work his way into a horde style army.

Meliador the Celestial (below-right): The most powerful magician the Lion army can field...for a mere 72. Yes for this cheap of a price he is an Adept of light and air and has a power rating of 7. He, oddly enough, has the scout ability. He can truly toss spells at will and his Tempête de Lumière spells has the ability to devastate troops all day long. He can also cast a Piller de Energie to heal the troops around him. Vent Pouteur allows him to disengage and float away. No other army has a magician of his power for anywhere near his points. Many of the armies online include him as their focal point. If using Meliador do not forget to spend time mulling through the air spells to find those that fit your army.

The Red Lioness 1st Incarnation: The Red Lioness continues to be one of the most powerful Lion characters in the game. Complete with her Sacred Sword, her stats make her a monster to behold. She can outmaneuver and against low courage troops her war cry of six is nothing to scoff at. She lacks the command ability in her first incarnation, so treat her as a hand to hand fighter. Oddly enough to use the bard she will not be able to scout, so there is a choice to make.

The Red Lioness 2nd Incarnation on foot: When facing the undead she is a dream come true. With her lending out courage of nine, the army's courage hits 11 with a full command. The 2nd incarnation loses the War Cry ability and gains the justice skill.

She is also the plague of the undead counting all wounds counted against these troops as a line lower. The Red Lioness 2nd Incarnation is 37 points more expensive than her first edition. If you are not fighting the Undead one should really consider whether you want to bring her or not. If the army you are fighting does not cause fear at all save the 37 points and field her older version.

The Red Lioness 2nd Incarnation on Horseback: Lareena loses her scout ability (no surprise here) and gains the warhorse and bestial charge skills. Her toughness increases dramatically as does her movement and cost. This figure



will put you back a whopping 171 points before magic items. This is a bit steep for any figure so her use in Confrontation is limited. When combined with a mounted command staff she gains the ability Implacable/1 making her more a more ferocious hand to hand fighter. I think she will see the battlefield when RagNarok is finally released. Until then she is on foot and ready to go.

Dragon of Orianthe: Dragon is a whopping 192 points without his magic items. Although his stats are very high, his cost is more than a bit scary. His Ata and Def stats are both one point higher than the Red Lioness, but his damage on the charge is 15. Combine that with a master stroke/4 and he can easily do a damage 30 attack. Combine him with a mounted command and you army has a discipline and courage of 11 and Dragon gains a Sacred Weapon. If Dragon is the champion of the Mounted Knights, I cringe at thinking about the stats of the Lion's living legend. Dragon is another figure reserved for RagNarok, which hopefully will be out by Christmas in English.

Putting it all together

When choosing the army list make sure you have a plan. If you are not worried about fear do not bring a full command. Take Alahel the messenger or the Red Lioness's 1st incarnation. Always take a bard when you take a character. Bards are worth their points by themselves and that re-roll is an added boost. Make sure you mix your units a little. Wasting a Sword Players attack to defend for a Paladin is better than wasting a Sacred Weapon's chance of an auto kill. Here are a few army lists that I have used with some success.

400 points

Alahel the Messenger with the Armor of the Allmoon
Female bard with Arc de Mana
Sardar the Pure with Guardian Angel + Arc de Mana
3 Archers
1 Spearman
2 Alahan Guards with spears
3 Sword Players
4 Paladins

Total 16 troops

400 points

Agonn the Flame 2nd Inc + Pavois de Baronnie on a 3+
Standard Bearer
Musician
Female bard with Arc de Mana
3 Archers
3 Alahan Guards with spears
3 Sword Players
5 Paladins

Total 18 troops

400 points

2 Cavaleries d' Alahan (Mounted Knights)
Standard Bearer
3 Alahan Guards with spears
3 Sword Players
3 Archers
3 Paladins
1 Royal Guardsman

Total 17 troops



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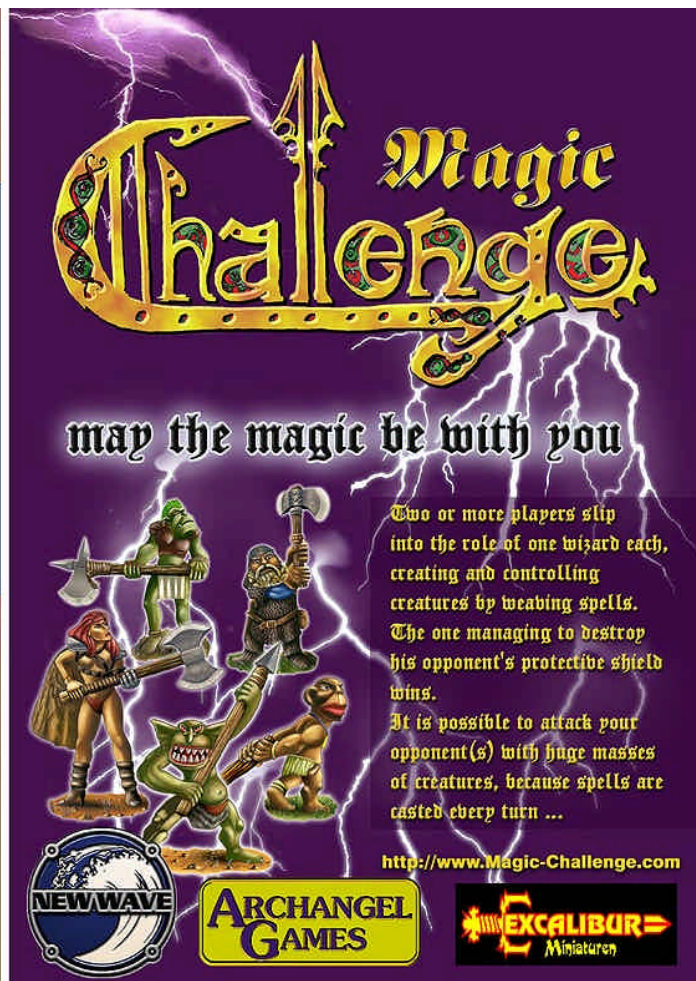
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