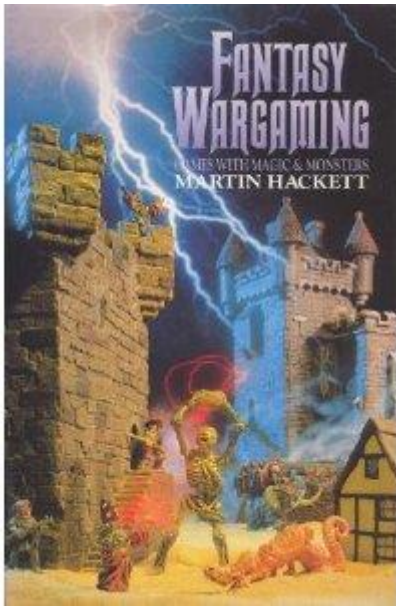


“Fantasy Wargaming: Games with Magic and Monsters”

By Martin Hackett

Review by Paul Le Long

It feels a bit odd reviewing this as a classic wargaming book since it isn't that old (1990) and is only partly about wargaming! Nevertheless there is significant wargames content and it does read like a classic because of an indefinable nostalgia value – plus, I love this book. I felt that it deserved to be included in the reviews of classic books on this blog.



So what is it all about? Essentially the book is an introduction to Dungeons and Dragons style fantasy roleplaying and how to develop from fantasy roleplay to fantasy wargaming. Actually, I think the book is organised in a weird way so I'll just go through chapter by chapter so you can see what's included.

First, we have an introduction in which the author defines wargaming and roleplaying, and also talks about solo gamebooks. This is followed by a chapter entitled "What is Fantasy Role Playing," which describes a typical episode in an RPG (roleplaying game). Then we have a chapter on how

the author got into wargames and RPGs. Then we go back to a chapter on what's good about RPGs – teamwork, educational value and so on – you know the drill – basically a list of reasons why RPGs shouldn't be associated with Satanism! This is followed by a chapter on how to be a good dungeon master and another giving advice on rules for RPGs.

Then we flit to a chapter on figures – scales, painting, basing, and so on – applicable to both RPGs and Wargames. But it's not until page 63 that we get a chapter on mass battles – here we get rules for issuing orders, movement, firing, close combat, magic, statistics for lots of different creatures, humanoid and otherwise. The combat rules are pretty simple – basically you apply modifiers to the stats of a particular creature type, roll a die and read off the results on a series of tables – this gives you the number of casualties inflicted. Like I said, simple, but it's not about the rules; the emphasis is on the flavour of the game with different races or creatures behaving in very distinct ways.

This is followed by a chapter outlining a sample scenario with goblins and undead attacking an outpost defended by humans, dwarves, elves and halflings. After that, we have army lists for 14 armies: Crocatole (crocodile men), Dwarf, Elf, Goblin, Halfling,

Hobgoblin, Human (European type), Human (Asiatic type), Lizardman, Maiden (Amazons), Ratmen, Swampatole (watergoblins), Undead, Woodland Realm.



Next we move to terrain, both for dungeons and wargames, before proceeding to a chapter on how to create your own fantasy world. Then (oddly) we jump to a chapter on science fiction roleplaying. But just when you're wondering what on earth is going on, we get the best & longest chapter in the book – 37 pages, all about campaigns. Here we have all sorts of advice on things like size of armies, record keeping, maps, deployment, movement rates, couriers, some

great stuff on economics (simple rules but robust), trade, living off the land, supply, weather, government, random events, battles, sieges, naval warfare, attrition, recruitment and much else. Now this is all geared to fantasy wargaming but it can be applied to historical campaigns too – I used the ideas in this chapter as the basis for my own campaign rules which I then used to conduct a campaign set in 18th century Europe so I can attest to their utility and versatility. They are very simple but nevertheless allow you to incorporate a lot of detail.

The final chapter is another lengthy one outlining the author's own fantasy campaign setting. The book ends with a lot of appendices dealing with things like availability of figures, magazines, boardgames, RPGs and so on. Obviously these appendices are somewhat dated but not as much as you might think as he has described, for example, boardgames, and these descriptions could allow the reader to check out these products – if you can still find them.

So what in this book is good and what isn't? If you don't like fantasy then obviously you're going to hate it. If you don't like roleplaying games then you're not going to appreciate the book either because so much of the book focuses on this hobby. Also, as I've already said, there is little logic to the structure of the book which might frustrate some readers. Now I have always liked RPGs as well as wargames so the fact that this book concentrates on both – about 50% on each – doesn't bother me. In fact, I loved all the roleplaying stuff when I first read it. As for wargaming, well, you get an excellent chapter on wargames campaigns – in fact, I have used these ideas and rules far more than those presented in other, more celebrated, books by people like CS Grant and Tony Bath. And you get some wargames rules which though pretty simple, offer a nice flavour for fantasy wargaming that is different from the otherwise ubiquitous Games Workshop approach. From a nostalgia point of view, the book is full of photos of games, figures and so on that are really evocative and take you back 20-30 years to the games you were playing in the 1980s.

This book is, I suspect, a love it or hate it thing. Don't like fantasy? Don't like roleplaying? Then don't buy the book, you'll definitely hate it. Even if you don't mind that, then you still might not be interested unless the campaign rules grab you. Personally, though, I love this book – the (chaotic) mix of roleplaying and wargaming, the nostalgic photographs, the excellent campaign rules, the quirky style and the indefinable charm, all add up to a classic for me.

Details:

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