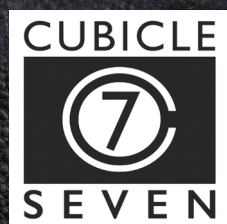


WARHAMMER FANTASY ROLE-PLAY

The Making of Death on the Reik
—By Graeme Davis



DEVELOPER DIARY

WELCOME TO DEV DIARY EIGHT! BY GRAEME DAVIS

When many **WFRP** fans talk about the **Enemy Within** campaign, they are mostly thinking about **Death on the Reik**. That is quite understandable: this sprawling adventure contains so much that became iconic about the campaign, and about **WFRP** itself. River travel, of course, and mutant attacks, scheming cultists, warpstone, bizarre NPCs — and, of course, an ending that leaves the Characters wondering whether they actually won.

Let's start with the title - a homage to Agatha Christie's murder mystery *Death on the Nile*. Jim and Phil planned the adventure around river travel in order to emphasize the role of the Empire's rivers in transportation. As in medieval Europe, a river is a far easier way to move goods and people than the roads of the time. Rivers are already there and do not need to be built, they remain open and passable in all but the most extreme weather, and they automatically connect the most fertile lands — and therefore, the major towns and cities — because the soil on their banks is well watered and replenished with nutrients by the occasional flood.

In some ways, **Death on the Reik** was the first part of the original campaign planned as a part of the campaign. I was writing **Shadows Over Bogenhafen** as a stand-alone adventure, and Jim and Phil wrote **The Enemy Within** around it. That's **The Enemy Within**, the first part of the campaign, of course, rather than the campaign as a whole. The two were first published as two separate products using the old 'module' format, but ever since they were bound together as **Warhammer Campaign** for the 1988 reprinting, they have always shared a binding. **Enemy in Shadows**, the first part of the Director's Cut, continues that tradition.

But let's get back to **Death on the Reik** — or rather, to its ancestry. Before coming to Games Workshop, Jim and Phil had worked at TSR UK, the British arm of the company that published **Dungeons & Dragons** at the time. One of their last projects there was a campaign module called **Night's Dark Terror**. It was quite groundbreaking for this time, when stand-alone 'modules' were the norm and roleplaying campaigns were in their infancy. Almost as soon as they arrived, they set about applying the same principles to designing a campaign for **Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay**, and **Death on the Reik** represented the first fruits of this process. They mapped a huge swath of the Empire, from Delverz in the north to Nuln in the south, with economic information on the towns and a trading system. Together with my contribution to the project — the "*River Life of the Empire*" supplement — **Death on the Reik** contained everything a GM and players needed to ply the Empire's waterways forever, making money through trade and adventuring.

Many groups did just that. When **Power Behind the Throne** was first published the following year, we started to hear from GMs who were finding it difficult to persuade their players to give up river life and travel to Middenheim for the next part of the campaign. In the Hogshead edition of **Power Behind the Throne**, James Wallis added a new section, 'Carion up the Reik', in which the Characters' barge was destroyed no matter what they did, forcing them to leave the river behind. Perhaps the river trading rules were a little too successful.



Art by Sam Manley

There was more to **Death on the Reik** than just a vast expanse of territory to wander through at random. There were several mini-adventures within the greater whole, some following on from previous events and some designed to help the GM handle the Characters' first Career progression, which we had calculated would be taking place during the course of this adventure. The whole thing culminated in a huge, Chaos-infested castle and dungeon that took up almost half the book.

Developing the Director's Cut version of **Death on the Reik** was a unique challenge. At first glance, there seemed to be little to do: in terms of its adventure content, this has always been the best-loved instalment of the campaign, so why mess with success? At the same time, though, thirty years of feedback had identified a few serious weaknesses.

First, like **Enemy in Shadows**, this adventure was very well known. I heard from people who had played or ran **Death on the Reik** three times, or even more. I added 'groggnard boxes' to offer the GM a wide range of options, so that the adventure could be fresh and surprising even for seasoned players.

Secondly, players over the years had reported that they found the mass of information in the original version a little difficult to navigate, and reported some problems with the central section of the adventure, in which the Characters are racing a small group of cultists to a cache of warpstone.

I took the adventure apart and re-ordered it so that everything is easier to find and the GM has all the necessary information to hand when it is needed. I expanded the timeline considerably, offering advice on adapting it to events as they unfold. Hopefully this will make the adventure much easier to run.

Finally, players have commented on an uncomfortable jump in power between **Death on the Reik** and **Power Behind the Throne** ever since they were first published. Two adventures were published to fill the gap. Carl Sargent's 'The Grapes of Wrath' was published in **White Dwarf** and reprinted in the Games Workshop anthology **The Restless Dead**, and as I already mentioned James Wallis added 'Carriion up the Reik' to the Hogshead reprint of **Power Behind the Throne**. I used the best elements of both, and in the **Death on the Reik Companion** and the **Power Behind the Throne Companion** I wove them into an entirely new sub-plot with a new recurring villain — I think readers will enjoy it. While I was at it, I took some measures to strengthen the links between the plots of the two adventures, and make the leads pointing to Middenheim much clearer.

Just like **Empire in Shadows** and the other volumes in the campaign, **Death on the Reik** has its own companion volume. This is where you will find an updated version of 'River Life of the Empire', and many more things to expand and enhance adventures on the Empire's great rivers, both in the **Enemy Within** and your own campaigns.

For those who remember the original, I enlisted the help of artist Martin McKenna and former publisher James Wallis to contribute their memories, just as Phil and I did in the **Enemy in Shadows Companion**. At the time when he worked on **Death on the Reik**, Martin was at the start of what would become a distinguished career. His work had appeared in **White Dwarf** and some other Games Workshop products, but **Death on the Reik** was the first project where he was the sole artist.

James became notorious for the brutal way in which his 'Carriion up the Reik' deprived the Characters of their barge, and he looks back to a vitriolic yet good-natured online exchange on the subject with a fanzine editor (fanzines were the analog equivalent of today's fan blogs, printed on paper and sold in game shops and by mail order). The editor's rant and James's equally uncompromising reply went on to become part of **WFRP** legend, to the point where someone quoted it at me all this time later in a question about my intentions for that part of the adventure. I have offered the GM a much wider range of options, which should hopefully be enough to satisfy everyone!

The **Companion** includes an updated version of the river trading rules and articles on various subjects old and new. You'll find the grand river liner the *Emperor Luitpold*, used by the great and the good to travel in style. There are details on the Imperial Semaphore Service, waterborne villains including wreckers, smugglers, and pirates, a profile of the Red Crown cult with more spells from the Lore of Tzeentch, river-borne monsters and diseases, and much more. Early reviews of the **Enemy in Shadows Companion** have been very positive, and I am confident that the **Death on the Reik Companion** maintains the same high standard. **WFRP** fans have been waiting thirty years for this version of the campaign, after all, and they deserve nothing less than the best.

Another thing you'll find in the **Death on the Reik Companion** is a short piece on the various Easter eggs, gag names, and pop culture references in the adventure. But just for you, here are a few more memories of the time when the original **Death on the Reik** was being developed.

Not many people know that Mutants were invented specifically for **WFRP**. The first encounter in 'Mistaken Identity' — now the first part of **Enemy in Shadows** — was originally playtested using Beastmen as the enemy, but they proved far too strong for a party of beginning Characters. So Mutants were developed as a less powerful alternative, and like 'Mistaken Identity', **Death on the Reik** begins with a Mutant encounter.

At various Dragonmeets in 1987 (Dragonmeet was a roadshow-style event back then, and I remember going to events in Sheffield, Nottingham, and other places), I ran demos of **Death on the Reik**, both to promote the new product and to introduce players to the still-new game of **Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay**. I used the Weissbruck section of the adventure, and little Liza was always a big hit. Liza was an interesting NPC, as she was very fearful of the adventurers at first, but overcame her fear when she met Malmir, the Elven Minstrel. Liza added another layer to the adventure — a challenge for the players that couldn't be resolved in the usual head-on manner. I decided, quite spontaneously, that she had never seen an Elf before, and Malmir fascinated her. Her eyes went as big as saucers, she forgot that she was crying, and she half-whispered, 'You're a Nelf!' That moment was always memorable, and Malmir suddenly found himself in charge of talking to the little girl and finding out what she knew — with quite a bit of nudging and whispered coaching from the other players. **WFRP** encouraged a variety of playstyles, which has always seemed to contribute to the game's wide appeal. Players discovered that there was more to this game than just hitting things with swords — and, through Liza and Malmir, discovered there could be more to roleplaying games than hack-and-slash adventure.

A LITTLE RULES-Y BIT: CATCHING CRABS

I went to school not far from the River Thames at Runnymede, and one of the sports activities on offer was rowing (crew, for American readers). I enjoyed being out on the river, but I quickly found I was too weedy to make any kind of mark in the sport. One thing I did become an expert on, though, was 'catching crabs' — rowing parlance for putting the blade of your oar in the water at an angle rather than vertically, with the result that it dives toward the bottom instead of driving the boat forward. To make things worse, the butt end of the oar comes up with unexpected speed and force, aiming for your chin and putting your teeth at serious risk.

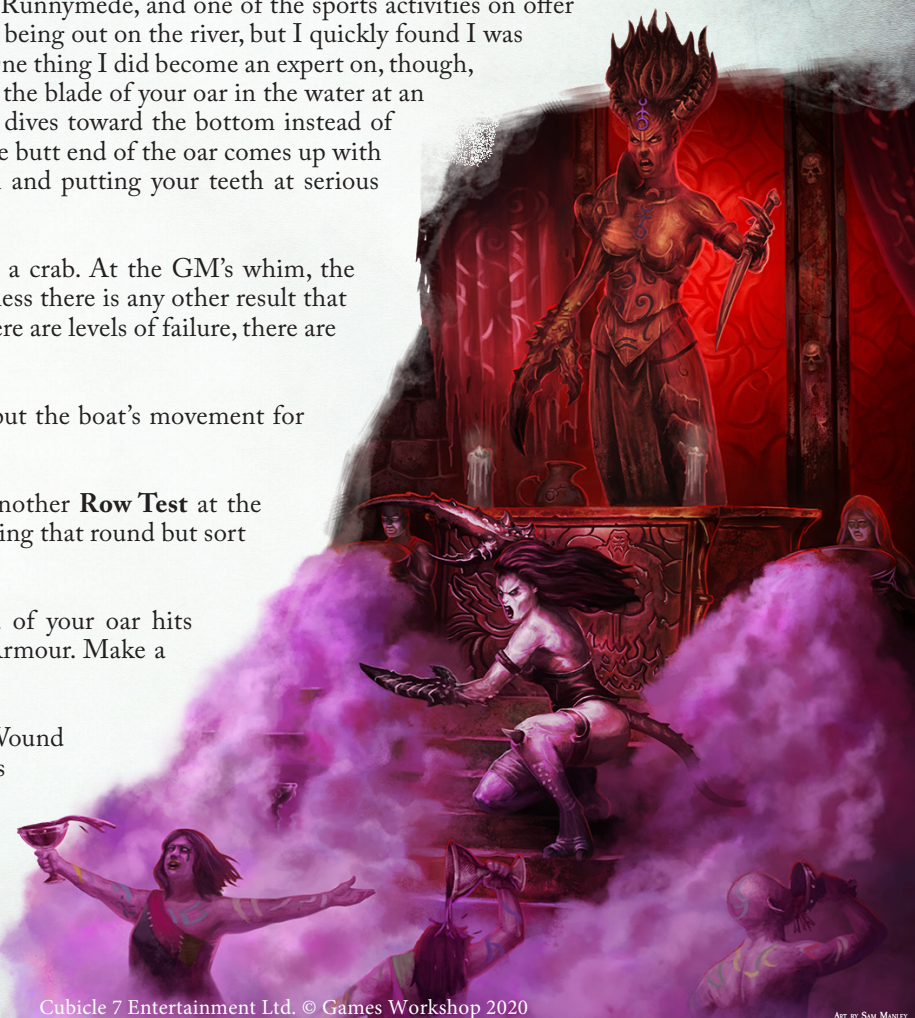
Any failure on a **Row Test** has a chance of being a crab. At the GM's whim, the chance might be 50%, or it might be automatic unless there is any other result that seems better suited to the circumstances. Just as there are levels of failure, there are crabs of varying severity.

Marginal Failure: You regain control of the oar, but the boat's movement for this round is halved.

Failure: You are left severely off balance. Make another **Row Test** at the start of the next round: if you fail, you may do nothing that round but sort yourself out.

Impressive Failure: As above, plus the butt end of your oar hits your face for 1 Wound, ignoring Toughness and Armour. Make a **Toughness Test** or suffer a *Stunned* Condition.

Astounding Failure: Your oar scores a Critical Wound on your head (adjust the descriptions of the effects as necessary for a blunt object), jumps out of the rowlock, and floats off downstream. The boat can only drift until it is retrieved, if you are the sole rower. Otherwise the boat might suffer reduced movement or other rowers might face more difficult Row Tests as they carry your failure.



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Art by SAM MANLEY



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