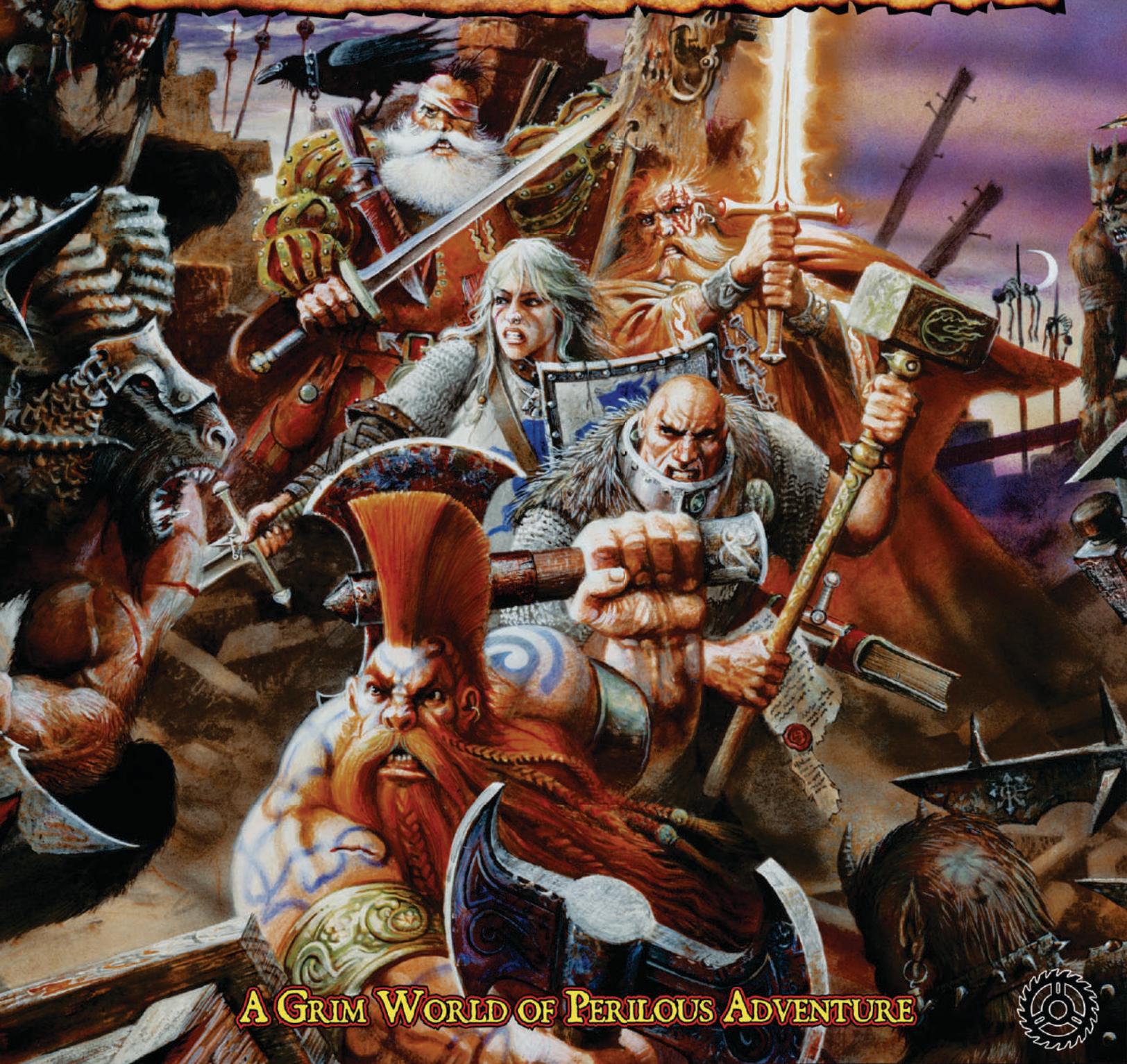


WARHAMMER
FANTASY ROLEPLAY



A GRIM WORLD OF PERILOUS ADVENTURE



WARHAMMER FANTASY ROLEPLAY



FANTASY FLIGHT GAMES

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— LIFE, AFTER DEATH —

By Dan Abnett

The rain caught them as they were negotiating the slopes of rubble behind the cattle market, or, more precisely, behind the wasteland where the cattle market had once stood.

Franz looked heavenwards as the first few spots hit his brow, and said a grace to Taal-in-the-sky that it would only be a light shower. But more spots came, heavier, and then the deluge began.

There was no point running for shelter. Every one of them was skin-soaked in a moment. Besides, they couldn't run. The rubble slopes were too precarious at the best of times, and now they were treacherously wet. Safe progress could be only one slow, carefully planted step after the next.

Despite their care, two of the rag-pickers went over in the first few minutes of the downpour, as loose tiles or bricks slid out under the soles of their pathetic shoes and sent them sprawling. One landed hard on his backside. The other, a woman of advancing years, fell badly and began to slither down the slope itself, causing an avalanche of dislodged rubble.

Franz and Grunor went down to help her, picking their way cautiously, the filthy rat-catcher more steady because of his low centre of gravity.

"What'ye think, Falker?" Grunor asked, the heavy rain streaming off his scared nose and the long, pitch-wound strands of his beard.

"He'll turn us back," Franz replied. "He won't want to, but he'll turn us back. The streets will be a-mire already. We'll be wasting our time unless this stops and it dries out a bit."

The Dwarf nodded, and together they helped the unfortunate woman up, half-carrying her as they made their way back up the slope.

Werner Broch was standing near the summit of the slag-heap, rain dripping off him, gazing at the ruins beyond the veil of rain.

"We're going back," he announced at length, his bark delivered with the characteristic twang of a Middenland accent.

There was a chorus of disapproval from the thirty plus rag-pickers in the procession behind him.

"Ulric's arse to you!" Broch snarled back. "I make the decisions and that's my word on it! Falker, Grunor, get the line to come about!"

If anything, the rain was getting heavier. Franz made his way carefully along the line of the hunched, shabby rag-pickers, and began to wave his arms to get them to herd the other way. Further down the line, the Dwarf did the same.

"Back! We're going back!" Franz called, clapping his hands. "Back to the camp! No picking today!"

The girl caught at his sleeve as he went past. He'd noticed her three days earlier when she'd first come to the camp and been put in their troop. Imke, Imma, something like that. She was as filthy as the rest, her skin ingrained black with dirt in some places, and her clothes were torn and stiff with clay-mud, but under it all she was young, and there was an intense cast to her eyes that he thought unusual.

"Really?" she asked. "Back to camp? We'll never make a scrap at this rate."

Franz shrugged. He gestured about them. The rainstorm was so thick, it was dissolving the distance, and raising a kind of steam from the ruined city.

"Nothing else for it," Franz said. "Those gods as have not yet deserted us are shedding tears for Wolfenburg today."

Wolfenburg, great Wolfenburg, first city of Ostland and Franz Falker's home once upon a day, had fallen to the hosts of the enemy the previous year. A vast and ravaging horde, commanded, so the stories went, by some warlord named Surtha Lenk, had risen in the

north and burned its unholy path down into the lands of the Empire, making Wolfenburg its prey, and a dozen other towns besides. Word was, Lenk's host was but one of many that had made savage inroads from the northlands. The world had turned upside down.

Franz was twenty-five years old, the son of a Wolfenburg cobbler. As a member of the city militia, he had fought to defend the walls and, by the strange blessing of Sigmar, had been amongst the few hundred souls to escape the final destruction with his life. He was of average height, and owned good strength in his upper body, but he was thin and sallow from the lack of decent food, and his black hair, long and tied back, was shot through with streaks of grey that had appeared almost overnight after the city fell. The sights he had seen, Franz believed, the horrors, had scared the colour from his hair.

Franz carried a short pig-spear with a crossbar under the blade, and a poor quality sword. His clothes seemed torn and dirty brown, but were in fact, under the rusted breastplate and the grime, the tunic and breeches of the Wolfenburg militia, quartered in the black and white of Ostland.

In the months following the sack, survivors—Franz amongst them—had trickled back to the city ruins, some in search of family, others in search of food, and most because they didn't know where else to go. A shantytown of dirty tents and shelters had grown up outside the southern skirt-wall, slowly spreading as more and more folk appeared. Living conditions were dismal, and food scarce. The only viable occupation was "rag-picking", which entailed venturing into the ruins each day to sift the debris for anything valuable. Coin and other precious trinkets certainly lay hidden in the flattened city, and a few of the pickers fooled themselves they would escape their misery by finding wealth. But for the most part, all the rag-pickers hoped to find was cutlery, combs, unbroken pots, furniture, perhaps preserved food from some collapsed larder.

Franz hoped to find something too. That's why he had joined. That's why he was Werner Broch's man.

At the head of the line now, Werner Broch trudged through the rain with the Dwarf Grunor at his side. Behind him, the procession tailed back. Some of the pickers carried baskets, others pushed empty barrows.

"Damn rain," Broch murmured, to himself. "This is no way to make a damn living."

Grunor grunted in agreement.

Broch was a mercenary, a veteran. He was unusually tall, but stoop-shouldered, as if his years pressed down on him, and he wore decent leather armour with metal thigh-plates and a plain black hauberk. A great sword was sheathed across his back in a massive leather scabbard, but he carried an arquebus, currently shrouded in a waxed canvas wrapper against the rain. His hair, almost white, was shaved close against his scalp, and his face sported a strangely lopsided silver beard. At some point in his career, Broch had taken a blade in the left side of his face, leaving a deep scar of shiny tissue across his cheek and right down through the jaw line. The jaw had healed, cleft and deformed, twisting his face oddly. Where the scars lay, no hair grew, so the left side of his face was beardless. As a mercenary, he owed allegiance only to coin. Only his accent and a small medal of Ulric betrayed his origins.

Franz reckoned, rightly enough, that Broch had come to Wolfenburg on the sniff of plunder. But there was work here. Rag-picking was a dangerous employment, for the ruins had become home to scavengers from the forests: bears, wolves, feral dogs and worse. So bonds had been formed. Each team of rag-pickers, when they went out, took with them a soldier or two, to watch over them. In return for this service, anything of value found by the pickers was to be split with their guards.

Broch and Franz were the soldiers assigned to this party, and Broch was in charge. The Dwarf, Grunor, was a tag-along, who with them because he wanted to be. Ancient, decrepit and quite the worst smelling thing in a place where everything smelled bad, the Dwarf was utterly mad. But they tolerated him. His axe had proved useful more than once.

The rain showed no sign of slackening. It was sheeting down, straight down, like the torrent of a waterfall, drumming off the broken rubble, running down the stained plaster of those walls still standing. Small flash floods had turned old gutters into racing streams, and the party kept to the stones and broken tiles because the earth was now sucking mud.

"Aye now!" Grunor said suddenly, his head turning to the left. He held up one filthy handful of stubby fingers and cocked his head.

"More of your damn rats?" Broch asked wearily.

"Nah," rumbled the Dwarf. "Summat else."

Grunor had been one of Wolfenburg's premier rat-catchers before the fall. His clothes and armour were made of unidentifiable materials, thickly patched and no doubt stuck to his body by dirt alone, but the jerkin over the top of them was sewn together from rat skins. Several dozen vermin skulls rattled around his neck on a cord, under his plaited beard. His face above the straggled moustache was wizened and sunken in around his lump of a nose. One eye was bright, the other milky and dead. From his belt hung a great many mismatched daggers and estocs, the tools of his trade, the salvage of a lifetime in the sewers.

"There's rats for sure, but this ain't one of 'em," he said.

"Not even your great rat?" Broch sniggered.

"Don't joke of it!" Grunor hissed. "I knows what I saw. Great thing from under the ground. When I sees it again, I will know it and make kill of it."

That, as far as Franz could fathom, was the source of Grunor's madness. During the city's destruction, Grunor claimed, he had seen great rats the size of men come up out of the sewers and fall upon the fleeing citizens. The sight had snapped his mind. Grunor had sworn to his calling as a catcher to find them and skin them.

Rats the size of men... Franz smiled at the notion as he clambered forward to join Broch and the Dwarf.

"Why have we stopped?" Franz asked.

"Keep 'em stopped," Broch replied. He was looking to the left too now, following Grunor's gaze. "The ratter's right. There's something there."

Franz glanced back at the rag-pickers and held up his hand. He saw Imke, near the front of the line, staring at him intently.

"Just the rain," Franz said. "Just the rain hitting a broken bottle..."

Broch shook his head. "That's a blade. Metal on metal."

Franz shrugged. "If you say so."

"Stay here!" Broch yelled to the waiting pickers. "Stay and watch them," he told Franz. Then he and the Dwarf began to approach the tumbled walls ahead. Waddling on his stocky legs, the Dwarf had raised his long-hafted axe across his chest.

They struggled up a scree of rubbish and mud, and through a shattered archway until Franz and the pickers were no longer in view.

"Through here," Grunor mumbled.

The noises were getting louder: a fight, most definitely. They crossed under a leaning, charred timber frame, and found themselves looking down in a deep cavity, a crater of rubble where some large building, perhaps a tavern, had been razed right down to the cellar floor. This depression was now shin-deep in dirty rainwater, and wading through it, a young man in the robes of a priest was fighting to stay alive.

He was armed with a warhammer, plain but well made, and was using its metal haft to fend off the blows of a jagged falchion that was swinging at him savagely and repeatedly. With every struggling impact, the young priest barked out a grunt of effort.

The falchion's owner was over six feet all. His bare, hairy torso was fat and bulbous, like an infant's, but his legs and arms were long and ghoulishly thin. He wore furs, and some small sign of metal trinkets and bone ornaments. His head... well, that was what made him an "it".

The head was that of goat. Shaggy, bearded down the throat, with snorting nostrils and rounded, maniacal eyes. Above the tufted ears, the brow widened in a crest from which sprouted two long, curled horns. With each savage blow, the beast rasped and whinnied.



"Ulric spare us," Broch gasped, and raised his arquebus, drawing back the wrapper and pausing only to touch the silver charm of true aiming he had tied around the handgrip.

"Vermin! Vermin in the city!" Grunor yelled, already charging down the slope into the water, his axe whooshing as he circled it.

The beast-thing heard the cry and glanced round. In that second, the priest saw a chance, and took a swing of his own. But he was too slow, perhaps too out of breath to land it properly. The beast-man saw it coming, and lashed out, catching the priest in the face with the hilt of his weapon and sending him sprawling backwards into the turgid water.

Then it turned, nostrils flaring, and brayed as it faced the charging rat-catcher; its brown, spatulate teeth bared, its tongue blue as the spittle spattered out.

"That's right, you filth. Smile," whispered Broch. He had a good aim.

There was a dull thump. The firearm had dead-fired. The cursed rain had soaked the black powder, despite his best efforts.

"Damn it!" Broch yelled. Grunor had already engaged the beast, but the advantage was not his. He was nearly up to his waist in the water, slopping around, and the beast had all the range of a far longer reach. It sliced the notched blade at Grunor, deflected once by the whirring axe, and then again. This time the blow seemed to connect directly with the Dwarf's face.

Broch cried out in dismay, and threw his arquebus aside. It looked like the ratter had been decapitated.

But no. Grunor sprawled in the water then got up again just as fast. There was blood on his face, and two of his beard plaits were missing, but his head was still on his shoulders. With an angry whoop, the Dwarf dragged his axe out of the silt, ducked another slash, and renewed his attack, howling out some curious battle cry.

Broch had drawn his great sword now, sliding it deftly from the scabbard over his broad back. The blade was nearly four feet long, its grip double-handed. It had served Werner Broch well for seventeen seasons.

He was beginning to scramble down the slope towards the fight when he heard a sound to his right. Two more figures appeared from the ruins above him.

"Damn me, Ulric, but you don't like me much today!" Broch spat. Two more beast-kin emerged, both shorter than the first, but no less monstrous. One was a skinny, shambling thing with a potbelly, its legs the backward jointed, cloven limbs of a goat or hog. Its arms were particularly hairy and short, and held up a bone lance. Its head was also goat-like, but its horn was a single thing, rising from its brow like the monocorn in the books of myth. Its eyes, hideously, were human.

The other was the size and form of an average man, clad in a tabard of sewn-together hides that seemed, distressingly, to have been flayed from the flesh of several humans. Malevolent symbols, marked in dye, covered the hides, and the sight of them made Broch sick to his stomach. The thing's head, malformed and grunting, was mercifully draped in a hood made from another stitched hide, with slits cut for the glaring eyes. The beast's pig-nose protruded from the front of that stained hood, tusked and foul.

They hurled themselves at Broch. He met them with his first swing, putting his back into the cut, and caught the hooded thing across the right shoulder.

It was a glancing blow, but the thing staggered aside, squealing, and lurched away into the rain, out of sight.

A result, but it was far from over. Now the lance was stabbing at him, striking at Broch's belly to rip him open and let his lights spill out. He guarded once, then his foot slipped on a wet stone, and he barely recovered in time to strike away the spear-point a second time.

Cursing, Broch tried to make a full swing, cross-body, but his feet slipped again.

And this time he went over, crashing backwards down the slope into the pool.

"What's going on?" Imke asked. Franz looked round. The other rag-pickers were still where he had told them to stand, huddled in loose groups, talking nervously. But the girl had come right over to him. Rain streaked her face.

"I told you to—"

She fixed him with her oh-so-intense eyes.

"Something," he said, looking back through the rain at the ruins. "Something's going on in there. I heard some cries. A..."

"A what?"

"A snorting sound. I don't know." Franz tightened his grip on the pig-spear.

"You hear that?" Imke said suddenly.

"No." He strained to listen, to look. All he could hear was the torrential drumming and hissing of the rain, the occasional half-sound from behind the ruins ahead of them.

"Have a care!" she cried.

A hooded thing, bleeding from one malformed shoulder, came ploughing out of the ruins right towards them. It was snuffling and whining. It had a crude, curved short sword in its left fist.

Imke stumbled backwards with a shrill cry of alarm. Franz hefted his spear and thrust it at the hooded creature, but the sword chopped around and shattered the spear's shank behind the tip, ripping it out of Franz's hands.

Franz leapt backwards, dodging the next murderous blow. He wrenched out his own sword, and the blades kissed with a clatter. Franz blocked and guarded, but the thing was furious in its attack, and drove him backwards.

He crashed against a mossy wall, then ducked to the left as the curved sword swung in again, scoring a long scratch across the lichen-coated stone. Franz shouldered the thing away and hacked again, missing wildly. Then it was on him, crashing into him with its whole bodyweight, and they grappled.

He could smell the thing's fetid wet reek, its animal stink, its rancid breath. He tried to break off, but it clung to him, snorting and squealing.

They staggered backwards through a ruined doorway and went sprawling amongst roof tiles and scattered masonry swamped by at least six inches of water. Franz thrashed free, spraying water, but the thing rose up again, blade raised to split his skull in two.

Then it squealed, louder and more furiously than ever before. The squeal turned into a gurgle, and then a great vomit of bloody matter sprayed out of its mouth. It crashed over onto its face.

Franz struggled up, clutching the iron charm of Sigmar around his neck in gratitude. Imke crouched down beside the thing's corpse, and drew a long, straight estoc, a most elegant dagger, from the small of its back. She wiped the blood of its blade, and nearly sheathed it away in a leather scabbard bound to her right calf. Then the rag-picker rags fell back, concealing her leg and the weapon.

Franz blinked. No vagabond owned a blade like that, or knew how to use it so surely.

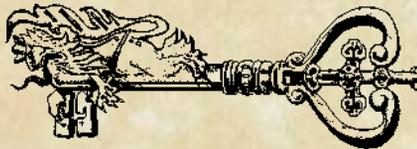
"You're no rag-picker," he murmured.

Imke put a lean index finger to her lips and pinned him with those eyes again.

The sweeping falchion missed Grunor's skull by a little finger's length, but he didn't seem to care. A Dwarf knows his limitations, especially those decreed by his stature. He had no reach, no height to prevail with. But he had brute strength, and an axe as sharp as all glory. To win out, he had to get close, right in under the massive beast's attack. So, heedless of the danger—and his madness helped him much in this wise—he stamped forward and kept his head down.

The goat-thing shied and circled, trying to get the distance back. It made a low cutting attack with its heavy blade.

Grunor bawled out the war cry of his people, and lopped round with the axe. The head-blade struck clean through the beast-man's



right wrist, and the severed hand - still clutching the falchion - flew off and splashed into the pool. Blood jetted from the rust stump. The goat-thing brayed in agony.

"Shut it," Grunor advised, and swung the axe again, like a forester felling a tree.

This second blow severed the beast's left leg entirely at the knee. Unsupported, stricken, it toppled over with a vast splash, staining the water bright pink with its blood. It writhed and shook, churning up spray. Grunor swung the axe back behind his head with both hands, and buried the blade down into the thing's hideous skull.

The thrashing stopped abruptly. It took Grunor a moment to pull his axe-head free.

The Dwarf looked across the pool at Broch. The human had recovered well from his fall, and was back on his feet by the time the single-horn reached him. Broch cut aside the strikes from the lance, and then clove the thing right down through the body with his great sword, splitting it from left shoulder to right hip.

Broch dragged the sword out and the mutilated corpse flopped wretchedly into the water. The mercenary spat.

"Damn you, Ulric, I make my own luck."

He waded across the pool and lifted the priest to his feet. The young man was coughing and spluttering, retching up brackish water. A bloody bruise discoloured his mouth and right cheek.

"And who might you be?" asked Werner Broch. "Falker? Where are you?" Broch stepped into the ruin and found Franz crouched beside the corpse of the hooded beast. "You kill that, Falker?" he asked.

Franz looked round. Behind Broch's back, he could see Imke staring at him, shaking her head gently.

"Yeah," Franz said.

"Good work, boy. We got another two yonder. Huh. What's she doing here?"

"She... she came to make sure I was all right," Franz said.

They went back into the open and the rain. As she slid by him, Imke whispered "Thank you."

Grunor had sat the priest down on a lump of stone and the rag-pickers had gathered around.

"So, the question stands," Broch said. "Who are you?"

"I am Sigamund," replied the young priest, lisping slightly because of his swollen mouth. "I am a manciple from the temple of Sigmar at Durberg. I have come to Wolfenburg on a holy mission, charged by the temple fathers."

"What kind of mission?" Broch wondered.

"One I must complete, sir. I thank you for your intervention. Ah, I should say, Sigmar thanks you."

Broch shrugged. "He can owe me. He was doing a piss-poor job of looking after you until we arrived. Those things had almost sent you to Morr's cold embrace."

The manciple nodded. "It is dangerous work I undertake. Suffice to say, four of us were sent out from the temple. I am the only one left."

The manciple looked up at Broch. "You, sir... you are a sell-sword?"

"I prefer the term 'man of negotiable honour'."

Sigamund smiled, then winced, wishing he hadn't. "If I am to complete my task, I could do worse than purchase protection for this final stage. There are three of you?"

Broch glanced round at Franz and Grunor. "I suppose so..."

"By Randal's own luck," Sigamund said, "I have three silver crowns on my person. They are yours, one each, if you would see me safe to my destination."

"Which is?" asked Franz.

"Look at me! Look at me!" Broch snapped. "Who's negotiating?"

"You are, sir," said Franz.

"Which is?" Broch asked the manciple.

"The Temple of Sigmar, deep in the heart of this ruined city, and ruined itself no doubt."

"For the purpose of what?"



The manciple got to his feet. "To recover a vernicle of holy Sigmar, which is to say a little relic: an image painted upon a tiny cloth. My temple fathers believe that Wolfenburg may not rise again until this relic is recovered and properly venerated."

"A silver crown each?"

Sigamund nodded. "And if anything remains in the temple coffers, it may please you to divide it between yourselves. The temple fathers are not interested in money."

"The rain's not yet eased," Franz said to Broch.

"Send the rag-pickers home."

"But..."

"Send them home. Tell them to go directly. They'll be safe enough if they hurry. We're doing this."

"But, sir..."

"Did you hear what he said, boy? Temple coffers! This could be the making of us! A way out of this dung-heap!"

"I don't really want a way out..." Franz began.

"Shut it. That was an order."

Grunor and Franz sent the rag-pickers on their way. They were reluctant to go without the protection of their soldiers, but Grunor was firm, and eventually they scurried off into the rain, all but running back to the comparative safety of the shanty camp.

Imke, however, refused to go with them.

"You have to," Franz said.

"I do not. I'm coming with you."

"What are you? You're no rag-picker."

"So you said. I'm coming with you. Make it happen, Franz Falker. You owe me. Make something up. Fast."

Broch came over. "What's she still doing here?"

"She's coming along," Franz said.

"Like hell."

"I'll watch her."

"She's a liability. Send her on her way."

"She's my lucky charm," Franz said, trying desperately to think of something.

"What?"

"That thing would have gutted me but for her. I mean, she

distracted it so I could get the kill-cut in. Made me lucky. I want her to come. I won't go on without her. Ranald favours her."

"She won't get any coin, if that's what she's thinking," Broch growled.

"I'll give her a few of mine once we're rich as princes," Franz smiled.

Broch shrugged. "Be your own fool, then. Come on!" They set off, Broch and the manciple leading the way, followed by Grunor, stomping along. Franz and Imke brought up the rear. The rain stopped suddenly after fifteen minutes, and the ruins around them began to steam and billow up mist that softened the edges of the stonework and made ghosts out of the taller ruins. The silence was unnerving. But for the gurgle and chug of water draining down to ground level through old pipes and broken spigots, there was unearthly quiet, as tense and bewitching as the enfolding mists.

"It's like the land of the dead," Imke said. "Cold and drab and numb. It's like Morr's realm, where the souls flit like bats."

"It is the land of the dead," Franz replied. "This is what life after death feels like. I know. I lived here all my life, and now that life is gone and buried."

"You were here when it happened?"

Franz nodded.

"Did you lose..."

"Mother, father, two sisters."

"Why do you stay?"

"There's something I have to do. Something I want to find."

"What's that, Franz Falker?"

He looked at her. "You give me something first. Like who you are or what you are. Like why a common rag-picker has a nobleman's dagger in her leg-sheath and knows how to use it."

"I'm a hunter," she said. "What you might sniffily call a tomb robber. Mixing with the rag-pickers was a useful way to get in here."

He stopped and gazed at her, disgusted. "That makes you no better than a carrion eater. Ransacking the dead for loot."

"I don't care what you think," she said, striding on past him.

"You owe me and you won't say a damn thing about this to your sell-sword comrade."



He nodded. "As soon as that debt's cleared, you and I will have words again," he assured her.

"And I was so enjoying our conversation. You were going to tell me what you were here to find."

"It's nothing."

"Tell me, Franz Falker," she said, lancing him with her intense eyes once again.

Franz shrugged. "My father's shop. He was a cobbler. I want to find his shoemaker's tools, and maybe some wooden shapers and some good leather. The folk in the camp are crying out for good shoes, or at least someone who can repair what they have. I have the skills and if I could find the materials..."

His voice trailed off. She was staring at him.

"That's your ambition? Your destiny? To make shoes for the wretches out there?"

Franz nodded.

Imke shook her head and walked on.

When he caught up with her, she whispered, "By the way, watch this manciple closely."

"What? Why?"

"I don't think he's all he seems. He has marks on his hands, sigils... runes, I think. He's been careful to conceal them, but I noticed his manner. He's not as holy as he likes us to think." Grunor had come to a halt in a mist-choked void between two tumbled walls. Rainwater gurgled. He sniffed the air.

"Vermin," he hissed.

"Not this again," Broch said. "What are they? Size of a man, you mad runt?"

"Smells that way," Grunor replied. There was an odd note of fear in his voice.

Broch took a step forward. "You talk so much—"

The first rat appeared, silent, looming out of the vapour. Broch gasped and swallowed. Suddenly, Grunor's madness seemed like sanity itself. The rat was upright. Its eyes were bright. It clutched a bladed weapon in its forepaws the way a grown man might hold a lance.

It was indeed the height and bulk of a man.

So were the other six that loomed from the mist all around them.

"Holy Ulric's beating heart!" Broch howled in disbelief, drawing his great sword. "Form a circle! A circle!"

But Grunor had already broken forward, screaming, his axe swung up high to strike as he charged the monstrous vermin. His madness had been made flesh. The things began to chatter and pipe, darting forward to attack.

The noise they made was fearful, and all the more so because of the shrill chattering that answered it from the mists around them. Franz's sword was out. Broch had already engaged, slamming his great sword at the nearest mangy black hide. Grunor had struck well, and his bloodstained axe had raised a cacophony of injured squeals.

"Get behind me! Behind me!" Franz yelled at Imke as a rat-thing powered towards him. Imke had her estoc out already and was stabbing and slicing with expert strokes.

Franz struck off a rat's head with one clean blow and, spattered by the foul blood, looked round at the manciple.

The young priest was yelling at them to protect him, his hands raised, palms visible.

Franz saw the symbol carved into the flesh of the manciple's palm. It made him shudder. He'd seen it twice before. Once on the hood of the beast-thing in the ruins.

And once on the banners of Surtha Lenk's host as they stormed the walls of Wolfenburg.

Franz winced as a rat-blade scythed through the meat of his left arm. He wheeled and speared the thing through the torso with his sword point. He knew for a certain thing that the real enemy, the worst fiend of all, was right amongst them, but there was nothing he could do.

The rats were all around him, the rats as large as a man that had haunted Grunor's nightmares, charging out of the smoke-mist, swarming, skittering...



WELCOME!



Welcome to Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay (abbreviated *WFRP* throughout this book). As the name indicates, *WFRP* is a roleplaying game (RPG). If you are new to this type of game, take a few moments to read the “**What Is Roleplaying?**” section on this page; that should make things more clear. If you’re an old hand, welcome back to *WFRP*, the RPG that lets you experience a grim world of perilous adventure.

The book you hold in your hands is the first in a series that will explore the Old World setting and bring new dimensions to the Warhammer World. You may already be familiar with the setting through the Warhammer Fantasy Battle game or the Warhammer novels and comics of the Black Library. If this is your first taste of the setting, you’re in for a treat. The Warhammer World is a rich one, a place of

chaos and war, of intrigue and politics, of desperation and heroism, and of gods and daemons. *WFRP* is your chance to live in this world, to make a name for yourself or to die unknown and unmourned like so many before you.

A NOTE ON “YOU”

Much of this book is written in the second person. Sometimes “you” refers to the player or Game Master and sometimes the character. Which “you” is being addressed should be clear from the context. The talent Stout-hearted, for example says, “You are exceptionally brave.” While you the reader may indeed be brave, this is clearly about a character with the Stout-hearted talent.

— WHAT IS ROLEPLAYING? —

Roleplaying games are games of creativity and imagination. They have been described in many different ways over the years, but fundamentally RPGs answer the following question: wouldn’t it be fun to be the hero of a book or a movie? We’ve all read novels and seen movies and, fun as they are, they are passive forms of entertainment. Roleplaying games let you both be the entertainer and be entertained at the same time. How do they do that? Glad you asked.

In an RPG, you get to take on the role of a character. You create an alter ego, a fictional character like the heroes you’ve read about or seen in movies. You and your friends take your characters and play through their adventures. Rather than read the story, you tell the story. Rather than watch the action, you make the action.

In concept, this all seems rather chaotic. How is the story told? How do you decide what happens? What do you do if you and your friend disagree? That’s where this book comes in. Roleplaying is only half of the story; the other half is the game. *WFRP* presents you with the rules of play. This book explains how to make your character, how to resolve actions, how to achieve your goals, and, most importantly, how to have fun doing it.

Before you can begin, you and your friends have to make an important decision: who is going to be the Game Master (GM)? The GM is the referee and the lead storyteller, the person in charge of running the game. The GM presents the stories and situations, describes the Warhammer World and its denizens, and adjudicates the rules. The GM is the most important member of your group, so choose wisely. The GM ought to be fair-minded, well spoken, and imaginative. An eye for detail is also helpful.

If you are the GM, you need to know the rules of this book quite well. You can learn more about your job in **Chapter 9: the Game Master**. If you are a player, your first stop should be **Chapter 2: Character Creation**. You can pick up most rules in play, but you need a character to start the game. Once you’ve finished reading this chapter, move onto the next chapter and follow the instructions there for character creation. In less than half an hour, you can be ready to play.

If you are still not clear on what roleplaying is, be sure to read the example of play on page 11. That concretely illustrates what a game is like.

READING THE DICE

All dice rolls within *WFRP* use a standard ten sided die (d10). These dice usually have the numbers 1 to 9 on their sides with a 0 to represent the 10 result. These dice are used in two different ways.

Sometimes, you will be asked to generate a number between 1 and 10. To do this, simply roll one die and read the result. When you roll a d10 this way, try to roll as high as possible. Occasionally you will be asked to add or subtract a number from this result. Your GM will tell you when you need to do this.

The other type of dice roll in *WFRP* is called a percentile roll. A percentile roll uses two d10 to create a number between 1 and 100. To do this take 2d10 and decide which one will create the “tens” and which one will create the “units”. It’s important that you don’t mix them up. The best way to do this is to have dice that are of two different colours. Once you’ve decided, roll the dice and read the result as a two digit number. So, if your “tens” die rolled a 7 and your “units” die rolled a 3, the result of your percentile roll would be 73. If you rolled a 4 and a 9 your result would be 49. If you rolled 0 and 0 your result would be 100. You roll percentile dice when you have a percentage chance to do something. When you roll percentile dice, try to roll as low as possible. For example, if you have 34% chance of hitting a Goblin, the result of your percentile roll needs to be 34 or less for you to succeed in striking the filthy greenskin. During play you will be asked to add or subtract from your percentage chance to do something. Your GM will tell you when you need to do this.



— WHAT IS THE WARHAMMER WORLD? —

The Warhammer World bears a vague resemblance to our own history, but in this land, mankind does not hold sole dominion over the globe. The kingdoms, empires and principalities of the world are shared with fantastical and horrific creatures, from the ancient races of Elf- and Dwarf-kind to Vampires, Trolls and Daemons.

Conflict is rife, from the clashes of mighty armies to the politicking of ambitious burgomeisters. The very ground seems to breed division and malcontent, intrigue and corruption.

Life is short and brutal. Danger lurks in the dark of the forest and the stink of the cities. Orcs, Beastmen and other, blasphemous things stalk the wild places, attacking the weak and unwary. Beneath the earth loathsome Ratmen gnaw away at the soft underbelly of civilisation itself. At their hands many die each day, finally escaping a world where dark humour and wilful ignorance are the cold comforts that folk must cling to.

Of course, this mortal suffering does not go unseen. Ancient eyes ceaselessly regard this roiling tableau of life and death, trust and betrayal. These Ruinous Powers seek to snuff out the candle flame of mortal existence, and claim the land as their own, eternal, Realm of Chaos.

It is to these Dark Gods that many turn. Heretical cults promise power, knowledge, pleasure and riches to those willing to give themselves over to worship of the forbidden. The Ruinous Powers bless these folk with all that they deserve—from miraculous powers to hideous mutations. Each soul so touched becomes part of the unending war that Chaos wages upon the world and its inhabitants.

This is the land in which your adventures will take place, a world of unwilling heroes, desperate struggle and black irony. This is the Warhammer World.

— WHAT'S IN THIS BOOK? —

The *WFRP* rulebook contains everything you need to get started except dice. Everyone should have two ten-sided dice (d10s) of different colours. The d10 are the only type of dice you need to play *WFRP*. You can find ten-sided dice at any hobby store. The place you bought this book likely has them in stock. *WFRP* is broken up into twelve chapters. They are:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This is obviously the chapter you are reading now. It provides an overview of *WFRP* and roleplaying in general.

Chapter 2: Character Creation

This chapter shows you how to make your own character for the game. It explains Characteristics, describes the races you can play, and provides advice on bringing your character to life.

Chapter 3: Careers

Careers are the building blocks of your character. They both describe what you did before you became an adventurer and provide you with new paths to explore. This chapter details all the various careers and explains how to switch between them.

Chapter 4: Skills and Talents

Every character has a variety of abilities called skills and talents that define what you can do. This chapter describes the skills and talents and tells you how to use them.

Chapter 5: Equipment

Every adventurer prizes his equipment. This chapter describes the tools, trappings, weapons, and armour that can be found in the Old World.

Chapter 6: Combat, Damage, and Movement

The Warhammer World is not a peaceful one. You will be forced to fight for your life and this chapter tells you how to do it.

Chapter 7: Magic

Wizards and priests can draw on the Winds of Magic to cast spells, from the insignificant *magic flame* to the mighty *conflagration of doom*. This chapter explains how magic works, the dangers inherent to it, and the spells you can choose from.

Chapter 8: Religion and Belief

The Old World is a place where many gods exist. This chapter describes the gods and how they are worshipped.

Chapter 9: The Game Master

The GM has a special role to play in *WFRP* and this chapter explains how to take it on. In addition to advice on how to run a game and how to be a good Game Master, it contains rules for insanity and experience.

Chapter 10: The Empire

The Empire, the greatest nation of the Old World, is the core setting for *WFRP*. This chapter describes the Empire, its neighbours, and the threats it faces.

Chapter 11: Common Creatures and NPCs

The Old World is a dangerous place. This chapter, meant for the GM's eyes only, details many of the foes to be found there, as well as some common non-player characters (NPCs).

AN IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT REALITY

When you take part in a roleplaying game you and your fellow players set aside reality and literal truth for a world of imagination and adventure. The GM is there to create that world for the players. All the ideas and rules in this book are tools for the GM to use as he sees fit. *WFRP* is written with the assumption that each group of roleplayers is different—hence the inclusion of many optional rules. It is up to the GM to decide which rules apply, and which do not. The GM is the ultimate arbiter of the rules and may choose to modify, amend, or even ignore certain rules to better suit the play style of your group. Abide by your GM's decisions—after all, they are the one doing all the work to keep you and your group entertained!

Similarly, *WFRP* deals with many things that are very complicated. To make things easier for everybody, the rules in *WFRP* have accepted a level of abstraction. Some of the rules you encounter may not be “totally realistic” but they are fun and easy to use. Some people are uncomfortable with this, but most accept that this is necessary to keep things simple, and fast flowing. Should anyone start querying the rules, citing martial arts training, historical precedent, or even, Gods forbid, logic, the GM is fully within their rights to throw dice, food or even this book at the offender. *WFRP* is a game, not real life.

On a final note, it must be pointed out that *WFRP* deals with mature themes and concepts. Daemons, insanity, death, corruption and despair are all integral parts of the Warhammer World. Inside every cloud, there's a tarnished lining. Just because *WFRP* deals with these things, it doesn't mean every game session needs to be a harrowing experience. *WFRP* is a game. It's meant to be enjoyable. Similarly, all the things depicted in this book **do not exist**. The Ruinous Powers aren't watching you on the privy, and there's no such thing as a Goblin. Don't get confused—just play the game and have fun!

Chapter 12: Through the Drakwald

This is a short scenario you can use to jump right into the action. If you are a player, you should not read this chapter.

— AN EXAMPLE OF PLAY —

If you are new to roleplaying, you may still be unclear on how it all works. What follows is an example of play that picks up where the story “Life, After Death” left off. It doesn't get into the rules of the game (that comes later), but it does illustrate the basics of roleplaying and the Game Master's job.

In this example, Chris is the Game Master. Tim is playing Werner Broch, a Human Mercenary; Bruce is playing Franz Falker, a Human Militiaman; Evan is playing Grunor, a Dwarf Rat Catcher; and Kate is playing Imke, a Human Tomb Robber. They have just fought off the vile ratmen as the example of play begins.

Chris [GM]: The last of the ratmen flee into the ruins of Wolfenburg and are soon lost from view. The priest Sigamund turns to you and says, “Once again, I am in your debt. Thank you for your assistance.”

Tim [Werner]: “Just doing our jobs, manciple.”

Kate [Imke]: “What *were* those things? Rats that walk on two legs? Surely, madness has come to life!”

Evan [Grunor]: “Madness indeed. I told you about the ratmen and you thought I was crazed. Now you see I speak the truth.”

Chris [GM]: Sigamund looks nervous. He says, “Come, let us leave here before those things return with reinforcements.”

Tim [Werner]: “That is the safest course. Franz, Grunor, Imke, let's go.”

Bruce [Franz]: Chris, I want to get a look at Sigamund's hand again. I want to be sure of what I saw.

Chris [GM]: OK, you need to roll a Perception Test.

Bruce rolls his test.

Bruce [Franz]: I made it.

Chris [GM]: You catch another glance at his hand as he's wiping Skaven blood from his robe. The smear of rat



blood makes the symbol look even more sinister. You definitely remember seeing it during the siege of Wolfenburg. Sigamund, the supposed priest of Sigmar, bears the sign of Chaos. What do you want to do?

Bruce [Franz]: Nothing for now, but I keep a close eye on Sigamund.

Chris [GM]: OK, noted. Your band continues through the ruins for another half an hour. The air is periodically rent by an anguished scream; other than that, it is eerily silent. You can see the shadow of a large ruin up ahead. Sigamund says, "That's it. That's the temple of Sigmar."

Kate [Imke]: I slip ahead of the group, moving silently, and scout it out.

Tim [Werner]: I whisper, "Imke, no!"

Kate [Imke]: I whisper back, "I'll check things out. Cover me." Then I move off.

Tim [Werner]: "Franz, I told you Imke was your responsibility. She could get us all killed."

Bruce [Franz]: "I don't think so. Imke has, um, skills. Give her a chance."

Tim [Werner]: "What's that supposed to mean?"

Bruce [Franz]: I smile. "You'll see."

Evan [Grunor]: "I've seen enough already. She dealt swift death to the ratmen and can fight by my side anytime."

Tim [Werner]: "If she can stand the stench, that is."

Chris [GM]: OK, Imke, you move out alone. Make a Silent Move Test.

Kate rolls her test.

Kate [Imke]: I make it easily. I try to move up behind some cover so I can spy out the temple.

Chris [GM]: You quietly pad your way through the ruins and make your way into a burned out inn across from the temple. You have a good vantage point from here. Make a Perception Test.

Kate rolls her test.

Kate [Imke]: Made it again. I'll show that Werner! What do I see?

Chris [GM]: At first it looks deserted, but then you see the gleam of metal in a ruined tower. Looking closer, you see there are at least three men with crossbows up there. It looks like an ambush.

Kate [Imke]: I slip back to the group and report my findings. We've got some planning to do...

The adventure continues on from here. Who are the ambushers in the ruins? Are they allies of Sigamund or a different threat? And what is Sigamund's real purpose? Is the story of temple riches a convenient lie? Bruce, Kate, Tim, and Evan will find out as game goes on.



UPON THE MATTER OF THE EMPIRE

Being a noble Contemplation to fortify the mind for duty, encourage the spirit for worship, and steady the hand for battle, also to warn the unwise against neglect of vigilance or piety. So declaimed by Fra Albus Dominus of Wolfenburg, priest of Sigmar, this three hundredth day of the year 2520, to a great congregation of good folk in the high temple of that burg, and writ down as perfect testimony by R. Josephus, rubricator. Commend me, oh lord, to his Imperial Majesty Karl Franz, hammer of the heathens, everlasting in Sigmar's grace, world without end.

Gather close and listen now, be you ploughman or warrior, high-born or low. Attend me now. These words are meant for you, for are you not all men born of the Empire?

I see you nod. Aye, listen then, and consider. To be a man born of the Empire is to be one little part of a greater thing, and to play that part, a man must know his place in the workings of the World.

The first duty of a man is to rejoice! For the Empire is a glory upon the earth! It is the light by which the outer dark may be driven back! Never before, since the birth of the Ages, has man wrought such a great and civilising estate upon the face of the World!

To the common-born man, this is a thing he must know, even though he cannot see it. Even the blessed Emperor himself, from the highest battlement of his palace, yet even from the loftiest tower of Middenheim, cannot see the edges of his dominion all of a whole. It has been said that a man, even with a good mount, will ride for a full half-year of his lifetime if he wishes to cross the Empire from one margin to another. And how many men, of the base and common kind, never venture further than the limits of their village, or the boundaries of their parish? Such men know nothing of the greater thing, except that which they are told by travellers and scholars; such men never behold a building more splendid than their own burg's small guild hall, or a tower more massive than the spire of their poor village church.

Yet, as the thinkers of antiquity have taught us, just because we cannot see a thing, does not mean it is not there. We do not see the lamp of the sun at night, but we know it sleeps safe in its cavity beneath the earth. We do not see almighty Sigmar, yet we do not doubt that He watches over us always.

So it is with the Empire. We are girt about by its vast domain, wherein are mountains and moors, forests and pastures, rivers and vales, and many towns and greater cites, peopled by the common crowd and the noble born both. But we never see it whole and all together.

To imagine it in full, imagine this in its part. In fair Altdorf, in the gleaming halls of the most royal palace of all, there is a chamber of most wondrous beauty. The pillars of the walls are wrapped entire with gold leaf, and the great casements look out across the River Reik itself, a splendid vista. Upon the walls hang many an arras tapestry on which are threaded scenes of hunting and sport, of war and victory, of Lord Sigmar and the Unberogen. Marvellous to behold! But it is the floor which most arrests the eye.

Into this wide surface is inlaid, by means of handsome craft, a mosaic of lacquered wood and polished metals, forming in all detail a mappa mundi, a chart of this world that is the Empire. Few men have had the privilege of seeing this mappa mundi, but just because you cannot see a thing, does not mean it is not there.

I have seen it. I have seen it lit about with tapers. Such a thing it is...

The limits of the Great Chart are made of satin wood and silver thread, showing the icy bounds of our domain. Almost unbroken, a majestic circle of mountains surrounds the Empire, like the high brim of a vast chalice. Within that chalice bowl, the precious life-blood of the Empire and all its wealth is cupped.

Lime and rose wood segments interlock with burnished panels of green copper and ruddy brass to represent the extents of the eleven provinces, and rosettes of oak and maple, wound with gold wire, mark the places of the great city states. Each town or prosperous burg is a flat button of ivory. The web of rivers and their tributaries is chased out in bars of pearl and loops of spun steel. Lakes are slivers of looking-glass. The mighty forests of the realm, chevron darts of ebony, speckle the entire floor like the coat of a brindled mare.

Admire such craftsmanship! Here is Nordland, facing the sea. Here, if you look, Ostland, and Hochland too, dressed in forests, athwart the jumbled masses of the Middle Mountains. To the east there, Ostermark, guarding the line of the north against the cold encroach of Kislev, there rural Stirland and the Moot, the World's Edge Mountains climbing beyond them. To the south, Averland and Wissenland, contained to the east by the Black Mountains and to the west by the ancient forest tracts known as Loren. And there Talabecland, Middenland and Reikland.

Look closer now, at the proud cities: Nuln, pungent with black powder, the foundry of the Empire; Talabheim, the Eye of the Forest, its impenetrable wall protecting its pasture lands from the woods without; Middenheim, the city of the White Wolf, a craggy bastion raised above the world; and Altdorf, royal Altdorf, jewel of the Empire. And here too Wolfenburg, our own fair city, stalwart guardian of Ostland's reaches.

Marvel at it; rejoice! This Empire of man! Picture that fine chamber again, picture it as on a fair summer's evening, such as was the occasion when I witnessed it. Servants appear, dressed in fine livery. Flaming candles are brought out on golden sticks—one! two! a dozen! more!—and placed, each one particularly, upon the Great Chart to indicate the mighty cities and city-states. Then smaller tapers too, aflame also, carried in by more servants and set upon the mark of every noted town and burg. Such a sight! In the last rays of the sunlight falling in through the casements, the Great Chart is

ablaze with a thousand points of light, a constellation that shapes out in scintillating glory the immensity of our domain!

Thus may a man rejoice.

But attend me now. If a man's first duty is to rejoice, his second is to beware. For all the golden splendour of the Empire, for all its worth and lore and monuments of stone, there stands against it great and perpetual jeopardy: enemies more numerous than all the trees of the forest.

They coil in the darkness; the ice-darkness beyond the rampart mountains, the shadow-darkness of the deep forests, the tomb-darkness of the pits beneath the earth. They lurk in ruins, in desert places, in the long grass of forsaken fields, in the creaking, green-black shade of forlorn woodlands. They scuttle in dry catacombs, they claw beneath the flint and granite of the lonely hills, they haunt the tumbledown ruins of villages long since abandoned by man. They even stalk our own dreams. And, as night comes, they keen with the whippoorwills and move against us; curious, greedy, wild, rapacious, hungry.

The enemies are older than us, older even than the tribes we men of the Empire sprang from. Knowing only the clarion-cry of "Murder All!" they would set the world ablaze, make doom upon us, and carry off our heads on pikes!

You quake and you tremble! Justly so! They would make battle trophies of us, cast down our walls, and burn our crops! Our womenfolk, our children, none may be spared the dreadful butchery!

So we must watch for their first stirrings, and sharpen our blades. Place sentries on the walls. Close our gates at nightfall. Listen to the whisper of the wind and the sounds it may bring. Trust not the dark, or the scratching of rats, or even the neighbour whose ways seem alien. The enemy comes in all shapes and guises.

Some are beasts, some are wild, barbaric tribe-kin, some are vermin within our very walls. Most know nothing of our proud, fair gods, or if they do, know them only as bright things that they yearn to tear down and trample. They have spirits of their own, feral godlings and daemons which they worship with gleeful lust and to whom tributes are made in blood. In the name of Sigmar, we renounce all such misbegotten spirits!

What enemies, you mutter. I work my craft and pay my tithe and sleep soundly, and I have not seen the like of them. Just so? Yes? Beware! Just because you cannot see them, doesn't mean they are not there.

Consider their handiwork. There are bleak places in the Empire, out of the way of man, where certain ruins stand, open unto the elements. I have seen a few such edifices myself, and can attest to them. Time and weather have worn them plain, but it is still possible to discern that these ruins were not raised by human hands. They are the work of other kinds, other races that dwell in these lands long before the rise of the Unberogen. We may suspect they are the relics of the fading races; the half-ling men, the indomitable Dwarfs we sometimes welcome as allies, even, perhaps, the Slight Ones themselves, who linger in the ancient forest paths.

Whatever their makers' identity, they are just ruins now. Cold and dead. But they tell of huge strength and formidable defence. Indomitable bastions, high towers, earthworks, siege walls.

Yet none remain. For all their strength, they were overcome in the early times, and put to flame, and ransacked. Even they could not withstand the feral onslaught of the enemies in the dark. Even they could not withstand!

But we must. This I say to you with the force of my heart. We must beware at all times, and be ready, peasant farmer and spurred knight alike, to fight, for Sigmar, for the Emperor.

The Empire has stood for twenty-five centuries. It has driven back the green-skin brutes from the mountains, the tribal hordes from the north, the incursions of the blasphemous Dark Gods themselves. If the Empire is to stand for another twenty-five centuries, it depends on each and every man born its son! You, and you, and you!

Rejoice, but beware! Rejoice, but beware! That is balance every man must keep in his mind. Picture the Empire again, the glorious chart, lit by a thousand candle flames. Its achievements are manifold, its power great. No feat of mankind is more worthy of protection and safeguard.

But now the evening light fades, and night closes in outside the casements. In the splendid chamber, shadows gather, deeper, darker, until we cannot see the map at all anymore. Only the taper flames burn, a thousand furious, fragile lights in the dark. How small they seem now, how far apart from each other! What tracts of darkness separate one flame light from another!

And in that darkness, we cannot see. But just because we cannot see, doesn't mean there isn't something there.

The night wind picks up outside the casements. Close them fast, before it is too late! The scattered flames flutter, frantic in the black. One by one, they sputter and die.

How quickly they go out. How easily they are extinguished.

How total the darkness that remains.

Go from this place. Praise Sigmar, and go about your lives. Peddler, provost, woodsman, soldier, barkeep, coachman, chandler, goodwife... go to your varied callings and prosper. But keep the holy days and the festivals, bar the door at night, whet your blade's edge, and, in the name of Sigmar, keep watch against the dark.

How quickly the lights go out!

Here ends the lesson.