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Fantasy Gaming



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Fantasy Wargaming (FW) was written by a circle of gamers in and around Cambridge University under the leadership of Bruce Galloway. It would be fair to say that it was tremendously influential on my gaming, even though, to be perfectly honest, I've barely played it at all. My brother and I were pre-teens in the early 1980s and had been playing *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* for a while. We'd moved on to some other TSR games, mainly *Gamma World* and *Boot Hill*, as well as a few other systems like *Villains and Vigilantes* and *Champions*. *Dungeons & Dragons* (D&D) was our main reference point for fantasy but we'd been looking at other options. My brother, who would eventually become an engineer, loved

to tinker with systems and mechanics, and I had strong opinions, partly informed by my voracious reading. For whatever reason, when we stumbled onto the bizarre and idiosyncratic tome with the legend "The highest level of all -- Fantasy Wargaming" on its cover, we were intrigued. A casual skimming of book told us the authors meant to bring a kind of *realism* to the fantastic. The few tables, badly laid out as they were, promised a complicated system where one's strength and agility determined which weapons a character could wield effectively and magic was powered by something called "mana" that could be accumulated by various methods, including sacrifices! But there was also much more here than mere weapon fetishism and schoolyard Satanism. There was a kind of purism that focused on history and legend. The monsters were not just monster-movie chimeras. They were based on myth, legend, and the fantastic imaginings of alien civilizations – for what could be more alien to the pulp and comic book sensibilities of

D&D than actual medieval bestiaries and romance? It was something out of this world, although also wholly of this world, from the "foreign country" of the past.

We spent a great deal of time figuring out the character generation, combat, and magic systems. We puzzled over the incomplete and at times incoherent subsystems. I don't think we ever played out more than a single session, regardless of how many characters we rolled up. My brother eventually moved on to other systems, but something about this game kept me fascinated. In junior high school, I'd compile lists





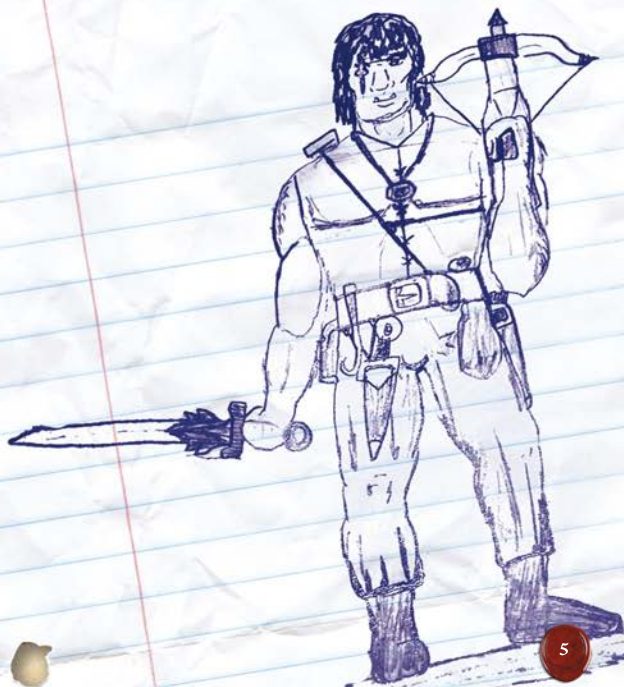
Image: The author's first D&D group -- from the right: his brother Tom, Mike, and the Miller twins

of magic items and monsters from myth and folklore to supplement the sketches in *FW*. I filled a sketchbook with drawings of monsters and their *FW* statistics. By high school, my first attempt at game mastering (GMing) would be a scenario based on Beowulf, using *FW* as the rules. It did not go well, for a number of reasons, and no one in my group asked to try *FW* again.

I put *FW* aside for maybe 20 years. Through the 1990s I played dozens of different games in a college club and with my brother and friends. The groups broke up and my hobby time dwindled. TSR was sold off, *D&D* re-imagined, and I focused on miniatures, painting and collecting for roleplaying games (RPGs) and wargames I rarely played.

In the later 2000s, I found the "Old School Renaissance" (or OSR), started a blog, and even became a Dungeon Master for a couple of reasonably successful *D&D* campaigns. The OSR bloggers often discussed old games, and I was saddened to see how little respect *FW* tended to get. Indeed, the conventional wisdom

seemed to be that it was unplayable, bigoted, and of interest only as a curiosity. But I also met a few folks who had the same soft spot for it. I saw other bloggers track down and interview the authors and artists of gaming past and wondered that no one had ever bothered to find this Bruce Galloway character, who edited *FW*, or the other contributors. As a professional librarian, I had a bit of experience tracking down writers and determined to put my investigative skills to use. Similarly, some bloggers were doing "cover-to-cover" commentaries on RPG materials, and I decided *FW* deserved no less treatment. This work is largely documented on my blog, *Swords & Dorkery*, and the curious might look there for a play-by-play account of it, but I'd like to present the result of my research in a more concrete, perhaps lasting, format, which is the present volume. In the meantime I published my own gaming book which was inspired



by much of the same spirit as *FW* which might equally well stand as my tribute to *FW*. However it would be a shame for the work I've done to bring *FW* back into the fold of semi-legitimate old school games to be lost whenever Word-Press decides it no longer reaps enough revenue from the visits and clicks on my blog and *Swords & Dorkery* disappears. I should admit that part of my motivation also comes from the fact that I've found my blogs on this topic cited in an academic treatise on games (White, 2014), which confirms my conceit that this work in some way advances scholarship. Indeed, the work here far outstrips and supersedes the blog posts in terms of accuracy and completeness, especially as so many additional sources have come to light since I started the project.

FW is what it is because of a constellation of factors: the aims of the lead author/editor, the contributions of the co-authors and their assorted friends, the intent of the publisher, and more. Both the flaws and the genius of the book were more than accidents,



Image: Christmas 1982. Author with the *Dark Tower* game, another RPG-related obsession

I think, and understanding the soil the book grew out of helps shed light on the artistic achievement it represents. I am no biographer and cannot pretend to tell the whole story of the authors and their authorship, but I hope the reader will find something here that increases their appreciation for *FW*.

Acknowledgments

This monograph would not have been possible without the support and help of many people. First and foremost, a huge thanks is owed to the people wrote or otherwise contributed to *FW* especially to Kevin Prior, Andy Strangeways, Lawrence Heath, and Ian Heath for their patient efforts to answer my questions and share memories, and most of all to Nick Lowe who went above and beyond with detailed recollections and excavating the primary sources to be found in the appendices here. Special thanks to my brother Tom Monaco, who made the fateful decision to buy the *FW* book in the mall's bookstore in 1984 or so, shared my enthusiasm for this unusual game, and provided many insights into the mechanics of the game. Thanks to C. Lee Vermeers, David Trimboli, and K. David Ladage, who share my fascination with *FW*, helped me understand the rules, and provided feedback on many occasions. Your patience is appreciated! Thanks to Ian McCullough for proofreading and insightful sug-

gestions. Thanks to all the folks online who posted in forums and who left comments on my blog, especially "Coyotegrey," "Luke," Jack Colby, "Tony," "Ze Bulette," Jeff Rients, "Telecanter," Anthony Emmel, "Scottsz," and "classicdnd." Many thanks also to David Day Stein, Hannah Sturman, N. Eric Phillips, Estelle Wolfers, Jon Green, Cheryl Morgan, Steve Coote, and the King's Lynn RPG & Gaming Club. Thanks to

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Tara C. Craig, and William Ingraham for their answers to my queries. Thanks to Timothy Hutchings, who first suggested revising the blog entries from 2010 into the present volume. Huge thanks to Heather Ford for the spectacular layout of the text and for providing so many great illustrations. And thanks to my family and friends for their patience with the hours I spent working on, and talking about, this book.

A note on citations of the text and other games

Fantasy Wargaming was published in three distinct editions. I would inevitably need to cite specific passages of the book, and settled on the book club edition (Galloway, 1982b) as it is the edition most readily available on the used book market. When referring to the game, I will follow the authors' habit of using "FW."

In the case of other games, it is generally clearer to cite them by title rather than the scholarly Author



Illustration by Lawrence Heath

(Year). The initial mention of games will include the Author (Year) citation, but thereafter I will prefer to use the title of the game, following the conventional abbreviations for *Dungeons & Dragons* (D&D) and *Tunnels and Trolls* (T&T).

A note on my informants

Some of the people who provided information about *FW* asked not to be identified for personal reasons. In the interest of preserving their privacy, I do not indicate them.

A note on terminology

“Roleplaying games” is sometimes hyphenated as “role-playing games,” or abbreviated “RPGs,” with or without the modifier “fantasy” (and thus “FRPGs”). I prefer the unhyphenated usage and use the acronym RPG, and pluralizing it as RPGs, but most often use just “games,” as do most of my sources. “Roleplaying game” or “RPG” is most often used to distinguish the hobby from other kinds of games; I trust the reader will be able to pick up the meaning in context.

The player in charge of running an RPG (as opposed to playing a personal “player character” or PC) is variously referred to as game master, GM, dungeon master, DM, judge, or referee within games texts and by gamers. I will use “game master” (generally abbreviated GM) in the present text, except of course when quoting other sources, and follow the convention of using “game mastering” (or GMing) to describe the activity involved in being a GM.

