Realms of Chaos
Slaves to Darkness

by Bryan Ansell, Mike Brunton and Simon Forrest
with additional material by Matt Connell, Graeme Davis and Rick Priestley
reviewed by Rev. Garett Lepper

Well, here it is. This is one of the "holy grails" of the Warhammer world, the first of the two volume Realm of Chaos books, and when it was published, the chaos in the Warhammer milieu became standardized and took its current and persistent form. It's a thick, densely illustrated book with a lurid and somewhat trashy cover.

So what is it like? Straight from the Table of Contents the book leaps into depth on the subject matter with its rather imposing list of contents. You need look no further than the table of contents to sort out what this book is about: "Chaos Crunchy Bits". It is in fact, "Ye Olde Book of Chaos Tables", and a person's enjoyment out of this book determines whether they want chart after chart of chaosy goodness or whether they were more interested in exploring the background, details, nature and philosophy of Chaos. If you're into background and atmosphere, this book has much less to offer than one would think. But if you want to do a lot of die rolling, then this book can't help but appeal to you.

Background?

There is a page on the Spread of Chaos, each chapter begins with the ongoing tales of two brothers, seduced by chaos, and then a blurb on an area in the Realm of Chaos (with accompanying Miller illustrations). The Chaos Pantheon gains a meager page describing the entire pantheon. However only two of the gods are really covered in any detail in this book: Slaanesh and Khorne, who each get a single page write up on the nature of that chaos power. And that's about it for the background, except for the continuing aforementioned chapter introductions on the brothers and chaos locales.

Crunchy Bits?

That's about all there is. The book launches into rules on Daemons: their types, daemon pacts, allies, servitors, magic, the "death" of daemons, a list of daemonic abilities, daemon names, and then onto the daemons of Khorne and Slaanesh (in WFB and WFRP stats). It's a little light on atmosphere, heavy on detail. Even with the illustrations, the book packs the information in.

However the book doesn't stop there. "Followers of Chaos" provides a brief introduction to those who follow the powers of chaos before launching into the "system" to govern the followers of chaos. Essentially it introduces us to the "Chaos Champion", either a Chaos Warrior or Chaos Sorcerer who, with their loyal band of flunkies battle for the honor of their gods as well as for the blessings their gods bestow upon them. Their is even a flowchart which, rather than simplify the process, seems to make it even more byzantine and chaotic. When one is bestowed a blessing by the god, they receive a reward of chaos, thus rolling on the "Chaos Rewards Table". From there they can gain a "Chaos Attribute" (essentially a mutation) in which case they roll on the "Chaos Attribute" table, gain armor, weapons, steeds, hounds, or spawn as servants, or the gain a "Gift of the Gods" result which entails rolling on the "Gift of the Gods" table. Of course, the rest of the chapter is taken up by the long "Rewards of the Gods" tables (one for Slaanesh and one for Khorne), rules on the fate of champions (includes a Chaos Spawn table), ascendance to daemonhood, or death and service as a Skeletal Champion. There are also tables for the retinue of the champion ("Retinue Table") and of course a table for the rewards of the followers (Follower's Reward's Table). A section on "Instant Daemon Princes and Chaos Spawn" predictably provides tables for generating these things on the "Chaos Spawn Creatures Table". There is, at the very end of this chapter, a single page on integrating Chaos Champions into WFRP.

The Magic of Chaos does start off with an introduction on Magic, so maybe I've been a bit harsh in my assessment of the book's background value, and it does provide a nice introduction to the magic of chaos. It provides two new spells, "Dispel Daemonic Presence" and "Summon Daemon Pack", provides details on Pentagrams and summoning, and then goes onto daemonic abilities and magic (with a complicated daemon saving throws table). Then again the chapter turns to the magic of the chaos powers and goes into more detail on magic and spells, introducing four Slaaneshi spells. This chapter does have its table, in this case the "Chaos Weapons" table which details close to 80 chaos properties for chaos weapons. Not to be outdone, Daemon Weapons follow, which are not merely weapons bestowed with the power of chaos, but are weapons composed of the bound body of a daemon. Like Michael Moorcock's "Stormbringer", these weapons are extremely powerful and drain the vitality of their foes. The chapter continues on with a few "Chaos Magic Items" and rules for familiars (there are six types described in the book). As I stated, the book is quite dense with content, and this chapter is no exception.

The Mark of Chaos is no less dense, as the entire chapter is comprised of one huge table: the "Personal Attributes Table" which has over 120 individual mutations for Champions of Chaos. It is accompanied by a smaller "Dominant Attribute Table" that has some 60 or so results to determine the most frequent mutations among chaos creatures. This table is one of the more useful, allowing one to quickly determine results for beastmen, mutants, and chaos warriors without any of the unbalancing results so common on the "Personal Attributes Table".

What is a Games Workshop publication without Miniatures? The "Colours of Chaos" chapter provides us with 16 pages of coloured pictures of miniatures and drawings of banners, interspersed with a painting guide and sample warbands.

Hordes of Chaos is primarily the army list for Warhammer Fantasy Battle 3rd edition, although it also details how to run truly epic battles in the Chaos Wastes amongst Daemon armies. This section takes up close to 30 pages in the book.

Dark Millenium section takes up the remainder of the book and deals with the forces of Chaos in Warhammer 40,000. Initially, this may seem of little value to those interested in the worlds of WFRP, WFB, and Mordheim, but in truth it is one of the more useful chapters in the book! Its treatment of the chaos powers and Warpspace is more useful than the earlier material, and for those with any interest in 40k the material is exceptional since it provides a wealth of detail. Of additional use are rules for "Intrusions", daemons breaking through the fabric of reality and some details on possession, the latter proving quite useful for WFRP. The remainder of this section and book details chaos renegades, traitor legions, the daemon-hunting Ordo Malleus and 40k Army lists.

Is all the detail in the book worth hunting the book down? If one is a collector then the answer is "yes!" but for everyone else the answer varies. Overall I recommend this book to everyone, but for those who want to really plumb the depths of the nature of chaos this book offers very little, it is primarily a collection of tables and the like. However the descriptions of daemons, rules for the magic of chaos, and the sheer number of mutations and weapons makes this book useful to those who really enjoy lots of detailed technical information. If it can be purchased for a reasonable price, then acquire it, but take note, this book is rare and often sells for anywhere between 50 and 100 US dollars (equivalent to 30 to 60 pounds sterling). I must state though that this book really focuses on just one vision of what Chaos is in the world and does little to expand it beyond the stereotypes that this book first fabricates. For those seeking something ground breaking and/or mind blowing, this book may very well disappoint you. I personally found this book to be full of information and well worth the investment.

Stun Factor 8 of 10