

In Open Box, fantasy and science fiction games and supplements currently in the shops are examined by independent reviewers.

OPEN BOX

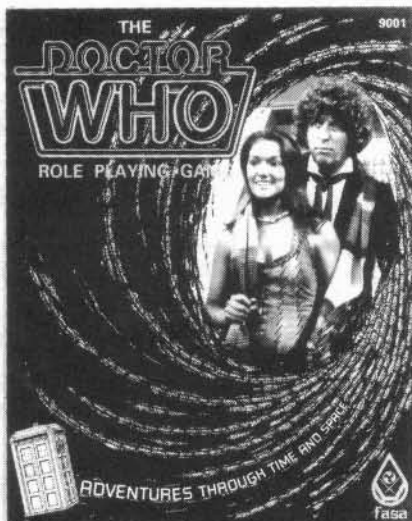
THE DOCTOR WHO ROLE-PLAYING

GAME
Role-Playing Game
FASA

£14.95

A game about *Dr Who* designed by Americans? Surely not! But it's true, and the remarkable thing is that they've made such a good job of it. For *Dr Who* is rooted in the minds of a large proportion of the population of this country in such a way that mistakes in this game would very rapidly become obvious. And while it's by no means perfect, I can assure anxious punters that FASA have spared no effort in ensuring that the flavour of the series is captured. Let's start at the beginning, though, and get the hard facts out of the way.

The game comes in three books, one for players, one for the GM, and a general source-book. Presentation is generally good, being reminiscent of that used in the *Star Trek* RPG. This similarity goes further, as many of the same rule systems are used – particularly in combat.



The most important difference, however, is that *Dr Who* is played with six-sided dice only, and this requires an alteration in the method of rolling for skill use. This is achieved by means of the Interaction Matrix, a general purpose table used for all skill or attribute use. Each scale of the Matrix is referenced by both a numerical scale of -12 to +12, and a Roman Numeric scale of I to VII. The Roman Numeric scale is that used to grade all attributes and skills, and determines the 'Entry' line to the Matrix, which is moved up and/or down the numeric scale according to situational modifiers. This is done both for the character performing the action (who uses the vertical scale) and the Resistance (whether it be an opposing character's skill, or an abstract value representing difficulty). Cross-indexing on the Matrix yields a number, which a character must roll under on 2d6 to succeed.

Character generation uses the now-popular method of allocation. A random number of points are generated and added to the base of 6 in each of the six attributes, to generate a raw score. This then determines the Level of the attribute. Each successive level costs a number of points equal to its own value, plus the cost of the previous level, making general competence relatively easy, but mastery quite exceptional. The points in each attribute further yield a number of points to be used to generate starting skills. Skills are bought in the same way as attributes, and the system is weighted so that it is easier to acquire skills connected with your higher attributes. Skills are rated in terms of both Levels (Roman Numeric) and by the number of points.

Combat is deadly. The *Dr Who* philosophy that if you're hit, you're either incapacitated or dead certainly applies here. While it is based on the Matrix, the Combat system has added complexity, including numerous modifications, and an Action Point system to regulate movement.

These are the hard details. Perhaps more important with a game such as this is the background – the feel of the game, and how closely it resembles the feel of the series. Here FASA have applied the thoroughness we expect from the makers of *Star Trek*. Certainly there are occasional contradictions with isolated details from the series, but nowhere are these worse than the series' own continuity cock-ups, and they generally make the background far more coherent than one would expect from such a sprawling mythos as *Dr Who*.

The depth of detail is remarkable. Considerable space is (quite rightly) given over to the operation of a TARDIS, and theories of time travel. The FASA rationalisation of time travel is slick and playable, and as long as your players aren't deliberately aiming to mess you about will remove the problems of time paradox quite neatly. Details are also given about Gallifrey, and this includes mention of the Celestial Intervention Agency – the underground organisation which is responsible for all these player character Time Lords whizzing about in space and time, righting wrongs, fighting evil, and generally behaving like the Doctor. Players who aren't Time Lords, by the way, are human companions.

Further goodies include stats for a small selection of the Doctor's most dreaded enemies, information on the technological hardware that's available, and copious notes on how to generate alien worlds and inhabitants. Although the latter section contains a stupid error (a linear multiple is used to generate planetary area, when it should be squared) all are usable without being unnecessarily complex. The Game Master's book also contains some excellent

essays on the craft of running a rolegame, which should be invaluable to inexperienced GMs.

I can find no major flaws in this game, despite my initial reservations at the idea of a fundamentally British institution being interpreted by an American company. The systems are not revolutionary, but they are quite simple and easy to use, and complement the wealth of background detail admirably. I can appreciate what an achievement it is to wrap together the *Dr Who* mythos into a coherent whole, having tried it myself – there has been a lot of effort put into this game, and it shows. Recommended for anyone who has watched and enjoyed an episode of *Dr Who*.

Complexity:	5	Ease of Use:	7
Production:	7	Value:	6
Overall:	8	Paul Mason	

KING ARTHUR PENDRAGON

Role-Playing Game
Chaosium

£25.95

King Arthur Pendragon, or *Pendragon* as it is constantly referred to, looks like being one of the best systemised role-playing games around. There are more free-form games, such as *AD&D* and *RuneQuest*, but these cannot be realistically compared with *Pendragon* because there is something a lot more essential and vibrant contained within the game itself; it is itching to be played as soon as you open the first book and start reading. *Pendragon* is better compared with *Middle-earth Role Playing (MERP)* or *Call of Cthulhu* because it revolves around something specific and laid out for all to see. However, the *MERP* system leaves a lot to be desired (in terms of presentation if nothing else) and *Call of Cthulhu* can be very disconcerting to those who have not read Lovecraft. *Pendragon*, on the other hand, draws from folklore so popular that no one can have escaped exposure to it in one form or another; the bibliography covers sources as diverse as John Steinbeck and Mary Stewart in addition to Sir Thomas Malory, Nennius and *The Mabinogion*. Then there are the popular T H White books and the more recent stories by Gillian Bradshaw and Phyllis Ann Karr. Even if your players are illiterate they can go and see *Excalibur*!

The name of the game, to use a cliché, is Chivalry. Player characters are knights (and possibly ladies) seeking glory for themselves and their lieges; they follow the legendary timeline through from the death of High King Uther Pendragon and wait for his heir to arrive; later they can help unify the Kingdom once more and turn it into an Empire by fighting the marauding Saxons and Irish; and all the time there are tournaments to attend, quests to achieve, damsels to be saved, honour to be upheld and fame and fortune for the taking. Character progression is measured by Glory which can be gained and lost over the course of each year; then in the winter, the knights and nobles return to their homes to lick their wounds and count the spoils of war. The game moves on a much faster time scale than most others, with a year quite possibly passing in a session. This in turn is

reflected by major events happening elsewhere: people are born and grow up and do their deeds (unless player characters interfere) and then die: after all, the scope of the Arthurian epic is truly vast and this game attempts to paint it in all its splendour. So player characters have to participate in all the facets of knightly life, such as gaining a wife and begetting children, preferably boy-children, so that their line can be carried on; and who better to play the son than the player of the father. In this manner, Greg Stafford has elevated the campaign to a new level, where a player must role-play a whole genealogy.

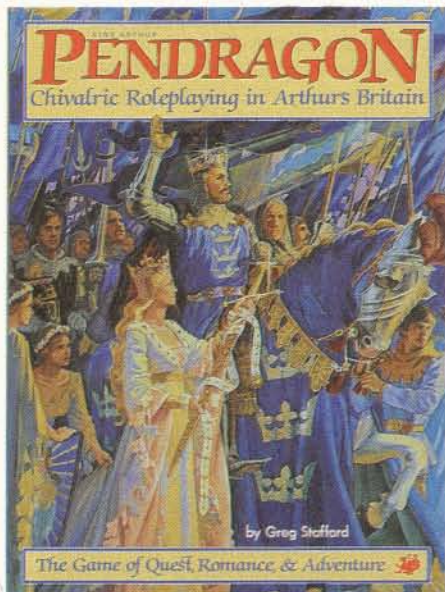
If this is the flavour and style of the *Pendragon* rolegame, what then is the material like? For the £25.95 price tag you get an elegant box containing two rule booklets (one of 88 pages, one of just 16), some character sheets, some characters known from the literature, a summary sheet with tables and a full colour map of Britain as represented by the game. Greg Stafford and his team have put much thought into the game, and an awesome amount of research. They have organised a timeline for the campaign to progress upon: no mean feat when the best scholars cannot even agree which century to place Arthur in; added to which they have produced an

ful maidens come to the knight's bed-chamber, what does he do? The Passions also give characters secondary goals to aim for alongside the primary one of Glory, and are typically spurs such as Loyalty, Love, Hate and Amor. These additions mesh into a unified whole: Skills can be matched with Passions, Passions can interact with Traits and Traits can influence Skills.

Needless to say there are many other parts to the system, all worked in with the background. Rules for battle, for tournaments, for running an estate and a family, for behaviour, for courting ... The rulebook is enlightening and interesting to read on its own; the text is error-free and accompanied with lavish illustrations by the talented Lisa Free and has glosses in the manner of illuminated mediaeval bibles and texts. These side notes are humorous, illustrative, useful and complement the tenor and spirit of the rules.

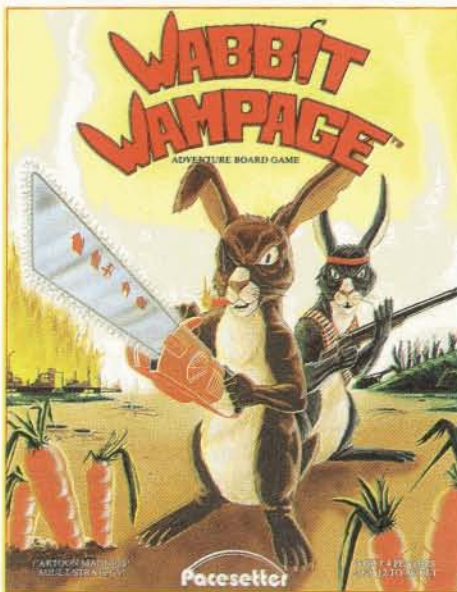
Overall, I would not hesitate to recommend the game to any rolegaming aficionado who is looking for inspiration ... were it not for the dreadful price.

Complexity:	7	Ease of Use:	9
Production:	10	Value:	6
Overall:	9	Graham Staplehurst	



accurate portrayal of British folk beasts that derives nothing from Tolkien's legacy.

For characters, who get the lion's share of the rules, generation is handled very adeptly. There is a span of cultures and talents open to all, with the restrictions of putting knightly skills to the fore, but all these are useful anyway. The skills system derives from *RuneQuest/Basic Role-Playing* but is simpler and only uses d6s and d20s (you get both in the box). However, Greg Stafford has taken the ideas behind Chivalry and the knightly ideal and converted them into a beautiful system for handling behaviour, based on Personality Traits and Passions. These help to illustrate – but do not restrict – characters, and would greatly facilitate rolegaming for novices. They are also useful tools for both the players and the GM to use in unfamiliar situations: for example, when taking refuge in a monastery and seven beauti-



WABBIT WAMPAGE
Boardgame
Pacesetter

£17.95

Wabbit Wampage is loosely based on most of the cartoons you can remember which did not include mice, cats or pigs. Set in rural America mid bosky glades and rolling arable land the game postulates a war between the tribes of Wabbits and Mr Farmer. The Farmer lives on a four part jig-map. He farms a number of fields abutting the highway and has a number of woods, meadows and buildings on his property. He also has Wabbits and lots of 'em. The belligerent bunnies are not only determined to beat the farmer but the other tribes of rabid rabbits. Make no mistake this is a game with a serious theme.

Also trolling around the property are sundry cartoon characters (a Duck, a Bear, a Big Chicken, and two, count 'em,

two Chipmunks); these go by the generic name of Local Critturs. The Farmer is assisted by his Dog (not I note a Dawg) and the Farm Hand who slumbers in the arms of Morpheus beneath l'arbre des Chipmunks. Scattered around the farm are numerous 'artifacts' like shotguns, tractors, etc.

There are twelve turns to the game and each turn is one month in duration. In each turn the players (up to four, one farmer and three tribes of conies) go through the same process. They discard and draw cards. They move a character and attack with him. They then repeat this for each other character all the while playing cards as the whim takes them. The Cards contain Defence cards, Zap cards (in fact, to use current military jargon, dedicated zap cards; each has a particular target including the mail-box), Mail Order cards (all the extraneous elements of cartoon violence – like dynamite – must come from somewhere – the Mail Order Catalogue being the source), Local Crittur cards, Attack cards, and Special cards.

Combat consists of adding 2d10 plus attack bonuses and trying to get more than the target's defence value. This is not easy and most attacks (like in the cartoons) cause little more than momentary concussion, leaving the target free to whomp someone else. Whomping causes the victim to go back to his home base and to lose all his artifacts. This is a game with a lot of whomping.

To add to the agricultural leitmotiv of the piece the turns and the victory conditions reflect the agricultural year. In the Spring months one not only gets points for whomping your enemies (a year-long pursuit among these rubes) but gets points for ploughing fields with the tractor. Most of the Spring turns therefore consist of violent hijackings. Seldom does one see the carrots planted and I fear the designer does not penalise either the cash-less Farmer or the food-less Wabbits. Come Summer one stockpiles the carrots in the barn. What a joyful occasion as all the cartoon characters assist in bringing in the sheaves. Come Fall it's big points for whomping – but the Farmer receives the assistance of the Hunters so watch out Wabbits! In Winter the Wabbits, Soviet-like in their warren structures, launch a Winter Offensive and get points for zippoing the farm buildings while the Farmer tries to fend them off.

What can one say about this game? True to its origins, certainly. Internally consistent, I think so. Physically attractive, again one must say it certainly is. Indeed I may even say it is better researched and more redolent of its subject than are most wargames or RPGs. This is the *Bushido* of wampaging wabbitdom. It's also rather tedious in play with lots of inconclusive dice-rolling. This vice of the game could, however, be instanced as a virtue in that it exactly simulates the continual violence of its subject-matter. If not an inspired design it is at least an informed one.

Complexity:	3	Value:	4
Production:	7	Playability:	9
Skill:	4	Overall:	6

Charles Vasey