



Open Game Table: The Anthology of Roleplaying Game Blogs, Volume I

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Open Game Table has the accurate subtitle of "The Anthology of Roleplaying Game Blogs, Volume 1". Editor Jonathan Jacobs has scoured the 'net in a quest of a number of articles that provide a snapshot of what is happening 'on the street', as it were, within our hobby. It is, of course, a highly selective and subjective process, however it is evident that some effort has been made to seek a diversity of sources. The book is softcover, well bound, with two column serif font throughout. Neither the murky cover art nor the internal cartoons show a great deal of artistic technique, although the latter are often contextually appropriate and on occasion can bring some level of mirth.

Organised into ten chapters, the book comes with a comprehensive table of contents but no index. The articles usually come with a URL but unfortunately this is often a domain rather than path URL, meaning that you're probably required to using a search engine to find the article anyway. As is the nature of a compilation of 'blog posts, there is sometimes an excessive amount of white-spaces where some extra artwork could have been handy.

As can be expected the style is highly variable, which is often a good thing. I appreciated the ineberiated rant of Jeff Rients on 'How To Awesome Up Your Players', as much as I disagreed with the content. Likewise, I didn't have much time for the style of James Raggi's 'Is This How D&D Is Supposed To Be Played?', although it was solid in content. A little less expected was the variability in substance. The first three chapters are full of awesome; there is excellent advice on play style, game play and characters and players throughout. Likewise I thought Jonathan Drain's 'The Invisible Dungeon' pushed the metaphor just far enough as an example of narrative, and of course the famous article by Ben Robbins on 'Brunstein' as the origin of roleplaying games is certainly a classic.

On the converse side, I was reminded how much of a space-filler D&D 4th edition could be with the eighteen page article on the monk, followed by a paragon path for the Warlock. Indeed D&D, and especially D&D4th edition, is the only game system that receives particular attention. Not only with a more expansive reader find absolutely nothing about other game systems, nor will they find anything in particular outside of the fantasy genre. Many of the articles are undeveloped, often barely more than a page of an idea that is left without sufficient elaboration to be useful. This is fine of course, if you have a particular desire to play a monk in 4th edition D&D. Indeed, for that purpose it is an excellent and complete article. But that's a pretty narrow focus for a book that's entitled "An Anthology of Roleplaying Game Blogs" - more specifically it is "An Anthology of Almost Exclusively Fantasy Roleplaying Blogs With Some Specialist Articles on D&D4e". This is not quite what I expected from the title of the book and seems very odd given the emphasis on variety that is evident on other metrics.

More on-topic with the title; it is a collection of 'blog posts. As such, it contains many lightning flashes of genius in the various short pieces. But it usually lacks the substantial thunder that is supposed to follow in lengthier form, and it often lacks the editorial discipline of demanding something that can be used in a very immediate and practical sense around in actual play. As an example of this there's the excellent illustrative and review article on "Healing Time Sets The Tempo" by Martin Ralya, which compares (with some exaggeration) the difference in healing between D&D, Decipher's Star Trek, Hunter: The Reckoning and Pendragon. It serves as an observation, but there's no further elaboration and no evidence of experimentation, for example the effects of changing the healing system of D&D4e to something more like Pendragon and the effects this had on narrative tempo. As another example the very short sample NPC 'The Stargazer' was absolutely tantalising and extremely incomplete in both character description and game

statistics.

There are, of course, some exceptions to this. Whilst I am unlikely to use it myself, the creation of counters for D&D battlemaps using Photoshop, metal washers and glue had a delightful old-school feel to it. The essay 'The Adventure Funnel' whilst not providing immediate solutions itself, does provide a set of ideas on how to generate immediate adventure situations, and "Making the Party: Wedge Issues" provided a quick solution to those situations when players both have a very similar wish for character design.

Overall, this is an interesting survey of existing those many die-hard fans that make up the RPG blogging community and who really keep this hobby alive and kicking; the single-page of 'blogs on the final page, the RPG Bloggers network, is certainly an opportunity to spend one's hours reviewing the imagination that is generated by such fans. Due the peculiar features of the medium and the the variety of authors, the book is certainly a mixed bag and, is often the case, a far cry from the back-cover blurb that describes it as "a must-have for any roleplaying game enthusiast". It is not a "must-have" but certainly an interesting collection with some very good ideas which can be useful with a bit of work. Certainly kudos are deserved to the editor who decided - quite correctly - that these 'blogs are deserving of an "in print" recognition as a new moment in the hobby's development.

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