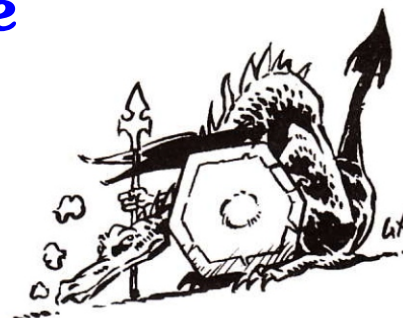




Dragon

**Roleplaying game
for wargamers
or wargame
for realists?**



Before getting to the heart of the matter, let's admire for a moment the box cover illustrated by Florence Magnin - ah! If only all games had such beautiful boxes! A moment of tenderness... Okay! Dragon Noir, Volume 1 - Exile! What can I tell you? It's Cry Havoc adapted from the fantasy genre. Sorry? You don't know Cry Havoc? Then follow the guide...

Little reminder for the uneducated and the absent-minded

Cry Havoc (in everyday French, "No quarter!") is a military simulation game (a wargame, what!) set in the medieval era and before that, for scale, one pawn = one man (hey! That's the role-playing game scale, right?). Its rules are of English inspiration (in fact, the game was born there), but they were extensively revised by Duccio Vitale, head of Eurogames, who refined them to eliminate the bugs, inaccuracies, and other absurdities that plagued the original edition. Soon, the game spawned other games, entirely compatible in terms of rules, pawns, and cards, but playable independently of each other.

First, there was Siege, which, as its name suggests, sent dashing Knights and poor, poorly armed pagans storming a fortified castle. But already, all the cards in this second game could be used with those in the first box, as could the pawns—which are better called characters—since they all have names.

Then came the Croisades, where the joyful soldier of Christ could have his armor dented by the infidel lances. The use of a map of the Near East around the year 1100 made it possible (especially in the French version) to link the battles together and play a campaign in which a young knight could become a powerful lord. But here too, the compatibility of the games was respected.

**Eurogames' latest game
aims to appeal to
both roleplayers and wargamers.**

**And indeed,
thanks to many good ideas
and the core qualities
of the Cry Havoc series,
of which it is
the most recent incarnation,
it might just succeed!**

We weren't far from Asia, so why not push on to the Far East and the Land of the Rising Sun? With Samurai, the ninjas brought into the picture. Who would be the new Shogun? And since the compatibility remained perfect, you could have samurai and paladins face off, even if this mix made for some bizarre fare.

Add to these three games two expansions, the Templars' Castle and the Fortified Medieval City... And another complete game: by the time you read these lines, Vikings will finally be on the shelves of your favorite store, with rules for naval combat, boarding, and landing. All in all, a great family, right? And one whose French parents can be all the more proud since their rules are clearly superior to those of the original versions.

The Great Adventure

But wasn't the dream of knights to fight dragons? Finally, they are coming to us—and it's not just, especially in England, the addition of more or less fanciful rules to the basic system, but an authentic epic in four volumes/boxes. A Romanesque story underlies the series of four boxes, the first of which is entitled Exile.

and the second, which should be released this fall (in time for your little Christmas anyway). The Trial. We will then see a more strategic game. The Conquest and finally The Return. Each box is, it must be emphasized, a complete game. A small band of courageous rebels led by a noble warrior, an equally noble warrior and a powerful magician has fled the terrifying war-wolves of the abominable tyrant Sigeric (we will only discover the wolves in question in Volume 3 but, according to our spies, we have nothing to lose by waiting!). Our soldiers are now on a lost island inhabited by various tribes: orks, dwarves, elves, trolls. The first five scenarios tell of their confrontation with the orks. Then the adversaries. Having become allies (with Orks? But yes. Don't be racist!), they will have to slay a monstrous dragon and finally penetrate the caves of the Black Dwarves to rescue a princess and a dragon trainer... Phew.

A Well-Developed System

The rules are characterized by great clarity, derived from the original system, duly tested by experience. The description of a pawn is enough to summarize a large part of it: top left, attack potential; top right, defense potential (in a circle for armored characters); and bottom, movement potential. This is something that means something to wargamers, but the average roleplayer seems capable of assimilating without overheating their brain. However, the great originality of the series lies in the fact that each character is represented by two pawns: a pawn in good form (on the back: character knocked out) and a wounded pawn (on the back: character killed). The characters who can ride a horse also have a pawn representing them in good form and on horseback (back: horse without a rider) and one representing them wounded and on horseback (back: horse killed). In any case, we are treated to a very enjoyable illustration.

Noir

The game turn represents at most a few dozen seconds of real (or fantasy) time. Player A's turn follows that of Player B. For each turn: offensive shots from the phasing player's archers, movement of the phasing player's characters, and any defensive shots from the opposing archers, melee combat, rules based on the good old system of balance of power, and recovery of the phasing player's characters knocked out during the previous turn.

Nothing insurmountable in this sequence. The only tricky points seem to me to come from the fact that, to shoot defensively, characters armed with longbows or crossbows must not have moved during their turn: it's better to use random markers to avoid disputes. Obviously, there are problems with the line of fire, the protection offered by walls, the advantages given to shooters by towers...

Let's clarify here - Eurogames won't hold it against us - that if a line of fire Along one side of an obstacle square, shooting is possible, unless the side in question separates two obstacle squares.

As for movement, there are no notable difficulties. As with all the rules, everything is very well explained—and, I'll remind the inattentive, it's in French! Which makes things much easier. One interesting point to note: even if there isn't the sacrosanct Zone of Control of most wargames, a character is exposed to a passing attack if they cross a square adjacent to an opponent. Obviously, purists will want to orient their pawns and only allow this passing attack in the defenders' front squares. It's up to you; it's not difficult but a bit of a pain to use, and the proposed system works well that way. You can still decide that a knight can only make a passing attack on an opponent crossing a square adjacent to his front half [the one with a small black arrow].

Close combat is, as we've said, very simple. It's worth noting that on the table showing the results of combat against knights, the results C, D, E, F, G, and H all apply to the defender. Also, be aware of the numerous specificities of this or that character or character type: there's a generous menagerie in this game!

In short, the rules of Dragon Noir seem remarkably clear and concise to me. A little attention while reading guarantees smooth, and therefore enjoyable, games.



Magic within everyone's reach

And then there's magic. It's easy to make a mountain out of a molehill when you look at the entire books devoted to it in some role-playing games. Here, all you need is a small double-sided sheet and less than two short pages of rules. Each magician can cast one spell and one counter-spell per player turn, spending a certain number of energy points to do so. Here again, you're free to expand the list of available spells.

Once upon a time...

There are seven scenarios available, playable separately or as a campaign. In the latter case, the first five even use a brilliant trick: the characters.

The sequence of scenarios in the campaign and the ability to swap roles between players avoids unbelievable behavior (continuing to have a wounded player fight to the death) or unnecessarily bloody behavior (finishing off a harmless wounded player for the hell of it). Because you have to think about the next scenario! Needless to say, even the Black Dwarves will be recruited for scenario 8: avoid massacring them.

Ultimately, Dragon Noir is taking off very well as a wargame to follow. It's probably the first game of this style to appear as a serialized series! Of course, it's not a role-playing game, since there are no roles to play, strictly speaking. But it could provide wargamers with a very appealing change of scenery, and above all, beyond its serial or purely personal appeal, it could provide role-players with the opportunity to quickly and pleasantly play through the battles that punctuate their adventures. Especially since with the entire Cry Hovoc series, you have a host of settings and characters (player and non-player) at your fingertips, including magical creatures (you have gargoyles and undead in Exile, and more in future installments).

Can't wait for the sequel!

Frank Stenra

Technical Sheet

Dragon Noir 1: Exile is a game in French published by Eurogames.

Materials:

- 2 surface maps (the Watermill and the Enclosure) comparable with all the maps in the series, 2 underground maps (the Dragon Lake and the Dwarfs' Cave), 3 sheets of scenery elements to cut out.
- The pre-cut colored tokens (one sheet) are also compatible with the rest of the series.
- Player aid sheets, two magician sheets, two character distribution sheets for scenarios 1 to 4, a 10-sided die, the rules and magic booklet, a booklet telling the story and describing the scenarios, and a storage case.