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## About this Book

Just a few points I thought may be useful to clear up :

- This sourcebook is free and freely distributable.
- Compatibility with Warhammer Fantasy Battle wasn't an objective. This work is based on the description of Bretonnia given in the WFRP rulebook (p. 274-277). What we have put together is dark, fun and occasionally innovative.
- If you don't like something in this book, change it. It is your creative right to do so. In the end, there is no official WFRP World but that of the GM.

I hope you enjoy our corrupt vision of Bretonnia.

Thanks,

Peter Butterworth (Project Coordinator)

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# Prologue

By Rory Naismith



*'...and with a great roar the dragon keeled over and breathed its last.'*

The reader swirled his short, polished knife in the air and stabbed it down into the hard wooden table. It made a thud which, with a little stretch of the imagination, could easily have been the skewering of a dragon's throat. A suitably awed gasp arose from the three listeners. Feeling proud of himself, the reader looked back down at the book and carried on. He was expecting a few appreciative pennies this evening from the satisfied audience.

*'The gallant Sir Agravain retrieved and cleaned his sword and advanced into its fetid, bone-strewn lair. There, he freed the fair, virginal maiden from her ghastly bonds, and she made sweet moan...'*

'She what?' asked a gruff voice.

The reader jumped slightly, his imagination jarring to a halt. The wizened forest of Sir Agravain and his lady faded from view, leaving him sitting at a chipped table in the shadowy, smelly inn on a cold night. 'She...made sweet moan. It's what fair, virginal maidens do when they've been freed by a brave knight in shining armour.'

Arnaud, the short but burly innkeeper, folded his arms and narrowed his eyes at the reader. His pox-scarred face made the young reader squirm uncomfortably as he awaited some kind of reaction. Eventually, Arnaud gave a low, disapproving grunt which signified his deep-felt sentiments and grudgingly allowed the reader to continue. But the suspension of disbelief had evaporated. Moan, sweet or otherwise, was not heard from females in Arnaud's establishment, 'Le Jardin d'Or', and in the opinion of Arnaud and his regulars was best saved for the kitchen and the bedroom. Those ladies who did enter the inn were bound by a strict but unspoken rule of silence and respectable distance from male conversation. In the

reader's humble opinion, chivalric stories were not to be criticised and challenged - who was he or any winey innkeeper to find fault with the great Sir Agravain? - but to help him escape from the trials of daily life and perhaps earn a few extra pennies. He continued, determined to try and salvage whatever credibility and coppers he could.

*'...she made sweet moan. Then they mounted Sir Agravain's noble steed and rode through the forest for three nights and three days until they came to a narrow bridge over a deep river. Before this river there stood...'*

'A knight in black armour, perhaps?' offered the unshaven soldier crouching on a stool to the reader's left. He wore a mail shirt and a badly weathered breastplate, and a dented helmet rested beside his goblet of wine on the table.

'Maybe,' replied the reader, not wanting to spoil the story yet further for the others and risk losing all his pay at the tale's end. 'You'll have to wait and see.' He smiled at his own quick-witted reply and prepared to go on, but was interrupted by the soldier again, who was getting slowly and contentedly drunk on Arnaud's heavy red wine.

'They always wear black, bad knights. It's so the good knights can tell they're not killing each other. In stories.' He took another swig of wine, then spoke in an altogether more serious and sober tone, his eyes fixed seemingly on a distant and nauseating vision. 'If only that were so.'



'If only what were so?' asked Jean Manger, the tall and rangy farmer who came to the inn to spend the little money he saved (or perhaps, the reader suspected, stole from his wife) every week on wine and tales of chivalry. He had come to listen to the adventures of Sir Agravain every week since the reader had begun, and would do his best to recite them again for his children: the lions, witches and black knights scared them into a terrified silence every night. As good and honest a man as could be found working the fields of any squire in Bretonnia. 'When do the bad knights not wear black armour?'

The soldier peered across at the peasant, and his face seemed to have become suddenly haggard and gaunt in

the flickering firelight. He looked briefly at Jean, then at the scrawny, beardless reader, then cast a glance round the whole small circle of men listening to the famous and celebrated adventures of Sir Agravaïn the Chaste.

'Are there any good knights? Were there ever any good knights? If one of the knights that I've known had found out about that girl in the lion's cave, he'd either have left her there to rot, or else got someone like me to kill the lion for him. And may the gods protect a girl rescued by any knight of Bretonnia.'

Jean's wind-weathered cheeks reddened yet more at such an affront to his hero, but the soldier silenced him with a stony glance and a raised hand. He was determined to have his say.

'If you'd seen the things that I've seen,' he went on, 'you'd think differently of our daring knights. They're as ready to take their fill of plunder - in gold and in women - as the next penny a day warrior. And that's not all: on the field of Charentaine I saw them cut down their own men as they fled before the enemy, slitting their throats as you, my good peasant friend, might prepare a pig for your supper.'

'Do you mean to say,' began Jean, wondering whether he dared take offence at the veteran's slander of his favourite stories (his best excuse to escape the wife for an evening), 'that these chivalrous stories are false?'

Before the soldier could speak up again, a voice rang out from the corner of the inn, outside the circle of listeners. It was mellow and articulate, a far cry from the strong provincial accents of the other visitors to 'Le Jardin d'Or'; it was the voice of one who knew knighthood from more than storybooks and bloody battlefields.

'False? You think you are listening to falsehoods? Does this unshaven pike-pusher think that the kingdom's finest are no better than he: cold-blooded killers and mercenaries?'



The soldier bristled and half rose to meet the new speaker as he advanced across the room. Until then, he had been sitting silently in the corner, brooding and toying with a jewelled locket he opened from time to time, and looked at with trembling hands. After a while, even Arnaud had stopped paying attention to him. He was tall and thin and moved with a ballroom grace. A warm, dark cloak and a wide-brimmed hat - both travel stained - hid him from prying eyes; he had dressed, the others thought, deliberately to keep his face hidden beneath a dark shadow. All they could see were his grey eyes occasionally catching the light. The locket hung from a small gold chain, and though now tucked into his sleeve, the chain still glinted around his wrist.

'You insult me? You, who have been warm and safe while I've spilt blood in your name?' growled the soldier, the wine lending him courage and eloquence. The others saw a knife in his hand, no doubt one of many he carried secreted about himself; the soldier stood poised to hurl the slim blade at the stranger.

There was a sudden flash and a gasp of steel, and the soldier sat back heavily clutching at his bleeding hand, his teeth gritted as he bore the pain. The knife turned slowly on the floor, casting lurid reflections in the firelight. A delicately balanced rapier was in the stranger's hand, with a few specks of fresh blood along the edge. It glowed with a light all of its own, and the others realised that this was no weapon to be trifled with; it was, if anything, the sort of sword a latter day Sir Agravaïn might have worn. A Sir Agravaïn who expected to fight duels rather than dragons.

All was hushed and poised for a second, save only for the soldier's cursing over his wounded hand. Then the stranger stepped back and, taking a lace handkerchief from a pocket, wiped the blade clean and replaced it in a scabbard beneath his cloak. There was a momentary glimpse of the stranger's fine, silken clothing. After taking a step back and letting the full gravity of his presence sink in, he spoke again.

'Oh, please do not be aggrieved, sturdy soldier; I have no doubt you shrugged off such paltry injuries last time you shaved. It is upon men of your ilk that the safety of our fair kingdom rests. As I was saying before that unpleasant interruption, do you think that any self-respecting knight would throw himself upon the serried ranks of the enemy while there are others to do so for him? Like myself, the gentry of this land confine their martial excesses to the fencing hall and the jousting field; or, if they're adventurous or foolhardy, to the honourable duel.'

The stranger paused for a moment, stirred by something he'd just said, and flexed his hand again, as if reaching for the locket in his sleeve. He paused at the last moment. None of the others dared speak out of turn - the man carried an air of authority they had been brought up to revere - but it was clear that the last words had woken an unhappy memory. In a moment the stranger buried it, and went on quickly.

'And do you believe that a knight's armour can hold back cannon balls, crossbow bolts, musket shot or a firmly dealt blow from any sword or axe? We are all men of flesh and blood, and in this day and age have sensibly relegated armour to pageants and tourneys for the delight of noble ladies. These are far more regulated and sedate

affairs than might be imagined, partly because we dare not risk the death or discomfort of the realm's finest, and partly lest the nobles ladies become too agitated and faint due to the tightness of their corsets. You were fortunate indeed to witness an old-style knightly charge at Charentaine, although on that occasion there was a very good reason why they took to battle. I am sure you recall whom you were fighting at Charentaine. Do remind us, please, or does it slip your mind?



he speaker said these last words with a note of arrogance, and the others saw the pained expression on the soldier's face as he forced himself to reply, still cradling his bleeding hand.

'You know full well who they were hacking and killing there, you silk-tongued bastard!' 'They?' responded the tall man, firmly in control of the situation. 'They were not alone, remember; you too were hacking and killing and shooting and stabbing and scavenging for petty trinkets in the corpses' pockets after the fight. Do tell this company against which terrible enemy you fought alongside the knights of the land, in a battle essential for the security and safety of the great kingdom of Bretonnia.'

A taut silence fell over the inn, with Jean, the reader and Arnaud glancing between the still unrevealed stranger and the soldier. They noticed the stranger's hand gradually moving again towards the hilt of his rapier. Tears rolled down both the soldier's cheeks as he forced himself to speak.

'They were farmers! Tenants of the lord I served! They'd rioted and killed a tax collector after he tried to take all the half-rotten food they had left, and for that they had to die. Starving, desperate Bretonnian farmers driven to revolt by parasites like you.' The soldier looked around at the shocked gathering and fell silent. He buried his face in his hands and began to weep like a child.

The reader, who was just a humble scribe unused to such harsh realities, closed his book and laid it down on the table, and looked at it as if it were poisoned. Somehow it no longer felt quite right to read such stories, to exult in the glorious deeds of men prepared to do battle against their own unarmed, unfed peasants.

Jean stared in disbelief at the soldier. He had heard tell from his wife's sister of events at Charentaine, but from what he had heard the lords had been fighting off a dangerous attack by foreign spies, or possibly witches' thralls. If what the soldier said was true, then what chance did he himself stand if a hard winter or a poor harvest deprived him of sufficient food both to satisfy the squire and feed his family? Would he too find himself hewn down like a beast on some forlorn field? The thought chilled him.

'I see I have disturbed your entertainment,' said the stranger, looking at the book on the table and at the weeping soldier. The jewelled locket was back in his hand, and he seemed unconscious of the fact. 'But I wanted to show you the truth, to unveil what lies behind the glorious stories and the shining ornaments with which we lords are masked.'

'What you're saying is treasonous. Why do you tell us this?' asked Arnaud, always wary of any trouble in his inn. 'What's to stop us going out and telling everyone what you've just said and stirring another revolt...' He hesitated before adding, 'My lord?'

'I tell you because I must tell someone; guilt and conscience must be satisfied somehow, and this opportunity is as good as any.' His voice faltered, and he cast his eyes downwards so that his face was entirely hidden. 'Once I cared nothing for you, nothing for anything beyond my estate wall or the bounds of the Oisillon Palace. Could I say I was happy? If the blind are happy for never having seen, then I was happy. But it was three months ago that understanding dawned. I was with you at Charentaine, soldier; do you not remember the name of the man you served? Did you ever know?'

The soldier glared at him, hate in his eyes. 'No,' he retorted, 'I did not know his name. All I know is that he paid me and that I did my work.'

He glanced to either side of him, meeting the disgusted, incredulous expressions of the others. They were beginning to comprehend for themselves just what the soldier had done: blood seemed to have covered his face.

'Do you think I'm proud of the lives I took at Charentaine?' he almost yelled, not at the stranger in particular, nor at the three onlookers, but at himself. 'What could I do?'

'You,' said the stranger, more subdued than the soldier and with almost all feeling drained from his voice, 'served as you were paid to serve. I was the one who ordered and contracted you to serve. What does that make me? It was my bailiff who was killed by those peasants whilst following my orders. I hired mercenaries to kill my own vassals, and even took part in the slaughter myself. It felt...good, at the time, to ride and laugh and slay like a knight of old. I tried to tell myself that they weren't people I was killing. I suppose the visor of my armour blocked out more than just the blows of the enemy, such as they were. As long as I wore the armour, rode the horse and from time to time made some pathetic chivalric gesture, I was another Sir Agravain and none could gainsay me.'

His gloved hand was playing frantically with the locket now, feverishly turning it this way and that. He was unaware of what he was doing, but the others had riveted their sights onto it, seeking for any excuse not to gaze at the stranger's face. The stranger noticed that their stares were turned to his hand as he finished, and with a shudder he stopped playing with the locket. His eyes widened as he lifted and regarded it. He raised the locket up and took a closer look at it, a new tenderness appeared on his face, and the reader fancied even a tear caught the light for a second. The stranger spoke again,

'But it was not at Charentaine that my world died, though it was there it began to sicken. For all that I despise myself and my past deeds now, I met with nothing but praise for my firm action and daring swordplay at the battle of Charentaine. Given time, I might even have blotted it out and carried on as I always had. However, it was not to be.'

With a sigh he sat back and paused before telling a gaggle of peasants the secret of his sorrow. But that world was gone now, and the guilt and pain overcame whatever

vestiges of decorum still lay within him. Before speaking, however, he held up the locket into the light and opened it. Peering over, the onlookers saw the tiny, perfectly executed portrait of a beautiful woman, with a number of bloody fingerprints on the sky-blue background.

'I loved her, once. So did many others like me. I, carried away by something stronger than words and meaningless niceties of honour, took the life of another man over her, and of his brother when he sought vengeance. There was blood enough on my hands, but when she was sickened and shocked by what I had done in her name, and scorned me, it was more than I could bear.'

A momentary bitterness and edge came into the stranger's voice, and his fingers went white as he gripped the locket's chain yet harder.

'I killed her. A moment of childish, spoilt rage and she is gone forever. This trinket is everything that remains to me. It's all gone now. Try as I might, nothing can be the same again. For too long I went blinkered, inured and unthinking, and I am neither capable nor willing to go back. I want to forget myself and the world that made me. And, to answer your question about why you will not stir a revolt, it is because no-one would want to believe what you say.'

'What do you mean no-one would want to believe us?' asked the reader, hesitant to believe that such a gentleman as this stranger could have done what he'd just said.

The stranger laughed slightly. 'Do you not see? Lies and meaningless charades are all that lie between the people of Bretonnia - the people who fell at Charentaine - and the heartlessness of their masters. Masters like me. If you were to shatter the dream - as it has been shattered for me and, I fear, as I have shattered it for you - then people would wake up to the nightmare.'

'Then,' said Jean quietly after a long pause for troubled thought, 'what do we have to live for? What can the common man like me do if it's all a great jest to keep us in our place? And how far does it all go, my lord? Can we trust anyone?'

Before the stranger could answer, the soldier, his tears now under control, spoke out loudly. 'No! You cannot trust anyone. In this forsaken land where lords slaughter their tenants for refusing to give up their last morsel of grain, where witches and murderers stalk the shadows, where even the saints and the priests are no more than liars and frauds...what hope do any of us have? None. Only by being crueller and more deceitful than the others can you survive. That's what it comes down to, when the mask is dropped.'

The soldier stood up slowly, his eyes still red and watery from the pain in his hand and in his breast. He began to walk slowly towards the door of the inn. The stranger laid a hand upon the soldier's shoulder as he passed by, drew back his sleeve, undid the gold chain and handed the locket to the soldier. For a second he hesitated, unsure whether to give up this keepsake to the lowlife before him. Finally he pressed it into the soldier's unwounded hand, and said,

'Please, take it. It is best that I forget. Let her beauty be a comfort to you, as it once was to me.'

Then he turned and was about to march out of 'Le Jardin d'Or' when the reader called to him.

'Wait! What is your name, my lord?' The reader found the others giving him sharp looks: even now, there were certain age-old customs that they did not like to see infringed.

'My name,' he responded slowly and deliberately, 'doesn't matter any more.' He swivelled to face the reader, and moved closer to him. 'But if you are determined to know, then I will tell you...' The stranger leaned forward and said his name to the reader. However, the latter did not notice what was said, for then he saw with an exclamation that the lord's face, so long kept in the darkness, was black as pitch, coarse and mottled; the skin of a beast. As the stranger drew back, he smiled and said under his breath,

'See how my deeds have marked me.'

The reader never spoke again of what he had seen, and stood shocked and unblinking as the stranger slipped out of the inn. None of the others had seen his face closely enough to be able to recognise him again. Not that any of those in the inn wanted or expected ever to see him again. The stranger passed away into the night like a bad dream, blending seamlessly into the shadows.

Everyone else felt that it was time to put an end to the evening's events, and to retreat to the comfortable normality of their homes and beds. The soldier, after looking for a few minutes at the locket the stranger had given him, slipped it into a small purse he kept hidden in the back of his boot where no thief would find it. He marched out of the inn without another word.

Arnaud the innkeeper went round cleaning up for the night; Jean muttered goodnight and furtively went out, wondering whether to tell his wife and sister-in-law of what he had heard. He decided not: these were things he would never have wished to know, and didn't want to pass on.



The reader was the last to go, having sat for a long spell regarding the book of chivalrous stories on the table. When he finally got up to leave, hearing Arnaud's impatient grunts in the background, he stopped for a moment beside the dying fire and dropped the book of Sir Agravaïn's adventures into the glowing embers. It caught light, and was soon reduced to ashes and forgotten.