

WARPTONE

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BRETONNIA

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"A kingdom founded upon the principles of chivalry and the protection of the weak"

Immediately on its release this much maligned book created controversy among WFRP players. Gone is the decadence of the land ruled over by King Charles de la Tete d'Or III. Indeed, gone is King Charles. Instead, Bretonnia has become a pseudo-Arthurian kingdom, shining chivalrous knights worshipping The Lady of the Lake, rescuing damsels in distress and so on. With such radical changes is it of any benefit to WFRP campaigns? The book itself follows the same style as GW's previous battle books. The first part of the book covers the history and character of Bretonnia, while the remainder is made up of painting tips, tactics, and character and troop profiles. This all works okay for a background designed for Wargaming. As a basis for WFRP it is less successful, if you wanted an Arthurian background the excellent Pendragon fits the role perfectly. The new Bretonnia ideas are very lazy. It is easy to appropriate the ideas and tenets from the Arthurian legends into a background (not to mention Joan of Arc, Roland and Robin Hood). But the book has done it without adding anything to it, taking the idea of Camelot without any of the darker aspects. It is plainly aimed at the younger player, who GW obviously believes doesn't want to be bothered with these more difficult subjects.

The fundamental idea of setting an Arthurian-styled background in the pseudo-French setting that is Bretonnia is not actually too much of a stretch of the imagination.

Although the legends of Arthur are set in Britain, most of the stories we know are from medieval France. It was here that the ideas of chivalry and what constituted knighthood were first created. Thomas Mallory's two volume Morte D'Arthur is based largely on these French tales. His books are the basis for much of what we consider Arthurian although many writers have attempted their own spin on the idea.

Bretonnia is now ruled by King Louen Leoncoeur, a one dimensional heroic figure. He leads the Knights who protect the country, inspired by their devotion to the deity known as the Lady of the Lake. These knights are loved and respected by the people. Many knights go searching for and find the Grail, becoming stronger because of it. The idea of the Lady of the Lake simply tramples over the previous WFRP gods, ignoring them completely, although she does retain the association with magical water that Shallya has (in Couronne). Morgiana le Fay becomes her prophetess.

Only Mousillion retains any of the darkness that affected the Bretonnian cities as described in the WFRP rulebook, the others simply being big castles. Mousillion's destruction comes about due to an event known as 'The Affair of the False Grail'. The country is divided in political dukedoms and the Border Princes become closely associated with Bretonnia. Chaos is largely ignored, reduced to occasional incursions. The Skaven remain the biggest threat and it is stated that they are trying to infiltrate Bretonnian cities.

"Happy is the land of Bretonnia where chivalry reigns and honour is upheld"

The changes to Bretonnia both radically alter the WFRP interpretation of the land and limit the roleplaying possibilities. If you take the book as gospel that is. As has been previously stated elsewhere, the army books are written in a propaganda or legend style. Simply by levering at the cracks this opens a number of possibilities.* The code of Chivalry is the backbone of the knightly ideal and as stated this was that of the French Knights. One of the French tenets was 'To protect Noble Women.' and this is what they did. When, during the crusades, Asalon fell, Noble women were escorted in safety while all the others were raped. So where in Bretonnia it says 'To protect the weak and fight for the right', who says those peasants asking for less taxes are weak? They certainly aren't right! What's a knight to do but teach them a lesson? The rules of honour state that a knight cannot use missile weapons, but what does that matter? He can get his men-at-arms to pepper the enemy instead.

"All knights receive the respect of the peasants"

The Duke of Parravon is known as Machevort the Merciless. Not a name you get by killing Orcs, more for massacring prisoners and trampling peasants. Indeed, as Bretonnia is a Feudal system the peasants will work solely for their lords. Armour isn't cheap and the taxes will need to be high. Protecting the weak doesn't mean making sure they don't go hungry.

So there is room for interpretation if you read between the lines. But if you wish to retain the flavour of WFRP you will need to do a lot of work. Everything here is clean cut, with not an ambiguity of any kind. It is a continuation of WFB's move towards high fantasy.

If you are looking for an insight into Bretonnia, this is not it and I can't recommend the sourcebook. The background in the WFRP rulebook contains far more flavour in its four pages than the battle book does in its ninety five.