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Marienburg: Sold Down the River
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Reviewed by John Foody

Weighing in at 160 pages comes this impressive looking city sourcebook from Hogshead. It builds on articles originally published in *White Dwarf* magazine. However Anthony Ragan, the author (and co-author of the original articles) has chosen to not use all this material and rewrite the parts he does. *Marienburg: Sold Down the River* is a major release for Hogshead, the first truly original publication since the partly Marienburg based *Dying of the Light* and in many ways far more important. It is the first release to expand on the background of the Warhammer world. In fact due to Marienburg's nature as the principal port in the Old World means there are snippets of information from around the world.

The city of Marienburg is located in the Wasteland and the its population centre of note. In fact, it is also the largest city in the Warhammer World. Once part of the Empire, it proclaimed independence some seventy years ago. Now it controls access of goods into its former ruler and many prominent noble families are in debt to the rich merchants who rule the city. The ten richest of these form the Directorate and control the city although many claim it is a democracy. Of course not all is equal and in the streets of the city the ultra-rich rub shoulders (not too closely though) with the destitute of whom there are many. Marienburg has tended to be seen as a city for political scenarios and intrigue but does the new sourcebook manage to carry this off with success? Of course, it is similar in intent to *Middenheim: City of Chaos* and thus needs to be compared with this. After all do you need two city sourcebooks in your collection?

Heralded by a nice logo the cover art initially looks excellent. However, a closer look tempered my enthusiasm for it. There is lots going on, and some nice touches but it looks too clean, too computer generated. Attached to the back cover is a city map. Actually, it comes in a rather nice envelope which is rather a good idea (This was due to the Marienburg map mistakenly being stuck into the back on *Something Rotten in Kislev* by the printers). Ralph Horsley's map looks great but it isn't of much use to GMs, instead it works best in giving players a feel for the city. The map in the book itself is much better for the GM. Inside, Horsley's illustrations are the best of an excellent set of atmospheric pieces. Not that their all good though, some are average and some are plain poor. Overall though, they give a feel for the city. There is a lot of text for your money and the layout is nice and clean. Quotes are scattered through the book and these are fun and nicely illustrate the attitudes of those in the city.

The city background and history is covered in some depth, also looking at the geography of the Wasteland and the population outside Marienburg. Inside the city politics, history, law and Religion are all detailed. Ragan constantly fleshes out the descriptions with anecdotes and pieces of history, all ready supplies for plots and scenarios to be developed from. He succeeds in making Marienburg a city with a distinctive atmosphere of its own. This comes through in all these background aspects, whether it the attitude of the people, the political structure or the nature of religious worship. In Marienburg, Manann and Hædryk are the two strongest cults, respecting the sea and money respectively). Included in a WFRP book for the first time is the notion of Sainthood, here

being given a strongly political dimension. The other unusual aspect of Marienburg is that it contains a community of Sea Elves. These hold a lot of power in the city and Ragan manages to convey the mixture of fear and respect they inspire with confidence. The bulk of *Sold Down the River* is devoted to detailing the various areas of the city. Here it takes a different approach to Middenheim. Instead of giving an overview of each district, a few are covered in depth. Eight areas out of a possible thirty are given this treatment. The others are simply named and given a one-line summary. The author's stating his intent is to allow GMs to develop these areas themselves.

Each area detailed follows the same format. Firstly, quotes give the locals' thoughts on the area. A map, a cut away from the larger pullout map, shows the important locations. This doesn't as well as it should. The maps are stylish but more detail would have been welcome. Locations detailed in the section are shown mentioned but others mentioned in passing are not. The background, atmosphere and locals are examined first. After these, various location are covered in detail, including an NPC in each. A number also have descriptions of NPCs not associated with a particular location. The Suiddock area is the centre of Marienburg, sea-faring ships docking here and the Import-Export Exchange, home of the Mercantile Guild dominating the area. However, it is also the centre of the criminal underworld. Ragan sends a lot of timing detailing this important location, describing ten locations and eleven characters. So for example, the Stevedores' and Teamsters' Guild covers a description of the building, who would be found there, some history on the guild itself and mention of recent conflict with the Elfs. Lea-Jan Cobbius, Master of the Guild, is then described with a full profile. As part of this, his connection with other characters is given an overview. Under the description of the Import-Export Exchange details are given of making deals and how the market works. The seven remaining areas have around six locations described within each. Some give an example of a kind of area, in much the same way as the Suiddock is a working class location. Others are more unique like Elftown or Rijker's Isle. All these areas are well described with inherent numerous scenario ideas.

The next section is a collection of fifteen Adventure Seeds. Each is one or two paragraph long and give an idea for a scenario within the city. These are a mixed bunch, generally strong, and as is their nature need some work to use them. A full-length scenario, The Lustrian Bubble, written by James Wallis follows these. This set outs to highlight the way the city works and does business. It is a very low combat scenario, ideally pitched for Marineburg. It is a good scenario although short and it could have been stronger, especially at the end.

Sold Down the River finishes with seven appendixes and some notes on the map. The first gives details of the gods Hædryk and Stromfels, the latter the god of the dangers of the sea. Both are detailed and useful. Stromfels, especially is well done. An evil and outlawed god, but one with interesting twists that adds to the idea that religious doctrine is all politics, something Ragan explores at a number of points within the narrative. Indeed, as all the best WFRP products have done, the author manages to successfully avoid splitting everything into good and evil, most characters have solid motivations and morally grey areas abound.

The next appendixes hold summary information; standard NPCs, encounter tables, a gazetteer and trading rules (a synopsis of those found in *Death on the Reik*). Also here is a Wastelander modified version of the character generation table and a huge list of typical Wasteland names. The former is a good idea while the latter is very, very useful indeed. Finally, a history is given for the map bundled with *Sold Down the River*. This is entertaining but it has to be asked, is the author trying to tell us something about Ralph Horsley?

Marienburg: Sold Down the River is an excellent sourcebook and one that gives future publications a very high target to aim at. The book is written with humour and a thorough appreciation of the game world. Anthony Ragan has managed to make Marienburg feel like a living city, one with countless facets to explore. The atmosphere is strong, and it is not just a Middenheim clone. There is a huge amount of information, leaving the reader with numerous ideas to get the most of the book but there is also enough space to expand the city if desired. Chaos is also regulated to a low rung in the

city, and where it is present is more subtle, allowing GMs that so desire to bring it to the forefront in their plots.

I have few criticisms with the wide sweep of book but some of the details are not to my taste. Magic is a little too trivialised I feel. Whereas the Elfen sorcery rightly inspires fear, I don't like the idea of a magic shop that makes self-cleaning bedpans (Why buy this when a servant will do the job at a fraction of the price?). On a similar vein there are a few too many Bags of Middenheim, rings of protection and the like. Can't say I'm too keen on the credit card idea either. These are minor points easily changed, but there is one larger area of concern. Simply, nearly everyone detailed has got a large skeleton in the closet. Again, not a problem but more could have been made of lower-key problems and situations.

I feel the brevity of descriptions on the other areas in Marienburg is a loss. Even a paragraph on each would have given a solid base for GMs to work from. Other pieces that would have strengthened *Sold Down the River* would have been an index (there is a lot of information) and a players introduction sheet (as provided in *City of Chaos*. Warpstone did publish a Marienburg version in issue 9).

As many of you will have noticed there has been some delay in getting Marienburg released. After all Warpstone 9 was originally tied to coincide with it. However, the delay has not been due to a weakness in the product. Marienburg is well worth adding to your collection but does it replace *Middenheim: City of Chaos*. No? Comparing Sold Down the River to *Middenheim* is difficult. Instead, they both offer very different views of their respective city. I would go as far to say Marienburg is for more experienced players, while Middenheim makes the better introductory location. Marienburg is the better of two, but simply, the two sourcebooks complement each other.

Marienburg: Sold Down the River is highly recommended for those looking for a somewhere new to explore, and makes a welcome addition to the slowly growing pile of WFRP literature.