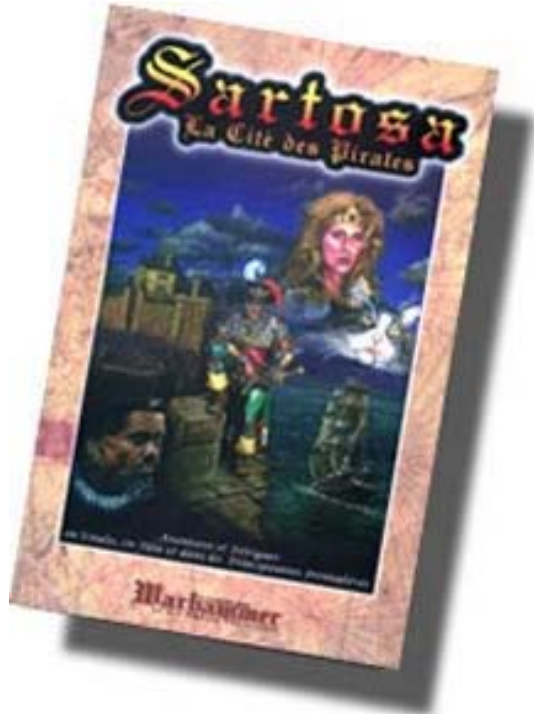


Sartosa: La Cité des Pirates

An unofficial supplement for WFRP
Reviewed by Markus Widmer

When I first held "Sartosa" in my hands, I could not help being impressed. This was supposed to be a fan-made booklet, perhaps matching the very high standards set by Warpstone. In fact, it is much more than that: a 220-page soft-cover book featuring high-gloss paper as well as a cover and some plates in full colour. Leafing through it, I discovered high-class art, which was as atmospheric as it was functional. There was only one problem: the whole thing is written in French. So I was forced to dig out my high school French and start working my way through the volume. Let me anticipate my conclusion - it was well worth it.



The biggest part of the book is devoted to the pirate city of Sartosa on the island that lies south-west of Tilea. The authors start out with the few details given in WFRP and flesh them out, making places, people and conflicts come alive. The atmosphere of Sartosa is quite different from the rest of the Warhammer world, where political struggle, Chaotic plotting and internal strife prevail. The more light-hearted, but quite equally deadly, ambience of swashbuckling pirates is predominant. The city lies on an isle protected by a natural maze of sandbanks and reefs, as well as some particularly nasty artillery. It is ruled by the pirates themselves, who annually elect a captain to be pirate king. The populace of Sartosa is unusually mixed, with all seafaring nations, Tilean, Estalian and Arabian, intermingling - united through their love of freedom and a strict code of pirate honour. Add a thriving slave market, noble hostages, drug dens and a couple of cursed caves, and you will get the very distinct atmosphere of Sartosa: exotic, fun, and full of conflicts and plot hooks for the swashbuckling GM.

The sourcebook provides you with more than just ambience. Extensive and well-made floor plans and maps will help gamesmasters, as will descriptions of inns and popular places. Most prominent, though, are the descriptions of important NPCs. The book does not only feature eight full portraits of the most essential personalities of the city, but also details on all the 40 (forty!) pirate captains of Sartosa, complete with drawings. One could argue that this is really a bit more than necessary, but hey, why shouldn't we get it all? The picture of the isle is completed with the city's surroundings and non-pirate inhabitants, plus several pirate careers.

All of this would have made a really nice city-sourcebook in the approved Warhammer style. But since GW has always neglected Tilea, Estalia and the whole south, Le Grimoire decided to add even more information. The second part of the book details the whole area around the Tilean and Southern Sea. Beginning with the cities allied to Sartosa, the authors go on about the current maritime powers from Arabia to the Elves and their most important commercial interests. Essays about the Tilean City States of Miragliano, Tobaro, Remas and Luccini

follow, as well as introductions to Estalia, Lustria, the Border Princes and the Badlands. Did I mention that I was impressed?

Clearly, though, "Sartosa" also has its weaknesses. Most of them become apparent when you turn the book around and start reading from the back, where the scenario and rules section is printed upside down. Apart from the fact that this is a little irritating, the material is poor. The so-called scenarios are nothing more than garbled sketches with a few good ideas but no organisation whatsoever. A well-presented and thoroughly planned adventure would have been much more useful. It is quite surprising that no-one managed to integrate the huge range of finely characterised NPCs, locations and conflicts into a fine scenario. On the other hand, any moderately experienced GM will be able to do that himself or herself. The rules section gives a few ideas about things like gunpowder barrels, duels and alcohol. A couple of details on ageing characters and maritime illnesses conclude the book.

"Sartosa: La Cité des Pirates" is wonderful proof that fan-produced sourcebooks can be at least as valuable as the official stuff. This one is not only very diligently written and illustrated, it also deals with a region of the Warhammer world that needed fleshing-out. There will probably never be a Tilean or Estalian army-book, thus an official sourcebook on the southern regions of the Old World is not to be expected. "Sartosa" fills that gap in a very professional way, providing alternative gaming concepts to those tired of the Empire.

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