

SAVAGE CITY

A Warhammer novel

By Robert Earl

The city of Bordeleaux, in the ancient land of Bretonnia, is having to put up with the loveable rogues Florin and Lorenzo. Fresh from their adventures in the Ogre Kingdoms, Florin and his companion are quickly burning through their new-found wealth and making enemies left, right and centre.

Having returned with them from the land of the ogres, Katerina is having difficulty shedding her savage nature and acting like a young lady. And the in-laws are not too impressed with her...

When her husband is murdered, Katerina responds the only way she knows how, going on a feral rampage throughout the city. Can Florin and Lorenzo stop her before Bordeleaux becomes a savage city?



About the Author

Robert Earl graduated from Keele University in 1994, after which he started a career in sales. Three years later though, he'd had more than enough of that and since then he has been working, living and travelling in the Balkans and the Middle East.

Robert is currently back in the UK with his Romanian wife (who is still giving him hell for using her brothers' names in the Inferno! story 'The Vampire Hunters'). Savage City is his third Warhammer novel.

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By now, any doubts that Florin had had about the transaction were long gone. It wasn't just that the barrels of Tilean wine he'd bought had all been tested and safely stowed on his own boat, although that had certainly helped. No, what lent him such an air of confidence was the fact that the wine tasting had been going on for more than an hour. That and the lying.

It seemed that the captain of this ship, a Signor Ballideci, was a distant cousin of the hero Castavelli, which meant that he couldn't hear enough about his illustrious relative's heroics. And, despite the egotistical pang Florin had first felt upon hearing the Tilean version of the events in Lustria, he was happy enough to lie on Castavelli's account. After all, although hardly the hero his countrymen thought him to be, the mercenary had been a friend and a comrade.

‘So there we were,’ Florin said, accepting yet another goblet of the finest wine the Old World had ever produced. ‘There were no more than a hundred of us and out there, as far as the eye could see, was a vast horde of monsters. Horrible they were. The smallest was twice the size of a man and they had scales harder than any armour.’

‘You must have been terrified,’ Ballideci said in the rolling dialect of Tilea.

Florin agreed. ‘We were. We were all terrified. In fact, many of us wanted to run. But then Captain Castavelli leapt up onto the pyramid and said... and said...’ He trailed off, his imagination failing him despite the wine, but Ballideci was there with the words.

‘He said, “Have faith, my brothers. The work ahead may be bloody, and some of us might fall. But in days to come, in every taverna in the land, men will say, “I wish I’d been there”.’

‘Um, yes. That’s right,’ Florin said and Bellideci smiled proudly.

‘I learned the words of the play by heart,’ he explained.

‘And then,’ another of the crew chipped in, ‘Castavelli led the cavalry charge.’

‘Yes, I was just getting to that,’ Florin said, desperately trying to guess what his former comrade had said about a cavalry charge. It wasn’t as if they’d even had any horses. But before he could continue the story, a cry from the crow’s nest brought the party to a sudden halt.

‘Doganale! Ufficio doganale!’

The crowd that had gathered around Florin exploded outwards, the men running like hares from a wolf. Although the deck was crowded and snared with hawsers and tackle, the crew moved with a practiced ease, scuttling to their positions and leaving Florin standing alone and confused. Captain Ballideci, remembering his guest, paused as he followed them. He turned back to slap him on the back and grinned enormously.

‘It was very nice to see you. I tell my cousin we meet back in

Tilea. Ciao.'

'What's the rush?' Florin called after him, but the only reply the captain could spare was 'Ufficio doganale.'

Florin dodged through a group of hurrying sailors to peer over the gunwale at Lorenzo. 'Get a move on,' the older man shouted up at him. 'Didn't you hear what they said? A customs boat is coming.'

'Damn!' Florin swore. With a last swig he emptied his goblet and vaulted over the side of the ship, sliding back down the mooring rope with palm-blistering speed.

'The wind's against us, so we're going to have to tack,' Lorenzo told him, already untying the rope and pushing away from the side of the ship. Florin cursed again. The run in had been relatively easy; with the wind behind them they had been able to ride before it and steer with the tiller. Now, though, with the wind against them, they would have to tack, to use the angles of the sail to zigzag into it.

But first they would have to row clear of the Tileans.

'Right then, on three,' Florin said as he seized hold of his oar. He had a sudden flashback to Lustria, and the days they'd spent on her malarial waterways, but then all of his thoughts snapped back to the task at hand.

'One, two, three!'

The herring boat was designed for sailing, not rowing, and she moved with a ponderous reluctance against the current. Undeterred, the two men hurled themselves against their oars and, gradually, they began to nose their way out of the larger ship's shadow.

Florin waited until they were two lengths away before stowing his oar and racing forward to unfurl the sail. It snapped eagerly in the breeze as he did so, and the boat rolled alarmingly as the material billowed around a bellyful of air. For once, Lorenzo was too busy to complain. He'd just unhitched the ropes that controlled the boom, and now he heaved on one of them. The sail swung round in response, belching out the air

and slicing neatly into the wind. Florin, ducking beneath the swinging boom with perfect timing, rolled back to seize the tiller. As he pulled on it, he could see that the Tileans were also on the move. Even as some of their crew dragged the ship's anchor up from the depths, her sails were filling.

The Bretonnian watched anxiously as the larger vessel overtook them, her wake setting his own boat rolling from side to side. The Tileans turned, and for one terrifying moment it seemed that the two vessels would collide. But then the Tileans were in front of them and, with a surge of white water that soaked Lorenzo with brine, they were past them and heading out to sea.

Captain Ballideci, seeming not to hear Lorenzo's curses, waved his hat over the side and yelled 'Ciao!'

But Florin didn't return the gesture. He'd just seen how close the customs cutter was.

He would have spotted it before had it not been coming straight for them. As it was, the pale billow of its canvas had blended in with a skyful of white clouds, and the sharp angle of its prow had been lost against the rolling expanse of the ocean beyond. The predatory shape grew larger even as Florin watched, and, to his surprise, he saw the Tileans steer straight towards her. The sea curled up beneath their hull like soil beneath a plough as the southlanders turned, and for a moment the customs ship was eclipsed by her gilded stern.

'What are they doing that for?' Florin yelled to Lorenzo as the two ships drew nearer. 'They look as though they're going to meet.'

The older man twisted the sail into a new angle before replying. 'Treachery?' he suggested as they cut back into the wind.

Florin spat the suddenly sour taste of wine out of his mouth, his attention torn between the two ships and the sea ahead. The customs men had come from the clear ocean which didn't leave him with many options. If the Tileans were in league with the enemy then they wouldn't be drawing them away, and if they

didn't draw them away then he and Lorenzo would be faced with a lethal choice.

They'd either have to surrender or risk tacking back through the Bite. A sudden image sprang unbidden into Florin's mind. It was of his boat's hull being torn out from under her, her timbers splintered into matchsticks by the gnashing granite teeth of the reef. The vision was horribly realistic, right down to the way he and Lorenzo were pitched into the sea.

Another man might have taken it as an omen, but not Florin d'Artaud. To the hells with it, he decided in a flash of alcohol-fuelled boldness. After all, it was me that held things together in Lustria, not Castavelli. It was me who discovered the Ogre Kingdoms... And it was me who rescued Katerina Hansebourg.

The thought of what Katerina might say if he did surrender squared his jaw with fresh determination, and he scowled across at the customs ship.

By now the Tilean was almost upon her and Florin suddenly realised that this was no pre-arranged meeting. Far from it. The smuggler's sails remained as fat as an ogre's gut, and her helmsman had kept her arrowing towards the exciseman as straight as a battering ram.

'What's he doing?' Florin shouted to Lorenzo, surprise edging his voice.

'Ramming her, it looks like,' Lorenzo replied, sounding surprised himself.

'That's insane. They'll both go down.'

But that didn't seem to bother the Tileans. When the customs cutter turned to circle around them, the southlanders turned too, keeping their ship aimed at their enemy with a lethal, suicidal precision.

Again, the cutter turned, and again the Tileans turned with her.

'They're going to do it,' Florin breathed into the wind, his voice hushed with respect. 'The lunatics are actually going to ram her.'

And, right up until the point where the ships were barely a length apart, it seemed that they would do just that. It was only when the collision became inevitable that the Tileans made their move.

It was the most incredible display of seamanship Florin had ever seen. The way that the Tilean's three sails shortened, then swung around like three perfect mirror images. The way that every man on the ship leapt over the gunwales to hang from her side like so much moveable ballast. The way in which the weight of her anchor was harnessed to pull her tiller with a superhuman speed – these and a hundred other perfectly synchronised manoeuvres sent the fifty tons of merchantship slipping past the customs boat with barely a foot to spare.

Amidst the desperate ballet of his men only Captain Ballideci remained still, the swirl of his cape marking him out amongst the sweating crew. He didn't move until he was level with the deck of the customs cutter, and even then it was only to lean over and wave a horned fist towards the pale faces of the excise men.

Florin found himself cheering. Even Lorenzo cackled as the Tileans slid past their nemesis, some of them finding the time to jeer at her terrified crew as they raced to reset their sails. Before the customs ship had a chance to recover, the smugglers were scudding away to the south, sprinting before the wind that would take them back to the safety of their own waters.

‘What an escape!’ Florin exulted. ‘What a nerve! That Ballideci is a hero even if his cousin isn't.’

The customs boat had put out more sail, her crew struggling to pick up speed, but Florin wasn't concerned. The Tileans were well clear and opening up their lead by the minute.

But then the cutter turned and something hit Florin like a punch in the stomach. It was the realisation that the ship wasn't even going to try to catch the Tileans.

It was going to pursue them instead.

‘I told you we should have just bought wine from the guild,’

Lorenzo grumbled as the same realisation hit him too. For a split second the two men hesitated. They could surrender. They'd lose the boat and the cargo but at least they'd be safe.

They exchanged a glance and, with a burst of desperate activity, started to angle their boat back towards the hungry jaws of the Bite.

More Florin & Lorenzo from Robert Earl

THE BURNING SHORE
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