

WARPSTONE

The independent magazine for Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay



Warhammer Armies: Vampire Counts

Published by Games Workshop

Reviewed by John Foody

Before I begin, it's worth stating the intentions of this review. Examining a Games Workshop product for *Warpstone* is not a straight forward task. Although both are nominally based in the Warhammer world, you are reviewing a product for a purpose it wasn't created for. Simply, this review examines if *Vampire Counts* is a useful product for WFRP not is it a good product for *Warhammer Fantasy Battle*. And there is a difference.

With many previous products, many WFRP players have held their hands up in despair as the background is changed and in some cases ripped apart. Bretonnia (reviewed in issue 7) is certainly the most extreme example of this. Many of the books, and this one is included, has the problem that the army seems to dominate the World in its impact with minimal influence from other cultures and races.

The latest *Warhammer Armies* book it follows the others in offering army lists, painting tips and background on its chosen subject. *Vampire Counts*, written by Tuomas Pirinen and Alessio Cavatore, looks at the undead within the Old World. These are led by the Vampire Counts, four families (bloodlines they are called here) that rule Slyvania. As an easterly province of The Empire (ruled by the elector in Stirland) it is of potential interest to WFRP players. Vampires themselves are popular bad guys and they have never been fully detailed for WFRP. Of course, there are many sources both in literature and cinema and it was going to be interesting to see how Games Workshop integrated them into the Warhammer world. In fact Games Workshop had turned down a WFRP Vampire sourcebook in the past as the writer, a well known WFRP author, had made some of them sympathetic characters and thus no longer canon. Although Vampires dominate the book, there are liberal helpings of Zombies, Skeletons and Ghouls among others.

The book itself is in the style of the previous Warhammer Army books, eighty pages long with the middle sixteen in colour plates. Unusually, the cover art is garish and poor. This leads the way for the internal art. Although dark it is poor and generally lacking atmosphere, although a few pieces rise above the rest (One of these is shown and gives you an idea of the book's tone).

The first quarter of book is dedicated to the background and history of the Vampire Counts. Although heavy-handed in parts (do they really to march hordes of skeletons and zombies to Altdorf at the drop of a femur?) it is good, atmospheric and evocative. Enough of the background is useable for Warhammer roleplay. Yes, a GM may need to treat the background as an exaggerated history but even this feels right for the material. You can imagine peasants sitting around the fire telling these stories, the tales growing with each generation.

A few Undead associated Old World locations are mentioned, Mousillion among them. However, it is Slyvania that dominates the legends of the Undead and the book. A map of the province is given but this is pretty basic and not much use. The description of the area is also sparse, but scattered throughout the narrative are enough stories, descriptions and history to flesh the area out. The book obviously nods to Transylvania but the Vampires within are more obviously inspired by Bram Stoker's own inspiration,

the bloody 15th Century Vlad the Impaler, rather than his own creation Dracula. Certainly, the suave, sophisticated Vampires of Anne Rice and Hollywood aren't much in evidence. Much of the area's history is told through the stories of the most famous of these Vampire Counts. Legend has it there are seven Vampire bloodlines but only four are known, and thus described here. The von Carsteins of Slyvania are the most famous and feared. Each of the four has a different personality and it is very tempting to see the influence of White Wolf's *Vampire* background here. Finally, a number of tomes containing knowledge of Vampires and the necromantic arts are discussed and there is enough detail for expansion should you wish to use these.

Following this background are the game rules. Rules for counts, necromantic spells, collecting and painting an army, as well as army and character lists. The background for the rest of the Undead is useless and you will get far more inspiration and detail in the WFRP rulebook itself. The final part deals with famous vampiric characters but this is sketchy and all the interesting information has been dealt with before.

Vampire Counts does have some benefit to WFRP players although GMs will have to work with the information to get the most out of it. There is little subtlety in the backgrounds, and there are simply too many huge battles consisting of hordes of Undead against hordes of Imperial Templars and the like. As far as Mousillion and Slyvania are concerned, it also depends if you like the idea of an area being ruled by Vampires. Of course as I said, it could just be stories. However, there are nuggets of information within the book that can be used to enhance a WFRP campaign.

In the end though, the cost of the book compared to its influence means I cannot recommend it to WFRP players. If you are desperate for some ideas on Slyvania, then borrow a book. However, the tone of the book does offer some comfort to those who despair of Games Workshop's history of publishing Warhammer books that disregard what has gone before in the Warhammer World.