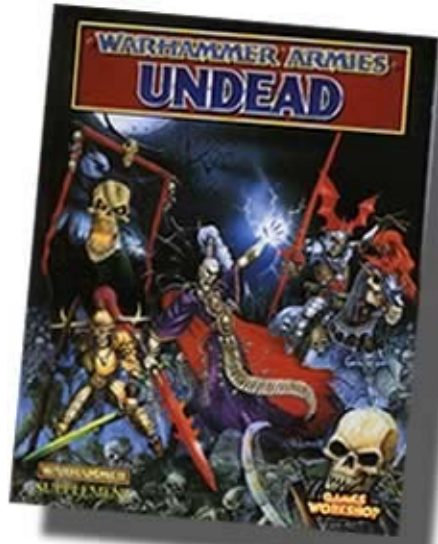


Warhammer Armies: Undead

This review assesses the value of a Warhammer Fantasy Battle product not as a war game accessory but as a resource for those looking for detail on the Warhammer world and its background. With that in mind, let's look closer...

Introduction

The introduction starts off predictably with an overview of the world, which does an acceptable job briefly examining the nature of the dead and philosophic thought around it, necromancy, and various undead of the world.



The Undead Gazetteer

This section examines "The Land of the Dead" (an entirely new addition to the world), Nagashizzar (new as well), the Plain of Bones (newly introduced), Drakenhof castle, and Moussillon (changed from the WFRP version and derivative of Poe's "The Masque of Red Death". All in all it's a mixed bag - more of a brief overview of some areas that are later developed more fully.

In the middle of the Undead Gazetteer is a map that may fire your imagination, amuse you with its fighting fantasy game book locations (The Cursed Jungle, the Charnel Valley, the Swamp of Terror), or appall you with the radical changes rendered to the WFRP world. I resigned myself to it and I tried to make the best of it.

History of the Undead

It is here that the book really develops its ideas in a fashion more grandiose than one would expect when the book explores the history of the undead in relation to The Great Necromancer. In one fell swoop it defines some pre-human history, accounts for the origins of necromancy, creates a villain of epic power, defines an entire part of the Old World, explains the origin of Vampire and Ghouls, and effectively doubles as a history of necromancy.

There are two responses to this: one is either delighted at further development or horrified at the changes that are made. I believe that the author takes a number of risks and creates an internally consistent background that meshes well enough with the existing material to make this stuff a suitable, possibly even worthy addition to the WFRP world. While the material may seem epic and grandiose in scale, it is of course situated in the historical past and thus distant and removed - and certainly no less grandiose than space ships, experimenting slann, and elves creating and bargaining with gods.

Vampire Counts of Sylvania

It is when the book moves closer to the Old World and the Empire that it loses its momentum. The material on the Vampire Counts is tired, they are nearly your prototypical Eastern European Vampires shoe-horned into the WFB milieu. There is little effort to integrate it into the material beforehand. Sylvania is spookily evoked and it is useful for those wanting to get a feel for Sylvania, but the historical details quickly become a blur, one count is defeated only to be followed by another who in turn besieges the capital of Altdorf. The story telling is amusing and lively, but as I stated, not quite enough to raise it above the well-trod roots of its source material.

Undead Timeline

A timeline that puts all the material previously mentioned in the book into perspective historically, including a slew of details not mentioned previously. It is in some ways more complete and useful than much of the material that came before it. The purist will note a handful of historical mistakes in the timeline, but overall it proves just as interesting as reading some of the earlier material.

Undead Banners

Skulls, skulls, and more skulls. Boring...

The Land of the Dead

A little map with a few details on it, not useful in the least.

How to Paint a Skeleton Regiment

The 15th paint guide regarding this particular material. A waste!

Revenge of the Doomlord

A battle between a Necromancer and the Empire with some historical inaccuracies, not particularly illuminating.

Undead Battle Tactics

No content related to background.

Undead Bestiary

This primarily features undead creatures we have all seen before, the exception are skeleton steeds and the Zombie Dragon. Included in the bestiary are siege weapons.

Undead Magic

Other than a brief exposition on how necromancers use necromantic energies, the material is mostly related to dealing with WFB mechanics. The brief treatment, while tantalizing, offers little more.

The Army List

List after list of troops. Not useful except for a few details on "Mummy Tomb Kings".

Special Characters

This chapter is an improvement over the last half of the book, in which a number of powerful necromancers are detailed, Nagash the Great Necromancer and potentially the least beneficial to include directly into a campaign, Vlad von Carstein (now deceased for the second time), Isabella (dead and dead again), Manfred von Carstein (still wandering about), Heinrich Kemmler the much kicked about "lichemaster", Arkhan the Black a liche who had served Nagash, Krell the Lord of the Undead an entirely uninteresting character, Settra the Tomb King of Khemri whose entry further develops some of the background, and another tired and overused Dieter Helsnicht, the self styled "Doom Lord" of Middenheim.

All in all the characters are mostly uninteresting...

The Rest

Pictures of minis, products, and magic cards describing items.

The Fiction

There's some fiction by Bill King in it. Some might enjoy it, but overall I think little of fiction for game products, so I'll allow you to make your own judgment while reserving my own.

The Art

Interesting and evocative, some of the better art I have seen in GW products. Some is overwrought, but I enjoyed most of the illustrations, particularly the water colors that are in the book.

Conclusion

This conclusion is a highly subjective one. Overall, I don't care much for many of the changes that GW has made in the world or the development of the areas, but I do accept that this is what we have to deal with.

That said, I enjoy the supplement and rank it very highly. GW took a risk, changes a big portion of the world and executed it in a fashion that actually develops the world in a consistent fashion and explains the origin of a number of elements of the world. Other parts of the world, while historically less interesting are at least depicted in a lively and interesting manner which can be imported into the game as legends and superstitions that liven up the world.

This is a superior product despite the amount of material dedicated to the war game. This book goes far beyond the duty required of it and elaborates upon the world in generous detail told in an entertaining manner. Excellent!

--Rev. Lepper