

Vampireslayer

A Gotrek & Felix Novel
By William King
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The novel begins where we have left our heroes, Gotrek and Felix: in Praag. The Chaos siege has left the city in ruins, plague and famine threatening whoever survived the attacks. What is more, a series of gruesomely murdered prostitutes shocks the few who know of them. When Felix, Gotrek, the wizard Max Schreiber and the lovely Kislevite Ulrika are asked to protect an artefact belonging to an old man, there seems to be no connection. There is, of course, since an ancient vampire came looking for that very artefact, which seems to be very powerful indeed. The Arisen manages to steal the thing, taking Ulrika hostage. Trying to save her life, Gotrek, Felix and their friends hunt down the vampire, following him to his homeland Sylvania, where the Vampire Counts once ruled - and will rule again, if our heroes will not prevail.

Serial novels have the tendency to be very predictable, following the same overall structure and tone. That has been very true for the Slayer series, until its miserable fifth instalment, "Beastslayer". The author William King constructed a plot around a villain as an environment to stage lots of high-level fighting scenes and battles. Most novels tended to illustrate one or the other race, geographical region or army book of Games Workshop's Warhammer World. It's a simple structure, but sometimes it was an entertaining one. However, William King seems to have realised that he needed to adapt that scheme to be able to keep Gotrek and Felix alive.

Which is not saying that "Vampireslayer" is not predictable. We still get to know the identity of the villain very early in the plot, to be able to follow the road to his destruction. King's talents certainly don't lie in mystery or the creation of suspense. One of its two plots twists is a little more than foreshadowed and no surprise to any reader. Neither does the text indulge in subtleties. While there are a few points about the ethical ambivalence of a vampire's existence, the novel's philosophy is rather stale and stereotypical. Gamers will look for some background information about Sylvania and the Vampire Counts, but there is nothing new or original to be found in that department. Still, King stopped having one battle after the other and pushing the

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level of the villains to incredible dimensions, which is a very welcome change. On the whole, though, the first three quarters of the book are all but tedious.

After that, however, William King redeems himself by pulling through some showdown. There is a second plot twist which, while possibly predictable, is still surprising in its harshness and its consequences to the overall plot of the series. More importantly, King has a few of his best moments describing the final confrontation in and around the Vampire Count's castle. I especially recommend the scene where the villain summons a regiment of skeletons, which is a morbid beauty.

As a postscript, let me add that "Vampireslayer" does not feature Grey Seer Thanquol. While the Skaven leader and his lackey Lurk were still hanging around "Beastslayer" in a little subplot with no consequence whatsoever, the new novel does not even mention them. It is a terrible fate for such a nicely crazed villain to just be dropped long after becoming useless. Gotrek, be merciful and kill that rat!

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