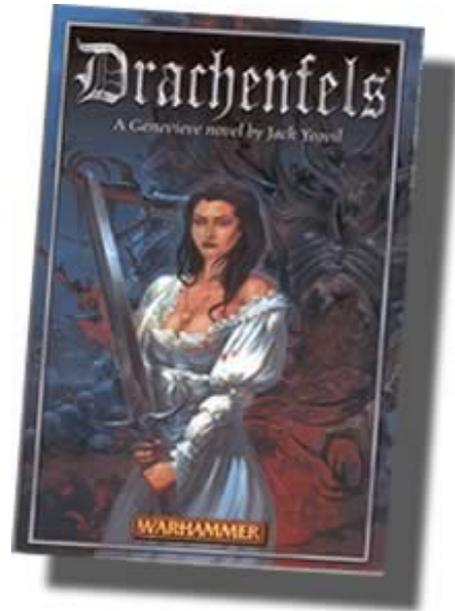


Drachenfels

By Jack Yeovil
Reviewed by Markus Widmer

The Black Library has not been known for its reprints until recently. Well aware of the fact that most of their products won't make it into the literary canon (or even the fantasy canon), they usually treated their books as disposable texts. Once they were out of print, they were gone. Luckily for Warhammer fans, the Black Library is beginning to make exceptions. And, even more luckily, they start with probably the only three novels worth reprinting: the Genevieve novels by Jack Yeovil. Hiding behind this pen name is the British author Kim Newman, who has gained some renown through his "Anno Dracula" series soon after the second Yeovil-novel. He is also a film critic and screen-writer, author of non-fiction books about horror and SF, and the proud owner of one of the strangest moustaches I have ever seen. Most importantly though, he is an excellent writer with a great sense of humour.



"Drachenfels" is the first of three novels featuring the character Genevieve Dieudonné, a surprisingly nice and gentle vampire girl. In the first of the three books, she is confronted with a dark memory of her past. Genevieve was one of the handful of adventurers who took on the evil wizard Drachenfels in his own, warped castle. Their leader, the noble Oswald von Königswald, single-handedly killed the mage, though no-one really knows how. Many years later, the same Oswald, now elector of Ostland, commissions the brilliant actor and playwright Detlef Sierck to concoct a drama about his quest. Oswald gathers the survivors of his adventures, not all of whom are very eager to go back to Castle Drachenfels, in the ruins of which the play is to be staged. The rehearsals at the castle are soon troubled by the dark spirits the players seem to have awoken. Mysterious deaths occur, mutants are exposed and a certain actor seems to identify just a little too intensely with the character he is to portray.

The writer Kim Newman is known for his ironic use of classic horror stories and generic stereotypes. It is thus rather typical that he did not write about a quest to kill the evil wizard, but about a play about a quest to kill the evil wizard, which inadvertently turns into a quest to kill the evil wizard. Got it? This may sound a little abstract, but in fact the novel is a page-turner. The writing is straightforward and its pacing is fast, with a good eye for detail and a sense of humour but no self-indulgent pseudo-poetry that mars so many fantasy novels. As a reader, I was instantly immersed in the plot, the suspense of which kept me tense until the last letter. Moreover, Yeovil creates a number of memorable characters. Genevieve Dieudonné herself is, technically speaking, probably too powerful, and she does not seem to

have much to do with the Vampire Lords of WFB. However, as she hardly ever uses her supernatural abilities, the rule-related questions stay out of the picture. Instead, Genevieve is portrayed very sympathetically as a being striving for humanity, struggling with her own immortality. Detlef Sierck goes a long way in "Drachenfels", from a failed genius to bouts of hubris, from moments of triumph to the dirty and dangerous reality of true heroism. The novel also features a very plausible and well-balanced cast of minor characters, among them a climacteric diva and the most heart-warming mutant of all times.

"Drachenfels" is the best ranked among the best Warhammer novels. It provides a realistic feel of the Old World, without having to resort to the usual clichés of mud'n'blood. It dwells in the shady ambiguities between good and evil which originally made the Warhammer background so interesting. It is well written and features a great story and subtle characters. In four words: a very good read.

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