

Skaven

By Alessio Cavatore
Reviewed by Tom E. Green

Warhammer Skaven was published in spring of 2002 and was written by Alessio Cavatore, with additional material by Anthony Reynolds, Andy Chambers and Phil Kelly. This Warhammer armies supplement numbers 80 pages and contains the detailed army list and unit profiles for using the Skaven miniatures in the Warhammer Fantasy Battle Game. If that were all that it was then it would fit into an issue of White Dwarf. The real importance of a supplementary book for army lists is the inspirational artwork, background information, short stories and full color photos of painted Citadel miniatures. I will try to address all of these things within the course of this review.



Artwork: The front cover features a dark and violent painting by Alex Boyd. This sets the mood for the rest of the book, as all of the artwork is a grim portrayal of the Skaven in their grittiest and most aggressive poses. Most of the illustrations seem to be new work commissioned for this release. I did spot a couple of older pieces but nothing that doesn't support the theme of filth and violence. The least effective piece is on page 33, but while the illustration is absurd, the flavor text of "Hieronymus Bouscus" is perfect. I would have given the text dominance over the artwork placing it in a much larger font so as to be the primary focus of the page. The illustration would have been better used as simply an impressionistic background to the text. My favorite illustration is that of the Grey Seer atop a screaming bell on page 31. The perspective adds an original point of view not often seen in Warhammer illustrations.

Just as the Skaven army is not for beginner Wargammers the painting section in the center of this book is not geared for the beginning painter. The 16 page color section at the heart of the Skaven army book is both pleasing to look at and informative for the dedicated painter. While there is a basic explanation of the techniques "drybrushing" and "ink-wash" most of the information on how the "eavy metal" team achieved the look of the studio models must be gleaned from the pictures of the finished models and help from the supporting text. The two-page spread on Skaven Terrain was such that I felt glued to the pages and my fingers were itching to create such masterpieces of miniature architecture as the dilapidated mill with water wheel.

Background: Origins of the Skaven is a two-page spread that gives you the impression you have become a scholar of arcane lore in ancient tomes. Then after the first paragraph you read "Once upon a time, long long ago..." ok if you look at it as a bad joke I guess its tolerable, but for the dark and sinister mood of Warhammer it just seemed like a waste of ink on the page. I thought that if I could get past that retched introduction I might be rewarded with something original. No such luck.

What follows is a sad retelling of the biblical story of the “Tower of Babel”. Then comes the “gray clad stranger” and the tolling of the bell that brings something akin to Noah’s flood. Just when it can’t get much duller it turns out that dwarfs really are very stingy and not altogether bright. I wonder why the “manlings” didn’t just leave the city when it got really bad. Oh well, don’t strain your eyes for this tale in small print, its not worth it.

The next two-page spread doesn’t try to be cute; it just gives you the straight story on the Skaven society. It is a good introduction for the new Skaven general. A map of the old world follows this section. It is done from the Skaven point of view. I liked the reference to locations such as “Man Things” and “Dead Things”. Personally I would have liked to see the names of some of the distant Skaven holdings given rather than only the names of the cities of men. It might be possible on the original map to see which clans control parts of the Skaven under-empire, but I struggled to make out the dark gray markings of the clans icons on the little gray circles. The map could certainly use some improvements, but the intent was good.

“Skaven Special Rules” is the best new thing in the Skaven army book. These rules add power, flexibility and character to the Skaven army. “Strength in Numbers” gives Skaven high leadership in big units, (but keep your flanks protected). “Life is Cheap,” allows Skaven to target ranged attacks at enemy units engaged in close combat. Perhaps the new rule with the most character is “Lead From the Back” which, as the name implies, allows characters to lend their leadership to a unit while hiding in the back row. This is particularly useful with Battle Standards, allowing them great protection from the enemy.

The next sections of the book cover the Clans and their unique units within the Skaven Army. The Warlord clans bring the Clanrats, Stormvermin, Slaves and Rat Swarms. The background here is limited to a paragraph or less for each but given the limitations of the format it is understandable that the bulk of the space for background was given to the primary clans. Each of the subsequent clans presented gets a two-page short fiction piece preceding their pages troop descriptions. If you lack the stomach for these stories, maybe you should stick to playing the Empire or the Dwarfs. Gruesome yes, could be worse, but certainly paints the picture of how divided the clans are against one another. Indeed half the time they seem to be at war with themselves, rather than focused on dominating the world. The stories are good and the backgrounds of the various troop types adequate. Each of the major clans also has accompanying artwork depicting their elite units. The rules for each special unit are clearly stated, but I can’t emphasize enough how valuable the summary on the last page of the book is for such a complex force as the Skaven have become. It makes them an interesting alternative for the experienced general, but perhaps too confusing for the novice. Some of the changes in the Skaven army reflect their unique sub-culture. The rules for their magic are not as per the standard for 6th edition Warhammer, and their unit restrictions allow for specialized forces using the core Clanrats as a measurement for how many of each other type you are allowed to take.

Masters of the Under-Empire is the special characters section. It is sadly lacking for in-depth character backgrounds. But then if you have read the Gotrek and Felix

novels you are probably more familiar with Thanquaol than the average Skaven general. The authors ran short on background space for characters, due to the extensive rules involved in using them. I would like to know more about the characters at the start of this section, such as Ikit, Skrolk and Queek. The end of this section is a four-page short story, the longest piece of fiction in the book. It reads like one of the new-style battle reports, and while I was bored in the middle of the story, it got better towards the end. If it had a title, perhaps it would be: Dastardly Skaven Grey Seer makes good on promise to eradicate dwarf army.

The Verminous Horde is the section on tactics for the Skaven player. While I didn't agree with all of it, it was well written. There is an easy to follow breakdown of each of the greater clans, and how to use their specialist troops. Then closing the book are some experimental army lists that give some more choices for an army that already has so many choices as to make the players head spin. Still if you are a fanatical follower of one of the greater clans, you will be pleased by the optional Clan Warlord choices.

Altogether, this was a worthwhile effort on the part of Alessio and his chattering cohorts. While there were some things I didn't like so well, they were made up for by the new rules, good photos, and a very versatile army list. I will say that for the player of Warhammer Role-playing, this book is not an essential reference tool. Not much to sink your teeth into for establishing a Skaven campaign. But for the player of Warhammer Fantasy Battle, this is a winner.

Stun Factor: 7 of 10