

Genevieve Undead

by Kim Neman

reviewed by Markus Widmer

The last part of the so-called Genevieve trilogy, "Genevieve Undead" marks the return of the ancient teenage vampire as a true heroine. Not Jack Yeovil's best work, but certainly amusing.

After "Drachenfels" and "Beasts in Velvet", one could expect the final Genevieve novel to be another intricate mystery novel. As it turns out, "Genevieve Undead" is not a novel at all, but a collection of three novellas, which vary in tone and quality. All three have a Jack Yeovil a.k.a. Kim Newman trait in common. He has again ransacked literary history to incorporate its classics in the Warhammer world in an ironic and self-referential way.

The first story, "Theaterblut", has the playwright and actor we know from Drachenfels, Detlef Sierck, compose a play called "The Strange Tale of Dr. Ziekhill and Meister Chaida". Yes, it is just what it sounds like. Playing the part of the innocent prostitute, the young rising actress Eva Sarinen dazzles audiences. Detlef himself is bound to rediscover the dark shadows he gained in Castle Drachenfels, playing both Dr. Ziekhill and Meister Chaida. Meanwhile, a cleric of Solkan rediscovers something else that was created and apparently destroyed in the castle. Whatever it is, the thing wants revenge - and its target is Detlef Sierck.

And yet another tortured character - and a further literary reference - haunts Sierck's playhouse, in the form of a backdrop ghost. This phantom, as you might have guessed, secretly tutored young Eva Sarinen to be the greatest actress of all time. Genevieve also features in the story, since she is still Sierck's "undying love", although she will learn shortly that it is time to move on.

"Theaterblut" is the only part of the Genevieve Trilogy that could actually be called a sequel. It takes up story lines and themes of "Drachenfels", spinning them in another direction. The text's atmosphere is very dense and gloomy, but its suspense is not quite as nerve-wracking as in "Drachenfels" or "Beasts in Velvet". One could argue that the references to "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" and "Phantom of the Opera" are a little too obvious. On the other hand, it is clear that the references are intended to be blatant.

The next novella, though, takes the quoting game even further. "Das kalte, düstere Haus" is a pastiche of everything Gothic. For one, almost every character mentioned in the story is named after some famous figure out of a classic 19th century gothic novel. You get a Christabel and a Melmoth, a Dr. Waldemar and a Vathek. Making sure that even the guys in the back row get the joke, the noble family owning the manor house of the title is called Udolpho. And just like Ann Radcliffe's classics, the



story does not feature much of a plot, but lots of gloomy details. Every set-piece known from the gothic novels of the Romantic era resurfaces in Yeovil's tale: decadent nobles and lecherous monks, chain-rattling ghosts and dusty dungeons, sleepwalking ladies and hollow laughter, original forms of torture and most diverse ways of dying. One of the more original in-jokes of the novella is that the Udolphos are actually Genevieve's relatives, which of course they are: the vampires of modern literature are the 19th century gothic stereotypes' offspring.

In the end, though, "Das kalte, düstere Haus" is a nice piece of spoof, but nothing more. A reader unfamiliar with the works of Walpole, Radcliffe or "Monk" Lewis probably will not see much in this curious spooky tale. Set in Tilea, it is justifiable that the story's tone is very different from anything else in the trilogy. However, I cannot help asking myself, if the self-referential in this piece has not turned into self-indulgence.

The last novella in the volume, "Das Elfenbein des Einhorns", seems to be another attempt by Jack Yeovil to do something different. Genevieve is forced to kill Graf Rüdiger von Unheimlich by someone blackmailing her. She joins a hunting party at the Graf's lodge, where the latter tries to make a man out of his son Doremus by having him hunt and kill unicorns, as well as drink their bodily fluids. Soon enough, though, the whole thing turns into a man-hunt. It is not always clear though, who exactly is the hunter and who the hunted.

The unicorn hunt seems to be a touch too "high-fantasy" for Warhammer, but the animal itself is just a MacGuffin for much more intricate intrigues. As usual with Yeovil, the characters are well-drawn and life-like, the language is to the point. The story is too low-key to be a dramatic showdown for a novel, but that is not the intention. It is an intimate, but nevertheless suspenseful, novella.

As you can see, "Genevieve Undead" is a mixed blessing. Those expecting something in the line of the two previous novels will probably be disappointed, since apart from the first novella, the stories do not seem to fit tightly in the Warhammer canon. The volume lacks the straightforwardness that gave its predecessors their page-turner quality. On the other hand, it is nice to see that Warhammer novel actually can drift toward literariness, even if it is not entirely for their own good. "Genevieve Undead" may be a little loose and self-indulgent, but it still qualifies as a good read.

Stun-Factor: 6 out of 10