

Hammers of Ulric

Written by Dan Abnett, Nik Vincent and James Wallis

Published by the Black Library

£5.99

Hammers of Ulric is set in and around the great city of Middenheim, as we know it from many Warhammer publications. The book's many protagonists all become involved in the foiling of a most sinister plot which threatens the city's existence. But first, we witness a company of White Wolf Templars finding a new leader, a country girl discovering the city, a thief meeting a strangely invisible boy, and a priest of Mórr with a past investigating strange murders.

It took me about three months to read through *Hammers of Ulric*. Not because I'm a particularly slow reader, or because I didn't have a lot of time, but simply because it bored the living daylights out of me. As a novel, it is a complete failure. This is probably due to the fact that three different authors worked on it. Such co-operation may work from time to time, but only if the team consists of particularly brilliant writers, and only if their effort is very well co-ordinated. Neither is true for *Hammers of Ulric*.

In fact, this so-called novel is just a collection of rather lame short stories, which are interconnected in a loose and very unconvincing way. The different chapters themselves didn't really incite me to turn another page. The descriptions aren't detailed or in any way original, the storylines are predictable to the point where I as a reader would have welcomed any twist, even the most ridiculous one. When in finally comes the showdown, it is so ludicrous and overdone beyond anything feasible in Warhammer that boredom turned into annoyance. Neither do the many characters of the book save the day. Most of these are actually nothing more than regurgitated clichés. Take the White Wolves themselves. One of them is a gambler, which, in the logic of *Hammers of Ulric*, means that he predictably starts all of his sentences with "I'll bet..." or "I'll wager...". This is characterisation as subtle as the blow of a warhammer.

To be fair, there are a few nice touches in the book. The idea of a monk playing detective is not exactly new, but making him a priest of Mórr with a dark past is an idea that works. I also liked the notion of an innocent and naïve boy who is so inconspicuous that he is virtually invisible. In other words, a natural thief. Furthermore, I think that the overall storyline of *Hammers of Ulric*, as weak as it is for a novel, could actually work as the backdrop of a role-playing campaign. Predictability and cheap thrills are the deathblow to any literary text, but, as any GM knows, those simply-knit structures work quite well in the context of a role-playing scenario. Still, a good GM would have to change quite a lot of things. Magic, for instance. Magic is used in *Hammers of Ulric* as a cheap excuse for anything that actually couldn't happen. All religious and ritual icons of the city stolen in one night? 'Magic' has done it! That is bad GM practice, and even worse writing. Moreover, you would have to change the chief villain drastically, simply because he operates beyond any rule. I might have accepted that as 'poetic license', but not if this is the only thing 'poetic' in the book.

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Which brings me to the point that most annoyed me as a reader: language. The text, as I mentioned, was written by three different authors - and it shows. Apart from the fact that the writing is operating on a very low standard anyway, the mixture of American and British English, of different tones and rhythms, is appalling. In the same book, you will find sentences such as "Whoa! No way!" and "Sweat beaded his broad, young brow". It seems like American High School kids and Barbara Cartland have joined forces to invade the Warhammer world.

To conclude, let me assure you that my personal standards for Warhammer novels are very low. I don't expect literature, I don't expect much of a novel. All I ask is a little inspiration and a touch of originality. *Hammers of Ulric* has none of this. It combines an uneven and boring storyline with bad writing. The Black Library can do better.
(mw)

Rating: 1 of 10