

Vampire Counts

By Alessio Cavatore

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I do not have the previous Vampire Counts or the even older Undead army books; so I will not be making a comparison with them for this review. For those who also do not have them but wonder what has changed or stayed the same, I would direct you to read the reviews, written by Garrett Lepper.



Warhammer Vampire Counts was published in spring of 2001 and was written by Alessio Cavatore, with additional material by Tuomas Pirinen and Space McQuirk. This Warhammer armies supplement numbers 80 pages and contains inspirational artwork, background information, short stories and full color photos of painted Citadel miniatures. Of course, the heart of the book is the detailed army list for the Vampire Counts army, complete with stat lines and point costs.

Artwork: The front cover features an evocative painting featuring the “Red Duke” and his “Black Knights” mounted and charging into the face of the viewer. Sadly, it is the only colored artwork you will get in this book, aside from a small picture of a ghoul (or perhaps he is a Strigoi Vampire) on the back cover. The rest of the artwork is dark and foreboding, an excellent representation of the flavor the writers have given this army in the background text and short stories. What it is NOT, however, is helpful in painting an army of Citadel miniatures. The color section in the center of the book showing the ‘*eavy metal* teams’ painted Vampire Counts army is meant to do that. Is it everything you could hope for? No.

Page 33 starts the color section off with the standard Games Workshop “pump up the painter- you can do it ” speech. There is a reminder that you will not likely be able to paint your first army to the high quality represented in the book, but maybe

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on your second or third army... Just have fun, that's the ticket. Whatever. Turn the page and enter de-ja-vu mode. There it is again, that obnoxious white dwarf article on how to paint skeletons. They call it "Painting the Undead" but it should be called "More plastic skeletons and variations on the color of dried bones". So after four pages of the nice plastic regiments of skeletons and zombies we get to the Vampire character pages. No you wont find out how they painted them, just good pictures of the various models available for you to buy, and painted up real sharp in black, red and white. Ok, I realize that those are the tried and true colors for vampires, but what I really wanted was a how to article on variations for ghouls and the Strigoi, Dire Wolves and Fell Bats.

What did I like best about the color section? Pages 46 and 47 have terrific pictures of terrain that makes me droll. How about a how-to article on making some of these incredible spooky houses and graveyards? You will have to get issue 255 of White Dwarf for the "beginners guide to boneyards". (Side note* not a bad issue overall, since it also has Alessios' article about writing the VC book and contains a battle report and pictures of converted undead models.)

Background: The Introduction is a nice piece of descriptive writing that sets the mood for the material to come, and then gives a bit of information about the chapters in the book. Next we enter the ancient city of Lahmia and get two full pages of text on the origin of Vampires in the Warhammer World, and specifically the history of the Lahmian Bloodline. Good stuff, I felt like I had a handle on the background of the undead after reading this. Turn the page and you get a short story about an encounter between a Kislevite soldier and a deceptive young girl. There is also a piece of artwork that must have been done for this story, but it doesn't depict the scene as I pictured it, perhaps the artist didn't get to read the story first.

What follows the story is an account of the Von Carstein line of Vampires, and another short story, this time in the form of an intercepted letter. The counts of Sylvania and their history are all here, but it doesn't trace their bloodline back to Lahmia. Why is that? I wonder.

I really like the next two-page spread. A map of the old world, marked with the locations and bloodlines of Vampire strongholds. While only in grayscale, it is one of my favorite maps ever produced for the old world. Want to know which Vampires live where? Consult this map and be amazed.

Blood Dragons get their fair shake in this edition of the Vampire Counts army book. A two-page spread, including a dark and gritty illustration, gives us the story of Abhorash and his founding of the Blood Dragon line. Also mentioned, in passing, are two other famous Blood Dragons; Walach, who founded Blood Keep in the Empire, and the Bretonnian Blood Dragon, known as the Red Duke. The next two pages has a short story about an encounter between a Questing Knight of Bretonnia and a Blood Dragon who haunts the forest of Chalons and challenges passing knights in single combat. Not so much original, but at least well written.

Next comes a page of background about the Necrarch Vampires. This reads more like an encyclopedic entry and is just a longer description of the Necrarchs than what can be found in the *Living Dead*, the army section of the book. For a more interesting account of the origins of this bloodline I recommend White Dwarf issue 256 and the Vampire article by Space McQuirk. The short story of a Necrarch and his overly ambitious apprentice is not particularly exciting, but fills the space nicely. The same can be said of the two-page spread of artwork that follows. Grim, dark and evocative of DaVinci's notebooks (if DaVinci had studied undead monsters) somehow it leaves me unsatisfied considering the amount of space allocated for it.

The Strigoi section is a two-page spread, including a great illustration of one of these monstrous Vampires. While better than the Necrarch article it is still greatly enhanced by reading the Vampire article in WD 256. Strangely the short story that follows is told from a Skaven point of view and relates to an attempt of the ratmen to invade the Tilean city of Miragliano. In their typically amusing ineptness, the Skaven are devoured by ghouls and a Strigoi Vampire. Comic relief I suppose, but I liked it.

The *Living Dead* is a nine-page section, outlining the troop types available to a Vampire Counts army. This was an unexceptional but adequate descriptive series of short articles introducing the Characters and Units. The description, profile and any special rules are all given, everything you need except the point cost and the bloodline abilities can be found here. This is followed by the *Shades of Death* color section, described earlier.

Unholy Artefacts is the title of the Vampire Counts magic items section. Every item is given a minimum of one sentence description and then the rules that apply to it, and the cost. Better treatment of the "Artefacts" would have been to include them in the short stories and artwork so that they could have more character than

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just a name and short description. For example, the Staff of Damnation is a 40 point magic item that contains the bound spell *Hellish Vigour*. The description reads, “The Staff of Damnation contains a powerful spell that fills the undead with renewed vigour.” Pretty exciting? No? What if the “Staff” was featured in one of the short stories, or if we were told in the description a little about the items history? I feel that it would make the magic items more interesting to get a chance to see them and know some of the background of how they came to be.

One of the best things about Vampire Counts is the choice of “Bloodline” abilities. In the next six pages we get a breakdown of the modifiers that characters can receive by choosing one of the *Bloodlines*, or Families, of the Vampires. There are four families to choose from that modify the basic stat line, which is representative of the Von Carstein line. Then each of the five families is given a choice of six special abilities to pick from. The add on abilities add anywhere from 10 to 65 points to the cost of the character they are given to, but it is a great way to specialize your Lord and Hero characters. Each of these pages is also graced with a piece of artwork depicting the Vampire Bloodline in question.

The Black Art is a two-page spread that lists and describes the magic lore of Necromancy. Necromancy is the specialized magic of the Vampire Counts army and as such is not available to any other army. The rules presented here are clear easy to digest and almost as poorly described as the magic items. The names are terrific, evocative of the mood of this army, I only wish the descriptions were given a bit more thought.

Armies of Darkness is the Vampire Counts army list. This section is nine pages of the most vital information that a player of an undead army needs. Here can be found the profiles, special rules AND point cost of all the units available to a Vampire Counts general. I feel that this method of redundant listing of information must have some purpose only known to the games designers who have been listing the profiles this way for many years. In case you didn’t get the stats for the Wraith the first time around, here they are again. Oh, and just in case you don’t catch ‘em this time, you can find them in the handy reference chart on the last page (without point cost, of course).

Following the army list is the special characters section. *The Aristocracy of the Night* begins with background on the old favorites of the Undead. Here is the summary of Vlad Von Carstein, Walach of Blood Keep, Neferata, Vorag and Heinrich. You wont find the stat lines or special rules for these characters, but be

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patient, they will likely show up in some future issue of White Dwarf. The special characters, who get the full treatment, are Mannfred Von Carstein and Zacharias the Everliving. A full page is devoted to each, and for Mannfred at least a good full-page piece of art. The picture of Zacharias is just over half a page and not as good.

As we approach the end of the book we turn the page and without precedent find “Chapter 10”. Upon careful review of this two page spread I come to realize that they must have been short on material and so decided to throw in a little fluff. By inspecting the artwork along the edges of these pages it becomes clear that this is Chapter 10 of the Book of Sigmar, not of the Vampire Counts army book. It deals with the subject of how to kill Vampires and protect you from them. Nothing here about any of this actually pertaining to the game, just some simple drawings and cliché text of standard Vampire lore.

So how does the author of this tome feel about using the units of this army? Well I hope you wanted to know cause he’s going to tell you. Alessio takes a two-page spread to sum up the book. He basically tells you what each of the troop types are good for. Must have been written for the novice player.

The last section, short of the reference page, is called *Legions of the Dead*. This two-page spread I really like. Here can be found some alternate choices for army composition. In addition to the unit list modifications that allows you to customize your Vampire Counts army, there is also a good picture of a Lahmian vampire.

In conclusion I have to say that I like this book. It could have been better, but it is better than the first Vampire Counts book that I have read, but never purchased. This one I bought and would recommend to anyone with some experience with Games Workshop games who is thinking about starting a new army.

Tom E. Green

STS Rating: 8 of 10