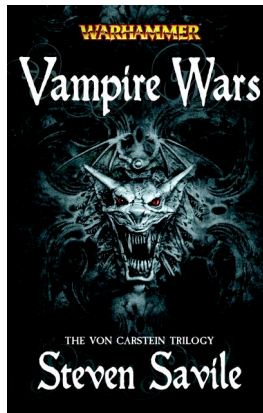


VAMPIRE WARS: THE VON CARSTEIN OMNIBUS

By Steven Savile

Contains the novels *Inheritance*, *Dominion* and *Retribution* plus a brand-new short story and introduction by the author.

The Von Carsteins are the most infamous vampires to stalk the Warhammer Old World. Their very names – Vlad, Konrad and Mannfred – conjure up images of doom, death and destruction. This omnibus edition collects all three of Steven Savile's Von Carstein novels, into one gore-drenched volume.



Inheritance – The rise to power of the dark and sinister Vlad von Carstein at first goes unnoticed, however, once he has established his rule in Sylvania, a plague of evil is set loose on the Empire. Can anyone save the land of the living from this bloodthirsty family of vampires?

Dominion – A new evil threatens the Empire when the insane Konrad von Carstein comes to power. Savage and bloodthirsty, he and his vampire servants embark on a reign of terror and conquest.

Retribution – The way lies clear for return of the greatest and most dangerous Vampire Count of all – Mannfred von Carstein. Divided by conflict, the rulers of the Empire must put aside their differences and unite to battle this threat from the new lord of Sylvania, or the land of men will be lost forever...

About the Author

British author Steven Savile is an expert in cult fiction, having written a wide variety of sf, (including Star Wars, Dr Who and Jurassic Park) fantasy and horror stories, as well as a slew of editorial work on anthologies in the UK and USA. He won the L. Ron Hubbard Writers of the Future award in 2002, was runner-up in the British Fantasy Award in 2000 and has been nominated three times for the Bram Stoker award. He currently lives in Stockholm, Sweden.

The following is an excerpt from *Vampire Wars: The Von Carstein Omnibus* by Steven Savile.

Published by the Black Library. Games Workshop, Willow Road, Nottingham, NG7 2WS, UK.

Copyright © Games Workshop Ltd, 2008. All rights reserved. Reproduction prohibited, in any form, including on the internet.

For more details email publishing@games-workshop.co.uk or visit the Black Library website www.blacklibrary.com

DRAKENHOF CASTLE

Late winter, 1797

THE OLD MAN WAS dying an ugly death and for all their skill and faith there was nothing either the chirurgeon or the priest could do to prevent it. Nevertheless they busied themselves by plumping the sweat-stained pillows that propped the old man up, and fussing like fishwives with candle stubs and curtains to keep the shadows and the draughts at bay, and still the bedchamber was bitterly cold. Where there ought to have been a roaring fire the stacked logs and kindling remained unlit. The two men lit smoke to ward off the ill humours and offered prayers to benevolent Sigmar. None of it made a blind bit of difference. Otto van Drak was dying. They knew it, and worse, he knew it. That was why they were with him; they had come to stand the death watch.

His bottom lip hung slackly and a ribbon of spittle drooled down his chin. Otto wiped at it with the back of a liver-spotted hand. Old age had ravaged the count with shocking speed. Otto had aged thirty years in as many days. All of the strength and vitality that had driven the man had fled in a few short weeks leaving behind a husk of humanity. His bones stood out against the sallow skin. There was no dignity in death for the Count of Sylvania.

Death, he finally understood, was the great leveller. It had no respect for ancestry or nobility of blood, and his death was determined to be as degrading as it could be. A week ago he had lost

control of the muscles in his face and his tongue had bloated so much so he could barely lisp an intelligible sentence. Most of the words he managed sounded like nothing more than drunken gibberish.

For a man like Otto van Drak that was perhaps the most humiliating aspect of dying. Not for him the clean death of the battlefield, the bloodlust, the frenzy, the sheer glory of going out fighting. No, death, with its macabre sense of humour, had other humiliations lined up for him. His daughter had to bath him and help him go to the toilet while he sweated and shivered and barely managed to curse the gods who had reduced him to this.

He knew what was happening. His body was giving up the ghost one organ at a time. It was only the sheer force of his will that kept him breathing. He wasn't ready to die. Otto was contrary like that; he wanted to make them wait. It was one final act of stubbornness.

Using a cold compress his daughter Isabella leaned over the bed and towelled the sweat from his fevered brow.

'Hush, father,' she soothed, seeing that he was trying to say something. The frustration ate at his face, sheer loathing burned in his eyes. He was staring at his brother, Leopold, who slouched in a once plush crimson velvet chair. He looked thoroughly bored by the whole charade. They might have been brothers but there was no fraternal bond between them. Her mother had always claimed that the eyes were gateways to the soul. Isabella found them mesmerising. They contained such intensity of emotion and feeling. Nothing could be hidden by them. Eyes were so expressive. Looking into her father's now she could see the depth of his suffering. The old man was tormented by this degrading death but it would be over soon.

'Not long now,' the chirurgeon said to the priest, echoing her thoughts. He bent double over his case of saws and scalpels, rummaging around until he found a jar of fat-bodied leeches.

'Perhaps there is small mercy in that,' the priest said as the chirurgeon uncapped the jar and dipped his hand in. He stirred his

hand through the leeches and lifted one out, placing it on the vein in Otto's neck so that it might feed.

'Leeches?' Isabella van Drak asked, her voice tinged with obvious distaste. 'Is that really necessary?'

'Bleeding is good for the heart,' the surgeon assured her.

'Reduces the strain if it has less to pump, which means it can keep on beating longer. Believe me, madam, my beauties will keep your father alive much, much longer if we let them do their work.' The young woman looked sceptical but she didn't stop the surgeon from placing six more of the bloodsuckers on her father's body.

'All... talking about me... like I am... gone... Not... dead... yet...' Otto van Drak rasped. As though to prove the point he broke into a violent coughing fit before the last word was clear of his lips. He slapped ineffectually at the leeches feeding off him.

'Be still, father.' Isabella wiped away the mucus he coughed up.

'Damned... giving up... without... a fight.' Otto struggled to form the words. The frustration was too much for him.

Leopold pushed himself up from the chair and paced across the floor. He whispered something in the surgeon's ear and the other man nodded. Leopold stalked over to the window and braced his hands on the windowsill, feeling the wainscoting with his fingers. Listening to the old man's laboured breathing he dug his nails into the soft wood.

A jagged streak of lightning lit the room, throwing gnarled shadows across the inhabitants. Thunder rumbled a heartbeat later, the vibrations running through the thick walls of Castle Drakenhof. Leopold could barely keep the smug smile from his face. Rain lashed at the glass, breaking and running like tears through his reflection. He chuckled mirthlessly. Crying was the very last thing he felt like doing. 'You'll be damned anyway, you old goat. I'm sure the only reason you aren't dead already is that you are terrified they're all waiting for you on the other side. That's right isn't it, brother of mine? All of those wretched souls you put to death so cheerfully. You can hear them, can't you, Otto? You can hear them calling to you. You know they are waiting for you. Can you imagine

what they are going to do to you when they finally get the chance at retribution? Oh my... what a delicious thought that is.'

Otto's eyes blazed with impotent rage.

'Come now, Otto. Show some dignity in your final hours. As Count of Sylvania I promise you I will do all I can to dishonour your memory.'

'Get... out!'

'What? And miss your final breath, brother mine? Oh no, not for all the spices in Araby. You, dear Otto, have always been an incorrigible liar and a cheat. Dishonesty is one of your few redeeming features, perhaps your only one. So, let me put it this way: I wouldn't be surprised if this was all one grand charade. Well, I won't be a laughing stock at your expense, brother. No, no, I'll wring the life out of you with my bare hands if I have to, but I won't leave this room until I've made sure you are well and truly dead. It's nothing personal, you understand, but I am walking out of here Count of Sylvania, and you, well the only way you are leaving here is in a box. If the roles were reversed I'm sure you'd do the same.'

'Damn you...'

'Oh yes, quite possibly. But I'll cross that bridge when I come to it, which looks like it will be a good while after you've already gone trip-trapping over it, eh? Now be a good chap and die.'

'Vile...'

'Again, quite possibly, but I can't help wondering what father would think if he could see you. I mean, no disrespect, but you are a mess, Otto. Dying obviously doesn't become you. It hasn't changed you much, either, for that matter. So much for learning the error of your ways. You are still too cheap to light a damned fire in your bedroom so we have to freeze while we wait for you to pop off.'

'Damn you... your children... damn all... rot... in pits... of hell. Never let you... be... count.' Otto clawed at the bed sheets, the skin around his knuckles bone-white. 'Never!'

Lightning crashed once more, the bluish light illuminating the sickening fury in Otto van Drak's face. Twin forks struck somewhere along the mountain path between the castle and the town

of Drakenhof itself. Fat rain broke and ran down the glass of the leaded window as another jag of lightning split the storm-black darkness. The wind howled. The wooden shutters rattled against the outer wall.

‘I don’t see that you have much say in the matter, all things considered,’ Leopold said. ‘That sham of a marriage you so conveniently engineered for Isabella with the Klinsmann runt, well it was laughable, wasn’t it. I can’t say I was surprised when the boy threw himself from the roof of the Almoners Hall. Still, all’s well that ends well, eh, brother?’

Sitting down on the edge of the old man’s bed, Isabella dabbed away the blood-flecked saliva that spattered his chin and turned her attention to her uncle. She had known him all of her life. At one time she had worshipped the ground he walked on but with age came the understanding that the man was a worm. ‘And I suppose I have no say in the matter.’

Leopold studied his niece for an uncomfortable moment as she brushed the long dark hair back from her face. She was beautiful in her own way, pale-skinned and fine-boned. The combination crafted a glamour of delicacy around the girl though in truth she owned the foul van Drak temper and could be as devious as a weasel when the mood took her.

‘None, I’m afraid, my dear. Would that it was otherwise, but I am not the law-maker. By accident of birth you came out... female. With no sons your father’s line ends, and mine, as eldest surviving male begins. With your betrothed coming to such an... untimely end... well, that is just the way it is. You can’t tamper with tradition, after all it becomes traditional for a reason. Though,’ Leopold mused thoughtfully as though the idea had just occurred to him. He turned to look at the priest. ‘Tell me, how does the benevolent Sigmar look upon the union of close family, say uncles and nieces, Brother Guttman? Being the kind of man I am, I might be convinced to make the sacrifice to set my dear brother’s mind at rest. Wouldn’t want to see the only good thing he ever managed to create forced into whoring on the street, would we?’

‘It is frowned upon,’ the aged priest said, not bothering to look at Leopold when he answered him. The priest made the sign of Sigmar’s hammer in the air above Otto’s head.

‘Ah, well. Can’t say I didn’t try, my dear.’ Leopold said with a lascivious wink.

‘You would do well to mind your tongue, uncle.’ Isabella said, coldly. ‘This is still my home, and you are alone in it, whereas there are plenty of servants and men-at-arms here who remain loyal to my father, and in turn, to me.’

‘A woman scorned and all that, eh? Well of course, dear. Threaten and bluster away. You know I love you like my own flesh and blood and would never see you suffer.’

‘You would turn your back so you didn’t have to watch,’ Isabella finished for him.

‘Damn, you’ve got spirit, girl, I’ll give you that. A true van Drak. Heart and soul.’

‘Hate... this. I don’t... want... to die.’ The leeches at his throat and temples pulsed as they fed on Otto van Drak. In the few minutes since the surgeon had placed them they had bloated up to almost a third again their size and still they sucked greedily at the dying count’s blood.

‘Pity you have no choice in the matter, old man. First you die, and then you will go to Morr and I am sure the Lord of the Underworld will delight in flensing your soul one layer at a time. After the kind of life you’ve led I can’t imagine any amount of grovelling and snivelling by our friend the priest here will help you avoid what’s coming to you.’ Leopold said. ‘Tell me, Brother Guttman, what says your god on this matter?’ Leopold asked the stoop-shouldered priest of Sigmar. The man looked decidedly uncomfortable at being addressed directly.

‘Only a repentant soul can be shrived of the taint of darkness,’ the priest answered. Isabella helped the aged holy man kneel at Otto’s bedside.

‘And there you have it, brother, out of the mouthpiece of blessed Sigmar himself. You’re damned.’

‘Are you ready to unburden your soul of its sins before you meet Morr?’ Victor Guttman asked Otto, ignoring Leopold’s gloating.

‘Get... away... from me... priest.’ Otto spat a loose wad of phlegm into the priest’s face. It clung to the cheekbone just below the old man’s eye before slipping down into the grey shadow of his stubble. The frail priest wiped it away with a shaking hand. ‘I have nothing ... nothing ... to repent. Save your breath... and mine.’ Otto trailed off into a fit of raving, spitting out half-formed words and curses in a senseless torrent.

‘Father, please,’ Isabella said softly but it was no good, the old man wasn’t about to be convinced to cleanse his soul.

‘Oh, this is wonderful stuff, Otto. Quite wonderful,’ Leopold gloated. ‘Do you think I have time to summon the priests of Shallya and Ulric so you can alienate their gods, too? Any others you would particularly like to offend?’ Another jag of lightning split the darkness. If anything the storm was worsening. The shutters clattered against the stonework outside, splinters of wood tearing free. The wind howled through the eaves, moaning in high pitched chorus from the snarling mouths of the weather-beaten gargoyles that guarded the four corners of the high tower. ‘Every bitter word that froths from your mouth is rubbish, of course, Otto, but such marvellous rubbish. Give it up. All this breathing must be awfully tiresome. I know I am growing tired of it.’

The laughter died in his throat.

Three successive shafts of lightning turned the black night for a heartbeat into bright day. The storm lashed the countryside. The trees bent and bowed in the gale. Skeletal branches strained to the point of breaking. Thunder grumbled around the hilltops, the heavy sounds folding in on themselves until they boomed like orc war drums.

A shiver chased down the ladder of Leopold’s spine one bone at a time. Behind him the priest pressed Otto to confess his sins.

‘It’s pointless,’ Leopold said, turning to smile at the earnest priest. The old man’s hands trembled and every trace of colour had drained from his face. ‘If he starts at the beginning he won’t make it

out of his teens before Morr takes him. Our Otto has been a very bad boy.'

'Morr... take... you...' Otto cursed weakly as a fit of coughing gripped him. He hacked up blood. Brother Guttman took the towel from Isabella and made to wipe up the red-flecked saliva but Otto jerked his head away with surprising strength. 'Get... away from me... priest... won't have you... touch me.' Otto slumped back exhausted onto his pillows.

As though the sheer force of Otto's loathing had undone him, the priest staggered back a step, his hand fluttering up weakly toward Isabella to prevent himself from falling as his knees buckled, then swayed and collapsed. The side of his head and shoulder cracked off the rim of the bedside table with the sick sound of wet meat being tenderised.

Mellin, van Drak's surgeon, moved quickly to the fallen priest. 'Alive,' he said, feeling the faint pulse at Brother Guttman's throat. 'Though barely.'

Lightning rent the fabric of the bruise-purple sky, the incessant drumming of the fat rain stopped suddenly.

The frail priest contorted in a series of violent convulsions, almost as though his body were somehow earthing the raw electricity of the storm. And then he lay deathly still.

In the deafening silence that followed there was a single sharp knock and the door opened.

A terrified man-servant stood in the doorway, head down, humble. A hauntingly handsome man pushed past the servant, not waiting for his formal introduction. The stranger was easily a head taller than Leopold, if not more, and had to stoop slightly to enter the bedchamber. In his hand he held a silver-topped cane. The handle had been fashioned into the likeness of a dire wolf, teeth bared in a feral snarl. The shoulders of his cloak were a darker black where they were soaked through with rain and water dripped from the brim of his hat.

‘The noble Vlad von Carstein, my l-lord,’ the servant stuttered. With a wave of the hand, the newcomer dismissed the servant who scurried off gratefully.

The sound of rain rushed back to drown the silence in the very heart of the storm.

The newcomer approached the bed. His boots left wet prints on the cold wooden boards. Leopold stared at them, trying to fathom where the man had come from. ‘Out of the storm,’ he mumbled, shaking his head.

‘I bid thee humble greeting, Count van Drak,’ the man’s accent was peculiarly thick; obviously foreign. Kislevite perhaps, or further east, Leopold thought, trying to place it. ‘And you, fair lady,’ he said, turning to Isabella, ‘are quite enchanting. A pale rose set between these withered thorns.’

Her face lit up with that simple compliment. She broke into a lopsided smile and curtsied, never taking her eyes from the man’s. And such eyes he had. They were animalistic in their intensity, filled with nameless hungers. She felt herself being devoured by his gaze and surrendered willingly to the sensation. The man had power and he was not averse to exploiting it. A slow predatory smile spread across his face. Isabella felt herself being drawn to the newcomer. It was a subtle but irresistible sensation. She took a step toward him.

‘Stop staring, woman, it is quite unbecoming.’ Leopold snapped. ‘And you, sir.’ He turned his attention to the stranger. ‘Thank you for coming, but as I am sure you can see, you are intruding on a somewhat personal moment. My brother is failing fast and, as you only die once, we would like to share his last few minutes, just the family, I am sure you understand. If you care to wait until... ah... afterwards, I would be pleased to see you in one of the reception rooms to discuss whatever business you have with the count?’ He gestured toward the door, but instead of leaving the newcomer removed his white gloves, teasing them off one finger at a time, and took Isabella’s hand. He raised it to his lips and let the kiss linger there, ignoring Leopold’s blustering, the convulsing priest and the surgeon as they were clearly of no interest to him.

‘I am Vlad eldest of the von Carstein family—’ the newcomer said to the dying count, ignoring Leopold’s posturing.

‘I don’t know the family,’ Leopold interrupted somewhat peevishly.

‘And neither would I expect you to,’ the stranger countered smoothly. He regarded Leopold as though he were nothing more interesting than an insect trapped in a jar of honey, the sole fascination being in watching it drown in the sticky sweetness. ‘But I can trace my lineage to a time before van Hal, to the founding of the Empire and beyond, which is more than can be said of many of today’s nobility, yes? True nobility is a legacy of the blood, not something earned as the spoils of war, wouldn’t you agree?’ Vlad unclasped the hasp on his travel cloak and draped it over the back of the crimson chair. He set the wolf’s head cane down to rest beside it, laying his white gloves over the snarling silver fangs, the wet hat on top of the gloves. His raven black hair was bound in a single braid that reached midway down the length of his back. There was an arrogance about the man that Leopold found disquieting. He moved with the grace of a natural predator stalking tender prey but equally there was no denying the fellow possessed a certain magnetism.

‘Indeed,’ Leopold agreed. ‘And what, pray tell, brings you to us on such a foul night? Does my brother owe you thirty silvers, or perhaps he had your betrothed executed on one of his foolish whims? Let me assure you, as the new count, I will endeavour to make good on whatever debt you feel the family owes you. It is the very least I can do.’

‘My business is with the count, not his lackey.’

‘I don’t see what—’

‘There is no need for you to see anything, sir. I was merely in the vicinity, travelling to the wedding of a close friend, and I thought it right and proper to pledge fealty to the current Count van Drak, to offer my services in any way he might see fit.’

In the bed Otto chuckled mirthlessly. The chuckle gave way to another violent fit of coughing.

‘Marry...’ Otto’s eyes blazed with vindictive glee. ‘Yes,’ the dying count hissed maliciously. ‘Yes... yes.’

‘Preposterous! I will not stand for this nonsense!’ Leopold spluttered, a flush of colour rising in his cheeks so the broken blood vessels showed through angrily. ‘In a few hours I will be count and I will have you drawn and quartered and your head on a spike before sunrise, do you hear me, fool?’

Otto managed something halfway between a cough and a laugh.

On the floor, the priest of Sigmar was gripped by a second, more violent, series of spasms. The surgeon struggled to hold him fast and prevent the old man from biting off or swallowing his tongue in the depths of the fit.

‘Like... hell... will... see you ruined first!’ Otto spat, an echo of his true self in his final defiance.

‘Sir,’ Vlad said, kneeling at the bedside. ‘If that would be your will, I came to be of service, an answer to your prayer, and as such I would gladly accept the hand of your daughter Isabella as my wife, and would that you were alive to see us married.’

‘No!’ Leopold grabbed at Vlad’s shoulder.

The priest’s heels drummed on the floor punctuating Leopold’s outburst.

‘Excuse me,’ Vlad said softly, and then rose and turned in one fluid motion, his hand snaking out with dizzying speed to close around Leopold van Drak’s throat.

‘You are annoying me, little man,’ Vlad rasped, lifting Leopold up onto the tips of his toes, so that they were eye to eye. He held him there, Leopold kicking out weakly and flapping at Vlad’s hand as the fingers tightened mercilessly around his throat, choking the very life out of him. Leopold struggled to draw even a single breath. He batted and clawed at Vlad’s hand but the man’s grip was relentless.

And then, almost casually, Vlad tossed him aside.

Leopold slumped to the floor, retching and gasping for breath.

‘Now, we do appear to have a priest, could you rouse him?’ Vlad von Carstein told the surgeon. ‘Then we can get on with the

ceremony. I would hazard that Count van Drak does not have long left, and it would be a shame to rob him of the joy of seeing his beloved daughter wed, would it not?’

Mellin nodded but didn’t move. He was staring at Leopold as he struggled to rise.

‘Now,’ Vlad said. It was barely above a whisper but it was as though the word itself possessed power. The chirurgeon fumbled for his bag and knocked it over, sending its contents skittering across the floor. On hands and knees he picked through the mess until he found a small astringent salve. Shaking, he smeared the ointment on Brother Guttman’s upper lip. The Sigmarite priest shuddered and came to, spluttering and slapping at his mouth. Seeing Vlad for the first time, the aged priest recoiled, reflexively making the sign of Sigmar’s hammer in the air between them.

‘We have need of your services, priest,’ Vlad said, his voice like silk as his words wrapped around the priest, caressing the man into doing his bidding. ‘The count would have his daughter wed before he passes.’

‘You cannot do this to me! I won’t allow this to happen! This is my birthright! Sylvania, this castle... it is all mine!’ Leopold blustered. He needed the support of the wall to help him stand.

‘On the contrary, good sir. The count can do anything – anything – that he so wishes. He is a law unto himself. If he bade me reach into your chest and rip out your heart with my bare hands and feed it to his dogs, well,’ he held his hands out, palms up, then turned them over as though inspecting them. ‘It might prove difficult, but if the count willed it, believe me, it would be done.’

He turned to Isabella. ‘And what of you, my lady? It is customary for the bride to say “yes” at some point during the proceedings.’

‘When my father dies he,’ Isabella levelled a finger at the cringing Leopold, ‘inherits his estate, the castle, the title, everything that by rights should be mine. All my life I’ve lived in the shadow of the van Drak men. I’ve had no life. I’ve played the dutiful daughter. I’ve been possessed – and now, my father is dying and I hunger for

freedom. I hunger for it so desperately I can almost taste it, and in you, perhaps finally, I can realise it. So give me what I want, and I will give myself to you, body and soul.'

'And what would that be?'

She turned to look at her father in his death bed, and saw the malicious delight in his face. She smiled: 'Everything. But first, a token... A morning gift, I believe they call it. From the groom to the bride as proof of his love.'

'This is ridiculous!' Leopold shouted, his voice cracking with the strain of it.

'Anything,' Vlad said, ignoring him. 'If it is in my power to give, you shall have it.'

She smiled then, and it was as though she sloughed off the years of subjugation with that simple expression of pleasure. She drew him to her and whispered something in his ear as he kissed her delicately on the cheek.

'As you wish,' Vlad said.

He turned to face an apoplectic Leopold.

'I am a fair man, Leopold van Drak. I would not see you suffer unduly so I have a proposition for you. I will give you time to ponder it. Five minutes ought to suffice. Think about it, while the priest gets ready for the ceremony, and my wife to be makes sure her father is comfortable, and then, and only then, after five full minutes have passed, if you can look me in the eye and tell me that you truly wish me to stand aside, well then, I will have to accede to your will.'

'Are you serious?' Leopold asked somewhat incredulously. He hadn't expected the stranger to back down so easily.

'Always. What is a man if there is no honour to be found in his word? You have my word. Now, do you accept?'

Leopold met Vlad's coldly glowing eyes. The startling intensity of the hatred he saw blazing there had him involuntarily backing up a step. He felt the wall and the ridge of the windowsill dig into the base of his back.

‘I do,’ he said, knowing it was a trap even as he allowed himself to be shepherded into it.

‘Good,’ Vlad von Carstein said flatly. In four quick strides he was across the room. With one hand he picked Leopold up by the scruff of the neck, the other he rammed into the man’s chest, splintering the bone as his fingers closed around the already dead man’s heart. In a moment of shocking savagery he wrenched it free and hurled the corpse through the window. There were no screams.

The dead man’s heart in his hand, Vlad leaned out through the window. Lightning crashed in the distance. The eye of the storm had passed over Drakenhof and was moving away. In the lightning’s afterglow he saw the outline of Leopold’s body spread out on a flat rooftop three storeys below, arms and legs akimbo in a whorish sprawl.

Isabella joined him at the broken window, linking her fingers with his, slick with her uncle’s blood. But for the blood the gesture might have been mistaken for an intimate one. Instead it hinted at the darkness inside her: by taking his hand she was claiming him and the life he offered every bit as much as he was claiming her and the power her heritage represented.

The power.

‘Your gift,’ he said, offering the heart to her.

‘Throw it away, now that it has stopped beating I have no use for it,’ she said, drawing him away from the window.

Somewhere in the night a wolf howled. It was a haunting lament made more so by the wind and the rain.

‘It sounds so... lonely.’

‘It is missing its mate. Wolves are one of the few creatures that mate for life. It will know no other love. It is the creature’s curse to be alone.’

Isabella shivered, drawing Vlad closer to her. ‘Let’s have no more talk of loneliness.’ Rising onto tiptoes she kissed the man who promised to give her everything her heart desired.

Vampire Wars: The Von Carstein Omnibus can be purchased in all better bookstores, Games Workshop and other hobby stores, or direct from this website and GW mail order.

Price £9.99 (UK) / \$11.99 (US) / \$15 (CAN)

ISBN 13: 978 1 84416 539 1

- Bookshops: Distributed in the UK and the US by Simon & Schuster Books.
- Games & hobby stores: Distributed in UK and US by Games Workshop.
- UK mail order: 0115-91 40 000 US mail order: 1-800-394-GAME
- Online: Buy direct care of Games Workshop's web store by going to www.blacklibrary.com/store or www.games-workshop.com.