

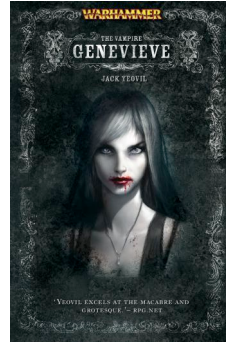
THE VAMPIRE GENEVIEVE

A Warhammer omnibus

By Jack Yeovil

Contains the novels *Drachenfels*, *Genevieve Undead*, *Beasts in Velvet* and *Silver Nails*.

Meet Genevieve Dieudonné. She's beautiful, powerful, resourceful and courageous... and over four hundred years old. In the dark forests and cities of the Warhammer world, she and her unlikely companions battle the forces of evil and insanity. From the dark lord Drachenfels to a deranged killer running loose in the city of Altdorf, Genevieve must use all her wits and skill to survive. However, the vampire blood running through Genevieve's veins means she must constantly fight the urge to surrender to the evil within her.



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The following is an excerpt from the anthology *The Vampire Genevieve* by Jack Yeovil.

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

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The first Genevieve Dieudonné knew of the treachery of Ueli the dwarf was the prod of a blade-end in her right side, just above the hip. Cloth and skin dimpled, and she felt a wasp-like sting. There was something about the knife. It slipped under the flaps of her padded leather jerkin and into her flesh.

Silver. The knife was edged with silver.

Her body took fire at the touch of the charmed metal. She felt the weapon withdrawn and half-turned, ready for the killing thrust, for the heart-strike. She heard herself hissing and knew that her face – the face she had not seen for six centuries – was twisted, eyes reddening, sharp corner-teeth bared. The wet hole in her side closed, tingling. Blood trickled down the inside of her britches.

Somewhere, on one of the nearby crags, an unclean bird was squawking as it devoured the weakest of its young. Rudi Wegener was on his knees, trying to wrestle Sieur Jehan down, a hand pressed to the spewing hole in the scholar's throat.

This pass they had come to, this stony and unfruitful spot high in the Grey Mountains, was a filthy place. It was late afternoon and she was still slowed by the sun; otherwise, Ueli would never have dared strike at her.

She brought her ungauntleted hand up, palm out, and placed it beneath her breast, shielding her heart. The knife leaped forward and she saw Ueli's face contorted in a feral snarl. His thumb-size teeth were bloodied from Sieur Jehan's neck and she could see torn fragments of skin caught between them.

She pushed outwards and caught the knifepoint with the centre of her hand. The pain was sharper this time, as the bones were displaced. She saw the point pricking outwards from the back of her hand. Flesh parted and the red metal emerged from between her middle knuckles.

Even through her slow-flowing blood, the silver caught the last of the sunlight. Ueli swore and spat red foam. He put his shoulders into the attack and tried to push her arm back, to staple her hand to her chest. If the silver so much as scraped her heart, there would be no more centuries for poor Genevieve.

She could ignore the pain of the sundering of her flesh – by tomorrow, there wouldn't even be the slightest scar – but the silver burned inside her. She shoved the dwarf back, the blade sliding through her hand by agonizing inches. She felt the hilt against her palm and made a fist, gripping the dwarf's weapon with still-strong fingers.

With his free hand he punched her in the kidneys, twice. She was ready for that; the blows didn't bother her. She kicked him square in the chest and he backed away from her, leaving his knife in her blood-slick grasp. He reached for the curved dagger in his boot and she backhanded him. The blade that stuck out like a spiked extra finger from her fist carved a deep rut across his forehead. Her hand hurt as the knife jarred against Ueli's skull.

The dwarf fell back, blood in his eyes, and three darts appeared in a diagonal line across his chest, sunk to the feathers in his ribs. Anton Veidt had used his trifurcate crossbow well. Genevieve pulled the knife out of her hand and threw it away. She made and unmade her fist as the stinging wound closed. Ueli still staggered as Veidt's venom shocked his body, the little smears of death coursing through his veins, reaching for his brain. The bounty hunter mixed his poisons with unrivalled skill. Stiffening, the dwarf fell.

Erzbet, the dancer-assassin, looped her wire noose around Ueli's neck. She pulled it tight, cinching until she was satisfied of his death. Genevieve held out her bloodied hand. Oswald von Konigswald was there with a kerchief, which she took from him. She licked the slit clean, savouring the tang of her own blood. Then,

she wrapped the kerchief tightly about her hand, pressing shut the already-healing wound.

‘Dwarf bastard,’ said Veidt, hawking phlegm at Ueli’s dead face. ‘You never know when one’s going to turn.’

‘Less of the dwarfish bastardy, bounty hunter,’ said Menesh, who had joined them with Ueli. Genevieve had always supposed they were related. ‘Look.’

The traitor was growing in death. At least, his skeleton and insides were expanding. His dwarf shell and clothes split, and showed raw pink and purple through great tears. Human-sized bones twisted on the ground, their wet contents pouring through the remaining, ragged strips of Ueli’s skin.

Oswald stepped back, leery of getting his fine Tilean leather boots in the mess. Ueli’s still-glaring eyes popped and maggots writhed in their sockets, spilling over stretched-tight cheeks and into his beard. His tongue slithered out of his mouth like a strangling snake, twisted down impossibly long towards his chest and then died. Erzbet voiced her disgust loudly as she pulled her noose free.

‘He was no true dwarf,’ said Menesh.

‘That’s certain,’ said Rudi Wegener, who had given up stanching Sieur Jehan’s wounds, leaving the doctoring to his tame warlock, ‘but what was he?’

Menesh shrugged, his harnessed weapons rattling, and touched the still-spreading body with his boot-toe. ‘A daemon, perhaps. Some creature of Drachenfels.’

The dwarf kicked Ueli’s swollen helmet off the wide ledge. It fell, striking the ground long after they had forgotten it.

The stink of the grave wafted away from the remains of the dwarf-seeming thing who had ridden with them for three months. Ueli had shared quarters with them and broken bread with them. He had never spared himself in their fights and Genevieve knew that without his deftly-thrown knives she would have been orc-meat several times over. Had Ueli always been a traitor to them? Always in the service of Drachenfels? Or did his treachery begin a few moments ago, when the shadow of the Fortress fell upon him? How little she really knew about any of her companions in this adventure.

An adventure! That is what it had seemed when Oswald von Königswald, eyes ablaze, had recruited her in the Crescent Moon. She had been working in the tavern at Altdorf, trading one drink for another, for a hundred years or so. Longevity brings a heavy burden of tedium. Genevieve, suspended eternally between life and death since the Dark Kiss, had been willing to do almost anything to relieve her boredom. Just as Anton Veidt was willing to do almost anything for gold crowns, or Sieur Jehan for a chance to increase his learning, Rudi Wegener to expand his glory, or weeks-dead Heinroth to achieve his cherished revenge. And Oswald? What was Oswald – Crown Prince Oswald, Genevieve reminded herself – willing to do almost anything for?

An adventure! A quest! The stuff of ballads and chap-books, of legends and tavern tales. Now, with so many dead behind them and two more dying in her eyesight, Genevieve was less certain. Now, their business here seemed just a nasty, messy job of murder. A nasty, messy life had to be ended, but murder it still was.

‘Sieur Jehan?’ Oswald asked.

Rudi, the ruddy cheeriness gone from his bluff bandit’s face, shook his head. The scholar was still bleeding, but his eyes showed only white. He had stopped kicking. Stellan the Warlock looked up from the corpse.

‘He had no chance. The dwarf bit clean through his throat to the bone. He’d have bled to death if he hadn’t been strangling for lack of air. Or the other way round. Either would have done for him.’

‘Enough,’ said Oswald, ‘we must go on. It’s nearly nightfall. Things will be more difficult after dark.’

Difficult for the others; better for her. The sun dipped below the horizon and Genevieve felt her night-senses come back. She could ignore the echoes of pain in her hand and side. Above them all, the fortress of Drachenfels stood against the crimson sky, its seven turrets thrust skywards like the taloned fingers of a deformed hand. The clifftop gates were, as ever, open, a maw in the side of the stone. Genevieve saw the eyes in the darkness beyond the gates, half-imagined unwelcoming shapes flitting past innumerable windows themselves shaped like eyes.

This was where their adventure would end. In a castle as grey and jagged as the mountains around it. A fortress older than the Empire and darker than death. The lair of the Great Enchanter. Drachenfels.

Constant Drachenfels, the Great Enchanter, had been old, had been ancient, long before the first birth of Genevieve Sandrine du Pointe du Lac Dieudonné. And that, she never allowed herself to forget, had been six hundred and thirty-eight years ago.

In true life, Genevieve's home had been the city of Parravon, in the east of Bretonnia, where her father was minister to the First Family and her sisters were counted among the greatest beauties of a court renowned throughout the Known World for its great beauties. Drachenfels had been more often abroad among men in those days and went to show his metal-masked face in the courts and palaces of Bretonnia and the Empire.

The stories were fresher then. Tales were told in a whisper of his vast debauches, of his inconceivable crimes, of his devastating rages, of his titanic sorceries, of his terrible revenges and of his single defeat. Drachenfels had been one of the powers of the world. She supposed, though half-forgotten, he still was. He had only been bested once, at the hands of Sigmar Heldenhammer. Strange to think that Sigmar had been deemed a man then. A hero, but still a man. Now, the priests called him the patron deity of the Empire. Sigmar was gone, no one knew where, but the monster he had once humbled was still here. The evil of Drachenfels was still very much with the world.

As a girl of twelve, four years before the Dark Kiss, Genevieve had seen Drachenfels in person. He rode through Parravon with his army of the dead, bedecked in gorgeous silks, wearing his mask of gold. The heads of the First Family's militia captains bobbed open-mouthed on pikes. An assassin dashed from the crowds and was torn to pieces by Drachenfels's rotting lieutenants. Daemons danced in the air, bearing away pieces of the martyred daggeman. Genevieve hid behind her sisters' skirts, but got a good look all the same.

Her father's friends had discussed Drachenfels in her presence. His origins were unknown, his weaknesses unknown, his powers unlimited, his evil depthless. Even his face had not been seen by living man. She had tried to conceive of a hideousness under the mask, a hideousness so dreadful that it would make the skull-and-meat faces of Drachenfels's armies seem attractive. Or, as her sister Cirielle suggested, a handsomeness so awesome that all who gazed upon it were struck dead in an instant. Cirielle was always the silly one. She had died of the plague some fifty years – a heart's beat, really – later.

Drachenfels had his tribute from Parravon, but slew the First Family nevertheless. As an example. Genevieve's father also perished, served with other public officials as a meal for one of the Enchanter's attendant daemons. Six hundred years later, Genevieve could summon little thirst for vengeance. Her father would have lived another twenty, thirty years – thirty-five at the most – and would still be lost to her memory. It's hard to think the premature death of a mayfly any great tragedy. She sometimes found the faces of her parents, her sisters, her friends at court, popping into her mind. But mostly those were lost times, a life that had happened to someone else.

A few years later, years that were now minutes to her memory, Chandagnac came to her uncle's house. Chandagnac with his dark eyes and plaited beard, his needle-like teeth and tales of the world's youth. She received the Dark Kiss, and was born a second time, born into this half-life.

Chandagnac was dead, too. He had always been too flamboyant for their kind and made too many important enemies. Finally, the priests of Ulric hunted him down and pinned him to the ground with a length of hawthorn while they sawed off his head with a silver scimitar. That was three hundred years ago. She was the last of his get that she knew of. There were many others older than she, but they lived far to the east, on the borders of Kislev, and kept to themselves. Occasionally, mindless dead things would come to the Crescent Moon, drawn by her presence, and she would turn them

out, or put an end to them, depending on how she felt. Sometimes, they could be a nuisance.

Centuries had passed and everything had changed many times. Empires, dynasties, wars, alliances, cities, a few great men, numberless little ones, monsters, arts and sciences, forests; all had come and gone like the seasons of the year.

Genevieve was still walking the earth. And so was Drachenfels.

She wondered if he felt the same suppressed kinship for her that she felt for him. There were songs that they alone of all the world would recognize, once-famous names that they alone knew, extinct animals the taste of whose meat they alone could recall. Probably, he did not feel for her. Probably, he was only dimly aware of her. She was what she was, at best the cousin of humanity, but Drachenfels was beyond even that. He had ceased to be any kind of a man long before he rode into Parravon. The face he kept beneath his bland collection of metalwork masks would not remotely resemble anything else that drew breath.

Tonight, one way or another, she would look upon that face. Perhaps long-dead-and-dust Cirielle was right after all. Perhaps she would not survive the sight. And perhaps, after six and a half centuries, she would not mind dying all that much.

She had followed Drachenfels's career down through the ages, kept a mental note of the kingdoms sacked and bled dry, the plagues unleashed, the tributes exacted, the daemons set free. He had been quiet for a few centuries now, quiet in his impregnable fortress in the Grey Mountains. Some believed Drachenfels dead, but there were too many evidences of his continued handiwork throughout the Old World. The wizards who frequented the Crescent Moon would talk about him sometimes, about the disturbances he was making in that sphere beyond time and space where the greatest of enchanters venture in search of the vast principal beings of the universe. They knew enough not to sign up with Oswald's expedition. Some said he was too old to be the monster he once was, but Genevieve knew that immortals grow rather than diminish in strength as they put years behind them. Some ventured that the Great Enchanter was voyaging within himself, trying to plumb the depths of his own darkness, to

summon the worst of his personal daemons. One song, sung only by a strange-visaged Bretonnian minstrel, suggested Drachenfels was meditating his many sins, finding the strength to battle again with Sigmar and that this time he would vanquish the wielder of the warhammer forever, bringing about the end of all things.

She had heard all manner of rumours, but none had touched her more than any other tavern gossip until Prince Oswald von Konigswald, son of the elector of Ostland, walked into the Crescent Moon. He told her that Constant Drachenfels was preparing to return to the world and take over the Empire, and that the Great Enchanter would have to be stopped before he could bring down fiery doom upon an entire continent.

That had been three months ago. Oswald was a year or two older than she had been when Chandagnac had kissed her. She supposed him a handsome youth and could see around him the aura of the great and noble man he would grow into. He would be elector after his father, of course. The elector of Ostland could sometimes sway the others completely and hold the course of the Empire in his hands. Never had a candidate opposed by Ostland succeeded. Never. Oswald's father lived in a comparatively modest palace, but upon occasion Luitpold himself came to his court as if the elector were Emperor and he the supplicant. If Luitpold's son, Karl-Franz, were to succeed him on the throne, he would need the support of Oswald's father. Indeed, since the elector had married late and was now nearing the end of his middle years, the Emperor would soon need the support of Prince Oswald.

Genevieve had heard that the prince was a serious youth, a young man capable of outstripping all his tutors in everything from gastronomy to philosophy, and who was as skilled with the Estalian guitar as with the longbow of Albion. The tavern jesters told jokes about the grave-faced boy who had, it was rumoured, once shamed Luitpold into withdrawing a proposed edict against harlotry by asking if the Emperor intended to set an example by burning at the stake a certain substantial Tilean fortune teller much in evidence at court functions since the demise of the lady empress. And Genevieve had read, with interest, a slender but acclaimed volume

of verse in the classical style, published anonymously but later revealed, through a careless boast on the part of the elector's tutor-in-residence Sieur Jehan, to be the work of Oswald von Konigswald. Nevertheless, she had been unprepared for his ice-clear eyes, the strength of his handshake and the directness of his speech.

In the back room of her tavern, Oswald had offered her his wrist. She had declined. Aristocratic blood was too rich for her. She depended upon the friendless, the unmourned. In Altdorf, there were many without whom the Empire, indeed the world, would be much improved. And they had been her meat and drink since she had decided to settle down.

Sieur Jehan was with the prince, a bagful of scrolls and bound books with him. And Anton Veidt, the bounty hunter who cared for his weapons as others care for their women. Oswald knew about her father. Oswald knew things about her that she had herself forgotten. He offered her a chance for revenge and, when that hadn't been a temptation, appealed to her need for variety, for change. The young Sigmar must have been like this, she thought, as she sensed the excitement Oswald was suppressing. All heroes must have been like this. Suddenly, rashly, she longed for a taste of him, a flavour of the pepper in his blood. She didn't mention her rush of lust, but somehow she knew that he had seen the desire in her, and answered her longing with a need of his own, a need that would have to be postponed until after the accomplishment of his current mission. She looked into his eyes, into the eyes in which her face was not reflected and, for the first time in centuries, felt alive again.

Sieur Jehan laid out the proofs of Drachenfels's recent doings. He read aloud the testament, obtained through a medium, of a wizard who had lately been found flayed and boneless in his chambers. The dead sorcerer alleged that all manner of magical and daemoniacal forces were converging on the fortress of Drachenfels, and that the Great Enchanter was reaching new levels of power. Then the scholar talked of a plague of dreams and visions that had been reported by the priests of all the gods. A masked man was seen striding over a blasted land, between the fires that had been cities and the deserts that had been forests. The dead were piled high as

mountains and the rivers were nine-parts blood to one-part water. The forces of evil were gathering and Drachenfels was at their heart. Oswald intended to face the monster in his lair and vanquish him forever. Again, he offered her the chance to join the party and this time she relented. Only then did he reveal that his father, and presumably Emperor Luitpold himself, had refused to believe Sieur Jehan's evidence and that he was pursuing this venture unsupported by any Imperial forces.

They set out from Altdorf for the Grey Mountains the next day.

Later, others joined. Rudi Wegener, the bandit king of the Reikwald Forest, threw in his lot with them and helped fight off the possessed remnants of his own comrades during one long, dark night in the thick of the woods. Along with Rudi came Stellan the Warlock, who had lived with the bandits and was determined to pit his magics against those of the Great Enchanter, and Erzbet, the dancer-assassin from the World's Edge who recited every night like a prayer the names of those she had killed. Ueli and Menesh had been recruited at Axe Bite Pass, where an entire community of peaceful peasants had turned out to be daemons in disguise, and where young Conradin, Oswald's squire, was spitted and eaten by an altered ogre. The dwarfs had been travelling south, but were willing to pledge their swords for gold and glory. Heinroth, whose soul was eaten away by the murder of his children, joined them soon after. A raiding party of orcs from the fortress had made sport with his two little sons and killed them afterwards. He had vowed to scar himself with his serrated blade every day he let Drachenfels live, and grimly sliced at himself every morning. One day, they woke up to find Heinroth turned inside out, with words carved into his bones.

GO BACK NOW.

None of them had heard a thing, and the sharp-witted Veidt had been standing guard.

Through it all, Oswald had been at their head, undaunted by each new horror, keeping his followers together – which in the case of Veidt and the dwarfs or the licentious Erzbet and the fanatically ascetic Heinroth hadn't been easy – and forever confident of the eventual outcome. Sieur Jehan told her that he had been like this

since childhood. The scholar evidently loved the boy as a son and chose to follow Oswald when the prince's real father had refused to listen. These were the last great days, Genevieve had thought, and their names would live in ballads forever.

Now, Conradin was dead. Sieur Jehan was dead. Heinroth was dead. Ueli was dead. And before the night was over, others – maybe all of the party – would be joining them. She hadn't thought about dying for a long time. Perhaps tonight Drachenfels would finish Chandagnac's Dark Kiss, and push her at last over the border between life and death.

Oswald walked straight up to the open gates of the fortress, looked casually about and signalled to them. He stepped into the dark. Genevieve followed him. And the others came after her.

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

Price: £8.99 (UK) / \$10.99 (US) / \$15.00 (CAN)

ISBN: 1 84416 244 3

Bookshops: Distributed in the UK by Hodder. Distributed in the US by Simon & Schuster Books.

Games & hobby stores: Distributed in UK and US by Games Workshop.

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