



Middenheim: City of Chaos
Published by Hogshead Publishing
Reviewed by John Foody

Middenheim: City of Chaos was originally published as *Warhammer City* (with the tag-line 'A complete Guide to Middenheim, City of the White Wolf'). It is a companion piece to the scenario *Power Behind the Throne*, which forms Volume Four of the *Enemy Within* Campaign. Indeed, Middenheim: City of Chaos grew from the notes of Carl Sargeant, writer of *Power Behind the Throne*, only being developed into a fully-fledged book in its own right when the designers saw the city's potential.

The cover has been redesigned slightly, with Ian Miller's fantastic art given a more prominent position. As with *Death on the Reik*, this sets the atmosphere perfectly. The mood is continued by the new page introducing the book, designed in the style of a renaissance book cover. Inside, the art is variable. For the most part, the buildings are poor and the maps are average. Much of the rest is good, however, continuing the cover's example of setting the right tone. The fold-out colour map of the city is clear and useful, if not anything special. It would have been nice to have a detailed map, similar to the one supplied with *Death on the Reik*, that covered the area around Middenheim. Perhaps next time...

Middenheim remains my players' favourite city and it is not difficult to see why. The simple defining image of the city is very strong, both in character and appearance. Dedicated to Ulric, this stronghold stands high above the forest on a flat topped mountain (named Fauschlag meaning fist strike a named derived from the legend of its creation), both spiritually and physically. Space is at a premium, but the city is divided into clear districts, distinguished by class. It is a cosmopolitan and somewhat liberal city, being home to large populations of Elves, Dwarves and Wizards. Of course, not everything is as it appears.

The source book begins by detailing the history and general background of the city and this is put across nicely. Almost from the first page, relationships between various individuals and groups are set up. This aspect is present throughout the text, and helps make the city come alive. Another aspect noticeable from the outset is how much advice is given to GMs on how to run city-bound adventures. This is solid and well written, and got me wondering how much was written to help ease GMs away from 'dungeon style' adventures. Remember, at the time of its original release, these held sway over the gaming industry.

Each chapter covers an aspect of city life from religion to law, from defence to common pastimes, and so on. These give background and advice on how characters can interact with the relevant NPCs. 'Religion and Worship' details the inter-cult politics in the city, what services they perform and how characters can go about becoming initiates. The number and level of clerics within each temple is very well balanced.

The Chapter on law and order details each of the different kinds of court (Religious, Military & Criminal), and a system for putting characters through court. This is a little over-dependent in number crunching, but that can be forgiven; at least this reflects the somewhat arbitrary and biased nature of the legal system! Of course it wouldn't be difficult for GMs to incorporate more role-playing elements into this process if so desired.

The chapter on Chaos cults within the city is informative without being too detailed, allowing the Games Master plenty of room to manoeuvre.

The largest chapter in the book is a gazetteer to the city, divided into districts. An overview is given of each district and they give a nice idea of each one's atmosphere. A selection of the key buildings in the district are then detailed. In total, the chapter covers fifty or so landmarks in the city, including typical inns and taverns. These buildings, such as the various Temples and Guild Houses, are all places where PCs are likely to spend a lot of time while digging around for clues. However, each location is only covered briefly, with one line descriptions of NPCs at most.

Also described in some detail are a number of 'generic' buildings, such as an armorer, herbalist, printer and jeweller, among others. These are interesting, very briefly noting each industries' methods and covering the relevant NPCs in enough detail to make them usable at short notice.

The undercity of Middenheim is a collection of tunnels originally used to gain entrance to the city. Dwarves mined them out and were responsible for blocking them up again. However, there are mysteries and danger in them still. This network is only barely detailed, although the book encourages GMs to flesh them out.

With the city covered, what is there to do? A number of prominent personalities are detailed but the PCs are unlikely to meet them (until *Power Behind the Throne* anyway). More useful are descriptions of possible encounters with individuals such as beggars, agitators or footpads. Each district includes an encounter table for use with these descriptions. Random Encounters, although not to everyone's taste, certainly make more sense in a city than a dungeon.

A number of encounters are fleshed out in more detail, but sadly these are relatively uninspired. The short adventure contained within is also poor. After all the talk about how to stage city adventures, it goes and ignores most of its own advice. This is a shame, but is perhaps forgivable when you consider the book was intended as a companion to *Power Behind the Throne* - a full length city adventure. However, I have never found a use for these short cameos in my own campaign.

The book is written in a very economical fashion: lots of information given over quickly and succinctly. However, I do feel it is flawed in a number of areas. The use of magic is trivialised to some degree, and more detail and a few extra locations could have been added to flesh out the city. Example NPCs are in particularly short supply. For a source book it is quite short; GMs will have to spend some time fleshing out these bones. Also, it could really have done with a strong city-based adventure, separate from *Power Behind the Throne*.

Bearing in mind these negative aspects, I really like this book. The Warhammer atmosphere is very strong, it's full of appalling puns, and rereading it again has given me a host of ideas for encounters and plots. It succeeds in making the city a distinctive and interesting location, while at the same time serving as a useful template for other cities in the Empire. If you already own this book there is no need to buy this re-release. Strictly speaking, you aren't obliged to own this book in order to run *Power Behind the Throne*. That said, however, I do recommend this as an essential purchase in its own right.