



## Hammer's Slammers

*David Drake*

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When a planetary government faces threats from guerillas, insurgents or terrorists, the men they hire are Hammer's Slammers - known throughout the galaxy for their cold, ruthless ferocity, their ability to defeat overwhelming forces, and their willingness to go up against impossible odds.

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Introduction by Jerry Pournelle

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## Hammer's Slammers Details

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Author : David Drake

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## From Reader Review Hammer's Slammers for online ebook

### Valerie says

Very good story, well written & interesting to those of us not particularly thrilled with military hardware.

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### \_ says

Like with most of Drake's books I have read, afterward I find myself thinking... 'Well, that was almost good.' It's just on the border of OK and Good. This one was good in premise, and it had its moments of intensity, but for the most part I have to call it lackluster. Something about it just felt like I was thrown into the middle of a story without enough context to understand what was happening. You eventually get the info you need, but it's like having someone explain an inside joke after everyone is done laughing about it... it falls flat.

One word of caution to anyone reading these as part of the Complete Hammer's Slammers omnibus... ORDER MATTERS. I suggest you read in the order shown in the original, and not the order of the omnibus version. I did not realize this, and I think this is why I felt contextually lost as I mentioned above.

Anyway, I'm going to write about the individual stories (but not the interludes) in detail and give them ratings. I'll try not to get spoiler-y, but be cautious reading from this point forward. Overall I give the book a rating of PI - 22 stars over 7 stories – (3.14 stars) and call it an OK Read.

### But Loyal to His Own (4 stars)

An introduction to the origins of Hammer's Slammers. General Hammer must defend his troops from political plotting of the Friesland President who sent them out to fight in the first place. Now that they have won (at any cost) he fears they are too powerful and can't be redeemed. His solution to that problem is not something Hammer will let happen. This is a good story. It should be read first before anything. It is key to understanding the background for all the others.

### The Butcher's Bill (2 stars)

Introduces a recurring character, Danny Pritchard, who serves as a conscience (albeit maybe an ignored one) to Hammer's Slammers. In this story, the client who's hired the Slammers is naïve to the costs of war. They want to stop once they realize what's coming, and Mercenaries live off their reputations, and blood has already been spilled.

### Under the Hammer (3 stars)

This is a decent story introducing another minor recurring character, Rob Jenne, who gets his first taste of combat on his first day on the job.

#### Cultural Conflict (5 stars)

This is the best story in the book IMO. A tanker crew whose boring assignment is canceled runs afoul of local flora/fauna. A sentient hive mind tries to defend itself, but the supertanks of Hammer's Slammers are not a natural enemy. There is another minor recurring character intro in this one also, Sgt. Horthy.

#### Caught in the Crossfire (4 stars)

A competing Merc group is trying to set a trap for Hammer's convoy. They are using a village populated by women and children (whose men-folk – save one too injured to go - have been conscripted) to do it. One of the women, Margritte, is made a widow and has nothing left to strive for except revenge. She too becomes a recurring minor character in later stories.

#### Hangman (3 stars)

A competing merc company and the Slammers have been transition from fighting on either side of an ethnic war to keeping the peace in it. Unfortunately, the opposing mercs have too many cultural ties to one side and surreptitiously begin to aid them, while the Slammers can do nothing that won't jeopardize their own contract. That's why Danny Pritchard and his crew must allow one atrocity to trigger a reaction that will prevent a larger one. This story highlights Pritchard's conscientious but loyal personality, and the dichotomy of war as a means to peace.

#### Standing Down (1 star)

While this story puts a period to the quest for a home for the Slammers, it is scattered and not very memorable. Hammer returns his company to Friesland to help put a dictator in power... the dictator 'dies'... Hammer becomes ruler and is about to marry the daughter of former President Tromp to cement a political alliance. Holdouts die mercilessly.

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### **Karl Schaeffer says**

Better than i thought. Another cheap pick-up from the Library used book sale. First couple short stories were very detailed fog-of-war stories. latter stories showed some non-fighting plot and character development.

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## Benjamin Espen says

I didn't really enjoy this book. I was expecting something like Falkenberg's legions, which is reasonable since Jerry Pournelle blurbed this one, but I found that Hammer is a harsher, more brutal man than Falkenberg. This is probably an accurate portrait of many such soldiers, but I found it unpleasant to read about. I think there is a place for such stories, I just don't want to read them.

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## Frantick Reader says

From the fun era of war sci fi. So many books and stories that are lost in bargain bins that can excite the imagination and would most likely make better television shows and films than what we have today.

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## Nicole says

Very military, but very human too.

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## Jay says

This is a seminal, maybe even archetypal, work of military science fiction, and as such it ranks up there with Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* and Haldeman's *The Forever War*, though it doesn't get into civics like the former, or social commentary like the latter. It's the story of a mercenary regiment organized by Alois Hammer, a former colonel in the military of the powerful colony Frisia, in the late 26th (I think) Century--a period of fragmenting societies and rebelling colonies, analogous to the 15th and 16th Centuries in Italy when mercenaries were in high demand by all sorts of factions. The Slammers are different in that they are an armored regiment, which--by virtue of their iridium-armored hovertanks--is a much more expensive proposition than a leg infantry unit. In this collection of stories, they have to fight against rebel farmers, alien freedom fighters, and the perfidy and betrayal of their employers. The anthology spans a period of at least ten years, from the formation of the regiment to Hammer's marriage and retirement. Later volumes in the series, I assume, fill in the gaps in the chronology with additional tales of the regiment's adventures.

There are several recurring characters in the collection beyond Col. Hammer himself: Joachim Steuben, his closest confidante and psychopathic assassin; Margritte, the war-widow turned mercenary communications officer; Danny Pritchard, an enlisted man who worked up through the ranks to become a trusted officer; etc. These people give connective tissue to an otherwise disconnected series of vignettes that feature a little background and lots of well-described combat--based on Drake's own experiences in Vietnam.

The stories are interspersed with small explanatory essays that deliver background material regarding the universe in which they are set: the organization of the Slammers, the political history of Earth colonies that led to the current era; and so on. They are a tantalizing way of revealing details about the events that led to the formation and employment of the Slammers, without having to insert a stilted conversation between characters in the main narrative.

I first read this book in 1985, and dusted it off and re-read it in 2013. It held up beautifully across the intervening decades.

## **James says**

The author introduces an intriguing future universe and situation; the book is about a mercenary military unit traveling from world to world, all human - no alien cultures here - selling their services to the highest bidders in local wars. His characterization of combat is intense and his action sequences are fast-paced. Neither utopian nor dystopian, it presents a complex social situation that is more believable than the homogenous visions, either light or dark, of a lot of writers.

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## **Jason says**

There is nothing I can say to do David Drake's series justice. It was the first military science fiction I ever read (I was around 10 I think and reading one of my brother's books; this was around the time I read First Flight by Claremont too). Drake, at least in this series, always treated his characters as nothing more, or less, than just regular guys having a job to do. Many of them liked the job and many of them hated it, but it's what they were paid to do. Going back to these stories was like curling up with a childhood stuffed animal, comforting and nostalgic.

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## **Charles JunkChuck says**

This is the book that made David Drake, an exciting and quietly incisive collection of short stories following the (mostly) noble mercenaries of Colonel Alois Hammer's armor divisions. While the stories can be read as straight combat fiction, written by a man who saw war first hand, there are greater truths not only about war, but about peace and human nature, about honor and duty and fraternity, at every corner. Drake has gone on to become one of the more accomplished speculative fiction writers of our time, and compared to his masterful and seemingly effortless contemporary work these stories can seem a little rough, but that comes with its own merits which actually serve the hard-nosed spirit at work. Note: I read this book as a high school student and it was, along with Gordon Dickson's "Soldier, Ask Not" one of the primary reasons I became a sci-fi junkie, so read at your own risk: contents are highly addictive.

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## **Wolfgang Kolb says**

Great read for an insightful view on the role of the "professional" soldier. Given recent world events and the increasing need for military contractors, Hammer's Slammers still has its place.

The book format is a quick read and very easy to rip through a chapter then put it down and come back. This book is more of a sketch to the imagined world Drake portrays with the a deeper look into the underlying philosophies of military action and the men that are required to carry out these actions. Added bonus, explosions, tanks, advanced weapons tech and body parts.

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## Cheryl says

The original version of short stories about Hammer's Slammers by David Drake has everything you really need to know to learn about whether you will like military SF. If you like history or action then you should read this book, it will definitely make you feel like you were in on the tale.

Contains stories along with world building information: shown with Star\*s:

But Loyal to His Own

Supertanks\*

The Butcher's Bill

The Church of the Lord's Universe\*

Under the Hammer

Powerguns\*

Cultural Conflict

Backdrop to Chaos\*

Caught in the Crossfire

The Bonding Authority\*

Hangman

Table of Organization and Equipment, Hammer's Regiment\*

Standing Down

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## Mark says

Trying to understand my illogical interest in tanks, I recalled reading this when I was a kid in the SciFi book (of the month) club. The men were mercenaries, foreshadowing the movie "Soldier" or at least overlapping that, in my mind.

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## Robin says

An uneven collection of barely-connected short stories/novellas with a shockingly bad opening and a sudden, strange ending--but some of the stuff in the middle is quite effective.

Drake's prose varies wildly from awfully amateurish to quietly effective between the tales. Most of the characters are lifeless; motivations and setting are often left unexplained, or else alluded to in bafflingly circuitous language; there's a jarring tense shift in the first story; and Drake spends a lot of time and space avoiding characters' names (it's always 'the tall man,' 'the tanker,' 'the colonel's aide,' 'the blonde,' 'the black,' 'the Oriental'--at several points he even switches between a character's first name and surname mid-paragraph). There's a lot of terminology that only makes sense after 200 pages of repetition, and the combating factions in the final showdown (in fact, in most of the many combat scenes) are never clearly defined.

Despite this, there are some brilliant ideas here (aliens show up for a couple of stories, but are quickly forgotten about), and there are some surprisingly effective moments towards the end dealing with the moral ambiguity of violence. The prose improves drastically in the chapter titled "Hangman," which makes up a third of the book's length. One wonders if Drake could have improved the product overall by cutting the extraneous stuff (the first two stories, and the last), and focusing entirely on the Slammers' exploits on Kobold.

A book that's as entertaining as often as it is tedious, lacking any memorable human characters, with no proper denouement, is difficult to recommend to anyone. Nevertheless, there's something about it that just works--barely, but enough--so I'll give it half marks.

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### **Tony says**

Decent military pot-boiler. I was REALLY intrigued by the chapter describing a battle from the point of view of "animals" whose sensory systems were directly linked with those of the plants in the forest where the battle was under way.

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