

Plague Daemon

By Brian Craig

reviewed by Rev. Garrett Lepper

Plague Daemon was the second book written by Brian Craig, but unlike Zaragoz, this book is a remarkable disappointment. On the surface, it shares some similarities with Zaragoz, but in this case the formula is a disaster. Like Zaragoz, it is a story within a story, a tale told by a captive Bretonnian entertainer to the Araby pirate lord holding him. In this book the prologue and epilogue wherein their relationship is described and which begins and ends the actual “Plague Daemon” tale is extraneous and unnecessary and robs the story of what little suspense it has in the first place.



Plague Daemon also takes place in an unexamined part of the Old World, the Border Princes, but its treatment of the Border Princes is implausible, for it introduces us to the poorly placed “Khyprian Empire”.

This “empire” located in the heart of the Border Princes as well as the area’s nomadic and warlike herders of cattle known as the Zani. As the tale unfolds one gets the feeling that this story could have been set in any generic fantasy world for there is little infusion of Old World atmosphere, it could have taken place in the Dalelands of the Forgotten Realms for Example, or Northern Gondor in Middle Earth. The locale is bland, tasteless, and generic.

The main protagonist of the tale spun by Orfeo, the imprisoned bard, centers on the experience of Harmis Detz, a remarkably colorless character with whom the reader has the misfortune of empathizing with. Detz also encounters a whole series of other characters who are as undeveloped and lacking in any character as the main character himself. This lack of personality can be offset by an interesting story, but here the reader is unlucky as well, the story is a indifferent chase story: in this case our personality impaired hero is chosen by fate to hunt down a menacing plague daemon. The entire pursuit of the plague daemon, around which the novel centers, is not visceral and exciting, but distant and unendurable. Worse, the story itself is callous and at times brutal, making reading this tripe distinctly unpleasant. There isn’t a single “human” moment in the story, nothing that seems authentically warm or touching.

One of the redeeming things about Zaragoz is one of its intriguing villains and his philosophy on chaos. But in this book the plague daemon is little more than uninspired metaphor for decay and evil, and not necessarily one fitting even Nurgle. Furthermore the book employs terms “Lazarite” and *katharos* that just seem to suggest that the book could very well have been written as general fantasy and then shoe-horned into the Warhammer world.

Thus the plot muddles along, furthered by some muddy devices to justify the importance of the protagonist. At the heart of the story are some half-baked and poorly articulated reflections on heroism. Such reflections are trivial and overdone, poorly executed and excessive. The story within the story ends in a hopelessly clichéd manner; the epilogue goes even further in beating the reader senseless with its point while making the conclusion more saccharine and unpalatable. Adding insult to injury, my copy of the book repeats the offending passages twice, presumably a type-setting error, but after reading the story the skeptic toyed with the thought that it had been done so as to ensure that the reader didn't miss the point the author was making.

There is nothing to recommend this book: the "world" feels wrong, the characters, plot, pacing, its philosophical and ethical points are trivialized and boorish, and the very reading of it a most unappetizing experience. If anyone else finds *anything* redeeming about this book, please tell me, for I would hate for the three hours I spent reading the book to be a complete waste.

--Rev. Lepper

Strike to Stun Rating: 3