

Zaragoz

By Brian Craig

reviewed by Rev. Garrett Lepper

Zaragoz is one of the exceptions in the Games Workshop/Black Library collection: its a decent book. Rather than embrace the testosterone induced mayhem of the Gotrek novels or books like "Hammers of Ulric", Zaragoz hews closer to the original concept of "dark fantasy" that seemed to initially launch the GW novels that were later carried on by the Black Library.

Zaragoz is a story within a story, a narrative offered to the reader and the narrator's captor. The character Orfeo recounts his experience in the homeland of Alkadi Nasreen, an Estalian who has now become a powerful Araby Caliph. The interaction between the two begins and ends the book with a short interlude. This device is not entirely successful and robs the story of some of its dramatic tension, and this sort of recounting adds little to the story; still the quality of the story is enough to support the actual story.



The story being retold takes place in one of Estalia's smallest and most impoverished kindgoms, or actually a Duchy, Zaragoz. Here a wandering minstrel becomes immersed in a world of intrigue and illusion with past injustice and curse looming over the heads of the inhabitants of Zaragoz. Estalia is a distant and undeveloped place, many may find this makes the book less appealing from the more familiar locales and its distance seems to suggest that the tale itself is less significant.

For those seeking the bravado, heroism, and oft times juvenile tone common in some of the other Warhammer books, this book is a refreshing break. The tone of the story is dark, there are few clear cut heroes, tragedy befalls many, the plot has a couple of nice twists, and of note is one of the villains of the novel who convincingly portrays the seduction and wisdom of chaos. Absent is the pseudo-bondage spikes and metal fetish that is common to chaos, the chaos in this book is treacherous yet alluring and offers a different perspective to the common single minded bedlam Chaos portrayal.

There are a few licenses taken with magic, but this too is a relief, when reading the book you cannot hear "dice rolling" or guess which spell is being cast. The author is remains fairly to source material while introducing some side details, but has no problem making changes and re-interpreting things to make the world seem mysterious and dangerous. The curses and the magic that occurs in the novel are more essential to the tale and not a list of generic spells common to any game, thus faithfully portraying the wonder and horror of magic and in particular chaos.

I did enjoy the book, or at least as much as I can enjoy any fantasy novel. However for those looking for a Warhammer novel a bit more akin to Warhammer Fantasy Battle, a story with a psychotic axe-wielding dwarf as hero, or a light and cheerful narrative probably won't appreciate the book much. For those who are looking for a story that mystifies chaos, features at least one intriguing villain, and is gritty and atmospheric, this book should suffice. I consider it the second or third best warhammer book after some of the Jack Yeovil novels.

Stun Factor: 7 of 10