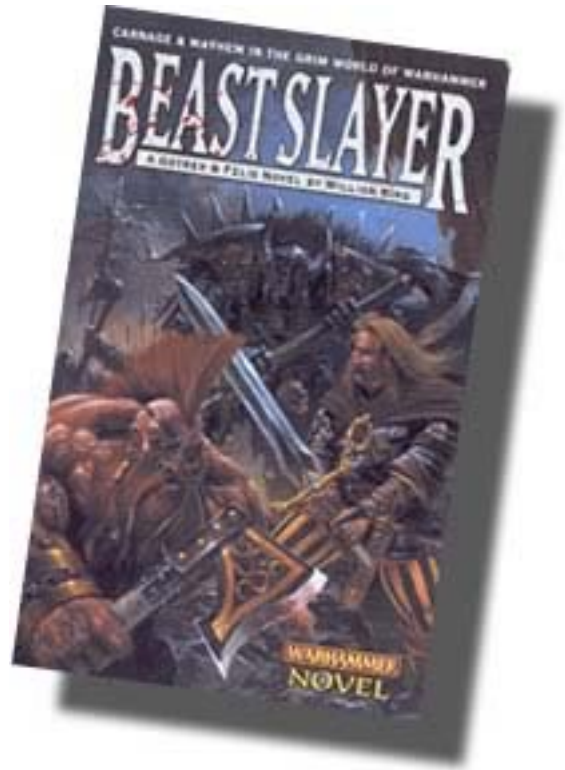


Beastslayer

A Gotrek & Felix Novel
by William King
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In the fifth part of the Gotrek and Felix series, the two companions are helping to defend the city of Praag. The Kislevite citadel is under siege from a huge Chaos force uniting armies of all the Dark Gods. Grey Seer Thanquol, Gotreks enemy of old, is also meddling, after escaping Clan Moulder's Hell Pit in the middle of the Chaos Wastes. Within the city walls of Praag, Chaos cultists dangerously close to the throne have ways to help the dark forces outside, as they poison food supplies, spread the plague and plot to kill the Duke himself. Luckily, the Chaos armies themselves aren't quite as united as they seem. The different forces are torn apart through their own greed, envy and endless infighting as they plan to overrun Praag and build up their first stronghold on the way into the heart of the Empire.



Doesn't this sound slightly familiar? 'Beastslayer' is, in fact, a collection of the standard Games Workshop set-pieces. On the WFB front, we have a perfect collection of all possible Chaos armies, on the WFRP side, there is a city full of conspiring cultists. This isn't original, to say the least. But to make matters worse, it's isn't very well done either. The 'spot the cultist' mystery is so obvious, your average role-player or fantasy reader will solve it in seconds. The city of Praag itself is a gloomy maze, full of gargoyles and squat gates. Another boring cliché. Gotrek and Felix mainly stand on the city walls and wait for a few beastmen to slay, or come across suspicious citizens sneaking around the granaries in hooded cloaks. Been there, done that.

We're also very familiar with the fact that Chaos armies do not tend to be very united, and that every single warrior follows his own agenda. William King tries to make Chaos minions come alive by narrating from their point-of-view. He creates Arek Daemonclaw, Chaos Champion of Tzeentch, and his two albino twin sorcerers. While King succeeded in making us enter the depths of Skaven psychology, he fails when it comes to Chaos. I couldn't help thinking that the dialogues, the schemes and the interior monologues of Arek and his wizards are somewhat banal, much too human.

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In my opinion, the Chaotic mind should remain beyond comprehension, or else it will lose its fascination. If Chaos Warriors turn out to think like your ordinary warlord, they'll be nothing but guys in spiky armour. No wonder William King falls back on his well-developed Skaven villain Grey Seer Thanquol. He and his lackey Lurk get their own little subplot, which, however, is almost meaningless for the rest of the novel. Maybe King should have killed off Thanquol a couple of novels earlier, when the rat mage was still in his prime.

Fantasy is a very conservative genre which very much relies upon its standards and stereotypes. Hence the average reader won't expect originality from a new novel. But he or she must demand at least some inspiration and craftsmanship. Inspiration there is none in 'Beastslayer', for there is not even a twist to the standard Games Workshop battle'n'gore routine. And while I appreciated William Kings skills as a writer in previous works, he's done a sloppy job on this novel. The standardised plots and loosely connected sub-plots lack any suspense, the characters fail to touch the reader, and the endless fighting scenes quickly become repetitive. King has shown that he can do better than that. Maybe it's just that Gotrek and Felix have lost their charm for him.

(mw)

Stun-Factor: 2 of 10