

The Search for the Dragon's Dagger

Daniel J. Zedan

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Daniel J. Zedan's *The Search for the Dragon's Dagger* is an enthusiastic swords and sorcery novel in which an experienced yet haunted warrior is placed at the center of a dangerous and intriguing plot.

The last survivors of a quest turned south, watching firsthand as their companions are mercilessly torn asunder by a dragon—a creature thought to exist only in legends—Aramas and Loki are unsure of their futures. They are brought before the one who gave them their quest and are given a new task: to rescue hostages taken into a forest that's occupied by thieves and other dark creatures. Reluctant but willing to help, Aramas can't help but feel that there's more going on than what he's been told.

The story is fast to get going and become intriguing, with mysteries piling up that initiate a constant sense of unease. Aramas's journey brings him all across a nautical fantasy world bordering on the Inland Sea, all of which can be seen on a map that feels just as at home on a withered piece of parchment as it does in the borders of a daydreaming teenager's homework binder. From the portside town of Everand to the foreboding Raven's Nest, Aramas is often accompanied by his trusty dwarf companion, Loki, whose undying loyalty to his friend proves to be not only Aramas's greatest asset, but also the true emotional weight underlying most of the novel.

Aramas and Loki are easy fits among their contemporaries: Aramas is unsurprising as a gruff, masculine knight, and Loki is his jovial, irreverent companion. Still, their relationship and mutual respect for each other elevates them above these tropes. In addition to their other traits, they are authentic and melancholy. Aramas is cool and level-headed, though he's survived years of hardships whose traumas linger, while Loki's snarky quips often mask the terror of living a life that could end any day. Still, what hurts the novel most is its dedication to its own genre. While not without its subversive elements and unique takes, the story often leans toward the traditional. Those who find stories of dragons and dungeons entertaining will enjoy it, even if it doesn't position itself to win converts with fresh surprises.

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QUIN SONNER (September 19, 2022)

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