CLASSIC BOOK REVIEW

The Damned of Magdeburg

Written by: H. Allenger
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Rating: 4.3/5

How do you live a life under an impending doom? Characters in *The Damned of Magdeburg* show exactly this as a predominantly Protestant city in Germany becomes a target of a Roman emperor hell-bent on enforcing an order to exert Catholic dominance in Europe. Assembling a gripping take on historical events, H. Allenger effectively humanized an otherwise vague and heavy theme by directing the readers’ attention to the intriguing complexities of human behavior, particularly of those in positions of power, in times of crisis.

Citizens of Magdeburg enjoy a relatively prosperous life amid clashes, called the Thirty Years’ War, ensuing in light of the Reformation movement. Emperor Ferdinand, leader of the Holy Roman Empire, sees the city—considered a center of intellect and culture in Germany—as a threat to the Catholic rule, fearing it for possibly imposing Lutheranism in other states. Fueled by insecurity and offended by the city’s refusal to attend the Regensberg Summit and comply with his Edict of Restitution, Emperor Ferdinand ordered an attack against Magdeburg. As word of threats they face reach them, council leaders and their constituents navigate their differences of political opinion, religious beliefs, and desires for influence and dominance—and the opposite sex—as they find means to hold their ground and protect their life and possessions.

There is no single turning point that grips anyone who chooses to engage in this story set in the early 1630s, when being either a Catholic or a Protestant is the only defining feature of one’s character. Major characters are in a constant struggle choosing between morality and survival. The piece is also filled with stereotypes strewn across Western literature set in this era, like how the burghers and their wives exhibit possessiveness toward each other, or how the goddess-like beauty of a priest’s wife, Isolde, was used by council leaders to show what is in store for Gustavus Adolphus, King of Sweden, and his men if they come to the rescue of Magdeburg.

But the charm of H. Allenger’s work is in how it poses as a study of what makes humans tick at a given circumstance by cracking open the motivations that keep the characters alive. Ultimately, what makes *The Damned of Magdeburg* an intriguing and engaging read is not so much that it is full of historical references but that much of what the characters go through resonate with the present. Soon enough, the reader finds out that threats to their power still drive many leaders mad, trust is still scarce among men, real friendships are still indispensable, and religious faith may still be one’s downfall or saving grace.