

Servant of the Shard (Forgotten Realms: Paths of Darkness, Book 3)

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The Assassin

Surrounded by dark elves, Artemis Entreri tightens his grip on the streets of Calimport. While he urges caution, his black-skinned sponsor grows ever more ambitious. The assassin will soon find himself on a path his most hated enemy has walked before him--a path that leads to a place where someone like Entreri would never be welcome.

The Drow

Jarlaxle has ascended from dark Menzoberranzan with only evil intentions. The malevolent Crystal Shard's influence on him intensifies until even the drow agents he brought with him grow fearful. When Bregan D'aerthe itself begins to turn on him, Jarlaxle will be forced to find a savior in the man he's come to enslave.

Think of it as Drowfellas. Backstabbing and internecine intrigue abound as the ambitious members of a shady organization (in this case, the dark-elf mercenary band Bregan D'aerthe) vie for power, struggle to fend off reprisals, and generally cause all sorts of trouble. Themes of redemption and moral metamorphosis keep the plot moving, accompanied by intermittent bursts of spectacular, cinematic violence.

The Servant of the Shard, the immediate follow-up to The Spine of the World and The Silent Blade, is the long-awaited exposition on the history of Artemis Entreri. But perhaps more importantly, Servant of the Shard brings us the brilliant, bang-up pairing of master assassin Entreri and Bregan D'aerthe godfather Jarlaxle, filling out a deadly triangle with the bloodthirsty artifact Crenshinibon. (The rest--more magic items, tons of cool spells and psionics thanks to Rai-guy and Kimmurriel Oblodra, cameos from The Cleric Quintet, and a blow-out finale with an ancient red dragon--well, that's all just icing on the cake.)

The big question, which hopefully won't have to be asked again after this title: Can Bob Salvatore really pull off another Drizzt Do'Urden book without Drizzt? Without a doubt. Anybody who wasn't won over by the Wulfgar-centric Spine of the World should come away more than satisfied with The Servant of the Shard. Grumbling and hammer-hurling (courtesy of Wulfgar) might not be your thing, but Drizzt does have an equal in Entreri when it comes to perplexed introspection and predictably dazzling swordplay. If nothing else, Salvatore is merely collecting on investments he's made in his previous 17 Forgotten Realms novels--after laying such a strong foundation with solid plots and characterizations, it should come as no surprise that we're instantly sucked into a story that brings a couple of formerly supporting characters to front stage center. --Paul Hughes

R.A. Salvatore is the New York Times best-selling author of more than forty novels, including the popular Forgotten Realms series The Legend of Drizzt. He's an avid gamer, father of three, and loyal citizen of Red Sox Nation. Residence: Massachusetts

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