



R.A. SALVATORE

NEVERWINTER

THE **NEVERWINTER**™ SAGA
BOOK
II

COVER ART
TODD LOCKWOOD



The Neverwinter Saga, Book II
NEVERWINTER

©2011 Wizards of the Coast LLC

All characters in this book are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead is purely coincidental.

This book is protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America. Any reproduction or unauthorized use of the material or artwork contained herein is prohibited without the express written permission of Wizards of the Coast LLC.

Published by Wizards of the Coast LLC.

FORGOTTEN REALMS, NEVERWINTER, DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, D&D, WIZARDS OF THE COAST, and their respective logos are trademarks of Wizards of the Coast LLC in the U.S.A. and other countries. Hasbro SA, Represented by Hasbro Europe, Stockley Park, UB11 1AZ, UK. All Wizards of the Coast characters and their distinctive likenesses are property of Wizards of the Coast LLC.

PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

Cover art by Todd Lockwood
First Printing: October 2011

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN: 978-0-7869-5842-9
ISBN: 978-0-7869-5939-6 (ebook)
620-28362000-001-EN

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Neverwinter / R.A. Salvatore.
p. cm. -- (Neverwinter saga ; bk. 2)
ISBN 978-0-7869-5842-9 (hardback)
I. Title.
PS3569.A462345N48 2011
813'.54--dc22

2011023670

U.S., Canada, Asia, Pacific, & Latin America, Wizards of the Coast LLC, P.O. Box 707,
Renton, WA 98057-0707, +1-800-324-6496, www.wizards.com/customerservice

Europe, U.K., Eire & South Africa, Wizards of the Coast LLC, c/o Hasbro UK Ltd., P.O. Box 43,
Newport, NP19 4YD, UK, Tel: +800 22 427276, Email: wizards@hasbro.co.uk



Visit our web site at www.wizards.com

Welcome to Faerûn, a land of magic and intrigue, brutal violence and divine compassion, where gods have ascended and died, and mighty heroes have risen to fight terrifying monsters. Here, millennia of warfare and conquest have shaped dozens of unique cultures, raised and leveled shining kingdoms and tyrannical empires alike, and left long forgotten, horror-infested ruins in their wake.

A LAND OF MAGIC

When the goddess of magic was murdered, a magical plague of blue fire—the Spellplague—swept across the face of Faerûn, killing some, mutilating many, and imbuing a rare few with amazing supernatural abilities. The Spellplague forever changed the nature of magic itself, and seeded the land with hidden wonders and bloodcurdling monstrosities.

A LAND OF DARKNESS

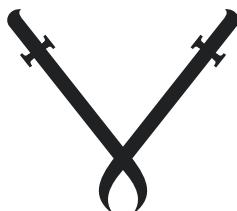
The threats Faerûn faces are legion. Armies of undead mass in Thay under the brilliant but mad lich king Szass Tam. Treacherous dark elves plot in the Underdark in the service of their cruel and fickle goddess, Lolth. The Abolethic Sovereignty, a terrifying hive of inhuman slave masters, floats above the Sea of Fallen Stars, spreading chaos and destruction. And the Empire of Netheril, armed with magic of unimaginable power, prowls Faerûn in flying fortresses, sowing discord to their own incalculable ends.

A LAND OF HEROES

But Faerûn is not without hope. Heroes have emerged to fight the growing tide of darkness. Battle-scarred rangers bring their notched blades to bear against marauding hordes of orcs. Lowly street rats match wits with demons for the fate of cities. Inscrutable tiefling warlocks unite with fierce elf warriors to rain fire and steel upon monstrous enemies. And valiant servants of merciful gods forever struggle against the darkness.



A LAND OF UNTOLD ADVENTURE



PROLOGUE

*The Year of the Reborn Hero
(1463 DR)*

DAHLIA'S LIPS CURLED INTO A SMILE AS SHE WATCHED THE DARK elf dance. Stripped to the waist, Drizzt Do'Urden moved through his attack and defense routines, sometimes slowly and sometimes with blinding speed. His scimitars spun gracefully, deceptively delicate, then darted with sudden, straightforward power. They could strike from any tangent, stabbing often at unexpected angles, and more than once, Dahlia found herself startled and blinking at a clever twist or turn.

She had fought beside Drizzt on the road to Gauntlgrym and inside the dwarven complex, so she thought she had come to understand the extent of his martial prowess. But now, on this moonlit night, she could truly appreciate the grace and coordination of his movements and reminded herself that such perfection in battle didn't come easily.

She marveled at the drow at work, at his slim form, his tight muscles so apparent, and so appealing.

He was always on the balls of his feet, never on his heels, she noted, and his every turn ended in alignment and balance. She noted, too, that Drizzt's neck did not strain with his sudden stabs and swings. So many lumbering human warriors kept all their power up high, above their shoulders, and so their strength seemed to increase in proportion to the decrease of their balance and swiftness.

But not Drizzt.

His neck was loose, his shoulders nimble. His strength came from his belly and the muscles lining the sides of his ribs. How many opponents, Dahlia wondered, had been comforted by the drow's slim neck and flat shoulders, by his apparent lack of strength, only to have their weapons smacked from their hands or cut in half by the power of his blows? His blades hummed with amazing speed as he fell deeper into his dance, but weight, balance, and strength hid behind every cut and thrust.

Dahlia's hand instinctively went up to her right ear, empty now of diamond studs, and her smile widened further. Had she at last found the lover who would end her pain?

Drizzt was sweating, his dark skin glistening in the moonlight. He stabbed out to the right with both blades in a parallel thrust, but deftly turned his feet opposite the attack and flashed away to the left, using his upper body turn to gain momentum for a somersault, one that landed him back on his feet. A mere heartbeat later, he slid down to his knees as if forced low by some imaginary blade coming in from the right. A blue-glowing scimitar stabbed up that way, then Drizzt was moving again, back on his feet so smoothly Dahlia hadn't even noticed the transition.

The elf woman licked her smiling lips.



"I can ride him," Dahlia insisted. "I'm a skilled horseman."

"Andahar isn't a horse," Drizzt replied from his seat on the unicorn's back. The drow reached down to offer his hand to Dahlia once more. Still she resisted.

"Or are you afraid that Andahar will come to prefer me?" she replied.

"It wouldn't matter. I have the whistle."

"I could take that whistle."

"You could try." With that, Drizzt retracted his hand, shrugged, and clucked softly, starting Andahar into a slow trot. They had only gone a single stride, though, before Dahlia planted the end

of her eight-foot staff and vaulted up onto the unicorn's back behind the drow.

"Why do you think I need your hand, drow?" she asked. "Why do you believe I need anything from you?"

Drizzt kicked the mighty steed into a faster canter, tugging Andahar's flowing white mane around to steer the unicorn through the brush.

"We'll break early for a midday meal, and make the road soon after," Drizzt said.

"And then?"

"North," Drizzt answered, "to Port Llast, perhaps Luskan, to learn what we may."

From his tone and posture it was obvious he expected an argument. Dahlia had expressed her eagerness to go south to Neverwinter Wood, where she could be rid of the Thayan wizard Sylora Salm and her Dread Ring.

Surprisingly, though, Dahlia didn't object. "Luskan, then," she agreed. "But with all speed, then just as fast back to the south. I'll let Sylora Salm gnash her teeth in dismay over the failure of the primordial, but not for long."

"And then we'll kill her," Drizzt said, as much a question as a statement.

"Second thoughts?" Dahlia asked.

Drizzt steered Andahar toward a copse of trees then, and brought the unicorn back to a slow trot. "I said I wouldn't join you in a quest merely for revenge."

"Sylora isn't finished here," Dahlia said. "She will seek to again free the primordial—raining catastrophe on the North to fuel her Dread Ring—and you think all I seek is revenge?"

Drizzt pulled Andahar to a sudden stop and slowly looked back to stare straight into Dahlia's blue eyes. "I said that if it was no more than your personal quest for revenge, I wouldn't join you."

Dahlia grinned at him, the movement causing the intricate blue and purple dots of the woad on her face to form the hint of an image of a hunting cat poised to strike. Drizzt couldn't miss it, and

his expression reflected his intrigue. Dahlia tilted her head to the right, then swayed it back left, and the drow blinked in amazement. In the woman's movement, the cat seemed to spring.

And with Drizzt still obviously mesmerized, Dahlia leaned forward and brushed his lips with her own.

It took several heartbeats, but that at last seemed to break the spell and the dark elf leaned away from her, staring at her with puzzlement.

"Why did you do that?" he asked in a voice that seemed hard to find.

"Because I don't believe you," she replied.

Drizzt cocked his head curiously, and when he started to protest, Dahlia put a finger over his lips to silence him.

"Don't be a fool, drow," she said with a wicked grin. "Don't deny me my fantasy out of some chivalrous notion of the importance of truth."

Drizzt just looked confused, and that made Dahlia laugh aloud at him. Finally he surrendered and turned back, urging Andahar into motion once more.

Andahar didn't tire through the rest of the day and long into the night. Unlike Guenhwyvar, the magical unicorn could be summoned at any time, and could remain for as long as Drizzt needed him. But also unlike the panther, Andahar could be wounded, if not outright slain, and such wounds would take as long to heal as those of a mortal creature. So Drizzt took care to involve Andahar in as few battles as necessary, and only rarely kept the unicorn around when danger was afoot.

They had hoped to make Port Llast that night, but the weather turned foul and it was not to be. They set their camp under an overhang of rock on a high bluff some distance from the road, but in sight of it. Chill rain poured down, and an occasional streak of lightning split the sky. Drizzt managed to get a campfire burning, though it stayed low and sputtering. Whenever the wind swirled, both he and Dahlia found themselves coughing in the smoke.

But still, it was not so bad for Drizzt. How could it be? He was on the road again, and with the promise of adventure awaiting him

at every turn. The road was filled with danger, the forests full of wild things, and the land untamed. Even the cities ahead, first Port Llast then Luskan, would keep him on his edge, would keep his hands in easy reach of his blades.

He sat with his back against the stone and stole glances at Dahlia as she ate, as she paced, as she stretched her road-weary muscles. . . . She was out near the front edge of the overhang, her back to him, the swirls of rain catching her just a bit. She stood on her toes and peered into the distance, her diagonally-cut skirt riding up high and affording Drizzt a long look at her shapely legs.

The drow smiled and shook his head. She knew he was watching her. Dahlia played a game, like the kiss when she sat behind him on Andahar, or the way in which she'd wrapped her arms around him for the hard ride.

"Douse the fire." Dahlia glanced at him over her shoulder.

Drizzt's smile disappeared and he stared at her curiously.

"We're not alone."

With a single slide of his boot, Drizzt pushed a mound of dirt that had been strategically placed for just this purpose and killed the flames. He scrambled to his feet and stared into the rain, but saw nothing. Dahlia reached her arm out in front of him and guided his gaze.

A torch's glow flickered from behind distant trees, down along the road.

"They're moving," Dahlia said.

"Along the road, at night, in this deluge?"

"Highwaymen . . . or soldiers of some warlord or another," Dahlia reasoned. "Or some monstrous group, perhaps."

"Perhaps it's only a merchant caravan seeking shelter?"

Dahlia shook her head. "What merchant would so imperil his wagon or his team by moving along a muddy and unstable road in the dark? If he broke a wheel or hobbled his horse, it would likely prove fatal."

"Unless they're fleeing from trouble already found," said Drizzt, and he scooped up his weapon belt.

“You intend to go out to them?” Dahlia asked in an almost mocking tone.

Drizzt looked at her as if the answer was, or should be, obvious.

“To right all the wrongs of the world, Drizzt Do’Urden?” she asked. “Is that your purpose for being? Is that the only motivation that drives you?”

“You would not aid a helpless innocent?”

“I don’t know, and I highly doubt that’s what we see on the road below,” Dahlia countered. She gave a little laugh, and Drizzt knew he was being mocked. “That’s all there is for you? Black and white, right and wrong?”

“There’s a profound difference between right and wrong,” Drizzt replied grimly, and he strapped on his weapons.

“Of course, but isn’t there more to the world?”

Drizzt paused, but only for a heartbeat before he produced the onyx feline figurine and called Guenhwyvar to his side. “A light on the road,” he explained to the panther. “Find it, watch it.” With a low growl, the panther leaped away, disappearing into the night.

“Don’t you believe that there are instances where both sides believe they’re right?”

“Remind me to tell you the tale of King Obould Many-Arrows some day,” Drizzt replied and walked past Dahlia. “For now I’m going to learn what I may. Are you joining me?”

Dahlia shrugged. “Of course,” she replied. “Perhaps we’ll find a good fight.”

“Perhaps we’ll rescue an innocent merchant,” Drizzt countered.

“Perhaps we’ll rescue the ill-gotten booty from an undeserving, self-appointed lord,” Dahlia said as soon as the drow turned away.

Drizzt didn’t look back at her. He didn’t want her to see the unintentional grin her unrelenting sarcasm had brought to his face. He didn’t want to give her that satisfaction.

He moved swiftly down the rise and into the trees, pushing himself hard because he wanted to push Dahlia even harder. With his magical anklets speeding his stride, he knew she couldn’t pace him. So every now and then he slowed just enough to make her

think she was catching up. Long before he neared the road, however, he was only guessing as to how far behind Dahlia might be, if she was still behind him at all.

Drizzt forced his focus in front of him, to the road and the torches down to his right, approaching quickly. He nodded in recognition as a wagon came into view, driven hard by an obviously flummoxed man. His companion crouched beside him, bow drawn, looking behind over the back of the bench seat. Behind the wagon came three other torches, all carried by men running hard to catch up—no, not to catch up, Drizzt realized, but to keep up. These were not the enemies from which the wagon fled. If that had been the case, then surely the archer would have had little trouble in knocking them down.

Barely thirty yards away, one of the trailing torch carriers went down.

“Shoot them! Shoot them!” another of the trailing runners, a woman, shouted desperately.

Drizzt’s hand went to Taulmaril, his bow. He gave a little whistle, one Guenhwyvar knew, and the panther revealed herself on a tree branch across the road from him. Drizzt motioned to the path of the oncoming wagon.

Out leaped the panther to the middle of the road, to face the approaching wagon.

The horse team started to veer.

Guenhwyvar roared, like the rumble of boulders, the sheer strength of that call echoing throughout the forests and hills for a league. The horses skidded to a stop, rearing and neighing and kicking their forelegs in terror.

The jolt almost knocked the archer from the bench seat.

“Shoot it!” the driver yelled, working furiously to control the shuddering wagon. “Shoot it dead! Oh, by the gods!”

The archer managed to swing around, his eyes going wide as he spotted the source of the roar. He brought his bow up, his hands shaking.

A streak of silver, like a small bolt of lightning, cut the air right in front of the two men, startling them further, so much so that the

arrow slipped from the bowstring. Oblivious to the disarmament, the archer let fly, and the arrow tumbled harmlessly. The man shrieked and the bow jumped, nearly tumbling from his grasp.

The horses continued to rear and whinny, even after the panther jumped back into the brush, disappearing from sight.

“Bowman to the side!” yelled one of the trailing runners, at last nearing the wagon, and both she and her companion veered Drizzt’s way in a brave charge.

He wasn’t going to shoot them dead, of course, for he still had no idea if these were friends or foes. So he dropped Taulmaril to the ground and drew forth his blades defensively.

He needn’t have bothered.

The nearest attacker, a tall and gangly man still many strides from Drizzt, gave a howl and lifted his sword up over his head. Then a lithe elf form swung down agilely from the branch above, her legs hooked and secure. With the momentum of the movement, Dahlia smacked the charging man on the forehead with her long staff and sent him to the ground, his sword flying away.

Dahlia came forward, letting go with her legs to spin down in a landing so balanced that it seemed somehow casual. Even as she touched down, she gracefully sprang right over the sitting and dazed man. The woman, just a couple of strides ahead, tried to get her spear in line, but Dahlia slipped down low as she swept past her, her staff sweeping in to take the woman’s feet out from under her.

Back on the road, the archer cried for the driver to ride on. But just as the horses began to run, Guenhwyvar leaped into the middle of the road and roared again. The terrified team reared and shrieked in protest.

From the edge of the road, Drizzt noted the third of the trailing runners—the one who had gone down hard—stumbling in the darkness, his torch sputtering in the rain far behind on the road. Drizzt paid him no heed and sprinted for the wagon, which had gone past him to his left. Though it was no longer moving, Drizzt saw the archer come up facing him, bow reset and drawn.

Drizt dropped to his knees, sliding across the mud as the arrow went harmlessly above him. He came up right behind the wagon bed and leaped high with his momentum, easily clearing the low tailgate. As soon as he set his feet firmly, he leaped again, tucking his legs to clear the bench and the ducking drivers, and turning as he went so he landed at the base of the yoke, facing the two men. The team continued to rear and struggle, but the jostling didn't bother the agile drow at all. He held his scimitars level in front of the faces of his captives.

"Take it all, but don't ye kill me, I beg," the driver desperately pleaded, his open palms waving and shaking up beside his wide, wet face. "Please, good sir."

The other man dropped his bow, covered his face with his hands, and began to weep.

"Who is chasing you?" Drizt asked the drivers.

They seemed flummoxed by the unexpected question.

"Who?" Drizt demanded.

"Highwaymen," said the archer. "A foul band o' ne'er-do-wells thinking to steal our goods and cut our throats!"

Drizt looked at Dahlia, who had come out on the road to face down the third runner, who stood with his hands up in surrender, obviously wanting no part of a fight with her.

"Who are you and where are you from?" Drizt asked.

"Port Llast," answered the archer, at the same time the driver said, "Luskan."

Drizt eyed them suspiciously.

"Out o' Luskan, but coming back on our way through Port Llast," the archer explained.

"Commissioned by the high captains," the driver quickly added, and he seemed to gain some confidence.

"Carrying?"

"Food, wine, goods," the driver said, but the archer tried to halt him, putting his hand out across the man's chest.

"Carryin' what we're carryin' and what business is it o' yer own?" the archer asked.

Drizzt grinned at him wickedly and the man seemed to deflate, perhaps reminded that the high captains wouldn't offer him much of a defense against a simple thrust of the scimitar that hovered barely a hand's-breadth from his face.

A ruckus farther down the road indicated that the pursuit was nearing.

"If I find you're lying to me then know we will meet again long before you see the lights of Port Llast." Drizzt withdrew his blades and flipped them over before neatly sliding them back into their scabbards. "Now be gone!"

He tipped a salute and leaped between the men, over the back of the bench. He helped the three stragglers up into the wagon then watched as it sped on its way.

"Letting them go?" Dahlia came up beside him. "How noble of you." She handed him Taulmaril and the quiver Drizzt had dropped before his charge at the wagon.

"Would you have me steal their goods and slay them?"

"The first, at least."

Drizzt stared at her. "They're simple merchants."

"Yes, from Luskan, I heard. Simple men in the employ of the high captains—pirates one and all, and they who destroyed that city."

Drizzt tried to hold steady against that truth—a truth that he, who had been in the City of Sails during the fall of his dear friend Captain Deudermont, knew all too well, and all too painfully.

"So what they're carrying is ill-gotten from the start, then, and which highwayman is which, Drizzt Do'Urden?" said Dahlia.

"You twist everything to suit your conclusions."

"Or everything is twisted to begin with, and few are what they seem, and a good man does evil and a beggar is a thief."

More noise sounded from down the road.

"We will finish this discussion later," Drizzt said, and he motioned for Guenhwyvar to take a position in the brush.

"To no conclusion that will satisfy the idealist drow," Dahlia assured him, and she too sprinted off into the brush at the side of the road.

Drizzt thought to follow, but the sound of galloping horses, and Dahlia's words stabbing at his thoughts, changed his mind. He lifted his bow, setting an arrow and leveling it.

A quartet of riders came into view a moment later, tightly grouped and leaning low against the driving rain.

Drizzt drew back, thinking he could strike down two with a single shot, for it would take more than a man's girth to halt a bolt from Taulmaril.

"Beggar man or thief?" he whispered.

The riders neared, and one held a sword up high.

Drizzt dipped the angle of the bow and let fly. A sizzling blue-white flash rent the air, momentarily stealing the night, and the arrow burrowed into the road in front of the riders, blasting through cobblestone and dirt with a thunderous report.

The horses reared and bucked. One rider went tumbling, and hung desperately from the side of the saddle. The other two fared better, until Dahlia came soaring out of the trees to the side. Her staff clipped one hard as she stretched out and double-kicked the other.

And then came Guenhwyvar, and the horses spun and bucked and reared in terror.

Dahlia hit the ground with a twist and roll, came right back to her feet, and swung around. She planted her staff to vault up high once more, this time kicking the female rider she had struck with her staff. To the woman's credit, she still held her seat, but Dahlia wasn't done with her. As she landed, the elf whipped her staff out to strike the rider again, and this time sent a burst of magical lightning through the metal pole. Shaking uncontrollably, her hair dancing, her limbs waving wildly, the woman had no chance of remaining on her turning, terrified horse, and down she tumbled.

Three of the horses rushed away, riderless. Guenhwyvar kept the fourth turning and turning, the poor rider hanging on to the side.

"More are coming," Dahlia called to Drizzt when he joined her above the three prone highwaymen, his scimitars informing two that they would be wise to lie still.

“But don’t ye kill me, Master Do’Urden!” one middle-aged man whimpered. “Be sure that I ain’t no enemy o’ yers!”

Drizzt looked at him with puzzlement, not recognizing the man at all.

“You know him?” Dahlia asked.

Drizzt shook his head and demanded of the man, “How do you know my name?”

“Just a guess, good sir!” the man cried. “The cat, the lightning bow, the blades ye carry . . .”

“Guen!” Drizzt called.

Off to the side, the panther was getting a bit carried away with her game, and had the poor horse spinning furiously. As the panther backed off and the horse stopped its spinning, only then did the dizzy highwayman fall to the ground.

“Ye’re Drizzt?” the fallen woman asked, her teeth still chattering from the residual lightning.

“That a highwayman would find that a comforting possibility perplexes me,” the drow replied.

The woman gave a snort and shook her head.

“They have friends approaching,” Dahlia warned. “Finish them or let’s be on our way.”

Drizzt considered the ragtag group for a few heartbeats then flipped his scimitars into their scabbards. He even offered the man who’d recognized him his hand and hoisted him up to his feet.

“I’ve no love for the high captains of Luskan,” Drizzt explained to the highwaymen. “Only that fact spares you the blade this day. But know that I will be watching you, and any assault upon an innocent will be viewed as an attack upon my own body.”

“And that’s it, then?” asked the woman, looking miserable and beaten. “We’re to forage and starve so as not to offend the sensibilities of the great Drizzt Do’Urden?”

Drizzt looked at her curiously, but for just a moment before he noted Dahlia’s superior, knowing smile.

“I was a farmer,” explained the man Drizzt had just lifted. “Right near Luskan. Goodman Stuyles at yer service.” He held out his hand,

but Drizzt didn't take it. "My family worked the land since before the fall o' the Hosttower of the Arcane."

"Then why are you here?" the drow asked suspiciously.

"Ain't no use for farms around Luskan no more," the man replied. "Folks're trading for their food now, and most by ship, or by the wagon like the one that just passed."

"And most of it stolen food, don't ye doubt!" another man interjected. "They got no patience for a farm, nor no means to protect one."

Drizzt glanced over at Dahlia, who merely shrugged as if it was all quite expected.

"We grew it, they stole it, and burned that what they couldn't take," said Stuyles.

Down the road, more of the highwaymen came into view, but only briefly before scattering into the brush, no doubt to try to flank the newcomers.

"Go," Drizzt bade the four, waving them away.

A couple moved to do just that, one going over to help the woman to her feet and calling for the nearest horse as he did.

"I would think you would offer a meal and a dry bed for the two of us for letting you go," Dahlia said to the group, drawing surprised looks from all four, and most of all, from Drizzt. "Weary travelers, rainy night. . . ." she went on.

Drizzt's jaw hung open, and didn't begin to close when Goodman Stuyles answered, "Join us, then."

"We have other business," Drizzt said rather sternly, aiming his remark squarely at Dahlia.

But Dahlia just laughed and followed the four highwaymen. With a great sigh, Drizzt did, too.

The bandits had set up several wide lean-tos among a row of thick pines just off the road, affording them a comfortable enough camp despite the driving rain. They proved to be surprisingly hospitable, offering a warm meal and some good, strong drink.

Goodman Stuyles stayed with Drizzt and Dahlia through the meal and afterward, prodding Drizzt for tales of Icewind Dale—old

adventures that had apparently become legendary in these parts so many years later. Drizzt had never fancied himself a storyteller, but he complied with the requests, and soon found quite the audience—a dozen or so—sitting around him and listening intently.

Most of those drifted off to sleep as the fires burned low, but a couple remained, enjoying the banter. “And what business might you have now that brings you south of that forsaken land?” asked one of them, a tall man named Hadencourt, after Drizzt had finished the story of battling a white dragon in an ice cave.

“We’re on our way to Luskan,” Drizzt answered, “to inquire after some old friends.”

“And then to Neverwinter Wood, eh?” Dahlia added, and Drizzt couldn’t react fast enough to suppress his surprise at her inclusion of that tidbit.

“There’s a great battle raging there,” farmer Stuyles remarked.

“Neverwinter Wood?” Hadencourt pressed. “What would bring a drow elf and a”—he looked rather curiously at Dahlia, as if not quite knowing what to make of her—“a lady such as yourself to that war-scarred place?”

Dahlia started to reply, but Drizzt spoke over her. “We’re adventurers. It would seem that Neverwinter Wood is now a place of adventure!” He ended by lifting his cup of brandy in a toast. “Though in truth, we haven’t decided our course after Luskan, and in truth, we are not even certain that our road will take us all the way to the City of Sails. I’ve been thinking that it’s far past time for a return to Mithral Hall.”

The whole time he spoke, the drow stared intently at Dahlia, warning her to keep silent. When he looked back at Hadencourt, he noted that the man wore a smile that seemed a bit too informed for his liking.

“Call it personal,” Dahlia said, and she never stopped looking at Hadencourt.

The discussion ended there, abruptly, with Drizzt commenting that it was past time for them all to get some rest. As the others dispersed, Dahlia watched Hadencourt head off to his lean-to for the night.

Goodman Stuyles stepped away to speak with several others of the band. “We’ll be moving tomorrow,” he reported back to Drizzt a few moments later. “That wagon will soon enough reach Port Llast and we’re thinking a garrison’ll come looking for us. Are ye to be coming with us, then? We’d be glad to have ye along.”

“No,” Drizzt stated flatly, over Dahlia’s opposite response. “I cannot.”

“We’re just surviving, is all,” Stuyles said. “A man’s a right to eat!”

“That you didn’t feel the bite of my blade is a testament that I don’t disagree,” Drizzt told him. “But I fear that traveling along beside you would show me choices with which I cannot agree and of which I cannot abide. Would you enter every adventure unsure of my allegiance?”

Stuyles took a step back and eyed the drow. “Better ye go then,” he said, and Drizzt nodded coldly.

“So the world is too dirty for Drizzt Do’Urden,” Dahlia mocked when Stuyles had gone. “What rights, what proper recourse, for those who have not, when those who have keep all?”

“Waterdeep is not so far to the south.”

“Aye, and the lords of Waterdeep will throw open their gates and their wares to all those put out in the chaos.”

At that moment, Drizzt didn’t find Dahlia’s sarcasm very endearing. He calmed himself with memories of Icewind Dale, memories nearly a century old, of a time and place when matters of right and wrong seemed so much more apparent. Even in that unforgiving frontier, there seemed a level of civilization far beyond the current drama playing out along the Sword Coast. He considered the fall of Captain Deudermont in Luskan, when the high captains had seized full control of the City of Sails and thus, the surrounding region. A Waterdhavian lord had fallen beside Deudermont, and the other lords of that great city had surely failed in their subsequent inaction.

But even in that dark moment, Drizzt understood the fall of Luskan to darkness was just a minor symptom of a greater disease, as was the fall of Cadderly and Spirit Soaring. With the advent of the Shadowfell, the patches of shadow were both literal and figurative,

and in those vast areas of darkness, anarchy and chaos had found their way.

How could Drizzt fight beside men like Stuyles and these highwaymen, however justified their ambushes, when he knew that those they ambushed would very often be men and women, like this band, simply trying to find a way to survive and keep their families fed?

Was there a “right” and “wrong” to be found here? To steal from the powerful or to toil for their copper coins?

“What are you thinking?” Dahlia asked him, her voice having lost its sharp edge.

“That I am one very small person, after all,” Drizzt replied without looking.

When he did at last turn around to regard the woman, she was grinning knowingly—too confidently, as if she was working some manipulation on him he didn’t yet understand.

Strangely, that notion didn’t bother Drizzt as much as he would have expected. Perhaps his confusion when faced by such a reality as the tumult of the Sword Coast was so profound that he would accept a hand, however offered, in lifting him from the darkness.

R.A. SALVATORE

R.A. Salvatore was born in Massachusetts in 1959. His love affair with fantasy, and with literature in general, began during his sophomore year of college when he was given a copy of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* as a Christmas gift. He promptly changed his major from computer science to journalism. He received a Bachelor of Science degree in communications in 1981, then returned for the degree he always cherished, the Bachelor of Arts in English. He began writing seriously in 1982, penning the manuscript that would become *Echoes of the Fourth Magic*.

His first published novel was *The Crystal Shard* from TSR in 1988 and he is still best known as the creator of the dark elf Drizzt, one of fantasy's most beloved characters.

His novel *The Silent Blade* won the Origins Award, and in the fall of 1997, his letters, manuscripts, and other professional papers were donated to the R.A. Salvatore Library at his alma mater, Fitchburg State College in Fitchburg, Massachusetts.

THE ABYSSAL PLAGUE

From the molten core of a dead universe

Hunger

Spills a seed of evil

Fury

So pure, so concentrated, so infectious

Hate

Its corruption will span worlds

The Temple of Yellow Skulls

Don Basingthwaite

Sword of the Gods

Bruce R. Cordell

Under the Crimson Sun

Keith R.A. DeCandido

Oath of Vigilance

James Wyatt

Shadowbane

Erik Scott de Bie

Find these novels at your favorite bookseller.
Also available as ebooks.

DungeonsandDragons.com



DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, D&D, WIZARDS OF THE COAST, and their respective logos are trademarks of Wizards of the Coast LLC in the U.S.A. and other countries. ©2011 Wizards.

