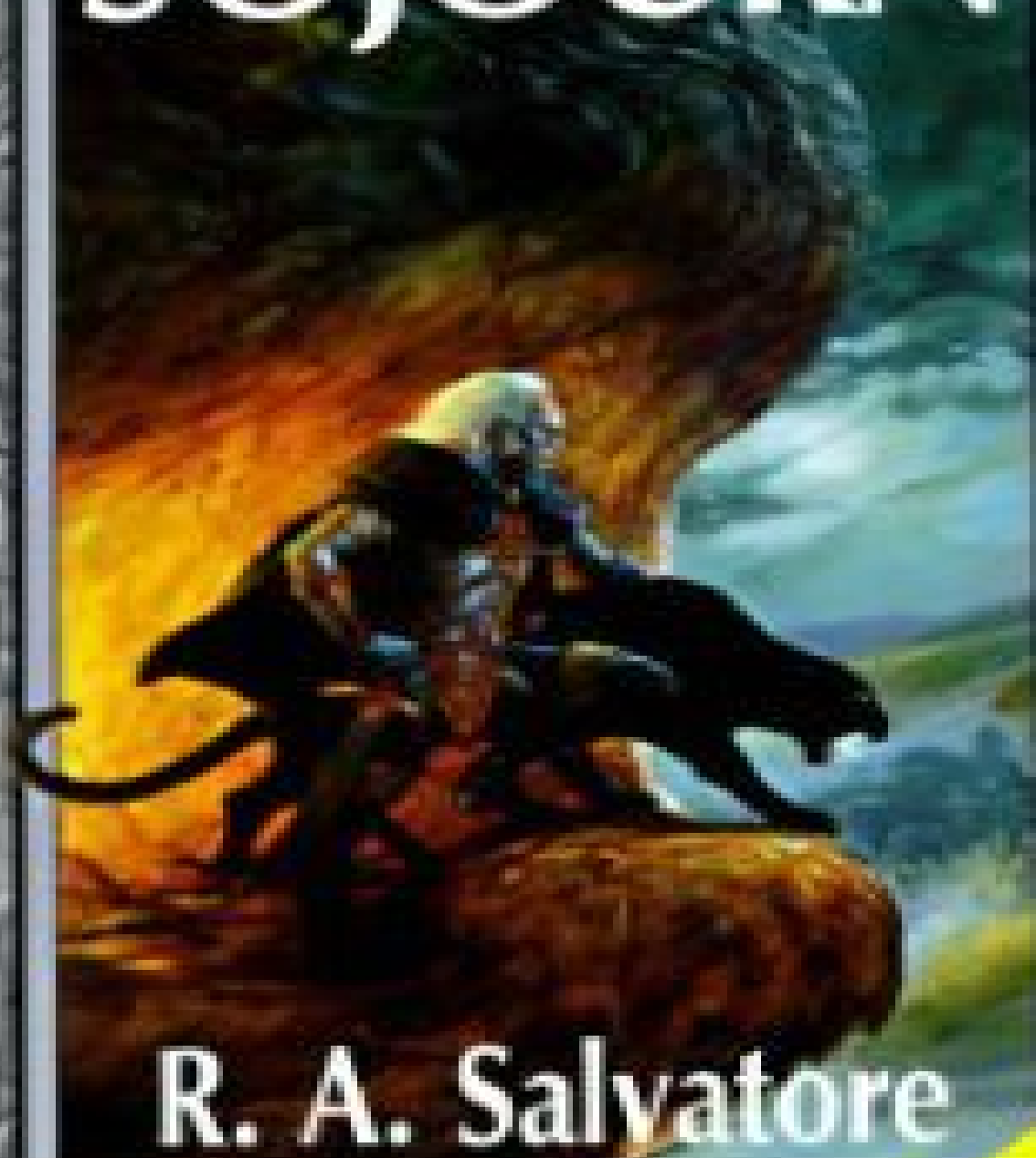


Book Three • The Dark Elf Trilogy

FORGOTTEN REALMS

SOJOURN



R. A. Salvatore

The New York Times
Bestselling Author of The Legend

Sojourn
R. A. Salvatore

Mooshie's Grove	3
Part 1	7
The Stalk of Doom	72
Part 2	82
Rage	95
Clues and Riddles	112
A Question of Honor	143
Part 3	171
Mootolio	172
Winter	174
To Know Your Enemies	192
Montolio's Test	221
Of Gods crad PciRpose	251
The Battle of Mooshie's	286
Separate Ways	310
And Miles	327
Heptaaestas	341
A MeraoR*/ Corae To Life	386
Revelations	399
Epilogue	433

Mooshie's Grove

The dark elf sat on the barren mountainside, watching anxiously as the line of red grew above the eastern horizon. This would be perhaps his hundredth dawn, and he knew well the sting the searing light would bring to his lavender eyes that had known only the darkness of the Underdark for more than four decades.

The dwarf did not turn away, though, when the upper rim of the flaming sun crested the horizon. He accepted the light as his purgatory, a pain

necessary if he was to follow his chosen path, to become a creature of the surface world.

Gray smoke wafted up before the drow's dark skinned face. He knew what it meant without even looking down. His piwafwi, the magical drow made cloak that had so many times in the Underdark shielded him from probing enemy eyes, had finally succumbed to the daylight. The magic in the cloak had begun fading weeks before, and the fabric itself was simply melting away. Wide holes appeared as patches of the garment dissolved, and the drow pulled his arms in tightly to salvage as much as he could.

It wouldn't make any difference, he knew, the cloak was doomed to waste away in this world so different from where it had been created. The drow clung to it desperately, somehow viewing it as an analogy to his own fate.

The sun climbed higher and tears rolled out of the drow's squinting lavender eyes. He could not see the smoke anymore, could see nothing beyond the blinding glare of that terrible ball of fire. Still he sat and watched, right through the dawn.

To survive, he had to adapt.

He pushed his toe painfully down against a jag in the stone and focused his attention away from his eyes, from the dizziness that threatened to overcome him. He thought of how thin his finely woven boots had become and knew that they, too, would soon dissipate into nothingness.

Then his scimitars, perhaps? Would those magnificent drow weapons, which had sustained him through so many trials, be no more? What fate awaited Guenhwyvar, his magical panther companion? Unconsciously the drow dropped a hand into his pouch to feel the marvelous figurine, so perfect in every detail, which he used to summon the cat. Its solidity reassured him in that moment of doubt, but if it, too, had been crafted by the dark elves, imbued with the magic so particular to their domain, would Guenhwyvar soon be lost?

"What a pitiful creature I will become," the drow lamented in his native tongue. He wondered, not for the first time and certainly not for the last, about the wisdom of his decision to leave the Underdark, to forsake the world of his evil people.

His head pounded, sweat rolled into his eyes, heightening the sting. The sun continued its ascent and the drow could not endure. He rose and turned toward the small cave he had taken as his home, and he again put a hand absently on the panther figurine.

His piwafwi hung in tatters about him, serving as meager protection from the mountain winds' chill bite. There was no wind in the Underdark except for slight currents rising off pools of magma, and no chill except for the icy touch of an undead monster. This surface world, which the drow had known for several months, showed him many differences, many variables—too many, he often believed.

Drizzt Do'Urden would not surrender. The Underdark was the world of his kin, of his family, and in that darkness he would find no rest. Following the demands of his principles, he had struck out against Lloth, the Spider Queen, the evil deity his people revered above life itself. The dark elves, Drizzt's family, would not forgive his blasphemy, and the Underdark had no holes deep enough to escape their long reach.

Even if Drizzt believed that the sun would burn him away, as it burned away his boots and his precious piwafwi, even if he became no more than insubstantial, gray smoke blowing away in the chill mountain breeze, he would retain his principles and dignity, those elements that made his life worthwhile.

Drizzt pulled off his cloak's remains and tossed them down a deep chasm. The chilly wind nipped against his sweat beaded brow, but the drow walked straight and proud, his jaw firm and his lavender eyes wide open.

This was the fate he preferred.

Along the side of a different mountain, not so far away, another creature watched the rising sun. Ulgulu, too, had left his birthplace, the filthy, smoking rifts that marked the plane of Gehenna, but this monster had not come of his own accord. It was Ulgulu's fate, his penance, to grow in this world until he attained sufficient strength to return to his home.

Ulgulu's lot was murder, feeding on the life force of the weak mortals around him. He was close now to attaining his maturity: huge and strong and terrible.

Every kill made him stronger.

Part 1

Sun Rise.

It burned at my eyes and pained every part of my body. It destroyed my piwafwi and boots, stole the magic from my armor, and weakened my trusted scimitars. Still, every day, without fail, I was there, sitting upon my perch, my judgment seat, to await the arrival of the sunrise.

It came to me each day in a paradoxical way. The sting could not be denied, but neither could I deny the beauty of the spectacle. The colors just before the sun's appearance grabbed my soul in a way that no patterns of heat emanations in the Underdark ever could. At first, I thought my enhancement a result of the strangeness of the scene, but even now, many years later, I feel my heart leap at the subtle brightening that heralds the dawn.

I know now that my time in the sun my daily penance was more than mere desire to adapt to the ways of the surface world. The sun became the symbol of the difference between the Underdark and my new home. The society that I had run away from, a world of secret dealings and treacherous conspiracies could not exist in the open spaces under the light of day.

This sun, for all the anguish it brought me physically, came to represent my denial of that other, darker world. Those rays of revealing light reinforced my principles as surely as they weakened the drow made magical items.

In the sunlight, the piwafwi, the shielding cloak that defeated probing eyes the garment of thieves and assassins became no more than a worthless rag of tattered cloth.

—Drizzt Do'Urden

Poignant Lessons

Drizzt crept past the shielding shrubs and over the flat and bare stone that led to the cave now serving as his home. He knew that something had crossed this way recently very recently. There were no tracks to be seen, but the scent was strong.

Guenhwyvar circled on the rocks up above the hillside cave. Sight of the panther gave the drow a measure of comfort. Drizzt had come to trust Guenhwyvar implicitly and knew that the cat would flush out any enemies hiding in ambush. Drizzt disappeared into the dark opening and smiled as he heard the panther come down behind, watching over him.

Drizzt paused behind a stone just inside the entrance, letting his eyes adjust to the gloom. The sun was still bright, though it was fast dipping into the western sky, but the cave was much darker—dark enough for Drizzt to let his vision slip into the infrared spectrum. As soon as the adjustment was completed, Drizzt located the intruder. The clear glow of a heat source, a living creature, emanated from behind another rock deeper in the one chambered cave. Drizzt relaxed considerably. Guenhwyvar was only a few steps away now, and, considering the size of the rock, the intruder could not be a large beast.

Still, Drizzt had been raised in the Underdark, where every living creature, regardless of its size, was respected and considered dangerous. He signaled

for Guenhwyvar to remain in position near the exit and crept around to get a better angle on the intruder.

Drizzt had never seen such an animal before. It appeared almost catlike, but its head was much smaller and more sharply pointed. The whole of it could not have weighed more than a few pounds. This fact, and the creature's bushy tail and thick fur indicated that it was more a forager than a predator. It rummaged now through a pack of food, apparently oblivious to the drow's presence.

"Take ease, Guenhwyvar,' Drizzt called softly, slipping his scimitars into their sheaths. He took a step toward the intruder for a better look, though he kept a cautious distance so as not to startle it, thinking that he might have found another companion. If he could only gain the animal's trust. . .

The small animal turned abruptly at Drizzt's call, its short front legs quickly backing it against the wall.

"Take ease," Drizzt said quietly, this time to the intruder. "I'll not harm you." Drizzt took another step in and the creature hissed and spun about, its small hind feet stamping down on the stone floor.

Drizzt nearly laughed aloud, thinking that the creature meant to push itself straight through the cave's back wall. Guenhwyvar bounded over then, and the panther's immediate distress stole the mirth from the drow's face.

The animal's tail came up high, Drizzt noticed in the faint light that the beast had distinctive stripes running down its back. Guenhwyvar whimpered and turned to flee, but it was too late....

About an hour later Drizzt and Guenhwyvar walked along the lower trails of the mountain in search of a new home. They had salvaged what they could, though that wasn't very much. Guenhwyvar kept a good distance to the side of Drizzt. Proximity made the stink only worse.

Drizzt took it all in stride, though the stench of his own body made the lesson a bit more poignant than he would have liked. He didn't know the little animal's name, of course, but he had marked its appearance keenly. He would know better the next time he encountered a skunk.

"What of my other companions in this strange world," Drizzt whispered to himself. It was not the first time the drow had voiced such concerns. He knew very little of the surface and even less of the creatures that lived here. His months had been spent in and about the cave, with only occasional forays down to the lower, more populated regions. There, in his foraging, he had seen some animals, usually at a distance, and had even observed some humans. He had not yet found the courage to come out of hiding, though, to greet his neighbors, fearing potential rejection and knowing that he had nowhere left to run.

The sound of rushing water led the reeking drow and panther to a fast running brook. Drizzt immediately found some protective shade and began stripping away his armor and clothing, while Guenhwyvar moved downstream to do some fishing. The sound of the panther fumbling around in the water brought a smile to the drow's severe features. They would eat well this night.

Drizzt gingerly flipped the clasp of his belt and laid his crafted weapons beside his mesh chain mail. Truly, he felt vulnerable without the armor and weapons—he never would have put them so far from his reach in the Underdark but many months had passed since Drizzt had found any need for them. He looked to his scimitars and was flooded by the bittersweet memories of the last time he had put them to use.

He had battled Zaknafein then, his father and mentor and dearest friend. Only Drizzt had survived the encounter. The legendary weapon master was gone now, but the triumph in that fight belonged as much to Zak as it did to Drizzt, for it was not really Zaknafein who had come after Drizzt on the bridges of an acid filled cavern. Rather, it was Zaknafein's wraith, under the control of Drizzt's evil mother, Matron Malice. She had sought revenge upon her son for his denouncement of Lloth and of the chaotic drow society

in general. Drizzt had spent more than thirty years in Menzoberranzan but had never accepted the malicious and cruel ways that were the norm in the Drow city. He had been a constant embarrassment to House Do'Urden despite his considerable skill with weapons. When he ran from the city to live a life of exile in the wilds of the Underdark, he had placed his high priestess mother out of Lloth's favor.

Thus, Matron Malice Do'Urden had raised the spirit of Zaknafein, the weapon master she had sacrificed to Lloth, and sent the undead thing after her son. Malice had miscalculated, though, for there remained enough of Zak's soul within the body to deny the attack on Drizzt. In the instant that Zak managed to wrest control from Malice, he had cried out in triumph and leaped into the lake of acid.

"My father," Drizzt whispered, drawing strength from the simple words. He had succeeded where Zaknafein had failed, he had forsaken the evil ways of the drow where Zak had been trapped for centuries, acting as a pawn in Matron Malice's power games. From Zaknafein's failure and ultimate demise, young Drizzt had found strength, from Zak's victory in the acid cavern, Drizzt had found determination. Drizzt had ignored the web of Kes his former teachers at the Academy in Menzoberranzan had tried to spin, and he had come to the surface to begin a new life.

Drizzt shuddered as he stepped into the icy stream. In the Underdark he had known fairly constant temperatures and unvarying darkness. Here, though, the world surprised him at every turn. Already he had noticed that the periods of daylight and darkness were not constant, the sun set earlier every day and the temperature changing from hour to hour, it seemed had steadily dipped during the last few weeks. Even within those periods of light and dark loomed inconsistencies. Some nights were visited by a silver glowing orb and some days held a pall of gray instead of a dome of shining blue.

In spite of it all, Drizzt most often felt comfortable with his decision to come to this unknown world. Looking at his weapons and armor now, lying in the shadows a dozen feet from where he bathed, Drizzt had to admit that

the surface, for all of its strangeness, offered more peace than anywhere in the Underdark ever could.

Drizzt was in the wilds now, despite his calm. He had spent four months on the surface and was still alone, except when he was able to summon his magical feline companion. Now, stripped bare except for his ragged pants, with his eyes stinging from the skunk spray, his sense of smell lost within the cloud of his own pungent aroma, and his keen sense of hearing dulled by the din of rushing water, the drow was indeed vulnerable.

"What a mess I must appear," Drizzt mused, roughly running his slender fingers through the mat of his thick, white hair. When he glanced back to his equipment, though, the thought was washed quickly from Drizzt's mind. Five hulking forms straddled his belongings and undoubtedly cared little for the dark elf's ragged appearance.

Drizzt considered the grayish skin and dark muzzles of the dog faced, seven-foot tall humanoids, but more particularly, he watched the spears and swords that they now leveled his way. He knew this type of monster, for he had seen similar creatures serving as slaves back in Menzoberranzan. In this situation, however, the gnolls appeared much different, more ominous, than Drizzt remembered them.

He briefly considered a rush to his scimitars but dismissed the notion, knowing that a spear would skewer him before he ever got close. The largest of the gnoll band, an eight foot giant with striking red hair, looked at Drizzt for a long moment, eyed the drow's equipment, then looked back to him.

"What are you thinking?" Drizzt muttered under his breath. Drizzt really knew very little about gnolls. At Menzoberranzan's Academy he had been taught that gnolls were of a goblinoid race, evil, unpredictable, and quite dangerous. He had been told that of the surface elves and humans as well, though and, he now realized, of nearly every race that was not drow. Drizzt almost laughed aloud despite his predicament. Ironically, the race that most deserved that mantle of evil unpredictability was the drow themselves!