

Interview with R.A. Salvatore



Keri: Most probably you've been asked this question many times but let us ask it once again: Howcome did you start writing? What made you write fantasy fiction?

Salvatore: Honestly, I ran out of fantasy books to write, so I wrote my own. True story. Back in 1982, there weren't many fantasy books to be found on the shelves of my local stores. I fell in love with the genre and when I had nothing left to read, I wrote my own.

Keri: How did you come to meet Forgotten Realms and WoTC?

Salvatore: I sent an original manuscript to TSR (the company WoTC bought to acquire Dungeons and Dragons and the Forgotten Realms) way back in 1987. The editor liked it, but explained to me that she had no room on the schedule for any books except for Forgotten Realms book. She asked me if I could set the book in the Forgotten Realms, or would I audition to do a book in the Realms. I didn't even know what the Realms were (they weren't published at the time), but I jumped in. I'm glad I did.

Keri: Is there anything that you don't like about Forgotten Realms?

Salvatore: Sharing a world always has pitfalls - I can't blow up a city, for example - but there are more benefits to be found. I get to stand on the shoulders of giants like Ed Greenwood, and there's a great view from up there!

Keri: As many of your fans know, your primal characters are Bruenor, Wulfgar and Catti-Brie. But WoTC asked you to create a Menzoberranzan character. What was your first reaction?

Salvatore: No, no, that's backwards. I came up with Drizzt when writing "The Crystal Shard" as a sidekick to Wulfgar, but Drizzt took over the book immediately. After the Icewind Dale Trilogy was finished, TSR (it didn't become WotC until 1997, this was in 1990) asked me to go back and show where this character, Drizzt, had come from, as he was becoming a fan favorite and they needed someone to define the dark elves in the Forgotten Realms.

Keri: I think your initial intended protagonist was Wulfgar but when Drizzt came to life, Wulfgar lay low. Were you ever dissatisfied with it? Do you plan about a series based on Wulfgar?

Salvatore: I've always felt bad about how Wulfgar got pushed to the edge of the story, and then, to make it worse, I've beaten the guy senseless over the years. At this point, the Realms are moving forward, not back, so I doubt we'll see too much of Wulfgar in the near future. After that, you never know.

Keri: It's been a full 20 years time with Drizzt. What were your first thoughts about Drizzt, what are they now? After all, he's spent 20 years with you. Has anything changed along the way?

Salvatore: My first thoughts were to make him a cool sidekick, like Artemus Gordon on the old Wild, Wild West show. You know, the friend who's always got an answer, even if it isn't the right one, and who doesn't actually have to take responsibility for the conflicts in the story. Thibbledorf Pwent is another example. So are the Bouldersoulder Brothers, or even Jarlaxle. It changed in the first scene I started to write on that first book. I had Drizzt running across the tundra and getting jumped by yetis, and on page 2, I knew. It was his book. Since then, he's become my mouthpiece above all others.

Keri: We are all curious about how you come up with the names of your characters? Are you inspired by something?

Salvatore: Terror? Sometimes in creating names, I just want to close my eyes, hit the keys and hope enough vowels come up. Seriously, though, with the drow, I was looking for a cross between Tolkienish elven and dwarven syllables, since we're talking about elves who live underground.

Keri: Was it your plan or a mutual decision with WoTC that Drizzt came up to surface and made friends with Bruenor, Wulfgar and likes?

Salvatore: The first book was "The Crystal Shard," not "Homeland," so Drizzt actually started on the surface, in Icewind Dale. They've re-released the books in chronological order based on Drizzt's life, but they weren't written that way. Icewind Dale was completed and published before I ever started writing The Dark Elf Trilogy.

Keri: As you've mentioned in the preface of Amber and Ashes by Margaret Weis, you've been deeply effected by the autograph session of Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman at Gen-Con. I believe you still remember that day. What did you feel then and how did make a change in you?

Salvatore: I was reading one of their books when I got a very nasty rejection letter. I hated their book after that and was convinced it wasn't any good. When I saw them sitting there, and listened to the reactions of the fans, one after another coming up to them with heartwarming stories of how the characters had touched their lives, I realized that I hadn't enjoyed their work because of me, and not because of their work. Sure enough, when I went back and read those Dragonlance books, I loved them. I learned an important lesson that day about the relationship of the reader to the book.

Also, Margaret and Tracy are genuinely good people, and deeply love and appreciate their readers. I'm proud to call them friends.

Keri: Most of your readers think that you have a soft spot for your characters and can't let them die. Are these comments accurate? What do you think?

Salvatore: I think "most" of my readers should go read my DemonWars novels and get back to me with an apology, if that's the case! not to mention the newest book...I'll leave it at that. But yes, killing a character is a painful thing indeed.

Keri: There have been rumors of filming Legend of Drizzt for many years. Is there such chance? If there is, which books do you prefer to be filmed? Have you ever made a character-actor match?

Salvatore: There's nothing going on regarding a movie that I'm aware of, but Hasbro owns the rights to Drizzt, not I. Actually, of all my books, I think "The Highwayman" or "The Woods Out Back" would make terrific movies. Of the Drizzt books, I'd probably go with "The Crystal Shard" to start, or maybe "Homeland." And no, I haven't put actor to character, although someone once suggested that Edward Norton would make a great Entreri, and after seeing "American history X," I find it hard to disagree with that.

Keri: Will Drizzt ever be sick and tired of fighting? :)

Salvatore: I hope not! :)

Keri: What is the thing you've most enjoyed creating and felt yourself most creative? It can be a character, an item, a spell, a race...

Salvatore: The world of Corona for DemonWars. I love that place! Other than that, the bond between the Companions of the Hall in the Drizzt series. These characters have become long-time friends to me, in a very strange kind of way.

Keri: Are there any references in your books? For example, Mordor lands of Tolkien were said to be Turkish soil. (Accurate or not). Maybe you've made a reference to capitalist system with Menzoberranzan's hierarchical order, created elven nation to symbolize peace? Or similar things? May the Mithril Hall bear a resemblance to a place of your childhood?

Salvatore: I have five older sisters who are constantly arguing about which one is which drow sister. it's pretty funny to watch. But sure, there are analogies and references to the "real" world all the time. How can there not be, particularly when we live in such dramatic and tumultuous times? My opinion is part of who I am, and who I am has to translate into the works in some manner, right?

Keri: We've first come across Drizzt at the "Menzoberranzan" DOS game made by SSI Games in 1994. Later, it has made the readers and players very happy to see Drizzt in Icewind Dale series and games like Demonstone scripted by you. Shall we have a chance to see Drizzt in new games?

Salvatore: I think so, yes, and I hope so. I'm very impressed with the storytelling and direction of video games over the last few years and am as interested in seeing Drizzt in that format as in seeing a Drizzt movie, honestly.

Keri: Why do you especially choose to work with Mr. Lockwood for cover pictures?

Salvatore: It's not up to me. The publishers make the call, but I have to say, i got pretty lucky indeed when Todd started doing Drizzt covers. I did get to pick the artist for The Highwayman books, and I chose Todd immediately. He ranks up there with Larry Elmore and Keith Parkinson to me, and that's about as high as it gets.

Keri: What do you think about comics series Legend of Drizzt published by Devil's Due Publishing? Do the drawings fit to your imagined characters? We know that it is a fact that novels need to be shortened to become comics. Has there ever been a situation that these shortenings bothered you?

Salvatore: I loved those, particularly the Dark Elf interpretations. Andrew Dabb is a great storyteller, and he picked out interesting parts of the novels to bring to life in the graphic novels.

Keri: Thank you so much. Good luck in your writings. We are awaiting your new novels impatiently.

Salvatore: Thank you Keri. Say hello to Turkey.

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