



City of Shards

Steve Rodgers

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City of Shards is a dazzling and captivating introduction to a new fantasy adventure series.

In Steve Rodgers's fantasy *City of Shards*, a boy learns that the hero's journey is never a straight path; sometimes, the only way forward is to plunge into darkness.

Larin lives with his warrior-priest uncle, Akul, in a temple in the middle of Wormpile, a ruthless city of simmering violence and treachery. While Larin is a quiet soul who struggles to learn basic magic, he is plagued by outbursts—uncontrollable episodes where he thrashes and screams in a foreign tongue.

These outbursts are from Haraf, Lord of Demons, imprisoned long ago by the Six-Legged Gods. Now, Haraf wants out. Larin and Akul must figure out a way to stop him without unleashing a greater evil on the land.

City of Shards is an engaging and immersive story, mainly because its world building is so detailed. The novel opens with maps of the regions and a historic timeline that provides necessary background. Larin's placement in a semireligious institution also provides a way to introduce the values, the morals, and even the trivialities of his world.

Everything Larin sees and experiences is described in succinct detail. He steps outside on a cold, snowy evening and hears "the low whistle of the wind"; he feels the "cold pinpricks melt on his neck." Later in the novel, he comforts another character, and as she cries, he hears only the rattling of the Imperial decrees posted on the wall. These moments where Larin is mentally present to little details bring his world to delicious life.

This level of detail also shows up in the characters. While it is clear that Larin is on the mythic hero's journey, his path is never smooth and sometimes is not even heroic. When he discovers that neither keeping Haraf imprisoned nor releasing him has a positive outcome, he expresses genuine uncertainty about his predicament. This complexity makes Larin both believable and relatable.

Other characters are also richly developed. Akul's gruff exterior hides a more mysterious past. Trana is a priest who can't hold her liquor but who figures out that Larin is holding Haraf.

These characters come to life through crisp, action-filled prose. Larin enters scenes and the drama that unfolds around him tells the story. While the story sometimes glosses over information or takes its time to dissect a point, the pace of the action throughout is engaging.

City of Shards is a dazzling and captivating introduction to a new fantasy adventure series. Larin may not seem like the hero to save the world, but he proves to be one who can lead the way through the darkness.

KATERIE PRIOR (April 17, 2018)

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