



Nythan: Soulstealer: Book 1

Shane Boulware

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Soulstealer is a compelling urban fantasy novel that teems with moral quandaries.

In Shane Boulware's epic fantasy novel *Soulstealer*, an ancient being attempts to amass power while his human host struggles with taking innocent lives.

While house sitting for a friend, Nythan, a college student, barely survives a violent robbery. The last thing he remembers from the night is the strange white mist that left the robber's body.

Nythan wakes in the hospital with a strange voice in his head—that of an ancient being, Bane. The two form an unusual alliance: Nythan uses Bane's powers to devour souls. But protecting innocent life is Nythan's prime goal, even as the drive to feed overshadows his morals. Meanwhile, a shadow cabal will stop at nothing to destroy Bane before he can achieve maximum power. Nythan and Bane are forced to adjust to their new partnership while forces move against them.

Though Nythan is central to the story, he is underdeveloped. In his life before Bane, he lost his mother and wanted to join the military, but nothing grounded him. Who Nythan is on his own is not explored, and the contrast between who he was before Bane and who he becomes under Bane's influence is lackluster. Bane is more intriguing: an entity of unknown age with a deep history. His self-aggrandizing stories make him an unreliable narrator, and he sways Nythan at the expense of the truth. It's never quite clear if Bane is who he says he is.

The pacing is uneven. There's an initial burst of action and character development before the book transitions toward a languid series of scenes in which Nythan moves from his normal life to Thailand in his attempt to excise Bane. He visits groups that Bane established decades before, all formed to help him upon his return. These visits are repetitive, though, following a cycle of Nythan proving that he contains Bane, followed by events that push him toward the next group.

Much of the story focuses on the inner dialogue between Nythan and Bane, allowing the two to discuss philosophy and morals while the action moves around them. Bane's side of the conversation is humorous and intriguing, helping to humanize him, though he's still an entity who devours souls and who could end the world. Conversations between Nythan and others take place to propel the story, as with an early scene wherein Nythan and a monk discuss cyclical philosophies before he masters his abilities and moves on. External scenes are grounded by thorough details, so that it's clear who and where each character is, even during busy sequences.

With its cliffhanger ending, *Soulstealer* is a compelling urban fantasy novel that teems with moral quandaries.

JOHN M. MURRAY (August 10, 2020)

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