



Solum

G. M. Chmilar

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Solum is an emotive fantasy novel about a family that's driven to protect the unwitting populace from supernatural threats.

In G. M. Chmilar's urban fantasy novel *Solum*, a family of magical warriors takes a young college student under its wing.

After a horrific childhood drowning accident resulted in his sister's death, Bennett wants nothing more than a normal life. He's settled into college with friends, but his trauma continues to resurface. Around him, shadows move in unnatural ways, animals respond to his commands, and the dean wants to exchange his soul for tuition. But just before Bennett accepts the contract, an effervescent cheerleader, Cecelia Cervantes, saves him, declaring that the dean has broken treaties. And through Cecelia, Bennett meets the rest of the Cervantes family—including Cecelia's sister, Emilia, who is comparatively reserved and who also has a traumatic past (her father was killed during a demonic hunt). In Emilia, Bennett finds a kindred spirit—though he is desperate not to fall in love with her.

The Cervanteses are a subset of a larger organization, the Sentinels, who protect human beings from supernatural entities that collect souls and spread violence. Through them, Bennett is pulled into a world of magic warriors and fantasy creatures. Meanwhile, Emilia works to rebuild her life after her loss; she continues to serve the Sentinels' oath. Their differing responsibilities and desires clash, resulting in addictive, endearing momentum.

The fantasy elements of the world are developed in accessible, deep terms. The Sentinels have a complex schooling system that divides magic into temples centered on specialties, with Bennett experiencing most of these specialties as he becomes a student himself. The dynamics between the Sentinels, other global agencies, and the supernatural creatures are intricate; they clash over their unique goals. And the monsters that the Sentinels face vary in intelligence and brutality: Emilia's father was killed by brute Screechers, while Bennett almost falls prey to a sinister and charismatic succubus-like creature.

The Latin-evocative language used by the Sentinels is not translated; natural, context-based understandings of what's being said are nonetheless imparted. More often than not, this language is used to swear around the Cervantes family matriarch without invoking her ire.

The hunt that resulted in Emilia losing her father serves as a prologue to the story with a subtle hint that the fantasy elements occur in parallel with the modern world. There are references to modern technology, slang, and pop culture. The fates of Emilia's father and other members of her family looms over the narrative, though these threads are ultimately unanswered in this volume. Bennett's introduction to the Sentinel program and education are the volume's focal points. Both help to flesh out the world, introduce major characters, and establish the key series conflict.

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JOHN M. MURRAY (November 15, 2022)

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