



Steven: Soulstealer Book 2

Shane Boulware

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In the fantasy novel Steven, a determined man stands against the encroaching darkness.

In Shane Boulware's tense fantasy novel *Steven*, a lone member of an ancient order announces a demon's terrifying return.

Steven is one of the last stalwarts of the Ordo Solis, a storied group tasked with standing against the Soulstealer. A false outcry from a rival group years prior left the world wary of such orders, but Steven remains vigilant. He takes note when the Soulstealer returns with a new human host—and as the Soulstealer's followers begin to assassinate those who witnessed their master's return. Soon, Steven himself is captured and tortured for information.

Elsewhere, the Soulstealer and his followers enact a war of psychological terror against human beings. They want to ensure that no one believes that the enemy has returned, leaving the Soulstealer free to feed on souls with wanton glee. Nonetheless, after Steven is rescued by Ordo Solis's European chapter, he and his new allies formulate a plan to defeat the Soulstealer for good.

Taking place simultaneous to the events of the first book in the Soulstealer series but narrated from the other side's perspective, this standalone volume helps to further contextualize the supernatural war. It centers Steven as an everyman hero with an anger problem. His dogged belief in the Soulstealer's return seems foolhardy at first, but once he is vindicated, he risks it all to stop his enemy. This comes at the cost of his friends and allies, who are murdered and tortured in front of him. A tender moment between Steven and a former Ordo Solis member injects some humanity into the otherwise unrelenting, brutal tale.

Much of the violence and gore unfolds off of the page; it is captured at a distance in the horrified reactions of the cast, whose members respond to the cult's murders of innocents in time. Still, the prose is thorough and detailed, helping to ground and flesh out the nuances of its unusual sequences. It follows as the Soulstealer and his cadre of psychotic followers act out their violence, and it is laden with curses and vulgarity, though some such instances are blocked out by asterisks that make the most profanity-laden lines almost unreadable. Nonetheless, this is a triumphant series entry: Steven arms the world with knowledge of the Soulstealer's potential return, setting the stage for an ultimate showdown later in the series.

Working in tandem with the previous series volume, the fantasy novel *Steven* follows a determined man who stands against a violent supernatural being and his followers.

JOHN M. MURRAY (August 11, 2022)

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