

# SHADOWS FALL



- The Salvation of Tempestria Book 3 -

GARY STRINGER

*The Salvation of Tempestria*

Shifting Stars  
Gathering Storm  
Shadows Fall

# **Shadows Fall**

The Salvation of Tempestria  
Book 3

Gary Stringer

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Copyright © 2021 by Gary Stringer

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or used in any manner without written permission of the copyright owner except for the use of quotations in a book review.

First paperback edition December 2021

Cover Design by BespokeBookCovers.com

ISBN 978-1-8382777-4-1 (Paperback)

ISBN 978-1-8382777-5-8 (eBook)

Published by Gary Stringer

# Chapter 1

Sara and Jessica were on full alert. There was an intruder in the portal room, and they had tripped a silent alarm.

The black-robed figure of Dreya the Dark stepped out into the long corridor, unconcerned, unhurried. She sensed them before she saw them, hiding at the far end. She had taken no more than two steps when two purple catlike alien girls stepped out from where they thought they were concealed, each pointing a weapon at the woman in black, who continued to walk slowly forwards, regardless.

“Sorry, love,” Jessica spoke up, “but I don’t think you’re meant to be here.”

Still, the intruder’s steady pace continued.

“In the interests of fair play,” Sara advised her, “in case you’re unfamiliar with guns, these things can kill from a distance.”

“In the interests of fair play,” Dreya countered, still not stopping, “in case you’re unfamiliar with wizards, so can I.”

“Oh well,” Jessica accepted with a shrug, “can’t say we didn’t warn you, dear.”

With a shared glance, they both fired at once. To their astonishment, however, the beams seemed to hit some kind of invisible shield surrounding the intruder, which filtered the energy, allowing some to penetrate, while keeping the rest out.

“Thanks for the energy top-up,” called out the sorceress, who finally did stop walking. “Just what I needed after a long journey. Now, I believe it must be my turn.”

Bolts of electricity shot out of both hands, striking the two defenders, but they were equally unharmed.

“Magically resistant body armour,” Sara explained, “which means you can’t do anything to us.”

The two Chetsuans drew swords and rushed down the corridor, but with a flick of her shoulder-length hair, Dreya caused the weapons to fly from their grasp. Undaunted, they switched to the knives they had strapped to their wrists and closed the gap, but all they struck was a shadow.

They scarcely had time to recover from that shock, before a large linen cupboard flew across the corridor to slam Jessica

painfully against the wall. Sara cried out her sister's name, but her breath was knocked from her lungs as the grandfather clock flew out, catching her full in the face and pinning her against the wall on the opposite side. Struggle though they might, they could not break free. The swords they had dropped floated in the air, threatening their owners.

"Lesson learned, I trust?" Dreya remarked, materialising before their eyes. "Magic resistance only stops direct magic. I still have a thousand ways to kill you with indirect magic."

The Chetsuans weren't ready to concede defeat yet, however. They didn't get much chance to use their telepathy. Earth humans couldn't do it, and they knew each other so well, they really didn't need special powers to know what their sister was thinking. But the mental abilities of two Chetsuans together, especially twins who were naturally in harmony with each other, were considerable.

Staring intently at Dreya, from where they were pinned, their eyes glowed with amber light, as they chanted, "You don't want to harm us...You don't want to harm us...You don't want to harm us..."

Dreya felt the assault on her mind and raised her eyebrows, intrigued. She hadn't experienced such a ferocious mental attack in a long time.

"You two are powerful," she acknowledged, "and I don't often say that. If any other wizard from my world came through that portal, they would find you a serious threat, but your telepathy won't work on me for two reasons.

"First, in addition to my own mental discipline, I am protected by a sympathetic link."

Upon hearing that word, the girls stopped chanting.

"Wait, sympathetic link?" Sara wondered, a puzzled look on her face. "I've only ever heard that once before."

"From a certain half-Faery druidess called Catriona Redfletching, no doubt."

"You know Cat?" Jessica asked.

"Better than most, or so I like to flatter myself. Which brings me to the second reason your mental attack was always going to fail: I really *don't* want to harm you."

"You don't?" Sara checked, tentatively.

Dreya shook her head as the swords clattered to the floor. “I never had any such intention. I’m not a tyrant, despite what some on my world might think. I didn’t come here to kill you. If I had, we wouldn’t be having this conversation. As I said, I have a thousand ways to kill you, yet I haven’t used any of them. You attacked me, and I don’t generally react well to that, but you were defending your home, and I respect that, so I’m willing to give you both a pass this once.” She raised a warning finger. “But only this once, is that clear?”

They both nodded.

“Excellent. Now, I’m going to release you both. When I do, I suggest we put this misunderstanding behind us and start again. Agreed?”

“Agreed,” they chorused.

True to her word, Dreya cancelled her magic and allowed both Chetsuans to free themselves. They immediately sheathed their weapons.

Stepping forward in a non-threatening way, Dreya offered her hand and introduced herself.

“So, are you, like, Cat’s friend or something?” Sara asked.

“A friend, yes,” Dreya confirmed, “and more besides.”

“More besides?” Sara wondered.

“Of course!” Jessica cried. “Don’t you see, Sara? That’s why she wouldn’t get into a relationship with Daelen – she was already in a relationship with Dreya, here.”

“Jess!” her sister hissed in warning, worried that Dreya might not take kindly to the news that her girlfriend had feelings for someone else and she might take it out on them.

Guessing her fears, Dreya smiled, reassuringly. “Don’t worry, I know all about that. It’s not a problem.”

“Then why wouldn’t she just tell him she was with you?” Sara wondered.

“An unintended side-effect,” the Faery woman explained, regretfully. “Keeping me a secret via a magically backed promise was a strategy. It was never supposed to cause her emotional distress. Believe me, I would never do that, and I would have met up with her to remove the block any time she asked. She chose to keep it because she still believed the strategy was sound. And just to be clear,” she added, “the magic never stopped her from doing

whatever she wanted. It didn't force her to choose me, it only prevented her from telling anyone that she had."

"So, you're linked with her at all times?" Sara asked.

"To a greater or lesser extent. The link has a privacy mode, like closing a door, but in an emergency, that door could be flung open at any time."

"Then you could swoop in and save her if you needed to?" Jessica wondered.

"Or stand and fight with her. Whatever the situation demands." She shrugged. "I love her. It's as simple as that."

"Wow, that's actually proper romantic!" Jessica grinned.

"If it's true," Sara pointed out, who was less willing to take Dreya's word than was her sister.

"Sara!" Jessica scowled, hands on hips. "Don't be a misery just because you're missing your elf boy. You can't go around asking people to prove they're in a relationship. How's she supposed to do that, anyway?"

"Actually," Dreya ventured, pulling something out of a pocket, blushing as she did so. She didn't usually do things like this. "If it helps, I do have these."

She produced a pair of photographs, taken in the studio in Gaggleswick the last time they were out together, a few days before Catriona went out to investigate Justaria's disappearance and began her adventure with Daelen. They were small and in black and white, hardly up to Earth photography standards of the time, but it was clear what they showed. One was just a portrait shot of Catriona alone. The other was Cat and Dreya together mid-kiss. She'd never shown them to anyone else before. Even the photographer, like everyone else in that town, took it as read that they needed to be the soul of discretion in anything relating to Dreya the Dark. As for Dreya herself, the kinds of feelings she had for Catriona were still new to her, and she hadn't yet worked out how to show them to the world while maintaining her image. With these two, for the first time, she didn't need to worry about that.

"Aww!" Jessica gushed. "Look, sis! Satisfied now? Oh, my gods, Dreya, you two are so cute together!"

Sara's scepticism evaporated. "I'm sorry for doubting you, Dreya," she apologised, holding out a hand.

Dreya shook it. "No apology necessary."



Jessica could barely tear herself away from the photos, but she reluctantly handed them back.

“That’s it,” she told Dreya, “you two are totally my new top celeb couple.”

“Er, Jess,” Sara put in. “I just realised.”

“Realised what?”

“We tried to kill Catriona’s girlfriend.”

Her sister’s jaw dropped. “So we did,” she agreed.

“I won’t tell if you don’t,” Dreya promised.

Jessica flashed a smile and agreed, “Good plan. Well, dearie, what do you say we all have a nice cup of tea and a chat somewhere a bit nicer than this draughty old corridor, eh?”

“That would be lovely, thank you,” Dreya acknowledged. “Might I suggest the library? There’s something I’d like to show you.”

“Show *us*?” Sara frowned in puzzlement. “In *our* library?”

“Oh, yes, I fully intend my visit to be mutually beneficial.”

“Well,” Jessica declared, “you can colour me intrigued.”

## Chapter 2

In the library, as Dreya sipped her tea, Sara asked, “So what did you want to show us, Dreya?”

In response, the sorceress pointed to a small ornate box on a table at the far end of the room.

“Catriona noticed Daelen hiding something in that box, using what she calls her special ability of paying attention. She could tell it was a letter or note, obviously for you to read when he thinks the time is right.”

Jessica went to examine the box and confirmed it had a time lock.

“Cat didn’t say anything because she didn’t feel it was her place to interfere. I take a different view: Why does Daelen get to decide what you need to know and when? A pair of bright, independent young women such as yourselves deserve to have all the facts so you can make the best life choices. If the information was important enough to hide, it’s too important for you to not know. That’s my opinion, so…” she stared at the box and unfolded her power word, “OPEN.”

The box obeyed; time lock overridden, and Jessica removed the sealed note.

“What happens now is for you to decide together. It makes no difference to me whether you read it or not. I won’t lie and say I care about that. I do this because I want information from you, and this was the only way I could think of to pay my debt, by giving you access to information to which I believe you are entitled.”

“And what information do you want in exchange?” Sara asked. Dreya may have mostly won her over, but she was still wary. “We won’t tell you anything that would betray Daelen, I don’t care what you do to us.”

“I’ve told you, I’m not here to do anything to you,” Dreya replied, rolling her eyes, “and what I want to know has nothing to do with Daelen.”

“Ignore my sister, Dreya,” Jessica told her. “I trust you, even if she doesn’t. What can we help you with?”

Dreya sipped her tea some more, before replying, “Tell me everything you know...about dragons.”

\*\*\*\*\*

The two Chetsuans spent the next hour sharing everything they could on the subject, describing different kinds of dragon and their abilities, omitting no detail. When they could think of nothing more, Dreya stood, thanked them for their hospitality and the two girls walked their guest to the portal room.

“Before I go,” said Dreya, standing in front of the portals, “I have a couple of small favours to ask.” She fished out her photos along with a small parcel, wrapped in brown paper. “First, would you mind keeping these safe for me until I return? This shouldn’t take too long, but I don’t want to risk them getting lost or damaged.”

“Sure, no problem,” Sara agreed.

“Is this a present for Cat?” asked her sister, carefully taking the items from their visitor.

“In a way, yes,” Dreya confirmed.

“Do you mind if I ask...?” Jessica left the question hanging.

“Have a guess. What would you give the girl who wants to learn everything?”

The two Chetsuans glanced at each other and chorused, “A book!”

“That’s it exactly. Just a book. Anyway, second favour, could I borrow a camera, please?”

Jessica pulled a device out of her pocket and handed it to Dreya.

“You’re giving her your phone?” Sara wondered, staring in disbelief.

“I told you, I trust her!” she insisted, showing Dreya how to use the camera function. “Besides, what’s she going to do, hack my Facebook account? I don’t think they have wifi on Tempestria!”

“I’m not going to Tempestria, I’m going to Phitonia.”

“Whatever for?” Sara asked.

“Why did you think I was asking about dragons? It was information I needed to do what I’m about to do.”

“And what’s that?”

“Well,” Dreya began, “there’s a tradition on my world. Whenever a Dark wizard rises to dominance, they usually try to conquer the world. I’ve always resisted that particular tradition, but now I’ve decided that maybe the idea does have merit, after all. But I’m not going to conquer my world,” she continued, “I’m going to conquer yours.”

With that, she stepped through the portal to Phitonia.

“Dear gods, what have we unleashed?” Sara wondered.

“Something awesome,” her sister answered with a grim smile.

“An avenging Angel.”

“Avenging Faery,” Sara corrected.

“Even better.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Making her way out of Daelen’s hidden facility on the other side, the first thing Dreya did was open a micro-portal directly to the Black Tower on Tempestria. She didn’t know if she was as susceptible to the effects of being cut off from her world as Cat was, but it was possible. After all, there was a reason she’d chosen to make her home right on the border with the Faery lands of Sylfrania. Either way, she couldn’t afford to take stupid risks. Also, widening a pre-existing portal was faster than creating one from scratch in an emergency. The third reason for the portal was that she could establish a link with the power of her elite guards. They had absorbed higher planar energy from her battle with Aden, the same as she. Through that link, she could get a top-up at any time without needing to wait for it to recharge. The information the two young Chetsuan women had given her had been invaluable, but there was no way for them to assess the effectiveness of her various forms of magic against these dragons. The only way to establish that was through experimentation. Whatever their individual resistances, it was all the dragons of Phitonia versus one Faery sorceress from Tempestria.

She allowed a small smile to escape her control at the thrill of it all.

“Finally,” she whispered to herself. “A decent challenge.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Apart from the two moons and the lack of void storms in the night sky, the most distinctive feature of the world of Phitonia, or at least the bit Dreyra could see, was the prevalence of grass and leaves that were blue, rather than green. She knew this suggested the light emitted by their sun must be different and she was vaguely curious about what that would look like come daytime, but she wasn't here for sightseeing. She wasn't a tourist – she was a dragon hunter.

She stepped up to the perimeter of Daelen's containment field. It was curious technology, but it was simple enough for a wizard of her ability to teleport through it. She saw the broken remains of Chetsuan culture that had existed just a few decades ago, Phitonian time. It was a sobering lesson in the fragility of civilisation to see how quickly it could fall.

Dreyra began scanning the sky as she walked. It was imperative that she remain vigilant so that she could get the first strike in. She had ways of shrouding herself, but such laziness would cost her energy that would be better used in the battles to come.

It didn't take her long to spot her first dragon in the distance. Its dark scales aided camouflage against the blackness of the night, but then Dreyra's robes did much the same for her. The dragon began to swoop down, and following its trajectory, the sorceress saw what it had spotted: a pair of Chetsuan children, young boys, desperately scavenging for food.

"Well, lads," Dreyra murmured to herself, "looks like today's your lucky day."

In an instant, she chose her opening gambit. According to Jessica and Sara, black scaled dragons were vulnerable to fire, so a simple, mid-power Firestrike aimed at its head seemed like a reasonable place to start. She could quickly escalate to higher forms of magic, if necessary. Blood magic was available with a quick prick of her finger on the dagger she carried up her sleeve, but she wanted to see how effectual regular magic could be. No sense in wasting power.

The dragon bellowed in pain as the flames engulfed its head. Dreyra could see her magic had done significant damage, but it was still alive. She considered using poison but rejected it immediately as she realised her actions could have a side benefit if the carcass remained untainted.

The dragon seemed confused about what had happened, and Dreya took full advantage, unleashing a second Firestrike at around three quarters of the maximum power for that spell. She was pretty confident that full power would finish it off, but if three quarters would do, then so much the better. This wasn't really a battle to her – she could kill the big lizard at any time – it was an experiment, an exercise in efficiency. As she was casting, the dragon, at last, identified the source of the threat and headed towards her. Too late. The fire damage was too much for it, and it crashed to the ground, sliding to a halt, mere feet from where she stood, unmoved, as the two Chetsuan boys looked on in amazement.

“Stop showing off, Dreya,” she admonished herself, with a half-smile. “Cat’s supposed to be the one with the dramatic touch, not you.”

Next thing she knew, the two Chetsuan boys ran to her and flung themselves at her, hugging her and thanking her. Dreya flushed at their adulation. She could only imagine what this would do to her reputation if people back home could see her.

The question of having children was something that did occur to her, from time to time. She hadn't spoken to Catriona about it – it had always seemed a bit soon in their relationship for that conversation, to say nothing of the obvious biological practicalities. Still, who knew what the future might bring?

Further groups of Chetsuans emerged from hiding, then, and approached her. As they did so, one of the boys tugged her right sleeve and with the bluntness of youth, asked, “What are you?”

“Micah, that’s rude!” one of the adults rebuked him. To Dreya, she offered, “I’m sure what he meant to say was, ‘*Who* are you’? Sorry.”

“Not at all,” Dreya assured her, shaking her head. “I think both are perfectly fair questions, under the circumstances. My people are called Faery, and my name is Dreya the Dark.”

“Well, Dreya the Dark of the Faery,” the woman acknowledged, “you are a stranger to us, yet you saved my sons and provided our starving community with enough meat for a month.”

Dreya had hoped that dragon meat would be digestible for Chetsuans, that was why she hadn't used poison. It was one question neither Jessica nor Sara had been able to answer. They'd never had the chance to find out – dead dragons were something of a rarity.

Dreya planned to change that, and if killing dragons had the side benefit of feeding starving Chetsuan communities, then that was excellent.

The woman's other son tugged Dreya's left sleeve, "Are you a hero?" he asked, hopefully. "Have you come to save the world?"

Dreya laughed and shook her head. "No, I'm not a hero, and I'm not here to save the world. I'm here to conquer it."

"Does conquering the world involve slaying more dragons?" asked the mother.

Dreya confirmed that it did.

"Then, from where I'm standing, whether you call it conquering or saving, I can see little distinction."

\*\*\*\*\*

Dreya was soon on the move, finding a stray horse to cover the ground more quickly and hunt more dragons.

Word of a disturbance was obviously spreading because dragons were coming to investigate in twos and threes. Other species of the reptiles proved more of a challenge than the black she had first encountered, and she escalated her magic proportionally. Some had magic themselves, some even breathed fire, but Dreya's shields were up to the challenge of their every attack.

With dawn's light, dragons continued to come at her, but their numbers were still no threat to a sorceress of Dreya's power. Frankly, she was beginning to feel quite insulted.

When at last a quartet appeared, she decided to try something new. She made a show of killing three of them in particularly agonising ways. In one she burst its heart, in another she cooked its brain, and in a third she created tiny air bubbles in its bloodstream, causing death by embolism. The fourth dragon panicked and flew away, and Dreya allowed it to escape to warn others. It went against the grain, but maybe a different world warranted a different approach. At the moment, she supposed, the dragons had only vague reports of a disturbance. If word spread that they were under attack from a strange and powerful alien creature, that should induce a greater response. There could only be so many dragons in range, so the more she faced on the journey, the fewer there would be at her final destination. Dreya knew she had no chance of a stealthy

approach, no matter what she did. Therefore, she might as well make as much noise as possible to try and draw the garrison out into the open where she could see them and deal with them.

After a while, a wing of five dragons showed up with another, more numerous, group on the distant horizon.

“Taking me seriously, at last, are we?” Dreya called up.

The sorceress knew it was time to take things up a notch with blood magic. It was also an opportunity to advance her plan.

Feeling her power flow through her veins, she dismounted her horse and sent it away. A pair of electrical bolts flowed from each hand, each stopping the heart of a dragon. For the one in the middle, she had something else in mind. This one had magic, and she was curious about how dragon magic worked in this world. Careful experiments with draining a magic-wielding dragon of its power would test whether it was compatible and therefore useful to her. She also knew from the two Chetsuans on Earth that the main dragon headquarters were across the sea. To get there, she was going to need a lift.

Focussing her will on that single dragon, she unfolded her power word, “STUN,” and suddenly, it was unable to fly. It fell to the ground, physically unharmed, but unable to move.

“Just wait there a moment, would you?” Dreya remarked, not that it had a choice. “I’m busy.”



## Chapter 3

The next wing of dragons was now close enough for her Faery eyes to count individuals: a dozen. She also thought she could make out a few curious Chetsuans peeking out from their underground hidey-holes. Dreya the Dark was about to provide them with a feast. It wouldn't be the most varied diet, but at least starvation would no longer be a worry.

"Time to show you lot what I can really do," she told the dragon on the ground.

She waited until all twelve dragons were in range and then fired her beam of focussed energy like a deadly searchlight, blasting straight through the lot of them.

Dreya was no expert on dragon facial expressions, but she flattered herself that the emotion she was seeing displayed before her on the face of the dragon on the ground – now stunned figuratively as well as literally – was fear.

"I didn't actually need to use that much power against a mere dozen of your kind, but I thought it would be a useful demonstration of the fate that awaits you, should you fail to do everything I say from this moment on. In fact, compared to what I will do to you if you disobey, that was mercy."

"What are you?" the dragon gasped.

"I'm y—" she stopped herself. "Sorry, for a moment there, I was actually going to say, 'I'm your worst nightmare'. Can you believe that? What is it about conquering the world that makes it so easy to slip into melodrama? Let me try again: I'm your ruler, now. Actually, I'm not sure if that's less melodramatic or more. Whatever. My name is Dreya the Dark. Mistress Dreya is the most acceptable way for you to address me. Basically, I'm in charge, now, and any dragons out there who think otherwise, you're going to help me convince them.

"In a moment, I'm going to release you. I've already covered what happens if you disobey, so you're obviously not going to do that. Instead, let me tell you what you *are* going to do. You're going to let me ride on your back across the sea to where your soon-to-be-ex-ruler Mallax is based. You know the place, I presume?"

"Yes, Mistress Dreya."

## Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

