



**BOOK THREE:
THE SHINING BLADE**

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SCHOLASTIC INC.

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CHAPTER ONE
NEW SHORES

He had been dreaming of home, of Lakeshire—at least, he thought he was. One moment, he was in his stepfather’s shop, watching the forge grow red and hot, the next he was on fire, burning up from grasping black tendrils that held his arms tight to his body.

If that wasn’t bad enough, Aramar Thorne saw again the twisted, cruel face of his father’s killer, the most hateful man in all of Azeroth: Malus, captain of the *Inevitable*. He growled at Aram, so close he could smell the sweat dripping off the man’s brow. Aram’s mother always told him that a bad person’s innards would out, and the same had happened to Malus, contorting a once noble face into eyes and a mouth made only for sneering. Only for contempt.

He wanted the magical compass around Aram’s neck and he would stop at nothing to get it, including, it seemed, bursting into Aram’s dreams uninvited.

“I gave you every opportunity, boy. You brought this on yourself. Like father, like son,” he said in a deadly whisper.

It was just like his memory of being back in Gadgetzan, back in Winifred’s house, snared by horrid magic, unable to move, unable to breathe, friendless and desperate, knowing any moment could be his last. Aram struggled to reach for his cutlass, then remembered it had been useless against the dark energy, so instead he reached for the incomplete crystal sword hilt tucked in his belt. Reached for it and gasped. It was gone. But how? Now he truly had nothing . . .

There was no Light to save him this time, only Malus and his enormous hand slowly coming to rip away the one thing most precious to Aram, the thing he had sworn to protect for his father . . .

“Ticktock,” Malus hissed. “Your time is up, boy.”

And then, as quickly as the nightmare had taken him, it was gone. Malus exploded into thick, black smoke, the only lingering trace of him a pair of eyes in the darkness. Aram felt pressure on his shoulders, his chest, and shouted himself awake. He flailed while staring directly into the far more welcome eyes of his sister, Makasa Flintwill.

It was just like being back on the *Wavestrider*, when she would snap him awake with a steely, “Aramar Thorne, get your sorry bones out of that bunk!” He had heard the words so many times from Makasa, they were practically burned into his mind. But

this time she wasn't yelling or impatient, just concerned, her dark brows knit with worry.

"Brother? We've touched down. It's time to go."

"Sure," Aram whispered. "Yeah, I'll be ready."

"Bad dream?" she asked as she left him, hefting her own pack and double-checking that she had her weapons and canteen.

"You have no idea," he said with a wince. The others had already gone ahead and left the goblin-made zeppelin, so Aram hurried to pack, though his hands were slick with nervous sweat. He couldn't shake the nightmare. Usually his dreams were of the Light, there to guide and protect him, but now? He hoped it was not an omen of things to come. It wasn't so strange, he decided, that the wild and sometimes scary events of the last few weeks would return to haunt him as he slept—most twelve-year-olds were worried about oversleeping for their studies or getting caught kissing behind the Boughmans' place. But Aram, dressed in his father's oversized captain's coat, wielding a cutlass and carrying an enchanted compass, was beginning to feel less like a boy and more like a young man.

Maybe he really *was* becoming a man. After all, they had come so far from where they began; for Aram, this long, winding adventure had started as a way to get to know his father better, but that simple plan imploded when the despicable Captain Malus sank their ship. Armed with his trusty sketchbook, Aram had followed the compass and visions from the Light, trying his

best to fulfill his father's mission to find and then retrieve shards of the Diamond Blade scattered across Azeroth. This was of vital importance. Azeroth was a big place, hard for Aram to even fathom, just like the mission he had been tasked with. But he had managed so far—or rather, *they* had. For everywhere Aram went he seemed to pick up more and more allies to his cause, including the powerful druid Thalyss Greyoak, who had met an end he did not deserve. An end that Aram and more of his friends might face if he didn't rise to the challenges that lay before them.

And so he squared his shoulders and departed the zeppelin, feeling a pang of regret that there would be no more late-night chats about technique with his fellow artist, Charnas. Yet Aram felt optimistic that saying good-bye to the goblin did not mean good-bye forever.

The ladder was already lowered and Aram descended as steadily as he could, trying to balance all of his things and his dignity. When he landed, it was with the sea at his back and the blackened land spreading north and east into the vale, with mountains to the south. His optimism flagged a bit as he surveyed the landscape awaiting them.

The Charred Vale was, well, *charred*, and Aramar Thorne felt the smoke and ash sting his lungs the moment they departed Gazlowe's zeppelin, the *Cloudkicker*.

I don't know what I expected, he thought with a snort. The

others didn't look pleased at the thought of traversing a burnt and darkened landscape, but Aram tried his best to see the luster in it. There was a severe, brutal beauty to the smoldering hills, a stark contrast between the embers still burning and the charred land. It would be difficult to capture it, he thought, to communicate the awe of it, but that was his job as an artist—he had to try.

He stood with his feet still on the otherwise untouched sand, the toes of his boots just barely brushing the blackened grass that carpeted the burning forest. An ashy wind ruffled his dark hair; it blew hot and dry, but still he shivered. Makasa, his taller, bolder counterpart and chosen sister, blew out a long, low whistle as she stood next to him. She fiddled idly with the chain crisscrossing her torso, then itched a new scab on her forearm.

“We’re a long way from Feralas,” she murmured.

And she was right. They might have been abandoned, hunted, and near-starving in that rain forest, but at least there *was* rain. Still, it might not be so bad. They would be able to see enemies coming from a mile away; that wasn't so easily done in a dense, misty jungle.

The airship pattered behind them, hovering, its pointed nose angling north. Gazlowe, the short, green goblin engineer whom Aram had come to greatly admire, sighed and strode across the beach to them, stretching his arms over his head. The remainder of the crew stayed aboard, a clear sign that they wouldn't be stopping there for long.