



The Sword and the Chain

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WARRIOR, WIZARD, DWARF, THIEF, AND MASTER BUILDER

All of them had chosen this world as their destiny, a realm where dragons were only too real and magic, not science, was the law of the land. Karl, Andrea, Ahira, Walter, and Lou knew there was no going back to twentieth-century America now. Instead they were stranded in a time and place where only healing spells and their own wits stood between them and the sharp, deadly edge of a slaver's blade.

But even if they could have returned home by some sorcerous trick, all of them would have refused the chance, bound by their pledge to bring this incredible realm the one treasure it lacked -- freedom! But leagued against them in their fight were the entire forces of both Wizards and the Slavers guilds. And, in this world where a wrong step or a twisted spell could transform friend into foe, how could Karl and his band fulfill their pledge?

The Sword and the Chain Details

Date : Published April 1st 1984 by Roc (first published 1984)

ISBN : 9780451453518

Author : Joel Rosenberg

Format : Paperback 250 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Fiction, Science Fiction Fantasy, Dragons

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From Reader Review The Sword and the Chain for online ebook

Steve Tetreault says

The second volume of this series picks up shortly after the end of the first book. The main characters are now forced to deal with the after-effects of the promises they made at the end of the first book, and must start to figure out how they're going to live in a world that is essentially medieval by their standards. As the book rolls along, it becomes clear that Karl Cullinane is going to be the main character of this book. His character gets built out a bit, and he starts to "grow up" as the responsibilities of his mission begin to weigh on him.

One element I didn't love was a "tease" of deus-ex-machina toward the end that implies a major plotline that will come to pass in the future, and which implies a long and interesting backstory, which is never explained. I feel like a major chance was missed here. Having read the next book in the series, also, I happen to know that this thread is brought up yet again, before being dropped yet again, with no satisfaction to be had. This is some long-range planning, here, that I hope will pay off someday.

Overall, this is an interesting thought experiment in how modern people might try to fit into and/or reshape a medieval society.

Steven Williamson says

Joel Rosenberg was one of the most inspirational fantasy authors to me, and is probably the second biggest reason I became a fantasy author myself, closely behind the legendary Sterling E. Lanier. The Sword and the Chain pulls you along with a perfect pace of action and risk, and the characters are as memorable as the most famous movie roles from Hollywood.

Derek Brown says

Meh. I try not to start reviews so, but this sequel was just so much less than the first book promised, or what could be done in a story where real people are transported into a D&D type reality, filled with magic and dragons and sword fighting.

The first in the series focused mostly on world building and the characters learning about their world, what they could do. This one focuses instead on what they can do to fix the world's problems (namely abolishing slavery) by applying their own morality everywhere! The characters either never watched Star Trek or weren't paying attention. Apparently the prime directive need not apply here. The slaving stuff got really old, really fast. And spoiler: that's all this was about.

There are 10 or so other books in the series and I know at least one person that will never read them.

Tim Martin says

Fun read. I enjoyed rereading this novel from back in my early D and D days.

Bea says

This is Book Two (out of ten) of the Guardians of the Flame. In this fantasy, the college game players are back in the other world with a fire-breathing dragon guarding the exit back to their usual world. So, they accept that they are "here to stay".

This adventure focuses on their setting up their own community and taking on the mission to destroy slaving capture and transport. Karl feels this mission personally and so heads up the raids against the slavers. However, the Wizard Guild has put a bounty on him...and so the story begins.

It is full of emotion, action, wizards, danger, and interpersonal interactions that keep the reader reading to reach safety or to conclude the moment. The characters are believable. Some are likable and some not. Just like ordinary life - with a twist of fantasy. My dream world.

Thomas says

Stick with the 1st book and call it good enough, the series gets weak after the 1st - REALLY weak. I give The Sleeping Dragon 5 stars, then each following book (2 & 3) only 3 stars. The first book condenses everything into a neat, if simple, package.

2 & 3 get overly moralistic, and the writing seems to be directed at people with a 5-6th grade education. Just WEAK. Plus, the whole "modern society folk try to modernize a primitive land" has been done so much better it makes me wish Rosenberg had not tried at all.

Lisa (Harmonybites) says

At first impression the first book in this series, *The Sleeping Dragon* didn't seem like it would be anything special. Seven college students from modern-day America playing a game reminiscent of *Dungeons and Dragons* are transported to the fantasy world of the game as their role-playing alter egos. So one of them becomes a powerful dwarf warrior, another a thief/assassin type, another a sorceress and so on, and they have to find a way back into our world.

So what makes this different? Well, because it's the anti-high fantasy. I do often love sword and sorcery because it's the last bastion of adventure and heroism. At the same time, part of me is resistant, because hell, I'm a believer in democracies and republics, not a fan of monarchies and aristocracies, of reason, not magic. It's practically the definition of high fantasy that they're set in quasi-medieval worlds. And you know what?

They suck. They have slavery (or at least serfdom) treat women like dirt, and lives are nasty, brutish and short. So what happened at the end of that first book? Lou renounces magic in favor of *engineering* and Karl and the others stay on and in this book takes on the Slaver's Guild. So hell yeah, I did adore the idea of those college kids from contemporary America messing with that world, not just taking it for granted as sacrosanct. And I liked the characters--Karl, Walter, Lou, James (Ahira), Andrea--and oh, yeah, that Sleeping Dragon they don't let lie--Ellegon. This book was an entertaining continuation on that premise, well-paced and thoroughly enjoyable.

Michael says

If I recall correctly, I actually read this book, the middle of the trilogy, before I was able to locate a copy of *The Sleeping Dragon*. This one had just come out, and for some reason all the bookstores only had the new book, and no one was carrying the first one. So, I finally gave in and read it, and loved it. But, apparently I didn't love it as much as the first volume, because I don't seem to remember it nearly as well, which suggests that I haven't re-read it as often.

The book picks up where *Sleeping Dragon* left off, with a group of former college students choosing to remain in the fantasy world they were transported to by their professor/Dungeon Master. Each of them had to "give" something in order to earn the resurrection of their friend (the "disabled kid" of the previous book), and the most significant of these was former skinny nerd Karl Cullinane, who took on a quest for the powerful cleric that performed the miracle. He agreed to make it his personal mission to abolish slavery in this primitive world. His friends (of course!) agree to help him, and that's the jumping-off point for the plot of this book.

Of course, abolishing slavery in any world is a long-term project, and so Rosenberg gives us a relatively short-term villain for Karl and his friends to fight (an important slaver), and focuses on how our heroes adjust to the world they've chosen to live in. The party is down in the magic department, since the cleric chooses to stay with her sisters in the Tabernacle, and the formerly powerful magician has transformed back into his geeky-engineer self of pre-fantasy days. All they're left with is the girl who had just joined the game for the first time and was playing, in effect, a first-level Magic User. Fortunately, they picked up a daunting ally: Ellegon, a baby dragon. He's got certain limitations, though, which they learn about as the first battle commences.

In general, the book has everything you'd expect from the previous one, including those pivotal epiphanies. The first of those comes early on, as Karl learns why his dragon friend is so frightened in certain combat situations. The characters continue to learn and grow, although from looking at it now, I'd say that's less of an emphasis than it was in the first book. Maybe that's because there's a limit to how much growing one character can do in a short trilogy, and Rosenberg couldn't come up with as many learning experiences for them. Or maybe he just needed to focus more conventionally on plot for the middle book. In all, I still remember it fondly, but not with quite the strength of affection I have of the first book.

Laura says

The Sword and the Chain continues the adventures of Karl, Ahira et al. in the fantasy world they have found themselves in. Bound by an oath to free the society from slaves, Karl sets off to do just that. Or tries

to--his reckless behaviour has caused a price to be put on his head, and his companions beg him to be cautious. After initiating a haven for freed slaves, Karl sets off to return one of the slaves to her home, unaware that he is being hunted by an unknown enemy wizard.

This book was short and could have been fleshed out more, but it was cute and I continued to enjoy the young voice of the juvenile dragon, Ellegon. Some elements of the story are a bit--convenient, I suppose, is what I want to say. However, that does fit in with the D&D-esque nature of the premise. Healing potions can cure almost everything (save death) and the main characters are far stronger than the average Joe, for example. Karl has plenty of room to grow and does so. It was a quick read.

Ronnie Cross says

Great dialog and banter between characters for those who come from the 70's and 80's. If you are younger you may not get all the popular cultural references. Not an incredible story but simple and fun.

Wise_owl says

My review of the first book in this series talked about how this felt like 'false nostalgia' in a way. That is, this was a book I would have loved at twelve, but didn't read when I was twelve and am now not in a same position to enjoy it.

The Sword and the Chain is a weaker book than it's predecessor. The continuing adventures of a group of University Students propelled into a Fantasy world by the Dungeon Master of their D&D Group. That premise alone should be, and is fun, and I'll talk about the parts I didn't like a little bit later.

The Characters continue to be interesting if for no other reason than while we have our 'Main Character' who is sort of a Nerd transformed into Super-fighter, you get a sense from the others of a divergence of characteristics, opinions, etc. The impression that the course of action they are taking is because of the personalities involved but that were the composition fo the group different, the actions would be different.

Having freed a dragon and slain a Master slaver the group is hiding near a holy order of healers. They realize they cannot hide here forever and set off a ways. They start to persue their goal, given an oath they gave said healers group for helping a friend of theirs last book; To eliminate slavery from the world.

So this sets up the driving narrative of the series one presumes and of this book; Trying to create a community as a base of operations, made up principally of free'd slaves. Setting up attacks against slavers, etc. The book as it goes on also reveals a bit more of the world; the nature of Dwarves and Elves for example, and mysteries regarding what they 'know' of the world. Is their Former DM/Wizard using them as proxies in some sort of War against the Wizards guild? Is the nature of time not as precise here as they first believed? These are interesting mysteries, even if they occasional come across as attempts to direct the plot in contrived ways at times.

The adventure parts of the book are interesting, but it does suffer from some flaws. Some of these are simply a product of the time and place in which it was written. There are two principal female characters from the original troupe; One is not in the book at all, having suffered a catastrophic assault in the previous book. She

is 'off healing'. The other spends the majority of the book being Pregnant and existing as a motivation for the principal character. These tropes, which were a little present in the last book become very noticeable in this one. Something I might have overlooked but it's a bit glaring.

The other big problem for me is a problem I have with much fiction of this kind. The old trope of introducing Gun Powder as a leveler is here, and I'll admit I just don't find it that interesting.

Related though is a sort of naivety about history, economics and social engineering which tend to raise their head in these sorts of things. There is always much crooning about the outsiders bringing in some superior methodology of technology, but rarely a recognition of what that might entail or how that technology might get away from them, how it might impact the broader society and how it might interact with the magic at the heart of this society. Chattle Slavery's existence is a well researched topic and its social implications don't always so neatly align with the idea of 'Evil Greedy Slavers vs. Freedom'. Two of the largest Slave owning Societies in History billed themselves as bastions of Freedom, and I don't think that accidental.

But perhaps that's asking too much of a book series that is fundamentally an imagining of 'Wow, how much would it actually kind of suck to be a D&D Character in real life'. That I can still applaud. I'm not sure if I'll continue with the series, but it is a light read.

Kevin says

Really liked this more than the first book, my objection to multiple character names has been dealt with and the story seems a little better as well, an extra 1/2 star to 3 1/2 stars.

Mark says

Not much to say here. Continues the adventures of the first book, with a logical progression of how the characters evolve. Has a few inconsistencies with the first book, but I think that's because the first was written as a stand alone and now the author chose to build in a few longer running plot threads.

Aelvana says

Having sworn an oath to bring freedom to slaves, Karl Cullinane finds himself at a bit of a loss how to pull it off. It's one thing to have defeated a single band of slavers and freed a dragon from its chains, but changing the whole institution will involve something else entirely. But he's determined, and after all, what a small band of friends can do may well change the world. . .

Picking up right where *The Sleeping Dragon* left off, the plot wastes no time digging right into the action. Unwelcome in the Society of the Healing Hand, Karl and his friends are camped right outside trying to figure out their next move. Karl's impulsiveness decides about as much as rational thought, and shortly they've got a plan strung together. Though the goal is more nebulous than the first book, the story hangs together more, resulting in a fast-paced trip and a number of intriguing mysteries. And people die. Quickly. Senselessly. Survival is a real struggle.

Also nice was how the story moved beyond its gaming roots, concentrating more on the world and the people in it. The roots are still very evident in places like the miraculous healing potions (everything but death, cured in seconds), but a large part of the story is about settling down, making a home.

Although this book does a better job at handling the characters (mostly due to the current party not having double personalities on everyone), they still show pretty much everything through action, without much backstory or description. The good guys and villains both are pretty straightforward; nobody really breaks out of the stereotype set during his or her introduction. Also really odd was how, after all the effort to bring her home, Aeia decided not to stay. It wasn't clear if her parents had been killed, but it felt like she made the decision far too quickly.

The story has improved a lot from the first book, but there's still not much to grab a non-gamer who would have to wade through the first book to understand what's going on. I rate this book Neutral.

Dustin says

I liked it. It was better paced than the first in the series and the author did a better job with the characterization of the protagonists.

The heroes take up the task they were charged with at the end of the first book: ending slavery across the fantasy world, and they hit upon a clever way to do it, making it economically unfeasible to afford slaves. Of course, that's background detail to the book's adventure, which is about getting all up in some slaver's grills, returning a slave to her homeland, and for the protagonists to come to terms with the life they'll have to lead to make everything work.

I would definitely recommend both this and the first book in the series.
