

## “The Antithesis of the Traditional Elf:” Deconstructing Racial Representations in Dungeons and Dragons and R. A. Salvatore’s The Legend of Drizzt



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### Abstract

This thesis examines the implications of subverting the appearance, characteristics, and morality of the fantasy race of the elves. This attempt at subversion exposes the limitations and liberations that some races have, particularly their ability to transcend their expected racial identity to establish a personal identity. Our long historical fascination with elves establishes them as a means to understand issues of particular times in the Anglo-Saxon culture, the Renaissance, Victorian England, and Tolkien. Dungeon and Dragons' introduction of the drow in a popular game allows for exploration of how people understand these different races and what racial expectations linger in the cultural imagination. Comparing the traditional surface elves to the drow and Drizzt Do'Urden to Artemis Entreri in R. A. Salvatore's The Legend of Drizzt series further allows an exploration of how we think about race and the limitations or freedoms we permit to different creatures. Scholars have examined the cultural and historical significance of the elves, explored how D&D works and reinforces cultural thinking about race, and have begun to examine Salvatore's elves, but no in-depth work has yet been done on racial representations in these works. This thesis will help to fill this current research gap and further the conversation on racial representations in fantasy literature and popular culture.

### Degree

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### Department

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r.a. salvatore wrote in one of the legend of drizzt books "he died of natural causes, for a dagger in the heart quite naturally ends one's life" and i've never gotten over that. #ra salvatore #r.a. salvatore #legend of drizzt #1k #2k #3k. 3,557 notes. I remember I was thrilled when I started writing "Servant of the Shard" because Jarlaxle could finally be front and center. Then I was terrified because I was on a tight deadline and realized that I had no idea of what this guy had for equipment, given all of his cameos in the previous books. So I went to a message board anonymously and started a thread "Let's inventory Jarlaxle's cool items!" A few days later, I downloaded and printed the 10-page thread - these folks had put in page numbers from the books and everything in their discussion of Jarlaxle...hehehe. If you've been playing Dungeons and Dragons for any length of time, you've probably heard of the Drow. My first experience with them was the module series. But it feels like, more than thirty years after Drizzt Do'Urden became one of the most famous characters in D&D history, that the folks at Wizards of the Coast are finally starting to come to grips with the idea that players and DMs should ultimately choose what characters they play and how good or evil they are, not some inherent bias baked into the game. In a new press release, they acknowledged some of the issues they face as a company, and the steps they're going to take to rectify their previous poor handling of some of their races. A Reader's Guide to R. A. Salvatore's the Legend of Drizzt is a guide written by Philip Athans in cooperation with R. A. Salvatore which was published by Wizards of the Coast, Inc. in August 2008 to celebrate twenty Years of The Legend of Drizzt Saga. The book is a large reference book detailing the characters, items, and locations within R.A Salvatore's novels. Their book is printed in color with numerous detailed maps and illustrations.