



Vizard: An Ember Files Side Story

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Intriguing and magical, the fantasy novella Vizard expands the world of the Ember Files series.

A world-building series title, Shari Marshall's fantasy novella *Vizard* is a fast-moving tale of revenge and romance.

Rye survives an attack on her family home with the help of a vision—and thanks to her mother's artful use of a coma-inducing spell. Still, her parents are murdered in the process. The clues point to the Society of the Blood Wind as the perpetrators.

Rye flees. She spends years working on a plan for revenge, growing her abilities as a talented spellbinder. The perfect opportunity arises when she catches the eye of a Blood Wind member, Nekane. Protected by their whirlwind romance, Rye gathers information about his group and relays it back to her allies. In time, Rye is forced into hiding once more.

Rye, whose child is destined to play a part in an erupting magical war, is centered here in service of greater series characterization. However, this series entry is short on information regarding the spellbinders, the Society of the Blood Wind, and the dynamics between humans and Fae. As a result, certain of its storylines—including that related to Rye's parents' deaths—are underserved.

Nor is it clear, in this volume alone, what the defeat of the Society of the Blood Wind would mean for the ongoing conflict. The series' magic system is better detailed herein, though: its visceral nature is clarified, with unsettling colors and unnatural sounds emanating from the use of dark magic, while Fae magic is light and joyous.

The book's pacing is uneven as well. At first dialed in to Rye's plans for vengeance, it loosens as the story progresses. The narrative jumps forward in time, glossing over years of Rye's life to arrive at its ultimate conflict. The concluding chapter covers one pivotal decision, but it does more to connect this volume to the larger Ember Files series than it does to resolve Rye's current storyline.

Still, Rye is a compelling heroine whose powerful abilities make her a lightning rod for political intrigue. Her spying against the Society of the Blood Wind results in tense scenes. Further, she transforms in remarkable ways in the course of the book's short pages. At first held back by her grief and driven by revenge, she is nurtured toward introspection by patient allies. In time, her magic deepens, too, until it is almost unparalleled in strength. Her affection for Nekane weakens her resolve, though, and leads her toward a harrowing decision between her own safety and being with her child.

With its intriguing and magical elements, the fantasy novella *Vizard* expands the world of the Ember Files series.

JOHN M. MURRAY (August 31, 2023)

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