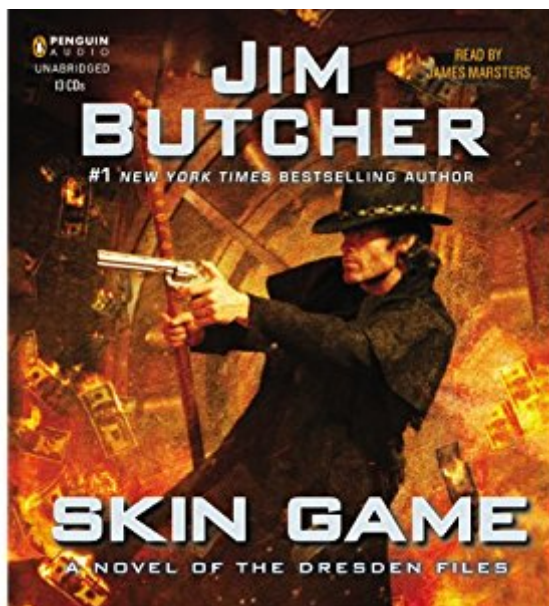


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Skin Game: A Novel Of The Dresden Files, Book 15



Synopsis

Harry Dresden, Chicago's only professional wizard, is about to have a very bad day.... Because as Winter Knight to the Queen of Air and Darkness, Harry never knows what the scheming Mab might want him to do. Usually, it's something awful. He doesn't know the half of it.... Mab has just traded Harry's skills to pay off one of her debts. And now he must help a group of supernatural villains - led by one of Harry's most dreaded and despised enemies, Nicodemus Archleone - to break into the highest-security vault in town, so that they can then access the highest-security vault in the Nevernever. It's a smash-and-grab job to recover the literal Holy Grail from the vaults of the greatest treasure hoard in the supernatural world - which belongs to the one and only Hades, Lord of the freaking Underworld and generally unpleasant character. Worse, Dresden suspects that there is another game afoot that no one is talking about. And he's dead certain that Nicodemus has no intention of allowing any of his crew to survive the experience. Especially Harry. Dresden's always been tricky, but he's going to have to up his backstabbing game to survive this mess - assuming his own allies don't end up killing him before his enemies get the chance....

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

An ex-cop, a Denarian, a mercenary sorcerer, a wanted warlock, a shapeshifter, and a Warden of the White Council all walk into a slaughterhouse...Alright, that joke isn't really set up to elicit a lot of laughs, but this book does have plenty of laugh-out-loud moments. Skin Game is the fifteenth book in Jim Butcher's fantastic Dresden Files series, and this review is going to

assume that you have already read the first fourteen books. If not, you should get on that. Since this novel is the 15th out of a proposed series of about 20 books, you can expect this number to hold a certain degree of significance in the life of Harry Dresden. Much like in the 10th book, *Small Favor*, Queen Mab wants Harry to do something despicable for her, and he doesn't really have a choice in the matter. In this case, he's robbing the Lord of the Underworld for some of the Church's most powerful artifacts--and he is allied with Nicodemus Archleone, the baddest of the Denarians and Harry's greatest archenemy. Harry Dresden has had a rough time of it so far, and the books thus far have had their ups and downs; lots of fist-in-the-air moments juxtaposed with some cringe-worthy scenes of forced, awkward dialogue. *Skin Game* is a return to some of Butcher's best characters, and it is easily one of the better books in the series. I loved this book for many reasons, but the greatest one is this: Harry is back. While the last few books have been weighed down pretty heavily by the established lore of Dresden's world, *Skin Game* introduces some fresh faces to bring back Harry's dry wit and light-heartedness that have been so notably absent. He is less mopey about being the Winter Knight, or at least less vocal about it, and he is just as affably awkward around beautiful women as he was at the start of the series. After having dated Susan Rodriguez, resisted the advances of Lara Raith, and thoroughly sexed the Queen of Air and Darkness, you'd think Harry would be able to cope with alluring fun bags and shapely thighs. Nevertheless, this lack of character development was actually a bonus, because it made him more like the Dresden of old, the young renegade wizard who didn't carry the weight of the world on his shoulders. Still, that doesn't mean that we're wiping the slate clean. Harry has been a pretty awful friend for the past couple books, and that karmic justice is catching up to him now. He can't keep up the lone-wolf protector routine forever, and Butcher brings some of these issues to the fore here. In addition, Harry has been the Winter Knight for a while now, and it shows in this book. It isn't always explicitly shown, but the kinds of injuries he sustains and ignores, the kinds of comments he makes without realizing, all indicate a deeper dependence on the mantle. Several of these moments gave me chills (pun intended), because like it or not, Harry Dresden the gumshoe private investigator is disappearing on us, slowly being replaced by something colder and darker. Harry is also considerably cleverer than in previous books; he's no longer the fire-slinging brute who stumbles upon victory by sheer luck. A wizard can overcome almost any obstacle given proper time to plan, and Harry finally seems to be following his own advice, devising plans that make his contract suicide after Chichón Itzá look like child's play. While Dresden still cracks off plenty of Star Wars references, *Skin Game* adds a slew of new fandoms to his repertoire, so be on

the lookout for some Monty Python and Lord of the Rings as well, to name a couple. I did not receive an ARC of this book. I didn't even pre-order it and wait to read it after a good night's rest. I stayed up until midnight, and then until 3 a.m. (because apparently midnight on EST isn't good enough for), just so I could start as soon as possible. Then I stayed up until sleep sucker-punched me into unconsciousness; and when I woke up, I started reading again. And you know what? It was worth it. After more than fifteen months of waiting, Jim Butcher has provided me with a book that improves upon the best aspects of past Dresden stories. Am I biased for being a long-time fan of the series? Probably. But fifteen books in, this story isn't really for newcomers, is it? This review is for all of those readers who, like me, have questioned whether Harry Dresden was worth following for another six years or more, whether Jim Butcher had lost interest in his flagship character after more than a decade and a half of writing about him. I like to think this book is a tribute to the fans. It has pulpy fight scenes and distractingly beautiful women, and the build-up to the heist of Hades is something to behold. Harry is becoming more aware of the community of allies that he has created, and he is becoming wise in his years. Dresden makes up for a lot of debts he has accumulated over the years, and it feels like we finally get some closure to things that have bothered Harry for ages now. If you've read this far, you're good people. I like good people, and I liked this book. You can do the math. 5/5 stars.

I admit it freely. I am an absolute glutton when it comes to books. I have a marked impatience with short stories; the portions are not nearly large enough. I like my story fix to come in great big value size portions...when it comes to fiction super-size me please. I love coming to a series late in the game because I finally have portions to state my voracious appetite for words...or come close. I do not read 'a' book. When the next book in a series comes out I will read 15 books. I will read a stand alone novel and then read the rest of that author's body of work. I will read something and then devour every book I can find on that topic. When an author creates stories I feel compelled to binge it is because I want to live in the world they created for as long as I can...And few authors have created worlds that I am as fond of, even feel at home in, like Jim Butcher. So here I am, begging bowl outstretched, asking for just a little more please...And soon. My literary tummy is rumbling.

I plowed through this series in a few months and I'm sad that I'll have to wait along with everyone else for the next installment. I'm even considering reading this one again. I will try to avoid spoilers in this review, but let me say that there are a lot of shifting loyalties and double crosses in this book, and now that I know what happens in the end, I want to go back and see how it is set up, to look at

the clues I totally bypassed as unimportant or unremarkable the first time around. Because I suspect it was quite cleverly planned, I just didn't pick up on it at the time. This book was quite enjoyable, for me. Harry, as part of his duty as Winter Knight, is required to work with an old enemy, Nicholas Archleone, the chief Knight of the Blackened Denarius. Sure, it's a set-up that's been used time and again in fiction and film, but Jim Butcher is, in my mind, very good at taking tropes and running with them, in making them fun to read even though you know you've read something very much like them before. So Harry and Nicholas and assorted allies of dubious loyalty are going to break into Hades's vault and steal an item Nicholas is particularly interested in. Nicholas has the assault fairly well planned out and has recruited each ally based on his or her special skills. We've met some of the allies before, and others are new (a few may become recurring characters in the series at some point in the future). From the moment the job officially begins (that is, breaking into the vault), the pace is quick, with conflict on nearly every level: Harry is conflicted about helping Nicholas (though Mab, the Winter Queen, requires Harry to take part in this venture), people on the team are constantly sniping at each other, plans go awry and innocent people get hurt, and then there are a couple of confrontations that put people Harry cares about in harm's way. I'm not going to attempt to argue that Harry's battle strategy is new or innovative, because it's really not, but at least he has to apply his usual tricks in a new situation, and that was enough to keep my interest. (In fact, I stayed up reading this far too long because I had to get to the end!) Harry has taken up a new, non-magical hobby (Parkour) and that ends up helping him out more than once, as well. There's a side plot involving Harry's headaches; these were showing up in previous books, but their cause is now explained. It's characterized in a silly way, and some of Harry's friends laugh when they hear his explanation. I think the end result is interesting, although this problem is solved a bit too easily for it to ever really feel like a threat to Harry. I'd argue that there's not a lot of character development in this book. Some events relating to Harry's personal life occur, but they follow from his actions in past books and were kind of expected to happen at some point. He makes decisions that are entirely consistent with his character, so there aren't any surprises. Michael is back, as is Karrin Murphy, and they behave pretty much as expected. Butters has an interesting arc and it took me until this book to realize that it's been built up since nearly *Dead Beat*, if not before. I don't know whether or not Jim Butcher planned out every little detail about the series before he wrote it or not, but it certainly seems like he did. That's good news, because meticulous planning now means that there is an end in sight some day. We won't be waiting forever to see how the series gets resolved (unlike with some fantasy authors who shall remain nameless). As with the other books in the series, there's a main quest that gets resolved and a contribution to the overall series arc. The war between

the wizards and Red Court vampires has been over for some time, with the events of Changes. In fact, no White Council wizards make appearances in this book. And yet, we get a new, troubling piece of the puzzle as to what is going on in the world. I'm excited to see where that goes (sorry for being vague; didn't want to spoil anything and this element I'm thinking of comes nearly at the end of the book). So the structure is as expected, as are the writing style, setting, and other story elements. If you have gotten to this point in the series, you probably like these books anyway and would read this one, regardless. (That happens to describe me.) If you're new to the series, you'd be better off starting with volume 1 (Storm Front). If you lost interest somewhere along the way, this book probably won't change your mind, although I think this happens to be one of the better books in the series (but you would need to read all of the books to understand all the details).

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