

HOLY SISTER



‘Plotted with
gripping intensity’
Daily Mail

‘Dark, passionate,
tense’
Tamora Pierce

MARK LAWRENCE

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Book Three of Book of the Ancestor



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Dedication

For my grandfather, 'Bill' William George Cook, who lived most of his first decade under the reign of Queen Victoria and who with great patience helped me make my first treasure box

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The Story So Far

For those of you who have had to wait a while for this book I provide brief catch-up notes so that your memories may be refreshed and I can avoid the awkwardness of having to have characters tell each other things they already know for your benefit.

Here I carry forward only what is of importance to the tale that follows.

The people and places in the brief summary I start with are expanded on further down, so if it means nothing to you, skip the next paragraph then come back to it.

Grey Sister ended with Nona, around fifteen years old, escaping Sherzal's palace with troops in pursuit. She had friends with her, including Zole, Ara, Regol, Abbess Glass and Sister Kettle, and assorted other survivors. Zole had the Noi-Guin's shipheart, stolen from the assassins' headquarters beneath the palace. Clera helped Nona escape but went back to Sherzal's service. Nona's enemy from the convent, the novice Joeli Namsis, was still in the palace and her actions led to the death of Nona's friend Darla during the escape. Nona and her companions are in the mountains on the border with Scithrowl and a long way from the convent. The story does not begin with this scene but will return to it presently.

Abeth is a planet orbiting a dying red sun. It is sheathed in ice and the vast majority of its people live in a fifty-mile-wide ice-walled corridor around the equator.

An artificial moon, a great orbiting mirror, keeps the Corridor free of ice by focusing the sun's rays into it each night.

When, thousands of years ago, the four original tribes of men came to Abeth from the stars they found the ruins of a vanished people they called the Missing.

The empire is bounded by the lands of the Scithrowl to the east and by the Sea of Marn to the west. Across the sea the Durns rule. At the end of *Grey Sister* Scithrowl hordes under their Battle-Queen, Adoma, were amassing on their side of the mountain range that borders the battle lines.

The emperor's sister, Sherzal, commands the defence against Scithrowl from her palace in the mountains. She was going to betray the empire and let Queen Adoma's forces through the Grand Pass. The deal included combining the shipheart held by the Noi-Guin assassins and the shipheart stolen from Sweet Mercy Convent by the ice-triber Yisht, with the two shiphearts Queen Adoma has, thereby making the quartet of shiphearts believed necessary to open the Ark. The Ark lies beneath the emperor's palace and was built either by the Missing or the first humans and is said to allow control of the moon.

Shiphearts are objects of disputed origin that may have powered the ships that brought the tribes of men to Abeth. The closer a person gets to one the more enhanced their natural talent for magic is. Get too close, though, and the shipheart's power begins to break your mind apart. Undesirable pieces of your personality like anger or greed or malice split into sentient fragments called devils and exert greater influence over you.

As the sun weakens, the ice continues a slow advance despite the warmth of the moon's nightly focus. As the Corridor is squeezed, nations look to their neighbours for new territory.

The empire's nobility are the Sis. The suffix is attached to the names of ennobled families (e.g. Tacsis, Jotsis etc).

The four original tribes that came to Abeth were the gerant, hunska, marjal, and quantal. Their blood sometimes shows in the current population, conferring unique powers. The gerant grow very large, the hunska are fantastically swift, the marjal can manifest all manner of minor to medium

magics, including shadow-weaving, sigil-writing, and mastery of elements. The quantal can access the raw power of the Path and manipulate the threads that are woven to create reality.

The Missing left behind structures called Arks. Three exist within the Corridor. The emperor's palace is built on one. There are no reliable records of anyone being able to open the Ark, but a faked prophecy predicts the coming of a Chosen One who will be able to. Others believe that four shiphearts used together can open an Ark.

Nona Grey was a peasant child from a nameless village. She was given to the child-taker Giljohn who sold her to the Caltess where ring-fighters are trained and pitted against each other. She ended up at the Convent of Sweet Mercy where novices are trained in service to the Ancestor. Novices take orders as one of four classes of nun. Holy Sister (entirely religious duties), Grey Sister/Sister of Discretion (trained in assassination and stealth), Red Sister/Martial Sister (trained in combat), Holy Witch/Mystic Sister (trained to walk the Path).

Nona has proven to be a triple-blood, an incredibly rare occurrence. She has hunska, marjal, and quantal skills. Nona has wholly black eyes, a side effect of taking a dangerous antidote. She has no shadow, having cut it free while fighting Yisht.

Yisht is a woman of the ice-tribes and is in the employ of the emperor's sister Sherzal. Yisht stole the Sweet Mercy shipheart and killed Nona's friend Hessa.

Nona is hated by Lano Tacsis because she killed his brother and also left his father, Lord Thurán Tacsis, bound to his own torture device.

Joeli Namsis is the daughter of a lord with close ties to the Tacsis family. She is skilled at quantal thread-work and poisoning. She became Nona's enemy at the convent.

During the theft of the shipheart Nona was betrayed by her friend and fellow novice Clera Ghomal. Among Nona's remaining friends are novices