



Mystic and Rider (Twelve Houses series Book 1)

By Sharon Shinn

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Gillengaria seethes with unrest. In the south, hostility toward magic and its users has risen to a dangerous level, though King Baryn has ordered that such mystics are to be tolerated. It is whispered that he issued the decree because his new wife used her magic powers to ensnare him...

The King knows there are those in the noble Twelve Houses who could use this growing dissent to overthrow him. So he dispatches the mystic Senneth to assess the threat throughout the realm. Accompanying her is a motley band of magic-users and warriors including Tayse, first among the King's Riders—who holds a hard view of mystics in general, and Senneth in particular.

But as the unlikely allies venture farther into the south, they will face death in a land under the sway of a fanatical cult that would purge Gillengaria of all magic users. And they will come to realize that their only hope of survival lies in standing together...

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

While not as original as Shinn's popular Archangel trilogy, this first of four in the Twelve Houses series, set in the land of Gillengaria, is tailor-made for the growing audience of fantasy fans who like a good juicy romance. Elderly King Baryn sits on a shaky throne, wed to a strange childless queen, and hides his only heir, a daughter. To investigate rumors that Gillengaria's southern noble houses are plotting revolt and fostering a pogrom against mystics born with supernatural powers, Baryn sends out five diverse individuals: Senneth, a female mystic who commands fire; Kirra, an aristocratic healer and shape-changer; Kirra's shape-shifting servant, Donnal; and Tayse and Justin, two elite King's Riders deeply distrustful of mystics. After rescuing the boy Cammon (an orphan empath) and a raelynx (a savage cat), the party undergoes increasingly perilous adventures while a disturbing attraction between Senneth and Tayse builds into profound and forbidden love. Shinn's spellbinding characterizations, especially that of the hard-bitten Tayse, who loses his heart to the powerful yet vulnerable Senneth, animate this familiar parade of shifting political alliances and disparate adventurers who gradually bond. Shinn's complicated pantheon of gods fallen mostly into disregard, a plethora of unsolved puzzles and ample promise of her characters' lives "changed by love" in future installments make for a rich beginning.

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Gillengaria abounds in magic, yet its mystics, the carriers of magic, aren't well regarded. Tolerated in the North by royal order, in the South they're feared, even hated. Lately it appears that organized riders are attacking and murdering mystics. To verify and assess the situation, King Baryn dispatches fire mystic Senneth to the South. With her are foremost King's Rider Tayse; Baryn's shape-changing mystic daughter, Kirra; Kirra's mystic servant, Donnal; scrappy street-urchin-turned-Rider Justin, whose only lost fight was with Tayse; and orphaned Cammon, found serving ale in a tavern, who Senneth suspects is a mystic. They make a tension-filled group, especially because Justin is hostile to mystics and Tayse is uneasy around Senneth. Much of the book concerns their learning to trust and accept one another, and to work together. Pressing deeper into dangerous territory, they hear that the southern king's new, mystic wife has bewitched him, and a moon-goddess cult bent on eradicating mystics is suddenly popular. It's all too clear that, when the 12 ruling houses begin choosing sides, civil war could be the upshot. Clean, elegant prose is, as usual, one of the joys of a Shinn novel, and here it conjures entirely likable major characters and an interesting group-development narrative. Never tripping over the plot twists and complications, Shinn gives us an easy, absorbing, high-quality read sans gratuitous bloodshed and violence. *Paula Luedtke*

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Review

Shinn's novels are always surprising. ("St. Louis Dispatch") Shinn's most successful book. ("SF Revue")

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Alan Coleman:

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