



## Duties of the Heart

**Sherrill Burns**

Page Turner Press and Media

(435pp)

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*This series opener introduces a vast and exciting fantasy world filled with strange creatures, political turmoil, and a forbidden romance.*

In Sherrill Burns's fantasy novel *Duties of the Heart*, a young sorceress with a part to play in a war between two nations masters her magical skills.

Mirage, a sorceress from a persecuted Theslian line, was sheltered in her childhood for her own protection. As a teenager, she learns the truth about her lineage: she is the descendant of a rebellious slave who was given magic for refusing to bow to Lavitian oppressors. In the generations since, the Lavitians have executed Theslian magic users like her.

To learn more about her powers and family history, Mirage leaves the safety of her home. As she travels, she encounters a prince; they fall into a fast, earnest, and intense romance whose excitement is deepened by the fact that it goes against their parents' wishes. Meanwhile, the malicious Lavitian ruler grows paranoid because of a prophecy that proclaims that a child will bring him down; he moves to protect himself.

While Mirage's pursuit of self-understanding is the story's impetus, it deviates from this quest to establish her world in dark but through terms. It features conniving nymphs who are eager to steal hapless children; there are distant demigods who rule over the land in its creator's absence too. Strange creatures and supernatural beings abound, and human politics and conflicts roil in the background. Indeed, there are a bevy of details to track, and the book is further complicated by its vast cast of characters, whose motivations and backstories are often detailed. With so many stories being told at the same time, the book becomes dense. Further, Lavitia is often written as "Lavatia"; the inconsistency is distracting.

Still, as Mirage evolves from a naïve child into a capable sorceress and political power player, the book's center holds. Her perspectives on the gods and the Lavitian king's prophecy help to flesh the story out. Because of her general inexperience in the wider world, the exposition that arises in her exchanges with others sounds natural too. As she masters her powers and learns more about the world, the book lays tantalizing groundwork for the series' continuation.

There are rumblings of a supernatural threat in the series-opening high fantasy novel *Duties of the Heart*, but romance still blossoms between two people from warring nations.

JOHN M. MURRAY (April 13, 2023)

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