

## The Ember Stone: Revised Edition

**Shari Marshall**

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*In the fantasy novel The Ember Stone, a gifted woman struggles to establish her place in a supernatural war.*

In Shari Marshall's fantasy novel *The Ember Stone*, a retired police officer learns about her magical heritage as a war between secret societies flares up.

A lottery win gives Kori the freedom to travel in her retirement. It comes just in time: she needs a break from her life after catching her husband cheating. Though she finds a brief semblance of peace in a quiet tropical town, she also takes notice of sinister shadow creatures that seem to be stalking her.

Kori turns to her grandmother, Pearle—the only person she can trust—for help. She learns that a war is brewing between her family, the Embers, and the secretive Society of the Blood Wind. She is forced to confront a side of herself that she fought to suppress. She, Pearle, and an eclectic coterie of supernatural allies prepare to fight off the Society of the Blood Wind and finish an ancient ceremony.

However, the story is centered less by the supernatural feud than it is by Kori's inability to confront her traumatic past. She's developed in terms of just a few traits and memories, including her work as a police officer, family drama, and her relationship with her husband. In her childhood, she lost her brother to a supernatural attack; infidelity consumes her present concerns. While her heritage and shunned gifts drag her into the supernatural conflict, she also has to do the inward work of self-discovery. When it comes to the war itself, her role is thus limited, even passive, despite a prophecy deeming her a major player in it.

The story's fast pace leads to underdeveloped characterizations. Beyond Kori herself, who acts on her own too infrequently, other people's motivations are often murky. And Kori's husband's impotence and tendency to expose himself are focused on to an off-putting degree.

Further, though the book's magic is intriguing, too much of the worldbuilding comes via information that's shared with Kori; it is rushed and expository, and extraneous details overwhelm it. There's information about generational magic that is unique to each family, complicated dynamics between humans and other supernatural races, and the Ember Stone, but these interjections are unnatural in tone. Additionally, some of the lore is muddled: the Ember Stone is tied to Kori's family, for example, but it is also hidden from them until the relevant moment. And in the end, this first series title devotes too much time to its setup; once the connection between Kori and the Ember Stone is established, it comes to an abrupt conclusion that is most focused on generating interest in the books to come.

In the fantasy novel *The Ember Stone*, a gifted woman struggles to establish her place in a supernatural war.

JOHN M. MURRAY (May 31, 2023)

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