



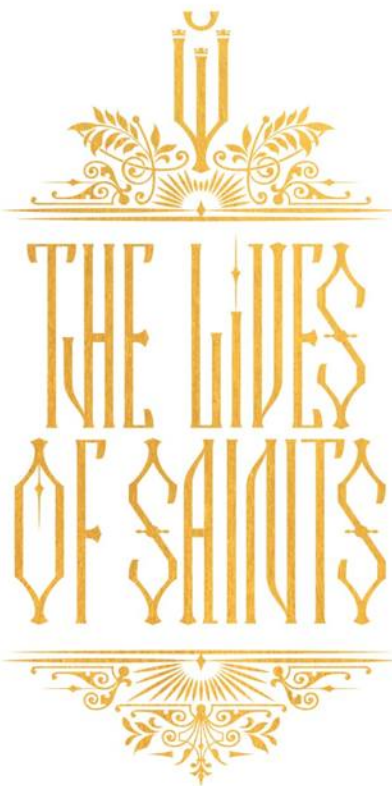
THE LIVES OF
SAINTS



#1 NEW YORK TIMES—BESTSELLING AUTHOR

LEIGH BARDUGO

ILLUSTRATED BY DANIEL J. ZOLLINGER



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To those who keep faith with stories

As a wise woman once said,
“You know the problem with heroes and Saints?
They always end up dead.”
In fact, we all end up dead.
But people who steal books
have a truly miserable afterlife.



SANKTA MARGARETHA

As sometimes happens in Ketterdam, a demon took up residence in one of the canals, this time beneath a bridge in the Garden District. It was a hideous clawed thing with a scaly white hide and a long red tongue.

Each day children would pass over the bridge on their way to school and then back again on the way home, in two lines, side by side. They didn't know a demon had come to live in the city and so they would laugh and sing without worrying what attention they might attract.

One day, on their way to school, as the children stepped off the bridge and onto the cobblestones, they heard a voice whisper sweetly, "Jorgy, Jorgy, you'll be first."

Now, they did have a little boy named Jorgy among them, and he was teased mightily when they heard the voice singsonging, but no one thought too much about it. All day the voice whispered—following them through lessons and while they were at play: "Jorgy, Jorgy, you'll be first." But nothing happened, and so the children strolled home in their two orderly lines, hooting and giggling as they crossed the bridge.

When they reached the other side, Jorgy was nowhere to be found.

"But he was right here!" cried Maria, who had been beside poor Jorgy.

The children ran home and told their parents, but no one listened when they described the whispering voice. The families searched high and low, and

took boats up and down the canal, but there was no sign of Jorgy. They were sure that some madman or criminal must be to blame and set guards all along the street.

The next day, as the children walked to school, Maria was afraid to cross the bridge. She heard a voice say, “Do not worry, I will hold your hand and no one will take you.”

Maria thought it must be her friend Anna and so reached out to hold her hand. But when they arrived at the other side of the bridge, Maria found her hand empty and Anna was gone. The children wept and shouted for help, and their teachers and parents scoured all along the streets and waterways. Anna could not be found.

Again, the children told their parents of the whispering voice, but they were all too distraught to listen. Instead they doubled the number of guards.

The next day, the children walked quietly to school, huddling together as they neared the bridge. “Closer, closer,” whispered the demon.

But in an apartment above a jeweler’s shop, Margaretha was watching from her window. Her father sold all manner of beautiful things in the shop below, many of them Margaretha’s designs. She had a gift for the finest details, and the stones she set were brighter and clearer than they had any right to be.

That morning as she worked in the square of sunlight by her window, she saw the demon leap up like a curl of smoke to seize little Maria. Margaretha shouted at the vile thing, and without thinking, she grabbed a sapphire in her hand and hurled it at the creature.

Light caught and hung on the jewel as it arced through the air, making it glitter like a falling star. The demon was transfixed. He tossed his prey aside and leapt into the canal after the beautiful jewel. Maria bounced along the cobblestones. She had a very sore bottom and a skinned knee, but she hurried on to school with the other students, safe and sound, and grateful she’d been spared.

Margaretha tried to tell her friends and neighbors about what she’d seen. They listened attentively, for Margaretha was a practical girl who had never

been given to fancy. Yet no one quite believed her strange tale. They agreed she must have a fever and recommended she retire to bed.

Margaretha did go to her room and there she sat at her desk, vigilantly watching the bridge. The very next morning, when the demon tried to seize Maria again, Margaretha tossed a big emerald pendant into the canal. The demon threw Maria into a doorway and leapt into the water to retrieve the jewel.

Now, Margaretha knew this must not go on. One day she would be too slow and the demon would take another child, so she set her mind to the problem. She worked all night upon an extraordinary jewel, a diamond brooch so heavy she could barely lift it. As dawn broke, she used a pulley and a winch to raise the brooch off her desk and heft it out of her window, until it dangled above the canal, straining the rope that held it. In the shop below, her father's customers wondered at the noises coming through the ceiling, but with children disappearing right and left, there were other things to concern them.

This time, when the children approached the bridge, Margaretha was ready. As soon as the demon leapt up, she released the rope. The brooch plummeted into the canal with a tremendous splash. But even the quick glimpse the demon had of it was enough to drive him mad with need.

Down the demon went into the dark waters, all thoughts of children to devour abandoned, its claws reaching out for the diamond at the bottom of the canal. But the brooch was too heavy to lift. Anyone with sense would have left the jewel there, but demons have no sense, only appetite. It had seen the sparkle of the brooch as it fell and it knew this stone was more lovely and necessary than any it had seen before.

The demon died wrestling with the brooch, and its drowned corpse floated to the surface of the canal. The Merchant Council skinned its body and used its hide as an altar cloth at the Church of Barter.

It's said that many years later, when the great drought came and the canals ran dry, a stash of jewels was found at the bottom of the canal,

including a brooch so heavy no one could lift it, and beneath that pile of gems, a heap of children's bones.

Every year, lanterns are lit along the canal and prayers are said to Margaretha, the patron saint of thieves and lost children.



SANKTA ANASTASIA

Anastasia was a pious girl who lived in the village of Tsemna. Known as a great beauty, she had red hair bright as a field of new poppies and green eyes that shone like polished glass. This was what the villagers remarked upon when they saw her at market, whispering what a shame it was that Anastasia spent all her time lighting candles for her poor dead mother in the church and tending to her old father in their sad little house. A girl like that should be seen and celebrated, they said, and warned she would grow old before her time.

But the villagers lost their taste for gossip when Tsemna was struck down with the wasting plague. They hadn't the strength to go to market or even church any longer. They lay in their beds, gripped by fever. No food could tempt them, and even when they were force-fed, they withered and eventually died.

Anastasia did not sicken. Her father, afraid their neighbors would brand her a witch, kept his daughter in the house, hiding her plump limbs and rosy cheeks. But one morning her father would not rise from bed; he would eat neither meat nor bread nor any of the delicacies Anastasia prepared for him.

A voice spoke to her as she knelt by the bed, praying to the Saints for her father's life to be spared. When Anastasia rose, she knew what to do. She found her mother's sharpest knife, made a long, slender cut along her arm,

and filled a dish with her blood. She lifted it to her father's lips and bid him drink.

"What is that delicious aroma?" her father cried. "It smells like partridge with crispy skin and wine warmed with spices."

He drank greedily of his daughter's blood, and soon his cheeks were flushed and the plague had gone from him. A servant had observed the whole endeavor, and word soon spread of the healing properties of Anastasia's blood.

The townspeople came to the house, then people from the neighboring towns. Anastasia's father begged her to see sense and bar the door, but she refused to turn anyone away. Her blood was drawn into little dishes—from her wrists, her arms, her ankles—and taken out to the people, who drank and were healed. When Anastasia learned that there were people too weak to come and beg for her blood, she asked to be placed in a cart, and she was taken into the countryside, from village to village, to farmsteads and cities. She grew weaker and weaker until finally, in Arkesk, the last drops of her blood leaked from her body into a waiting cup and her body became a husk that blew away on the wind.

Sankta Anastasia is known as the patron saint of the sick and is celebrated every year with tiny dishes of red wine.



SANKT KHO AND SANKTA NEYAR

Long ago, before the reign of the Taban queens, Shu Han was ruled by a cruel and incompetent king. His many wars had left the ranks of his troops depleted and his country vulnerable; the draft had been exhausted and there were no more soldiers to fill the army's ranks. The king gathered his advisers, but all they could do was prepare for the enemy to descend.

A clockmaker named Kho lived in the shadow of the palace and he vowed to use every ounce of his skill to help protect the kingdom. He worked through the night, binding bone to metal, stringing sinew over cogs. In the morning, arrayed in neat lines, their boots and buttons shining, a battalion of clockwork soldiers stood at attention. When the enemy began their assault on the capital, the clockwork battalion marched into the fray. These soldiers never tired. They never grew hungry. No wound could break their stride. They fought on and on until the last of the enemy soldiers were dead.

But the king did not let them stop. He sent the battalion to claim territory to which he had no right, and if the people there protested, he ordered his clockwork soldiers to silence resistance to his rule. On the battalion marched, slaying all who dared offer challenge, laying waste to cities at the king's command. They marched until their clothes frayed and their boots wore away to nothing, yet still they did not stop.

At last, even the king grew tired of conquest and ordered the clockwork troops to halt. They did not. Maybe the clockmaker had not crafted them ears fine enough to hear the king's orders. Maybe the soldiers simply didn't care. Maybe their cogs turned more smoothly with blood to moisten their teeth. Or maybe, they could not stop. They had been made for destruction and had no choice but to see it done.

High on a hill, a nobleman's daughter watched the battalion approach her city, and like Kho, Neyar vowed to use every bit of her skill to protect her people. She went to the family forge, and there she fashioned a blade so sharp it could cut shadow and so strong it laughed at steel. Neyar whispered prayers over the metal and walked the long road down to the city walls. There she met the clockwork battalion. For three days and three nights, Neyar fought the unstoppable soldiers, her blade flashing so brightly the people watching swore she had lightning in her hands.

At last, the final soldier fell in a heap of blood and broken clockwork, and Neyar laid down her weapon. Then she demanded that their irresponsible king lay down his crown. A coward to the last and without soldiers to defend him, the king fled the country, and Shu Han has been ruled by queens ever since. The sword was dubbed *Neshyenyar*, Relentless, and can still be found in the palace of Ahmrat Jen. Its blade has never rusted.

Sankt Kho is known as the patron saint of good intentions and Sankta Neyar as the patron saint of blacksmiths.



SANKT JURIS OF THE SWORD

In one of Ravka's many wars, a general marched his army into enemy territory, sure of a swift victory. But the weather had other ideas. The wind shredded through his soldiers' thin coats with cold claws. The snow crept through the leather of their boots, and their supplies dwindled. The enemy didn't bother with battles, but hid amid the rocks and trees, picked off the general's men in bursts of gunfire, and waited for winter to have its way.

Soon the army was less a body of men than a loose-limbed skeleton, staggering from dawn to dusk. The general abandoned his pride and called for a retreat. But by then, the final mountain pass that would lead them home was blocked with snow. The soldiers made camp as best they could. Night closed around them like a fist, and their fires sputtered as if struggling to draw breath.

The general railed against his luck. If only the winter had not come so soon. If only the enemy had not been ready. If only the pass had not been blocked. He cursed fate and told his men that if they died this night, taken by the cold, it would be because they had been abandoned by cruel and merciless Saints.

"Where is Sankta Yeryin to feed us? Where is Sankt Nikolai to guide us home? They're safe and warm somewhere, laughing at their wayward children."

Some of the men agreed. They sneered at the Saints' names and spat into the snow. But in one tent, six soldiers gathered. They bent their heads and prayed to the Saint who they believed had kept them alive thus far: Sankt Juris, patron saint of the battle weary, the warrior who had bested a dragon through cunning and strength, who knew the suffering of long nights in siege, and who might hear the pleas of common soldiers.

Shivering in their frayed blankets, the six soldiers heard a distant flapping of wings and felt the earth rumble gently beneath them. Then, up through the ground, they felt a warm gust, an exhalation of heat, as if the mountain were no longer rock and snow but a living beast, a dragon with breath of fire. They fell into a deep slumber, their battered bodies warm for the first time in months.

When they woke, they found the general and the other men had frozen to death in the night. The snow had melted away from the mountain pass, and flowering amaranth lined the path, its long leaves like tongues of red flame, guiding the faithful soldiers home.

Every year on his Saint's day, the people honor Juris by placing bunches of red amaranth over their doorways and welcoming soldiers and veterans into their houses.