

APOLLO ASCENDING
BOOK THREE

A
SHIELD
OF
FATE
AND
RUN

NICOLE BAILEY

A SHIELD OF FATE AND RUIN

Apollo Ascending

Book 3

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Bonus Content

Content Warnings

Please note that these content warnings will contain spoilers for the book.

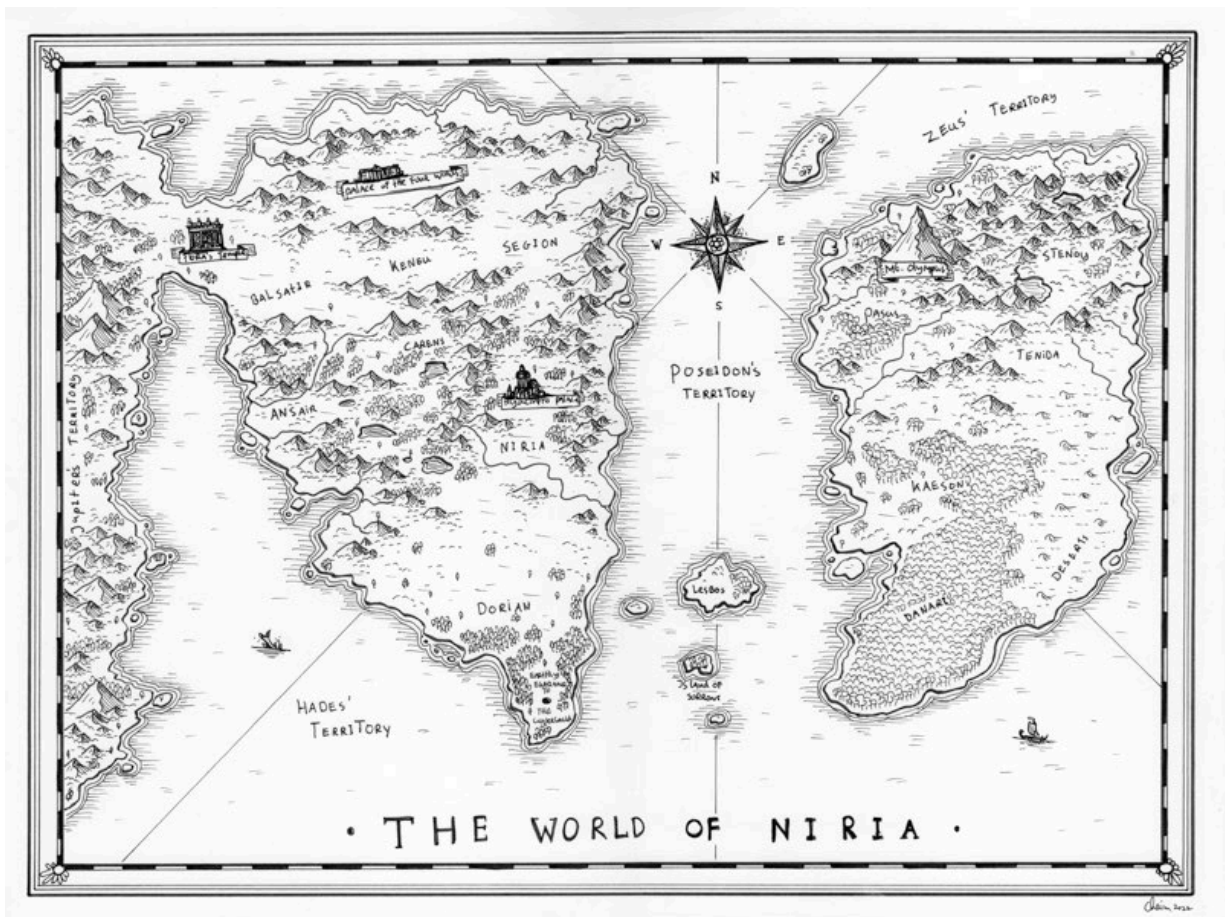
A Shield of Fate and Ruin depicts war, including the graphic death of gods, humans, and horses and the characters' emotional responses to these events.

Other issues include hunting (mentions), misogyny, parental death, discussions of adoption, and a father hitting a child.

The book also contains strong language and sexual content.

I hope readers will find that I've handled these topics with sensitivity. However, I wished to include a note for anyone who may find this content triggering.

Map



Character Review

Apollo

God of the sun. Hyacinth's partner and Temi's older brother.

Temi (Artemis)

Prophesied goddess of the sun. Huntress and Apollo's younger sister.

Hyacinth (Cyn)

Was the crowned prince of Niria before his death. A low deity. Apollo's partner.

Epiphany (Pip)

Princess of Niria and Hyacinth's younger sister. Valerian's partner.

Valerian (Val)

Master stableman at the palace in Niria. Epiphany's partner.

Emrin

Crowned prince of Niria (after Hyacinth's death.)

Joden

Nirian high lord and political advisor.

Zephyrus

God of the west wind (spring). Hyacinth's past lover who killed him out of vengeance.

Other wind gods include Boreas (north wind, winter), Notus (south wind, summer), and Euros (east wind, autumn.)

Galeson

High lord from the country of Segion and a suitor of Epiphany's.

Delon

A high lord from a prominent Nirian family who grew up with Hyacinth. He became good friends with Apollo in A Crown of Hopes and Sorrows.

Len

A high lord from a prominent Nirian family who grew up with Hyacinth and a friend of Delon's.

Zeus

Ruler over the deities of Mt. Olympus, god of the sky, and Apollo's father. One of the three major gods. (Married to Hera.)

Poseidon

God of the sea, Zeus' brother, and one of the three major gods. Temi's father.

Hades

God of the underworld, Zeus' brother, and one of the three major gods. (Married to Persephone.)

Hecate

Goddess of the dark side of the moon, night, liminal spaces, and necromancy. She is Persephone's companion in the underworld and connected with Temi.

Persephone

Queen goddess of the underworld. Married to Hades.

Ares

God of war, son of Zeus, and half-brother of Apollo. Father of Ixion.

Arion

Temi's immortal, sea stallion Poseidon gifted her.

Tartarus

The realm of monsters and torment that Zeus locks his enemies in.

Ixion

Ares' son. A high deity that Zeus has kept frozen in childhood.

Leto

Apollo and Temi's mother. High priestess of her village in Danari until her death shortly after Temi's birth.

Jupiter

High deity of the gods from the west.

Flora

Goddess of flowers and spring. Part of Jupiter's court. Married to Zephyrus.

Clothos

One of the three fates who determine the fate of mortals and gods alike. She forewarned Hyacinth of his death.

Review of Book 2

In **A Crown of Hopes and Sorrows**, the characters break into two separate journeys.

Apollo and Hyacinth travel to the Palace of the Four Winds, hoping to discover which low deities may be on their side in the upcoming war of Jupiter versus Zeus.

Temi, Epiphany, and Valerian travel to the island of Lesbos to meet with Sappho and attempt to discover Temi's origins. On the way, Temi runs into Hera, who attacks her. Hera reveals that she killed Temi's mother.

Apollo was jealous of Zephyrus, who is a past lover of Hyacinth's, but attempted to fight it. Zephyrus begins to make a public declaration to state that Niria stands with him in the battle of the gods. Hyacinth was panicking but uncertain how to stop him. Apollo breaks up the announcement by kissing Hyacinth in front of the crowd. This ruins Zephyrus' plans by shaming him. But it also embarrasses Hyacinth. Apollo and Hyacinth have a fight and split up, going in different directions.

Sappho introduces Temi to Hecate, who summons Temi's mother. Temi discovers Poseidon is her father. She meets with him and is disappointed to

find that he is emotionally withdrawn from the world and from her. Hera returns to the island to attack Temi's friends.

Valerian and Epiphany have a tumultuous beginning to a relationship. Val feels his reputation will harm Epiphany. They have sex, but the next day Valerian apologizes and says he regrets it because he acted selfishly. Epiphany leaves on her horse, angry and hurt, and gallops right into the hands of Hera.

Apollo and Delon go to the country of Ansair, where they discover the king has likely aligned with Zephyrus and will stand against Niria in the upcoming war. Apollo's group narrowly escapes and they return to Niria.

Hyacinth visits Flora's temple where Clothos, one of the Fates, waits to speak with him. She tells him that if he reconnects with Apollo, he will usher forth his death but also set up a changing of the high gods. Hyacinth heads home shaken.

Hera chained Epiphany in the earthly entrance to Tartarus to lure Temi into it. Temi works with Sappho, Hecate, Persephone, Hades, and Valerian to rescue her. Hades makes Hera vow to not harm Temi again. When Hera leaves, she mortally wounds Valerian. Temi calls on Poseidon, who reluctantly heals him and gives Temi his immortal horse, Arion.

As their party returns home, Epiphany and Valerian agree to fight the odds and be in a relationship together. However, Hyacinth is furious when he finds out and confronts Valerian. His treatment hurts Val and they fight.

Apollo finds Hyacinth and apologizes. Hyacinth decides he wants to be in a relationship with Apollo, no matter the cost. They play a game of discus with Delon and Len. Zephyrus uses his wind to slam the disc back towards Hyacinth, killing him on impact.

Apollo forces so much magic attempting to heal Hyacinth that he ascends. Hades appears and makes a deal with Apollo. If he spares Persephone in the future, Hades will make a Hyacinth flower in memory of the prince.

Months later, Apollo is in the heavens overlooking Niria when the Hyacinth flower blooms. Cyn appears and informs him that Hades bound his spirit to the Hyacinth flower and he has returned as a low deity. They vow to continue the work of bringing down Zeus and protecting Niria.

“Nature’s first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold
Her early leaf’s a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay.

-Robert Frost.

Apollo

“Golden boy.”

I fluttered my eyes open and shifted towards Hyacinth. He swept his fingers down my arm, his head resting on his free palm, his elbow dipping against a pillow.

“Did I fall asleep?”

He grinned and my heart flew about like a bird loose from a cage. I couldn’t believe he was alive. Part of me had expected to wake and find that his return was all a vision that desperation and grief had created for me.

I feathered my hand over his bare shoulder, down his arm, along the sharp edge of his hip. He didn’t glow as the high gods—as I did—his tan flesh holding a touch of a shimmer instead, his hazel eyes only slightly brighter than they had been in his human life.

He was here.

He was alive.

And he was a deity. Gods, that was not a twist I had expected. I twined my fingers with his. He nodded to the window where peachy light swept in alongside misty clouds. “We should go.”

“Shit.” I jumped out of the bed and snagged my tunic from where it lay on the wood floor. “The sun... I can’t believe I slept into the afternoon.” I yanked the clothing over my head.

Hyacinth stood as well and pulled on his outfit and robe—the one he’d apparently bargained with Hades for. “The sun?”

I sighed and stepped with him out of the bedroom and into the only other room in the cottage—a small sitting space with two oversized chairs in front of a fireplace. We opened the door and our feet dipped into the clouds that stretched in a million colors of lavenders and golds and ice-blues as the day swept away.

“Now that I’ve ascended, my magic is directly connected with the sun. I have to pull it up in the morning and down at night. I’ve learned, the hard way, that if I don’t, it causes issues in the human world.”

Hyacinth studied me, his eyebrows forming that v-shaped dimple that I loved. “Issues?”

I swallowed and squeezed my fingers into the back of my neck. “When you... I mean after you’d...” I couldn’t form the words. Tears bit at my eyes just from thinking about losing him. Even with him standing right there in front of me again, the pain still roiled its way through me.

“When I died,” he whispered.

I nodded. “I was so broken, Cyn.” My teeth clinked as I clenched them down hard to keep the swelling emotions at bay. “I wasn’t taking on the mantle of my role as I should. The weather in the human world...” I gave my head a shake. “It was strange. Storms would rise out of nowhere and then disappear. The sun stopped following a consistent schedule. It was chaos.”

He brushed a hand down the lapels of his robe. “Because you weren’t guiding the sun?”

I shrugged. “I suppose so. Temi was the one who worked it out, that my ascension had enmeshed my powers with the sun, and it no longer would rise and fall steadily without me guiding it. And that me neglecting my role would cause issues with the weather. She convinced me to...” I gestured to the cottage and the throne that sat in front of it couched in puffy clouds. And to the heavens there at the top of the mountains overlooking Niria.

Hyacinth walked over and pulled me into his arms. I rested my head against his shoulder, breathing in the sweet jasmine scent of him. “It’s all right. I’m here now, golden boy. I won’t leave you again.”

I nestled in closer but didn’t answer.

It was hard to say if that would be true or not.

After all, war had finally built up. Hyacinth's father believed it could break out for their country any day.

And it was Zeus we stood against.

Zeus didn't know that yet—I didn't think so, at least.

Now that Hyacinth returned... I sucked in a breath at that thought.

My father wouldn't hesitate to harm him to manipulate me. With Zeus holding the spark, he was the only god who could kill a high god. But Cyn wasn't even that. He was only a low deity. Zeus could end him so easily.

I tightened my grip on him as the wind picked up, causing goosebumps to rise on my arms.

Cyn studied me for a moment, a trace of concern in his expression. But he didn't share his thoughts. Instead, he turned towards the world elongated out below us. "This is so beautiful from up here."

I shifted to where he gestured and wrapped an arm around his back. The earth stretched out in miniature. Niria—the massive city that it was—glimmered like a stack of golden pebbles, lilac mountains shadowing it in the distance. From our height, the sea was just visible on the horizon, a razor thin line of glistening navy.

I shivered, my stomach swirling, but closed my eyes and leaned in closer to Hyacinth.

"Are you still afraid of heights?"

I chuckled breathily. "A bit, yes."

"Hmm."

"Do you want to see your family tonight?"

Hyacinth's features tightened, a muscle in his jaw jumping, but he nodded.

"Let me call Temi, then. I believe a forewarning might be helpful here."

"That makes sense," Hyacinth whispered. He raised his free hand and smoothed down the lapels of his robe, his eyebrows dimpling together.

"It'll be fine, Cyn," I said. "I think it may help with the shock if Temi lets them know before we come. She's all but joined your family in the last months."

His posture eased. "Is that so?"

“Hmmm,” I hummed in reply. “Let me call her, and guide the sun, and then we’ll go.”

Hyacinth crossed his arms, the burgundy silk of his robe rippling out on the wind. Gods, he was beautiful and perfect. I didn’t know what I’d done to deserve a second chance with him, but I would make the most of every moment.

I pulled my knapsack off, removed a bowl, and dumped herbs into it. I called on my magic to produce a spark that lit them, their rich smoke drifting into the air. “Artemis,” I said. “Goddess of the moon. Hear me and come to me.”

A cringe coursed over me as I shifted the herbs around, snuffing out the fire. She was going to chew my ass out for summoning her. In the last months she’d dragged me into practicing her powers with her—I suspected for my sake as much as her own—and we’d figured out that even though she hadn’t ascended yet, I could summon her. She had also threatened my life if I ever used it. But she would understand once she arrived.

I stuffed the implements back into my bag and rose, facing the sun. I sank heavily into my powers, letting them fizzle and warm their way through my blood. The glow grew until the cottage, the clouds we stood on, the heavens as far as I could see, all illuminated.

The massive heat and curling fires of that bright star reverberated within me. I whispered to it with my magic, like shushing a child to sleep. Time to finish your path for the day and tuck yourself down behind the mountains now.

The sun glimmered and then lowered incrementally, stars just piercing the violet edges of the sky.

The magic drew back into me, and I turned to face Hyacinth.

Who stared at me, his mouth agape.

Oh, right. He’d never seen me like that.

Divine.

Ascended.

A curl of insecurity wisped through me. Perhaps he would find it disgusting or terrifying. Like so many humans did.