

Praise for *That Self-Same Metal*:

‘**Glorious** (and very stabby!) . . . a heroine you instantly root for and admire.’

The New York Times

‘**A fresh take on faerie magic.**’

Leigh Bardugo

‘Vividly expressive, riotously queer, beautifully Black and wildly creative . . . **a pleasure to read.** If this is what she can do as a debut, there’s no stopping her.’

Locus Magazine

‘Nothing short of **a spectacular debut** . . . a groundbreaking addition to the fantasy genre.’

Ayana Gray

‘**A fresh and exciting** take on the Fae, a queer love triangle, and a host of memorable characters, including Shakespeare himself.

I’m looking forward to the sequel.’

Samantha Shannon

‘An addicting, original story. **Will delight readers of all ages.**’

Booklist

‘**Every sentence will thunder through your bones.**’

Roshani Chokshi

‘A **thrilling** read you won’t want to put down.’

The Scotsman

‘**Wildly imaginative** and refreshingly diverse.’

J. Elle

‘Will pull readers in.’

Kirkus Reviews

‘An intricate, historically rich tapestry.

Fans of Holly Black and Sarah J. Maas will love this.’

School Library Journal

‘I couldn’t stop reading it,

and when I finished all I wanted was more.’

Daniel José Older

‘Fast-paced . . . **a fresh take** on inclusive historical fantasy.’

NPR

‘A richly woven fantasy . . . a clever, entertaining, thoughtful read.’

Shelf Awareness

‘An **absolute feast** of imagination.

Complex, brooding, impossible to put down.’

Scott Reintgen

‘Combining Yoruba myths, Shakespearean drama, a love triangle,

and a race-against time adventure, this fantasy debut

certainly **packs a punch.**’

Irish Examiner

‘Williams’s **fast-paced adventure** gallops apace . . . once immersed in the world of Joan Sands, you’re not going to want to leave.’

Tor.com

‘A fun, quick read with diverse and queer characters

a reader will happily follow into battle.’

Historical Novel Society

SAINT- SEDUCING GOLD

◆ The Forge & Fracture Saga ◆

Brittany N. Williams

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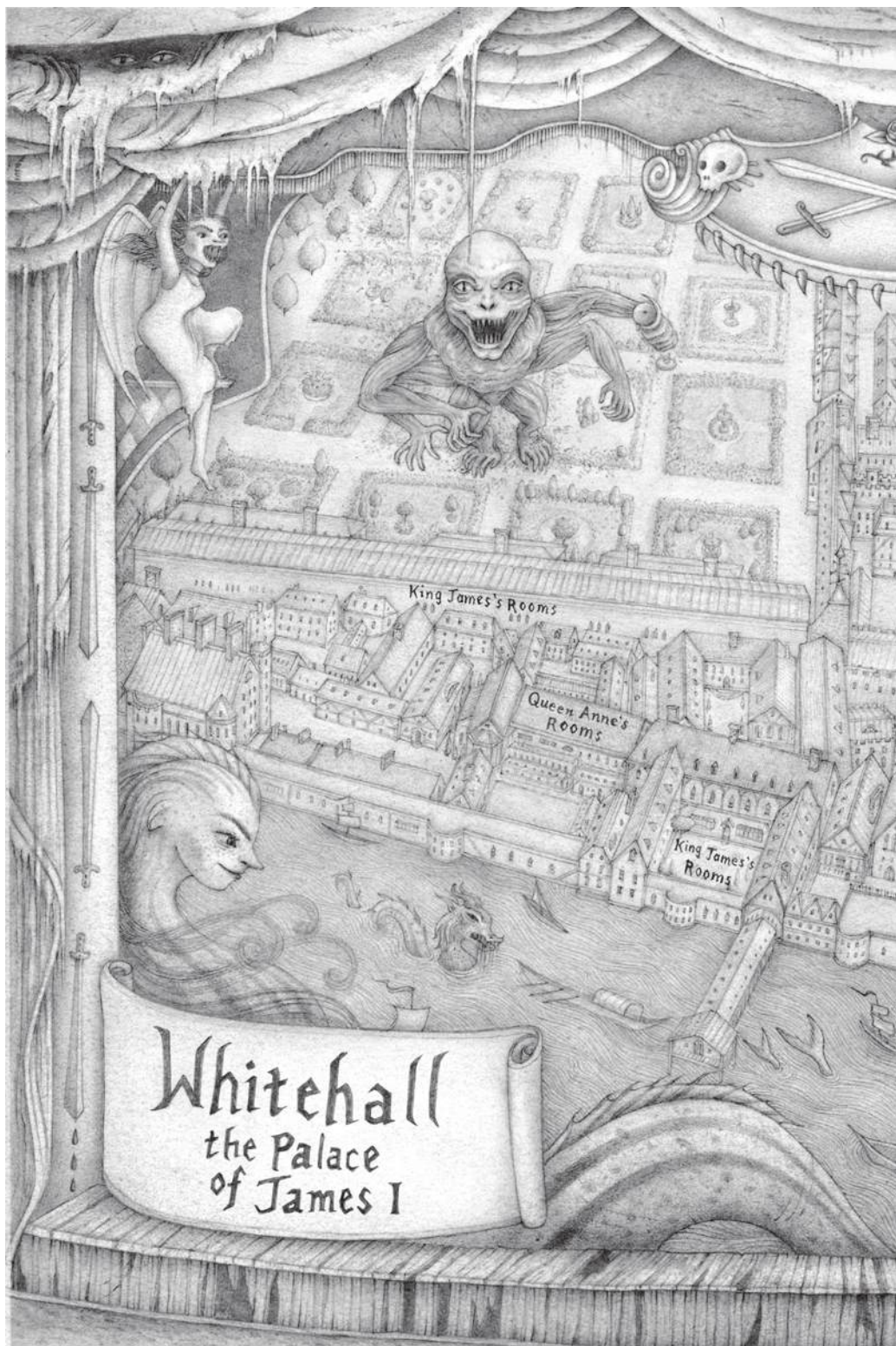
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*For Eric & Ericka, the coolest baby siblings
a chaotic older sister could want.*

&

*For every Black kid made to feel like you don't belong.
Ignore them, they're lying.*



Whitehall
the Palace
of James I



Banqueting House

Lady Clifford's Rooms

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

The Sands Family

Joan – a teenage swordswoman blessed by Ogun

James – her twin brother and an actor blessed by Oya

Bess – her mother blessed by Elegua

Thomas – her father blessed by Yemoja

Nan – their maid

The King's Men

William Shakespeare – a playwright & actor blessed by Oshun

Richard Burbage – an actor

Augustine Phillips – an actor

Nicholas 'Nick' Tooley – an apprentice actor

Robert Armin – an actor

Rob Gough – an apprentice actor

The Fae

Titanea – queen of the fae

Robin Goodfellow – a powerful fae

Rose – Goodfellow's half-mortal daughter

Herne the Hunter – leader of the Wild Hunt

Various sirens, red caps, jacks-in-irons, goblins, hags and the like

The Royal Court

King James I – King of England

Philip Herbert – Earl of Montgomery & the king's favourite

Thomas Erskine – Earl of Fentoun & captain of the guard

Robert Cecil – Earl of Salisbury, Secretary of State & the king's spymaster

William Ceci – Viscount Cranborne & Cecil's son

Frances Cecil – Cecil's daughter

Catherine – Countess of Suffolk & the queen's lady-in-waiting

Penelope – Baroness Rich & the queen's lady-in-waiting

Lucy – Countess of Bedford & the queen's lady-in-waiting

Grace – a palace servant

Gregory – a royal footman

Various courtiers, servants & guards

SAINT- SEDUCING GOLD

◆ The Forge & Fracture Saga ◆

. 6 JANUARY .



CHAPTER ONE
Fortunes Made & Marred



he queen is dead.

Joan Sands had expected Twelfth Night to go smoothly. She and her twin brother, James, would celebrate their birthday over a lovely morning meal with their family then spend the rest of the day at court with the King's Men. In the afternoon she'd help him and the rest of the players prepare for their royal performance. They'd pack up and end the evening eating royal delights, until Master Shakespeare and Master Burbage got drunk enough to take each other for an indecent turn on the dance floor. The day followed that exact pattern from the first time she'd attended the Feast of the Epiphany celebrations with the King's Men four years ago and every time since.

She'd been a fool to think the mayhem and bloodshed of last November wouldn't ripple chaos through this day and the royal court.

The queen is dead, and an imposter sits on her throne.

The breaking of the Pact between the Fae and the children of the Orisha released chaos upon mortal London. The only person with the knowledge of its sealing – Joan's godfather, Baba Ben – rotted in the Tower

of London. Joan had killed Auberon, depriving the worst of the Fae of their leader; and Titanea, the Fae queen, had been killed by the explosion that decimated the House of Lords.

Or so they'd believed.

The quiet of the last two months seemed to prove they'd averted a greater crisis. But what did it mean now that Titanea was alive and wearing the face of the mortal queen of England?

More than that, she was the mastermind behind the broken Pact. She'd had Baba Ben arrested and imprisoned in the Tower of London. She'd orchestrated the explosion that had killed the true Queen Anne and so many others.

Titanea, who smiled as she lounged on England's throne and wore the form of its dead monarch.

Joan sat on the edge of her own gilded chair placed beside Titanea's on the highest scaffold. The rest of the royal guests spread out before their platform and along the sides of the hall; a sea of festive courtiers perched on row upon row of benches bordering the central playing space.

Joan had never felt more exposed in her life.

The warmth of Ogun's presence burned in her chest, the pulsing heat seeming to encourage her along with the persistent thrum of Bia, the sword she'd worn hidden around her wrist as a bracelet from the moment she'd laid hands on it. No other blade seemed so attuned to Joan's senses. Even now, its steady rhythm beat in harmony to Ogun's fire.

Titanea patted Joan's cheek. 'Do not make us regret our love for you, and remember you twice over are in our debt.'

Joan's heart raced at the memory, a shiver shooting down her spine as fear and regret overpowered even Ogun's burn. Her thoughts had been so overtaken first by her mistreatment at the hands of Queen Anne and her

ladies and then at the queen's abrupt good grace, that Joan had offered her gratitude without hesitation.

Strike . . .

What a fool she'd been. Now the Fae queen held two chances to command Joan's absolute obedience to any request she may have. Two magical boons, which Titanea could use to compel her at any time to any purpose.

The potential in such unmitigated power was terrifying.

Strike.

Joan shook her head as if to dislodge the thought that she knew wasn't her own. She cut a look over her shoulder, certain that the women around them had heard every word. The queen's ladies faced away from the two of them, not a bit of attention paid to Joan. They twittered idle gossip like an obnoxious flock of birds, speaking eagerly to each other as if willed to do so by some force. A glance at Titanea's knowing smile told Joan they had been. None of them realised who they served in disguise, though Joan doubted they'd care so long as they continued to curry the monarch's favour.

She wondered if the difference mattered to her. She swallowed the uncomfortable lump in her throat when she couldn't give a simple answer even to herself.

Yes, Titanea had had Baba Ben arrested, but he was alive and unharmed – if she was to be believed. She'd caused the death of the true queen, but she'd also aided Joan in her greatest time of need. Titanea had given Joan the opportunity to rescue James by telling all under her command to stand down. Whatever dismay Joan felt over the loss of the true Queen Anne was hardly strong enough to drive an attack on its own, let alone when weighed against Titanea's aid.

Strike.

Ogun and Bia held no such doubts. The sword at her wrist pulsed so intensely that she feared Titanea could feel the vibrations. Her chest blazed with Ogun's pressure, the scorching heat urging her, driving her to attack the Fae queen though she'd done no harm in the time since the explosion.

Strike.

Ogun's command echoed firm and sure within her, but Joan didn't feel the Orisha's certainty. The doubt she held in her mind stayed her hand. She couldn't attack Titanea if any remained, refused to gamble with the lives of her loved ones. The stakes here loomed too high to allow any such errors.

Now. Strike now.

Joan took a shuddering breath, forcing the demand down and trying to calm the fire within her. Moving to murder Titanea now was not only unprovoked but rash and unwise. However much Bia and Ogun compelled her to attack, Joan knew she could not. She needed to be sure.

'Why have you done this?' Joan said, even as the insistent whispers raced through her mind.

Strike.

Titanea smiled indulgently and squeezed Joan's cheeks. 'Know us better and you will understand the why, dear Joan.'

Joan gritted her teeth but held the smile on her face. The vague response along with Ogun's pressing made her head swim. Joan hadn't expected a direct answer to her question, but Titanea's face held genuine affection. There was an advantage to be found in that. She only needed to press it.

'I would like to, Your Highness,' Joan said, exaggerating the deference in her voice. She cast her gaze down demurely. 'But your star lies so far above my own that we may find no more opportune moment to speak than

this.’ She frowned and lifted her eyes. ‘A mere merchant’s daughter could hardly hope to meet with Queen Anne once. Twice is unprecedented and I fear any more time together would be impossible.’ The sad resignation she forced into the words would’ve made James proud.

Had her brother been in her place, he’d have cajoled a full confession out of Titanea as easily as breathing, but he stood with the actors in the tiring-room, the lot of them completely unaware of the queen’s true identity. Joan prayed her own playing moved Titanea to make even a small admission, anything to help Joan plan her next action.

Strike.

Joan watched the Fae queen’s expression shift from comprehension to dismay to a sudden sly satisfaction. She released Joan’s face and leaned back on her throne. ‘If it’s time you want, dear Joan, then time you shall have.’ She patted Joan’s hand gently, her grin shooting apprehension through Joan’s gut.

Strike!

The Orisha’s voice screamed in Joan’s head, and she found herself fighting against the familiar haze of Ogun’s possession. Her vision darkened around the edges.

Strike!

She’d wavered for too long, and her indecision left her conflicted mind open for Ogun to overtake her. He’d attack where she wouldn’t and damn them all to traitor’s deaths.

She tried to resist but felt herself drifting, a numbness overwhelming her as her consciousness was shoved away from her physical body. Ogun pushed through and left her to see and feel with no control of her actions.

It played out in her head. She’d grab the front of Titanea’s chemise, wrenching the Fae queen forwards as she called forth an iron blade.

One jab through the woman's throat would finish her with a wound she couldn't hope to heal.

A quick, clean kill before a room of spectators and an assured death for Joan and every single person she loved.

Her fingers twitched when the cool rush of iron flowed down her arm towards her palm. She breathed deeply, exerting all of her will to force the Orisha back. Her hands tingled with the effort, her movements nearly her own again. She shifted forwards just as someone seized her wrist. She spun and met Cecil's fierce gaze. Terror surged through her, slamming full awareness back into her body with a cold clarity.

'His Majesty the king approaches,' he said to Titanea, eyes slipping from Joan's face to her open palm, and then to her other hand still clasped within Titanea's. His scowl deepened. Did he know what she'd been about to do under Ogun's control?

'Cross me again and I'll see you burn, girl.'

The memory of the threat he'd hissed earlier in the hall rushed back into her mind. Even Cecil's own family wasn't free from his wrath. She passed the heads of Cecil's own in-laws, tarred and perched atop London Bridge as gruesome trophies, each time she crossed the Thames. If he'd seen her attempt . . .

Titanea raised one blonde eyebrow. 'We shall prepare space for the king.'

She snapped her fingers, and a flurry of activity burst around them. Two servants brought up another throne, larger and more ornate than the queen's, and placed it beside her. Her ladies scrambled to their feet, Lady Foul-Breath stumbling up from her cushion on the floor. Their idle chatter flooded Joan's ears. Lady Goose Neck attempted to shoulder Joan out of the way. Joan planted her feet and let the woman ricochet off her.

Cecil's nails dug into Joan's skin. 'Shall I return this child to her players?' He spoke the words lightly even as he attempted to draw blood with his hold.

Damn that man. But she was herself again and Ogun's voice had gone quiet.

'Your Highness,' Joan blurted, squeezing Titanea's hand even as she felt Cecil's grip on her other wrist tighten. 'If I might have your ear for one moment more.'

Cecil jerked her backwards. Joan stumbled, her attention on Titanea the only thing that allowed the weaker man to move her even slightly. The Fae queen scowled and laced her fingers through Joan's, holding fast.

'Have we dismissed her, Salisbury?' she said, her voice sharp with command.

Cecil paled.

'Oh my,' a voice said from behind them, their tone gleefully scandalised. 'It seems Lord Salisbury has soured Her Highness's happy mood.'

'You'd suppose that after his last failure nearly killed my queen, he'd tread more cautiously before her,' another replied.

Joan twisted over her shoulder to see the tall, pale form of King James ascending the stairs to the raised dais. Clusters of flickering candles on polished gold candelabras cast shifting light and shadow across his imposing form, playing over his sculpted blonde hair and beard. A striking young man barely older than Joan herself stood just behind the king, his equally flaxen hair secured with an ebony ribbon at his nape and pulled over one shoulder.

His gaze shifted from Joan's face to where Cecil held her wrist before sliding over to where Titanea's fingers intertwined with her own. A sly

smile spread across the young man's face as he leaned towards the king. 'It seems this girl has caused some strife between our queen and Lord Salisbury. I'm surprised he has the temerity to so challenge Her Highness.'

'How impertinent,' the king grunted before dropping comfortably onto his throne. 'Erskine? Remind the Earl of Salisbury of his place.'

Cecil froze as a tall man approached from behind him, candlelight dancing over sharp features set in a pale but handsome face. His short fair hair was combed carefully to one side and brushed against his bushy blonde beard. He wore the crimson uniform of a yeoman guard, well-cut and bearing a host of medals and embellishments. A sword hung at his waist, shiny and well-made, but Joan could see the worn leather of the grip that spoke of its frequent use.

Erskine – for that must be his name – raised a bushy blonde eyebrow. 'I doubt the maid deserves such rough treatment.' A heavy Scottish accent coloured his deep voice, making the words sing. He placed one gloved hand casually on the hilt of his sword.

Cecil dropped Joan's wrist as if she'd burned him. She stumbled with the sudden release, and only Titanea tightening her grip kept her standing.

The young man slipped into place behind the king and leaned across the high back of the chair with an ease that spoke of comfort and frequency. A series of servants scurried around them, placing the brightly coloured standards bearing the royal Stuart crest all around the dais before disappearing discreetly.

King James's gaze swept over Joan. 'A blackamoor?' He raised an eyebrow. 'Is she so special?'

‘She is indeed, my lord,’ Titanea said, squeezing Joan’s fingers again. ‘After the loss of my dear Lady Clifford, I’ve found myself quite comforted by this girl’s presence.’ She sniffled, and one of her ladies dropped a delicate handkerchief into her other hand.

Joan fought the urge to snort as she watched the woman dab at dry eyes. The king smiled indulgently at Titanea, his expression gentle and affectionate.

‘Of course, my queen,’ he said. ‘What would you have done with the girl?’

The queen is dead, and a Fae imposter sits on her throne.

Titanea cast a grateful look at the king, then turned to Joan, her expression sharp with glee. ‘I want her as my lady-in-waiting.’

‘What?’ Joan blurted. Shock shoved any sense of propriety from Joan’s mind as she boldly locked eyes with Titanea.

The Fae queen jerked her close to whisper in her ear. ‘You wanted time, dear Joan, and time you shall have.’

Long live the queen.