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ALSO BY LAUREN ROBERTS

Powerless



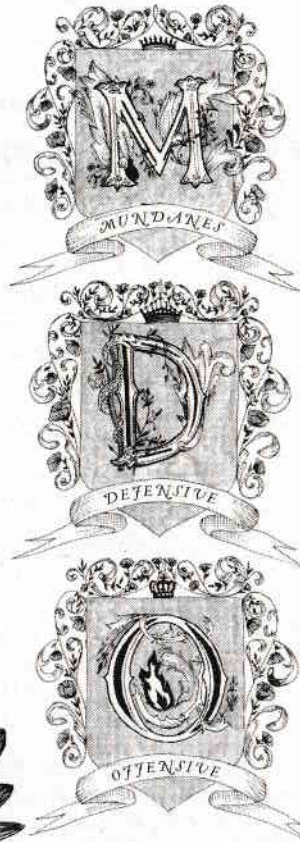
Powerful

LAUREN ROBERTS



SIMON & SCHUSTER

RECORDED ELITES



KNOWN RECORDED ELITES

Wielder - sense and use others' abilities within proximity - 1

ABILITIES > 100

MUNDANES

Amplifier - voice projection > 100
Bluff - lie detection > 200
Hyper - enhanced senses > 250
Scholar - intellectual > 100
Sight - video recording & projection via eyesight > 100

DEFENSIVE

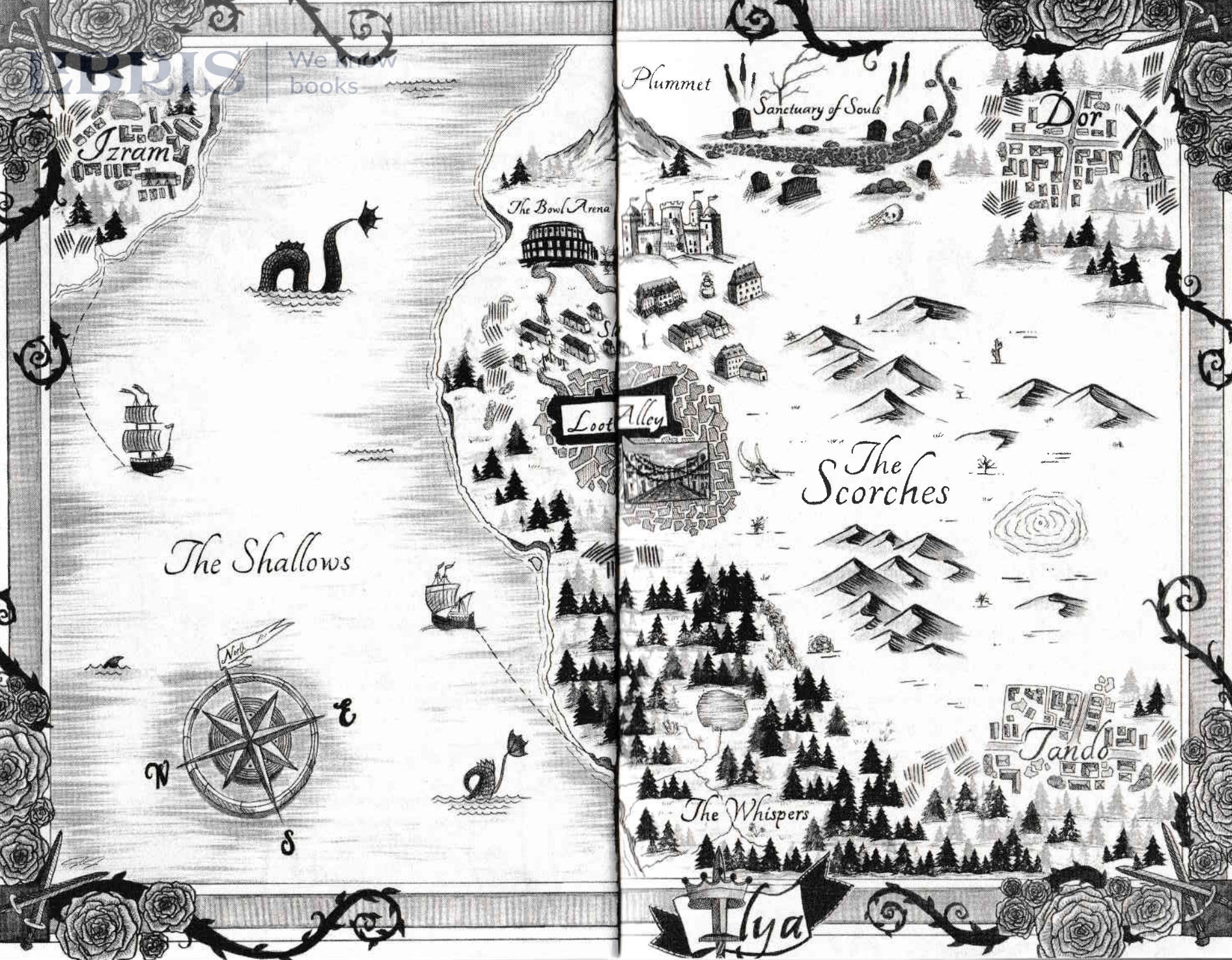
Blink - teleportation anywhere in sight > 100
Crawler - wall scaling > 225
Healer - quick healing > 100
Illusionist - illusion creation > 100
Shield - purple force field creation > 170
Shimmer - light manipulation > 125
Transfer - infuse objects with abilities > 100
Veil - invisibility > 130

OFFENSIVE

Blazer - flame manipulation > 200
Bloom - plant manipulation > 130
Brawny - physical strength > 250
Cloner - clone creation > 110
Dual - two-ability wielding > 100
Gust - air manipulation > 125
Hydro - water manipulation > 150
Ignite - explosion creation > 100
Shell - skin of stone > 125
Tele - object movement via mind > 100
Volt - electricity manipulation > 100

FATALS - 1 OF EACH IN
POSSESSION OF THE KING

Controller - manipulate others - 1
Mind Reader - 1
Silencer - smother abilities of others - 1



We know books

Plummet

Sanctuary of Souls

Dor

The Bowl Arena

Loot Alley

The Scorches

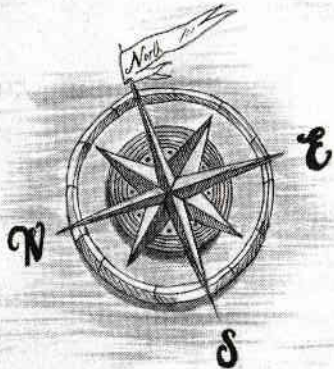
Tando

The Whispers

Ilya

Izram

The Shallows



LBRIS

We know
books



PROLOGUE

Adena

FIVE YEARS AGO

The biggest man I've ever seen is barreling behind me.

Then again, it is likely that I'm exaggerating. Mama always did tell me what a curse it is to be blessed with such an overactive imagination.

I would hate to proclaim that he's the largest man I've ever seen if he isn't truly worthy of the title. So, I dare a glance over my shoulder, dodging carts and jutting cobblestone beneath the boots swallowing my feet. Mama said I would grow into them. I'm still waiting for that day.

No, that is definitely a giant man. The white mask



he wears leaves the bottom half of his face exposed, displaying red cheeks and a twisted scowl between each panted breath.

A tangled strand of hair whips me in the face when I turn back towards the street sprawled before me. Several curls crawl into my mouth when a rare gust of wind decides to rush down Loot Alley on its way to somewhere far more important. I lift a hand to swipe at the unruly strands, only to be reminded of the very reason I'm running from an Imperial in the first place.

Honey oozes between my fingers, dripping lazily from the sticky bun squished in my palm. I might have gotten away with my first attempt at thievery if it weren't for the fact that I'd tripped into the very stand I'd tried to steal from.

Unfortunately, it only got worse from there.

I then profusely apologized for stealing before spinning on my heel and running off. This got the merchant's attention, then the Imperial's, and now everyone on the market street is bearing witness to the scene I'm causing.

It's not as though the Imperial – or the king he serves – cares about the overcooked dough I sloppily stole. No, it's the example that he is chasing. The

spectacle I will become at the bloody post in the center of Loot. Imperials like their whips, and I like my sticky buns. And, for some reason, the starving girl is in the wrong.

Men, women and wandering children jump out of my path, though most look unfazed by the sight of me hurtling past. Looting on Loot is hardly uncommon. Merchants curse as I weave between their carts, though I shout my apologies at anyone who cares to accept them.

This may be the most terrifying thing I've ever done.

I mean, attempting to sew a pleated skirt was certainly a daunting task. But the threat that pointy needles pose likely pale in comparison to what this Imperial has in store for me.

I glance down at the sticky bun that is, in fact, feeling like its name suggests.

What has gotten into me?

I shout an apology to the woman scurrying out of the way, likely swallowed up by the sound of her cursing my name.

Hunger. That's what has gotten into me.

But I don't particularly like being cursed at. In fact, if most of the people yelling in my direction actually

got to know me, I'm sure I would make a completely respectable impression under different circumstances.

Hair flinging over a shoulder, I peek at my giant pursuer. Face still red as ever, he charges persistently.

Well, he's definitely not a Flash, that's for certain.

When my head swivels back towards the street, it's glinting silver that catches my eye.

The girl stands in my path, staring curiously at the scene sprinting towards her. Silver hair spills from her head, pouring down her back. And if I make it out of this unscathed, I'm determined to find a fabric of the same shimmering shade.

I admire her hair until it is suddenly right in front of me. She hasn't moved, and I'm not planning on slowing down. So, without a second thought, I run right into her.

Well, technically, I run right *through* her.

Despite my many years of being able to pass through matter at will, the tingling sensation never fails to send a shiver down my spine. I have yet to get accustomed to the ability I possess – a result of the Plague that swept through Ilya and formed the generations after into Elites.

I don't dare look back until I hear a heavy thud hit the

cobblestones behind me. I barely catch the Imperial's face hitting the stones before the girl is bounding behind me.

'Don't stop!' she shouts, not bothering to fight the smile pulling at her lips. All I can manage is a breathless laugh in response as I focus on forcing my tired legs faster.

We run until she yanks me down a narrow alley, dodging the huddled homeless. 'This way,' she orders, continuing to tug on my arm. It's only after slinking down several shadowed alleyways that we allow ourselves to lean against a grimy brick wall, gulping down equally dusty air.

She looks over at me, and I look over at her.

Something like understanding seems to settle between us. As though loneliness has found its equal.

The girl raises her eyebrows at the sticky bun still gripped in my hand. 'First time stealing?'

'That obvious?' I smile sheepishly.

She shrugs. 'You would think a Phaser would be better at escaping.'

'See,' I say with a sigh, 'that's what I thought. And look at where it got me.' There is a stretch of silence before I blurt, 'Oh, and I'm not really sure what you did

back there, but thanks for your help.'

She flashes a smile. 'Nothing difficult. Just stuck my foot out. It's the Imperial's fault for running into it, really.'

We laugh. It's nice, this brief moment of companionship. The warmth coats my chest when I giggle for the first time in a long while. For the first time since Mama.

I raise the sticky bun between us. 'Wanna split?' She laughs again when I wave the dough beneath her nose.

'What, with your sweat all over it?'

'Oh, this is nothing,' I say, the words muffled by the bite I take. 'I've sweat more while trying to stitch up a corset.'

She looks absolutely distraught at that statement. 'Why would you ever need a corset?'

'Unfortunately,' I sigh wistfully, 'I wouldn't. But richer people do.'

She blinks at me, something brewing behind her blue eyes. 'You sell clothes?'

My eyes skim down the dirtied shirt hanging from her shoulder to land on the pants bunched at her boots. 'Yeah, and it looks like you could certainly use some.' I run a hand down her sleeve, feeling the coarse fabric

rubbing against her skin. 'No, this won't do at all.'

'Stealing food is kind of my priority at the moment,' she grumbles.

Excitement bubbles up my throat in the form of a hushed shout. 'You steal? Like, steal good?'

'Steal good?' she echoes skeptically.

'Well, whatever I just did was bad.' She is quick to nod in agreement. 'So, can you do what I did, but, like, good?'

'Anything is better than that,' she says with an amused smile. 'But yes, I steal *good*.'

'Perfect,' I say cheerily before sticking out the hand currently unoccupied with my stolen goods. 'I'm Adena.'

She takes my hand, seemingly shaking it just to humor me. 'I'm Paedyn.'

'Well, Paedyn—' I rip the sticky bun in half, offering a smushed side to her — 'I think we could make a great team.'

She pops a piece of dough into her mouth. 'So, you sew, and I steal? We share the money and the food?'

'Exactly.' I hesitate for a moment. 'I mean, unless you have somewhere better to go than the slums . . .'

'Not anymore,' she says a bit too quickly. 'So,

‘Partners.’ I smile before looking down the length of her. ‘And my first order of business is getting you into something far less horrendous.’

She huffs out a laugh. ‘Yeah, because that’s a priority.’

I take another bite of sticky bun, humming at the sweet honey melting on my tongue. ‘And your first order of business,’ I mumble between bites, ‘is getting me more of these.’



CHAPTER 1

Akoto

Her name is on a list of the dead.

I squint into the stinging sunlight, scrutinizing every name inked onto the banner. Hers sits among the eight others, likely overlooked beneath the prince’s crowning the top. But despite being on the list, our future Enforcer will easily evade the death awaiting the other contestants. Because these Trials were made for Elites like him. Not Elites like her.

My eyes skim over the list once again, recognizing no other names. I’ve never been one to keep up with which Elites manage to wrangle enough relevance to make it into the Trials.



A shoulder collides with mine, followed by several other limbs pushing against me. Loot is swimming with sticky bodies and echoing shouts of celebration, further adding to the list of reasons why I would rather be anywhere else but the slums of Ilya. It's a struggle to push my way through the crowded street, every inch of it crawling with ignorance incarnate. Every inch cheering for each contestant they chose to represent Loot.

I push through the crowd, ignoring their celebrations.

They have done nothing more than send Mundanes and Defensive Elites to their deaths.

And she is one of them.

But it should be me. Me who dies brutally. Dies alone. Dies at all.

Chants in honor of the sixth ever Purging Trials ring in my ears, each word a reminder of what I've done – nothing.

I've spent my whole life huddling in her shadow, hiding from life itself. And now she has been chosen simply because she did nothing of the sort. The people knew her, loved the street magic she performed as a Veil. And yet, they sentence her to death under the guise of honor.

She is a Defensive. Therefore, she is dead.

And I need to find her.

My hands are streaked with coal dust, leathers clinging to my sweaty body as though I'm still hammering steel over a scalding fire. I had worked through the night and was continuing still when the commotion managed to drag me from the shop.

I should have gone to see her last night. Should have been there when she found out.

And now I'm shoving through a sea of people, attempting to find her before it's too late. I scan the packed street, catching sight of a coach rumbling towards the end of it. It screeches to a halt, the horses nearly as impatient as the drivers, eager to escape the slums.

I sure as hell know how that feels.

I'm shoved forward when the congested crowd begins flocking towards the coach, clustering it as though they're offering free rides out of this shithole. Begrudgingly, I allow myself to be swept forward, managing to catch a glimpse of her climbing inside.

An Imperial ushers her up the step, and in typical Hera fashion, she shyly thanks him as though he's not escorting her to her doom. Her sleek black hair is the last thing I see before she's swallowed by the four walls, sitting in the belly of the coach.