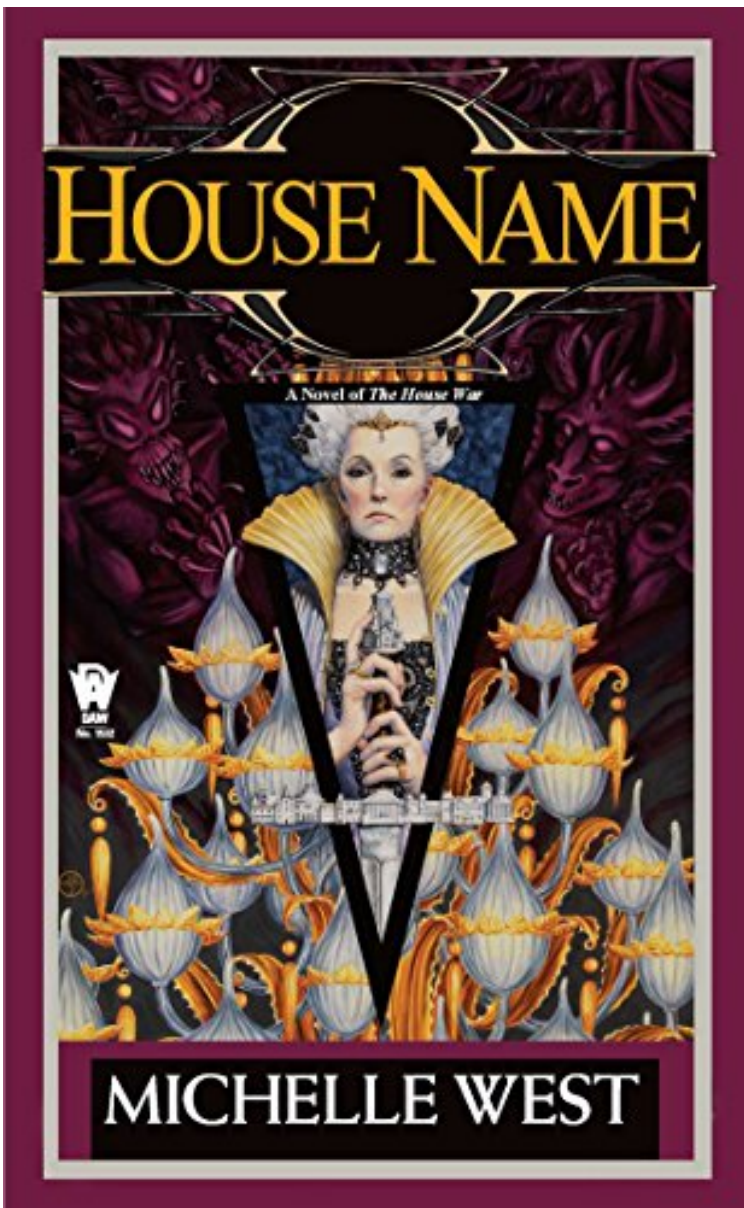


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House Name: The House War: Book Three



Par Michelle West

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurJewel Markess and her den of street children have been given shelter in House Terafin. The price for them to remain there is that Jewel must prove her value to the House.Jewel has been assigned the task of finding entryways to the ancient undercity that lies beneath the streest of the empire's capital. But even with the aid of the most powerful First Circle Mage of the Order of Knowledge, Jewel's search seems hopeless.All of the ways into the undercity seem to be magically disappearing before Jewel can lead the mage to them. And if they can't find a means to reach the undercity, they will not be able to prevent the demon kin from achieving whatever they are planning.Then the unthinkable happens -- a direct attack on

House Terafin -- and suddenly the stakes are raised to a whole new level....From the Paperback edition.Extrait22nd of Scaral, 410 A.A.Undercity, Averalan Sor Na Shannen was incandescent with rage; had light been required for the kin to see, she would have nonetheless been visible in the night of the ruins, so potent was her fury. Stray strands of ebony hair flew, limned in blue and red.Sor Na Shannen. It was Lord Isladar who spoke. Even Karathis was silent.She wheeled, her hands now shaped in fists, the perfect length of her nails also glittering with traces of dark light. She waited for his anger, his accusation, or the cool tones of his mockery; failure, if it did not destroy, had other consequences. She was not of a mind to accept them with grace.But he was Lord Isladar, the least predictable of the Kialli lords. We have been prepared for discovery for some time. It has come later, rather than earlier. He glanced at Lord Karathis, who nodded.Ariane has . . . disturbed the gate; she is now aware of what she faces. Whether or not she can intervene again remains to be seenbut it is my suspicion that she cannot. He knelt; the marble into which she had driven her sword was cracked, and the crack ran the length of the polished stone from one side of the coliseum to the other. We have failed in our attempt to take House Terafin, but it was never necessary; it would have been convenient, no more.It would have given us the opportunity, Karathis cut in, his voice rumbling and crackling, to destroy the god-born in the heart of their own domain. With their destruction, the Empire would have been in chaos just as the Lord emerged.Isladar nodded; that had, indeed, been the plan. It was not, however, the first time a plan would be frustrated; nor was it likely to be the last. Individually, mortals were beneath notice. This was an acknowledged truth. But in the aggregate? They were powerful and capable. This second truth, however, was less acknowledged, and when it was, in however reluctant a way, it was qualified: The god-born were mortal, but they bore the blood of the gods.We will not now have that opportunity, Isladar continued softly. But it was never required. He tendered the enraged demon a brief nod. We have what we require, if we are careful, and if your servitors can be kept in check.We will begin, Karathis and I, to close the ways.We will not now have Scarran, she said, grudging the slower burn of her rage.We will. The damage done by the Winter Queen will require the whole of the darkest night to repair. Can you do it? he asked. It was a challenge.But it was, as well, a gift, and it mollified her. Yes.Then stay; we must go in haste. Tell us only what you know of the entrances that Ararath once used to wander these streets; it is there we will go first.Does it matter? If they are found, we will merely add to the numbers of sacrifices required to dedicate the standing ground at the ceremonies close.Isladars silence was not gratifying. But, inasmuch as a Kialli lord could be, he had been gracious. She waited. It matters, he finally said. If, by unforeseen circumstance, one such mortal should escape, the Kings will know.They will know now, she snarled.Isladar chuckled. You have been decades in your dance among mortals of power, he pointed out. But you have not observed The Ten or their relationship with the Kings closely. I do not believe that it is so simple an affair as that. I believe that The Terafin will ask forwill indeed requireproof, before she approaches the Kings. Yes, if she chooses to do so without proof, they will hear her, and they will listen. But it might be politically costly for Terafin to do so.It is therefore urgent that we find, and seal off, all entrances that Ararath used before his death. Or, he added, all of the entrances gleaned from his thoughts before his death. They will be the most common, I think, and will also be the first searched.We must give them nothing.22nd of Scaral, 410 A.A.Healerie, House Terafin, Averalan AramarelasArann woke in the late afternoon.The slightly rounded ceiling of the healerie was the first thing he expected to see, and when he opened his eyes, it was there.Although hed never been in this room before, he knew it almost as well as he knew the dens apartment. He knew where the beds were laid out; he knew, as well, what the cupboards, recessed along the far wall, contained. He knew the womenand menwho had learned their craft from Alowan. He knew that Alowan, almost revered in Terafin, had steadfastly refused to take the House Name, and he even knew why: A House Name was a political statement, a statement of allegiance. Alowans allegiance was to life, in all its forms, and more, to the preservation of life. Healer-born, and scarred by his talentmore than mosthe had nonetheless chosen to serve. But service to The Terafin was not, in the end, service to the House. It was, in its entirety, service to the woman. Amarais Handernesse ATerafin.Alowan had healed her, just as he had healed Arann. And he had left her, just as he had left Arann, bereft and on the shoals of life, as if life were an unexpected burden.But she had borne it. She had accepted the gift, and in return, she had offered Alowan the healerie for as long as he was willing to stay within her walls. She had offered him the House Name, but she had never expected him to accept it. And he had not disappointed, in the end.Arann knew Alowans life.Alowan knew Aranns.Arann?He glanced down from the curve of a ceiling beyond which the sun shone cool in the coming Scaral evening. Finch was seated beside his bed, her face pale, her hair clean and bound above her face. She wasnt Jay; tendrils didnt escape to cover her eyes.She

wore a pale cream dress with a simple belt; he couldn't see her feet, but it didn't matter. He reached for her with his left hand, and she met him halfway with both of hers. He tried not to crush her fingers. She tried not to notice when he failed. Finch. She nodded. Jay told me to tell you she hesitated. There was trouble, in the House. Her voice dropped to a whisper. A mage came. There was magic. And Jay says . . . something tried to kill The Terafin. Something? She nodded. It looked like Rath. She glanced around the empty room. I'm not supposed to upset you. Or talk much, really. He nodded. Waited. Neither of them had ever been big talkers, and it was always awkward when two quiet people had no loud buffers between them. Were not sure what happened. Jays going to talk with The Terafin tonight. Drawing a breath, she added, The Terafins given us rooms here. Big rooms. And our own kitchen. And an old guy, Ellerson. I think hes one of the servants. She hesitated and then added, But his only job right now is us. Arann nodded again. Jay will come later if Alowan lets her in. He will. She hesitated and then asked, Should I stay? He nodded again and closed his eyes. After a few minutes, he said, I think this is a good place. The healerie? The House. Why? He shook his head. The Terafin. Why? What she wants isnt that different from what Jay wants. Jay wants to protect the rest of us. She wants to protect the things she loves. Right now, thats only us. Arann opened his eyes. But it wont always be only us. He glanced at the ceiling again, at the small cracks there. Jay thinks she failed, he said quietly. Because of Lefty. Finch didnt mention the others by name, but he felt the small accusation in her silence. What do you think? Coming from Finch, the question surprised him enough that he pushed himself up the headboard into a seated position. He didnt, however, let go of Finchs hand, so the shift in position dragged her half out of her chair. I think she failed, he said, after a long pause. She failed Lefty. Before Finch could find words and it was pretty clear she was searching for them he added, But it wasnt her fault. All of us failed him. Hes gone, he added. Hes Dead. She didnt ask him how he knew. She knew where he had almost gone. I was so angry, Finch. I was so angry. At myself. At Jay. At everything. He forced himself to release her hand, to lay his, white and trembling, against the coverlet across his lower body. But we dont fail if we dont try. Jay will always try. She wont always succeed. Arann Its better to try. Because she wont always fail, either. He looked at Finch, then. Finch, who, like Arann, was still alive. Yes, a new voice said, and Finch turned to see Alowan, standing in the arch that separated the arboretum from the beds. She will not always fail. Arann tensed. He couldn't help that. But he didnt try to stand; he didnt try to go to the old healer. Tell me about your Jay, Alowan said quietly. His voice carried; there was nothing to break it. Even breath was almost silent in this place. Finch glanced at Arann. Arann said, He knows what I know. Hes not asking me. Alowan grimaced slightly but nodded. Tell me, Finch, about the first time you met Jay. Finch hesitated. But Alowans age and the peaceful wisdom he radiated couldnt be reduced to simple threat; it couldnt be ignored as distant authority. Why? she asked, at last. She reminds me of someone, I think. And I would like to know what you see in her. Finch spread her hands. Shes Jay. She saved my life. And you stayed with her? I had nowhere else to go. She hesitated again and then added, But even if I had, I would have wanted to stay with her. Why? Because shes Jay. She knows things. She believes in things. I think she wants to change the world. I know I cant, not by myself but if I stay with her, I might be able to help. Does she know this? I dont know. Its never seemed important to her. Why we stay, I mean. I dont know if she really questions it. Alowan nodded, as if that answer satisfied him. She doesnt question it; she is young, and she is not yet what she will be. But it is there. It was dark, and the moons light filtered through the arboretum, silvering leaves and hanging plants, by the time Teller came to relieve Finch. Jays back, he whispered. He glanced at Arann, who was sleeping. He sleeps a lot, Finch told him, as she vacated her chair. But so does Alowan. Alowans old. She nodded. But . . . I like him. Teller smiled. He took Aranns hand from hers and settled in. Jayll come in the morning. Shes cleared the kitchen, he added, with just the hint of a smile. How did Ellerson take it? About as well as she expected. Finchs grimace was delicate. Did she speak with The Terafin? Teller nodded. The Terafin offered her two solarii a day. Finch couldnt whistle, and she seldom regretted the lack. She did make the attempt, now, and it fell into a quiet huff of breath, as it always did. For what? She was wary, but she wasnt entirely suspicious. Just a little. They would always have that little when dealing with the powerful. Work. Teller hesitated. Were not entirely certain what she wants, but she said he glanced at Finch. Maybe you should go back to the wing and let Jay explain. She wont say anything you dont. They both knew that Tellers memory was better. He was, as far as they had one, a keeper of records, a mini-historian. It was Teller who transcribed Jays dreams. Jay says The Terafin wants proof that the undercity exists. She The Terafinsent people out to explore Rath's place and the subbasement. They found nothing. Finch frowned. In the basement? He nodded. Nothing at all. But weve used that entrance About a hundred times. They couldnt find it. Maybe they Jay thinks it wasnt there. How could a hole that size just disappear? Teller shrugged. He

reached over and touched Aranns forehead with the back of his hand before nodding and returning to his chair. Probably magic, he told her, still gazing at Aranns sleeping face. We almost lost him. Finch touched his shoulder gently. We lost Duster. She had saved Finchs life. Finch said nothing, waiting. Jay wants to find the body if she can. Why? Bury it. Have a funeral. She says well never find the others. Did she say when? Teller shook his head. But shes serious about the work for The Terafin. Because The Terafin promised two things in exchange for the work. The money. And? We get to stay. Here, in the wing, while Jay works. And when shes done? If she can prove her value to the House and to The Terafin, we He swallowed. We get to stay. Stay? Shell offer Jay the House Name. Silence then. Of all the things theyd been foolish enough to hope for, to dream of, in the streets of the twenty-fifth, in an apartment that was smaller than their single rooms, becoming A Terafin wasnt one of them. Jay wont look for Duster, Finch said quietly. Teller nodded. Even in the gentle dark, his face was expressionless. Shes practical, he said softly. While theres any chance that she can do this, that she can prove shes useful, shell concentrate on that to the exclusion of almost everything else. What does she want us to do? She hasnt said. Angels biting through walls, he added, because Jays going to be searching on her own with the mage. He asked to go, and she said no. Did she take Carver? Shes taking no one. So . . . were supposed to sit around in our rooms and wait? Teller nodded. Weve done worse. I told Angel that. He wasnt impressed. Not much. Teller hesitated again and then added, Shes lost too much. She cant stop, and she cant think about it. This is better, for her. Finch agreed. But the presence of a magea known magemade her uneasy. Ill go back, she told him and turned toward the arch. Finch? She paused. Talk to the others. Talk to Ellerson. What should I she stopped. I will. Watch Arann. Hes really, really lonely, she added, searching for words and finding all of them inadequate. Its the healing, Teller replied softly. She wanted to ask him how he knew. But she didnt; he was Teller. Rath told me once. He paused and then added, Rath is dead. So much death. So much death to bring them to the edge of House Terafin, upon the Isle. She surprised herself when she spoke. Lets make it mean something. Looking back, she saw that she had his attention. The deaths, she said. Lets make them count. For what? For anything, Teller. Duster died so the rest of us could live. Lets make it count. You sound like Jay. There are worse things to sound like. They both smiled, and she turned then and left the room, pausing for a moment to dip her fingers into ripples of moon-dappled water in the arboretums fountain.

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