



# The White Mirror

*Elsa Hart*

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## The White Mirror Elsa Hart

In *The White Mirror*, the follow-up to Elsa Hart's critically acclaimed debut, *Jade Dragon Mountain*, Li Du, an imperial librarian and former exile in 18th century China, is now an independent traveler. He is journeying with a trade caravan bound for Lhasa when a detour brings them to a valley hidden between mountain passes. On the icy planks of a wooden bridge, a monk sits in contemplation. Closer inspection reveals that the monk is dead, apparently of a self-inflicted wound. His robes are rent, revealing a strange symbol painted on his chest.

When the rain turns to snow, the caravan is forced to seek hospitality from the local lord while they wait for the storm to pass. The dead monk, Li Du soon learns, was a reclusive painter. According to the family, his bizarre suicide is not surprising, given his obsession with the demon world. But Li Du is convinced that all is not as it seems. Why did the caravan leader detour to this particular valley? Why does the lord's heir sleep in the barn like a servant? And who is the mysterious woman traveling through the mountain wilds?

Trapped in the snow, surrounded by secrets and an unexplained grief that haunts the manor, Li Du cannot distract himself from memories he's tried to leave behind. As he discovers irrefutable evidence of the painter's murder and pieces together the dark circumstances of his death, Li Du must face the reason he will not go home and, ultimately, the reason why he must.

## The White Mirror Details

Date : Published September 6th 2016 by Minotaur Books (first published 2016)

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Author : Elsa Hart

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# From Reader Review The White Mirror for online ebook

## Fran says

Eighteenth Century Asia was wrought with political intrigue. In "The White Mirror", sequel to "Jade Mountain Dragon", imperial librarian Li Du travels with six muleteers and a trading caravan on the roads between China and Tibet.

Inclement weather abounds and mountain passes will soon be blanketed in impassable snow. Approaching a bridge, the muleteers view a monk seemingly engrossed in prayer, however, they are witnessing a corpse with hand held knife in the abdomen, prayer beads in hand and a white circle painted on his chest beneath his robes. Two strips of folded rawhide contain white and blue paint respectively and deep red cinnabar shards are present.

Li Du, reunited with Hamza, a fellow traveler and storyteller, proceed to a manor house where they will wait out the storm. The dead monk, Dhamo, is assumed to have committed suicide. Li Du, a master of deduction, believes that a murder has been committed. The loss of a monk should have been devastating but the reaction of the manor residents as well as those residing nearby is surprisingly minimal.

Li Du is determined to prove that Dhamo's death was no suicide. Why, for example, did Dhamo, a painter, go out in a blinding snowstorm to get red paint? Li Du enlists the help of Hamza to weave folktales and distract the travelers so he can conduct his investigation. He accesses Dhamo's temple and painting area in the mountains, the hot springs where dark cinnabar is procured, the spacious manor hearth and the manor's upstairs rooms for clues in his quest to solve the crime before the weather clears and the trading caravan departs.

Elsa Hart has done an amazing job continuing the adventures of Li Du, royal librarian/detective. Additionally, "The White Mirror" provides background about Dali Lama succession and political conflict between China and Tibet in the eighteenth century. An excellent mystery/historical fiction.

Thank you St. Martin's Press and Net Galley for the opportunity to read and review "The White Mirror".

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## Mark says

Second book I read by this author and I was really impressed. Set in 18th century Tibet with the main protagonist a scholarly exiled librarian from the Forbidden City, Hart's books are my ideal mixture of a layered plot that is not just puzzle-box clever but has some cultural and political resonance. Her books show detailed knowledge of the period and the culture - reminiscent of the more contemporary setting of Eliot Pattison's powerful books but a lighter, less ponderous and less somber read. Highly recommended!

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## Shayla McBride says

Hart is a marvelous writer with a lyrical turn of phrase and an eye for the odd, telling detail. The exiled librarian Li Du is a restrained character but is surrounded by a host of well-drawn secondary characters such as his story-telling friend Hamza and the mysterious but attractive Sera-tsering. Set in the China-Tibet borderlands at the start of winter, Li Du's caravan stops at a manor house and discovers the painted body of a Buddhist priest. The mystery of who killed him is almost obscured by all the side plots, but Hart deftly ties up everything.

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### **Skip says**

Former royal librarian Li Du has joined a trading caravan on the roads between China and Tibet. Waiting for a snowstorm to pass, they come across a bridge with a monk (Dharmo), who appears to be praying; instead, he is dead holding a knife in his abdomen, with a white circle painted on his chest -- an apparent suicide.

Li Du is determined to prove that Dharmo's death was no suicide, and investigates thoroughly in the style of Columbo: asking many questions, which make little sense along the way. Dharmo leads a solitary life, painting murals for distant monasteries. As in the first book, there is plenty of politics, religion, and skullduggery as Li Du solves the complex mystery. The book was slower than the first one, and Li Du's analytics less understandable.

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### **Shomeret says**

The copy I read came from the F2F mystery group that I attend. The facilitator of that group receives many more review copies from publishers than she has the time to review. So members get the opportunity to claim review copies for themselves.

Before starting this book, I knew relatively little about the pre-20th century history of Tibet or the history of the Dalai Lama. Let me say that there were some eye openers in *White Mirror*.

I did know about Tibetan lamas being tulkus. What is a tulku? Each lama is supposed to be a single reincarnated spirit that has been reborn for centuries and must be re-discovered as a child who will then become the next lama. The process of discovering a tulku is a significant plot element in *The White Mirror*.

I felt that *The White Mirror* had historical and cultural depth which makes it a solid candidate for one of my best reads of 2018.

For the blog version of this review and an opportunity to enter a giveaway for a copy of *The White Mirror* see <http://shomeretmasked.blogspot.com/20...> The giveaway will be over on June 23, 2018.

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### **Pat says**

*The White Mirror* is Book #2 in the Li Du series. Li Du was a librarian in the Emperor's court but was exiled due to rumors of his betrayal against the emperor. That mystery has never been solved but Li Du performed a

valuable service to the Emperor when his life was threatened (Book #1). Li Du has become a traveler, something he wanted to do to see more of the Chinese empire.

In this latest book, Li Du is traveling with a trade caravan delivering goods to Lhasa in Tibet when an early snowstorm strands the group in a valley. Luckily the caravan is able to stay at Lord Doso's manor house with other stranded travelers. But, to the horror of all, a monk is found dead on the bridge leading to the manor. It looks like suicide but Li Du is not convinced and due to the storm, he has time to investigate before the caravan moves on.

Very well written. Beautiful descriptions of the mountains in China near Tibet, even a reference to Everest. Author Elsa Hart has a great talent is describing ancient China which attracts me to this series since I know very little.

Recommend if looking for a historical fiction as well as mystery. Not a thriller series.

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### **?Laura says**

Loving this series and hoping there are more to come!

#### **Ratings (1 to 5)**

Writing: 4

Plot: 4

Characters: 4

Emotional impact: 4

Overall rating: 4

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### **Nori says**

Just as thoroughly enjoyable as Hart's first Li Du book, but this time in the Tibetan borderlands. More, please, Elsa!

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### **Jeanette says**

Elsa Hart, I am a fan.

This second novel of the series of Li Du was scrumptious. Exceptional in its placements within the mountains of Lhasa, its characters, its juxtaposition of different authorities, it lyrical and yet logical language.

This is a who-dun-it that comes fully framed in a photo/painting of "oh so much more" than the mystery of event or circumstance than normally surround protagonists in this genre. It's more cultural. It's the Tibetan ambiance of the 18th century, but it has prophetic eyes, as well.

Li Du is from the Chinese Emperor's Forbidden City. Schooled to be a magistrate from a family of high magistrates, he chooses instead to become a librarian under his mentor, Shu. But after reversals in fortune due to truth telling, he is exiled now for 14 years. We follow him on his caravan travels through many countries. The Emperor has pardoned him- will he return home?

The people he meets, the tales they tell, the events he observes comprise the books in this series. Think "Canterbury Tales" gone Dalai Lama discovery mixed with prophetic Machiavelli deductions and you have some sense of what these entwine.

You will need patience. In this one, they are trapped in a small valley waiting for a snowstorm to complete, melt (it is very early autumn) and for the pass to open again in order to reach the next province. Li Du is accompanied by a trade caravan for safety. We have continuing characters from the first book within this company. One is a Jesuit that's really a Franciscan/Capuchin. One is a tale teller by trade, hired for recreation in courts and ageless in his acting and voice abilities. Most of the company can speak 3 languages. One of which is either Chinese either/or the "travel" tongue for the steppes. But a number can communicate in Latin, as well.

My problem with the first book was only the numerous character introductions. This one simmers in all that knowledge. I have a feeling that they are only going to get better and better. Watch out Brunetti, Gamache, Flavia de Luce.

So many quotes I could add. Here is one coming only pages from the ending:

Hazma gave a self-satisfied smile. "I have said it before. I'm as old as the oldest in my stories, as young as the youngest, as benevolent as the kindest and as cruel as the most wicked."

They are not there yet (5 or 6 most returning characters), but some of these players have the potential to be glorious historical fiction as per a Hilary Mantel for the Cromwell era type. That type of depth. But not in the order of the prose form though- that would be quite different.

There are 3 empires and possibly 4 belief systems crossing intellectual and military swords/power/influence. China, Tibet and Lhasa, Mongol (Northern) and far Western science among the strongest. And on another level it is a "closed door" who-dun-it" because they are snowed in and physical conditions plus communications are dire and nil.

If you are a cozy reader, you will love Li Du's character. And if you like parables or stories akin to those of Aladdin, you will enjoy this.

This type of mystery writing, the mood/tone/prose poetry style- I have only found so far within a great extent anyway- in the Japanese placements. Elsa Hart has hit upon something unique in what she has combined here. And I love it. It pulls you into this era within the women's lives too. Nary a stupid housewife stereotype in these pages. And you better listen to that Grandmother at her praying wheel too. I'm hoping that Sera appears again in a further episode. Not as a widow taking over her husband's tax authority but as one who travels the "women's roads of secret" and the savvy practice of non-notice for journeying. She described that sublimely.

As much as I liked Elsa Hart's debut (Jade Dragon)- I had hopes it was only for a preliminary expansion for wider and better. And now I'm ecstatic that she's bloomed this into what it could be. Highly rec. for the historical fiction fans who love reading detail of life and logic in another time. With all the minutia that

makes it pop and at the same time as an understanding to the contrasting cognition and social order for vying geographic locations. If you like constant action, sexual content, dysfunction at the core- this may be boring to you. It's paced for immersion. And I truly got swallowed.

No spoilers except one. No converts for Campo. 4.5 stars. There's a bit too much tension delaying, and not finishing an explanation between compatriots. It could have been edited down in back redundancy. Hazma and Li Du conversations in privacy; those were all 5 star.

Pull this series up and partake of a bowl of butter tea.

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### **Shannon Upton says**

Li Du is my favorite new detective. Picture Hercule Poirot or Miss Marple stumbling across murders in eighteenth-century China, and you'll understand the basic concept of "The White Mirror."

In her second novel, Elsa Hart again writes an enjoyable mystery while unobtrusively creating and explaining a setting that is unfamiliar to most of us. I loved learning about this portion of history while being so well entertained! The writing is beautiful. Don't let the setting fool you—this is a lovely and relatively easy read.

The only reason I left off that last star is that Christianity is not as adequately represented in "The White Mirror" as it was in her first novel, "Jade Dragon Mountain." Christians were obviously not viewed well in China at this time and I would never want her to be historically inaccurate, but at least "Jade Dragon Mountain" presented Christians as scholars and generally friendly people. The only Christian in "The White Mirror" is a fanatic who spends the whole book acting slightly crazy and incessantly talking about all of the the other characters' damnations. Not exactly an effective missionary approach... nor a sympathetic character. I do recognize that there are all kinds of Christians and this didn't dampen my enjoyment of the novel (other than wondering glumly what non-Christians would think of this portrayal). I hope Ms. Hart chooses to include a portrayal of a more loving and Christlike missionary in her next novel—a book I'm already looking forward to reading.

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### **Amelia says**

Li Du's travels take him far up into the borderlands between Tibet and China where a remote mountain valley is caught in the cross-hairs of a murderer. I enjoyed this at least as much as the first Li Du novel. I don't read a lot of mysteries but part of the appeal of this series, for me, is that it takes me back to places I've traveled -- not exactly the same places, but close enough that I can get caught up in the memory of the scenery etc.

In this story I especially enjoyed Hamza's whimsical and usually off-topic stories as a counterpoint to the building murder investigation, and Li Du continues to be an interesting and sympathetic character, as are many (but not all) of his fellow travelers.

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## **Beverly says**

thoughts coming shortly

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## **Laura says**

I re-read "Jade Dragon Mountain" and then read this in preparation for the third book (City of Ink) in the Li Du mystery series.

Jade Dragon Mountain was fabulous -- a combination of a murder mystery set in 18th century China, with lots of details and character development that made it a delicious read. The White Mirror is the second in the series. I enjoyed it, just not quite as much as the first one. This may partly be because what felt new the first time around isn't new now -- Li Du is our thoughtful detective, with his entertaining and helpful friend Hamza assisting in the crime-solving. We do find out a bit more about Li Du's somewhat mysterious past, which was interesting, and it sets us up well for the third book, in which he returns to Beijing.

I think the other thing I found more difficult in The White Mirror was that I am less familiar with the area in this book (near Tibet) and I was sometimes confused about the locations and the characters. I felt I had to work somewhat harder to figure out what was going on, which isn't bad, but it made for a slightly less delicious read than Jade Dragon Mountain.

Nonetheless, the author writes beautifully, I'm totally invested in Li Du and Hamza (though will Hamza even appear in the third book?), and I look forward to reading the third book when it comes out.

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## **Antonia says**

*The White Mirror* (Elsa Hart's second Li Du mystery) is not exactly a thriller or page-turner — or at least, I find myself wanting to read it slowly — but rather a more subtle and sophisticated mystery than the typical. Subtle in the way that “clues” are revealed and in the subplot concerning Li Du’s past and his inner life. I also really like the historical setting — 18th-century China. Hart has done a lot of research on the culture, customs, politics, trade & trade routes, belief systems (and Li Du’s distrust of religion), etc. Elsa Hart is an excellent writer, too. Some lovely descriptions. . . . It makes me want to reread Hart's previous novel, *Jade Dragon Mountain*. I think, too, that I should seek out other novels set in ancient China. Let me know if you know a good one.

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## **Ingrid says**

Again a great story about the librarian in exile Li Du who has to solve a few murders. I just love the atmosphere. Very close to five stars.

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