

## The Rebel Nun

**Marj Charlier**

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The story of a community of women in crisis and the power they found through their will to save themselves, *The Rebel Nun* tells the fictional truth behind the historical rebellion of the Holy Cross nuns in 589 CE, as recounted in her latter days by one of the rebellion's leaders, Clotild.

In order to escape the limited options available to her as a royal bastard, Clotild joins the Holy Cross monastery and discovers a space in which women can live simply, but with some safety and self-governance. All this changes when Holy Cross's founder dies. Once hopeful about becoming Holy Cross's abbess, Clotild instead finds herself leading Holy Cross's rebellion, which first consists of forty starving nuns breaking cloister to walk twenty miles a day for three days in order to claim sanctuary and appeal their living conditions. Ignored for months, the nuns are forced to choose between a living martyrdom or a final stand that could result in their excommunication or deaths, but that might preserve Holy Cross's future as a viable community.

The novel's characterizations are somewhat shallow, foregoing explorations of the women's motivations in favor of action and the timeline's demands. Situated in the shadow of the Roman Empire's withdraw and decline, the novel illustrates how shifting power structures were ruthless in exploiting women. Its events coincide with Christianity's decision to purge women from churches. Backed into a corner, reimagined Clotild finds herself losing her religion and rediscovering a pagan reverence for nature and women that drives her to challenge all she's known.

Rich in facts and foreshadowing, the historical novel *The Rebel Nun* finds in the nuns' rebellion, and in Germanic tribal paganism, an inspirational morality tale and historical precedent for modern women to connect with their own powers, no matter the stakes.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (March / April 2021)

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