

Arrows of the Queen Study Guide

Arrows of the Queen by Mercedes Lackey

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Plot Summary

Arrows of the Queen, by Mercedes Lackey, is the story of a young woman named Talia who has been Chosen by a Companion to become a Herald of the Kingdom where she lives. In this Kingdom, Heralds are messengers and representatives of the Queen, and they ride about the Kingdom on assignments, riding horse like creatures named Companions. The Kingdom is ruled by a Queen named Selenay.

Talia is a young woman who was born and raised in a distant part of the kingdom on a Hold, a community whose culture suppresses women to menial roles in life. At thirteen, Talia is different from the other women in that she wants to read and write and be something more than a wife. When she is told she must marry, Talia runs away. She is found very soon by Rolan, a Companion who has been searching the Kingdom for a replacement for his lost rider, and this person will be the Queen's Own, confidant of the Queen and very important to the Kingdom.

Talia is chosen by Rolan, although she first refuses to believe she can become a Herald. Talia begins her journey to take this magical creature back to their rightful owners and it is only when the Queen tells her she is to become a Herald and her Companion is Rolan that she begins to believe it.

Even with the support of Rolan, the trust of her Queen, and the support of an elder Herald named Jadus, Talia struggles to accept her new life, and to believe she deserves to be in the exalted position she is in.

There are people in the Kingdom who do not want her to succeed, and this quickly becomes apparent when Talia is harassed and then almost killed by a group of fellow students who are not in the Herald clan. Rolan saves her life, accompanied by Keren.

The Queen and Council now realize Talia's life is in danger, and Talia begins to suspect that the Queen's daughter, Elspeth, is being influenced by her new maid, Hulda. Talia joins with her male friend Skif to investigate, and they find Hulda has been drugging the old maid, filling Elspeth's head with false notions that may prevent her from being Chosen by a Companion, and working together with an unknown member of the Council to cause trouble for the Queen.

Talia assists in unearthing this plot, and order is restored while Talia is left with the unenviable position of turning Elspeth from a brat into someone who can rightfully inherit the throne one day.

With Talia's patience and stern control, Elspeth becomes a loving child with potential again. Talia immerses herself in the culture, history and lore of the Heralds, but always has a sense she does not really belong there.

The story reaches its climax just as Talia is learning to use her Gift of Emotional Sensing. She reaches out and becomes mind locked with Ylsa, Keren's partner and a



Herald on a secret mission for the Queen. Ylsa is killed, but not before she is able to transmit an important message to Talia. With Talia's help, the Queen is able to discover what Ylsa has found, and use that information to rid the Kingdom of terrorists who would destroy her and all of the Heralds.

Now Talia feels as if she belongs, and she deserves all the love and kindness given to her by her new home and family. As the story ends, Talia has become a Herald, and agreed to be a sister to Skif.



Chapter One

Chapter One Summary

Arrows of the Queen, by Mercedes Lackey, is the story of a young woman named Talia who has been Chosen by a Companion to become a Herald of the Kingdom where she lives. As the story begins, Talia is sitting under a tree reading a fiction book about Heralds and Companions. Heralds are people of the kingdom who travel around the countryside dispensing justice, spreading the news of the Queen and gathering information that will assist the Queen in making decisions. Companions are horse-like creatures who have powers beyond ordinary animals and chose their riders themselves.

Talia lives in a Holding, a community of people, on the outer edge of the Kingdom. In her Holding, the men are stern and have several wives, fathering many children. The girls are taught to handle domestic duties around the community, but Talia has learned to read and write. Talia is not comfortable with her life, always feeling as if she is different from all the other girls. She reads whatever she can find and takes every opportunity to lose herself in a good book.

Talia has no friends at all in the Hold, even though it has always been her home. She is sometimes befriended by a couple of the wives of her father, but most of the older women are frustrated by how different Talia is from the other children. Talia is often beaten and is the subject of cruelty by some of the older boys. She is not happy with her life in the Hold and escapes often into the world of books and fantasy.

As she is reading, she is called by the Firstwife, Keldar, to come meet with the other wives. Talia wrenches herself from the outside world of magic and Heralds and Companions to see what the women want. She is sure it cannot be good because the only time she receives any attention from the community is when she has drawn their wrath. As Keldar walks behind the young woman, the Firstwife is scowling and angry, wondering why this child cannot be like all the others.

When Talia reaches the room where the wives are gathered, the first thing she is told is that it is her thirteenth birthday. She is just beginning to think about that when the wives announce to her it is time she was married. They have a number of men to choose for her, but Talia is shocked and angry. She does not want to be married. She announces to the women that she wants to be a Herald, and they are shocked into silence.

Keldar turns to one of the wives who has always been kind to Talia and begins screaming at that woman, blaming her for the stubbornness and bad behavior of Talia. While all the women are looking at the Firstwife, Talia escapes from the room and runs away from the Holding.

Talia finds a hiding place she sometimes goes to read privately and without interruption and cries, wondering what she will do now. She allows herself to indulge in a fantasy of



being rescued by a Herald and Companion, solving all of her problems and taking her away from this wretched life she is leading. She hears the sounds of a horse's bells, and thinking she will finally get to meet a Companion and Herald, leans out of her hiding place. Unfortunately, she leans too far, and begins tumbling down the side of the hill. She lands at the foot of a beautiful white horse, whose eyes are gazing at her.

Talia looks into the sapphire eyes of the riderless horse and for a time is lost in the horse's thoughts. She is told she has been Chosen, but then is made to forget this information. She realizes the horse must have run away from someone, and being unfamiliar with the ways of Companions and their Choosing, she decides she will take the horse back to its owner, and perhaps that owner will give Talia a job. This way, Talia will never have to return to the community.

The horse uses its nose and whickering to indicate to her she should climb on his back, and Talia surprises herself by doing so. She is amazed to realize the horse knows where it is going, and all she needs to do is hold on tight and leave the community behind them.

Chapter One Analysis

In this chapter, the reader learns of the life of a Holding, centered on the domestic duties of running a farm, such as the intricacies of the women's position as they share the few men of the community, the politics of the farm, the duties of the family members. It is a closed and somewhat backwards group, with women who did not step outside their specific roles, and peer pressure was strong. Talia has always been known as an outsider and a stubborn and difficult child, one that will not conform easily. The reader also learns, through the books Talia reads, about the legend of Heralds and Companions.

Talia's break away from the Holding creates a measure of suspense for the reader, as the young woman rides away from her prison-like surroundings on a beautiful white horse.



Chapter Two

Chapter Two Summary

Talia and her Companion horse are travelling on a road that goes alongside the River, and Talia thinks about how she has never been very far from her father's holding. The land is rich and green, and hypnotic to Talia. The experience of riding a Companion through strange lands is a dream to Talia. The horse seems to know the route, and when he veers from the road down a path, Talia is frightened, but reassured when they arrive at a Waystation. Talia has been reading stories about the Heralds and Companions since she learned how to read, so she knows that riders use these Waystations to sleep and refresh themselves on a long journey.

Talia removes the horse's saddle and tack and cleans them thoroughly. She brushes the horse and he rolls in the sweet green grass. The two walk down to the River where Talia removes her clothes and enjoys a much-needed bath. She scrubs her meager clothes clean, using a weed called soaproot that grows along the bank.

As she relaxes in the water, Talia thinks about her future. She cannot go back to the Hold, because now the wives would marry her off to the worst man possible to punish her for running away. If she went back to the Hold, she would never again be free to ride, or read or even write. She trusts this horse to take her to its owners and perhaps they will be grateful enough for the return of their animal that she will be offered some position in their holding.

As she dresses and returns to the Waystation, Talia realizes the horse needs to eat. In teasing the horse, she calls him Rolan, and wonders where she heard that name. She feeds him from the stores provided at the Waystation, and finds provisions for herself as well. After their meal, Talia and Rolan relax by the fire, and when she becomes sleepy, she retires to the small shed for a sound sleep.

The next morning Talia and Rolan continue their journey, although Talia has no idea where they are going, trusting that the horse knows his way. Since Talia has no experience with travel or even tales of how the world is outside of her own Holding, each turn in the road offers a new and wonderful sight. They reach a village, and she meets a man dressed in blue, standing by a small hut. She is informed that she needs to take the Companion, Rolan, back to the Collegium by herself. She is shocked to learn that the trip may take eight or nine days. The stranger gives her clothes, food, and equipment, telling her it is provided by the Queen.

As she travels upon Rolan's back, Talia wonders what is happening in her old home. She compares the way the villagers in the towns react to her, friendly and welcoming, to how her family would behave if they saw a young woman in grubby clothes riding this magnificent animal. She is sure they would pull her off Rolan's back and put her in jail after beating her.



For six days they travel, eating the provisions supplied by the first town, sleeping at Waystations and enjoying each other's company. Talia is very comfortable with Rolan, but is still confused about how this union came about. She is hoping there will be more answers when she arrives at the next town.

Chapter Two Analysis

The true character of Talia is shown in this chapter, as she refuses to believe she has been Chosen, and is still quivering with fear at being caught riding this magnificent animal. This young woman must learn to be stronger, to believe in herself, and to step into the role chosen for her by the beautiful Companion, before she can ever call herself a Herald.

In this chapter, the dreams and fantasies of Talia's youth have difficulty being accepted as reality. Talia chooses instead to busy her mind with thoughts of possible jobs for her once she returns the horse to its owner. She is with a creature who could give her all the answers to her questions, but she looks to humans instead, refusing to accept the magic she has always believed existed.



Chapter Three

Chapter Three Summary

At the next town, Talia is astonished to find a female guard at the guard shelter. In Talia's Holding, women were forbidden to do anything other than domestic duties. She is further surprised to hear the female guard address the Companion as Rolan, the same name Talia felt to call him. The female guard discovers that Talia has been on the road for almost a week, and sends her to get a bath and some fresh clothes while the guard tends to Rolan and re-provisions the team for their journey.

The guard sends them back on the road, and Talia realizes she was still confused about what is happening to her. Obviously the guards in the villages were not as surprised to see her as she was to find herself in this position. There are customs and routines to be followed, rules that she knows nothing about but are at least making her journey easier.

Talia and Rolan continue their travels, meeting another female guard at the next town, this time a woman who was injured in battle. A woman serving in the military for the Kingdom shocks Talia and she is still pondering that when she comes upon a Herald. Talia is sure she will be in trouble now for riding a Companion, but the Herald tells she is doing the right thing. She is intimidated by the Herald because of his uniform and bearing, but mainly because the Herald is male. She begins to plead with him for an explanation, but he sends her and Rolan on their way, saying that everything will be explained when she reaches the Collegium.

Talia ponders this life outside of the Hold, where women can be soldiers and guards. She is amazed to learn that she has missed so much in her time in the Hold and wonders why none of the children were ever taught about the world outside.

When she and Rolan arrive at the city, shortly thereafter, Talia is overwhelmed by its size, the bustle of the people, and the noise within its walls. She clings to Rolan, trusting him to take them through this maze of people and shops. Rolan stops at a gate, and the gatekeeper is delighted to see the Companion, telling Rolan how much he has been missed. When Talia dismounts and Rolan is led away, she wonders if she will ever see that beautiful animal again.

Talia is led through the castle and admires the grandness of the building, the furniture and the fixtures. She has never seen anything like this place. The gatekeeper leaves her in a room and tells her to wait. He says she is among friends now, and not to worry, but Talia is extremely intimidated by her surroundings. She is still convinced there has been a huge mistake.

A young girl enters the room and her rude behavior startles Talia, but she soon responds like any young woman to with a stubborn spoiled child. The child claims to be the heir to the throne, demanding respect from Talia, but Talia only laughs and says



maybe the child is a fish instead. As the little girl storms from the room, a woman enters, chuckling at the way Talia handled the little brat.

The older woman observes Talia closely, and Talia feels very comfortable in her presence. The woman asks Talia to tell her how she got here on Rolan, and Talia tells her everything, from the Holding wanting to marry her away, the ride to this place, and her frustration of not knowing what is happening.

Talia knows the woman is a Herald, because she is dressed in the brilliant white uniform, but is unaware she is talking to the Queen of the Kingdom. Before the Queen reveals her position, she allows Talia to cry in frustration, then explains that Rolan represents the Companion for the Queen's Own, a very special Herald position. The person who held the position before has died under mysterious circumstances, and happily, Rolan has Chosen someone to replace the previous Queen's Own. It takes Talia a few moments to realize she is the one who will become the new Queen's Own. Talia will enter training to become a Herald, her gifts will be discovered, and Rolan will belong to her. Another job waiting for Talia, when she is ready, is the taming of the spoiled and stubborn child she had met previously. The little girl is the Heir to the Throne, but needs her personality reworked in order to deserve the title. When the Queen asks Talia if she will accept these duties, Talia emphatically says yes.

Chapter Three Analysis

This chapter is mostly exposition of new characters and the setting in which the rest of the story will evolve. Talia meets the woman who will come to depend on her greatly, the Queen of the Kingdom. She meets Elspeth, a spoiled little girl who will challenge Talia's patience and resolve. Talia is made to realize that indeed, Rolan has Chosen her, she is going to be enrolled in Herald school, and she will be allowed to develop her gifts.



Chapter Four

Chapter Four Summary

The Queen calls the Dean of the Collegium, Elcarth, a birdlike man who immediately comes to show Talia around. Elcarth has been the Dean for many years and is excellent at reading people. He notices Talia's shyness, and after speaking with her for several minutes, he is appalled at the lack of knowledge she has about the ways of the Kingdom, especially where it concerns Heralds and Companions. Elcarth blames the remoteness of the Holdings.

Talia listens and learns about the various training taking place at the Collegium. There are classes for Heralds in training, like herself, and for Healers and Bards. The Heralds all have permanent dwellings here at the Collegium, when they are not out on assignments across the Kingdom.

Elcarth shows her the dormitory section, the Healers', Bardic and Herald areas. There are classrooms and common areas and a large dining hall. Elcarth explains how each student is assigned various chores, depending on their areas of expertise. When Elcarth mentions an extensive library available for the students and Heralds, Talia's eyes light up.

As they are walking a student rushes up, followed by the Provost-Marshal. Elcarth's attention is required. The Provost-Marshal describes an elaborate prank that has been engineered by one of the student Heralds who is infamous for his pranks, a young man named Skif. This one involves quite a few students, so the Dean must leave Talia's tour to someone else. Several young female students are approaching, and the Dean calls one of them to assist. The young woman's name is Sherrill. Sherrill is a little older than Talia and also was brought from a remote area to the Palace. Sherrill takes Talia to get uniforms, a room, assignments for duties, and tells Talia all she needs to know for her first night in the Palace.

Sherrill becomes Talia's mentor, but the older girl is careful to leave some areas for Talia to discover on her own. The dynamics of court, the interaction with the Blues, and the basic rules for the students are discussed in the first few hours together.

Over dinner, Talia learns that the man who was the Queen's Own, Talamir, sat with the Queen during meals. She also learns that most of the Heralds believe Talamir was poisoned. Talia realizes suddenly that her own life might be in danger. Sherrill tries to reassure her young friend, but it is only Talia's determination to learn everything new that keeps her mind off this frightening edge to her new life.

After dinner, Talia goes to the Library to immerse herself in her favorite occupation of reading. She is amazed at the number and quality of the books she finds there. In the meantime, Sherrill meets up with Dean Elcarth to share her experience with Talia. Dean



Elcarth says Talia's weapons knowledge is badly lacking and says she will be receiving weapons training immediately. Sherrill agrees that this is important because of what happened to Talamir. Sherrill and Dean Elcarth both are concerned about Talia's obvious fear of men and attribute it to the backwards ways of the Holdings.

In the Library, Talia meets a handsome Herald man named Kris, who is very friendly and shows her how to locate specific books in the library. She reads until she gets sleepy, then goes to take her bath. In the bathing area, she has a conversation with some other female students, who remind her that life in the Collegium is vastly different from the Holdings and that women can be whatever they want here. Talia falls asleep that night hoping she will be able to fit in.

Talia is beginning her new life as a Herald in training, knowing she is to be trained as the Queen's Own. But the day had been so full of new experiences, meeting new people and adjusting to new surroundings, that she has no time to even realize her life is in danger.

Chapter Four Analysis

In this chapter, many important characters are folded into the story, including Sherrill, who will become one of Talia's closest friends and mentors, Dean Elcarth, the official in charge of the entire Collegium, and many of the minor characters who play roles of teaching and companionship to Talia. The young woman is overwhelmed by names, sights, smells and even the large variety of food available to her. It is clear she has much to learn about the Kingdom as well as her new role as a Herald.

With all these wonderful revelations, Talia still feels inadequate to the task. Any teenage girl reading this chapter will surely feel a kinship with Talia as she faces the coming days with trepidation and self doubt.



Chapter Five

Chapter Five Summary

The next morning, Sherrill takes Talia to the dining room, where Talia is impressed by the types of food available. Afterwards, Sherrill and Talia go to Companion's Field, where Talia is reunited with Rolan and learns that part of her daily routine is to take care of him. Then the girls go to meet with the Weaponmaster, Alberich. Talia is afraid of angering the silent dark man, who is a Herald even though he is not wearing the traditional Whites.

Alberich is concerned that Talia has so little training, and schedules her for classes with him every day. Talia leaves the lesson feeling that she cannot do anything right except sew and cook. Her next class is an orientation class for new Herald trainees, and the instructor is an enthusiastic and friendly man named Teren. In this class, Talia learns the purpose of the Heralds in the Kingdom. She learns the Companions can run faster and longer than any other horses and that the Heralds are called the Arrows of the Queen. Talia learns that although the Heralds are much respected and honored, they are also in constant danger. There are Dark Servants who are a threat to the Heralds, and most of the Heralds do not live to old age.

Finally, Talia learns that the Companions choose their riders, and it was no coincidence that Rolan appeared to take her away from the Holding. Some Heralds have a mind link with their Companions that works both ways. She learns about the beginning of the Companions and about the Death Bell, a bell that sounds automatically whenever a Herald is killed. Talia learns more specific duties of the Queen's Own, or the Monarch's Own, which is the type of Herald she will be when she attains the status.

After class, Talia goes to her duty for the day, which is assisting the cook. She listens to the chatter of the kitchen and realizes there are many beliefs, many cultures and much to learn about the Kingdom.

After lunch she is back at weapons training, and has a conversation with one of the other students regarding the Blues, students who are unaffiliated with any guild but are attending classes. Most of the Blues are children of adults who are involved in the court and are not well thought of by the regular students. It is this day that Talia meets Skif, a friendly and outgoing young man who was a thief and a beggar before he was Chosen.

After weapons training, Talia eagerly goes to be with Rolan and rides him in the Companion Field. As she and Rolan jump obstacles and enjoy the ride, a woman named Keren is watching and compliments her on her riding ability. Keren is the riding instructor and believes Talia will be an excellent rider.

As the day ends, Talia realizes she is completely at ease with her Companion, and none of the worries of the day or her own inadequacies bother her when they are together.



Chapter Five Analysis

This chapter lays the groundwork for coming chapters regarding Talia's new routines and the expectations others have of her in the training. It shows how naïve and inexperienced the young woman is, and how acutely she feels her deficiencies. The bond with Rolan is growing. The controversy regarding the Blues and their standing with the Collegium is discussed, and there is a hint of danger for the reader regarding these outsiders.



Chapter Six

Chapter Six Summary

Over the next few days, Talia follows a schedule of classes and completes her orientation training. After Teren dismisses the others, he asks her to stay behind and reads her a note received from her Holding, sent in response to the Queen's message to Talia's family that she has been Chosen and is entering Herald training. The note is signed by her father and claims they have no daughter named Talia. Teren expects Talia to show more emotion, but Talia is accustomed to keeping her feelings to herself and leaves to go to her next class.

Trying to be strong in the face of this rejection from her family, Talia goes next to her History class, Geography, and then Mathematics. It is only when she is at her sewing duty she allows herself to shed silent tears.

After archery practice, Talia spends time with Rolan, who makes her feel stronger. When she is walking alone from the field, she encounters some unaffiliated students who push her around and are verbally abusive. Talia decides not to tell anyone about this incident, thinking that she will be in trouble for complaining too much. She reverts to her behavior at the Hold, where the older boys were cruel and there was no sympathy from the elders.

The instances of cruelty and bullying increase with dirty practical jokes at her expense, tripping, shoving and intimidation. Talia bears it all without telling anyone, ashamed to think that the remarks made by these children of the royal families was striking truth. Talia's instructors notice her clumsiness and ill ease, but are at a loss to explain what is happening to this shy but talented girl.

The time of Midwinter festival arrives, and most of the students go home to their families. Talia stays at the Collegium because she has nowhere else to go. For two weeks she has most of the grounds to herself and is looking forward to spending long days reading, free from the torturous activities of her enemies.

One day she is walking along a hall when she hears a beautiful melody being produced on a harp. She stops tentatively at the door of the room and the person inside the room asks her to come in. Here Talia meets Jadus, an older Herald who is also alone. Jadus teaches her music and singing, and the two become dear friends. One evening a servant comes to the door and asks if the two will entertain the servants as they celebrate their Festival dinner. Jadus and Talia have a wonderful, memorable evening singing and sharing the meal with the servants of the palace.



Chapter Six Analysis

Talia's remoteness and separation from others is heightened in this chapter, with her family's rejection of her and the beginning of the harassment from the Blues. Beset with her own feelings of inadequacy, attacks from others, and rejection of her family, Talia prepares to spend a two week holiday at the Collegium, alone with her books and Rolan.

The saving grace from all of this despondency is Talia's friendship with Judus. This elder man is also alone, but with a full life behind him. His music, comfortable, easy ways and genuine compassion for Talia save her from deep depression.



Chapter Seven

Chapter Seven Summary

When the students all return to school after the Midwinter Festival, the notes and harassment from the Blues begins again. It is impossible for Talia to hide her distress from her new friend, Jadus, and so she tells him everything that has happened.

Jadus keeps his promise not to tell anyone of her discomfort and instructs her to never be alone. What he and the other elders do not know is that this is not just an attempt to cause problems for a new arrival, but an extension of the plot to rid the Queen of counsel, just as the Queen's enemies had done when they poisoned Talamir.

One cold winter day Talia lets down her guard and chooses to take a route from the stables that provides her protection from the wind, and is alone. The Blues are waiting in ambush. They attack her and throw her into the icy River. Even though Talia fights as she has been taught by the Weaponmaster, there are too many of her enemies and they are determined to cause her death.

Talia is growing weak and her heavy clothes are dragging her under the water. Suddenly there is a great splash as Rolan plunges into the River and pulls her to him. As they get closer to the shore, her friends are there to pull her to land and they rush her back to the Collegium.

As they are immersing her in hot tub water and then drying her and covering her with blankets, Talia learns how rescue came so quickly.

Although Rolan and Talia have a new bond, theirs appears to be much stronger than anyone expected. Rolan heard her cry, alerted the rest of the Heralds, and came to her rescue. As soon as her friends have her warm and in bed, another Herald who has some Healing experience comes into the room and places her hand on Talia's forehead to determine the damage done. In this exchange with Herald Ylsa, Talia learns that Keren and Ylsa have been longtime lovers. Ylsa is shocked to see how strong Talia's Gift is, and breaks the connection as soon as possible. Another Healer takes over, and tells Talia she has pneumonia and will be in bed for some time. The Royal family and the Heralds decide that while Talia is ill, someone will be with her at all times, armed and ready to protect her. Now they realize they had underestimated the danger to Talia, the Queen's Own.

Guarding Talia becomes a full time responsibility for Jadus and Keren. Talia is honored to realize what she means to these two people.

One day, as she is healing, the Death Bell rings for a Herald named Beltren. Keren is with Talia when it happens.



Chapter Seven Analysis

The plot reaches a crisis when Talia's enemies go from harmless harassing to attempted murder. It is symbolic that Talia is tossed into an icy river, as this abrupt and bitterly cold act represents the end of any complacency Talia or the Council might have had about the danger the incoming Queen's Own is facing.

Rolan is directly responsible for saving Talia, and this accentuates the bond the two share. This incident also highlights how well the Companions speak to their Heralds; this is a plot development that will be utilized later in the book as well.



Chapter Eight

Chapter Eight Summary

As the Bell starts ringing, Skif arrives and volunteers to take over protecting Talia so Keren can be with the other Heralds to mourn Beltren. Talia asks Skif to explain the Death Bell to her, and he tells her the story. At one time there was a temple in Companion's Field with a bell-tower and a bell. However, the clapper and the rope to activate it had not been hung when King Valdemar died. It began ringing when he died, and continues to ring each time a Herald dies. The other Heralds feel it as well, when they have been in training for about three years.

Talia implores her Healer to allow her to attend Beltren's memorial service a few days later, because Talia feels urgently she needs to be there. As the service is being conducted, Talia is overwhelmed by the sadness and pain from one person: the Queen. Talia pulls the Queen aside and finds Selenay is torturing herself with blame for Beltren's death. Talia uses the skill she was born with, along with Rolan's encouragement, to make the Queen rest easier and forgive herself.

During this conversation, Talia and the Queen realize Talia is beginning to serve the role she was Chosen to do, in consulting the Queen. The Dean comes to visit Talia and teaches her how to shield her thoughts and protect herself.

Soon Talia is able to return to her studies, but many things in her life have profoundly changed. Her connection and bond with Rolan is constant, and she is surrounded by his love and compassion for her. She can see things through his eyes. Her ability to sense the Queen's emotions have heightened, as well as Talia's ability to be compassionate and helpful to others in need.

Talia realizes she must turn her thoughts now to her other task of changing the behavior of the Queen's daughter, Elspeth. Each time Talia attempts to spend time with the little girl, Elspeth's nurse Hulda interferes. Talia is beginning to suspect something is wrong and enlists the aid of Skif to investigate. Elspeth is difficult around others, always claiming she should be worshipped by them and is afraid of the beautiful Companions.

Talia's friends have noticed the attention Skif is paying to Talia and tease her about it.

A few days later, Skif finds Talia and they eavesdrop on a conversation between Hulda and Elspeth's old maid Melidy. It is obvious to Skif and Talia that Melidy is not herself, and they suspect she is being drugged by Hulda. During this eavesdropping, Skif manages to make the opportunity to kiss Talia.

Skif and Talia go to Jadus about Melidy and Hulda, inquiring about Hulda's history. She investigates any medicine that Melidy might be taking that would cause her to be so listless and finds that the local Healer has prescribed nothing. The mystery is deepening, and the child Elspeth's life might be at stake.



Chapter Eight Analysis

As Talia begins to take over her duties as Queen's Own, she realizes her Gifts are enhanced by Rolan, who is far more experienced and wiser than she. Talia is learning to trust her instincts in investigating Hulda, choosing her friends, and taking action.

The reader learns that the Queen is not safe, that there are dark forces at work within the Kingdom, and that Heralds do not live long lives. The full explanation of these dangers apparently will be outlined in succeeding books in this series.

The legends and lore of the Heralds, with the Death Bell, the Gifts and the connections between all Heralds, are detailed in this chapter, giving the reader further insight into the workings of magic in this Kingdom.



Chapter Nine

Chapter Nine Summary

Talia decides to take her investigation of Hulda further and discovers Hulda has immigrated to the Kingdom from another land. She convinces Skif to steal the immigration records from the Collegium so she can find out who sponsored Hulda into the Kingdom.

Talia realizes that Skif is in trouble and heads straight to the Palace to find him. Sure enough, he is being questioned by the Queen and Orthallen, and Talia hastily makes up a story about asking Skif to find the records of her Hold so she can get some revenge on them for refusing to claim her. The Queen and Dean Elcarth believe her and Skif is forgiven. Orthallen is very disappointed to hear that Skif is not going to be punished, and Talia can see that Orthallen does not like Skif.

Talia is frustrated about this turn of events, but a few nights later Skif appears at her door dressed all in black. He has brought dark clothes for her as well, and the two of them scale the castle walls in order to eavesdrop on a meeting between Hulda and an unknown Palace resident.

All of her fears are realized as Talia listens to the Lord pay Hulda for her services. Hulda is told to continue scaring Elspeth about the Companions, encouraging her to misbehave and making her unfit to be Chosen. The Lord also gives Hulda more medicine for Melidy.

Talia takes Skif with her and goes directly to Jadus with this news. Jadus carefully listens, then sends the two youngsters back to their rooms for sleep. Jadus calls his servants to contact two other Heralds and begins handling this matter of Hulda.

Talia is happy to leave this situation to the adults and relaxes by walking in the gardens. She hears someone crying and knows deep inside she must investigate. She finds Elspeth, sobbing about losing Hulda, who has been sent away. As Talia and Elspeth speak, Talia learns about the poisonous lies Hulda has been planting in the little girl's head and realizes this is why the child's behavior has been so awful. Elspeth cries and Talia holds her close, comforting her. Talia promises to be Elspeth's friend. She knows she has a lot of work to do before this child will ever be qualified to become a Queen.

Talia changes her routine completely so she can spend more time with Elspeth, having breakfast with her every day, visiting several times a day, then going on a long walk in the gardens every night before Elspeth goes to bed.

At first, every day is a trial as Talia sets out to counter the misconceptions and lies that have been fed to Elspeth by Hulda. Elspeth was encouraged to treat everyone like lesser beings, make unreasonable demands and throw fits. Talia tries to ignore these tantrums but soon finds that tactic does not do the trick. Talia spansks Elspeth and



removes her privileges, and slowly but surely the child begins to turn away from the selfishness and seek out a better character for herself.

The biggest change comes when Rolan assists Talia in making the child more comfortable around Companions, and one night Elspeth assists Talia in the birthing of a Companion colt. The colt's mother was appreciative of Elspeth, and asked Talia to make a little bracelet out of the mare's tail hairs to give to Elspeth in appreciation. In the weeks that followed the birth, Elspeth made a concentrated effort to change her behavior, often touching her horse hair bracelet to remind herself.

The Queen and Talia are surprised when, a few weeks later, Elspeth asks permission to attend Talia's classes with her. In a conversation with the Queen, Talia finds out that the Queen's Own bridges any age differences. Talamir, the previous Queen's confidant, was never really able to connect with Selenay, at least not on the level that Talia is achieving.

Chapter Nine Analysis

Not only is Talia facing change and an adjustment of attitude from what she has always known, so is Elspeth. When Hulda is removed from Elspeth's side, the young girl turns to Talia, who is the perfect companion to bring Elspeth back to becoming a good candidate as a Herald.

Through Talia's kind but firm treatment of Elspeth, the reader gets a feel for the true character of Talia, who is leaving her inexperience and doubts behind as the months in training increase.

The web of Heralds, their Companions, the Queen, the Council and the Kingdom is accented in this chapter, as the author shows how well everything works together in this society.



Chapter Ten

Chapter Ten Summary

Talia learns that Hulda vanished from the Kingdom before the Heralds had a chance to question her. She learns also that Hulda's immigration records are missing from the palace files. The Queen and Talia know this will not be the end of the threats from outside the Kingdom.

The Queen asks Talia to take Talamir's place at Council, so she can learn about the court dynamics and what will be expected of her when she achieves Herald status and takes her full place as a Queen's Own. Talia agrees, with the condition that Elspeth gets to attend with her so that the child can begin training to be the Queen.

One day at weapons training, Alberich uses Elspeth as an example for the older students as to how to be more receptive to training. Alberich, not realizing that the child he has just worked with is the Queen's daughter, asks Talia if Elspeth can be an active student in the training. It is at this point that the brat personality leaves Elspeth completely and the little girl begins to be accepted within the community of Heralds.

Sherrill gets her White Uniform as she is accepted as a Herald. She comes to see Talia before she goes on her first assignment, and teaches Talia about preventing pregnancy. The girls acknowledge that Heralds are known for being promiscuous, and although Talia has not participated in any sexual behavior yet, she needs protection when she does.

Talia begins to think about Skif, and of being with him sexually. He is her natural choice because they have a good chemistry and enjoy each other's company. Several times the two youngsters arrange to consummate their relationship, but something always happens to prevent it, or else they are too exhausted to do anything but sleep when they are together.

During Midwinter Festival, Talia and Jadus are joined by four others at the Collegium and spend their off time riding about the countryside and having long chats over cider in Jadus's room. Keren and Ylsa are one of the couples who are with them, and the friendships grow.

When classes begin again and spring comes to the Kingdom, Talia is growing in knowledge, in understanding her connection with Rolan and with the Queen and becoming a young woman. Talia and Skif decide their sexual relationship is just not going to happen, and a friendship deepens between them.

Heralds continue to die, and the Death Bell rings four times that year. Talia discovers that part of her Gift is comforting those who have lost a loved one, and although the experience of assisting in their healing is intense and draining, Talia knows it is part of her duty that will increase when she becomes a Herald.



One of the Heralds who dies that year is Jadus, and now Talia must comfort herself. Dean Elcarth calls Talia to his quarters and gives her Jadus's harp case. Elcarth tells Talia how much she affected Jadus and made his last years so enjoyable. Talia plays the harp, remembering their joyful times together.

Chapter Ten Analysis

This chapter is about endings, the closing of circles begun when Talia first arrived at the Collegium. Elspeth is becoming a good child, learning and growing with the assistance of her mother and Talia. Talia's Gifts are blooming, and she accepts a position on the Council, replacing Talamir. She discovers her sexuality, and makes the mature evaluation of her relationship with Skif as friendship only.

When Jadus dies, this is a bittersweet ending to the days when Talia had few friends. She is able to appreciate their relationship, realizing this man taught her to stop fearing men and to see herself as equal to everyone.



Chapter Eleven

Chapter Eleven Summary

It is three years from the time Talia arrived at the Collegium, and she has blossomed from a gangly and clueless thirteen year old to a beautiful and clever young woman. She is immensely popular with all students and instructors at the Collegium and handles her role as Queen's Own with grace.

Talia loves the people in her world, but she has yet to convince herself that she belongs at the Collegium. Her class today is to learn how to identify and use her Gifts to help the Kingdom. One of the students in the class is Neave, who is a projector. His Gift sends out powerful thoughts, and if not controlled, gives the other students horrible nightmares based on his past as being a slave child.

Talia learns that a Herald's Gift increases dramatically when used together with their Companion. She learns that all Heralds have Gifts, and although the specific Gifts differ between Herald, they all can speak to their Companions and can use the Truth Spell. For several weeks, Talia struggles to develop and use her gift of thought-sensing, and finally Ylsa realizes this might not be her gift at all. The instructors send Neave to another room and ask him to send out an emotion. Talia receives it more intensely and quickly than the others, and it takes everything she has learned to block it out and stop it. Talia learns that her Gift is empathy.

The class learns the Truth Spell, then are released to practice their gifts and grow with the knowledge of how to use them. Ylsa tells Talia she has several gifts, thought-sensing and healing and perhaps seeing from far away. She meets many of the Heralds in training and learns their respective Gifts. Ylsa tells Talia that without control, the Gifts can be destructive, and when used over much, will give the Herald a terrific headache.

Talia feels drawn to the Healing Collegium and begins to spend time there with patients. She learns how dangerous life can be for the Heralds as she assists in tending their wounds and their recovering minds. Talia hears how the areas near the Holds, on the outlying edges of the Kingdom are the most dangerous. One of the places the Heralds dread most is the Northwest, where strange beings are seen.

Talia discovers that she is able to ease the pain of the tormented souls who have self doubt, hatred or phobias. She does it lightly and carefully, and the ones who receive her treatment are unaware she has touched them.

Chapter Eleven Analysis

It is symbolic that Talia's hair has gone from a muddy brown to a full rich red, that her walk is no longer hesitant and that she is surrounded by people who admire her. The



young gangling teenager who arrived at the Collegium is now a young lady at the brink of womanhood.

Yet even with her accomplishments, she remains doubtful of her right to be a Herald. The reader sees Talia as a young woman with huge potential, with Gifts she has yet to tap and surrounded by everything anyone would ever want. This struggle creates tension in the plot.



Chapter Twelve

Chapter Twelve Summary

Keren, Talia, Skif and Elspeth decide to test how strong the bond is between Rolan and Talia. A maze is laid out on the forest floor, Talia is blindfolded, and Rolan is telling her where to walk. At the end of the test, Talia has successfully conquered the maze, to the astonishment and delight of her friends. The next test is to see how Rolan can see through her eyes, and the answers are one hundred percent correct. None of the other Heralds have a connection with their Companion that is this strong.

A few nights later, Talia decides to allow her mind to wander, to test how far her Gift of feeling emotion can go. She decides to follow the route in her mind that Ylsa is taking on her current assignment. She is pulled immediately into Ylsa's mind and sees that Ylsa is being ambushed and killed. Ylsa realizes Talia is in her mind and sends an urgent message to the Queen through Talia. The message is that something is in the shaft of the arrows. As Ylsa is dying, Talia is so immersed in the feelings and emotions that it takes Rolan to pull her out of the trance and back to the living. As she comes back, Talia hears the Death Bell begin tolling for Ylsa.

Talia rushes to be near Keren, who was Ylsa's lover. As she reaches Keren, Talia is again pulled into the overwhelming emotion of loss and despair, and Rolan helps her to emerge. Talia tries to bring Keren back with her, and is afraid Keren will die of sadness. No one seems able to reach Keren, and Talia suddenly thinks of Sherrill, and how Sherrill has always looked at Keren with love in her eyes. Sherrill is immediately brought to Keren's side. Finally Keren emerges from her despair and clings to Sherrill. Teren and Talia leave them alone.

Talia then rushes to the Queen with her message from Ylsa. Together with the help of a Fetching Gift Herald, they are able to bring the arrows that killed Ylsa to the Palace, using only their minds. Around a table, with the help of the Fetching Heralds, Rolan and the Queen, Talia takes all of their minds to the place where Ylsa was killed, pull the arrows and bring them physically from that place to the table.

Talia is completely exhausted after this experience and goes to her room. Amazingly, Ylsa and her Companion appear to her. Ylsa tells Talia many things, most of which Talia cannot remember, but knows it will be there when she needs it.

The Council meets, and the secrets inside the arrow shafts are revealed to be proof of treachery against the Queen. The two nobles who are involved are sentenced to death.

A few months later, Skif and Talia are Heralds. Talia now truly feels she belongs in the Collegium, a realization that came to her in the months following Ylsa's death, and her part in discovering the plot against the Queen.



Skif and Talia talk together, sharing about their past, about their adventures. Skif asks Talia to be his sister, and she gladly accepts. They take a blood bonding.

As Talia returns to the Collegium, she knows she has found a true family and a true home here.

Chapter Twelve Analysis

This chapter, the last of the book, is where the rising conflict reaches its crisis point and resolution. Talia must choose either to believe in herself and take her Gifts to their utmost limits, or turn away from all she has been trained to do at the Collegium. She is desperately needed by the Queen, and Talia is the only Herald who can take the other Heralds where they need to go to retrieve the stolen information.

The task is not simple or easy, and Talia suffers greatly in the implementation of her Gifts. She is aided, as always, by her beloved Rolan, and the power of the bond she has with her Companion and with her Gifts amazes even the most experienced Heralds.

The character of Talia is that of a strong young woman with many incredible talents, who has some very human frailties but depends on her judgment and her friends to do what is right. At the end of the story, she is facing a career as a Herald, and the reader feels she will be one of the best.



Characters

Talia

At the beginning of the novel, Talia is a young girl of thirteen. Arrows of the Queen is about Talia's three years in Herald training, from the time she is thirteen until she is sixteen.

Talia's young life is spent at a restricted and closed in community called Sensholding. In Hold life, the men dominate the culture and have several wives and many children. There is very little freedom and the role of women and girls is strictly defined. Talia does not fit well into this atmosphere of no freedom. She learns to read and write, use some of the boy's weapons and takes every possible moment to read what few books she can find.

Talia is not like the other girls, and the wives of her father do not know how to work with her. Only a few of the wives treat her with kindness, and Talia finds the world outside the Hold much more fascinating. She reads about Companions and Heralds, and her family frowns on this behavior. None of the legends of the Kingdom and its magic have any place at the Hold.

When Talia chooses to run away rather than be married off to one of the other Hold men, she makes a clear choice about her future. Rolan the Companion rescues her and takes her away to the world of her fantasies.

Talia becomes a young woman as she learns her Gifts, faces danger and makes lifelong friends at the Collegium. She adapts well into her new role as Queen's Own.

Talia is a good person and has qualities many young women of this age could admire and emulate. She is a steadfast friend, she accepts her responsibilities with growing maturity, and she is not afraid to indulge in her passions for life. Talia emerges from her experiences as a brave young woman, unafraid to do whatever is necessary to protect her friends and her way of life.

Through meeting good and decent men such as Jadus, Dean Elcarth, and her instructors, Talia learns that her fear of older men was based on a small minority of men, not all men. She learns to believe in herself and to discard the notions of restrictions and suppression of women in her new life.

Selenay The Queen

Selenay the Queen is tall woman with an angular, strong face. She has golden hair and eyes the same color blue as the Companions. Selenay is no longer married and is ruling the Kingdom alone, with the assistance of her Council and of her Queen's Own, Talia.



Selenay represents the authoritative figure in Talia's life once she leaves the Hold of her birth. The Queen must have someone to confide in and trust to repair her emotions and allow her to be a better ruler. Although she cared for Talia's predecessor Talamir, Selenay feels a much closer bond to the young Talia.

Selenay is a woman of many strengths and one of these is recognizing her own failures, as in the case of her daughter Elspeth.

Elspeth

Elspeth, Heir to the Throne, is six years old at the beginning of the novel, with chestnut hair and blue eyes. She is precocious and considered a brat by everyone she encounters. She has been influenced by a foreign spy named Hulda, who tries to turn Elspeth into a person who would never be Chosen to be a Herald. Luckily, Talia arrives and helps Elspeth become the good person she really is.

Skif

Skif is a young man who was a thief before he was Chosen, and continues to be a mischief maker around the Collegium. For a time in the story it appears he will become Talia's lover, but the two teenagers realize they are better as friends. At the end of the novel, Skif asks Talia if she will be his sister.

Jadus

An aging Herald who has lost interest in life, Jadus becomes Talia's first true friend. The older man teaches her how to sing and play the harp and brings out the best in this shy young woman. When he dies, he leaves her his harp, and she remembers him every time she plays it. Jadus is the first older man Talia ever learns to trust and love.

Rolan

Rolan is Talia's Companion, the magical creature who chose her above all others in the land to be the Queen's Own. Rolan has the ability to see through Talia's eyes and their bond is rare and special. Rolan has the body of a horse, but is able to run further, longer and faster than a normal horse.

Keren and Ylsa

Both Heralds, these women have found love and companionship with each other. Although alternative lifestyles are not common among the Heralds, the bond between Keren and Ylsa is accepted and appreciated at the Collegium. Keren is an instructor who always stays at the Collegium and Ylsa is sent out on assignments. When Ylsa is



killed, Keren almost dies of grief, but Sherrill, who has loved Keren from afar, comes to her side and saves her.

Alberich, the Weaponsmaster

Alberich is an unconventional Herald who teaches the students about weapons and trains them in self defense and fighting. He seldom wears his White uniform. He is tall, lean and dark, with a scarred face, black hair streaked with white, and gray penetrating eyes.

Teren

Teren is Keren's twin brother, and an instructor at the Collegium. Most of Talia's favorite classes are taught by this engaging young man.

Talamir

Talamir was an older Herald who served as Queen's Own for Selenay before Talia. Talamir was murdered and only appears in this story as the characters investigate his death. Although he loved Selenay and tried to serve her well, he was never able to reach across their age difference and achieve the same level of comfort the Queen has with Talia.



Objects/Places

Companions

These animals are horses, but have magical qualities that allow them to send their thoughts to their Chosen humans and travel the land faster and with more endurance than normal horses. Companions are in touch with the magic that exists in this Kingdom.

Collegium

This is a college and guild-like establishment that trains people to become Heralds, Healers, and Bards. There are elders who are instructors.

Senshold

This is the community of people where Talia was raised as a child. She escaped when marriage against her will was being arranged for her.

Gifts

Many of the Heralds have special Gifts. Talia has a strong ability to detect emotions, whereas some of the Heralds can transport items over long distances

Healers

These are the people in the Kingdom who are trained to use the appropriate medicinal plants and their Gifts to heal people.

Bards

These are the people who sing the oral histories of the Kingdom

Heralds

Heralds are the "arrows of the queen", providing information to the Kingdom, gathering information for the Queen and serving as judges and mediators during conflicts.



Uniforms

The colors of the uniforms are symbolic as to what guild and rank the person in the collegium is. A herald wears a light gray uniform until they become a Herald, then they wear pure white.

The River

There is only one river in the kingdom and it has no name, just called The River. Talia and Rolan follow the River to find the Palace, and it is at the River where Talia almost drowns.

Valdemar Kingdom

This is where Selenay rules as Queen and Talia as Queen's Own and Herald



Themes

Coming of Age

The novel, *Arrows of the Queen*, tells of a young woman hampered by a restricted culture as she is a child and becoming a powerful and Gifted Herald of the Kingdom in three short years.

Beginning at age thirteen, Talia is taken from a world where women are allowed menial chores only, men dominate the culture, and very little is expected of her, to a society where women can be the equal of men, she has much to learn, and she is being trained for one of the most important positions in the Kingdom.

Any young woman would be daunted by this task and these changes, and Talia finds herself feeling inadequate and unworthy throughout most of the novel. She learns to adapt to the culture because it most reflects her own feelings, but still struggles with her place in that society.

Talia faces adversity from people who are trying to kill her, but learns to trust her judgment and the instinctive guidance she receives from her Companion, Rolan. Much of her skill in reading others and interpreting actions comes not from her Gifts, but from her own life experience and beliefs, like any young woman of that age.

The theme of coming of age is the strongest theme in this novel, telling young woman to trust themselves and find their own gifts. A real girl of thirteen will not have a magical horse or the ear of a queen, but perhaps have an understanding cat to hug, and the friendship of a grandmother to assist them in the same way.

Self Confidence

In the novel, *Arrows of the Queen*, Talia was not raised to be a self confident woman. She was raised to do chores, mind the men and find a place in the domestic duties expected of her. From the beginning, this girl found a way to do what she wanted to do and dream of something more. Dreams of going beyond one's surroundings, achieving on a level far above what is available, and having the courage to pursue those dreams create a self confidence that cannot be taught.

Talia is certainly not a good example of self confidence when first introduced to the reader, but her pluckiness quickly becomes apparent as she leaves the safety of the only life she has ever known rather than be shackled in marriage to a stranger. Her belief that she can find a job somewhere is all that can be expected at that point, and even when she realizes she has been Chosen as a Herald, her own self doubts prevent her from accepting it as truth.



Talia must go through a crisis of the spirit, challenging herself and exceeding even her own expectations in her moment of dire need for the Kingdom before she can truly feel self confident.

The author's message is that self confidence is a valuable trait, one of the most desired and respected for a woman, but it is not attained quickly or without great cost.

Friendship

In the novel *Arrows of the Queen*, Talia has no friends in her life at the beginning. There are a couple of the wives who occasionally befriend her, but her life is filled with beatings and cruelty from others. Her first real friend arrives in the form of her rescuer, Rolan. When she arrives at the Collegium, many more people come into her life and she learns what it is like to be surrounded by people who actually care about her.

Talia learns the value of being a good friend to others and how friendship creates an atmosphere of love, learning and compassion. Her friend Sherrill is also her mentor; Keren her instructor becomes a dear friend as well, and Skif, at one time a potential lover, asks her to be his sister.

The joys of friendship are a strong theme in this novel, and the plot is laced with instances where friendship shared and given assist Talia in becoming the self confident, strong and gifted woman she becomes by the end.

Style

Point of View

In this story, the author uses an limited omniscient point of view, associating with Talia, the main character. All plot development is relayed to the reader through Talia's actions, dialogue, and how other people think of her.

With this point of view, the reader sees the author's world through the eyes of Talia, which means it is not totally reliable. Talia's conception of the role of men in her life, the system of Heralds and Companions, are all flawed until the plot brings those solutions to her awareness.

Even though the main character in this story is naïve and inexperienced, the author uses information provided at timely intervals so the reader is not truly as lost and confused as Talia is during some points of the story.

Setting

This novel is set in a mythical Kingdom founded by Valdemar. Although the landscape and physical properties of the Kingdom are very earth-like, including a single moon satellite, there is no confirmation that this story is set on Earth in the past or the future. The society is set up under the rule of a Kingdom, with a strong system of utilizing the magical skills of the citizens to create a Kingdom of strong people trying to help each other. The Kingdom is under attack from outside forces, but this book is more about the story of Talia and her experiences becoming a Herald.

The center of the Kingdom is an unnamed city where the Queen resides and the training facilities for the Heralds, Bards and Healers is maintained. It is a large noisy city, with good commerce and trade. There is only one river running through the Kingdom, and it runs through the city.

This fantasy setting allows the reader to believe any magical occurrences, and to accept the Gifts of the Heralds. Magic is the ingredient in this story that allows the laws of physics be overturned in the plot.

Language and Meaning

This book was written originally in English, and the style, vocabulary and terms are geared towards a teenage reader. The concepts are not abstract or difficult, and the words used are easily understood by its intended audience.



The author creates a world where magic is commonplace and legends are respected. There are no mass communication devices and information is carried from one part of the Kingdom to another by way of couriers and sometimes telepathy.

The author explains the Kingdom, including its systems and dynamics, through Talia's daily lessons from her instructors, her bond with Rolan, and her friendship with Jadus. This is the first novel in a long series of stories about this Kingdom, and it necessarily lays the groundwork for the future novels.

Structure

The novel *Arrows of the Queen* is 320 pages long and is divided into twelve chapters. It covers a three-year period in the life of Talia, a citizen of the Kingdom of Valdemar. The story is told in chronological order with no flashbacks or long memories. The plot is straightforward and clear.

The story begins with Talia at the Holding, living an unhappy life within the constricting lifestyle of a working Hold. The first crisis of the story develops when Talia is told she must be married off to some man in the Hold. She runs away, determined not to continue this life where she is expected to follow the demands of others, when her heart lies with the stories of Heralds and their Companions.

Once Rolan arrives at the Hold to Choose Talia as his rider, Talia's world changes completely and she is immersed in the legends and life of a Herald. Her journey to the Collegium is magical and prepares her for the learning ahead. Once at the Collegium, Talia encounters a free way of thinking, a society where women can be soldiers, rulers, instructors, or anything they want, on equal footing with men.

Talia is meant for this lifestyle, but in the beginning chapters of her time at the Collegium, she must learn how to live in a world where this freedom is being challenged. In each chapter, the plot develops to show a young woman coming of age in a mystical and dangerous land, where she will be taking a decisive role in the outcome of the Kingdom. Through these chapters, Talia strives to find her place and have a sense of worth in her surroundings.

The plot reaches a crisis point when, just as Talia is learning her Gift of sensing emotions, she is thrust into the mind of Ylsa, a Herald who is on a special mission for the Queen. This mission ends in Ylsa's death, and it is up to Talia to take the other Heralds on a mental journey back to where Ylsa died so that the information she discovered can be retrieved.

After this crisis, Talia no longer feels like an outsider and knows she has found where she belongs. As the story ends, she is becoming a Herald, and her best friend Skif asks her to be his sister.



Quotes

"I don't want to be married at all!"
Chap. 1, p. 16

"It really is strange, you coming along when you did,' she told him. 'I expect I'd have been found before dark or gotten resigned to the situation and gone back to the Holding myself."
Chap. 2, p. 35

"You're among friends here, never doubt it. We've been waiting for you, you know! You and Rolan were a welcome sight to these eyes."
Chap. 3, p. 63

"Should she frighten the child, perhaps needlessly, or should she leave her in ignorance of the intrigues going on all around her?"
Chap. 4, p. 86

"For the most part we are very much honored in this Kingdom; but being a Herald can also be a fatal occupation."
Chap. 5, p. 117

"Once in her Companion's presence, the ache of loneliness vanished..."
Chap. 6, p. 144

"They were only waiting for Talia to make the mistake of being alone to put their new plan into motion - and their chance came on the coldest day of the year."
Chap. 7, p. 167

"Then a start of surprise, followed by an outpouring of love and welcome. It was then that she realized that she was sharing Rolan's thoughts."
Chap. 8, p. 197

"Gradually, Elspeth's good days began to outnumber her bad ones, as they did so, more and more of her amenities came back into her life."
Chap. 9, p. 235

"I'd like Elspeth with me; that way she won't feel left out, and it will show her more



clearly than anything I could tell her that the job of reigning is work."
Chap. 10, p. 242

"A great part of that feeling had to do with the fact that it seemed to her as if she were continually receiving the affection and attention she so ardently craved, and yet was doing little or nothing to earn it."
Chap. 11, p. 267

"They were, all of them, more than friends; they were kin - the important kind, soul kindred. Her family."
Chap. 12, p. 320

Topics for Discussion

Talia was comfortable around women, even women in royalty; however, when she arrived at the Collegium, all of the elders noticed her fear and trepidation around men. What do you think was the basis for this fear?

The Kingdom created training and guilds for three career paths: Heralds, Bards and Healers. Why are these three careers so critical to the success of any society?

Discuss the irony that the society of the holds accepted polygamy as a way of life, yet found fault in the Heralds' reputation of having multiple sexual partners?

Why were the Blues so difficult for the Heralds?

Why do you think the author chose to tell the story of Talia from the time of her being Chosen as opposed to the beginning of her life, or after she had received her Whites?

What sort of Herald do you think Talia will become?

Discuss the relationship between the Companions and the Heralds. Why would it be so critical to have a horse as a link rather than a bird or a dog?

Symbolism often plays a big part in fantasy novels, with the author's message offering hope to someone in despair. Is it possible that the Gift in this novel represents maturity for a young woman in real life, and a way to describe the choices one must make as they progress through the teen years?

Skif and Talia are very close and attempt to take the relationship to a sexual level but circumstances always prevent it. Why do you think that is?

When Elspeth is led by Hulda to believe she is better than everyone else, and then led by Talia to believe she is the same as everyone else, what impression does that give you of Elspeth's personality? Will someone who is so easily swayed become a good ruler, or can that behavior be attributed to her age?