

A Clash of Honor Study Guide

A Clash of Honor by Morgan Rice

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Plot Summary

A Clash of Honor, by Morgan Rice, is a story about valiant warriors struggling to free their kingdom from oppression. Set against the backdrop of an invasion by the neighboring McCloud Kingdom, brave heroes from the MacGil kingdom defend their land and strive to return it to freedom.

Princess Gwendolyn of the MacGil family is deeply troubled by recent events. Her father, the king, has died recently, and the McClouds have been attacking because their king believes the MacGils are now weak. Gwendolyn's brother Godfrey is poisoned by their other brother Gareth at the same time the man Gwendolyn loves, named Thor, is ambushed by enemy soldiers. With the help of a mystical being named Argon, she manages to save both Thor and Godfrey. Thor rapidly gains fame and honor as his companions recognize his extraordinary fighting skills. But Argon has made it clear to both Thor and Gwendolyn that very powerful forces are at play, and fate itself is involved. Gareth, brother of Gwendolyn and Godfrey, has taken control of the throne despite his father's wishes that Gwendolyn should rule. Godfrey is convinced that his brother poisoned him, and as they decide to gather evidence to confront Gareth, enemies from a neighboring land arrive to take Gwendolyn. Gareth has promised her as a bride to their leader, and Thor and his companions must fight them off at the same time Godfrey searches for evidence of his brother's attempt at murder.

Meanwhile, an even deadlier enemy has approached both the MacGils and McClouds. Emperor Andronicus commands a vast land and extraordinary power, but has been prevented by entering the lands of the MacGils and McClouds by magical means. King McCloud's life ends suddenly when the Destiny Sword, which keeps the magical barrier in place, is suddenly stolen. This forces Thor to attempt to recover the sword even as the mighty and terrifying Emperor brings his forces into their land.

A Clash of Honor is a tightly-packed tale of sword and sorcery, with many major characters and several intersecting plots. As part of a series, a Clash of Honor thrusts the epic saga forward by the introduction of a far more serious and threatening enemy than the characters have ever known, and each of the heroes survives by trusting and relying on one-another, and many sections of the novel are devoted to sub-plots that seem destined to connect with the larger story in the next book. The book ends just as the real threat to the world becomes apparent. Thor, who has been growing increasingly close to Gwendolyn, manages to alienate himself by agreeing to attempt to recover the Destiny Sword, and that promises to be the central quest of the next installment.



Chapters 1-4

Summary

Chapter 1

Luanda fights her way through a battle towards King McCloud, whom she has decided to kill. Bronson, her husband, spots her and hurries to stop her from doing it. Nevertheless, she reaches the building that King McCloud has entered and goes inside. She finds him assaulting a young girl, and moves to stab him, believing that he is vulnerable and unaware of her presence. McCloud rolls out of the way at the last second and Luanda accidentally stabs the young girl. McCloud strikes her and sends her flying across the room.

Chapter 2

Gwendolyn flees from the King's Castle, escaping from her brother Gareth. Firth has just been hanged, and she needs to warn Thor of an ambush headed his way. Gareth has killed their father, the King, and Gwendolyn is the only one who knows it. She hurries into a tavern to find her brother Godfrey but instead finds his drinking friends without him. She demands to know where her brother is. Akorth tells her that Godfrey is sick in the back. Gwen demands to be taken there, and when she sees him he cannot move or speak. She orders Akorth and Fulton, Godfrey's friends to help her take him to the Royal Healer.

Chapter 3

Thor hurries on horseback with several other warriors to meet the McClouds in battle. They reach a view of King's Court, which has been attacked by King McCloud's soldiers. Thor's group is ordered to leave the main army and assault a fortress they have taken. They are meant to cut off supplies for the rest of the McCloud army, but as Thor travels with his group, he notices their leader, Forg, abandon them. Then, their group encounters the entire McCloud army.

Chapter 4

Gwendolyn, Akorth, and Fulton hurry through King's Court with Godfrey. She is stopped by the royal executioner who tells her that he does not have orders for what to do with Firth's body. Gwendolyn orders him to throw it in the mass grave. She hears Etopheles the falcon up above and whistles to it. When the falcon lands on her arm, she orders it to go to Thor and protect him from the ambush she knows is coming his way. The group reaches the Royal Healer's cottage and Illepra answers. She says the poison is very powerful but creates a potion for Godfrey very quickly and tells Gwendolyn to pray for him.



Analysis

As is expected of a mid-series novel, *A Clash of Honor* opens up in the middle of the action. These fast-paced chapters are brief and contain less character information than they normally would because it is assumed that the previous books have been read. Still, for new readers, there is more than enough information to understand the general situation. Gareth has taken over the kingdom and allowed the McClouds to attack it. Gwendolyn is trying to escape her brother's grasp in order to survive and challenge his rule. This particular situation has been explored countless times in literature, and the theme can be traced back ultimately to that of good versus evil. This story does manage a significant nuance, however, because the evil is present in both Gareth's rule and the invading McCloud army, suggesting that evil is strongly decentralized in the world in which this story takes place. Moreover, the "good" characters tend to unify and stay together in cooperation.

Discussion Question 1

The first two chapters open with female characters attempting rescues. What about this particular genre (sword and sorcery) would have encouraged the author to open the novel in this fashion?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss at least two possible villains in the novel. Which one seems like he or she will be the main antagonist? Explain.

Discussion Question 3

Describe Gwendolyn's attempt to rescue her brother. How does this event help to establish her character?

Vocabulary

amidst, naive, amplify, extricate, retribution, humility, liberate, intent, instinctively, deceiving, urgency



Chapters 5-8

Summary

Chapter 5

Kendrick is enjoying charging on his horse. He is eager to fight the McClouds. He seeks vengeance for the death of his king, and wants Gwendolyn to become the new ruler of the kingdom. King's Court is in ruin, but when he and his comrades enter, they find no enemies there, and the people have been slaughtered. He realizes they have fallen into a trap to separate Thor from the main army.

Chapter 6

The McCloud army charges Thor's group, who prepares to counter-attack. They fight through many of their enemies before Thor is cut on the shoulder. He leaps off of his horse to save his companion Reese from an attack, then Estopheles arrives and claws and the enemies eyes. Thor is trampled by a horse and beaten by more than a half-dozen enemies.

Chapter 7

Gwen grows desperate as Godfrey fights to stay alive. She leaves to search for Argon. She reaches his home and finds he is not there, then continues on to the Lake of Sorrows and prays for Godfrey and Thor. Argon finds her there and she asks him what she has to do to save their lives. He tells her that she must choose to save only one, but when she offers her own life in return, Argon reveals that neither will die, but that she will suffer a partial death, and that the cost of her sacrifice will be high. Argon then disappears.

Chapter 8

Thor suddenly feels powerful and breaks out of the soldier's grasp. He attacks them, and they are suddenly frozen by Thor's newfound magic powers. A gigantic man attacks Thor, and Thor finds he cannot freeze him. The giant strikes Thor and sends him flying. The giant throws him next, but Thor summons a massive swarm of bees. The bees drive McCloud's army away. Thor sees Kendrick and the rest of his army approaching.

Analysis

The higher powers of this world reveal themselves through the character Argon, who is either one of them or a wizardly character who speaks on their behalf. Argon's appearance marks a sudden and unexpected shift in the fortunes of the main characters Gwendolyn and Thor, and hints at much more powerful forces at play than either them or the reader understand at the present. Also apparent is the strength of Gwendolyn's



character. Even if she does not seem to know that many would prefer her on the throne to her brother Gareth, she is an extremely strong character, with no reservations about making difficult decisions. This section also details Thor's struggles against the trap laid specifically for him, and in doing so reveals that he is in fact a very different character than he or the readers may have believed at first. His magical powers are sudden and extreme, and it is obviously no coincidence that they appeared just as Gwendolyn offered to sacrifice herself for his safety.

Discussion Question 1

How does Gwen appear to know Argon? Is she specific about who he is?

Discussion Question 2

Thor unexpectedly develops magical powers in the middle of his fight against the McCloud army. What happens as a result of his discovery?

Discussion Question 3

Name two of Thor's companions and describe them briefly. In general, how do Thor's companions regard Thor?

Vocabulary

recklessness, acrid, vow, strategy, precision, nimble, impacted, exposed, mystical, desolate, radical, gratitude, careened



Chapters 9-12

Summary

Chapter 9

Erec races down the Southern Lane on his horse. His wife Alistair has been forced into slavery and he seeks to free her from the city of Baluster, the center of crime in the kingdom. He rushes past the city guards, approaches an Inn, and pays the bartender for information. Erbot, the man who took Erec's wife, can be found in his den nearby, according to the barkeeper. Erec races toward it and forces himself inside. He tells one of the men there the name of whom he is looking for, and that man tells him that Alistair has been sold. Two men move in to throw Erec out, but he disables them both, and the first man says he sold her to a lord who has a castle west of Baluster. Erec kills the man and begins setting the women in the den free.

Chapter 10

Gwen has fallen asleep and wakes up the next morning. Illepra wakes and revives Godfrey, who does not remember being poisoned. Gwen tells him that Firth is dead and Gareth plans to marry her off to keep her from being a threat to his power. Akorth and Fulton enter, relieved to see Godfrey alive. Soldiers are headed their way. Kendrick's men arrive to tell Gwen that Thor is safe. Gareth is unstable, and they all know of her father's desire to put her on the throne. He also tells her that Thor has gained much respect in the group of the former king's men known as the silver.

Chapter 11

Thor leads the army back to King's Court. He is confused by his new powers, because they do not always work. He has gained much respect since winning the last battle. His leopard Krohn is still healing. They enter the capital and search for Gwen. Reece directs him to her, and she greets him alongside Godfrey. The crowd cheers for Thor, who is taken to a victory feast.

Chapter 12

Gareth watches in fear as the King's Army returns. The corpse of his father appears and tells him to prepare for the worst. Gareth attacks him and his father vanishes. He smokes opium, and once subdued realizes that his plan is still intact, for the most part. Nevaruns are on their way to take Gwen away. He puts his father's cloak and crown on and enters the banquet hall. He complains about his soup not being hot enough during his meal and throws it on a servant, then smashes a plate over the same servant's head. Lord Kultin has arrived to see him, and enters the hall. Gareth says he has decided to promote him, and when Kultin objects, Gareth says he plans to pay him and his men for more than his father once did, and Kultin agrees.



Analysis

The story of Erec's attempt to rescue his wife, Alistair, parallels that of the main action. Since this is one book in a series, it is unclear if Erec is close to any of the other characters, but this is a common device used by authors in order to develop dramatic tension that pays off in later chapters or books. Like Thor, Erec is an excellent fighter, although his sense of justice seems overdeveloped, as evidenced in his unnecessary killing of the men in the crime den in Baluster. As the story returns to our major characters, the reader finds that two important groups of people have made contact with one another, the most important characters of which are Thor and Gwen, who represent the main characters of the novel. The story revolves around their romantic entanglement, but the reader may already have the sense that the two are not to be in each other's presence for long before they are called apart from one another. Gareth, one of the major villains, is also introduced. He is immediately portrayed as a weak and cowardly bully, who is scared that his devious scheme is about to become unraveled. His drug abuse supports the idea that he is mentally unstable.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Thor feel uneasy about his new magical powers?

Discussion Question 2

Compare and contrast what is known of the characters Gwen, Gareth, and Godfrey. Do they have any other siblings?

Discussion Question 3

Based on what characters have spoken about so far, what is Gareth's plan?

Vocabulary

reprimanding, claustrophobic, revolted, henchmen, disoriented, solemn, gratitude, surreal, sprawling, victorious, apparition



Chapters 13-16

Summary

Chapter 13

Thor asks Reece if he would support his proposal to Gwen. Reece completely agrees while Kolk praises Thor, which surprises Thor because he'd never accepted Thor into the Silver before the battle that Thor won. Thor is promoted to captain, but Thor's brothers, Drake, Dross, and Durs appear, announcing that Thor is weak and does not deserve the honor. They refuse to take orders from him. Reece shows Thor that Gwen is waiting for him across the hall.

Chapter 14

Gwen leads Thor from the feast into a giant meadow, then on to a giant structure she says is her mother's house. They enter, and Thor tries to ask her to marry him, but she stops him. Later, Gwen swims in the Lake of Sorrows. She realizes that she is pregnant. Argon's voice tells her that the child is a great being. She wakes up in Thor's arms, and knows that she is carrying his child.

Chapter 15

King McCloud is furious at his army's defeat. He does not understand how Thor could have beaten him. He knows that his men will turn against him soon due to his failure. He has Luanda bound as a prisoner, and decides to punish her. He announces that anyone who wishes to attack Luanda may do so. Bronson, who is his son, appears and cuts off the hand of the first man who approaches Luanda, then kills two more would-be attackers. He frees Luanda. McCloud fights him, but is beaten back. Bronson tries to force his father to set him and his wife free, but McCloud throws dirt in his son's eyes and has his soldiers tie him to the post. McCloud cuts into Bronson's wrist and brands him with a scorching iron. He then orders Luanda to be killed.

Chapter 16

Thor walks with Gwen through the meadow. He's afraid to ask her to marry him. He spots King's Court and realizes that The Silver and King's Army are nervously rushing about the city. He and Gwen hurry back to Kendrick, who announces that The Silver have been thrown out of their hall to make room for Lord Kultin's men. Gwen accuses Gareth of killing her father. Brom insists that they have no evidence. However, Godfrey believes that if he can prove that it was Gareth who poisoned him, he will have the needed evidence. Kendrick calls on Forg and demands to know why he led Thor and the others into ambush. Forg says it was the king's command, and Thor asks The Silver to show Forg mercy by banishing him instead of executing him. Kendrick complies and throws him out of The Silver. Brom wishes to know who will take Gareth's place if they force him to step down as king, and Kendrick says it was the old king's wish that Gwen



rule in his place. Gwen does not want to rule, but The Silver insists. A messenger busts into the hall to announce that Nevarun warriors have come to take Gwen away. Thor and the others prepare to fight. They meet the Nevarun leader and Thor strikes him down with a ball of light. The Nevarun promise to return, then flee.

Analysis

Thor's fear of proposing to Gwen reflects the side of him unaffected by his rapidly growing magical powers. Despite his feelings for Gwen, he is insecure about her response, and to make matters worse, she interrupts him just when he prepares to ask her to marry him. This can be seen by the reader as an extension of the fact that these two lovers are destined to remain apart through much of the remainder of this book and series. The introduction of Thor's brothers also reflects Thor's inherent insecurities. These three hate him unconditionally, and go so far as to embarrass themselves by condemning their brother, who has just won a major victory for all of them. This hints that Thor's childhood was a difficult one, which may remind the reader of King Arthur from legend, who was forced to serve his older brothers and regarded as inferior to them before he removed Excalibur from the rock. Since this sword echoes many such themes from Arthurian legend, Thor can be seen in this precise fashion.

The main narrative is counterbalanced, however, by the powerful female character Luanda, who is just as willing to fight as Thor. Her husband Bronson has defied his own father in the hopes of saving her life, and this goes a long way towards demonstrating how unstable McCloud's rule is amongst his own people.

Discussion Question 1

Why do Drake, Dross, and Durs claim that Thor's victory was not a true one? What might his brother's statements suggest about Thor's past?

Discussion Question 2

Bronson attacks his father when King McCloud threatens Luanda. What does this say about his relationship with his father. Compare it to the relationship that Thor appears to have with his brothers.

Discussion Question 3

Why is Gwen reluctant to become Queen? Why do members of the Silver insist that she rule them as opposed to Gareth?



Vocabulary

implying, exuded, derisively, animosity, exotic, dejected, scowling, maimed, milling, debate, muttering, circumstantial, dispatching, prohibits, legitimate, alternate, protruding



Chapters 17-20

Summary

Chapter 17

Erec charges through the night on his horse Warkfin, towards the castle his wife is imprisoned in. It is guarded by a large number of soldiers. He hopes to avoid conflict with the powerful lord. He announces himself and explains that Alistair is his wife. The lord rejects Erec's claim. Enraged, Erec throws a spear and strikes him through the throat, killing him instantly. Erec rushes through the gate and traps the soldiers outside of it. Erec defeats the soldiers inside and calls to his wife, defeating two more soldiers before he hears her call out to him. He rushes her direction, defeating more soldiers along the way. He hears the gate destroyed in the courtyard, which means the soldiers have broken through and will come after him. He reaches Alistair just as one of the Lord's servants tries to kill her. Erec throws a knife into the servant's throat. The servants get up after Erec frees his wife, but Erec tosses him out of a window. Alistair takes him to a back exit, where Erec uses a wire to slide down the castle wall, but he breaks a rib when they land. He summons Warfkin, and they escape.

Chapter 18

Andronicus has set fire to a McCloud village. He is angry with King McCloud's refusal to cooperate, even though he'd planned to kill the king anyway. He now plans to surprise McCloud's castle and burn it down, then turn on the MacGils and slay them. However, there is a ring of magic that keeps him and his armies out of the Canyon. Andronicus believes that he has found a way through that ring, and brings as a prisoner has promised to show him. When he summons the prisoner, he admits to lying. Angry at being lied to by a human, Andronicus crushes the prisoner.

Chapter 19

Thor and Gwen leave King's Court. She takes him to the House of Scholars, which contains the Royal Library, and leads him inside. Gwen spends much of her time reading here. She introduces Thor to the scholar Aberthol, who tells Gwen to prepare to lead the kingdom. He also suggests that Thor learn from Gwen, the two of whom then explore the library. Gwen offers to teach Thor the lost language of the ring. She's been researching the land and customs of the druids, and has discovered that they use sorcery. Thor explains that he wants to be human, not druid. She shows him the Chronicle of the Ring. It predicts the future, and as Gwen is to be the eighth MacGil ruler, there will be great destruction in their land, followed by a great chance for peace. Aberthol sounds a horn and they go to him. Reece, O'Connor, Elden, and other Legion members are there. Reece explains that The Legion has been ordered to rebuild. Gwen plans to stay safe in her mother's castle. Thor leaves her with Krohn for protection.



Chapter 20

Gwen watches Thor leave to rebuild surrounding villages. As she walks across the hillside, Argon appears. He tells her that much time will pass before she pays the price of Thor's survival. The sun and moon event will happen in several weeks. Argon insists that at this time the Ring will end, but Gwen does, in fact, carry Thor's child.

Analysis

This is the second time that the reader has witnessed Erec in his attempts to recover his wife, and it serves as an important reminder that the battle between good and evil in this world takes on a very broad context. Erec demonstrates incredible skill as a fighter, and his killing of the powerful lord likely comes as a surprise to the reader, who more likely expects the conflict to draw itself out over the course of several chapters. This is not the case, however, as Erec proves to be an incredibly capable warrior. Instead, Erec's challenge lies in the fact that he knows he has created problems for himself in the long-term. Killing this powerful lord will mean that those connected to him will seek Erec out, and he has very little knowledge with respect to their power.

Andronicus has clearly established himself as a major villain, within the series if not in this book alone. His conflict with the McClouds and MacGils seems to stem from the fact that, despite Andronicus' incredible power, they have remained safe from him within the confines of the magical barrier known as the Ring. Details in this particular novel about the Ring itself are sparse, but it is made known from Gwen's encounter with Argos that its time is nearly at an end. This means there is an excellent chance that Andronicus will make his way through the ring by the end of this novel, and both the McClouds and MacGils, along with their respective weak and petty rulers, will find themselves faced with a far more dangerous enemy.

Gwen and Thor's visit to the library is important primarily because it demonstrates Gwen's intelligence. This, the reader can assume, is why her father wanted her to be in charge of the kingdom upon his passing. It makes clear that benevolence and wisdom are important components in this world, and also serves to demonstrate that many of the characters--especially the leaders of the Legion and Silver--embrace feminist ideas readily.

Discussion Question 1

What does Erec's swift killing of the lord who imprisons his wife say about his character? Does he seem attached to the major story in any way?

Discussion Question 2

Despite all of the pressures put on Thor and Gwen's time together, she takes him to the Royal Library and explains important facts to him there. Why are these facts important?



Discussion Question 3

Compare the character of Andronicus with that of King McCloud. What similarities do they share? Which one is more dangerous to the MacGils and why?

Vocabulary

formidable, resorted, fortuitous, transitional, vassals, simultaneously, immensely, looming, volumes, exotic, haughtiness, intricate, vast, aloof, clarity, corralled, depose, treachery, contingent



Chapters 21-24

Summary

Chapter 21

Thor rides with members of The Legion to rebuild the village of Sulpa. His group grows nervous, but he reassures them that they are near and will arrive shortly. As they reach the village, a giant spider suddenly attacks Reece. Thor strikes it as it spits acid and wounds one of them. The giant spider, known as a forsyth, runs away. Reece has been bitten. Suddenly, several more forsyths come out of a cave and Thor orders his men to flee. The soldier who was wounded by the acid refuses to flee, however, and his horse is killed by the monsters. O'Connor kills a forsyth with an arrow as dozens more pour out of the nearby cave. The Legion flees and enters Sulpa. They are greeted by the village elders, who take Reece to their healer. Reece is immediately cared for by the young girl, who cuts into his wound and drains it. Her name is Selese, and Reece claims to be in love with her.

Chapter 22

Godfrey is with Akorth and Fulton in King's Court. They re-enter the pub where he was poisoned. Godfrey asks the barkeep who poisoned him. A drunken old man admits to seeing a young boy tamper with Godfrey's drink, and Godfrey convinces the old man to tell him more. The boy was a commoner, seen a few times at the gambling den. Godfrey heads there and bribes the den's manager to tell him where the boy has gone. The manager tells him that the boy is dead, and had been killed the night before. Godfrey goes out to see for himself. He finds another boy next to the corpse's body, who immediately runs away.

Chapter 23

Thor finds himself tired after a long day of rebuilding work. Reece asks about Selene, but the others make fun of him for confessing his love to her the day before. Later that night, Thor sees his home village in a dream. At his old home, he meets a woman in blue robes holding a yellow staff. The woman calls Thor "son" and tells him to return home. He wakes up with a desire to know who she is. Argon appears and speaks to him, encouraging him to go to his father for answers. Since he is close, he decides to ride out and investigate. Reece agrees to cover for him so that the others are not bothered by his absence.

Chapter 24

Luanda is imprisoned in the McCloud dungeon for her attempt at taking the king's life. Her tormentors discuss how they will harm her next, but she offers to do whatever they want if they unchain her. When she offers them money, they unshackle her. She attacks and kills both guards, then goes in search of Boden.



Analysis

The development between Reece and Selene can be seen as a pleasant subplot. It serves to introduce a vein of lighthearted romance into the otherwise fast-paced intensity of the novel. This can come as a very welcome break in the development of dramatic tension, and also serves to poke fun at Reece and his previous romantic adventures, which all The Legion seem to be familiar with. Selene's feelings are far from clear, and why should they be? Reece was suffering the effects of poison. From Selene's point of view, he was delirious. He could not possibly have meant what he said. In fact, Reece's friends, including Thor, seem to think the same thing, although Thor clearly entertains the idea that his friend's feelings are genuine. Thor begins to get a glimpse of his own origins, and the dreams he experiences suggest that his childhood was not everything he believed to be. Meanwhile, Luanda's character demonstrates just as much skill and determination as the male leads of the novel in her successful escape from McCloud's soldiers.

Discussion Question 1

Gwen has mentioned powerful beings known as druids to Thor in previous chapters. What role might these druids take in the rest of the novel, given Thor's sudden need to discover his heritage?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Thor more sympathetic to Reece about his sudden feelings for Selene than the other soldiers appear to be? How does this set Thor apart from his companions?

Discussion Question 3

Describe how Luanda manages to escape McCloud's soldiers. What does this say about her character?

Vocabulary

mustering, apprehensive, defied, demolished, stark, vibrant, genuine, repulsion, keeled, grimaced, fixated, paupers, lulling, fanciful, solemnly, crude, vile, affixed, dumbfounded



Chapters 25-28

Summary

Chapter 25

Thor rides alone to his home village. His father was angry and disappointed with Thor when he left, and how Thor wonders how he will be received in the place he grew up. He reaches the village and finds it unchanged. He goes to his old home and discovers the door has been left open. He hears his father working on the forge in back, and goes to him. Thor's father is shocked, but old resentment quickly wins him over, and he mocks his son. The two argue, and Thor realizes that his father now means nothing to him. His father, who has grown increasingly angry, attempts to shake him, but Thor pushes him back. He asks about his real mother, and his father tries to avoid the question, but Thor manages to learn that she was, in fact, a druid. And, moreover, no one has any idea who Thor's real father was. Thor's adoptive father gives him a letter written by his mother along with a ring and a necklace. He is to give the ring to Gwen, and always wear the necklace for protection. He puts the necklace on at once, and can feel its magical energy protecting him. As he leaves, he hears his adoptive father cry out in remorse.

Chapter 26

Reece goes to see Selese. Clumsily, he tells her that she forgot to check on his wound. She teases him, and Reece becomes nervous because he is unused to this treatment from women. He thanks her, and Selese tells him that she does not want a boyfriend. Reece again tells her that she is in love with her. This surprises her, and Reece interprets her reaction as rejection. He leaves, disappointed and confused.

Chapter 27

Godfrey, Akorth, and Fulton follow the young boy as he attempts to run away from them. Godfrey catches him and the boy admits that the body in the alley belongs to his older brother. They demand to know where he lives, and the boy shows them. They go inside and meet Blaine's parents. Godfrey tells them about the attempt on his life, and gives them a fortune in gold for Blaine's story. Blaine finally admits that Clayforth was approached by a stranger and asked to poison Godfrey's drink. Blaine describes a tall man who was missing a tooth. Godfrey recognizes the description as a man called Afget, one of Gareth's hirelings. This is the proof that Godfrey needed in order to convict Gareth. Blaine Promises to testify.

Chapter 28

Thor travels back to The Legion, wondering about his mother and real father. His horse suddenly veers off course and stops to drink. Argon appears, and Thor asks him about his real parents. Argon describes Thor's true father as a very powerful man, and tells



Thor that he is ready to begin his real training. Argon directs him to look into the ring, where Thor sees the past and present are all one. He watches King's Court destroyed by invaders, and he sees the Destiny Sword, along with an attack by dragons. Argon tells him to prepare for this future by growing stronger. Thor is taught to direct the flow of water, but the attempt exhausts him. Argon explains that he is tired because he is still part human, and explains that Thor can direct all of nature in the same way he directed the flow of the water.

Analysis

Thor's discovery of his true origins has been foreshadowed throughout the progression of the novel, and it is a very common element of fantasy. The author has blended real names and elements of history and put them to use in this fashion. Druids were a group of people known to other peoples of the British Isles in the middle-ages, and they are represented here in a much idealized form. This does not suggest that they bear any true resemblance to the druids who populated northwestern Europe. Instead, the author is drawing on their myth and legend in order to use them to advance the story. The druids represent a race of people who are almost godlike in their abilities to predict the future and--as demonstrated through Thor--control nature to an incredible degree. Thor's discovery then signifies that he is not human, though he still clearly maintains human values. Thor's abilities also serve to suggest that Gwen's child, who is Thor's son, will inherit much of Thor's strength and his magical abilities.

Meanwhile, as the story has spread to several important locations, Godfrey and his friends score an important victory. Blaine's willingness to testify means that they have a fighting chance against Gareth, but it does not mean that Gareth is without defenses. Gareth seemed to think he was still in a relatively safe position as King. The reader has seen very little of him since he reached that conclusion. Gareth is clearly a complete coward, relying on underhandedness through and through in order to remain in power.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Thor's father really disapproves of Thor?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the confrontation between Reece and Selene. What purpose does it serve in this otherwise action-packed story?

Discussion Question 3

At the beginning of the novel, the reader was given the impression by Gwen that her brother Godfrey was a weak character. Why was this, and was she correct in thinking so?



Vocabulary

momentous, marveling, fathom, idolized, procrastinated, delirium, quizzically, flustered, perseverance, defiant, devious, amends, apparition, tranquil, comprehend



Chapters 29-32

Summary

Chapter 29

Gwen practices with her bow, disappointed in her difficulties with hitting her target. Krohn is with her. She does not feel safe hiding at her mother's palace. Steffen comes to her. He is an old servant who has been kind to her through her entire life. She thanks him, and asks him to be her advisor. Steffen is honored, and offers to help her with her archery. He is excellent at it himself, and helps her to improve immediately. Krohn snarls, and a dozen men on horseback approach. The Nevaruns are back. Steffen grabs his bow and tells her to run. He shoots down three men almost instantly. Gwen grabs another bow and strikes down another. The remaining men reach them, but Gwen is saved by Krohn, then Estopheles. Gwen's group manages to defeat the Nevaruns, but hundreds more appear close by. Gwen orders Steffen to get word of her capture to the Legion and Thor. Reluctantly, he does so, and Gwen is surrounded. Krohn is caught in a net and the man Gwen was sold to knocks her unconscious with a backhand.

Chapter 30

Luanda sneaks through McCloud city to where Bronson is being held. She enters the city center. She sees her husband bound on a scaffold as a crowd ridicules him. She decides to wait for night. When it is finally dark, she leaves her hiding place and goes to him. He is extremely weak, and falls on her when she frees him. This draws the guard, but Luanda throws a dagger into his throat. Luanda takes his horse and puts Bronson on it, and rides to safety.

Chapter 31

Reece wakes early and thinks of Selese as he begins work rebuilding. He decides to return to her. She is woken up by him and greets him angrily. He demands to know if she loves him. She admits that she's been thinking about him, but she is afraid his feelings are not genuine. He kisses her, but a horn sounds, and he sees a messenger heading to the village center. Reese returns to The Legion. Thor meets the messenger. It is Steffen, who reveals that Gwen has been taken by the Nevaruns. Thor orders his men to their horses.

Chapter 32

Thor and the others charge into King's Court, and arrive at the place where Gwen was captured. He finds Krohn badly wounded. He puts the leopard on Steffen's horse and tells Steffen to go to the healer. The Legion agrees to follow Thor after the Nevaruns. They charge south toward the Nevarun province. They climb to the top of a ridge to spot the Nevarun army, then rush to meet them. Thor sees Gwen. Thor decides to release boulders on either side of the cliffs flanking the Nevarun army. The action shocks the



Nevaruns, but many manage to escape, leaving Thor no choice but to attack directly. The leader, with Gwen on his horse, goes directly for Thor. Thor is swarmed by Nevaruns and knocked from his horse. Thor watches as those in his legion, except for Reece, O'Connor, and Elden, are killed. Conven and Conval rejoin them after dropping the boulders, and Estopholese appears. Thor summons his magic, opens the earth and sends Nevaruns falling to their deaths. The Nevarun leader attacks Thor again, but Gwen shoots him with an arrow. The remaining Legion members shout in triumph.

Analysis

Gwen and Luanda both reflect strength in female characters. Their strength is directly related to the strength of the male characters. The author seems to be making an important statement about the abilities of females in his world. This is most important due to the way that women are commonly treated by authors of this genre. Females tend to be helpless damsels in distress or evil sorceresses in this kind of fiction, so it is very important for the reader to examine both Gwen and Luanda as the leading female characters in the novel. They are both intelligent, and they are just as capable of fighting as they are of thinking. In fact, a typical sword and sorcery scenario is cleverly placed upon its head as Luanda manages to escape, then determines to go after her husband in order to effect a rescue. Meanwhile, Gwen insists that Steffen escape to notify The Legion that she is about to be taken prisoner, but not without taking out a handful of Nevarun warriors herself. The book's treatment of women is further nuanced as the developing romance evolves between Reece and Selene. Selene does not want to be in a relationship with Reece because she correctly assumes that he has mistreated them often enough due to his station. Reece is baffled because he is unable to deal with a woman who does not automatically respond well to his advances. This becomes a humorous element in the novel, and Reece is forced to confront his own behavior in order to approach Selene.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the significance of Gwen's relationship with Steffen the servant.

Discussion Question 2

Does Luanda love Bronson? Contrast this with the way she interacted with her husband before she was taken prisoner.

Discussion Question 3

Describe briefly whether or not the Nevaruns represent serious enemies to Thor and Gwen in the context of this novel. Why or why aren't they a serious threat?

Vocabulary

indomitable, beaming, expeditionary, spectacle, indignity, vigilant, cryptic, incredulous, exhilarating, calamity, impunity, arrogant, resonating, prevail, malicious



Chapters 33-36

Summary

Chapter 33

Andronicus is still enraged at the dead McCloud soldier's deception. He meets McCloud soldiers on the eastern crossing into The Ring, but some of his men were instantly destroyed when they attempt to cross the magic barrier. Andronicus offers the soldiers great wealth and power if they let him through, but none respond. Further angered, he throws one of his men over the ledge, stunned when the man falls instead of disintegrates. He sends another man onto the bridge, and when he does not die, Andronicus orders a charge.

Chapter 34

Thor, Gwen, and the legion return to King's Court. They reach the Hall of Arms and find Steffen with Krohn, who was healed by Illepra. They are then met by members of The Silver. Thor tells them what has happened. Godfrey announces that he has proof against Gareth, and they all decide to take action to dethrone the King.

Chapter 35

Thor and Gwen's group march through King's Castle to the council. Gareth is with them, as are Lord Kultin's soldiers. Godfrey announces the charges, which Gareth denies. Blaine is revealed, but suddenly denies having seen anything, and the council refuses to take up Godfrey's charges. Gwen announces their separation from King's Court, and Gareth brands them as traitors.

Chapter 36

Erec returns to Kings Court with Alistair. He stops and rests next to a lake, and she thanks him for saving her. He asks her where she comes from, but she swore never to tell anyone. She does admit to being a King's daughter. The two sleep, and when Erec awakens, he feels that they must hurry away. They discover that they are followed by hundreds of soldiers once commanded by the lord Erec killed. Erec tells Alistair to ride to powerful friends of his who will keep her safe, and sends her away on Warfkin.

Analysis

This section marks the beginning of the end of the novel. Since the novel is part of a series, the section begins to open up new possibilities that a standalone would not. Gwen's separation from the MacGil court, Erec's separation from Alistair, and, of course, Andronicus' crossing through the magic barrier all represent problems that will not be solved by the end of the novel. It is important for the reader to note that sudden twists



have been introduced into each of the respective narratives except for Thor's. It seems that the author has reserved Thor's twist for last because it is the most significant twist of all. Thor's character has undergone the most change.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Andronicus kill his own men so often?

Discussion Question 2

Why would Blaine have possibly lied to the council about Gareth's hired assassin?

Discussion Question 3

What does Erec's willingness to sacrifice himself for Alistair say about him as a character? Briefly consider what role he would play in the next book if you wrote it.

Vocabulary

overzealousness, flailing, trot, verge, refortifying, rendezvous, anticipation, formidable, ecstatic, roused, obligates, reverberating



Chapters 37-39

Summary

Chapter 37

Thor and Gwen leave with the rebels, but a frantic messenger suddenly announces that the Destiny Sword has been stolen and the Ring has collapsed. The thieves of the sword have already been caught. They tell everyone that the sword has already been taken into the Empire. Then, they are quickly hanged. Thor's men determine that the sword must be returned somehow, and he volunteers to get it back. Reece, O'Connor, Elden, and the twins all volunteer to go with him. The rest will leave to form a new court away from Gareth. Thor explains to Gwen that he must go as part of his destiny.

Chapter 38

King McCloud charges off in search of his son, but spots the imperial army charging in his direction. Andronicus comes to him and McCloud tries to pretend that he let Andronicus in on purpose, but the emperor does not believe him.

Chapter 39

Thor leaves with everyone who choose to follow him to find the Destiny Sword

Analysis

The novel ends by ensuring that new beginnings are clear for those readers who intend to go on to the next book in the series. King McCloud's fate is not clear; and, although Andronicus had planned to kill the king before he made it through the barrier, he is likely still alive in some fashion. Much of the mythical symbolism that was explained or shown to Thor and Gwen throughout the novel becomes clear, as when Argon announced that The Ring would not last much longer. Thor realizes that he is the one who must attempt to recover the Destiny Sword in order to save his land. In this novel, Thor has undergone a powerful transformation into something more than human.

Discussion Question 1

Is the reader given any hint of how the Destiny Sword was stolen? Describe, and explain why (or why not) this is the case.



Discussion Question 2

What does McCloud attempt when Andronicus finds him? What does this say about his character?

Discussion Question 3

What is Gwen's reaction to Thor when he volunteers to find the Destiny Sword?

Vocabulary

plaza, pandemonium, entourage, venture, resolving, emboldened, vantage, crested, objective



Characters

Gwen

Gwendolyn MacGil is the daughter of former King MacGil, who confessed before he died that he wished her to take power in his kingdom. She is intelligent, well-read, beautiful, and completely in love with the warrior Thor. Gwen proves herself to be a fierce opponent against her brother Gareth, who became king through force and attempted to assassinate their other brother Godfrey for fear that he would become the next king. Gwen also manages to save Godfrey from deadly poison and Thor from a sneak attack by McCloud's forces at the same time, by offering herself up for sacrifice. Although Argon did not accept her death as the cost of Thor and Godfrey's survival, he did make it clear that she would die a partial death in the future. Gwen is highly respected amongst members of the Legion, and her other brother, Reece, is a member and steady friend of Thor's. She was once an excellent archer, but lost practice and seeks to regain her former skill. She also knows of many hidden places throughout King's Court and the surrounding area that serve as relatively safe places for her to hide. She actively resists the Nevaruns, who attempt to force her into becoming their prince's bride, and it becomes clear early in the novel that she is carrying Thor's child. She resents the fact that Thor must constantly place himself in danger, and is extremely upset when Thor volunteers to recover the Destiny Sword from the Empire. After Gareth is unsuccessfully confronted with evidence of his murder-attempt, Gwen assumes leadership over those who wish to separate themselves from Gareth's court.

Thor

Thor is a member of The Legion, a group of soldiers who have sworn loyalty to the MacGil king. Throughout the course of the novel, it is made known that Thor is more than human. He actually descends from a mystical people known as druids, who are capable of controlling nature and animals. He is a very well respected member of his army, and this contrasts sharply with what is known of his childhood, where he was constantly ignored and told he was not good enough. His brothers Drake, Dross, and Durs even refuse to take orders from Thor when he is promoted to captain for his victory over the ambush meant to kill him specifically. He is an excellent warrior, but he is also capable of great magical feats. He returns to his home village to discover more about his origins, and learns that the man he thought was his father only agreed to care for Thor after being asked to by a mysterious and beautiful woman. Thor begins to understand that his destiny is deeply woven into the survival of his world, and eventually volunteers to recover the Destiny Sword in order to protect the land from the invading empire and evil lord Andronicus. He is deeply in love with Gwen, but a curious insecurity makes it difficult for Thor to ask her hand in marriage, and his mission to recover the Destiny Sword alienates Gwen from him. The Legion is devoted to Thor who, through his constant victories in difficult situations, becomes a kind of mascot for them. Unfortunately, he gets most of his group killed during a rescue attempt for Gwen when



she is taken prisoner by the Nevaruns. Gwen is vital to the Legion. She is viewed as the rightful heir. So, Thor's mission was entirely necessary, and he did manage to overcome extreme odds.

Godfrey

Godfrey is the brother of Gareth and Gwen. Gareth poisons him just before the beginning of the novel. When Gwen revives him, Gareth resolves to find proof that his brother was the one who tried to kill him. He is successful in finding the boy Blaine, who knows the story behind his attempted murder, but the boy lies at the royal court, pretending to know nothing. Gareth is uninterested in becoming king, and defers to his sister Gwen in every matter.

King McCloud

King McCloud is an enemy to the kingdom of the MacGils. He suffers a major setback to his plans when Thor destroys his army. He seems to have made some kind of deal with Gareth, who also wanted Thor eliminated. However, McCloud is such a power-seeking and dishonest character that it is impossible to tell if he actually wanted to cooperate with Gareth. He is seen to have a terrible relationship with his son Bronson. He attempts to torture and kill his daughter-in-law Luanda, but McCloud's tactics of bullying and threatening wear thin. By the end of the novel, he is confronted by Andronicus, who is a far more dangerous bully than himself.

Gareth

Gareth is the unlawful king of the MacGils, even though he was the old king's son. The former king wished that Gwen would rule, but Gareth decided to take control of the kingdom and attempted to assassinate his brother Godfrey and marry his sister off to the Nevaruns so that she would not be a threat to him. He is portrayed as a cowardly drug addict.

Argon

Argon is a very mysterious character who appears as an old man and seems to know a great deal about the future. He appears when either Thor or Gwen require information, and he is also capable of performing incredible magic.

Andronicus

Andronicus is the evil leader of a giant empire who seeks to destroy both the MacGils and the McClouds. Unfortunately for him, these lands are protected by a magical barrier held in place by the Destiny Sword. Someone suddenly and unexpectedly steals the



Destiny Sword from its place near the end of the novel, and The Ring collapses, allowing Andronicus inside with his giant armies.

Luanda

Luanda is a noblewoman from MacGil lands who marries Bronson, the McCloud crown prince. She decides at the beginning of the novel that King McCloud must be killed and attempts to carry out the murder. She is quickly taken prisoner and punished, but she manages to escape with her husband Bronson, who defended her when his father tried to kill her.

Reece

Reece is Gwen's brother and Thor's closest friend. He falls in love with Selese, a healer, who believes that he is just trying to seduce her.

Bronson

Bronson is the son of King McCloud. Though he is terrified of his father, he tries to defend his wife Luanda from him. He ends up being thrown in the dungeon for defying the king.

Akron

Akron is a drinking friend of Godfrey's. He helps save Godfrey's life and investigate his attempted murder.

Fulton

Fulton is a drinking friend of Godfrey's. He helps save Godfrey's life and investigate his attempted murder.

Forg

Forg is a member of The Legion who is cast out after leading Thor and his men into an ambush.

Illepra

Illepra is the royal healer for the MacGils. She saves Godfrey's life. Later, she saves the leopard Krohn's life after he is badly beaten by Nevaruns.



Kendrick

Kendrick is a captain in The Legion and The Silver. He coordinates their efforts.

Erec

Erec is a powerful nobleman who attempts to rescue his wife, Alistair, from another very powerful lord. Though he is successful, he realizes that he has sparked a war by killing his enemy.

Alistair

Alistair is the daughter of a king from another land. She keeps her history secret, but Erec is clearly in love with her and does everything he can to ensure her safety.

Drake/Dross/Durs

These are the three brothers of Thor. They make only one appearance to complain about Thor's promotion and insist that he is not worthy. It turns out they aren't really even his brothers at all.

O'Connor

O'Connor is another member of The Legion and close friend of Thor and Reece.

Selese

Selese is a village healer who saves Reece's life. Reece falls in love with her, but she wants to see how devoted he really is.

Blaine

Blaine is the younger brother of the boy who tried to kill Godfrey with poison. He agrees to testify against Gareth, but he lies when he enters the King's Council.



Symbols and Symbolism

Destiny Sword

The Destiny Sword is seldom mentioned within the novel, but it is a great artifact of incredible power. Its magic is responsible for The Ring, the magical barrier that keeps Andronicus and his evil empire out of lands controlled by the MacGils and McClouds.

The Ring

The Ring refers to a magical barrier that neither Andronicus nor his troops can cross. If they attempt to do so, they are instantly destroyed. Near the end of the novel, the Ring is dropped suddenly when someone steals the Destiny Sword.

Magic Ring

Not to be confused with the magical barrier explained above, Thor's mother leaves him a ring and tells him to give it to the woman he loves. This ring represents the powerful commitment and devotion Thor feels toward Gwen. Interestingly enough, he cannot bring himself to propose to her even after he has the ring.

Magic Necklace

Thor is given a magical necklace and told to wear it in a letter from his mother. He does so and feels its protection surround him instantly. This necklace represents the divine or magical powers that preserve Thor in his quest for peace.

Horses

Horses are present on almost every page of this novel. They tend to symbolize freedom, as they allow for swift movement, and the main characters commonly manage to escape or effect rescues by using them. Some of the horses, such as Erec's horse Warfkin, are named and treated as companions rather than mere animals.

Castles

Representative of power and strength, castles are a commonplace sight in this novel, as both kings and many lords possess them.



Bows/Arrows

Gwen feels that it is important to learn archery, and this is reinforced when she is attacked by the Nevaruns. Archery is often regarded as the most refined form of combat. It is efficient because it allows one to combat enemies at a great distance.

Books

Books make only one significant appearance in the novel, but it is a pivotal event. Gwen shows Thor the texts predicting the future, from which Thor determines that he is not entirely human, due to his association with druidic powers.

Lake of Sorrows

The Lake of Sorrows serves as Gwen's connection to a more peaceful past, and she seeks refuge there often, until she is overrun by the Nevarun warriors.

Poison

Poison represents cowardice and villainy, as Gareth tries to eliminate his brother Godfrey through its use. The giant spiders who attack the Legion outside of the cave also make use of poison. In both cases, the wounded are cured through potions created by healers.

Settings

The novel takes place almost entirely inside the small-seeming kingdom of the MacGils, an ancient royal line going back eight rulers. It has all the trappings of a medieval fantasy world, including castles, villages, monsters, and magic. Knights hurry from place to place on horseback, in full armor with sharpened swords and powerful maces. In the villages, locals get by through farming, smithing, or any way that they can. Crime appears to be a major problem within the kingdom, with many gambling dens scattered across cities and villages, and no one seems capable of addressing the problem. Many lords of this land are so powerful that they challenge the sovereignty of the king, or at least do not seem afraid to break royal laws or decrees. As a result, fighting within the nobility breaks out on a regular basis. Either the present king is simply uninterested in resolving this situation, or it has never been the view in this land that the king should adjudicate between his subjects. Surrounding this land and the neighboring land of the McClouds is a magical barrier held in place by the Destiny Sword. This Sword protects both kingdoms from a vast and evil empire and its ruler Andronicus. In fact, the only reason these kingdoms appear to remain unharmed is because of this magical barrier, as Andronicus commands millions of soldiers. At the end of the novel, the barrier collapses, throwing the MacGil kingdom into a panic.



Themes and Motifs

Destiny

The entire work is loaded with a sense of destiny, and the character Argon acts as a go-between for the characters who are desperately seeking a return to more peaceful times and higher powers, most notably the druids who have prophesied a time of great conflict. Fate, according to this narrative, is somewhat changeable. Certain events must necessarily happen, and these events are disastrous. Where the characters can make a difference is in the sacrifices and decisions that they make. Gwen is the most capable of altering fate, as evidenced in her ability to change the future course of events to one not even revealed to her by the wise Argon. In this sense, it seems as though the powers that be test the characters and determine whether or not they are worthy of a better future, and the answer, more often than not, is favorable toward the characters. Still, the idea of destiny as a test or challenge is never expressly stated, and does allow room for the heroes of the novel to get thwarted or frustrated often, as when Gwen is captured by the Nevaruns, or Gareth is somehow able to silence Blaine's account of the poisoning. These unexpected events never defy fate outright, and even seem to serve as a counterbalance to the successes of Thor and Gwen, especially when, after being unable to bring a swift end to Gareth's rule, they are given news of Andronicus' rapid approach.

Sacrifice

Sacrifices are very common in the novel. They are seen as the primary way in which fate is made to change. Gwen's offering of herself is a prime example of sacrifice, and from the outcome and judgment of the powers weighing her offer of her own life in order to save Godfrey and Thor at the same time, it can be assumed that they look on such selflessness very favorably. Gwen's sacrifices are not the only ones present in the novel, even though they are the clearest examples. Erec sacrifices himself at the end of the novel in order to protect Alistair from his enemies. Bronson sacrifices himself and his standing with his father in order to stand up for his wife, and in turn Luanda stands up for him and saves him from torture and death. The villains, on the other hand, commonly make mockeries of sacrifices, as when King McCloud imprisons and tortures his own son to preserve his power, or Gareth poisons Godfrey for his own ends. Andronicus, easily the most powerful character in the novel, routinely kills his own men out of mild frustration, as though they should pay for his inability to cross The Ring or otherwise satisfy his objectives. The needless deaths of his men serve as a counterpoint to the good nature of the character's heroes, and draw a crystal clear distinction between the evil emperor and those who would stand against him. This idea of sacrifice as salvation plays itself out in even the smallest situations, as when Steffen begs to be left behind so that Gwen can escape the Nevarun warriors.



Prejudice

Although it never takes the form of racial injustice, prejudice is commonplace throughout the novel. Its close relations ignorance and foolishness are, too. Thor has overcome the idea that he is weak and unworthy of the honors bestowed to him through The Legion, but social prejudice shows itself through the form of his brothers, who insist that he is pathetic and will always remain so because of his low birth. This idea echoes itself again when Thor encounters his father, and prejudice seems to exist for its own sake. Thor's adoptive father seems to hate Thor because on some level he knows Thor is destined for greatness, and the old man is so steeped in ignorance he cannot bring himself to honor that distinction. Gareth is yet another character who adheres to strict social guidelines and enforces extremely prejudiced judgment on his servants, as evidence by his assault on the servant who did not heat his soup enough. Andronicus, who considers himself not entirely human, constantly demonstrates prejudice even to his followers, due to the mere fact that they are human, and the reason that the McClouds and MacGills infuriate him so is that humans have been able to escape his wrath for as long as they have. Curiously enough, the heroes of the story never confront this problem itself, and the world seems stricken with poverty and injustice everywhere. Erec, who could easily be considered a minor protagonist in the story, even thoughtlessly slays a relatively innocent person. Though a servant of a greater criminal, the man Erec kills after learning the whereabouts of his wife did not warrant his own death, and in fact it comes as a surprise to the reader. Still, it is proof that social stations are all-meaning in the world of the novel, and that people from higher classes can terrorize the poor and weak regularly.



Styles

Point of View

The story is told mainly through exposition. The author is so talented at including action at regular intervals so that the reader may not even notice a fair amount of internal monologue going on within each chapter. This internalization of the conflict absorbs much of the novel's text, and is important to establish the character's desires and hopes, but does, on occasion, become repetitive. Thor constantly wants to get back to Gwen, and his thoughts are never far from this fact. Likewise, Gwen is constantly worried about Thor, and she agonizes over the distance between them. Since they are so rarely together, these thoughts and feelings tend to generate long passages that an active reader could just as easily go without. Likewise, the dialogue tends to become repetitious, as the author uses conflicts from prior chapters to fuel new events and actions.

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Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is very simple and straightforward. This simplifies the cultural world in which the story takes place. As the story itself is really one of a straightforward battle of good versus evil, the presence of only a single language keeps the reader from being distracted from the major issues at play. There are, however, many references to older forms of English and the associated forms of mysticism present in Celtic, Nordic, and Druidic traditions. Again, these references are oversimplified and highly fictionalized, but the presence of The Ring, as in the barrier that keeps the two smaller kingdoms safe from Andronicus, and the ring that Thor is to give Gwen, are reference to a longstanding myth of The Ring, which typically plays an important role in fantasy fiction. The importance of the ring is its circular nature, implying that it is cyclical and eternal. Much of the tension of the novel is derived from the fact that The Ring, which has kept everyone safe from Andronicus for time unknown, has suddenly failed, bringing the old cycle to an end. Thus, the meaning of the word "ring" takes on an extraordinary amount of significance throughout the novel. The Ring, in this case, signifies a cycle by



which humans can live their lives, and it is very interesting to note that Thor receives his mother's ring (with instructions to give it to Gwen) very shortly before The Ring itself collapses.

Structure

The novel is divided into thirty-nine chapters. They are numbered without subtitles, and while there are often section-breaks within the chapters, there are no divisions that group chapters into larger sections. This is most likely the case because the novel is very fast-paced and part of a series, although plenty of similar series do divide into sections.

The plot of the novel is simple, but there are many subplots and stories that parallel the main action. The main plot revolves around Gwen and Thor's growing relationship, but several of the smaller subplots involve Gwen's attempt to warn Thor, Thor's desire to learn more about who he really is, and Godfrey's attempt to uncover proof that his brother attempted to murder him. Some plots never interact with the main plot directly, such as Luanda's attempts at killing King McCloud then escaping, or Erec's rescue of his wife Alistair. As this book is one in a series, it can be assumed that these plots will come in contact with the main characters at some point later on, but in this work on its own, they serve to parallel developments happening with the main characters.

The novel is very fast-paced, and gives the impression of being a short read, although it is average-sized for a book in its genre. As stated above, it can get a little repetitive, as the main character's concerns don't change a great deal from chapter to chapter. They do, however, rapidly respond to emergencies as is necessary. The action scenes are well-crafted and often epic in execution, which gives them a very quick and immediate feel.



Quotes

Luanda knew what she was about to do was crazy, that she was taking her life into her hands, and that McCloud would likely kill her. But she pushed these thoughts from her mind as she ran. (Chapter 1 paragraph 2)

Importance: This describes Luanda's thoughts and emotions as she runs after King McCloud in order to kill him. This is significant because it is only the second paragraph in the entire novel, and establishes that it will be a fast-paced story. Also interesting is that the novel did not open with a viewpoint from either Thor or Gwen.

Gwen suddenly had an idea; she whistled and held out one arm, and Estopheles swooped down off her perch and landed on Gwen's wrist. (Chapter 4 paragraph 16)

Importance: This quote establishes Gwen's connection to nature, and is the first glimpse we get in the story of animals that are somehow just more than beasts. It becomes an important re-occurrence later on, especially when Thor is told that he can control animals, such as bees, to attack enemies.

Not only was she racked with guilt and worry for Godfrey--but even more so, for Thor. She could not shake from her mind the image of him charging into battle, sent into a trap by Gareth, about to die. (Chapter 7 paragraph 2)

Importance: This quote is a perfect example of how Gwen's attention is pulled in different directions throughout the novel. She is similarly well-equipped at making decisions in these situations, and readily overcomes many difficulties.

Thor was just happy that he did not let any of his Legion brothers down. He was happy that his friends had escaped mostly unharmed, and he felt a sense of remorse about those who died in the battle. He did not know them, but he wished he could have saved them, too. (Chapter 11 paragraph 4)

Importance: This quote sums up Thor's devotion to the members of The Legion and Silver, and demonstrates that he is a character deeply interested in protecting his brethren. This sets him apart from his siblings, and even from many members of the King's Army, who for reasons of foolishness or greed, commonly disobey orders or otherwise fail their leaders.

You did not fight like a warrior," said Drake, the eldest. "You did not fight like one of us. If you did, you never would have won." "You are not deserving of the honors they heap on you," added Dross. "Despite what these men think, we know the truth about you. You are still just our younger brother," said Durs. "Still just a poor sheepherder. The smallest and least deserving of all of us.

-- Drake/Dross/Durs

Importance: This quote is the sole conversation Thor has with his brothers throughout



the entire novel. It demonstrates his family's hatred of him as well as their inherent foolishness. Drake admits that they could not have won the battle without him, but this only earns him their scorn rather than their appreciation.

As they strolled, Thor wondered what the future might look like with Gwen. He had his duties to fulfill for the Legion, yet he also wanted to spend time with her. He wondered how they could build their life together. He knew he wanted to be here, in King's Court, but in the back of his mind he knew that as long as Gareth was king, that was not possible. (Chapter 16 paragraph 3)

Importance: This demonstrates that Thor is just as concerned about Gwen as she is of him, and the two are very similarly minded in their desire to build a life together. They are also equally aware of the obstacles they must face first, but Thor is more often confronted with an immediate need and taken away from Gwen, who is consequently left behind to worry if he will return to her alive.

Most of all, there was the question that still burnt front and center in his mind: would she marry him? As they walked through the fields, making their way slowly past the cliffs, hand in hand, Thor's heart was pounding, his throat dry. He was ready to ask her; he wanted to ask her; and at every turn, he asked himself if this was a good place to ask the question that would change their lives forever. (Chapter 19 paragraph 4)

Importance: This demonstrates more of the relationship between the two, while also displaying Thor's seemingly only weakness. Through the novel, he is never able to ask Gwen, it is simply never the right time. Nevertheless, this specific question crops up numerous times. Each time, he just barely manages to not ask her to marry him.

Godfrey turned the corner and saw the sign for his old tavern, hanging crookedly, swinging in the afternoon, drunks spilling out of it, and felt a sense of repulsion. A wave of anxiety overwhelmed him. He no longer felt comforted being here; now he just associated the place with his near-death. He had told himself he would never walk through these doors again. (Chapter 22 paragraph 2)

Importance: This shows that Godfrey has undergone an important transformation from a drunk into a responsible member of the royal family. Although not as extreme as Thor's transformation, it does demonstrate that many of the characters undergo significant development through the course of the novel.

His father always thought he could end an argument by grabbing Thor by the shoulders, by shaking him, by infecting him with his anger--but not anymore. As soon as his father's hands dug into his shoulders, Thor reached up, lifted his hands between them and knocked his father's hands away; then, in the same motion, he shoved his father with the heel of his hands, right in the chest, hard enough to send him stumbling back a good five feet, so off-balance that he nearly fell. (Chapter 25 paragraph 50)

Importance: This shows that Thor's father really has been a menace to Thor all his life, but that menace is over. Thor will never get the respect and love he deserves from what



he considered his family at one point, but he does get it from the Legion, and that is more than enough for him. The encounter with his father only makes him realize that is true.

Thor heard the screams, watched thousands of people fleeing; he saw thousands butchered, thousands more imprisoned, taken as slaves. He watched as a wasteland spread and engulfed the once-bucolic hills of the Ring. He watched fruit fall from trees, saw women taken away. He saw great armies invading, covering every inch of the Ring. And he watched the sky blacken. (Chapter 28 paragraph 38)

Importance: This is Thor's first glimpse of the future--with the help of Argon. It marks a stage in his transformation where the responsibilities tied to his newfound powers become apparent.

Reece paced in the early morning light, tormented over it. She had left things ambiguous, and he could not be entirely certain if she did not like him. He knew that if he did not try to speak with her now, one last time, then he would never come back here, never take that chance again. He knew that if he returned to King's Court without taking that chance, without closure, it would haunt him. (Chapter 31 paragraph 4)

Importance: This quote shows Reece's sudden and powerful feelings for Selene. As the novel progresses, it shows that Reece, just like his brother Godfrey and sister Gwen, is capable of change.

If the council will not take action," Brom said, "then it is clear that we, The Silver, The Legion, the King's men, no longer have a place here in King's Court. If so then we shall all leave this place and set up a new court elsewhere!
-- Brom (Chapter 34 paragraph 43)

Importance: This statement, spoken by the minor character Brom, echoes Gwen's intentions and the desires of the Legion to get rid of Gareth as their leader. It hints about what their conflict will be in the next book in the series.

Before him there came into view an army of horses. It was the biggest army he had ever seen, unlike anything he had ever laid eyes upon. It appeared to be a million men, covering the entire countryside, swarming his way, like a swarm of ants. (Chapter 38 paragraph 9)

Importance: This is Andronicus' invasion into the Ring, and King McCloud is the one to see it. It suggests that McCloud is no longer the MacGil's largest problem.