

Catch a Fire: The Life of Bob Marley Study Guide

Catch a Fire: The Life of Bob Marley by Timothy White

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Plot Summary

The novel *Catch a Fire* is a complete biography depicting the events that happened to Bob Marley in his lifetime, as well as including the major events that influenced his behavior and thoughts. The beginning of the novel encapsulates the history of the Ethiopian people, specifically with Haile Selassie, who becomes the King of Ethiopia. The beginnings of Rastafarianism and why it started is fully explained. Since Rastafarianism played such a huge role in Bob Marley's life, it's important to know the history of this religion and how its origins would have appealed so strongly to Marley.

From there, the childhood and youth of Marley is explored. Marley is the child of a white American captain and Cedella Malcolm, typically called Ciddy. Captain Marley marries Cedella when he finds out that she is pregnant solely to make sure that his son will not be a bastard. However, shortly after Bob's birth, Captain Marley disappears. For this reason, Ciddy essentially raises Bob, who she prefers to call by his middle name "Nesta." He grew up in Nine Miles, Jamaica until his father called for him to come to Kingston to receive a better education. When Bob arrives in Kingston, however, his father immediately abandons him. When Ciddy comes to get him, she ultimately decides that she also wants to live in Kingston and works out a living arrangement with Toddy Livingston. Here, Bob gets his heavy influence in Jamaican culture and particular interest in reggae music.

Bob stays in Jamaica and eventually begins to record music and establish a group — Bob Marley and the Wailers. Working with Coxsone Dodd and other producers, he establishes his group as a success. Flying to England to record for Island Records, he meets Chris Blackwell who takes his music to another group of people — Europeans. As the popularity of his music increases, Bob and the Wailers become a fantastic success internationally. Throughout it all, Marley proclaims his personal feelings and messages about Rastafarianism and Jamaica in his music. He becomes a symbol for the Jamaican people and for poor people internationally with his songs that are intensely personal, but have incredible universal appeal as well.

Bob is sometimes brought into political arenas, which he tries to avoid and keep his music his only political message. However, at concerts like the "Smile Jamaica" concert, Marley is the centerpiece for Jamaican political figures and plays a role in trying to encourage peace and stability in Jamaica.

Bob is diagnosed with cancer at 33 and will die by the age of 36, a fact that he himself foresees and foretells to his friends. After he dies, he leaves behind 11 claimed children and his wife Rita and his mother Cedella, both of whom restart their music careers in his wake.



Chapter 1: Riddim Track and Chapter 2: Kingdom Come

Chapter 1: Riddim Track and Chapter 2: Kingdom Come Summary and Analysis

The novel opens with Bob Marley at the concert for Independence Day in Zimbabwe. He is disoriented and his illusions of grandeur with the African people have been dismantled after he has witnessed African police beating on their own people because of the chaos at the concert to see him.

The life of Marcus Garvey is covered next. Garvey is partly responsible for bringing Rastafarianism to the islands and in particular for his pro-African sentiments. Called a genius of media manipulation, Garvey was mistakenly famous in 1914 for saying "Look to Africa, for the crowning of a Black King; He shall be the Redeemer." These statements set the stage for what will be one of the founding tenants of Rastafarianism, which feels that Haile Selassie of Ethiopia was a prophet for the black people. With his arrival as the new king of Ethiopia, Garvey was granted some renown and fame for predicting it in America and in Jamaica.

The tenants and important documents like the Holy Piby or the "Black Man's Bible" of Rastafarianism are covered as well. Rastafarianism flourished in Jamaica since it appealed to the poor. When Haile Selassie came to Jamaica in 1966 over 100,000 Rastas surrounded his plane on the tarmac. Jamaicans revere their spiritual leaders.

For many in the Third World, Marley was seen as a man who had the capacity to repel evil, which is an idea he cultivated, calling himself the "Duppy Conqueror."



Chapter Two: Kingdom Come

Chapter Two: Kingdom Come Summary and Analysis

On July 23, 1892, a baby was born to Ras Makonnen named Ras Tafari. He was raised with both European influence and Shoan-Amharic traditions, but did not inherit the governorship of Harar that he was promised since birth. Nevertheless, as the boy grows up rumors start to spread about his childhood, including his relationship with the priests and other learned people. In addition, there was a stigmata on Tafari's palms that were inexplicable. In essence, Ras Tafari is thought to be a prophet for the African people, although many priests and powerful people made a pact to keep Tafari from gaining power because he was far too dangerous.

When Ras Tafari becomes the leader of Ethiopia, he changes his name to Haile Selassie I, becoming the Living God of Abraham and Isaac for the Rastafarianism. However, when he dies and is buried, no one can find his special ring, the ring thought to contain elements of Solomon's famous ring.



Chapter 3: Misty Morning

Chapter 3: Misty Morning Summary and Analysis

On February 6, 1945, nineteen-year-old Cedella Marley gave birth to her first child — Robert Nesta. Right away, Cedella's father Omeriah is convinced that an evil spirit is trying to do bad things to him since he nearly dies when he is only four months old. The Malcolms were one of the most prosperous citizens in the area and Omeriah is the most respected citizen in Nine Miles.

When Cedella, frequently called Ciddy, first sees Captain Norval Marley, he is riding a horse with her relative on the back. She quickly falls in love with him and believes him when he talks to her about marriage. However, when she becomes pregnant, Captain Marley only marries her to save Bob from being a bastard child and promptly tells her that he is leaving Nine Miles never to return. Growing up in Nine Miles, Bob — called Nesta in his childhood — is surrounded by tales of mysticism and spiritual beings that can influence any part of his daily life.



Chapter 4: Bad Card

Chapter 4: Bad Card Summary and Analysis

Nesta is served his favorite meal when Cedella prepares him for the big news she has for him. Captain Marley has written to Cedella to tell her that Nesta should go to Kingston to take advantage of the superior education system with the promise that she will be able to send relatives to check on him and he will be under the care of his wealthy nephew. She is worried about telling him, but recalls a situation when a local neighbor told her that Nesta had read her palm — successfully — some time ago.

Ciddy tells Nesta that he is going to Kingston and of course, the boy is upset. However, he is calm by the time she puts him on the bus with his elder cousin. Despite the rough drive, Nesta sleeps soundly the entire way. When he arrives, he is immediately taken from his cousin and Captain Marley grabs his hand. Upon seeing his father for the first time, Nesta faints and the Captain puts him atop a donkey cart and rides away from the house that he told Ciddy he'd be taking Marley and in the opposite direction to a decrepit house on Heywood Street.

Weeks pass and no one in the Malcom family hears from Marley. They realize he is lost in Kingston. However, two people from Nine Miles run across Marley who tells them where he is living. As soon as the news is relayed to Ciddy, she races to Kingston to find him. Eventually, they locate him in a rundown house under the care of a woman named Miss Grey.

Ciddy takes Nesta back to Nine Miles immediately and the whole family is happy and relieved to get him back. However, the taste of Kingston has made Ciddy want to live there instead of Nine Miles in order to get more out of her life. She tells the family that she will be taking Nesta back to Kingston where she will live with Toddy Livingston (whose father is one of Marley's best friends, Bunny) and work as a barmaid while she saves money and puts Marley in a better school.



Chapter 5: Pass It On

Chapter 5: Pass It On Summary and Analysis

Nesta's reentry into Kingston is smooth and he frequently hangs out with Bunny Livingston. The boys are learning to be much more independent and more mischievous in the big city. However, one thing they all have in common is wanting to look more like a white person because these are the people with the power. Also, the growing youths are frequently trying to have sex as soon as possible and if a girl isn't pregnant by the time she's out of her teens, she's seen as being a mule, or barren and worthless woman.

One Saturday, Ciddy shoots out of the house past Toddy Livingston and heads straight towards Whitfield Town. She goes straight to the house of the newly married Captain Marley and greets his new wife. When she is there, Captain Marley sees her and asks after Bob. Ciddy tells him that the boy is fine and the new wife realizes that the Captain has been married before. Marley is brought to see his father briefly and then Ciddy goes to the courthouse days later to file a formal complaint that the Captain has remarried without first divorcing Ciddy. However, because she doesn't bring a lawyer with her, Ciddy loses the case. Upon leaving, Bob tells her not to worry; they don't need the man anyways. A few months later, Ciddy learns that Captain Marley has died from a heart attack.

Chapter 6: Small Axe

Chapter 6: Small Axe Summary and Analysis

Ciddy, Toddy, Bunny and Nesta all move to Trench Town. Only the very poorest people live here, but Ciddy has moved here to save money for Nesta's education with the cheaper rent. Nesta finds the government yard in Trench Town to be highly monotonous and boring. When they are first there, Bunny and Nesta make only a few friends. However, over time, they start to make friends with all the neighbors.

Radios start to become popular in their neighborhood and the R&B coming out of the speakers is remarkable for Bunny and Marley. They spend the entire night listening to blues, R&B and more songs as they are beamed in from Miami.

Meanwhile, Marley is fourteen years old and is starting to go in and out of various private schools, but loves history. Toddy and Ciddy talk about making Marley an apprentice to a welder for the summer so that Marley can have a trade as a future career. Marley, however, has already started composing songs. He has also become a good street fighter, but his interest in ska music is corresponding with what's popular right now. He meets a man named Coxson Dodd who is one of the most influential producers in the music industry. Dodd has the most popular portable discos in the area and plays all of the hottest songs for up-and-coming artists.

Marley is given the opportunity to sing for his representative, Leslie Kong and Ken Khouri, another influential producer. A few hours later, Marley has cut his first recording (although he has not gotten paid for it) and they have given him a record for free. He's far down the street before he realizes that he doesn't know anyone that owns a record player.



Chapter 7: Who Feels It, Knows It

Chapter 7: Who Feels It, Knows It Summary and Analysis

Marley starts to promote his records by asking kids if they like the track they're listening to and then tells them that he recorded it.

While he is working as a welder, a piece of hot sliver metal goes into his eye. He screams and is taken home. Ciddy tries to give him home remedies, but must take him to the hospital in the morning. While there, he tells Ciddy that he has been writing songs and is going to start a musical career. Just then, Ciddy realizes how old Marley has become. Marley eventually recovers.

Marley gets together the rest of the Wailers — Bunny Livingston, Peter Tosh and Winston "Pipe" Matthews. Tosh likes to tell everyone that he is the leader of the group. Marley, meanwhile, has broken off his ties with Kong since the producer has refused to pay him. Marley moves to Coxsone Dodd and he starts to push the Wailers music.

At midnight on August 5, Jamaica becomes a free and independent nation. Coxsone decides to increase his profits by building a one-track studio called the Jamaica Recording and Publishing Studio, Ltd. He offers the Wailers a contract. Dodd decides that the group needs to have a clear leader and removes Peter Tosh from lead vocals. The music starts to catch on because it is a new form of music, directly addressing the "sufferah" which appeals to the people of the newly-independent Jamaica.

The Wailers enter a contest and when they lose, Marley decides to beat up the cocky winners until the police show up — an event that only causes the popularity of the Wailers to increase.



Chapter 8: People Get Ready

Chapter 8: People Get Ready Summary and Analysis

Marley loves the look of his new look onstage and his mother catches him looking in the mirror at himself, appreciatively. Ciddy has recently gotten pregnant again with Marley's half-sister Pearl by Toddy Livingston. As soon as Ciddy finds out that she is pregnant, she goes to Wilmington, Delaware and likes it there. She decides to move there with only herself and Pearl.

The Wailers are getting to be highly successful in 1964 on all the summer stage shows, but the band is getting jealous of the higher-quality recordings they hear from some of their competitors. They try to get their producer, Dodd, to find a better way of recording.

As they are walking back and forth to the studio every day, they pass by Rita Anderson, who hangs out on her porch to solely try to get the Wailers' attention. She forms a group called the Soulettes and arranges a formal meeting to see Dodd about a recording. When Marley sees her, she recognizes her as the girl on the porch and is surprised that she sings as well. He starts to work with the group to develop them, but is always cross and irritable around them. In private, however, Bunny begins to hand Rita love notes from Marley. Rita is utterly confused by these notes and confronts Marley about them.

Marley explains that his mother is afraid for him so Rita agrees to write letters to her to let her know that he is doing well since he is too busy to do it. He then explains to her that he is being attacked at night by bad spirits and asks her to spend the night with him. She agrees although she doesn't believe in it. They snuggle together and quickly fall asleep. Rita wakes up and is terrified by what she sees. While Marley is sleeping soundly, Rita is attacked by all of the evil things that Marley had described to her earlier.

She realizes that they need somewhere to sleep for the remainder of the night and chooses her place. Rita has a little girl named Sharon and Marley and Rita are asleep less than 30 minutes before Sharon starts to scream. The cries wake up Rita's aunt Viola, who immediately kicks both of them out of the house. She will eventually relent and allow them to stay in the shed behind her house, but Marley will never forgive her for her reaction.

Chapter 9: Natural Mystic

Chapter 9: Natural Mystic Summary and Analysis

Marley works hard to make the Wailers a success while Rita works hard to make a good home for Marley and her daughter Sharon. On September 10, 1964, Marley woke up with severe chest pain and had been having a dream about Nine Miles. When the report came two days later that Omeriah was dead, Marley said he already knew. The immediate family, still in Jamaica, drove to Nine Miles for the funeral.

For half a century, Omeriah had been one of the most influential people in his small village. With his passing, however, the true reflection of Jamaican mystic beliefs were fully on display. Omeriah's body was reversed to confuse any evil spirits lurking around. All mirrors were turned in the house to prevent more deaths in the family. Also, his bed was put outside the house for three days.

Omeriah bequeathed his entire estate to Marley, which the nineteen-year-old took in stride, remaining perfectly quiet. He showed no desire to fill the role that his grandfather had left behind and had made it quite clear that his path lay elsewhere. During the wake, Marley's errant godmother offends the family by questioning some of their family beliefs. Her outbursts represent what happens if you do not fully believe in the culture of Jamaica and its strong ties in Biblical heritage, family stories and respect to the deceased. She questions Marley's talents and his overall gifts with the mystic world. Finally, the family sends her off.

Just before Christmas, Marley gets a letter from his mother in Delaware telling him that she misses him and has since remarried to Edward Booker. He sends her some money with a note saying that he cannot come and is too busy working on his career. When Ciddy reads the note, she believes that Marley will be truly successful in music.



Chapter 10: Stir It Up

Chapter 10: Stir It Up Summary and Analysis

On Christmas morning in 1964, the Wailers gave a show that was the hottest ticket in Kingston. A fight breaks out at the show and for it, prominent church leaders and civil leaders name the Wailers as scapegoats for the problems.

Just before Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King arrives on the island, the Wailers release a single called "Rude Boy" to describe all the discontent to be found on the streets in Jamaica. In general, there is unrest in Jamaica with the futility of their lives and possibilities for a better situation in society. During the third annual independence parade in Kingston, the militia is preemptively called in to prevent upheaval and the upper classes are dumbfounded when total chaos does not occur. These fears, however, symbolize the state of the country at the time.

Ciddy writes Marley a long letter in February and asks him to come to Delaware for a visit. Right before he leaves, he decides to marry Rita so that if he likes America, he can sponsor her to come and live with them. Rita's aunt gives them permission to marry. Just like his father did before him, Marley leaves his wife the day after they are married, but this time in the hopes that he can improve their situation.



Chapter 11: Rat Race

Chapter 11: Rat Race Summary and Analysis

As soon as Marley lands in Delaware, he hates it. Everything is too fast and noisy for him. He breaks the news of his marriage to his mother in stages. First he tells her that he is madly in love with her and then continues to bring her up. When Ciddy tells him that he sounds lovesick and should go out to a club to find a girl, Marley tells her that he can't — he and Rita are married. She is shocked and even more shocked that he wants to return to his "rathole" life in the ghetto and the music business.

While Marley is gone, the Wailers continue to try writing with Peter Tosh being the most aggressive and releasing songs that are sub-par to what the Wailers typically record.

It is announced that His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie is scheduled to visit Jamaica while Marley is still living in Delaware. When Selassie arrives, it is mass pandemonium. Rita, meanwhile, has her best dress on and is walking with friends from Trench Town to the airport when the motorcade containing Selassie. She scans the cars, looking for the honored man. She sees a small man and looks to see the stigmata hands that she has heard so much about. As his car pulls away, His Majesty's eyes meet hers and he raises his hand in farewell. Then, Rita sees the stigmata and wonders if the King is truly the True God. As she is looking at him, she asks in her mind if he is the "True God?" and his eyes burn into hers and he nods slowly and then disappears, driven away.

This meeting is to have a huge influence on both Marley and Rita's life, ultimately affecting Marley's early demise. Marley, meanwhile, is getting more and more depressed while in Delaware. While his mother is at the store one day, he has a dream while taking a nap on the couch. He dreams that a short man in khaki walks in the door and hands him a ring with a black jewel embossed into an insignia. When he wakes and tells Ciddy his dream, she gives him a ring that she received from Norval. Marley doesn't like it, but Ciddy begs him to take it with him back to Jamaica since she feels the dream is an important sign.



Chapter 12: Coming In from the Cold

Chapter 12: Coming In from the Cold Summary and Analysis

The first thing Marley does when he comes back to Trench Town is roll a large spliff. There are rumors that Marley won't be as good as he once was in Dodd's studios. However, although Marley is initially hesitant and cagey about singing and playing in Studio One, he starts to strum and then wail, impressing everyone in the studio. The new songs are a marvel with their combination of being highly personal but universal at the same time.

Marley had hoped to save enough money to create his own studio while in America, but since he had left quickly after losing his job and being asked to register for the draft. Marley started to produce his own records, but when he runs out of ready cash to keep up with the demand, Dodd helps out intermittently. Dodd realizes they are moving from ska style music to more of a rock steady sound and so backs off promoting them, choosing other bands instead. Scraping whatever money he can get together, the Wailers keep recording and putting singles out as frequently as they can. Meanwhile, Bunny and Peter Tosh individually are also looking for more money and so record singles with Dodd despite the strained relationship.

During one shouting match between Bunny and Dodd, the cops were called. After this, Bunny is a prime target for the police and is busted in Trench Town with two other musicians and sent to prison for marijuana possession. When he is released from prison, Marley leaves Rita and Sharon in Nine Miles and goes to Kingston looking to produce with the only producer left to him — Leslie Kong, the man who he had originally sung to all those years ago.

Rita, meanwhile, is constantly talking about Rastafarianism and is trying to convert Marley. He is slow to convert, but her sudden conversion and previous dedication to Christianity is giving him pause for thought. More and more people are starting to grow their hair long and they have strict tenants by which they live. Women are seen more as child bearers and there are strict dietary rules of what they are permitted to eat.

Marley signs to a contract with JAD and Cayman Music with Danny Sims. The Wailers are all on board and they spend most of 1969 in the record studio. Marley takes his share of profits and buys a car and make improvements on their house, which now contains Rita, Sharon and two new additions — David "Ziggy" Marley and Cedella.

As the Wailers' success is taking off, their old producer Leslie Kong sees potential profits in re-releasing their old tracks for pure profit. Marley warns Kong that if he does it, he will make money but never enjoy the success. Kong ignores him and creates "The Best of the Wailers." Just hours after he is told that the album is so successful that he is

now a millionaire, Kong complains that he doesn't feel well and goes home, dying immediately of a massive heart attack at only thirty-eight years old.

Chapter 13: Crisis

Chapter 13: Crisis Summary and Analysis

Sims approaches Marley in 1970 and suggests that he and Johnny Nash go to Sweden to create the music score for a movie being shot there. Marley agrees and finds that he loves the Scandinavian cities. However, while out there, Sims thinks that the Wailers should go to England to help stimulate some interest in the label and music. They are promised a tour, but it turns out to be rather haphazard. They ultimately meet a man named Chris Blackwell who wants to sign them to his label, Island Records.

The Wailers return home and put together a good record to give to Blackwell, but walk into a legal nightmare back in England since Sims still owns them. They negotiate a deal and Island Records gets the rights to *Catch a Fire*, the first Wailers album for release. The album is a huge success and Blackwell works them hard to create another album to follow up on the success. Meanwhile, the Wailers release a song on their newly-created Tuff Gong label that is very popular in Jamaica and growing in popularity in England as well.

The Wailers tour England and the United States in 1973 to promote *Catch a Fire* and *Ciddy* and the family comes to see him in New York when they play. While on tour, Peter Tosh's jealousy becomes more apparent and it becomes increasingly difficult to be around both of them. Bunny loves them both, but doesn't want to be put in the middle.

Chris Blackwell purchases a house in Kingston in the early-1970s in order to get some roots in Jamaica. The house on 56 Hope Road will be renamed Island House and is just down the road from the prime minister's residence. Marley is a committed Rasta man by this point, trying to live as healthy and dedicated as possible with his family. The house on 56 Hope Road will eventually be taken over by Marley, however, and this will be the place where all of his best dreams and worst nightmares are set to transpire.



Chapter 14: Who the Cap Fit

Chapter 14: Who the Cap Fit Summary and Analysis

Marley is always the last to bed and the first to rise in the house. If the band wasn't recording or rehearsing, they were just hanging around in Island House. The early days at Hope Road were more like a non-dogmatic religious commune with casual sex and plenty of food and herb.

Marley was quickly becoming a musical prophet for the people in Jamaica and the popularity of his songs combined with thinly veiled statements about their political situation made them explosive in the community. Rastas were seen as highly political people in society. Meanwhile, both Bunny and Peter had left the Wailers. With Peter gone, the yelling matches stopped at Hope Road as well, so many of the Wailers were happy to see him go. Bunny still frequented Hope Road even though he was still developing his own work.

Marley and the rest of the Wailers, however, are an international success and rumors start to swirl that Marley is dead. Within a week, however, a new single is in the record stores and Marley proved that he was back on top.



Chapter 15: Redemption Song

Chapter 15: Redemption Song Summary and Analysis

Hope Road was becoming a more and more dangerous place to hang out. Marley has been actively having affairs with other women and driving a BMW whose initials he says stand for "Bob Marley and Wailers." They release another album in 1976 and Marley is now the most popular superstar in the Third World. However, he has soccer injuries that are very slow to heal.

One evening, Peter Tosh comes over with his girlfriend and smokes a huge spliff with Marley and Bunny. That evening, he and his girlfriend are in a bad car accident that leaves her dead. When this happens, Tosh cuts his ties with the Wailers and never returns to Hope Road again.

Meanwhile, any reporters that come to Hope Road to talk with Marley and the Wailers about their success find that he is a hard man to communicate with. Initially, he tried to help them, but as the novelty wore off, fewer reporters were able to get a story and start to leave, frustrated.

Bunny sees a man named Prophet Gad converting people to Rastafarianism. He believes that no one should be pressured into becoming a believer. He also notices when Marley joins the Twelve Tribes of Israel, which Prophet Gad is a part of. He sees a more dangerous crowd going on at Hope Road and disagrees with the newer forms of Rasta being introduced and so withdraws to Bull Bay and keeps out of sight.

Edward Booker passes away in 1976, but Marley has a chance to see him before he leaves. He convinces Ciddy to move to Miami since it is too cold up there for her, he believes.

Marley gets involved in a scam to get money out of him, although the initial deal had nothing to do with him. A man shows up regularly, demanding payments for a bad deal that went down in his front yard, thus making him responsible. More bad men show up and ask Marley to do a "Smile Jamaica" concert that will be sponsored by the Jamaican Ministry of Culture. Marley agrees, but wants to keep politics out of it. The situation is so bad that the Wailers are getting too tense to rehearse there any more.

A week before the "Smile Jamaica" concert, armed men show up claiming to be protectors of Marley, allowing no one but the members of the band on or off the property without permission. When the man comes to collect the payments as usual, he is denied entry. This goes on for a few days until men come and shoot the people in Hope Road at the time, nearly killing Marley. No one dies, but the attack is aggressive and many are wounded, including Marley and Rita.

Marley is spirited away with his family and they hide out. After debating for hours, they decide to do the "Smile Jamaica" concert anyways and is met with great enthusiasm.



Chapter 16: Exodus

Chapter 16: Exodus Summary and Analysis

The people involved in the scam that put Marley in the blackmail situation to begin with are all found dead by mysterious causes within weeks. Marley, meanwhile, goes to England and hears punk music for the first time, impressed with the Clash and other punk rockers. Some ranking Rastas in London put him in touch with Crown Prince Asfa Wossen. He is the son of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie, who recently passed away. After they chat and Marley is leaving, the prince stops him and tells him that he has something that once belonged to His Majesty that he knows Marley is the one to wear. He shows him the exact ring that Marley dreamed about on his mother's couch all those years ago. The ring fits perfectly and Marley tells Wossen that he has just solved a riddle that had been following him his entire life.

On July 7, 1977, many Jamaicans were hidden inside because they were fearful of the number 7. On this same day, however, Blackwell took a limping Marley in to see a physician because of a bad infection on his toe. The London physicians suggested amputation, but Marley refused since it conflicted with this Rasta beliefs. He is flown to Miami for an operation with a skin graft on the toe.

In Delaware, Marley tries to explain his Rasta beliefs to Ciddy. After she goes to visit relatives, he is visiting with two Delaware friends and tells them that he will die when he is thirty-six, just like Christ. They tell him that he is crazy, but he shrugs them off. When Marley returns home, he is approached by the two conflicting political sides to do a "One Love Peace Concert" to raise money and to save the country from imminent civil war between the factioning groups. Despite the outbreaks of violence before the concert, the One Love concert is a success.

While on tour in New York, Marley is running in Central Park when his body freezes on him and he falls forward. He is taken to Pittsburgh the next day to continue the concert, but no one tells Rita that Marley has collapsed. She is not allowed in Essex Hotel with Marley in Pittsburgh, a fact that infuriates her. When she calls New York, they tell her that Marley has had a stroke the night before and becomes enraged. Rita contacts his mother and finally gets in touch with Marley who tells her that he is sick and has a brain tumor.

Marley is secretly admitted to the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in Manhattan for radiation treatment, but when rumor is out that he is there, he immediately checks out and escapes. He goes to Bavaria and is treated by the controversial Dr. Issels. However, in 1981, Issels tells them that there is no more he can do for Marley and he is flown back to Miami. He dies only forty hours after he leaves Issels.

When Marley dies, Prophet Gad makes it very clear that he wants Marley's ring from Wossen. However, Ciddy and others make sure that the ring's location remains a mystery and he never finds it.

Chapter 17: Time Will Tell

Chapter 17: Time Will Tell Summary and Analysis

Marley is posthumously awarded the Jamaican Order of Merit by prime minister Edward Seaga. The Jamaican government then puts his likeness on a number of items, including postage stamps.

Rita showed documents that gave her the great majority of Marley's estate in order to provide for her and their now 11 legally recognized children by eight women. Rita started to spend Marley's money extravagantly and then started a rekindled recording career, seeing success with a few tracks. She refers to herself as the queen and must carry on after Marley's death.

Ciddy also undergoes a transformation after Marley's death. She was not entitled to any of the estate, but prevailed on Rita to give her funds. She initiates her own recording career and refers to herself as Mother B and calls herself the Queen of Reggae. Marley's children, however, joined together to create the Melody Makers and had some success of their own.



Characters

Robert Nesta Marley

The main subject in the biography, *Catch a Fire*, Marley was an incredibly successful reggae artist whose music and themes reached millions of people. Despite his humble beginnings from Nine Mile, Jamaica, Marley went on to become the symbol of Jamaica through his music. Because he was internationally popular, the message and emotions of the Jamaican people were portrayed through Marley's music.

One of the most remarkable things about Marley's music was that it appealed to a range of people. No matter what race or demographic background they came from, many people enjoyed his music despite the heavy political tones that he incorporated within the sounds. Marley's life was just as complex and intricate as his music. He came from a poor background and never knew his father, a white American captain who literally arrived on horseback to woo his mother Cedella, impregnate her and marry her only to ensure that Marley would not be a bastard child. He disappeared shortly after and Marley was raised mainly by his mother Cedella and grandfather Omeriah.

One aspect of Marley that is not widely known, but illustrated within the biography is Marley's close connections to mysticism. While he is well-known for his association with Rastafarianism thanks to a conversion influenced by Rita, his wife, Marley's ability to read palms and foresee the future is not a common fact. Marley foresaw his own death at 36 and his grandfather Omeriah was blessed with these same talents. While Omeriah had a heavy influence on his town of Nine Miles, Marley went on to have a large influence on the country of Jamaica and countless other individuals worldwide through his music and Jamician sensibilities.

Upon his death at age 36, Marley left behind 11 children (that he claimed), his wife Rita and his mother Cedella.

Rita Anderson Marley

Rita lived in Kingston and became Bob Marley's wife shortly after his group started to become popular in Jamaica. Bunny, Bob and Peter Tosh would regularly walk by Rita's home and she would sit on the porch to talk with them as they came home from the recording studio. At first, they mostly ignored her, but through her never-ending persistence, she finally became friendly with them.

Rita had her own musical group and would eventually sing back-up with the Wailers, although it was an arrangement created by the music studio and not one that Bob had initially encouraged. Shortly after meeting her, however, he started to write her love notes — although his behavior around her in public gave no indication that he was in love with her at all. Finally, Rita confronts Bob and he asks her to spend the night with him in the studio because he is having horrible nightmares. Rita agrees and there is no



sexual contact, but Rita awakes in the middle of the night attacked by Bob's demons. She realizes that evil is stalking him there and takes him back to her aunt's house, where her young daughter is also sleeping in the same room. Within moments, Rita's aunt finds Bob in Rita's bed and kicks them out. She will eventually change her mind and give them the shed in her backyard to sleep in with Rita's daughter, Sharon, by another man.

Shortly before Bob leaves for Delaware to visit his mother, he marries Rita in the hopes that he can sponsor her to move to America with him. Bob fails, however, and returns back to Jamaica. While he is gone, Rita has a shared moment with Haile Selassie that will forever change their lives, converting her to Rastafarianism and encouraging the conversion for Bob as well.

Over the years of their marriage, Rita endures Bob's many affairs with tact and grace, even when she is sometimes treated like a servant in front of the latest mistress. Through it all, she is still Bob's personal secretary and takes care of all of the children — even the ones that are not hers.

Chris Blackwell

The top producer with Island Records, Blackwell is an Englishman who helps to push Bob Marley and the Wailers into the public sphere. Through Blackwell's help, the Wailers are able to produce an album solely exhibiting their reggae music — a fact previously unheard of as most reggae albums were compilations of many different artists over a range of records. Through Blackwell's talent, the Wailers become an international sensation and becomes the most popular singer in the Third World, surpassing Stevie Wonder.

In an attempt to connect more strongly with the Jamaican artists that he represents, Blackwell purchases a rundown home on 56 Hope Road. This house will ultimately become Marley's house and where the assassination attempt on Marley and his friends and family occurs. It will be the center of a Rastafarianism controversy and where Marley will spend most of his time after his success.

Cedella Malcolm Marley

Cedella is Bob's mother and is often referred to as "Ciddy." She is nineteen when she gives birth to Bob with a white American captain named Norval Marley. Captain Marley marries her to ensure that Bob is not seen as a bastard, but she is essentially left on her own with Bob's birth, although she has the support of her extended family including father Omeriah.

Ciddy moves with Bob to Kingston, Jamaica in order to improve her situation as a single mother. Once there, she moves in with Toddy Livingston, with whom she has a little girl named Pearl. She will finally relocate to Wilmington, Delaware and remarry. She claims that Bob's musical talent comes from her.



Captain Norval Sinclair Marley

A white American captain who rode in on horseback to capture the heart of Cedella Malcom, Captain Marley is Bob's father. He marries Cedella to keep Bob from becoming a bastard child, but then essentially abandons both mother and son.

When Bob is old enough to go to school, Captain Marley contacts Cedella by letter to tell her that he is going to pick up Bob and take him to a better school in Kingston. Once Bob arrives in Kingston, however, he is utterly abandoned by the Captain and left in the care of an older woman, despite assurances that he will be left in the good care of Cedella's relatives. When Cedella realizes that Bob has disappeared and has no idea where he is, she panics. When a chance meeting helps her to relocate Bob, she saves him from Kingston and takes him back to Nine Miles (temporarily).

Years later, the Captain will appear again, remarried to another woman although he never officially divorces Cedella. Cedella will confront him about it, but her feelings for the Captain have utterly dissolved by then. He will die of a heart attack shortly thereafter.

Omeriah

Bob's grandfather is the person that Bob is closest to when growing up in Nine Miles. Although he has a number of grandchildren, he obviously prefers "Nesta" and the boy can nearly do no wrong. Omeriah is given the talent to foresee things and has a heavy interest in mysticism. He is also a clear leader in the community of Nine Miles. Omeriah sees the same gifts that he has in Nesta and is not surprised when the boy shows the ability to read palms. However, since Marley's birth, he feels that a bad omen or spirit is trying hard to take him down and kill him for reasons that he does not understand or can explain.

His Majesty Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia

While in America, Marley has a dream that a man gives him a special and unique ring. Years later, while speaking with a representative of Selassie, he will give Marley the ring since he feels that it is the ring of Solomon and Marley is the one who should own it. It will be a fulfillment of the dream down to the final detail.

Selassie is a mystic and powerful person for the people of Jamaica and for Ethiopians. When he is younger, he shows the ability to talk about biblical events that astonish his elders. As his name is Ras Tafari, meaning "Prince Tafari," the religion on Rastafarianism is built around the belief that he is a prophet who has returned to the original biblical people, the Ethiopians.



When Selassie visits Jamaica, Rita will connect eyes with him as he is being driven by her and the moment will convert her to become a Rasta. Her conversion will ultimately lead to Marley's conversion as well, which will influence the rest of his life — and death.

Coxsone Dodd

When Bob is first establishing his musical success in Jamaica, Dodd is the leading producer for him. He owns five major labels and is a huge influence in the Jamaican music community. He is not pleased when Marley attempts to create his own music studio, but works with the Wailers to create tracks with them.

Bunny Livingston

One of Marley's oldest friends from Nine Miles, Cedella will move in with Bunny's father Toddy. Bunny will be Marley's closest friend, but ultimately backs away when he sees the crowd and lifestyle get wilder at the house on Hope Road.

Peter Tosh

Another important member of the Wailers since the beginning, Tosh is a more aggressive and explosive leader in the Wailers. He will often tell people that he is the leader of the group and is likely to show violence when he doesn't like the situation. He will ultimately quit the band in order to promote his own songs.



Objects/Places

Nine Miles

The birthplace of Bob Marley and where he spent most of his early childhood. This is also the home of Omeriah and the rest of Cedella's relatives.

The Big House in Nine Miles

The home of Omeriah, his grandfather, who was also an important community leader. When Omeriah dies, the funeral and its processes will be held here.

Kingston, Jamaica

Where Bob moves to with his mother in order to give Cedella a chance to improve their lives. In Kingston, Marley becomes a street-savvy youth and establishes his successful music career here.

Government Yard in Trench Town

Often referred to in his music, Cedella is forced to move to the government yard in Trench Town to save money and send Bob to a better school shortly after they arrive.

Sound System

One of the biggest clubs in Kingston where reggae music is played. When Marley becomes popular, this is one place where he tries to promote his music.

Wilmington, Delaware

Where Cedella moves after Kingston and gets remarried. She will finally relocate to Miami after years in Delaware because the weather is too cold. Marley visits her here in an attempt to create a life in America for him and Rita, but fails.

56 Hope Road

Also known as the Island House, the house on Hope Road is first owned by Chris Blackwell, Marley's English producer. Marley takes over the house and a number of important activities happen here, including the assassination attempt on Marley and his friends and family.

Silver BMW

When Marley becomes successful and moves into 56 Hope Road, he gets a silver BMW that he says "Lettars stand fe Bob Marley an' Wailers."

spliffs

When Marley returns from Delaware to Jamaica, he immediately rolls a large spliff of marijuana. The Rasta men will often smoke marijuana despite its being illegal in Jamaica and will go to jail because of it.

The Ring of Haile Selassie

The subject of Marley's dream years earlier, Marley will receive the ring from Haile Selassie after his death and change his name in accordance to it.



Themes

Spirituality

Mysticism and spiritual beings are important in Marley's upbringing and an integral part of the Jamaican culture. When Marley is born, his grandfather Omeriah realizes that there is a bad spirit that follows Marley, although he is not sure why. He notes that someone wants Marley dead and he is confused by it. However, he recognizes that Marley is special and separate from the rest of the relatives.

When Marley is young, he starts to read people's palms. He is remarkably successful at it, but decides to stop doing it. Marley and the Jamaican culture at large have strong beliefs about what happens when a person dies and in particular, what happens to their spirits. Duppy spirits can harm a person and the Jamaican people work hard to avoid curses or evil duppies. Omeriah believes that an evil duppy has attached itself to Marley as a young child and he cannot escape it.

When Marley meets Rita, he tells her about bad demons and duppies that are trying to get him. She doesn't believe him until she spends the night with him and sees the black cat hissing in the doorway and the extreme pressure and unnamed evil that surround him that evening. She then realizes as Omeriah had earlier in his life that something bad is trying to get to Marley.

Marley is depicted as a spiritual figure who was extraordinary in more ways than his talent for music. These extra talents play an integral role throughout his life, from his relationship with Rita to his belief in Rasta and in Saile Halassie of Ethiopia. A big riddle for Marley is a dream that he had while in Delaware, visiting his mother. The dream is of a man handing him an important ring and years later, the crown prince Asfa Wossen of Ethiopia will hand him the same ring he dreamed about and it is a special ring that was said to have elements of Solomon's famous ring. For Marley, it all makes perfect sense and solves the questions for him,

Rastafarianism

Merging and blending well with Marley's concentration on spiritual elements, Rastafarianism is an important part of his life. However, Marley was not raised as a Rasta nor was his wife Rita. In fact, Rita was a Sunday School teacher for the local Christian church when she met Marley. However, when Saile Helassie visits Jamaica in 1966, Marley is out of town visiting his mother Cedella when he is in Jamaica. Rita happens to connect eyes with Helassie as he is being driven through Kingston and this single moment will change her life and Marley's forever.

Rita relinquishes her Christian religion and chooses Rastafarianism instead. She becomes so devout that her influence becomes an essential part of Marley's



conversion. However, once he converts and starts to fully accept Rasta beliefs, he becomes one of the biggest symbols for the faith and its followers.

A central part of the Rasta religion is a belief that Ethiopia holds all of the original people and initial religion. With this belief, he believes that Saile Halassie is the crown prince for the African people who has come back to show them the path to better living.

When Marley is diagnosed with health problems and has an infection in his toe so severe that the doctor wants to amputate it, Marley refuses because of his Rasta beliefs. He believes that his body must stay intact in order to honor Jah. However, this decision is fatal for Marley since it allows the infection and cancer to spread everywhere throughout his body, including giving him a brain tumor. Had he not been so devout in his beliefs with Rastafarianism, a different medical decision might have extended his life. Regardless, Marley himself recognized his own death was imminent and Rasta was a large part of his life that he could not be separated from. Just before his death, he was baptized a Christian Rasta in order to further demonstrate his strength in these religious beliefs.

Reggae and Jamaica

Part of Marley's popularity was that his music transcended the boundaries of race, society and demographic levels. Many of the lyrics in Marley's music had elements of Rastafarianism as well as strong statements about the people of Jamaica, but not all listeners seem to mind or even understand these lyrics. For that reason, Marley's music was incredibly popular and made him an international success. He replaced Stevie Wonder as the most popular singer in the Third World, but it was his role as the representative of Jamaica, Rasta dreads and the significance of black people throughout history that really mattered.

For Jamaican people, his ability to achieve such fame and wealth was a huge influence and symbol of hope for them. In addition, he wrote his music referring to popular Jamaican tales that only a native would understand. In this way, he is communicating to the world in a language that Jamaicans alone can truly comprehend, which endears him to them.

Before Marley and the Wailers, the only time a reggae album was released is when a complete compilation was gathered using a variety of reggae artists or albums from a single group over years. When the Wailers worked with Chris Blackwell, they were able to take reggae to another level of popularity and reach a much bigger audience.

Style

Perspective

The perspective of the novel is written solely from the narrator's point of view. For this reason, Marley's thoughts and specific analysis are not covered unless the narrator is quoting Marley or referring to something he said in a magazine, newspaper article or documentary. The narrator will also flip around to cover different actions of the characters as the events happen.

Since the perspective of the novel is written mostly from the narrator's point of view, the reader is removed from the main character of the novel. Had Marley written some of these passages himself or been able to be quoted from a diary, there would have been additional details and more emotions to tell us how he felt during particularly tumultuous moments in the novel. For example, the political tones of the "Peace and Love" concert in Jamaica could have been discussed using Marley's own words more thoroughly. Since the narrator controls the perspective, Marley's portrayal as a man who was hard to understand and hard to find empathy with rings true with the reader of his autobiography as well. It sets him apart as the near-mystical man that he was while living, someone that gave a little bit of himself to everybody, but not a single soul truly knew him completely.

Tone

The tone of the novel is straightforward and matter-of-fact. There are few emotional descriptions, although the narrator does indulge in some descriptive passages to capture more of the scene as it evolves. The narrator does not allow the reader to engage in much analysis since he uses all of the information at hand to deduce what was going on at any particular event. It is obvious that the narrator has a wide range of information that he uses to cover all of the events covered in the novel.

For this reason, the novel's tone is more journalistic. While many biography authors will present their subject in a more dramatic and emotional fashion, White keeps the tone calm and straightforward, even during the points in the novel when pure chaos is occurring. For example, during the assassination attempt of Marley and his family, White maintains the same levelheaded language and presents the facts as they were said to have happened, allowing the reader to stay calm and collected despite the terror and chaos in the novel.

Structure

The novel starts with the impact of Rastafarianism and the overall importance of Haile Selassie and his beginnings in Ethiopia. This history and events are important because they lay the foundation of the religious beliefs and spiritual elements that will be so



significant for Marley. By giving the reader these background elements, the reader has a much more thorough understanding of the motivations and core beliefs of not only Marley, but of all those individuals who believe in Rastafarianism. Since the Jamaican culture is so consumed with this form of religion, it is important to have these facts to give the reader a better understanding and deeper appreciation of the religion that defined Marley's life and decision-making processes. By giving the reader a better understanding of Rastafarianism, the mystical element of Marley is touched upon, lending another facet of Marley's personality and public persona.

From there, the novel covers the initial periods of Marley's life, including Captain Marley and Cedella's relationship that spawns Bob. The rest of the novel covers events that happen to Marley in chronological order using Marley as the main subject, but providing additional information whenever relevant. After Marley's death, the narrator covers first Rita and Marley's children and then Cedella's life after her son's passing.



Quotes

"There was no mention in the Gleaner, however, of an event which took place during the early hours of the morning in the rural parish of St. Ann. Nineteen-year-old Cedella Marley had given birth to her first child." p. 49

"Ciddy's heart shriveled, or something inside it that had long been forgotten seemed to have withered and died in the space of an instant." p. 114

"Why, Nesta asked, had his mother and Toddy brought them to this awful place? 'Fe cheaper rent,' she snapped, 'suh me cyan feed four mout' an' send yuh ta school an' save fe better conditions!' "p. 120

"Nesta had by now 'busted 'im double figures' (reached the age of ten) and thus fallen prey to the personal apprehensions, prejudices of color and parental perturbations that afflict many adolescent Jamaicans, giving them often acute anxiety problems and even ulcers." p. 102

"And it somehow didn't hurt matters any when, after the Wailers lost the contest to the slicker Uniques by a narrow margin, Bob got into an all-out brawl with the cocky winners. 'Wailers de best fockin' harmony group a Kingston!' he raged, as he punched and kicked them around in the wings until the police arrived." p.160

"She screamed. There was no sound. Screamed again. The silence seemed to shove itself down into her throat. She tried to stand and could not. Something was forcing her back, pressing irresistibly on her shoulders." p. 185

"While she was gone he fell asleep on the sofa, and when his mother returned, he told her that he'd had a disturbing dream. There'd been a short man dressed in khaki and an old felt fedora who came through the front door of the house and stood next to the sofa as he dozed. The man had dug his hand into his jacket pocket and produced a ring, set with a black jewel embossed with some sort of insignia." p. 214

"Bunny taunted Coxson, daring him to draw his fabled 'anti-rude bwai' side gun. ... From that point on, Livingston was a prime target for police harrassment in West Kingston." p.221

"Rita was increasingly left to look after the flock as Bob's star ascended, her own recording career was deliberately curtailed, but she issued the odd single under the name Esete and Ganette." p. 229

"'Who the cap fit,' said Bob, surveying the grounds of his uptown estate, 'let dem wear it.' The house at 56 Hope Road was destined to be the spot where all curses and spells, all follies and dreams, all hopes and hungers, all hatreds and horrors would reach their apotheosis for Robert Nesta Marley." p. 256



"The early Hope Road scene could be described as a non-dogmatic religious hippie commune, with an abundance of food, herb, children, music and casual sex." p.259

"'Ah, Jamaica,' he sighed. 'Where cyan yar people go? Me wondar if it anyplace on dis earth.'" p. 303

"'Me gwan die at t'irty-six,' he said quietly, 'jus' like Christ.'" p.298

Topics for Discussion

What does Bob Marley's dream with the ring signify?

Why is Bob so amazed when the Crown Prince Asfa Wossen gives him a ring of the Lion of Judah?

What influences Bob Marley to become a Rasta?

What was the "Peace and Love" concert in Jamaica about and for whom?

What role does Omeriah play in Bob's life?

What are some of the tenements of a Rasta's lifestyle and how did it impact Bob's life?

What path does Rita and Cedella take after Bob's death?