

A Darker Shade of Magic: A Novel Study Guide

A Darker Shade of Magic: A Novel by V. E. Schwab

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Contents

A Darker Shade of Magic: A Novel Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Part 1: "The Traveler".....	5
Part 2: "Red Royal".....	7
Part 3: "Grey Thief".....	9
Part 4: "White Throne".....	11
Part 5: "Black Stone".....	14
Part 6: "Thieves Meet".....	16
Part 7: "The Follower".....	18
Part 8: "An Arrangement".....	20
Part 9: "Festival & Fire".....	22
Part 10: "One White Rook".....	24
Part 11: "Masquerade".....	27
Part 12: "Sanctuary and Sacrifice".....	30
Part 13: "The Waiting King".....	32
Part 14: "The Final Door".....	34
Characters.....	36
Symbols and Symbolism.....	41
Settings.....	44
Themes and Motifs.....	46
Styles.....	51
Quotes.....	53



Plot Summary

NOTE: The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: Schwab, V.E. *A Darker Shade of Magic*. Tor, 2015.

Kell is an Antari, a blood magician, living in the kingdom he has dubbed “Red London” with his adopted family, the Mareshes, who rule the city. There are four Londons, existing in alternate dimensions: Grey, Red, White, and Black London, and Kell is one of the few with the magical capacity to pass between them.

While Kell is in another dimension on a diplomacy mission, his brother Prince Rhy is visited by Kell's arch nemesis, another Antari named Holland, who comes from White London. Holland brings Rhy a necklace as a birthday gift.

Meanwhile, in magic-free Grey London, an intrepid thief and would-be pirate named Lila Bard kills her landlord when he tries to assault her. She shows up at the local tavern, the Stone's Throw, where she is taken in by the owner, a man named Barron.

Kell brings a message to the Dane twins, Athos and Astrid, who have cast a spell over Holland to keep him under their control. White London is a cold and inhospitable place where the people are starving. The twins are bitter because long ago the people of Black London lost control of their magic and the city erupted into chaos before White London (with no help from Red London) stepped in to quell the uprising and shut the doors between dimensions. A woman stops Kell on his way home and asks him to take a letter to her brother in Red London, passing him the letter and payment for his trouble.

When he gets home, Kell realizes that the payment is actually a stone, a forbidden relic from the ill-fated Black London. Suddenly, he is pursued by an assassin. Kell kills the assassin and flees to Grey London where he collides with Lila Bard, who steals the black stone from his pocket. Back in Red London, the dead assassin awakens, reanimated by proximity to the stone, which leaves a zombie-like plague in its wake. Kell uses magic to find Lila at the Stone's Throw and reclaim the stone. After he leaves, Holland shows up and demands to know where Kell is, because he wants the black stone. Kell reappears, and the two Antaris fight. Kell is badly hurt, but Lila knocks Holland unconscious and they flee.

Kell and Lila formulate a plan to return the stone to Black London, but they need to move through each dimension in turn. They return to Red London to find a token that will allow them into White London. They find that Holland has burned down Red London's tavern where Kell kept his tokens. Holland appears and tells them he also killed Barron. Kell and Lila use the black stone to make themselves invisible and flee. They visit a pawnshop where they hope to find a particular token, a white rook from a chess set. The pawnshop owner calls the palace guards because the royal family has reported Kell missing. Lila turns herself invisible again as the guards take Kell away, and she sees one of them stay behind to stab the pawnshop owner. He seems to be operating under a spell. When the guard is gone, Lila grabs the white rook.



Lila arrives at the palace to look for Kell and there is a masquerade underway for Prince Rhy's birthday. The king and queen also appear to be under a spell. Kell is being held in Prince Rhy's bedroom, where Astrid Dane has taken over the prince's body and consciousness using the necklace delivered by Holland. She wants to use the black stone to reopen the doors between dimensions so that she can rule over both Red and White London. Kell's black stone is only half of a larger piece; her brother Athos has the other half, and the two pieces must be joined. Lila comes to Kell's rescue, but Astrid Dane stabs Prince Rhy in the stomach, removing the necklace first and putting it on a guard, who then begins acting on her behalf. Kell summons a magic door to get them out of the palace, and they go to the magic school where Kell was trained. He saves Prince Rhy's life, using the black stone to bind their two lives together, so that if one lives, so will the other. Lila and Kell leave Rhy at the school to recuperate and set off for White London. As they travel between dimensions, however, Kell is pulled back into Red London by Holland. They fight, but Kell is stronger with the black stone in his possession and he kills Holland.

In White London, Kell confronts Athos Dane. They fight using magic, and Athos summons a huge snake. The spell backfires and the snake attacks Athos, killing him. Kell destroys the snake with a magic-dispelling knife from Red London. Meanwhile, Lila sets out to kill Astrid Dane, who is senseless in the throne room, her consciousness still in Red London. She wakes up, however, and casts a spell to make herself look exactly like Lila, before knocking Lila out and going after Kell. The ruse fails; Kell can tell immediately she is not Lila and he stabs her to death.

Kell merges the two black stones and is plummeted into a shadowy world where he confronts a physical embodiment of the stone's magic, which is fighting for control of his mind and body. Kell wins and sends the black stone into another dimension, dispelling the zombie plague in the process. He returns with Lila to Red London where Prince Rhy is recuperating. The population of Red London is wary of Kell, unsure what role he played in the prince's ordeal. Lila sets sail from Red London's harbor to parts unknown, ready for her next adventure.



Part 1: "The Traveler"

Summary

The year is 1819. Kell is a blood magician (aka an "Antari") who travels through different worlds to visit different versions of London (23). He wears a shape-shifting coat that changes its appearance each time it is folded, and he moves from one world to the next with the magic of his own blood by cutting his palm and placing it against the wall. He must also wear a coin around his neck for passage. There are four distinct Londons with different levels of magic to each, and Kell is visiting George III, the king of Grey London, with a message from the Emira, queen of Red London. There is also a White and Black London. King George is nearly blind and a bit mad. The message smells like flowers to him.

In Chapter 2, Kell visits George III's son, the Prince Regent, who holds most of the power due to his father's failing mental capacities. Kell delivers a second letter to the Prince and the two talk about how Black London self-destructed because of their impetuous use of magic. Kell takes a walk along the Thames and admires Westminster Abbey before stopping at a tavern, The Stone's Throw, marking the beginning of Chapter 3. The Stone's Throw is owned by a man named Barron, and Kell goes there to trade in trinkets and magical objects, which he illegally smuggles from one London to the other.

Kell has a small game that is meant as a practice tool for those learning the magical arts, with tokens of the different elements, earth, water, fire, air, and bone. He is approached by a man named Edward Archibald Tuttle who has heard about Kell. Tuttle asks Kell to bring him a piece of earth from another London. Kell says he will bring it if Edward can show any magical ability at all using the game, which of course he cannot. Kell makes a non-committal comment about perhaps bringing the earth to him anyway on another day, and he shows off by levitating the piece of bone in the game, apparently the most difficult maneuver. Another patron brings Kell a music box. He returns home, again using the coin and his own blood to create a door.

Analysis

The colors of the different Londons are symbolic of their magical characteristics and/or habitability. There is no magic in Grey London, so it is given a drab color. Red London has a vibrant relationship toward magic, thus the warm color. Black London is the "lost city" and therefore receives the bleakest color, and while there is magic in White London, it is a cold and unfriendly place, thus white, like snow or ice, is an appropriate color (15). Black London presents a cautionary tale representative of a major theme in the novel, that magic must be respected and used with care. The people of Black London could not use magic with restraint and this caused the destruction of the city and everyone in it.



Grey London, having no magic, is closest to our "real life" world, particularly in that there is a King George III who is mad, as was the real nineteenth century King George III. There is a Thames River and a Westminster Abbey, but these are more or less the only references in the book to actual historical places/events.

Kell's coat represents his changeability. Moving between worlds, Kell must be a cautious diplomat, embodying different things to different people, just like the coat has many different sides depending on how it is folded. Kell's smuggling habit is another piece of character development. It represents his reckless side, a youthful acting out that he must suppress when on official business. He also exhibits his immaturity in the tavern, showing off in front of Edward Tuttle and taunting him when he cannot operate the game. When he says he will think about returning with the piece of earth, he tells Tuttle he wants something important to the man; he does not care what it is, and he then tells him to wait there for a month, which he admits to himself is a somewhat arbitrary display of cruelty. While his showing off with the bone in the game is immature, it also informs the reader that he is a highly skilled magician.

The author uses a lot of descriptive and figurative language in the novel. At the end of Part 1, she writes that Kell steps through his magical portal "shrugging off Grey London like a coat," which is a poetic phrase as well as a reference to Kell's literal coat/cloak which is a symbol of his changeability, as noted above (35).

Discussion Question 1

Why is "Black London" given this name? How is Black London described?

Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of Kell moving the bone in the magic game at the tavern?

Discussion Question 3

How is Grey London different from Red London, Kell's home?

Vocabulary

figurehead, countenance, vestige, discreet, cumbersome, prevalence, semblance



Part 2: "Red Royal"

Summary

In Red London, two guards, Gen and Parrish, play a card game outside the room of Prince Rhy. The prince is entertaining a guest named Holland. Holland is an Antari like Kell, but he makes Parrish uneasy. Parrish overhears Holland giving Rhy a gift for his upcoming birthday from his "masters" (42). Rhy objects because it is illegal to take it, but then he takes it anyway. When Holland leaves the prince's chambers, he tosses Parrish a coin that causes the guard to lose all memory of the Antari's visit.

In Chapter 2, Kell, who is back home, notes the difference between Grey London's Thames and the river of Red London, called the "Isle," which flows red (44). He walks through the market where vendors are selling various magical items. A woman bows before him and he feels embarrassed. He approaches the palace and switches his cloak around into a red version, "reserved for royalty" (48).

In Chapter 3, Kell joins his adoptive family, King Maxim, Queen Emira, and Prince Rhy in the courtyard. They banter about the prince's upcoming birthday party and when the king and queen leave, Rhy asks Kell what he brought back with him. Kell recalls an argument they had previously about his smuggling, which is a treasonous offense. Kell had defended himself, saying that he only brings back "trinkets" (53). Kell uses magic to convey himself to Red London's tavern, The Ruby Fields. He has a room there where he keeps these trinkets. He looks at a scar on his arm that is in the shape of a rune used to facilitate memory loss. Kell does not remember where it came from, or what happened to him before he came to live in the palace when he was five years old. Magic like this, used to bind someone or alter memory, is illegal. He looks at his knife; it has the initials "K.L." into the handle, which is how he got his name. He listens to his music box.

Analysis

In a perspective shift, the author puts us briefly in the mind of Parrish, which allows for a description and indirect characterization of the prince and Holland, the other Antari. Through Parrish's fondness and loyalty for his charge, it is apparent that Prince Rhy is benevolent, if a little frivolous; he has a weakness for a good time and likes both genders romantically. This may be why he is open to taking a gift from Holland when he knows it is not allowed. Parrish is frightened of Holland, who is an Antari with one green eye and one black eye, and has a "voice like a shadow in the woods at night," an evocative and sinister description (41). Parrish notes that Kell and Holland are completely unlike despite both having magic powers, which establishes a yin and yang relationship going forward—one good, the other evil, though it will prove to be a little more complicated than that.



Kell compares the Red London's Isle to the blood flowing in his veins, which establishes it as a symbol of this London's ample supply of magic. Readers are given the first indication that Kell is royalty in the marketplace when he is bowed to, and then it is stated outright as he approaches the palace in his red cloak. His slight embarrassment at the bow allows for a contrast in characters between himself and Prince Rhy, which occurs in Chapter 3. Rhy does not have the natural aptitude for magic that Kell does and he is nicer and more trusting, whereas Kell has some hard edges.

Several significant things occur in Kell's room at the Ruby Fields. The reader learns that Kell has a back story that is unknown to him, symbolized by the scar on his arm and the knife with the initials on the handle. This provides some context for Kell's more unsavory qualities; he does not feel like he belongs with the royal family, and he is unsure of his place in the world. While playing the music box, he draws a parallel between himself and the object; they are both "trinkets" (58). He believes that, as an Antari, he serves an ornamental or novelty function for the royal family and this is his only value to them.

Discussion Question 1

How is Red London's Isle River different from Grey London's Thames, and what does this signify?

Discussion Question 2

What is the symbolic function of Kell's music box?

Discussion Question 3

How are Holland and Kell different as characters, though they are both Antaris?

Vocabulary

vigilance, proclivities, scrying, reverent, affront, transference



Part 3: "Grey Thief"

Summary

In Part 3: "Grey Thief," the author shifts perspective to follow Lila Bard, a young thief residing in Grey London. Under her cloak Lila carries a stolen watch and various weapons. She brazenly chats with a constable, who shows her a Wanted poster bearing an image of herself in her usual disguise: a mask and a broad-brimmed hat, obscuring not just her face, but her gender. Not wearing the disguise, Lila is not recognized. She recalls Barron warning her of such incautious exhibitions.

In Chapter 2, Lila goes home to the ship she is living on. She has fantasies of being a pirate one day, but this ship belongs to a drunk named Powell. She admires her possessions, her weapons, and a favorite map. Powell enters demanding money, and when he does not get as much as he wants, he tries to sexually assault Lila. She stabs him in the stomach and sets the ship on fire as she flees, making sure to grab her map.

Now homeless as Chapter 3 begins, Lila shows up at the Stone's Throw and asks Barron for a room. She offers to pay him with the stolen pocket watch, but he does not accept it. She sees her Wanted flier again; on it she is called "The Shadow Thief" (73).

Analysis

Rather than telling the reader outright that Lila is in Grey London, the author provides subtle cues, including the title of Part 3, "Grey Thief," and Lila's mention of Barron, who we know runs Grey London's tavern from Kell's mention of the man at the beginning of Part 1, Chapter 3.

Lila's map is symbolic of her wanderlust and her desire to be a pirate. The map is unlabeled, which suggests the endless possibilities for adventure that she craves. This desire is Lila's defining characteristic and the quality that makes her the perfect candidate to assist Kell on his perilous mission to dispose of the black stone. Readers also learn that Barron and Lila have a congenial relationship. She might be reluctant to characterize it as such, but his unwillingness to take her pocket watch shows that he cares for her.

Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of the title of Part 3, "Grey Thief"?

Discussion Question 2

How does the author effectively characterize Lila as brave and impulsive?



Discussion Question 3

Why does Lila like the unlabeled map so much? What does the map signify?

Vocabulary

constable, lithely, haphazard, audacious, falsetto, wraith



Part 4: "White Throne"

Summary

Back in the palace, Prince Rhy is distracted from his magic lessons with Kell, thinking of his birthday celebration. Rhy asks Kell what it is like to move from one London to another, but Kell insists it is nothing special and directs the prince to focus on his studies. Rhy manages to summon fire briefly, loses concentration, and almost sets his room on fire, but Kell extinguishes the blaze. King Maxim arrives and asks Kell to take a message to White London, which lies between Red and Black London. When Black London lost control of its magic, Red London sealed itself off first, leaving White London to fight off its neighbor. Rhy reminds Kell that he is to bring nothing back with him.

White London is blanketed in a gray, ashy substance and Kell can see the royal palace in the distance. This is a place where magic lies only in the hands of the rulers, currently the Dane twins, Astrid and Athos. As Kell comes upon the Danes' castle, he notes the moat and a sinister garden featuring human-shaped sculptures. Holland greets Kell and leads him to the pale, ethereal Astrid Dane. Kell recalls the death of the former King of White London and the subsequent battle for power between Holland and the Danes. They had won by casting a binding spell on Holland, supposedly by enchanting the clasp of his cloak.

Chapter 3 begins in another room of the palace where Athos is whipping a boy who failed to bow before him. Athos then casts a binding spell on the boy to make him obey all future orders. Holland arrives and tells Athos that Kell is in the throne room with Astrid. Chapter 4 returns to the throne room where Astrid uses magic to force Kell to kneel. Astrid and Athos lament the fact that they cannot kill Kell because it would ruin the peace between Red London and White London. They drink blood from Holland, who has been compelled to cut himself, and they give Kell some kind of intoxicating elixir.

In Chapter 5, Kell is drunk and wandering the White London streets, where he admonishes himself for his recklessness. He starts to head for the tavern, the Scorched Bone, when a woman stops him. She knows who he is and begs him to take a letter to her family in Red London, from whom she has been separated since the doors closed. She gives him the note and a payment, which is wrapped in cloth so he cannot see what it is.

Analysis

The reader learns that, using magic, Kell could show Rhy something of what it is like in the other Londons, but he refrains from doing so. Rhy can never travel to another world, and Kell feels that showing him something he cannot have would be unkind. This is a demonstration of Kell's love for and thorough knowledge of the prince. Rhy has been



spoiled by his royal status and doting parents and he is unused to not getting exactly what he wants.

White London is a dangerous place where coups are common and power is the primary motivation. White Londoners likely have an ax to grind with Red London for leaving them to deal with Black London alone. Describing its environs, the author writes that “the castle lunged into the air with knifelike spires,” establishing a menacing and Gothic mood appropriate to the location and its brutal rulers (87). The castle is a symbol of the Danes' cruelty and their obsession with holding onto their power. There is a moat and a high fence to keep people out and the sculpture garden is rumored to be a collection of trophies or emblems of people they have killed.

Athos' binding spell over the boy he is whipping is an example of foreshadowing. This boy will be guarding Astrid later in the book when Lila comes to kill her, and he will beg Lila to put him out of his misery. The Danes' binding spells are evidence in support of two of the book's major themes: that magic should be respected, and that power in the wrong hands can be devastating.

At the meeting between Kell and the Danes, the author uses ominous descriptive similes. The Danes make Kell feel “like a mouse in the company of snakes,” and Athos smiles with his “teeth glinting like knifepoints” (102-3).

The author also draws an early parallel between Lila and Kell to ensure the reader knows that these two are on a collision course. Both have been described by others as reckless or seeking trouble, and when Kell heads to White London's tavern, he says that it “pulled at him,” (107) just as Lila, seeking shelter after burning the Sea King, felt the Stone's Throw “dragged at her like gravity” (71).

Discussion Question 1

What are some of the ways the Dane twins display their power?

Discussion Question 2

How does the physical description of Astrid Dane inform the reader's perception of her personality?

Discussion Question 3

How is White London different from Red London, from what we have seen so far?

Vocabulary

suppliant, adversary, invocation, synchronicity, unsavory, glean, mantra, guttural, visceral



Part 5: "Black Stone"

Summary

Lila is on her way to the Stone's Throw when she sees a boy begging for coins. She gives him a few. Barron observes this, and smiles approvingly. Suddenly a group of other boys approaches, robs the begging boy, and runs away. Lila puts on her mask and hat disguise and gives chase.

In Chapter 2, back in Red London, Kell seeks the address given to him with the letter, and suddenly senses magic all around him. He sees a figure in the distance. He opens the letter, and it is blank. He feels in his pocket for the object the woman gave him. As the figure moves toward him, he runs.

Switching back to Lila's point-of-view in Chapter 3, she chases the gang of boys and they run in opposite directions. She catches one, only to find herself cornered by the others who have circled back. They recognize her as the Shadow Thief and talk about claiming the reward. She slashes one with her knife and runs.

Kell returns to his room in the Ruby Fields in Chapter 4 and pulls out the object; it is a broken piece of black stone, vibrating with magic, which he recognizes as a relic from Black London despite the fact that every piece of Black London was supposedly destroyed. The stone bears a rune that Kell recognizes from his days at the magic academy, taught to him by his tutor, Tieren. The rune means "Vitari," or "Magic" (122). The cloth it was wrapped in bears evidence of a tracing spell. Someone has tricked Kell into moving this stone illegally from White London to Red London. An assassin arrives on the scene, bearing a stolen sword of the royal guard and clearly under a spell. There is a tussle, during which Kell grabs the stone in his pocket and says "Stop," causing black smoke to billow up around the assassin's legs and paralyze him (125). Kell has difficulty letting go of the stone, but when he does, he stabs the assassin through the chest and runs.

In Chapter 5, Kell returns to Grey London and promptly runs right into Lila. She sees he is hurt, and holds his arm steady, dabbing at his face with her kerchief. When she walks away, he realizes this was a sleight of hand trick; she stole the stone from his pocket.

Analysis

Though Lila is a coarse thief, the author shows that she has a heart and a deep sense of justice through her encounter with the beggar and the boys who steal from him. However, it also shows that she is impulsive; she is a wanted criminal and it would be smarter for her to lay low. The reader also learns that Kell is a little more hardened than one might have guessed, as he stabs the assassin in the chest despite the fact that he was already incapacitated by the stone's spell. The author notes that this is not the first time Kell has killed.



There is a running parallel drawn between Kell and Lila with the endings of the chapters in Part 5. Chapters 1-4 each end with whichever character is narrating running off, either away from or toward something, indicating that they are on a collision course with one another, and in Chapter 5, they literally collide, which allows Lila the opportunity to steal the stone.

There is some foreshadowing in Kell's earliest encounters with the black stone. First, he references the magic school and his tutor Tieren, whom the reader will meet later in the novel when Kell and Lila are looking for a safe place to take Rhy. Secondly, foreshadowing is seen in Kell's physical reaction when using the stone's magical properties. He finds himself almost unable to let go of it, which is an ominous sign that this magic may be so powerful that it could become dangerous to Kell and everyone around him. Finally, it is noted that the black stone is broken, which is a narrative thread that will be picked up later when the reader learns that there is a second piece of the stone which the Danes have in their possession.

Discussion Question 1

What is significant about the ends of the chapters in Part 5?

Discussion Question 2

Why does the author note that the black stone is broken? Why is this important?

Discussion Question 3

What does it say about Lila's character that she chases after the boys who stole from the young beggar?

Vocabulary

privateer, scabbard, piecemeal, talisman



Part 6: "Thieves Meet"

Summary

In Chapter 1, an omniscient narrator describes the dead assassin outside of the Ruby Fields. When Kell had bound the assassin with the black stone's magic, the magic had hardened into a black shell around his body. The shell breaks and the black magic oozes through the assassin, reanimating him.

In Chapter 2, Lila returns to the Stone's Throw, disappointed with the seemingly banal black stone she stole from Kell. She feels guilty that she has no money for room and board to offer Barron. In her room, she is shocked by the sudden appearance of Kell. He is still woozy from his fight with the assassin and she knocks him out with a book.

Kell awakens in Chapter 3 tied to Lila's bed. He uses magic to burn the ropes that bind him and demands the return of the black stone. He explains who he is, and that he found her using magic and the kerchief she left behind. They fight over the stone, and Lila uses it to summon a sword and then a doppelganger of Kell, which she teases him with. He uses his own power to bind her to the wall, grabs the stone, and jumps from her window.

In Chapter 4, Lila manages to free herself, and, disliking the dark power it seems to wield, tosses the sword she conjured with the black stone out the window. Down below, a drunk named Booth is stumbling through the alley when he sees the sword and picks it up only to realize he cannot put it down, and his hand is turning black. The magic within compels him to stab himself in the stomach. He briefly dies, before becoming reanimated. Both of his eyes have turned black.

Analysis

In Chapter 1 of Part 6, the author switches to an omniscient narrator, describing what has happened to the dead assassin and the magic that struck him down. This is the first time readers have been given a perspective outside of Kell and Lila's and it reoccurs at the end of Part 6 with the magic's possession of Booth. The author uses these moments outside the purview of the main characters to indicate how strange and dangerous the black stone's magic is. It has thus far turned two people into the walking dead.

The author provides further evidence that Lila and Barron are fond of each other in this section of the novel. He looks concerned when she enters the tavern, and she contemplates the knowledge that he would give her something to eat if she asked and would expect nothing in return. The fact that Lila cannot bring herself to ask demonstrates her pride and self-reliance that borders on stubbornness. In another illuminating detail, when Kell binds Lila to the wall in her room, she is more worried about paying Barron for potential property damage than anything else. Also, it is fitting that the first thing Lila summons with the black stone is a sword,



The first scene that features Lila and Kell together is charming and exhibits their obvious natural chemistry, even though they are in the midst of a violent brawl. When Lila summons the Kell doppelganger, she compels it to begin removing its clothes to embarrass Kell, and also to demonstrate that she has something of a talent for magic as well even if the stone is doing most of the work.

Discussion Question 1

How does Chapter 1 of Part 6 different from the rest of the novel so far? Why is this change significant?

Discussion Question 2

What does it say about Lila that she will not ask Barron for food, even though she knows he would give it to her?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Lila throw out the sword she summoned?

Vocabulary

fissures, divest, revulsion, skepticism, gangly, derisive, vigorously



Part 7: "The Follower"

Summary

Lila is astounded and excited by the things Kell has told her about magic and the other worlds. She goes to a different Grey London tavern, the Barren Tide, for a drink and she is approached by a man named Holland. She knows he is like Kell, but different. Holland can smell Kell's scent on Lila and demands to know where he is. She tries to get away, but he is too fast and strong for her. There is a struggle as Holland tells Lila to call Kell's name. When she finally does, Kell appears and tells her to run.

In Chapter 2, Holland demands that Kell give him the black stone, and Kell realizes he has been sent by the Danes. Holland releases Lila and she runs. Kell and Holland fight, each summoning magic to contain the other. Holland gets the stone and uses it to infect Kell with something that causes him to spontaneously bleed from the inside out. Kell tells Holland to use the stone to break the cloak clasp that the Danes used to bind him, but Holland claims that the power is not in the clasp; his soul is bound to the Danes, and there is no magical cure. The bind is demonstrated by a scar on his chest. Holland takes the coins Kell uses to move between worlds and scatters them on the ground. Suddenly, Lila appears from behind Holland and hits him over the head with an iron bar and grabs the black stone. They get away, but Kell is badly hurt.

In Chapter 3, Lila gets Kell safely back to the Stone's Throw where Barron is surprised to see them together. Lila tells Barron the story of what happened with Holland. She finally accepts some food from Barron. Lila watches over the sleeping Kell, noticing his scars, and vows to kill Holland if she sees him again.

Analysis

Just like when she exhibited an ease with operating the black stone in Part 6, Lila's ability to sense magic on Holland shows that she has some abilities of her own, though they are dormant—perhaps because she lives in Grey London. When contrasting Kell and Holland, Lila notes that Holland smells metallic, like electricity or blood, whereas the reader knows that Kell smells like flowers from repeated descriptions to that effect. Kell and Holland are frequently compared to one another, as they are character foils, representing two opposing paths for two different magicians. Kell has turned out relatively well, likely due to the influence of his adoptive family, whereas Holland has had the Danes and their binding spell to contend with. When Kell tells Lila to run at the end of Chapter 1, it is a clever echo of the ends of the chapters in Part 5, when both Kell and Lila were running, toward each other as it turned out.

As Kell and Holland fight over the black stone, Kell feels the danger of its power. The black stone is a symbol of magic's terrible potential when used injudiciously. Kell feels like the stone wants to take over his body and he must resist, because he can feel its



danger. When Holland briefly holds the stone, he uses it to sap Kell of his blood, the most important element of his magic. The coins are the other important element, so when Holland takes them he is literally and symbolically rendering Kell impotent.

Readers see the bond between Kell and Lila grow stronger as well in this section of the narrative. They have saved each other's lives, and there is an intimate moment when Lila is watching Kell sleep. She sees his scars and reflects that she has plenty of scars of her own. This is a literal and figurative/symbolic reference to the sordid pasts they have in common. They have both lived difficult, unconventional lives. Holland has a scar as well, but his past has led him down a different, more extreme path. There is also a suggestion that Lila is softening when she (reluctantly) takes the food Barron has offered her, despite her desire to never owe anything to anybody. Doing battle with Kell has taught her something about trust.

Discussion Question 1

Why is it significant that Lila takes the food Barron offers her, even though it makes her uncomfortable?

Discussion Question 2

In what ways are Kell and Holland similar? How are they different?

Discussion Question 3

It is mentioned that Holland, Kell, and Lila all have scars. What is the symbolic meaning of this?

Vocabulary

motley, tendril, divergent, expunged



Part 8: "An Arrangement"

Summary

Kell wakes up in Lila's room at the Stone's Throw. He worries about what he will owe Barron for his helping Lila to look after him. He explains what an Antari is to Lila and tells her about the four different Londons, noting that it has been three centuries since the closing off of Black London. He says that when the magic got out of control there, it infected people's minds, making them crazy and dangerous to the other worlds. No one knows exactly what the condition of Black London is today. They begin formulating a plan to take the stone back there where it belongs. Kell is hesitant to include Lila in this dangerous task, but he relents. They will need to move through the Londons in order. Since Kell lost most of his coins in the fight with Holland, they will first have to go Red London to retrieve a token that will allow for their passage into White London. They exit the tavern, and Lila leaves her pocket watch behind for Barron.

In Chapter 2, Kell and Lila prepare to move on to Red London, which Kell is wary about because he has never tried to travel with another person before. He wraps his coat around Lila, and she puts her kerchief in his pocket. As they move through the magic portal, she kisses him.

The perspective changes to Barron's in Chapter 3. He hears a noise and gets out of bed to investigate. He finds Holland in the room just vacated by Kell and Lila. He tries to shoot Holland, but the Antari raises his hand and stops the bullet. Holland demands to know where Kell and Lila have gone and when Barron says he does not know, Holland cuts his throat.

Analysis

The author draws another parallel between Lila and Kell when Kell wakes up at the Stone's Throw and immediately wonders what he will owe Barron for his trouble, as this is a concern Lila has expressed repeatedly. Kell marvels at Lila's cleverness and her loyalty, because she came back for him and knew exactly what to do to subdue Holland. She also asks astute questions about magic and the alternate worlds. She is not dumbfounded or incredulous of his story. The bond between them grows with his admiration. Lila's natural wonder and sense of adventure is displayed a great deal in this section. The author notes the gleam in her eye as soon as Kell describes the perilous journey to return the stone. She has been waiting her whole life for this.

This scene is also a skillful use of exposition. The chemistry between Kell and Lila during their conversation keeps the reader interested as Kell explains the black stone's back story and outlines the journey they will have to take, which is the basic plot of the rest of the novel. It is a lot of information, but it is delivered in a compelling way.



Kell feels the strong desire to hold the black stone in his hand repeatedly in this section while it is in Lila's possession, because of its strong and dangerous magical pull. His resistance provides a continual source of suspense and conflict.

The death of Barron is sad because he was a kind figure in Lila's life, but more importantly it adds a new layer of urgency to the plot. The reader now knows that there is no limit to what Holland will do to get to Kell and that when he does find him, his life will be in danger as well.

Discussion Question 1

What is noteworthy about Kell's wondering what he will owe Barron for his hospitality?

Discussion Question 2

What does Barron's death do to move the plot forward?

Discussion Question 3

What methods does the author use to show that Lila and Kell are fond of each other without stating it outright?

Vocabulary

salve, intermingled, conduits, forfeit, enchantment, eclectic, debris, affinity, futile



Part 9: "Festival & Fire"

Summary

Kell looks around and Lila is gone. He uses her kerchief and his magic to track her. A perspective shift shows Lila admiring the hustle and bustle of Red London, particularly the harbor and its ships. There is a parade featuring knights and dancing magicians, and then the royal family. Prince Rhy makes eye contact with Lila through the crowd. She asks some young women nearby what they are celebrating and they answer that it is Prince Rhy's birthday. One of the women wonders where the "black-eyed prince" is, though Lila does not immediately realize she means Kell (220). Lila wanders into a marketplace, where she is promptly caught trying to steal. Kell finds her as some guards are closing in, and Kell and Lila hastily retreat.

In Chapter 2, the author introduces Aldus Fletcher, owner of a disreputable pawn shop in Red London. Fletcher bears scars from a binding spell that was performed on him as punishment for the misuse of magic, though he has secretly had the spell reversed. Fletcher has a chess piece, a white rook that was given to him by Kell during a card game. He recalls Kell cheating during the game, and refers to him as a "royal brat" (230).

Kell tells Lila who he is in Red London in Chapter 3. She admonishes him for his comments about not feeling like a legitimate member of the royal family, noting that he should be happy that people love him. He knows she is right. Kell reflects on his plan, which was to take Lila no further than this, leaving her behind to explain his disappearance to the royal family, as he does not expect to return from Black London. They go to the Ruby Fields to acquire a token from White London from Kell's room and find the place on fire.

In Chapter 4, Kell expresses his belief that Holland set the fire, and Holland immediately appears to corroborate that belief. Kell uses the black stone to make himself and Lila invisible and incorporeal, but Holland can smell him. Holland takes out the pocket watch Lila left for Barron, tells her that he is dead, and vows to kill them both as well. Lila is distraught, but resolute, and vows revenge.

Analysis

In Part 9, the author splits Chapter 1 between Kell and Lila, offering alternating perspectives in the same chapter for the first time. Lila provides an outsider's view of Red London, and not only does she note a floral aroma, but the city actually looks red, "a subtle, pervasive hint, like she was looking through a pane of colored glass" (214). The vivid descriptive language continues as she notes the buildings of smooth rock and colored glass, the "impossible red river," and a palace that looks like "a crown of jewels," all so different from the drab environment of Grey London (217, 221).



This is also the first time Rhy and Lila see each other, through the crowd at the parade, and it is a significant moment. The stare is described as intense and it causes Lila to blush, a good indication that there is a spark of attraction between them. There will be other such exchanges later in the novel.

The introduction of Aldus Fletcher provides another window into Kell's troubled past. Cheating during the card game was dishonorable, and the chess piece was a condescending gesture at peacemaking. Kell had left the pawnshop after the game with an arrogant wink and Fletcher is still angry about it. This is foreshadowing of later events, when Kell will need his help and Fletcher will feel no qualms about betraying him.

The exchange between Kell and Lila about his family is significant for a number of reasons. It gives Kell a new, more appreciative view of his circumstances, and it helps highlight an important function to Kell and Lila's relationship. She challenges him like no one else does. He is fawned over as a prince in Red London, but Lila does not think of him that way so she is free with her opinions, which is exactly what Kell needs. The conversation also bolsters his respect for her and what she has obviously had to endure in her life to survive. Despite her troubles, she gets angry at what she perceives to be pity in Kell's tone.

The conversation becomes even more weighted when it is immediately followed by the protagonists learning of Barron's death. Barron was the only thing Lila had that was even close to the family that Kell takes for granted, and now that he is gone she is more alone than ever. Learning of Barron's death further cements her resolve to find and kill Holland.

Discussion Question 1

What does Lila help Kell realize about himself?

Discussion Question 2

How do Aldus Fletcher's memories of Kell help inform the reader about Kell's character?

Discussion Question 3

How is the white rook used as an element of foreshadowing?

Vocabulary

superficial, arbitrary, guttural, tourniquet, raucous, valiant, semblance, incorporeal



Part 10: "One White Rook"

Summary

In Chapter 1 of Part 10, the omniscient narrator follows the possessed Booth (whose body is now rotting) through Grey London. Meanwhile, Edward Tuttle (who we last saw in Part 1 at the Stone's Throw) is waiting around the tavern for Kell. He observes an accident—a horse-drawn cart colliding with a man. When he approaches to look under the cart, there is no man, only a smear of ashes. He touches the ashes and becomes possessed by the dark magic.

As they walk through Red London in Chapter 2, Lila tells Kell about her past – her mother is dead and her father tried to sell her to pay a debt. They bond over the fact that they have both killed before. They pass a scrying board, which is like a magical billboard, and see that it is reporting Kell as missing and advertising a reward for information. They arrive in the pawnshop and Kell tells the black stone to make them visible again. He has trouble putting it down and the veins on his hand are darkened from holding it. Lila asks about Rhy as they roam the store. Kell tells a story about how he saved Rhy's life when Rhy was 13. He had been abducted and Kell used magic to find and rescue him. Afterward, Rhy pardoned the kidnappers, but Kell tracked them down and killed them.

In Chapter 3, the author introduces another living iteration of the black magic, the assassin Kell killed back in Part 5. This means the plague is in Red London as well. The black magic compels the assassin's reanimated corpse to enter a brothel, where it infects a lady of the evening.

In Chapter 4, Aldus Fletcher appears and Kell asks for the white rook back. Suddenly, a group of royal guards appear on the scene. Fletcher has reported Kell's whereabouts, hoping for the reward. In Chapter 5, Kell leaves the shop with the guards, while Lila uses the black stone's invisibility spell to hide. She observes one of the guards murder Fletcher. The guard has a glimmer in his eye that Lila recognizes as the effect of magic. She sees the white rook on the floor and grabs it, also stealing a knife on her way out. The other guards who are accompanying Kell drug him and he loses consciousness.

The celebration for Rhy's birthday is ongoing in Chapter 5, and the guards Parrish and Gen are roaming the marketplace when Parrish spots the woman from the brothel and the assassin, both visibly infected by the black stone's spell. The assassin passes the spell to Gen by reaching into his chest with his bare hand, and then Gen kills Parrish.

Analysis

Through the possession of Booth, and now Tuttle, the author demonstrates the terrible power of the black stone as it passes from one person to the next. The omniscient narrator describes it poetically, remarking, "Magic was a truly beautiful disease" (246).



With these events, two things become clear: the black stone has unleashed a plague in Grey London that could have dire consequences, and its powers pose a serious threat to our protagonists who still have it in their possession. This is reiterated in the next chapter when Kell struggles to release the black stone and it is clearly altering his physical body, coloring the blood inside his veins. In the Chapter 3, the assassin who has been infected by the stone's magic is also described as having black veins. Kell can feel “the warmth of the magic spreading up his arm like poison,” and when he finally lets go, he feels physically exhausted (253). He also compares it to a powerful drug, as he feels the effects of withdrawal. The situation will clearly continue to worsen as long as he is carrying the stone and drawing from its power.

Chapter 5 of Part 10 provides another instance of alternating points of view in the same chapter. It serves an important function here, as Lila and Kell have been separated, and readers need to know what is happening in two different places at once. In Chapter 6, the author provides Parrish the guard's point-of-view for only the second time in the novel, again to exhibit the rapid dissemination of the plague and its mortal consequences.

When Lila asks Kell about Rhy, it is further evidence that she was intrigued by their first lingering glance at the parade. Kell makes a droll remark that Rhy “would flirt with a nicely upholstered chair,” providing a welcome moment of comic relief from the novel's building tension (254). His story about rescuing Rhy from the kidnappers shows his love and devotion for his brother, but also a darker side of his personality—a need for vengeance. Rhy was able to forgive those who hurt him, but Kell was unable to let it go. This foreshadows the future events in the novel when Astrid Dane takes over Rhy's body (essentially a magical form of abduction) and Kell goes to the ends of the earth to save Rhy and punish the Danes, putting himself at great risk in the process. Kell is extremely devoted to those he cares about, perhaps to a fault.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Kell go after Rhy's kidnappers despite Rhy having pardoned them?

Discussion Question 2

What metaphorical comparisons does the author make regarding the black stone's magic?

Discussion Question 3

How does learning about Lila's family history give the reader a better understanding of her character?

Vocabulary

nefarious, ominous, intangible, opulence, empathy, mundane, feign, masquerade



Part 11: "Masquerade"

Summary

Lila arrives outside the palace where a masquerade ball in honor of Rhy's birthday is taking place. She recognizes the young women she saw earlier at the parade. Using her thieving sleight of hand trick, she steals an invitation from one of them. Realizing she will need to upgrade her clothing in order to fit in she visits a booth in the marketplace, operated by a woman named Calla, who knows Kell and offers Lila whatever she wants for free with the understanding that she will pay Calla back in the future. Lila chooses a black mask with horns, black boots, and a men's black coat, feeling like the pirate she has always wanted to be.

In Chapter 2, Kell awakens in Rhy's bedroom with his hands cuffed behind his back. Rhy is there, and he begins questioning Kell about the black stone. Kell realizes that Rhy is under the spell of the necklace that Holland brought him back in Part 2, which is allowing Astrid Dane to take over his body. When Kell will not give up the whereabouts of the black stone, Astrid/Rhy begins beating him.

Upon Lila's arrival at the party in Chapter 3, an attendant asks how she would like to be introduced and she chooses the name "Captain Bard" (297). She meets King Maxim and Queen Emira, who also seem to be under a spell. She looks for Kell, and the black stone guides her to a hallway, where guards stand before one of the doors. She enters a nearby room that is unguarded.

Back in the bedroom in Chapter 4, Kell asks Astrid why she wants the black stone, and she tells him she wants to reopen the doors between Londons, merge Red and White London, and rule over both. She tells him that his black stone is half of a larger stone; Athos has the other half. As Astrid/Rhy approaches Kell with a knife, Lila appears on the balcony pointing her gun at Astrid. Astrid uses a magic lightning bolt to knock Lila over the balcony ledge, but while she is distracted, Kell frees himself from his handcuffs. Lila reappears, floating on a black stone-summoned cloud, and shoots Astrid/Rhy in the leg. Astrid tells Kell to hand over the black stone or she will make Rhy stab himself. When he still refuses, she follows through on the threat, removing the necklace and stabbing Rhy in the stomach in one motion.

In Chapter 5, Rhy is bleeding out, while Astrid Dane's consciousness passes through a guard, and then a female partygoer via the enchanted necklace. Kell tries to save Rhy with blood magic, and then summons a door to get them out of the palace.

Analysis

The author continues to provide vivid descriptive prose for Red London, which is clearly the most beautiful of the worlds. In the distance, as Lila approaches, the palace "rose like a second sun over the Isle as the day's light sank low behind it, haloing its edges



with gold” (283). This is evocative imagery and appropriate, as gold is often used to symbolize royalty. Also, this description is the first sentence of Chapter 1, and in the first sentence in Chapter 2, Kell regains consciousness but his disorientation causes him to see blurs of red and gold and rich dark blue, a reminder that these two characters, though apart, are inextricably linked.

The attendants at the masquerade appear equally elegant, like the sun over the palace, they “glittered in their jewel-tone gowns and dark, elegant suits,” a description that also serves as a contrast to Lila's disheveled attire (285). Lila's new outfit, resembling as it does a pirate's, is symbolic of her having finally arrived as the bold adventurer she was destined to be. The coat in particular is described in detail, “high-collared and lovely...true black, velvety and rich” with “glossy jet-black buttons” (288). Kell has a coat that transforms him, and now so does Lila.

In the scene at the marketplace, readers also learn that Kell is very popular in Red London. Calla, the woman who runs the clothing booth, describes him as a “jewel in our city's crown” (286). When Lila is admiring the palace and the party, she similarly calls Red London a “glittering jewel of a place” (297). The repeated mention of jewels helps characterize the city as a place of beauty and plenty, contrasting it in particular to Lila's home of Grey London, which is drab and lacking in magic.

As Astrid Dane unveils her master plan, the reader learns about her motivations, which are a hunger for power and anger at White London's having been left behind to handle Black London without the assistance of the magically-adept Red London. Her bitterness has transformed into a need for retribution, both personal and political. She hates the Mareshes because they symbolize all of Red London's opulence, and she hates that they rule over a superior kingdom. She feels that she is entitled to both thrones and she hopes to use the dark magic of the black stone to make this fantasy a reality.

Discussion Question 1

What is significant about Lila's new attire in Red London?

Discussion Question 2

What motivates Astrid Dane, and how does the author convey her motivations and mindset?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Calla give Lila the new clothes for free? What does this tell us about Kell?

Vocabulary

providence, ornate, austere, baubles, manacles, impertinence, reparation, eradication, tenuous, sanctuary



Part 12: "Sanctuary and Sacrifice"

Summary

The protagonists arrive at the London Sanctuary, Kell's old magic school. Kell uses the black stone to bind his life to Rhy's and save him. It works, and they now have matching marks branded on their chests. The spell is a "soul seal," ensuring that as long as one lives, so will the other. Kell finds himself unable to let go of the black stone. Kell's old teacher Master Tieren enters and guides them to some tunnels they can use to escape without drawing notice. Kell and Lila argue over her level involvement in the next part of the plan. They will need to go to White London and get the other half of the stone, and Lila says she will handle Astrid Dane. Tieren tells Kell that Lila has some magic in her. Tieren also notices that Lila has one glass eye. He asks her how she lost it and she tells him she does not remember. Lila and Kell leave Rhy behind to convalesce at the Sanctuary.

Back at the palace in Chapter 3, partygoers tell conflicting stories of what occurred. Astrid Dane, now in the body of a guard, tells the king that Kell stabbed Rhy and the king calls for Kell's arrest. Gen arrives at the palace, still infected with the black stone's plague. Kell and Lila slink through the streets, where the scrying boards are now advertising Kell as "Wanted" rather than missing (332). Kell creates a door to pass through to White London, but as they are moving through it, he is pulled back into Red London by Holland.

In Chapter 4, Lila arrives in White London alone and is harassed by a gang of men. She shoots one, but the others close in on her. In Chapter 5, Holland and Kell fight using magic. Holland raises the paving stones from the ground to shield himself. Kell uses a nearby pile of shipping supplies to bind Holland with a chain, and then stabs him through the chest. Holland dies and his silver clasp falls broken to the ground. Despite everything, Kell is sad, and notes from the look in Holland's eyes that he had wanted Kell to kill him. Kell takes Holland's body with him when he leaves.

As the chapter continues, Kell arrives in White London and he and Lila run from the violent mob. Lila has a knife she stole from a palace guard in Red London that disables magic. She gives it to Kell and they head to the Danes' castle.

Analysis

The author contrasts the frivolousness of the palace in Red London with the austerity of the magic sanctuary. Unlike the ostentatious home of the royal family, the magic sanctuary is a stone building of "simple elegance" that "scorned distraction" (315). Kell's room is lit by candles and furnished with only a table, desk, and cot. This provides some background characterization for Kell, who was raised here as well as in the palace, and is a much more serious person than his brother Rhy.



During the exchange between Kell and Lila about traveling to White London, he argues that she is being reckless, seeking out adventure at the potential cost of her death. These are criticisms Lila has heard before but this time she notes to herself that adventure is not her only motivation. She now believes that Kell needs her to succeed in the mission and that he is not safe alone with the black stone. This exhibits an evolution in Lila's character and a growing bond between herself and Kell. She is maturing, and she no longer cares only for herself. Kell is becoming like family. Note the newly disclosed similarity between Kell and Lila as well: they both have physical reminders of traumatic events that happened to them in childhood that they cannot remember. Lila has a glass eye, and Kell has the scar on his elbow that is evidence of a spell.

As Kell stabs Holland through the chest with the metal bar, the silver clasp that symbolizes his soul-bind with the Danes is broken and falls to the ground. This is a significant detail, as it fits with Kell stating that Holland wanted to die. Despite his hard words and aggressive actions, Holland was a tragic figure, acting for the Danes with no will of his own. Death was the only way to break the spell and release him, and he welcomed it. This realization, along with the fact that Kell feels a bond with Holland because they are both Antaris, causes him to grieve even though he knows it could not have gone any other way.

The black stone's power continues to play a part in the novel's themes involving the corrupting influences of power and covetousness. Kell finds himself unable to let go of the black stone now; its power hums through him, intent on controlling him if he lets his guard down. The black stone is a forbidden object, something that does not belong in the world outside of Black London, and it will continue to cause trouble as long as it is in someone's possession.

Discussion Question 1

Why is it significant that Lila has a glass eye from an accident in childhood she does not remember?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Kell feel sad after killing Holland?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Lila insist on accompanying Kell to White London, and what does this tell us about their relationship?

Vocabulary

grandeur, discretion, malice, preened, upheaval, treason, coup, antechamber, hewn



Part 13: "The Waiting King"

Summary

Athos Dane is sitting in his throne room looking at his half of the black stone, which is projecting an image of Kell and Lila's approach. He plans to kill Kell. Astrid Dane is on her throne beside him, immobile, as her consciousness is still in Red London.

In Chapter 2, Kell approaches the front of the castle while Lila goes around back. He places Holland's body on a bench. Athos appears and uses the black stone to bind Kell with chains. Meanwhile, Lila creeps into the throne room and finds the boy that Athos was whipping in Part 4 guarding Astrid. He begs her to kill him, and she does.

In Chapter 3, having backed Kell into the outer courtyard, Athos summons a huge ethereal snake, but it turns on its maker and snaps his neck. Kell stabs the snake with the magic-dispelling knife. It disappears, leaving Athos' half of the black stone behind. In the throne room, Lila tries to shoot the unconscious Astrid Dane, but the bullet ricochets off an invisible force field. Astrid wakes up and grabs Lila.

In Chapter 4, Astrid pummels Lila until she is sure she is going to die. Astrid casts a spell to turn herself into a Lila doppelganger, then knocks the real Lila unconscious and leaves. Outside, Kell fuses the two pieces of the stone together, and it grows black ropes that wrap around his arm. Astrid approaches in Lila's form and asks Kell to please let go of the stone. He knows she is not Lila, and stabs her.

The real Lila approaches Kell in Chapter 5 and asks how he knew it had been Astrid; he says it was because she said "please" (373). The stone continues to fight with Kell for dominance over his mind, dragging him into an unconscious state. In this state, a shadowy world emerges where the stone's persona, which he calls "Vitari," tries to take control of Kell (375). He can hear Lila calling in the distance. She reminds him that Rhy's life is tied to his. Kell dispels Vitari with a magic phrase, "As Anasae" (378). In Chapter 6, the narrator relates that the dispelling of Vitari has also ended the black stone's plague in Red London, leaving bodies in its wake, some living and some dead. Prince Rhy shivers.

Analysis

Part 13 opens with some vivid descriptive language that sets the ominous tone for the protagonists' arrival at the Danes' castle: "A cloud of black smoke hung in the air of the white throne room, a patch of night against the pale backdrop" (349). The description continues in Chapter 3 when Lila enters the throne room, "cavernous and circular and white as snow," while Astrid Dane's hair is described as "wisps as fine as spider silk" and her pallor "deathly pale" (361). These descriptions establish a scene that is appropriately chilling for the clash between Kell and Lila and their foes. The author uses



also uses an apt simile to depict Astrid toying with Lila in the throne room, “like a cat with a mouse” (366).

In Kell's fight with Athos Dane, readers see a final embodiment of the black stone's terrible power in the form of the snake that turns on Athos and kills him. This is the ultimate proof of the theme related to the corrupting influence of power. Athos engaged with power he could not control, resulting in his death. Kell on the other hand has fought the black stone's power at every turn; he is strong enough and smart enough to stop it from taking over during the battle within his unconscious mind.

As Lila fights with Astrid, she is surprised to discover that her main motivation is buying Kell enough time to kill Athos so he would not have to fight both Danes at once. She realizes that even if she dies here, she will not regret what she has done. Now only did she have the grand adventure she was pining for, but she also saved Kell's life and helped him on his mission. This is the culmination of her character's journey from selfish immature thief to noble heroine. Readers also see how strong the bond between Lila and Kell has grown. One of the themes in the book relates to the concept of family; the author demonstrates that it is possible, perhaps even preferable, to build close ties with people who are not blood relations. Compare Kell and Lila's relationship to that of the Dane twins. Astrid and Athos are brother and sister yet they have no detectable loyalty or affection for each other.

When Kell kills Astrid Dane, he does so out of a need for revenge for what she did to his brother. Revenge is a recurring theme and motivator in the novel and for Kell's character in particular. This moment should remind the reader of the story Kell told Lila about Rhy's kidnapping in Part 10, and his punishment of the abductors despite Rhy's pardon.

Discussion Question 1

How has Lila and Kell's relationship transformed over the course of the novel?

Discussion Question 2

How does the author demonstrate the inherent differences between Athos Dane and Kell in Part 13?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Lila regret nothing when she believes Astrid Dane is about to kill her?

Vocabulary

lenient, jaunt, labyrinthine, tendrils, cavernous, aesthetic, fissure, derisive, coalescing



Part 14: "The Final Door"

Summary

Kell awakens and finds the black stone's magical pull has abated. The mark on his chest binding him to Rhy is still there. Kell sends the black stone, along with Holland's body, into another world by touching the stone to Holland's blood. In Chapter 2, Kell and Lila return to Red London. They are immediately surrounded by guards who bring them to the king and queen. Kell tells them that Rhy is fine and promises to go get him.

In Chapter 3, Rhy is home and convalescing, distraught because Parrish and Gen are both dead and upset with Kell for binding their lives together. The king and queen have pardoned Kell, but the citizens of Red London are still wary of him, unsure if he was complicit in all that unfolded at the palace. Rhy and Lila flirt.

In Chapter 4, Kell and Lila are at Red London's harbor, where Lila is about to sail away on further adventures. He gives her a version of the small magic game from the beginning of the novel to practice her skills. Kell is sure he will see her again and Lila is excited to travel on a ship, just like she always dreamed of doing.

Analysis

The author fashions an ending that appropriately ties up all loose ends, while also leaving plenty of room for further material in a sequel or series. The reader will likely be curious about how these characters will meet again and what will happen to them, especially Lila Bard who seems bound for great adventures. One might also be curious about what effect the binding spell might have on Kell and Prince Rhy in the future.

The moment between Kell and Lila on the docks is satisfying because, even though they are saying goodbye, the author relates that Kell appreciates everything she has done for him and that he has grown to admire her a great deal, calling her a "valiant partner" (397). This is a reiteration of the close, familial bond they feel for one another—an important thematic element in the book. He also expresses his certainty that they will see each other again.

On the dock, Lila thinks back to her favorite map, first mentioned when her character was introduced in Part 3. The map was unlabeled and she thought of it as a "map to anywhere," giving it a symbolic function in the novel related to her keen desire for adventure (397). Though she no longer has the map itself, she now has the freedom it represents as she boards her ship. By putting Lila on a dock with a ship and referencing the map, the author shows that Lila is still the same person, staying true to herself and her motivations. Her experience with Kell has made her more mature, wiser, and more capable of being close to another person, but it has not dimmed her spirit for adventure.



Discussion Question 1

What does Lila's "map to anywhere" symbolize (397)?

Discussion Question 2

How does the author leave the book open to the possibility of continuing Kell and Lila's adventures in a series?

Discussion Question 3

How has Lila changed since the beginning of the novel? How is she still the same?

Vocabulary

plausible, nuisance, gossamer, valiant



Characters

Kell

Kell is an Antari (blood magician) who lives with his adoptive royal family in Red London. As an Antari, Kell can move freely between the different dimensions and he does so as a messenger and petty smuggler until he ends up with a dark magic talisman, the black stone. He then undertakes a dangerous mission to return it to its home dimension.

Kell is a serious, melancholy person who feels like he does not really belong anywhere. This is exacerbated by the fact that he cannot remember his own childhood due to a spell cast upon him. These troubled feelings can cause Kell to behave recklessly. Kell is warned by the prince that his smuggling habit is dangerous, which is proven true when he acquires the black stone. He is brave and merciless when it comes to protecting those he loves against their foes. Kell has red hair, one blue eye and one black, and he wears a magical coat that changes its appearance each time it is folded.

Despite some antisocial tendencies, Kell is capable of forming close attachments. He cares deeply for his brother, Prince Rhy, and he comes to be very fond of Lila as well. His mission to dispose of the stone requires a tremendous exhibition of willpower as it exerts its magical influence over him constantly, but he proves himself remarkably strong in resisting it.

Lila Bard

Lila is a young thief on the run from the law in Grey London when she meets Kell and steals the black stone, tumbling her into the grand adventure of the novel. She proves her ferocity and independence early on, pining to be a pirate, murdering her lecherous landlord, and worrying about what is expected of her if she accepts even the slightest kindness. Readers learn that her mother is dead and that her father tried to sell her to pay his debts so she feels quite as alone in the world as Kell does, making them kindred spirits.

Lila is also very brave. She spurs Kell on regardless of the dangers of their journey, saves his life, and refuses to be left behind in Red London even if at the risk of death. She has short, dark hair and brown eyes, and Kell describes her as “bony in a starved-bird kind of way” (142). Kell and Lila begin their relationship as adversaries when she steals the black stone from him in Grey London, but they grow to be very close over the course of the novel, almost like brother and sister. She exhibits evidence of a more romantic attachment to Kell's brother Rhy.

The journey to return the black stone is the grand adventure and opportunity to prove her mettle that Lila has been waiting for all her life. When this particular adventure is



over, she sets sail on a ship out of Red London's harbor to find her next adventure, fulfilling her fantasy of becoming a pirate.

Holland

Holland is an Antari (blood magician) like Kell. He was involved in a struggle for power between the former king of White London and the Dane twins, but when the twins won, they cast a spell binding his will to theirs, and making him their errand boy. He pursues Lila and Kell, trying to get their half of the black stone for his masters, killing Barron and burning down the Ruby Fields tavern in the process. He is killed in battle by Kell in Part 12, and his body is sent to another dimension in Part 13, along with the black stone. Kell is described as pale with black hair, with one grey-green eye and one black.

Kell has a complicated relationship with Holland because they are both Antaris, of only a few in the world, and therefore they share a bond. However, Holland is working for the Danes and proves himself to be a vicious killer. Consequently, when Kell finally kills Holland, he grieves. Kell also feels that, at the moment before his death, Holland looked at peace, like he wanted to die in order to escape the Danes' spell.

Holland is something of a tragic figure as he is often acting under the Danes' compulsion spell, but he is still a villain, unrepentant about the murders and other crimes he has committed, even bragging and taunting the protagonists about their inability to stop him.

Astrid Dane

Astrid and her brother Athos are the rulers of White London. They came to power after executing a violent coup against the previous king. Astrid organizes the ruse with the fake letter that causes Kell to bring the black stone into Red London. In Part 11, Astrid uses magic to take over Prince Rhy's mind and body, causing him to stab himself. In Part 13, after fighting with Lila and shapeshifting into her mirror image, Astrid is killed by Kell. Astrid is described as ghostly pale, with white blond hair and blue eyes.

Prince Rhy Maresh

Rhy is Kell's adoptive brother, the son of King Maxim and Queen Emira. He is about to turn 20 years old when the story begins. He is kind, but he likes having a good time and does not devote himself to his magic studies. He is a bit superficial and something of a "rake," but he cares deeply for Kell (53). After Rhy is wounded while under the spell of Astrid Dane, Kell must bind his own life with Rhy's in order to save him, so if one of them dies, the other will as well.



Athos Dane

Athos is Astrid Dane's twin brother, and co-ruler of White London. Athos found the black stone on the coast of White London and planned, with Astrid, to open the doors between Londons so they could rule over White and Red London together. After Kell kills Holland Athos tries to kill Kell in revenge, using the black stone to summon a snake, but the snake turns on its master and kills Athos instead. Athos is described as looking like his sister, pale and blond, but more muscular and with shorter hair.

Barron

Barron is the owner of the Stone's Throw tavern in Grey London. He has an amiable if gruff relationship with both Kell and Lila that predates the start of the novel. He offers Lila a room and food without taking payment and she worries about feeling indebted to him. Barron is killed by Holland at the end of Part 8 when he cannot or will not tell him where Kell and Lila have gone.

Parrish

Parrish is a member of the king's royal guard whose point-of-view readers are given a couple of times in the novel, once in Part 2 when Holland is visiting Prince Rhy, and again in Part 10 when he is killed by Gen.

Vitari

Vitari is the name Kell gives the physical manifestation of the black stone's power that he encounters while unconscious in White London in Part 13. The name means "magic." Kell battles Vitari for control of his own body and mind, and when he wins, he sends the black stone away to another dimension.

Booth

Booth is a drunk who is stumbling through the alley outside the Stone's Throw when he comes upon the sword Lila summoned with the black stone and then threw out the window. When he picks it up, it acts with a will of its own and stabs him in the stomach, causing him to become possessed by a force of dark magic. He is subsequently killed in an accident with a cart, and the force possesses the nearby Edward Tuttle.

Gen

Gen is a member of Prince Rhy's royal guard. He is infected by the black stone's plague in Part 10, which causes him to kill Parrish, his friend and fellow guard.



Aldus Fletcher

Aldus is the lowlife owner of a pawnshop in Red London. He bears marks of punishment for having committed crimes related to the misuse of magic. Kell and Lila seek him out to retrieve the white rook that will allow for their passage into White London, which Kell had given to him during a card game. Fletcher is killed by a royal guard acting under Holland's spell after alerting the authorities to Kell's whereabouts.

Edward Archibald Tuttle III

Kell meets Tuttle, a Grey London magic fan and aspirant, in the Stone's Throw at the beginning of the novel and makes a noncommittal verbal agreement to bring him a piece of earth from another world. Tuttle lurks around the Stone's Throw waiting for Kell's return and witnesses an accident involving the dark magic-possessed Booth and a horse-drawn cart. When he touches Booth's sooty remains, he too becomes possessed.

King Maxim Maresh

King Maxim is Prince Rhy's father and Kell's adoptive father, and co-ruler of Red London with his wife, Queen Emira.

Queen Emira Maresh

Emira is queen of Red London, Prince Rhy's mother, and Kell's adoptive mother. She and her husband are possessed by Astrid Dane's magic when she takes over Rhy's body in Part 11.

Tieren

Master Tieren is the head priest at the London Sanctuary and Kell's former instructor in the magical arts. He is old, white-haired and wrinkled, but also sturdy looking, wise, and perceptive. He can tell by looking at Lila that she possesses some kind of magical power. He helps Lila, Kell, and Rhy by leading them out of the sanctuary when they are on the run from the Danes' magic in Part 12.

Calla

Calla is a merchant at the market in Red London who is selling clothing and masks when Lila needs something to wear to the masquerade ball. She gives Lila a mask, coat, and boots for free because she is a friend of Kell's, and he is the "jewel in [Red London's] crown" (286). Lila promises to pay her back.



George, the Prince Regent

The younger George is the one with the real authority in Grey London. He is somewhat pompous and Kell issues a warning to him about the dire consequences of a hunger for power, which was the destruction of Black London.

George III

George III is the king of Grey London. He is a bit mad (as was his real life historical counterpart), so his son the Prince Regent makes most of the consequential decisions.

Powell

Powell is the drunken lout who owns the Sea King, the ship Lila is staying on at the beginning of the novel. When he tries to sexually assault her, she stabs him and escapes, setting the ship on fire as she leaves.



Symbols and Symbolism

Kell's Coat

Kell's coat symbolizes his character's ever-shifting identity as he moves through the different Londons. The coat has a different appearance each time it is folded, with a seemingly infinite number of variations. When he is in Grey London, Kell wears a plain black coat, as he is visiting in the capacity of a messenger and does not wish to draw attention to himself in the land without magic. When he returns to Red London, he switches to a red coat to reflect his status as royalty in his homeland.

Kell's Knife

Kell's knife symbolizes his past and all he does not know about it. It is a silver knife with the initials "K.L." on the handle, which is how Kell acquired his name (56). Kell has no memory of his life before coming to the palace at age five and does not know who his real parents are. He wonders where the knife came from, if perhaps it belonged to his father, and calls it a "relic from another life" (18).

Red London's Isle

The river that flows through Red London is called the Isle and it is symbolic of the city's capacity for magic. The Isle's water is red, which Kell compares to the dull black flow of the Thames at nighttime in Grey London. He describes the Isle as a "vein" curving through the city, creating a parallel between the river and his own capacity for magic, which requires the drawing of blood (44). He says that red represents "magic in balance" which is Red London's distinguishing feature (44).

Kell's Music Box

The music box Kell acquires at the Stone's Throw tavern is symbolic of how he sees himself in relation to his adoptive family - as an ornamental trinket. Kell believes that the royal family's affection for him is largely based on his status as an Antari - a highly skilled magic practitioner - similarly to how he regards his music box and other collectible items—as mere objects to be admired. Later, when explaining his position to Lila, Kell remarks that he is not really royalty, but merely "a possession. A trinket" (234).

The Danes' Castle

The Danes' castle is symbolic of their cruel and despotic rule. Astrid and Athos live in a protective fortress surrounded by a moat and a high wall to prevent trespassers, Gothic spires, and a garden of sculptures of human figures meant to represent those they have



killed on their path to becoming the leaders of White London. The Danes took power from the prior king in a bloody coup, so they have reason to be cautious of potential interlopers and assassins. The perimeter is surrounded by guards who act not out of loyalty, but necessity, as the Danes have magically bound them to obey their commands.

Lila's Coat

The coat Lila obtains to wear to the masquerade party symbolizes her arrival at the adventurous destiny she has always been pining for. Virtually the first thing readers learn about Lila when her character is introduced is that she wants to be a pirate, and in Part 11, when she dons the coat, boots, and mask, she actually looks like one. The coat is black and velvety, with glossy buttons and a high collar. It is also an appropriate symbol because Kell has a coat that allows him to transform his appearance, and now Lila does too.

The Black Stone

The black stone is symbolic of the corrupting influence of power on those who wield it, and the dangers of covetousness. The stone can essentially give people whatever their hearts desire, and in the wrong hands, the consequences can be terrible. Astrid Dane, for example, wants to use it to open the doors between Londons and overthrow the Maresh family from the throne. The black stone's magic is also capable of turning people into walking zombies, and those who hold it feel incapable of letting go. Just like power, once someone has experienced having it, it is nearly impossible to go back to the way things were before.

Scars

Scars are frequently used in the novel to represent a spell or magical influence, or to symbolize a person's past experiences. It is mentioned early on that Kell has a scar near his elbow, and that it is evidence of a spell used to make him forget something, in this case the scar serves both symbolic functions at once. Holland has a scar on his chest that is the result of the spell that binds him to the Danes. The people of White London intentionally scar themselves to try to enhance their powers. Lila, we are told, has "too many scars to count," which can be taken literally, or as a metaphorical indication of her difficult past (182).

Holland's Clasp

The silver clasp on Holland's cloak is symbolic of the magic bind the Danes hold over him that allows them to control his actions. At first Kell thinks the magic is in the clasp itself, but this turns out not be the case; the magic actually operates through a brand

mark on Holland's chest. When Kell stabs Holland in Part 12, he severs the clasp and it falls to the ground as Holland dies, symbolizing the end to his torturous confinement.

Lila's Map

Lila's map symbolizes her yearning and spirit for adventure. We are told she has an unlabeled map that she is fond of in Part 3; she calls it a "map to anywhere" (66). It is an apt symbol for Lila because she does not care for rules or for conforming her behavior to fit into society's boxes. She leaves the map behind in the Stone's Throw, but she recalls it again at the end of the novel when she is sailing away (to find further adventure), remarking, "The map to anywhere. Isn't that what she had now?" (397).



Settings

Grey London

Grey London is the home of Lila Bard and Barron, the keeper of the Stone's Throw tavern, which is frequented by Kell and Edward Tuttle. Grey London is most similar to its real life namesake, in that the inhabitants possess no magical powers, the common tongue is English, the Westminster Abbey is there, and the city's river is called the Thames. Lila is unaware of the existence of other dimensions before she meets Kell but she is desperate to leave the ordinary, dismal city for a more exciting life, which is exactly what she finds in Red London.

Red London

Red London, aka Arnes, is Kell's home, and the home of the Maresh royal family, who adopted Kell when he was five years old. It lies between Grey London and White London. It is the most physically beautiful and ornate of the Londons and the one with the greatest capacity for magic, the source of which is said to be its river, the Isle, which runs red. The city is permeated with a floral aroma that the other characters can smell on Kell when he travels to different dimensions. The common folk there speak Arnesian. When Lila sees Red London for the first time, she remarks on a general red tint to the air there. The tavern is called the Ruby Fields. Kell has a room there to store his smuggled items until Holland burns it down in Part 9.

White London

Also called Makt, White London lies between Red London and Black London. Kell relates that the city was forever changed by the battle against Black London, that it “fell to chaos and conquering,” and that there are frequent coups and struggles for power there (85). The Dane twins are the most recent victors in such a struggle, having overthrown the previous king and overpowered Holland, who they have bound to do their bidding. Where Kell's London is tinted red, White London is covered in a fine layer of white ash or dust (readers are also told by outside observers that Holland smells of ash). Its principle river is called the Sijlt. The people appear desperate and starving. The place is slowly being sapped of its magic, and only the strong still possess such abilities. The common language is Maktahn, and the tavern is called the Scorched Bone. The Danes' palace is a dark Gothic structure with sharp spires and a sculpture garden representing the people they have killed.

Black London

Black London has been inaccessible for 300 years due to the inhabitants having lost control of magical forces and caused the destruction of the city. Kell says “The people



fed on the magic and the magic fed on them until it ate their bodies and minds and then their souls" (23). Red London sealed itself off during this time, leaving White London to fight off its neighbor alone. Black London is used as a cautionary tale regarding the potential dangers of unchecked magical power. It is believed that, since magic requires a living host, nothing remains of Black London but an empty husk.

Kell's Unconscious Mind

In Part 13, with the two parts of the black stone now merged in his hand, Kell falls unconscious and must fight back the magic, which he calls Vitari, within his own mind. It is a place of shadows; shadows coil around his limbs and bind him and Vitari appears as a shadow before turning into a man. It is described as a "mental plane," but it could also be viewed as an extension of Black London (377). Were Kell unable to dispel Vitari, he would have fallen under the thrall of a terrible force that was trying to take over his mind, which is essentially what happened to the people of Black London.



Themes and Motifs

The Corrupting Influence of Power

The most ubiquitous theme in the novel is that too much power in the wrong hands, usually in the form of magic, can have disastrous consequences. Black London functions as a basic allegory for this message. The citizens of Black London went mad with magical power and caused the self-destruction of the entire city. The reader is informed of this very early on in the novel, as Kell explains to the Prince Regent in Grey London, “The people fed on the magic and the magic fed on them until it ate their bodies and their minds and then their souls” (23). This is why the black stone must be destroyed or sent back to where it belongs; it is a relic of the site of corrupted power, and it wields terrible power of its own over anyone who comes into contact with it. Kell knows that he must keep it away from the Danes at all costs because they are cruel and callous leaders with no respect for the dangers of power. Astrid Dane wants to use the black stone to open the doors between Londons so she can rule over White and Red London, and since she is a tyrant with a great deal of magical powers, this could not possibly be good for anyone.

Early on in the novel, foreshadowing later events, Kell remarks that his visits to White London have proven that “magic made rulers worse, not better” (53). While talking to Lila, he further explains that, after the destruction of Black London, the inhabitants of White London went overboard, killing nearly every Antari in the city in a frenzy of aggression. The Danes use their power to bind Holland, their guards, and an innocent child, forcing all of them to do their bidding. Both Holland and the child choose death rather than lingering on under such oppression. It is also noted several times that Red London has laws in place forbidding certain kinds of magic, particularly anything resembling the binding spells the Danes use. The pawnshop owner Aldus Fletcher had his powers restrained due to misuse. Red London knows the serious stakes involved when an individual is given too much power and they take precautions to regulate this.

The theme is also demonstrated by the black stone's plague that passes through Booth, the assassin, the woman from the brothel, and Gen. The magic possesses them the way that too much power can possess a person and causes them to act in ways they never would have before, mindlessly murdering those in their path. To a lesser extent, the black stone exhibits this same influence on Kell when he holds it, but his altruism and good sense allows him to fight back the corrupting influence.

The final demonstration of this theme comes in Part 13 when Athos Dane summons a large snake using the black stone, intending for it to kill Kell, but it turns on Athos and kills him instead. Athos pays for his hubris and thoughtlessness with his life.



Parallel Dimensions

Through the theme of parallel dimensions, the author imparts the message that where people come from is a defining factor in their lives when it comes to privilege, prejudices, and predispositions. Kell can move freely through the three major different dimensions, Grey, Red, and White London, and through him readers observe how environment comes to shape people.

The novel begins in Grey London, home of Lila Bard, and a land without magic. This dull, drab setting has instilled in Lila a yearning for adventure, as she seems to know instinctively that there is more to the world than what she can see. She is trapped in her circumstances, barely surviving as a thief, but through her experiences with Kell in the other Londons, she is able to blossom into the capable, confident, and brave hero she always wanted to be.

Red London is home to Kell and the Maresh royal family. It is a glittering, opulent city where magic is prevalent, symbolized by its crimson river, the Isle. The marketplace sells all kinds of magical wares, and the parade at Prince Rhy's birthday celebration features dancing magicians. Kell studied at a magic school there called the London Sanctuary. The city's wealth of magic has provided its citizens with virtually everything they need to be happy, and morale seems very high. However, living in such a land of plenty has made Prince Rhy a rather frivolous young man. He cares more about carousing and flirting than his studies or preparing himself to be a leader, at least until he goes through the genuine hardship of being maimed by Astrid Dane. Kell, the only person in Red London who can move between dimensions, is a more sober and serious person. Having exposure to other ways of life has provided him with a broader perspective than that of the common Red London citizen.

The novel's villains, Holland and the Dane twins, all live in White London, which Kell calls "the starving world," a land where magic is coveted and weaponized, used to get and maintain power (15). The Dane twins rule White London with an iron fist. It may not have always been so; readers are told that when Black London lost control of its magic, causing its population to go mad, White London had to forcibly contain the situation. This is demonstrative of the effects of war on a place and its citizenry. When violence and scarcity become common people become angry and bitter, like the Dane twins themselves, or the angry mob that tries to assault Lila in Part 12.

The author uses the colors associated with the different locations to make this point more blatant, grey is the color of plain, ordinary London, red the color of vibrant, healthy London, and white, symbolically linked to ice or bone, is the color of a cold and hungry place.

The Dangers of Covetousness

Another running theme related to the black stone is the negative consequences of covetousness desires. In the Bible, covetousness is a form of idolatry—the worshiping



of an object—and the root cause of a number of other grave sins like greed, dishonesty, and acts of violence. In *A Darker Shade of Magic*, the black stone casts a spell over those who encounter its powers, causing mayhem, destruction, and the intense desire to be near it at all times, culminating in Kell's inability to release the stone after using it to bind his life to Rhy's in Part 12. When the stone is being discussed, there is often language denoting desire, need, ambition, etc. Astrid describes the stone's two parts, one held by Kell, the other by Athos, stating, "... they want each other, you see. They are drawn to each other through the wall" (303).

Kell's natural yen for (admittedly benign) coveting is what brings him into contact with the stone in the first place. The Danes are able to exploit his propensity for smuggling items into and out of the separate worlds to get him to move the black stone from White London to Red London without his knowledge of what it really is. Readers are told from the beginning that the black stone should not exist and that all relics of Black London were said to have been destroyed after the city lost control of its magic and self-destructed. Nevertheless, the Danes sought out the stone to harness its dangerous powers.

The protagonists first use the stone in fairly innocuous ways and it obeys them, summoning the sword, turning them invisible, etc.—thus lulling them into a false sense of security. Even when the stone is used for an ostensibly good purpose, as when Kell uses it to bind himself to Rhy, there are unforeseen negative consequences, as he finds himself unable to let go of it. He can also feel its magic moving through him, asserting its will, and it takes everything in his power to resist it. He describes the desire to "claw free, break or tear or cut the stone from his skin" and the conflicting compulsion to "hold it close, to cling to its warmth as if he were dying of cold" (331). Lila foresees the stone's terrible potential and tries to keep it on her person through most of the events of the novel, astutely understanding that with her limited capacity for magic, it is safest with her.

The principle actors in the novel are unaware of the stone's worst properties, exhibited by the infectious sickness that it is leaving in its wake. After Lila conjures a sword using the stone, she tosses the sword out the window and it is discovered by Booth, a drunk wandering in the alley. When he goes to pick up the sword, it stabs him through the stomach and he is infected and transformed into a shambling, reanimated corpse. Similarly, Edward Tuttle reaches out and touches the ashes left behind by Booth when he is run over outside of the Stone's Throw and becomes infected as well. Both feel an inner compulsion to touch the infected object/substance, which is the stone working its magic from a distance.

Revenge

Multiple characters in the novel are motivated by their desire for revenge but the author does not place a blanket moral judgment on these desires, instead taking each character's circumstances and intentions into account. The Dane twins are bitter because their dimension was abandoned by Red London and left to fight off Black



London alone when the latter was consumed by dangerous magic. In Part 11, while in possession of Prince Rhy's body and holding Kell hostage, Astrid explains her plans for the black stone: to throw open the doors between dimensions and seize power to rule over both Red and White London. She feels entitled to both kingdoms as the righting of the perceived wrong of what Red London did to White London. White London became a shell of a place after fighting back Black London, whereas Red London continues to glitter and thrive. "It made of us a shield," she remarks about Red London, "and now it thrives while we perish" (301). By stabbing Rhy and using Kell as an instrument to smuggle the black stone, she also takes out her revenge on the Maresh royal family.

Kell is also motivated by revenge at several points in the novel. In Part 10, Kell tells Lila a story about Rhy being kidnapped when they were younger. Kell rescued Rhy and then found his abductors and killed them, despite the fact that Rhy had issued an official pardon for them. He claims he did it so they would not be able to hurt Rhy again, but he also says he could not forgive them as Rhy had; he needed revenge. When Kell kills Astrid Dane in Part 13, it is a reprise of that prior act of vengeance. Astrid had also abducted Rhy in a way, by overtaking his consciousness and stabbing him. When he stabs her, he recalls the terrible sight of Rhy stabbing himself and the reader is told "Kell wanted to crush her for what she'd done" (372). This rage, combined with the black stone's power, turns Astrid herself into stone.

It is interesting to note that the author does not make any grand moral claims about revenge as a motivation. Both the villains and the heroes in the novel seek revenge, and while the villains die and the hero triumphs, the point seems to be that the main hero, Kell, is not without flaws. His motives are not always pure; he is capable of violence; and he does not seek the high road of forgiveness, instead vanquishing his foes with satisfaction. This is an effective method of avoiding the "Mary Sue" trope of the perfect protagonist. Revenge, as it is used in the novel thematically, is not an inherently good or bad motivation, just an inherently human one.

Family

The author uses the relationships in the novel to demonstrate that "family" is a relative construct, dependent more on how people treat each other than their blood relationship. The most obvious, central example of this is Kell's status in the Maresh family. He is adopted and he feels like he does not belong with them, that they view him as a novelty or "trinket" because he is an Antari (58). The Mareshes give no indication that this is true and throughout the novel it is quite obvious that Rhy genuinely views Kell as his brother, and vice versa. Rhy shows his concern for Kell's safety by asking him repeatedly not to smuggle objects from one dimension to the other, as it is dangerous and forbidden. Kell has saved Rhy's life twice, once when he was abducted as a teenager, and again when he binds their lives together at the Sanctuary.

Compare this to the relationship between the Dane twins. They are related by blood and they do not seem to care for each other at all. They have an alliance that they maintain to stay in power, and that is all. In fact, they seem to be only working to fulfill their own



selfish desires. In Part 13, while Astrid is still unconscious, Athos chides her “foolishness” in Red London and decides to kill Kell immediately, even though he knows his sister will be angry about it (349). They are more like begrudging co-workers than siblings.

Over the course of the novel, Lila and Kell become like family. All readers know of Lila's real family is that her mother is dead and her father tried to sell her to pay his debts. Though she and Kell share a couple of kisses, they seem to have more of a brother/sister bond than a romantic attraction (Lila seems to favor Rhy in that department). They save each others' lives when in danger and throughout the novel she holds on to the black stone because she knows it has the power to harm him. At the end of the novel when Lila thinks she is about to die at the hands of Astrid Dane, she remarks that she regrets nothing, that the old Lila would never waste her life on someone else, but that her relationship with Kell as changed her. She loves him and she is a better person for it. He notes his own fondness for her on the docks when she is preparing for departure, calling her a "valiant partner" and expressing his certainty that their close bond will draw them together again in the future.

Styles

Point of View

The novel is related in third-person narration with the narrator's focus primarily split between the perspectives of the two main protagonists, Lila and Kell, in alternating chapters. However, in particularly action-filled sequences, there are shifts in perspective within one chapter. These shifts help orient the reader to what each of these characters is thinking as well as what is happening to them, as sometimes they are separated from one another. The shifts also provide suspense when one character is in trouble and the other is mounting a rescue or trying to minimize the possibility of further trouble, as when Lila crashes through Rhy's bedroom window during the masquerade, or when she tries to kill Astrid Dane in the palace in White London while Kell fights Athos outside. When she fails at this, and Astrid shapeshifts into Lila's form, the reader is unsure if Kell will be able to tell the difference or if he is in grave danger.

Several times in the novel, the narration switches to an omniscient observer that describes the spread of the black stone's plague. Readers first see this shift in the alley outside of the Stone's Throw in Part 6 when the plague kills the drunken Booth with Lila's sword and possesses his body, and then again when it moves from Booth to Edward Tuttle. In Red London in Part 10 readers see the plague move from the reanimated corpse of the assassin Kell killed back in Part 5, into the living body of a brothel worker. The stone's black magic is one consciousness, split between bodies, and the shifts in perspectives allow readers to see the growing threat it poses. Rhy's guard Parrish's perspective is also provided twice in the novel, once in Part 2, where his observation informs the reader that Holland is visiting the prince, and that he is dangerous, and again in Part 10 when he is killed by Gen after he has contracted the black magic spell from the aforementioned brothel worker.

Language and Meaning

The author uses imaginative language that blends elements of fantasy and reality to create a new world, or worlds to be precise. Many of these words and phrases are invented, like "Antari," which is the word used for blood magicians like Kell and Holland, and "As Tascen," ("Transfer") which Kell must say when he wants to move from one location to another (23,19). In Arnes/Red London, the commoners speak "Arnesian," though readers only observe a few words here and there; this is still enough to add a textured layer of detail to the narrative, just as the physical descriptions of the environment do (222). Members of the upper class speak English, as does everyone from Lila's world of England/Grey London. In White London, they speak a "guttural" language called "Maktahn" in which short, consonant-heavy words like "vejrtok" and "kijn avost" sound appropriately gruff coming out of the mouths of the tyrannical Dane twins (92, 97). These are effective nuances for showing how the worlds are different and also how they have drawn from each other. The author also uses the occasional



aphoristic phrase to illustrate a point or theme, such as “Power in Balance. Balance in Power” a common saying in Red London that indicates the importance of respecting the power of magic (86).

There is also a lot of information to be gleaned from the characters' motivations and personalities by what they say and the way they say it. Holland and Lila are the two most passionate characters in the novel. She is prone to dramatic declarations like, “I'd rather die on an adventure than live standing still,” while he angrily tells her, “You will die a coward's death, Delilah Bard” (199, 241). Lila often uses the word “thieving” as an adjective, the way someone might use an expletive, as in “she wasn't touching the thieving little rock again” (274). The other characters, even the Danes, tend to speak in more measured tones, likely because they are royalty and have learned to be diplomatic.

Structure

The book is divided into 14 parts, and each part is composed of 3-6 chapters. The parts are given titles that refer to the location in which the action is taking place, the characters involved, or the challenge being undertaken. For example, Part 2, which is titled “Red Royal,” refers to Kell's return to Red London and the Maresh royal family, and Part 3, “Grey Thief,” is the author's introduction to Lila Bard, the Shadow Thief of Grey London. Parts often end with a sudden dramatic event or cliffhanger, as with the death of Barron at the end of Part 8, or the desperate attempt to save Prince Rhy's life at the end of Part 11. This adds tension and suspense, keeping the reader invested and engaged in the story.

The novel's plot is essentially a three act drama centered around the righting of a wrong. When Kell is tricked by the Danes into bringing the black stone into Red London (the first act), he creates the circumstances that would allow for the reopening of the doors between Londons and the potential overthrow of the Maresh royal family. This conflict is escalated by the murder of Barron by Holland, and the attempted murder of Prince Rhy by Astrid Dane in the second act, and the conflict's resolution is found in the third act, when Lila and Kell kill the Danes and destroy the black stone. While the conclusion is satisfying, there is enough uncertainty to imagine a sequel. Lila has sailed off in her ship, destination unknown, and Kell is home in Red London but the prince is still unwell, and the citizenry is unsure of how much Kell is to blame for everything that occurred.



Quotes

The people fed on the magic and the magic fed on them until it ate their bodies and their minds and then their souls.

-- Kell (Part 1, Chapter 2 paragraph 3)

Importance: The four Londons used to be accessible to anyone through magical doors, but, as Kell explains here, Black London was unable to exercise restraint when using magic and the situation there escalated out of control. This necessitated the sealing of the doors so that only Antari can pass from world to world now using blood magic, though even they stay away from Black London. This is one of the major themes of the novel, that magic is dangerous and requires caution from its practitioners.

I feel more like a possession than a prince.

-- Kell (Part 2, Chapter 3 paragraph 6)

Importance: Kell recalls arguing with Prince Rhy about his status in the royal family. Kell feels like he is not a true prince and that he is only valued because of his magical abilities, and not as an equal member of his adoptive clan. This is a central trait of Kell's character, a feeling of alienation and inability to truly trust or love those around him. The comment infuriates Rhy, who does love Kell like a brother, and he responds by punching Kell in the face.

Trouble is the looker,' she'd answer. 'It keeps looking till it finds you. Might as well find it first.

-- Lila (Part 3, Chapter 1 paragraph 4)

Importance: Lila recalls Barron telling her frequently that she was looking for trouble, and this is how she would respond. As the reader has just been introduced to Lila, it is a helpful bit of characterization that establishes her as a risk taker and rule breaker, which are qualities that will serve her well on her adventures with Kell. The fact that she had this exchange with Barron is also evidence that he cares for her, a rarity in Lila's life.

Lila knew what it felt like to want something, knew the way it whispered and sang and screamed in your bones.

-- Lila (Part 6, Chapter 4 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote is a characterization detail for Lila; the author is reiterating that she is a thief who has had a hard life with its fair share of yearning. However, it is also a description of the black stone's power. Anyone who holds the stone (or in Lila's case, something the stone manifested) is possessed by a hunger to keep it. Kell has also felt this, when he used it to bind the assassin and found himself almost unable to let go. Thus the quote serves joint purposes, as well as being a vivid description of the siren song of deep desire/covetousness (which is a thematic element to the novel).



He was the same as Kell, and yet entirely different. Looking into Kell's eye had been like looking through a window into a new world.

-- Lila (Part 7, Chapter 1 paragraph 8)

Importance: One way we learn about Lila's immediate fondness for Kell is in her contrasting view of Holland, who she meets in the very next scene. She knows they share similar gifts, but she can tell they are wildly different. Kell's presence, as well as his words, made Lila excited about the possibility for adventure, whereas when she looks at Holland, she is frightened of what he might do to her. Lila's comparison helps to establish the foil relationship between Kell and Holland.

The stone is proof. You are either magic's master, or its slave.

-- Holland (Part 7, Chapter 2 paragraph 2)

Importance: Holland speaks these words while engaged in a fight with Kell over possession of the black stone. His argument is that magic is inherently unsafe. Kell believes that he can harness it for good, or at least benign effects, but Holland says this is wishful thinking. Arguably, Holland is correct, as proven by his own actions and those of the Danes. There will always be sinister people in the world who will use magic for evil. Holland is wrong, however, in his belief that it is possible to be magic's "master." It is too volatile and unpredictable for that.

Barron's kindness was like a curse, because she knew she had done nothing to deserve it.

-- Lila (Part 7, Chapter 3 paragraph 8)

Importance: This quote tells the reader that Lila feels like she does not deserve kindness for its own sake, and she is not capable of trusting other people. Lila's relationship with Barron is an informative part of her character development for this reason. They are obviously fond of each other, but Lila feels unable to get close to anyone because she is used to being on her own. As her relationship to Kell unfolds, she learns a lot about friendship and loyalty.

I'd rather die on an adventure than live standing still.

-- Lila (Part 8, Chapter 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: This is Lila's whole personality and all of her motivation distilled into one line, delivered as she invites herself along on Kell's quest to return the black stone to its rightful London. A life without excitement and adventure is more frightening to Lila than death. The author has planted suggestions to this effect previously in the novel, in Lila's desire to be a pirate for example, but here it is stated outright.

The moment he got inside, he burned them up to nothing, blood and bone to husk and ash in no time at all.

-- Omniscient Narrator/The Black Stone's Plague (Part 10, Chapter 1 paragraph 2)

Importance: The omniscient narrator describes Booth's rotting corpse that has been



reanimated by the black stone's terrible and contagious magic. The magic is running through several people, in both Red and Grey London, taking over and corrupting living and dead bodies alike. It is an interesting detail that the narrator refers to the magic/plague as a "he" - suggesting some kind of actual spiritual presence is possessing the bodies, though readers never learn exactly what it/he is.

Some people steal to stay alive, and some steal to feel alive. Simple as that.
-- Lila (Part 10, Chapter 4 paragraph 5)

Importance: When Lila learns that Kell has a history of smuggling things from one London to the other (which is forbidden), she makes this comment contrasting her motivations and his, though she does not say outright that this is what she is doing. She means that she steals because she has a lack of other options for feeding herself, and he smuggles because he finds the act exciting. It is slightly disingenuous because she finds the act of stealing exciting as well.

The stone still sang in Kell's hand, but not quite the way it had before. Now the melody, the thrum of power, seemed to be singing in his bones instead of over them.
-- Kell (Part 12, Chapter 3 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote indicates that the black stone's power and hold over Kell is increasing, particularly after he has used it to revive Rhy and bind their lives together. The black stone's power is in him now; he cannot physically release it from his hand, and he must use all of his strength to focus on carrying out the rest of his mission, which is to dispose of the very object that holds him in its thrall.

Perhaps she never should have stolen the damned stone, but even here, and now, facing death in the form of a pale queen, she didn't regret it. She'd wanted freedom. She'd wanted adventure.
-- Lila (Part 13, Chapter 4 paragraph 1)

Importance: Lila believes she is about to be killed by Astrid Dane, and she defines this moment as the culmination of all that happened since she bumped into Kell in Grey London and stole the black stone. She does not regret any of her actions because she had been desperate for adventure her entire life, and she had finally found it. She also believes that saving Kell's life and helping him with the black stone has given her own life meaning.