

Death Masks Study Guide

Death Masks by Jim Butcher

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Plot Summary

This paranormal mystery thriller is one of a series of books chronicling the exploits of Harry Dresden, wizard and private investigator. While facing the prospect of a duel with a vengeful and powerful vampire, Harry also has to navigate the temptations posed by the return of a sexy ex-girlfriend, track a missing religious artifact, and honestly answer some difficult personal questions about faith. As the action builds relentlessly to a final, apocalyptic confrontation between the forces of good and evil, the narrative also explores thematic questions related to the value of personal integrity and the temptations of power.

When Harry appears on a talk show in his home city of Chicago, he is confronted with information on the location of his former girlfriend, with the presence of a powerful vampire challenging him to a duel, and with the doubt of a Roman Catholic priest who is nevertheless there to hire him. The emotional intensity of the situation puts pressure on a magical spell Harry created to rein in his magical powers. They erupt, causing explosions in the studio. Harry and the other guests flee, Harry in the company of the priest who, to Harry's surprise, reveals a desire to hire him. Almost before Harry can answer, he and the priest are shot at by gunmen whom Harry recognizes as being employed by mob boss and rival Johnny Marcone.

With that begins a complicated, intertwined web of plots and counter-plots, each studded with surprises and violent confrontations. A further conversation with the priest, Father Vincent, reveals that Harry is to be hired to retrieve the Shroud of Turin, a renowned and apparently powerful Christian artifact. Meanwhile, Harry's girlfriend, half-vampire journalist Susan Rodriguez, returns, engaging him in a renewal of their intense sexual feelings for each other. Harry is also shown the headless, handless body of a mysterious corpse, told that it actually died from being infected with multiple diseases, and asked to find out its identity. In the midst of all these challenges to his life and identity, Harry enlists the aid of several allies, including the sword wielding Knights of the Cross.

After consulting with spirits of information, Harry discovers the location of the stolen Shroud. His attempt to retrieve it is interrupted by the thieves and later by the unexpected intervention of a demon, who gets away with a decoy while one of the thieves gets away with the actual Shroud. Meanwhile, plans for the duel progress, and Harry uncovers more and more information about why, exactly, the Shroud was stolen. A second attempt to recover it ends with a violent confrontation not only with the first demon but with two more, one of whom (Nicodemus) reveals that he has destructive plans for both Harry and the Shroud. With the assistance of Shiro, one of the Knights who offers himself in Harry's place, Harry escapes from Nicodemus' control. In the aftermath of his escape, he and Susan give in to their mutual passion for each other and, later, discover even more secrets associated with the missing Shroud.

Harry eventually discovers that the day on which the duel between himself and Ortega is to take place is also the day on which Nicodemus intends to put his plans for the



Shroud into action. He intends to use its power as fuel for a curse that would spread disease not only among the people of Chicago but, through them and via the thousands of travelers passing through Chicago's O'Hare Airport, among the peoples of the world. After surviving the duel with the cheating Ortega, Harry races to the airport where, in the company of the two other Knights, they discover that the death of Shiro has also been part of Nicodemus' spell, and that the demon is implementing the second stage of his plan - to spread his curse via train travelers in St. Louis.

Harry and the Knights, accompanied by Marcone, who is determined to gain possession of the Shroud no matter who opposes him, confront Nicodemus and his demons on the roof of a moving train, eventually retrieving the Shroud. As Harry recovers from his adventures, he is told the truth behind Shiro's actions, realizes that Susan has left for good, and faces one more confrontation with Nicodemus' power. This one he faces down himself, and this one he wins.



Chapters 1, 2 and 3

Chapters 1, 2 and 3 Summary

This paranormal mystery thriller is one of a series of books chronicling the exploits of Harry Dresden, wizard and private investigator. While facing the prospect of a duel with a vengeful and powerful vampire, Harry also has to navigate the temptations posed by the return of a sexy ex-girlfriend, track a missing religious artifact, and honestly answer some difficult personal questions about faith. As the action builds relentlessly to a final, apocalyptic confrontation between the forces of good and evil, the narrative also explores thematic questions related to the value of personal integrity and the temptations of power.

Chapter 1 - Wizard and investigator Harry Dresden appears on a Chicago talk show alongside fellow guest and occasional colleague Mortimer Lindquist, a spiritual medium. In narration, he describes how he cast a suppression spell around himself to keep his magical energies under control so they don't, as magic tends to do, short out all the electronic equipment in the room. As the show begins, the audience greets Harry with skepticism, which doesn't surprise him but still upsets him (see "Quotes," p. 2). On a commercial break between segments, Mortimer whispers to Harry that he has managed to trace journalist Susan Rodriguez to Peru. Harry then narrates Susan's story - how she and he became involved, how she followed him on an investigation into a lair of vampires in search of material for a column, how she was bitten and became part vampire, and how Harry's rescuing of her triggered a war between the White Council of Wizards and the Red Court of Vampires. When the commercial break is over, the host introduces the next two guests - Fr. Vincent, a Roman Catholic priest and paranormal doubter sent from the Vatican, and Paolo Ortega, another doubter, visiting from Brazil and whom Harry recognizes as one of the high up vampires in the Red Court. Harry feels the spell of suppression begin to slip as, on another break, Ortega presents him with a deal - duel him in an attempt to defuse the War, and Harry's friends and acquaintances will be allowed to live. Harry's anger which, he comments in narration, is always a good fuel for magic, gets the better of him. The suppression spell shatters, the electronic equipment in the television studio all explodes, and Ortega disappears. Out on the street after the building has been evacuated, Fr. Vincent tells Harry that he came to Chicago to talk to him. Harry isn't surprised. "It's just been that kind of day," he comments.

Chapter 2 - As Harry and Fr. Vincent head for his ramshackle car, the priest reveals he came looking for Harry on the recommendation of Chicago priest Father Forthill who, Harry reveals in narration, is a friend and owes him a favor. Before the conversation can go too far, though, Harry is shot at. Pushing the priest into the car, Harry grabs a concealed shotgun and then jumps into the car himself, attempting to follow the shooter. As they race out of the parking garage, Harry sees that the shooter has backup - another pair of gunmen, one of whom Harry recognizes as an employee of local mobster Johnny Marcone. Both shooters get away, and Harry explains to the shaken



priest that the attack was a professional hit. In narration, Harry reveals that up to this point, there had been a degree of peace between him and Marcone, and wonders what has changed.

Chapter 3 - Fr. Vincent takes Harry to an inexpensive hotel room and explains why he (Vincent) is there. As he shows Harry a photograph of a viciously cut man, Fr. Vincent explains that the man, a thief named LeRouche, stole an important church artifact with the help of two women (Anna Valmont and Francisca Garcia), was killed, and had the artifact taken from him. Harry analyzes the photograph, and theorizes that because there's not enough blood near the body, the man was killed elsewhere and the body dumped, in what he further theorizes is an effort to lure investigators to Chicago. When he asks Fr. Vincent for a description of the artifact, Vincent's comments lead Harry to the insight that the artifact was the Shroud of Turin (see "Objects/Places"), and to the worry that because the object has so much potential spiritual power, there could very well be paranormal implications to the theft. He agrees to take on Vincent's case, and the two part company. Back at his car, Harry arms himself with his usual weaponry - a blasting rod that focuses his magic, and a silver bracelet that generates a powerful shield (see "Quotes," p. 26). When he arrives at his apartment, he witnesses a confrontation between two apparently paranormal entities, one of which gets away and the other reveals herself to be Susan Rodriguez.

Chapters 1, 2 and 3 Analysis

Several of the narrative's key elements are introduced in this section, a skilful and instantly engaging blend of exposition (i.e. necessary information) and action. Most important of these elements is protagonist / narrator Harry Dresden, whose half-abrasive, half-charming attitude, magical capabilities, and personal history are all vividly portrayed. The last is perhaps the most important, in that Harry's history (with the Red Court, with Susan Rodriguez, and with investigating crimes with a paranormal angle) plays a fundamental role in triggering the several plot lines that weave their way through the book. Several of these are also introduced here - the Ortega duel plot, the search for the Shroud plot, the Harry/Marcone plot, and the Harry/Susan plot.

Four plots, several minor explosions and one big one, a murder attempt, a car chase, a vendetta, references to a war, a hint of failed romance, and a real-life religious artifact ... a lot of story for just three chapters and twenty seven pages. While the amount of story in this relatively short section may be somewhat surprising, it is not necessarily unusual, given that this book is, to all intents and purposes, essentially a "genre" novel, a book designed and constructed to fit within expected, traditional paradigms of a particular sort of story - in this case, the genre of the "mystery thriller." This means that, on a fundamental level, part of the book's narrative intention is to take the reader on an increasingly intriguing, increasingly exciting ride. That ride begins in earnest here, as the reader is introduced to narrative threads (plots), characters and situations that each hold promise of action, intense emotion, mystery - and in the end, with the appearance of Susan Rodriguez, those most unpredictable of all narrative and human elements, love and sex.



Chapters 4, 5 and 6

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 Summary

Chapter 4 - Harry leads Susan into his apartment, but doesn't invite her in, commenting in narration that evil supernatural forces have difficulty entering a place if they're not invited - in short, he's testing her to confirm her identity. She passes, and the two of them are almost immediately in each other's arms, kissing hotly. Susan, however, breaks it, explaining that while she's not a full vampire, she does possess a degree of some vampiric powers, including that of a narcotic kiss that lulls victims into a stupor so that their blood can be taken. She also explains that she's there to warn Harry about the repercussions of the duel with Ortega, saying there are factions in the Red Court who want the war with the White Council to continue and who believe that as long as Harry is alive, that's exactly what will happen. Conversation also reveals that Susan has become involved in something that she plans to take the place of her writing job, but before she can explain what, there's a knock on the door. Both Susan and Harry arm themselves, but when the knocker speaks, Susan comments that she knows him, and that Harry can open the door. Harry does, and admits Martin, whom Harry describes as being quite non-descript and who, much to Harry's chagrin, refers to himself and Susan as "we." After Martin and Susan leave, Harry takes a cold shower and jumps into bed, only to be roused almost immediately by a telephone call from Karrin Murphy, a police officer associated with the Chicago Police Department's Special Investigations Unit which, Harry comments in narration, occasionally engages him on cases outside the realm of the usual. She tells Harry she wants him to meet her at the morgue ... to look at a corpse.

Chapter 5 - When Harry and Murphy arrive at the morgue, the coroner on duty (eccentric Waldo Butters) shows them the corpse in question - headless, handless, and mutilated with the same sort of mathematically precise scars as the thief shown to Harry earlier (Chapter 3). He also reveals that the corpse died as the result of being hit with several severe diseases, including smallpox, all at once. Meanwhile, Harry notices a tattoo on one of its arms that he says resembles something from Ancient Egypt (The Eye of Thoth - see "Objects/Places"). After asking Butters to leave the room, Harry tells Murphy that while he can't give her any details because he's been sworn to secrecy, he suggests that she research the death of a man named LaRouche with Interpol. Conversation turns to whether demons (such as the Fallen - see "Characters") might have played a role in the killing, but at that point Butters returns, and Harry leaves. His mystical senses alert him to a strange, paranormal presence in the area and he readies his blasting rod, but for a while, nothing happens - until he is chased by a bear-like demon. Harry turns tail and runs, passing an elderly man walking with a cane and a young black man with a bottle.

Chapter 6 - Harry attempts to use his blasting rod to subdue the demon, but finds himself caught in the demon's gaze (see "Objects/Places - The Soulgaze") and drawn into his psyche, where he discovers that the demon is, in fact, a transformed human. An



immensely powerful psychic force pushes him out of the Soulgaze and into another attack from the demon, which almost succeeds. But the old man with the cane and the black man intervene, revealing themselves to be armed with mystic swords. The demon almost gets the better of them as well, but the intervention of a third man ends the demon's life. Harry recognizes the third man as Michael, a friend, ally, and Knight of the Cross. Michael, in turn, introduces the other two men, also Knights. The old man is Shiro, who taught Michael, while the younger man is Sanya, the newest recruit. Meanwhile, while introductions are taking place, the body of the demon named Ursiel disintegrates, leaving a human body behind. A coin rolls out of the body, and is picked up in a special handkerchief by Michael. As the human body itself disintegrates, Michael explains that the demon was a particular sort of Fallen, that he and the Fallen both know what Harry has been entrusted to find (i.e. the Shroud).

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 Analysis

Developments in plot, theme, character and relationship continue in this section. In terms of plot, key elements introduced in this section include the mysterious corpse whose identity is explained in Chapter 28, the diseases that killed him (the source of those diseases is also revealed in Chapter 28), and the tattoo (the meaning of which is revealed in Chapter 27). Also in terms of plot, important elements that intersect with developments in character and relationship include Susan's hints at significant changes in her life and the appearance of Martin, whose relationship with Susan is eventually revealed to be nothing at all like what the jealous Harry imagines it to be. Meanwhile, Harry's relationship with Susan also contains developments in the area of theme, in that Susan's struggle with the vampiric aspects of her nature can be seen as a manifestation of the book's thematic interest in the allure of, and struggle with, power (see "Themes" and also "Topics for Discussion - Discuss ways in which characters ..."). Then there is the fight with the demon and the appearance of the mysterious coin. Both serve as triggers for further developments in plot (i.e. the battle between Harry and the demons over the shroud), character (i.e. Harry's struggle for personal integrity, a struggle manifest in his temptation to acquire a coin of his own), and theme (again, the temptations of power).

Perhaps the most multi-leveled narrative development in this section, functioning on all four levels (story, character, relationship and theme), is the introduction of Michael and the Knights of the Cross. To begin with, Michael and the two other Knights (Shiro more so than Sanya) play essential roles in the resolution of the main plot (i.e. the "Harry vs. the demons" plot), with Michael and the Knights adding their power to Harry's in order to eventually secure victory. Then - the contrast in character and identity between Harry and all three of the Knights shows up the weaknesses of the former and the strength of the latter, with Harry learning more about himself, the ways of faith (see "Themes") and the ways of loyalty as the result of that contrast. Also, the relationship between Harry and Michael is strong, deep, and mutually respectful, in spite of their apparent differences on the question of faith. Meanwhile, the relationship between Harry and Shiro, while a new one, proves to be profoundly important on all three thematic levels, as Shiro provides an even more vivid example than Michael of how to function fully,

gracefully and graciously when it comes to the book's three central thematic concerns relating to power, faith, and personal integrity.



Chapters 7, 8 and 9

Chapters 7, 8 and 9 Summary

Chapter 7 - Harry and the Knights withdraw to a church, where they are met by Father Forthill. Harry has conversations with Sanya, who reveals that he doesn't believe in God and believes that everything happening to him is a hallucination, and Shiro, who asks why Harry is searching for the Shroud. Harry says he's doing it for the income, adding, in response to Shiro's questions, that it's less about love of money and more about dependence on it. Michael returns and explains that the demon they just fought was no ordinary member of the Fallen, but a member of the Order of the Blackened Denarius, a sect of the Fallen that tempts good human beings into evil through the focusing medium of a coin (see "Objects/Places - The Blackened Coins"). Harry, hearing of the Coins, imagines their potential power, believing them to be a possible weapon in his fight with Ortega. He then goes home, ready for a good night's sleep.

Chapter 8 - When he gets home, Harry withdraws to the laboratory he has built for himself beneath the subfloor of his apartment. There, he consults with the spirit of Bob the Skull, who tells Harry about the system of dueling within which Harry and Ortega will fight, and confirms that the tattoo on the cut corpse is the common, Ancient Egyptian symbol of the Eye of Thoth. He also confirms that the Order of the Blackened Denarius is extremely powerful, perhaps powerful enough to put a curse of multiple diseases on the found corpse. When Harry asks for information about the Shroud and who is after it, Bob directs him to contact the spirit Ulsharavas, who will be able to tell him what he needs to know. Harry releases Bob, telling him to check out the Marcone residence and asking him about an anti-venom for vampire spit, which contains the narcotic active in The Kiss. Bob goes, and Harry summons Ulsharavas who, in return for information, demands as payment the honest answer to a single question - why does Harry do what he does? Harry admits that he hasn't really thought about it, and then realizes that it's a good question (see "Quotes," p. 84). Ulsharavas tells him where to find the Shroud on a small boat called The Etranger, adding that the Knights warned him away because they had heard part of a prophecy foretelling his death if he pursued it. She also tells him the half the Knights didn't hear - that if he doesn't, the three Knights will die, as will the entire city of Chicago.

Chapter 9 - As he waits for Bob to return from his investigative mission to Marcone's, Harry contemplates the nature of prophecy and of spirits, comparing awareness of time, in both humans and spirits, to being in a river (see "Quotes," p. 87). He also brews a potion to protect himself from the power of vampire venom and takes a phone call from an old teacher, Ebenezar McCoy, who tells him The White Council intends to slap down the duel. Ebenezar is surprised when Harry reveals his plans to fight the duel, but accepts his logic. Afterwards, Harry wonders what weapon he can choose to duel Ortega since magic is likely to be rejected. Shortly before dawn, Bob returns, weary and beaten down. He reveals that Marcone's home is protected by powerful magic spells, and that Ortega is at a local hotel, surrounded by vampires. Harry tells Bob to get some



rest, and Bob does so. Almost immediately, Harry's paranormal warning system goes off, alerting him to the approach of powerful paranormal forces. He rushes back up into his apartment, preparing for battle.

Chapters 7, 8 and 9 Analysis

Developments in Harry's journey of transformation (the thematically significant discoveries he makes about himself and the changes he makes as a result of those discoveries) take primary focus in this section. Specifically, direct questions posed by Shiro and by Ulsharavas make him look more deeply into himself, his values, his beliefs, and his motivations, than he seems accustomed to doing (is this the first book in the series in which he is confronted with such important questions?) and result in the integrity-affirming choices he makes during the book's various climactic confrontations.

That said, there continue to be developments in the book's various plot lines as well. Here it's important to note that, as with many other works in the mystery-thriller genre (into which this book falls, even with its paranormal overtones), one of the important narrative techniques at work - specifically, the idea and practice of answers leading to more questions. There are a couple of notable manifestations of this technique in this section - Michael's answer to Harry's questions about the demon's identity lead to questions about why the demon attacked, while Bob's answer to Harry's questions about Marcone's defenses lead to questions about why an earthbound gangster would need paranormal defenses. Meanwhile, another motif (recurring narrative technique) in the mystery-thriller genre is the raising of stakes (i.e. giving the protagonist/hero more to fight for, increasing the danger he has to face while doing so). In this case, the stakes are raised substantially in Chapter 8 with the news of the potential danger of the plague attacking Chicago, which foreshadows even greater increases in the stakes later in the book as Harry and his allies realize the threat posed by releasing the plague at O'Hare Airport (see Chapter 31). One last piece of foreshadowing is the cameo appearance here of Ebenezer McCoy, which foreshadows his appearance in the book's final chapter, at which time he reveals that he and the White Council have finally taken action to eliminate the threat posed by Ortega once and for all.



Chapters 10, 11, 12 and 13

Chapters 10, 11, 12 and 13 Summary

Chapter 10 - Harry arms himself with both magical (his blasting rod and shield bracelet) and conventional weapons (i.e. guns), but is surprised when the attack he anticipates is a simple knock on his door. He admits a hulking man named Kincaid, who in turn introduces The Archive, a pretty seven year old girl; Kincaid, she reveals, is her bodyguard. She reveals that she is the living repository of all knowledge, arcane and otherwise, and that she is there to discuss the terms of the duel. In answer to her questions, Harry reveals that he has chosen neither a second nor a weapon. The Archive gives him until later that day to choose a second, and also offers him four options for weapons - will, skill (i.e. with physical weaponry), energy (i.e. magic), or flesh (i.e. physical combat). She warns him against the last, and he chooses the third. She says that will be rejected, and he acknowledges that, adding that making that choice gives him a little more time to decide which of the first two he WILL choose.

Chapter 11 - After Kincaid and The Archive leave, Harry calls Fr. Vincent, reveals what he has discovered about the Shroud, and asks the priest to obtain a shred of the Shroud, saying he needs to use it to authenticate (or not) whatever he finds but, in fact, intending to use it as a tool in magical investigations. Vincent agrees to make arrangements and hangs up. Harry then telephones Michael, to ask him to be his second in the duel. Michael, he finds, is not home. He speaks instead to Michael's wife Charity, who is very protective of her husband and angry at Harry for the number of times he has put Michael's life in jeopardy. Harry tells Charity what he needs, and she agrees to pass on the message. Harry then prepares to investigate the boat that Ulsharavas has told him is the location of the stolen Shroud.

Chapter 12 - Harry arrives at the dock where The Etranger is berthed, sensing that he is being watched but unable to identify by whom. He listens as a woman on The Etranger has a telephone conversation with an accomplice, making a note on a stationery pad, and then slips into the shower. He debates for a moment, then sneaks onto the boat and searches for the Shroud, eventually finding it hidden in a pile of laundry. He is surprised by another woman, who calls to the first woman that everything is clear. Conversation reveals that the two women (Francisca Garcia and Anna Valmont) are the two allies of Larouche, and that they are expecting him to join them. They're shocked, therefore, when Harry reveals he's dead. When the women search him, he is relieved to see that they don't recognize his magical weapons, and attempts to convince them to let him help them. They refuse his offer, and order him to handcuff himself to a railing. He is just starting to do so when, at that moment, another Denarian charges onto the boat.

Chapter 13 - The female Denarian kills Francesca and wounds Anna. Harry defends himself and tries to misdirect the Denarian's intent, leading her to disappear with what she thinks is the Shroud, but not before she damages the boat to the point where it begins to sink. Anna grabs the Shroud and the top sheet of the memo pad and runs out.



Harry grabs the cell phone Francesca had used and the rest of the memo pad and races out, wanting to avoid being interrogated by the police whom, he thinks would be arriving quite soon.

Chapters 10, 11, 12 and 13 Analysis

In formal dueling practice and/or tradition, a "second" is the person responsible for assisting the dueler in everything from helping make the arrangements, to ensuring the rules are followed, to holding the dueler's coat during the actual fight. It's generally important for the dueler to choose someone calm and responsible, since the dueler is likely to be focused on simply surviving, as is the case with Harry. In his case, Michael is definitely a good choice. Meanwhile, the choice to make The Archive a little girl is a very interesting one, almost comic, until one realizes, along with Harry, how much power goes along with knowing everything there ever was, or is, that CAN be known. Think about it ...

Also in this section, it's important to note the introduction of the intriguingly named Charity Carpenter, a strong willed woman simultaneously devoted to the well-being of her husband and to maintaining her own personal integrity. She is, in some ways, as important an antagonist to Harry as some of the demons he faces; theirs is not a physical confrontation but a moral one, leading him (in the same way as the questions posed by Michael and Ulsharavas in the previous section) to honestly examine himself and to make changes. Her name is intriguing because on the one hand, she is profoundly charitable towards her husband (i.e. whatever makes him happy she will support) but not towards Harry (i.e. no matter what he causes, he brings harm to her husband and potentially to her family).

Other important elements in this section include the further raising of the stakes with the appearance of the second Denarian, the raising of more questions about what the Denarians actually want to DO with the Shroud, and the escape of Anna Valmont with the Shroud.



Chapters 14, 15 and 16

Chapters 14, 15 and 16 Summary

Chapter 14 - Harry updates Fr. Vincent, who pointedly hints that that Harry didn't do everything he could to retrieve the Shroud. Speaking sharply, Harry demands that Vincent arrange to have samples of the Shroud left for him at his office, hanging up before Vincent can say anything more. Harry then checks out the memo pad he took from the boat, and finds a message (Marriott 2345) that he thinks could refer to a hotel and a time. He then considers the cell phone, realizing that even if he tried to activate it, his magic energy would short circuit it. He decides to hand it over to Karrin Murphy to get her to look at it. Meanwhile, he receives a phone call from Waldo Butters, who reveals that all traces of the many diseases in the mysterious corpse have disappeared. Harry theorizes that the diseases were probably constructed by a magical curse, most of which don't last the night. The moment Harry hangs up with Butters, Susan arrives. She tells Harry she has a chance to work in opposition to the Crimson Court in South America, and wants him to go with her. For a moment Harry is tempted (see "Quotes," p. 132), but they both realize he has too much at stake in Chicago to leave behind. Meanwhile, half-vampire Susan smells the blood on him, left behind by the attack on the boat, and wonders what's going on. Harry explains he's in pursuit of an artifact and has a clue (the Marriott note) he has to run down. Susan offers to look into it for him while he gets some sleep, and he reluctantly agrees. After she goes, he contemplates the changes he's seen in her, and how much he's going to miss her.

Chapter 15 - After a long sleep, Harry goes to visit Michael. He finds the well-tended house and yard suspiciously empty. A strange sound on the roof sends him hurrying up into the tree-house in the back, where he can see that there is nothing on the roof but where he is discovered by Michael's oldest daughter Molly, home from school. As she changes out of the clothes and makeup she wore to school and into the clothes her parents think she was wearing, she offers Harry unexpected, but wise and practical advice on how to deal with Susan. If he wants her but is afraid of taking her, tie her up - that way, she can't take HIM. Shortly afterwards, Charity and the other children arrive home from shopping, accompanied by Shiro. As Harry helps unload the van, he explains why he's there - to get Michael to serve as his second in the duel. Shiro agrees to serve in Michael's stead, and goes off to finalize arrangements. While he's gone, Harry helps Charity in the kitchen, where she confesses her dislike for him but her simultaneous determination to not do anything (i.e. reject Harry) that either will make her husband upset (see "Quotes," p. 148) or compromise her own sense of integrity.

Chapter 16 - As he drives home, Harry worries about how he's going to survive, let alone win, the duel with Ortega. When he arrives, he discovers Karrin Murphy waiting for him with several pieces of news - that Harry was seen leaving the scene of the death at the harbor and is under investigation, that Butters believes the woman there was killed by the same weapon that killed the mysterious corpse, and that she (Murphy) has been taken off the case. As Harry is realizing the apparent role played by the demon in



the death of the original Shroud thief, Murphy warns Harry to stay away from the case, but Harry tells her it's potentially much more serious than she knows, and she trusts him. She also hands him information about the cell phone taken from the boat, information which suggests it was contracted to a dummy company out of Quebec. After she goes, Harry discovers that he has a telephone message from Susan, who tells him there's a charity event at the Marriott that evening, hosted by Marcone, and they agree that the cover of such a busy social occasion is the perfect time/place for the handover of a stolen article like the Shroud. She also tells him she has arranged for them both to attend, and he agrees to get there as soon as he can (he comments in narration that he has to go to his meeting about the duel first).

Chapters 14, 15 and 16 Analysis

The most important element of this section is the conversation between Harry and Charity at the end of Chapter 15, in which Harry is challenged to consider some of his attitudes towards himself, his work, and his relationships. These challenges come from Charity whose personal integrity is a manifestation of one of the book's key themes (see "Themes"), from Shiro whose unexpected support foreshadows a truth about his feelings about Harry revealed in Chapter 32 and, perhaps most surprisingly, from Molly Carpenter. While her questions and challenges are perhaps less personally and/or spiritually profound than some of the others Harry faces, she nevertheless challenges him to look at his situation square in the face, see it for what it is, and look for solutions rather than worry about the implications of the problem. She is, in many ways, one of the more importantly down-to-earth characters in the narrative, in that she is more concerned with what things are rather than with what things mean.

Also in terms of Molly Carpenter, at this point in the narrative it might be interesting to consider the meaning and implications of the book's title. The motif, or repeated image, of an individual using some kind of mask or lie to conceal a truth occurs several times throughout the novel. It often takes place within the context of some sort of connection to literal or metaphorical death, but also takes place on less intensely dramatic circumstances. Molly's change of clothes (i.e from what she wants to wear into what her parents want her to wear) is a relatively low key manifestation of this motif, but an evocative one nonetheless. For further consideration of this aspect of the work, see "Topics for Discussion - At several times and under a variety of circumstances..."

Finally, and on a more technical/narrative level, some of the pieces of the various puzzles Harry is facing are starting to come together to create a full picture. It's becoming apparent, for example, that the Denarians have been after the Shroud right from the beginning, and that there is an apparent rivalry between the Denarians and Marcone over control of the Shroud. What either of them wants the Shroud for is still not clear, but at this point it might be worth noting an important irony. The Denarians, evil incarnate, are after the Shroud to use it as a tool to spread death, destruction and mayhem. Marcone, who is viewed by Harry as a more earthly evil incarnate, is after the Shroud to engender some kind of healing (see Chapter 33). Both attitudes towards the

Shroud can be seen as manifestations of the novel's thematic interest in the allure of power, both positive and negative.



Chapters 17, 18 and 19

Chapters 17, 18 and 19 Summary

Chapter 17 - On his way to the meeting about the duel, Harry picks up the Shroud sample left for him by Fr. Vincent. He is both surprised and disappointed to see how small it is, commenting in narration that its size will limit the range and the intensity of the spell he can channel through it as he tries to track the Shroud. He then picks up Shiro, and as they drive, they discuss the possibility of not fighting the duel, and the validity of not fighting at all, with Shiro commenting that he prefers not to fight, but that sometimes fighting is both necessary and unavoidable. Shortly after they arrive at the site for the meeting, a local hangout for paranormals called McAnally's, Kincaid appears, acting as proxy for The Archive. He is followed within a few moments by Ortega and his second, the foppish Thomas. As Kincaid, Thomas and Shiro converse, Ortega and Harry discuss how neither of them actually wants the fight. Ortega comments on how the self-perceived honor of The Red Court can only be restored if Harry is killed, then presents another option - that Harry give his life over to Ortega and become a vampire. That way, Ortega says, the war between the Council and the Court could end, and Harry could also be with Susan forever. For a moment Harry is tempted, but then remembers how monstrously Ortega and the other Red Court vampires behave, refuses, and leaves.

Chapter 18 - Outside the bar, and after Kincaid and Ortega have left, Harry talks with Thomas, who reveals that Ortega will try to cheat in the duel. After Thomas goes, Shiro explains to Harry that the duel will be fought with will as a weapon the following day, adding that the war between the Red Court and the White Council is not Harry's fault. The Court had been preparing for an attack on the Council for years, he says, and Harry's killing of Susan's captors was just an excuse. Shiro also warns Harry that no matter what happens in the duel, Ortega intends to see him dead. Finally, Shiro comments that no-one can ever know the whole story behind any individual or circumstance (see "Quotes," p. 176), and leaves. A few moments later, Susan arrives, in a limousine driven by the uniformed Martin. Looking spectacularly gorgeous, she hands Harry a tuxedo for him to change into as they drive to the Marriott. As they head for the hotel, they agree to flee if the going gets too tough, with Harry commenting that he should be able to find the Shroud fairly easily.

Chapter 19 - When they arrive at the Marriott for the benefit, Susan instructs Harry in the niceties of a high-society crowd so they can search for the Shroud without being obvious about it. At one point, they encounter Marcone, whom Harry startles with a reference to the attempt on his life (see Chapter 2). Marcone counters by introducing his bodyguards, one of which is one of the assassins from that first attempt and another, Harry's paranormal senses tell him, is the spell caster who created the magical protections around Marcone that disabled Bob. After Marcone and the bodyguards leave, Harry and Susan become aware of increased security moving towards them. They dance into the crowd on the floor and, at Harry's suggestion, Susan instructs



Martin via cell phone to create a distraction. Martin does so, and while the crowd's attention is diverted, Harry and Susan escape into the back halls of the hotel, where Harry is able to put together his tracking spell and search out the Shroud, tracking it through a series of air ducts to a small room. There, he sees Anna Valmont in cell phone conversation with Marcone, demanding more money and warning him that unless her terms are met, the Shroud can and will be destroyed, indicating she has a detonator in her pocket. As she ends the conversation, Harry slips out of his hiding place in an air vent and confronts her, attempting to convince her of the validity and dangers of the demons who are also after the Shroud and offering her protection. Just as she is claiming that they cannot hurt her, three demons arrive - one of them the demon from the boat, another a very human looking demon with a noose dangling around his neck.

Chapters 17, 18 and 19 Analysis

There are several conversations in this section. In Chapter 17, the conversation between Shiro and Harry reveals differences in their essential approach to battle, differences defined by Harry's tendency to expect battle and Shiro's determination to use battle only as a last resort. Their further conversation, in Chapter 18, offers not only important information (i.e. the history of the tension between the Court and the Council) but also another facet of the philosophical differences between the two (i.e. Shiro's perspective on the ultimate unknowability of others). This, it could be argued, is a more metaphorical manifestation of the book's interest in the idea of masks (see the title and also "Topics for Discussion - At several times and under a variety of circumstances ...")

Other important conversations include the discussion between Ortega and Harry which, aside from revealing Ortega as a clever manipulator, can also be seen as a manifestation of the book's thematic interest in the allure of power and the conversation between Harry and Valmont. This last is particularly interesting, in that it functions on a couple of levels - as Harry's attempt to get his hands on the Shroud, but also as his attempt to save another person's life ... in other words, as a manifestation of his emerging sense of personal integrity (see "Themes - The Importance of Personal Integrity).

Meanwhile, as the stakes are raised in several narrative lines (i.e. in the identifying of weapons in the duel, the tracking of the Shroud) and as more pieces of the various puzzles come together (i.e. Shiro's revelations about the relationship between the Court and the Council), new and important narrative elements are introduced. These include the appearance of the other two demons alongside the demon from the boat, both of whom are described in more detail in forthcoming chapters, in terms of both their physicality and their murderous intent, and Marcone's reaction to the news of the attempt on Harry's life. As Harry comments in his narration, Marcone generally has better control of himself than he displays here, particularly when it comes to accusations of involvement in criminal activity. In other words, his reaction is unusual, but is ultimately explained in Chapter 28. All that said, though, the mystery of why both sides want the Shroud remains.



Chapters 20, 21, 22 and 23

Chapters 20, 21, 22 and 23 Summary

Chapter 20 - Anna empties her gun into the lead demon Nicodemus, who shrugs off the shots and taunts her. Harry grabs her detonator and threatens to blow up the Shroud, but Nicodemus threatens to kill Anna. Harry throws aside the detonator, and then, even without the focusing power of his blasting rod, throws a surging fire spell at the demons, which knocks them back enough that he and Anna can escape with the Shroud. They crawl through the ventilator system and make it back to Susan, who fights back the boat demon, but is herself fought down by the third snakelike demon, who is in turn fought off by Harry but who refers to a "Fellowship" between himself and Susan. Harry, Susan and Anna manage to escape, Susan refusing to answer Harry's questions about what "Fellowship," not to mention the sudden, dark tattoos appearing on her face and body, all mean. Susan, avoiding his questions, calls for Martin to be waiting for them outside. When the three of them get to the alley where he's waiting, Susan and Anna manage to get into the limousine and escape, but Harry and the Shroud are captured by Nicodemus.

Chapter 21 - Harry finds himself imprisoned in an underground cave and in a manner that entirely defuses his magic. He is confronted by Nicodemus, who is still wearing his noose, and his daughter Deirdre, the human form of the boat demon. Nicodemus shows Harry another of the Coins and offers him a choice - accept the Coin, at least temporarily, and live to learn more about himself, his mysterious long dead parents, and about the power of which he is afraid. This, Nicodemus says, is why Harry does what he does, lives in poverty and gets himself into trouble, in spite of having immense power (see "Quotes," p. 214). "You pretend to be like any other mortal," he adds, "because you are too terrified to admit that you aren't." Harry realizes that everything Nicodemus says is true, but he also realizes the dangers of using such power - that his soul and being could be forever tortured like the human spirit at the heart of the Ursiel demon (Chapter 6). He tells Nicodemus no deal, and Nicodemus prepares to end his life.

Chapter 22 - Shiro suddenly appears, attacking and subduing Deirdre. Nicodemus holds a knife to Harry's throat as Shiro holds his sword to Deirdre's. Shiro and Nicodemus negotiate an agreement - that Shiro will take Harry's place for twenty four hours in exchange for Deirdre's life. Harry tries to talk him out of it, but Shiro will have none of it. He gives the wounded, exhausted Harry his sword and gives him directions on how to get out. Harry reluctantly takes the sword and makes his way out, aware that Deirdre is being released and Shiro is being attacked. Nicodemus tells Deirdre to take her demon form, kill Harry, and retrieve the Sword. As Deirdre transforms, Harry reluctantly runs.

Chapter 23 - Following Shiro's directions, Harry makes his way to an upwards-headed shaft. At the foot of the shaft, he is grabbed by a bulky human goon, and fights him off. A moment later Susan, still darkly tattooed, shows up and helps him up the ladder, unable to hold the sword and explaining that she and Martin went to Michael's for help where



they met Shiro, who instinctively knew where to go. As Harry asks her again what the third demon meant by "fellowship" (see Chapter 20), Susan again avoids the subject, throwing a stun grenade down the shaft at the advancing Deirdre-demon. Harry and Susan emerge into the street and a moment later Martin arrives. They jump into the back seat of his car, and as they discuss why so many demons are after Harry, Harry tells them the safest place for him is his apartment, with its magical protections. Susan resolves to go with him, over Martin's protestations. When they arrive, Susan tells Harry to be ready to jump out of the car. One part of Harry is apprehensive, but another part loves the excitement (see "Quotes," p. 228), and the two of them jump.

Chapters 20, 21, 22 and 23 Analysis

In the midst of the increasing pressure on Harry and his allies, of the deepening mystery about what Nicodemus and the demons want with the Shroud, of the torture and confrontations and spell casting, there are a number of intriguing nuggets of information, characterization, theme or of imagery that capture the attention. On perhaps the most apparent level of function and/or meaning, they generate additional layers of mystery that draw the reader even further into the intrigue of Harry's adventures. On another level, however, they tend to add depth and/or meaning to the story as a whole, and to Harry's personal experience of transformation as he moves through that story.

The first of these nuggets is the reference to Susan being part of a "Fellowship," later revealed to be a unity of individuals who, like her, have only partially completed the transformation into a full paranormal being (i.e. vampire or demon). While the actual meaning of Susan's involvement in The Fellowship isn't revealed until Chapter 25, it triggers the sense in Harry not only that there is more to her life than she knows — an echo of Shiro's comments in Chapter 18 (see "Quotes," p. 176). It also suggests to him, somewhat uncomfortably, that she has a place where she belongs, where she fits, where there are others like her. There is, by contrast, a sense of loneliness, or at least of solitariness, in Harry, as well as a longing to belong somewhere. This is one of the reasons that Nicodemus' offer is so tempting; if he accepts, Harry will belong to a community, albeit one as evil and corrupt as the Denarians. Another couple of nuggets appear in Nicodemus' conversation with Harry - his reference to Harry's past which suggests generations-old ties to not only the paranormal, but the battle between good and evil and his commentary on why Harry lives as he does. This is clearly constructed and/or placed to be at least an optional answer to the question posed by Ulsharavas (see Chapter 8), although it's important to note that Nicodemus himself doesn't see it as such. He merely sees it as a taunting invitation to Harry to give in to the temptations of the Coin. Speaking of which, it's also clear that the confrontation with Nicodemus is a vivid manifestation of the book's thematic concern with the allure of power (see "Themes"). At the conclusion of that conversation, though, is perhaps the most important of all the "nuggets" - Harry's choice to refuse the offer of the Coin and accept his fate, a realization of personal integrity (see "Themes") and a choice taken in response to that realization. It is, when viewed in this context, perhaps no coincidence that Shiro, the Knight of the Cross whose instincts are apparently so powerful, shows up



at that moment, endowing Harry with life immediately after he chooses to honor a positive value in that life.

One final point to note about this section - the appearance of the trio of demons, with their number (three) standing in apparent parallel contrast to the number of Knights of the Cross (also three) with whom Harry aligns himself, his powers, and ultimately, his morality and spirit.



Chapters 24, 25, 26 and 27

Chapters 24, 25, 26 and 27 Summary

Chapter 24 - Harry and Susan jump out of the car and roll to safety, but immediately find themselves under attack from spells that Harry believes were cast by Nicodemus. They hurry into Harry's apartment, where Harry immediately casts a powerful spell of protection which repels those cast by Nicodemus. As Harry recovers from his exertions, Susan realizes that the vampiric power she's been tapping into in order to help their escape isn't dying down, and that she should leave. Harry tells her that the spells he cast to keep Nicodemus' magic out are also keeping her in, and that she won't be able to leave for another few hours at least. She tells him that it would help if he cleaned off his leg and got rid of the tempting smell of his blood. He goes into the bathroom and does so, drinking one of the potions he made to protect himself from the Kiss in the process (Chapter 12). He goes back out into his living room, where the blood-hungry Susan warns him that he needs to find a way to hold her back.

Chapter 25 - Harry stalls for time by asking Susan about the Fellowship. She explains that it's a group of people like her, who have been half-turned into vampires. She adds that the powerfully pulsing tattoos all over her body are a spell to hold her vampiric powers and hungers in check, and to warn her when it's about to get out of hand. She becomes calm enough to sit quietly on the couch as Harry stealthily gets out a previously enchanted rope and binds her in it. Her vampiric instincts kick in and she struggles hard, leading Harry to increase the intensity of the spell and causing the rope to suspend her in the air. She eventually becomes still, and Harry starts to clean her many scrapes and cuts. Their bodies respond passionately to each other, and they have intense, powerful sex. Afterwards, after Susan's powers have subsided, Harry puts her to sleep on the couch and then retires to his bedroom, where he watches her through the open doorway.

Chapter 26 - The next morning, Susan is much calmer, and explains what happened after she and Anna left the hotel; she convinced the reluctant Martin to head for Michael's, where they found Shiro waiting for them with news that Michael and Sanya hadn't come back from a mission to St. Louis. Anna was left there when Shiro, Susan and Martin went to rescue Harry. Meanwhile, Harry cleans himself up, and then arms himself with both his paranormal and conventional weaponry as he explains his plans - collect Michael, talk with Anna Valmont, and then take on the Denarians, adding, in response to Susan's questions, that he has some idea of what Nicodemus and the other demons want with the Shroud. As they go, they both agree that the sex between them shouldn't have happened, and that it doesn't change anything - Susan is still moving to South America.

Chapter 27 - When Harry and Susan arrive at Michael's, they are admitted by Father Forthill, who takes Harry into the kitchen for coffee and doughnuts while Susan contacts Martin, another of the Fellowship. Forthill explains that Michael and Sanya should be



back shortly, and that Nicodemus has an ancient rivalry with the Knights of the Cross. Susan, in response to instructions from Martin, turns on the television, which shows the building atop the tunnels where Harry was held prisoner the night before is in flames; it seems that Nicodemus has left. Harry then goes to talk to Anna who, in response to his bullying, agrees to tell him what she knows. She asks to have a shower first, but is apparently unable to walk. Harry helps her to the bathroom. He returns downstairs, where he finds Father Forthill outside doing some yard work. During their conversation, Harry realizes that his car is being stolen, and that Anna had stolen his keys by fooling him into thinking she was wounded. As he vents his frustration to Forthill, he discovers that Forthill has a tattoo on his arm (the Eye of Thoth) identical to that found on the mysterious corpse (Chapter 5). Forthill explains that the tattoo signifies an organization to which he belonged with four other young priests (including Fr. Vincent) who destroyed a vampire together. As Forthill reveals that the others passed on over the years, Harry starts making some realizations and prepares to leave. At that moment, Michael and Sanya arrive. Harry gathers them and Susan together, saying they need to get ready for a fight.

Chapters 24, 25, 26 and 27 Analysis

As the narrative begins to build momentum towards its various climaxes, this section adds layers of both information and stakes to the mix, with more and more pieces of the puzzle (i.e. the origins of the tattoo) coming together to form a more complete picture - at least to Harry. Here, it's important to note the usage of a narrative technique frequently employed in works of the mystery thriller genre. This is the authorial practice of having the hero / protagonist / detective refer to, and/or act on, information he alone has or realizations he alone has made (for more on this aspect of the genre see "Style - Language and Meaning"). Specific examples here include Harry's reference to having ideas about why the demons are after the Shroud, and his realizations and comments at the end of the chapter, both of which draw the reader even further into the increasingly exciting, increasingly high-stakes narrative.

This section also features a variation on the work's thematic consideration of the allure of power - in this case, the power of Harry and Susan's sexual attraction to each other. Here, it's interesting to note Harry's use of the rope. Aside from the humorous reference back to Chapter 15 (the chapter in which Molly Carpenter suggested, much to Harry's shock, that he do exactly what he's doing here - did he prepare the rope in response to her suggestion?), there is a metaphoric level of meaning to his action. He is, in essence, choosing to tap into power wisely, with forethought and restraint. In other words, he has prepared for his contact with power and is able to harness it. While the book doesn't actually make the point explicitly, it's possible here to see a clear contrast with the power offered by, for example, the Blackened Coins. Harry has no means of controlling that power. Neither does he have a means of preparing for how it might manifest in his life. It's a lesson he also learned when he cast the fire spell at the demons in Chapter 20 - the unfocused use of power can lead to dangerous consequences, a circumstance he can foresee applying in his own life if he accepted the power offered by the Coins.

Finally, there is the powerful sense, at the end of this section, that the narrative is preparing to move into what might be described as its big finish. The epic confrontations - between Harry and Ortega, between Harry and Nicodemus, and ultimately between Harry and himself - are on their way.



Chapters 28, 29 and 30

Chapters 28, 29 and 30 Summary

Chapter 28 - When Harry and the others arrive at Fr. Vincent's hotel, Harry bullies him into transforming into the snakelike Denarian demon, who confesses that his name is Cassius. Harry reveals that he figured out that Cassius had replaced Vincent when he realized that "Vincent" didn't have the Eye of Thoth tattoo. He theorizes that the Denarians learned of the theft of the Shroud and decided to steal it themselves for some kind of ceremonial purpose, and that the attack on Harry after the television program by Marcone's thugs was actually an attack on Vincent, since Marcone didn't like the idea of being robbed of the Shroud. Marcone's unusual reaction at the benefit, Harry says, was the result of realizing that Harry thought the attack was on him, when in fact it was on the man (Vincent) that Marcone perceived as a rival for possession of the Shroud.

Neither the prospect of further violence nor the armed appearances of Michael and Sanya threaten Cassius enough to reveal the ceremony for which the Shroud is to be used. He taunts his captors by tossing them his Denarius, revealing his inner (captured) soul and claiming a desire for redemption. This, Michael reveals, handicaps what he and Sanya can do; as Knights of the Cross, they are sworn to accept such requests at face value, even when they know, as they do in this case, that such a request is ultimately insincere. Harry angrily tries to convince them of the value and necessity of violence in this case, but Michael stands his ground (see "Quotes," p. 269) and Sanya reveals that he was once a Denarian, but chose to redeem himself. Michael then suggests they leave, and he and Sanya go. Alone with Cassius, Harry beats him into confessing that Nicodemus intends to use the Shroud as a source of power to release an apocalyptic plague, using a disease curse of the sort that was found in what is now confirmed to be the corpse of Fr. Vincent. Cassius also reveals that he was to meet Nicodemus at the airport at eight pm in order to enact the curse. Harry rejoins Michael and Sanya who, without actually saying so, offer approval of what Harry just did. Michael offers to take Shiro's place as Harry's second at the duel, but Harry refuses, saying he'll join them at the airport after the duel is over.

Chapter 29 - Harry returns to his apartment and calls Karrin Murphy, who tells him that homicide detectives are coming to arrest him. Harry tells her to decoy them to the airport with a story about the Shroud. He also asks her to do him another favor, which he doesn't reveal, and she agrees. He then grabs a gun and goes out to Martin's rental car, where Susan (now his second, in Shiro's absence) waits. They drive to Wrigley Field, the setting appointed for their duel. Shortly after they arrive, Ortega appears, followed by a drunken Thomas and then Kincaid, who drives them into the field where they are met by The Archive. She reveals the focus of their duel - a supernatural, death-dealing substance called mordite which, by the force of their will, each has to try to force onto the other. Thomas and Susan retreat to their positions, Ortega and Harry take theirs, The Archive and Kincaid position themselves to observe, The Archive issues instructions, and the duel begins. Ortega immediately pushes the mordite to within



inches of Harry's face, taunting Harry by saying that if he (Harry) wins, all those he loves will be killed. Harry's fury is triggered, and he uses it to fuel his will, pushing the mordite back at Ortega, who finds himself weakened and angry (see "Quotes," p. 284). As the mordite approaches his face, though, he pulls out a gun ...

Chapter 30 - ... but before Ortega can fire, he is shot twice by a hidden sniper. Susan throws Harry his weapons and goes after Ortega, who flings her into the bleachers. A dozen angry Red Court vampires then appear. Harry and Kincaid fight most of them off, Harry shouting for Thomas to take care of Susan. The last of the vampires are dealt with by The Archive, who unleashes the mordite and destroys them. She then puts away the mordite in its special box, confirms it was Ortega who "broke the sanctity of the duel first," declares the duel concluded, and leaves with Kincaid. Harry checks on Susan and is joined by Martin, who is revealed to have been the sniper and who also reveals that he had been sent to ensure Harry's safety and Ortega's death, since Harry's remaining alive continued the possibility that the war between the White Council and the Red Court could be resolved permanently. After learning that Martin now plans to leave with Susan, and after getting him to agree to take care of her, Harry then prepares to head for the airport and the confrontation with Nicodemus.

Chapters 28, 29 and 30 Analysis

Information and answers fly thick and fast in this section, as the narrative builds in energy and momentum towards the first of its two primary climaxes, the duel between Ortega and Harry. Before the duel begins, however, there are some very important narrative elements - Harry's confrontations with Cassius and the revelation of the Denarians' agenda being the most significant in terms of plot, and the confrontation between Harry and the Knights being the most important in terms of theme.

In terms of the confrontations between Harry and Cassius, the major pieces of the book's primary mystery come together. As the result of a combination of deduction and interrogation, Harry gains knowledge of Nicodemus' true agenda and, by extension, of Marcone's role in the chain of events. Here again, though, answers raise more questions, or rather remind the reader that those questions are still there - what exactly does Marcone want the Shroud FOR? That question isn't answered until the book's final chapter.

In terms of the confrontations between Harry and the Knights, the developments here are primarily thematic, and take place on several levels. For example, Harry is tempted by the power he has gained over Cassius to use it in a violent and destructive way. The Knights, by contrast, also have power over Cassius but choose to use it in a way that accords with their individual experiences and/or values of personal integrity. Their choices are, in a substantial way, an act of faith, in that they believe firmly and unquestioningly that their choices will ultimately end in a positive outcome. Finally, the fact that Harry manages to find a compromise between giving in to the power he has over Cassius but manages to respect the wishes of the Knights is a manifestation of his own emerging sense of integrity. In other words, he is learning where the boundaries



are, of behavior and belief, that he cannot and/or should not cross ... practically a textbook definition of integrity.

The issue of integrity also manifests in the duel between Ortega and Harry, in which Ortega displays a singular, but not particularly surprising, lack of integrity and in which Harry's defeat of Ortega, albeit assisted by Martin, shows the value of fighting WITH integrity. Also in the duel, Harry again displays a rational, and considered, use of power, focusing himself and his will and his intense feelings thoroughly and tightly. This, it could be argued, is another form of integrity - the shaped, purposeful use of raw, intense power.

Finally, this section contains yet another example of the authorial motif, or technique, of hinting at information / action without actually explaining what it involves. In this case, the action in question is Harry's telephone call to Karrin Murphy, the unknown nature of which once again draws the reader further into the action ... not that, at this climactic point in the narrative, the reader really needs an ADDITIONAL incentive to turn the page.



Chapters 31 and 32

Chapters 31 and 32 Summary

Chapter 31 - Shortly after Harry arrives at O'Hare Airport, Michael and Sanya also arrive, armed for battle and bringing Shiro's sword, which they give to Michael. As they search for Nicodemus, they realize the depth of his plan; demons, Harry says, thrive on confusion and mayhem, and since O'Hare is an international hub for air travel, there is every chance that the plague Nicodemus plans to release will spread all over the world and cause worldwide chaos. Harry realizes the only way to clear the terminal and minimize the potential impact of the curse is to call in a bomb threat. He calls Murphy, who agrees to do so. A few minutes later, as the police on the scene are assisting in clearing the terminal, Harry and the Knights take advantage of the confusion and make their way into the airport. They deduce that Nicodemus will be launching his curse from the airport's chapel and make their way there, successfully avoiding a team of Nicodemus' human assassins. When they arrive, they discover that the ritual has already been completed, using Shiro as a focus. They discover his body, cut and bleeding, on an altar and believe him to be dead. Harry places Shiro's sword at his side, and is surprised when the elderly knight suddenly coughs. Shiro reveals that Nicodemus' power is focused by the noose he wears which, he says, carries the Barabbas Curse (see "Quotes," p. 305), intended to cause Harry's death but for which Shiro substituted himself. As he reveals his belief that Harry has a greater destiny, he bequeaths his sword to Harry's custody. When Harry protests he isn't worthy, Shiro tells him he will know who it truly belongs to. Shiro also reveals that Nicodemus' back-up plan was to take a train to St. Louis and release the plague there. At that moment, Shiro dies (see "Quotes," p. 306). Harry then leads Michael and Sanya out onto the airfield, where he signals for their ride - Marcone, called by Murphy in response to Harry's request and captaining a helicopter, determined to protect his investment in the Shroud and therefore willing to help them bring down Nicodemus.

Chapter 32 - While Harry and the Knights fly in the helicopter flown by Marcone's goons to catch up with Nicodemus' train, Harry manages to speak privately with Marcone, who refuses to explain why he wanted the Shroud but restates his determination to retrieve it no matter what. A few moments later, as the helicopter hovers over the train, a winch lowers Harry, Michael, Sanya, and Marcone onto its moving roof and then flies off. As Michael and Sanya advance forward, Harry and Marcone fight off a pair of lesser demons, discovering that Michael and Sanya have subdued Nicodemus' human goons. Marcone is all for killing them, but Harry refuses to let him. They are prevented from arguing further by shouts from Michael who, along with Sanya, has engaged in combat with Nicodemus. In the combat that follows, Sanya is wounded, Harry's blasting rod is destroyed, the Deirdre-demon attacks, Harry gives Michael Shiro's sword, and Marcone shoots Nicodemus several times, slowing him but not disabling him. Nicodemus shoots Michael and renders him unconscious. Marcone and Harry both shoot Nicodemus, but he keeps coming. Marcone pulls a knife and, when Nicodemus is close enough, cuts the Shroud off him and jumps into a river below. Nicodemus grabs Harry and threatens



to choke him to death, but Harry, recalling Shiro's comment that Nicodemus was afraid of him, grabs the noose around Nicodemus' neck and starts to choke him. Nicodemus calls for Deirdre to kill Harry, but before she can attack, Harry grabs Michael's body and jumps into the river, where they are rescued by Marcone, who hauls them out of the water with the help of the Shroud.

Chapters 31 and 32 Analysis

This section contains the book's thematic and narrative climaxes, its points of highest philosophical intensity (in the case of the former), emotional intensity (in the case of both), and confrontational intensity (in the case of the latter). The confrontation between the Knights/Harry and the demons/Nicodemus is the physical context for these joint climaxes, while the deathbed conversation between Harry and Shiro provides the spiritual and emotional context; in other words, the Harry/Shiro conversation defines the thematic and emotional meaning of the Harry/Nicodemus confrontation. Shiro is essentially telling the doubtful Harry that he (Harry) is a better man, a better human being that he thinks he is, and that he needs to proceed into the future (in terms of both the quest for the true owner of the sword and the confrontation with Nicodemus) operating from a place of faith in that better-ness. Shiro knows that Harry has faced down the allure of power and has begun to discover his own sense of identity and integrity. As he dies, he is instructing Harry to use these manifestations of self as motivation and support for taking a leap of faith of the sort symbolically represented by the leap Harry takes off the train at the conclusion of his fight with Nicodemus.

During the confrontation with Nicodemus, Harry applies and manifests power more thoroughly and with more focus and purpose than he has ever done, and rejects negative applications of such power more completely and decisively than he has done in the past although he will be challenged to do so again in the following final chapter. He also reveals that he has adopted a perspective on, and experience of, integrity more akin to that of the Knights than of the demons, by refusing to let Marcone kill the innocent human dupes of Nicodemus. He is, in other words, not going to do a bad thing for what he believes to be good reasons; he is acting out of both integrity and faith. Here, it's interesting to note how he and Michael are both saved by Marcone (a bad man who, as the next chapter reveals, does what he does for what appears to be a good reason) wielding the Shroud. The metaphoric meaning here is clear; act in the name of the good (i.e. God), and the good (i.e. the Shroud, endowed with what amounts to the spirit of Christ) will save you. This can be seen as another, perhaps not-so-subtle example of what could be argued is the book's core Christian theology - see "Themes - The Value of Faith." It might, in fact, not be going too far to suggest that in the context of these various Christian images, that Harry's plunge into the river represents a kind of baptism into new faith and new life - after all, Jesus himself was baptized in a river.



Chapter 33

Chapter 33 Summary

During his recovery from the confrontation on the train, a period when he is unconscious for long periods of time, Harry has a few flashes of consciousness. In the first, he realizes the Shroud should have torn during the rescue, and another in which he realizes he's being surgically treated in Waldo Butters' morgue and is told by Karrin Murphy that being treated anywhere else would raise too many questions. In the third, he realizes he's in Michael's home, where Michael himself tells him that there is bulletproofing in his armor, and that he's fine. When Harry recovers fuller consciousness, he is given a package sent to him by Shiro, in which Shiro reveals that he was dying of cancer when he substituted himself for Harry, but that he also believed in Harry's good heart (see "Quotes," p. 329).

Meanwhile, Anna Valmont returns the keys to Harry's car, and he has one final conversation with Susan, who says she didn't know that Martin had a mission to kill Ortega who, she says, is recovering and still intends to kill Harry. She also leaves Harry contact information that he is only to use when he needs her help. The next day, Harry is told by Ebenezer McCoy to watch the news, and learns that the compound where, according to Susan, Ortega was staying has been destroyed, apparently by a downed Soviet satellite which Harry realizes is a disguise for the work of McCoy and the White Council.

Once he's more fully recovered, Harry tracks down Marcone, and discovers that he is using the Shroud in an attempt to heal a young woman, perhaps his daughter, lying in a coma. The confrontation between the two men is tense but respectful, ending with Harry telling Marcone to wait three days which is the length of time Christ was wound in the Shroud before His Resurrection and, whether there are results or not, the Shroud is to be returned to Father Forthill. Marcone agrees, and Harry comments in narration that he now knows what motivated Marcone to do what he did (see "Quotes," p. 35). It doesn't let him off the hook; Marcone's crime organization, Harry comments in narration, has caused too much death and destruction. But knowing Marcone's truth makes it impossible to hate him.

A few days later, after the Shroud has been returned to Father Forthill, Harry is playing in Michael's yard with one of his children when a silver coin lands on the ground nearby. Harry grabs it before the child can, feels a surge of power, and looks up, seeing Nicodemus drive off. Harry takes the coin home, all the while aware of an insidious whisper calling to him. He digs a deep hole in the floor of his basement lab, places the coin inside it, casts some protective spells, and pours concrete over it. Afterwards, he sits in his living room and contemplates Shiro's cane, which contains the Knight's sword and which is inscribed with the Japanese character for "faith." Harry realizes it's time to let go of the past and move into the future (see "Quotes," p. 338). He puts away



everything that reminds him of Susan, and places the cane on his mantelpiece, looking ahead to tomorrow.

Chapter 33 Analysis

As the narrative's many loose ends are being tied up in this section (the book's denouement, or falling action), there are several important points. The first is Harry's questioning of why the Shroud didn't rip when Marcone was using it to rescue him, a suggestion that it is perhaps imbued with special powers and/or qualities - in other words, that it really is the burial cloth of Christ (in real life, the scientific jury is still out). A second important element is Shiro's letter, which in some ways is something of a disappointment. Shiro's confession that he has cancer in some ways diminishes the apparent nobility of his sacrifice, in that his life was going to be cut short anyway. The remainder of the letter, however (i.e. Shiro's comment on the quality of Harry's soul) reinforces the ultimate value of that sacrifice; is there a hint here that at least in Shiro's mind, the person destined to take custody of the sword is Harry himself? Not at all unlikely, given that at the end of the book Harry seems ready, at least to some degree, to accept and/or act on the power of faith as embodied/manifest in Shiro and the other knights.

Meanwhile, in the actions of Marcone and, to a lesser degree, of Valmont, Harry and the reader both come to an awareness that in spite of their being clear lines between good and evil in the world, sometimes those lines do get blurred. Also in terms of Marcone's actions, the reader can once again see a manifestation of Shiro's comment in Chapter 19 on how no-one can fully know another person (see also "Quotes," p. 176). For further consideration of Susan's revelation about Martin and the apparent actions of Ebenezer McCoy, see "Topics for Discussion - At several times and under a variety of circumstances ..."

Finally, in the book's concluding paragraphs, Harry has one last confrontation with power - the coin tossed at him by Nicodemus. His response couldn't be clearer, both in terms of his view of the power offered by the coin and in terms of the book's theme. Harry, whose power got out of control in the book's first chapter, is now exerting considerable control over an even greater power in its final one. The sense here is that over the course of the narrative, and as the result of his confrontations with various kinds of power under various circumstances, Harry has come to a new understanding of both himself and of how power works. By burying the coin, he is manifesting at least a degree of newly realized faith, is prepared to move into the future armed with that new understanding (perhaps embodied and symbolized by Shiro's sword).



Characters

Harry Dresden

Harry Dresden is the narrative's central character and first person narrator, a wizard and private investigator who, in this book and in the series of books in which he is also the protagonist, assists both the police and private clients end criminal activities involving paranormal and/or supernatural activities. The narrative never explicitly defines his age, but he seems to be in his mid-to-late thirties, his attitude towards his abilities, his relationships and his work defined by an edgy, awkward balance between youthful, impulsive over-confidence and a more mature, almost cynical, wisdom born of experience. He has substantial paranormal abilities, which he generally focuses (like a certain other wizard named Harry) through enchantments, potions, physical tools, and weaponry. There are hints, in the narrative, of a mysterious past (also like that other wizard named Harry) - a mother who, like her son, had substantial paranormal powers but was killed in her prime, and a missing father. Finally, and again like that other wizard, Harry Dresden has a substantial collection of both allies and enemies, the former complimenting his skills with their own and the latter determined to see his life come to an end, preferably after extensive suffering. What emerges in this particular episode of Harry's adventurous life is a sense that he is growing in both maturity and self-knowledge, challenged on several levels to examine his motivations and to ultimately abandon selfish desires in the name of serving the greater good, either of humanity as a whole or the good of another human being. In other words, in this novel (apparently the fifth of the series), Harry Dresden begins to come of age, maturing as both a human being, as an investigator, and as a fighter in the eternal war on evil.

Paolo Ortega

Ortega is one of the many antagonists in the book, a powerful vampire and one of the dominating members of the Red Court (see below), determined to take murderous revenge on Harry for killing one of their own and for robbing the Court of a potentially powerful blood recruit (see "Susan Rodriguez" below). Corrupt, manipulative, and a cheat, he challenges Harry to a duel and initially has the upper hand, but the combined efforts of Harry, his allies, and the duel's impartial arbiters (see "Kincaid, The Archive" below) send him from the arena and into a period of recovery. At the novel's conclusion, the villa in South America where he is reputedly convalescing is destroyed, but the narrative, perhaps deliberately and tantalizingly, avoids explicitly saying that he was there when it happened. In other words, he may well have escaped to torment Harry Dresden further ... Meanwhile, an important note about Ortega is that he, like all vampires, wears a mask or disguise, his human form masking his true, evil-and-corruption defined physical form. As such, he is one of the primary manifestations of the book's title.



Fr. Vincent

Fr. Vincent is a priest sent from the Vatican to enlist Harry's assistance in locating a valuable stolen artifact, The Shroud of Turin (see "Objects/Places"). Apparently suspicious of Harry's power and reluctant to trust him completely, Vincent nevertheless gives Harry everything he asks for. Late in the narrative, however, Harry deduces that the man he believes to be Fr. Vincent is, in fact, a demon in disguise, and during an intense confrontation, the demon reveals his true identity - see "Nicodemus, Deirdre, Cassius" below. As such, he is an embodiment and/or manifestation of the dark side of the book's thematic exploration of personal integrity. He, unlike the Knights of the Cross, Susan and Harry, has been thoroughly corrupted by evil and, as such, has no integrity to speak of. On another level, the disguise adopted by the demon can be seen as evocative of the book's title.

Susan Rodriguez

Susan is an investigative journalist, Harry's former girlfriend and recently bitten demi-vampire (the attack on Susan was the trigger for Harry's killing of the Red Court vampire that, in turn, triggered the war between the Court and the White Council of wizards which, in turn, is the reason Ortega intends to kill Harry). Susan is intelligent, quick witted, high spirited and, since her semi-conversion to vampire-hood, exceptionally strong and given to sudden attacks of blood lust. She and Harry still desire each other both emotionally and physically, but Susan realizes their relationship is too dangerous; if she gets too caught up in the intensity of her feelings, she could actually bite Harry and convert him in the same way she was converted. After helping Harry resolve and survive the series of confrontations and battles he endures over the course of this narrative, she returns to her new home in South America, where she intends to continue pursuing her war against the Red Court. Her choices and decisions can be seen as an echo / mirror of the self-controlling, self-responsible decisions made by Harry over the course of the narrative and, as such, are representative and/or evocative of the book's thematic emphasis on the power and value of personal integrity.

Johnny Marcone

Marcone is a Chicago mobster, the leader of a powerful organized crime family. He is a motivating force behind the transport of the stolen Shroud of Turin to Chicago, intending to use it for purposes revealed only in the novel's final chapter. He is a long time enemy of Harry Dresden's, but a respectful one; as Marcone himself says, he doesn't want to make Harry mad. In the aforementioned final chapter, Marcone reveals a human side of himself that wins Harry's grudging respect, a circumstance that manifests a different facet of both the narrative's thematic exploration of personal integrity and its theme. Specifically, Marcone's use of his power in ways that cause death and destruction echoes that of the demons and vampires, but because he is driven by a purpose and goal that is essentially good, human and vulnerable, he, according to Harry's perceptions, is at least doing the wrong things for the right reasons. In other words, his



mob activities are, in some way or to some degree, a "death mask" for the vulnerability beneath.

The White Council, The Red Court

The Council and the Court are opposing paranormal forces drawn into conflict, both violent and moral, as the result of Harry's actions in a previous narrative. The White Council represents and monitors positive wizarding activity. The Red Court is a loose association of South American vampires determined to undermine, and ultimately destroy, the White Court.

Anna Valmont, Francisca Garcia

Valmont and Garcia are two of the thieves who steal the Shroud of Turin from its place of safekeeping in Italy. They escape the attack that ended the life of the third thief LaRouche, but find themselves repeatedly under attack by demons intending to possess the Shroud themselves. Garcia is killed in an attack by one of the demons, but Valmont escapes - repeatedly, as it turns out, from both the demons and from Harry. Her whereabouts at the end of the narrative are unknown, but she at least respects Harry's help enough to return items she stole from him.

Karrin Murphy, Waldo Butters

Murphy is a hard-nosed police officer, a member of the Special Investigations Unit that handles cases outside the normal purview of the force - specifically, cases with some sort of paranormal element. Her investigations of such cases often lead her to call in Harry for advice and/or assistance, the favors she asks him being returned, at least in part, through the help she gives him retrieving the Shroud here. Butters is an eccentric pathologist with whom Murphy works in SIU. He is at first incredulous of the information and insight Harry has to offer, but quickly learns to take what appears to be the strangeness of Harry's line of work in stride.

The Knights of the Cross - Michael, Shiro, Sanya

The three Knights of the Cross are mysterious, powerful forces for good, their swords, paranormal abilities and wisdom giving them the strength and the means to at least fight evil to a standstill. Michael is a frequent ally and collaborator of Harry's. Shiro is an elderly Asian samurai, whose sacrifice of himself to save Harry results not only in his own death, but in a powerful lesson for Harry about the transcendent power of both integrity and faith. Sanya is a relatively new recruit, formerly possessed by a demon who realized he had another, better choice about how to use his spirit and made it. He, like Shiro, provides a dynamic example of the value and power of positive, life-and-spirit affirming choices. The clarity of the moral code preached and practiced by the Knights



(in particular, their determination to not kill in revenge) initially irks and provokes Harry, but is ultimately an important guide to new choices of behavior.

The Fallen, The Order of the Blackened Denarius

The Fallen are angels who followed Satan into the ways of evil when he, a former angel himself, was cast out of heaven. Several of The Fallen formed The Order of the Blackened Denarius (see "Objects/Places - The Blackened Coins") with the aim of corrupting and torturing human souls, initiating them into lower levels of the Order.

Nicodemus, Deirdre, Cassius

Nicodemus is a member of the Fallen, an angel corrupted to the course of evil. He wears a noose around his neck, a focus for the power he channels into maintaining The Curse of Barabbas (see "Objects/Places - Nicodemus' Noose"). Deirdre is his daughter who transforms into a demon form armed with razor-edged, snake-like hair. Cassius is a member of The Order of the Blackened Denarius, a human cursed by the power of one of the Blackened Coins and in service to Nicodemus. Cassius disguises himself as Fr. Vincent (see above) in an effort to manipulatively enlist Harry's help in obtaining the Shroud of Turin (see "Objects/Places").

Charity Carpenter, Molly Carpenter

Charity is Michael's wife, and resents Harry's presence in her husband's life, particularly the frequency with which assisting Harry has put her husband in danger. She honestly admits her dislike of Harry, but clearly places the well being of her husband as a priority. This, for her, includes respecting his choice of friends and allies (i.e. Harry). Her determination to behave with both personal integrity and respect for her husband is another indicator for Harry of the kind of moral choices he needs to come to value. Molly is Michael and Charity's daughter. As frank and direct as her mother, as compassionate as her father, Molly offers Harry a couple of insightful pieces of wisdom that he finds particularly useful in his dealings with Susan.

Father Forthill

Forthill is a Roman Catholic priest. He and Harry have had some kind of professional relationship before the events portrayed in this book, but here the narrative reveals they also have something in common. They both have fought vampires, Forthill in the company of a few other idealistic young priests (one of which was the real Fr. Vincent) who, in the self-congratulatory aftermath of their victory, tattooed their arms with The Eye of Thoth (see "Objects/Places"). Forthill's recounting of this story is an essential clue enabling Harry to resolve at least one of the mysteries he is thrown up against throughout the narrative.



Martin

Martin comes to Chicago with Susan as an ally and colleague. Like her, he is half-vampire, and is determined to end the power and rule of The Red Court. His support proves invaluable on several occasions, including the duel between Ortega and Harry, during which his (Martin's) efforts at assassinating Ortega save Harry's life. Later, it's revealed that Martin was dispatched by the enemies of Ortega and The Red Court to end Ortega's life. At the end of the narrative, he promises Harry that he (Martin) will take care of Susan for him.

Bob the Skull, Ulshavaras

Bob and Ulsharavas are two spirits of information that Harry consults in the face of those mysteries. Bob makes his home in a skull in Harry's laboratory (see "Objects/Places"), while Ulsharavas comes in response to a specific enchantment laid out by Bob and enacted by Harry. In payment for the information she has to offer, Ulsharavas asks for information herself - specifically, why Harry does what he does. The question prompts Harry to examine himself and his motives in ways that he hasn't before, a circumstance that combines with what is being demanded of him, the three Knights of the Cross, the comments of Charity Carpenter, and the circumstances of his relationship with Susan to lead him to greater self-insight and self-awareness.

Ebenezar McCoy

McCoy is a member of the White Council of Wizards, an ally and mentor of Harry's who, narration suggests, is one of his most influential teachers. Appearing only briefly, he nevertheless brings Harry important news about the tense relationship between the Council and the Red Court.

Kincaid, The Archive

Kincaid and The Archive are the impartial observers assigned to monitor and govern the duel between Harry and Ortega. Kincaid is essentially a big, powerful bodyguard for The Archive, the repository of all human knowledge accumulated over the centuries that has taken the form of a little girl, childlike but immeasurably powerful.

Thomas

This flamboyant, self-indulgent, hedonistic vampire is the second (assistant) that Ortega selects for his duel with Harry ... or rather, is forced to select by Thomas' powerful father. Later, after the duel is broken up by an attack by Ortega's vampire allies, Thomas reveals that he gave inside information about the impending duel and Ortega's intention to cheat to Martin.



Objects/Places

Chicago

This Midwestern city is the novel's primary setting, its cosmopolitan environment defined by Harry as the perfect place for him to live and work without raising undue amounts of attention and/or suspicion.

Harry's Apartment / Laboratory

Harry lives in the one-bedroom basement apartment of a suburban boarding house. In the floor of the apartment, there is a door that leads to an underground cavern that houses the laboratory where he, among other things, conducts research and prepares spells. At the novel's conclusion, he conceals one of the Blackened Denarius Coins in a deeply dug, cemented in, magically sealed hole.

Harry's Weaponry

Harry channels his innate mystical energy through a variety of armaments. These include a Blasting Rod which harnesses the destructive power of that energy into a tightly focused beam, a Shield Bracelet which focuses and amplifies his protective spells into a powerful protective barrier, a Staff which is a longer version of the Rod, and a Force Ring which, over the course of the narrative, he puts on but never describes actually using.

Harry's Soulgaze

One of the manifestations of Harry's power is the ability to use the Soulgaze. He looks into the eyes of an individual such as the Demon Ursiel, sees deep into their innermost identity, and discovers their deepest truths.

The Shroud of Turin

The Shroud of Turin is a centuries-old Christian artifact reputed to be the shroud, or cloth, that was wrapped around Jesus Christ following his Crucifixion, in which he remained for the three days he was entombed, and out of which he emerged on the day of his Resurrection. It is said to have imprinted on it images of Christ's face and wounds, theoretically seared into the Shroud as the result of the burst of energy that reanimated his body. Over the years, DNA testing on traces of blood on the Shroud and carbon testing of the material from which it was woven have proven inconclusive as to whether what it's believed to be is what it truly is. In *Death Masks*, the Shroud is stolen from the



church in Turin where it is kept and removed to the United States, where it is used to fuel a plague curse placed by the demon Nicodemus.

The Boat in the Harbor

Harry traces the stolen Shroud of Turin to a boat in the Chicago harbor. In his attempt to retrieve the Shroud, he is confronted first by two of the thieves who stole it, Anna Valmont and Francisca Garcia, and second by one of the Denarians, Deirdre. During the second confrontation, the boat is damaged and ultimately sinks.

The Blackened Coins

These ancient coins (an individual coin is called a Denarius) were, according to Christian tradition, one of the thirty silver coins accepted by Judas Iscariot as payment for betraying Jesus Christ to the Romans. In the context of the narrative, the coins are used by demons in order to enslave vulnerable, unsuspecting human souls, one of which lies beneath the horrific shape of the demon Ursiel. Harry is tempted by the potential power of the Coins, but at the novel's conclusion, proves himself able to resist it.

McAnally's

This is a bar in Chicago described by Harry as being a hangout for the local paranormal community. It is the place chosen for a meeting to set the terms and conditions for the duel between Harry and Ortega.

The Marriott Hotel

A high-end hotel in Chicago, the Marriott is the setting for Harry and Susan's attempt to retrieve the Shroud from Anna Valmont and their confrontation with Nicodemus and his demons, who are after the Shroud as well.

The Carpenters' Home

Knight of the Cross Michael Carpenter lives with his wife and children in a spacious, well kept house in a suburban Chicago neighborhood. It is the setting for several important scenes, and in many ways serves as a refuge for both Michael and Harry in spite of the fact that Harry's presence in Michael's life is strongly resented by Michael's wife Charity.



The Eye of Thoth Tattoo

This is a tattoo, based on an ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic or symbol, first seen on the arm of the mysterious corpse shown Harry by Karrin Murphy. The tattoo is later revealed to be a symbol of a youthful bond forged between Father Forthill, Fr. Vincent, and a small group of adventurous vampire hunters of which they were a part in their youth.

The Knights' Swords

Each of the three Knights of the Cross encountered here by Harry (Michael, Sanya, Shiro) has a powerful, paranormally enchanted sword that glows when its power is being used in the battle against evil. As he lies dying, Shiro entrusts his sword to Harry's care, saying he (Harry) will know the appropriate person it should be passed on to when the appropriate time arrives.

Wrigley Field, O'Hare Airport

These two Chicago landmarks are the setting for key scenes in the novel. Wrigley Field is the location appointed by The Archive as the place where the duel between Harry and Ortega is to take place. O'Hare Airport is the place where Harry discovers Nicodemus intends to release the power of his plague curse through killing Shiro, whose barely functional body is discovered there by Harry and the Knights in the course of their pursuit.

Nicodemus' Noose

Around his neck, Nicodemus wears an ancient noose that, according to Michael's theorizing, is the noose used by Judas to hang himself in the aftermath of his betrayal of Jesus Christ. The noose, Michael further theorizes, is empowered with a curse that can, and will, inevitably and inescapably end in the death of one chosen by the curse - in this case, Harry Dresden.

The Train to St. Louis

The final confrontation between the so-called "Forces of Good" (Harry, the Knights of the Cross, Marcone) and the "Forces of Evil" (Nicodemus, his fellow demons, his human dupes) takes place on top of, and inside the cars of, a freight train traveling from Chicago to St. Louis.



Themes

The Allure of Power

At some point in the narrative all the main characters find themselves drawn to power of one kind or another, power for good and power for evil both, sometimes represented by the same object (i.e. the Shroud of Turin). Protagonist Harry finds himself caught in the most complex consideration of the value and temptations of power. He is drawn to a source of evil power (i.e. a Blackened Denarius) and tempted by the idea of harnessing that power for good, but aware that his fundamental human frailty (manifested by his acting on his desire for Susan) makes him a candidate for corruption by that same power. At the same time, he is drawn to the power of the Shroud for the same reason (i.e. its potential as a source of positive power) but nevertheless allows it to rest, at least for a while, in the hands of someone he believes to be evil (Marcione) so that the latter can do some good. Meanwhile, he resists the allure of the positive power represented by Michael, Shiro and the Knights of the Cross because he finds security in the potential power of violence and vengeance (i.e. beating the demon Cassius almost to death). In short, and in the character/ experience of Harry alone, the narrative presents the allure of power, and the struggle over whether to give in to that allure, as complex and multi-faceted, and not always easy to resolve and/or understand in a black and white fashion ... at least at first. By the end of the narrative, however, Harry has realized/decided which side of the power equation he wants to be on, and disposes of the Blackened Coin presented to him as best he can ... for the moment. For further consideration of this aspect of the book, see "Topics for Discussion - Discuss ways in which characters other than Harry ..."

The Value of Faith

Ultimately, Harry's personal and professional struggles over the course of the narrative (with demons and Mafiosi, with himself and with his beloved, with faith and with friendship) come down to questions of faith - specifically, and he is asked several times (particularly by Michael and Shiro), whether he has faith in a positive outcome. For most of the novel, he does not. His choices and actions are defined and governed at best by cautious cynicism (i.e. having learned from experience to anticipate the worst) and at worst by a selfish carelessness (i.e. knowing the potential negative consequences but going ahead and indulging himself anyway, as he does when he has sex with Susan). There is the strong sense, however, that Harry coming to faith in a positive outcome, that good will win out, is a central component to the process of personal, spiritual coming of age that he undergoes over the course of the narrative. In short, Michael and Shiro turn out to be good teachers. As a result of both working with them and benefiting from their experience, history, and their own faith, Harry seems to accept that there is at least a greater possibility of positive outcome than he might once have believed. Here it's important to note that faith in a "positive outcome" is, throughout the narrative, implied to exist in terms of Christian faith. There are several manifestations of this



implication. First, the faith of Michael and the other Knights is clearly grounded in such faith, hence their being defined as "Knights of the Cross," the "Cross" being a clear reference to the means of Christ's Crucifixion and, by extension, His resurrection. Second, and perhaps more importantly, there are Harry's references to his weaponry as his "rod and staff," a clear echo of Psalm 23 in the Bible, which states in part that "thy rod and thy staff shall comfort me." These references to Christianity reinforce the thematic idea that while the resistant Harry is fighting a fight that he doesn't yet consciously or fully believe in, he is nevertheless becoming a foot-soldier in a fight against evil fought fully and clearly on the battleground of Christian faith and morality.

The Importance of Personal Integrity

Several times throughout the narrative, conflict defined by either and/or both of the major themes discussed above manifests, or is triggered by, issues of personal integrity. A particularly interesting example of this theme can be found in the emotional, not necessarily romantic, triangle that exists between Harry, Michael, and Michael's wife Charity. The latter is, for such a small character, particularly complex and intriguing. She doesn't allow her personal feelings (i.e. her distaste for Harry) to impinge upon either her personal integrity (i.e. she won't lie to Shiro to keep Michael from getting involved with Harry) or her love and respect for her husband (i.e. she won't keep him from doing something he values). In having such a strong sense of personal integrity and in acting to preserve that integrity, she is an example of how, even when love for her husband, fear for his safety and resentment of the person who puts him in danger are pulling her apart, her sense of who she is and what she values remains intact. Harry, over the course of the novel and inspired, in part by Charity and in part by the Knights whose sense of integrity is irreproachable, discovers the beginnings of his own integrity and begins to make decisions based upon it. These decisions include fighting back against Ortega's corruptive offer (i.e. to ensure his friends' safety if only he hands over his soul), with Harry's rejection showing his increasingly powerful resolution to not be tempted by anything other than his own sense of purpose. Another key decision shows up in the final chapter, when Harry buries the Blackened Denarius tossed to him by Nicodemus. He is resisting the temptation offered by its potential power once and for all. In short, Harry's coming to identify, understand and accept his own sense of integrity is an essential component of his coming of age, the central experience that motivates and defines the inner journey of transformation he undergoes as the result of passing through the many external trials he faces.



Style

Point of View

The narrative is written from the first person, past tense point of view - specifically, from the personal perspective of narrator and protagonist Harry Dresden. This also means that the point of view is defined as "limited" (i.e. subjective, that of only one character) as opposed to "omniscient" (i.e. objective, offering insight into the lives, emotions and perspectives of most, if not all, of the characters). This approach draws the reader immediately and intimately into the action, engaging him/her in the emotional and narrative intensity of Harry's many and various confrontations in a manner that, in many ways, is both common to and appropriate for the mystery thriller genre (see "Chapters 1, 2 and 3 - Analysis"). In short, if part of the purpose of the genre is, as previously discussed, to take the reader on something of a roller coaster ride, first person narrative increases the likelihood of that sort of engagement by creating and defining almost a personal relationship between the reader and the central character. In essence, the reader discovers what Harry discovers as he discovers it, has the encounters Harry has as he's having them, and faces the dilemmas Harry has while he's having them. It's important to note, however, that there are a couple of occasions where the Harry/reader connection is short circuited, in which Harry as narrator withholds information in the name of telling a good story ... of intriguing the reader even more. For examples, see "Language and Meaning" below. By tantalizing the reader with such important gaps of information particularly at a point in the narrative so close to the climax, the narrative increases tension in the reader, drawing him/her even further into the story and even closer to the point of climax.

Setting

The book is set in present day Chicago, one of the largest and most populous cities in America. There are several reasons why setting the book in this particular location is narratively significant. First, and on the most broad strokes level, as Harry points out the size of population makes it possible for his activities and abilities to pass relatively unnoticed. In other words, he can live and work discreetly, an important component to the successful career of a professional private investigator and to the longer life of a paranormal. Second, Chicago has a decades-long history of being the center of substantial organized crime activity, such as that practiced by Johnny Marcone. Said activity, and Harry's experience in dealing with it and occasionally ending it, is an important component of both Harry's background and the insight he brings into the criminal circumstances at the heart of all the narrative's crime-related plotlines. Third, and perhaps most importantly, Chicago is not only one of America's most populous cities, it is also the location for one of the world's busiest international airports, O'Hare (see "Objects/Places"). That circumstance, combined with the fact that Johnny Marcone is having the stolen Shroud of Turin brought there for him, makes it the ideal place for Nicodemus to launch his plague. Since his intention is to spread chaos and disruption



as far into the world as possible, and therefore make as many people as possible susceptible to the influence of himself and other demons, a city like Chicago, which has a great many people to start with and, because of the airport, can give him access to billions more, is a perfect target.

Language and Meaning

There are several noteworthy facets to the use of language in the book. The first, like many of the book's stylistic elements, relates to its positioning as a genre book (see "Setting"). A common element of the mystery-thriller genre to which this book belongs is the use of language to create both mystery and excitement, intrigue and anticipation. Words are chosen, sentences and paragraphs and chapters are all shaped with an eye to engaging the reader's senses and emotions at a high level of intensity - and also, at times, reduce that intensity so that the next moment of higher intensity has even more impact. In other words, language combines with structure to increase a sense of suspense and narrative momentum. Another, and related, facet of the book's use of language is, as suggested in "Point of View" above, how it is occasionally used to conceal information in order to generate even greater suspense. Examples include the moment at the end of Chapter 27 when Harry describes making an important realization without actually saying what it is, and in Chapter 29 when Harry asks Murphy for a favor without actually saying what it is. Then there is the matter-of-fact way in which the paranormal/magical aspects of Harry's work are dealt with. His magical weaponry is described as casually as his guns, the work in his magical lab is commented upon as casually as the work in Murphy and Butters' lab in the morgue, and the magical protections he prepares around his apartment are described in terms that are just as everyday as going to the fridge and getting a Coke. Finally, there are the strong, but subtle, glimpses of a Christian sensibility at work in the piece's narrative subtext. For more on this aspect of the book, see "Themes - The Power of Faith."

Structure

The novel's structure is linear and straightforward, moving from its point of beginning (the confrontation in the television studio) through to its climax/ending (the confrontation on the train) and its denouement, or resolution (the tying up of loose ends) in clear, cause-and-effect, action-reaction fashion. There are occasional and necessary narrative diversions into exposition or back story in which Harry explains events and circumstances in the past that have contributed to the present situation, but for the most part these are brief and don't interrupt the book's overall narrative flow. All that said, it's important to remember, when considering its structure, that the book is part of the mystery-thriller genre (see "Chapters 1, 2 and 3 Analysis"). With that in mind, it's possible to see how elements of the book's structure have been designed and shaped to realize that intention. Each chapter ends at a point of crisis, with Harry facing an unexpected confrontation with an enemy, a friend (i.e. Susan) or in some cases himself (i.e. a realization, an insight, or a discovery). Each of these confrontations might be described as a mini-climax, each such climax increasing narrative momentum and



tension as the narrative races towards the major, overall climax - the confrontation on the train. In other words, the narrative energy of each chapter compounds the energy of what has gone before, the structure of suspense building layer upon layer of intensity, excitement, intrigue and engagement in both the characters and the reader to the point of release in the final, climactic confrontation.



Quotes

"People don't believe in the supernatural these days. Supernatural things are scary. It's much more comfortable to rest secure in the knowledge that no-one can reach out with magic and quietly kill you, that vampires exist only in movies, and that demons are mere psychological dysfunctions." Chapter 1, p. 2

"Between the new case, the outfit hitter, and Duke Ortega's challenge, I wanted to make damn sure that I wasn't going to get caught with my eldritch britches down again." Chapter 3, p. 26

"[Susan] was one of the rare people who stopped and thought about things, even weird and supernatural things, instead of dismissing them out of hand." Chapter 4, p. 35

"Under the earth [is] where dead things fit. Graves are under the earth. So are Hell, Gehenna, Hades, and a dozen other reported afterlives ... maybe for us, under the earth is a subtle and profound statement. Maybe ground level provides us with a kind of symbolic boundary marker, an artificial construct that helps us remember that we are alive. Maybe it helps push death's shadow back from our lives. I live in a basement apartment and like it. What does that say about me? Chapter 5, p. 41

"Never walk into a fight when the bad guys are the ones who set it up. Wizards can call down lightning from the heavens, rip apart the earth beneath their enemy's feet, blow them into a neighboring time zone with gale winds, and a million other things even less pleasant - but not if we don't plan things out in advance." Chapter 6, p. 53

"...I'm not really big on religion. I do magic, sure, but it's like - being a mechanic. Or an engineer. There are forces that behave a certain way. If you know what you're doing, you can get them to work for you, and you don't really need a god or a goddess or a whatever to get involved." Chapter 7, p. 66 - Harry.

"Most wizards never had the kind of problems I did. They stayed at home, minded their own business, and generally speaking went on about their lives. They did not challenge other supernatural forces. They didn't declare themselves to the public at large. They didn't get into trouble for sticking their noses in other people's business, whether or not they'd been paid to do so. They didn't start wars, get challenged to duels with vampire patriots, or get the windows shot out of their cars." Chapter 8, p. 84

"...if time is a river, then you and I are like pebbles in it. We exist in one spot at a time, occasionally jostled back and forth by the currents. Spirits ... are more like a thread than a stone - their presence tenuous, but rippling upstream and down as part of their existence, experiencing more of the stream than the pebble." Chapter 9, p. 87

"Go with her. Leave Chicago ... leave a horde of problems - many of them ones I'd created for myself. I thought of packing up and heading out. Maybe fighting the good fight. Being loved again, held again. God, I wanted that." Chapter 14, p. 132



"I don't like you, Mister Dresden. I certainly don't care enough for you to abandon beliefs I hold dear, to use you as an excuse to cheapen myself, or to betray what my husband stands for ... whether or not I can personally stand you, it has no bearing on what choices I make. Michael is your friend. He would risk his life for you. It would break his heart if you came to grief, and I will not allow that to happen." Chapter 15, p. 148-9 - Charity Carpenter

"I am just another blind man. I do not get the whole picture of what transpires in all places. I am blind and limited. I would be a fool to think myself wise. And so, not knowing what the universe means, I can only try to be responsible with the knowledge, the strength, and the time given to me. I must be true to my heart." Chapter 18, p. 176 - Shiro

"...you are afraid, Dresden ... of what you could be if you ever let yourself stray from the right hand path ... of the power you could use ... some part of you has considered and found joy in the idea of using your abilities to take what you wish. And you are afraid of that joy. So you drive yourself toward martyrdom instead." Chapter 21, p. 214 - Nicodemus

"Some wild, reckless, primal piece of me had always loved the danger, the adrenaline, had always loved testing myself against the various and sundry would-be lethalties that crossed my paths. There was an ecstasy in the knife edge of the struggle, a vital energy that couldn't be found anywhere else, and part of me (a stupid, insane, but undeniably powerful part) missed it when it was gone." Chapter 23, p. 228

"It's one of the things that makes us different from them, Harry. The blood on their hands does not make it right to bloody my own. My choices are measured against my own soul. Not against stains on theirs." Chapter 28, p. 269 - Michael

"Ortega's face became strained, his breathing heavier. He didn't waste any effort on words now. His eyes darkened until they were entirely black and inhuman. There were ripples, here and there, under the surface of his skin - the flesh mask that contained the vaguely batlike monster those of the Red Court really were. The monstrous Ortega, the true Ortega, stirred underneath the false human shell. And he was afraid." Chapter 29, p. 284

"Just as the Romans put it within the power of the Jews to choose one condemned prisoner each year to be pardoned and given life, the noose allows Nicodemus to mandate a death that cannot be avoided. Barabbas was the prisoner the Jews chose, though Pilate wanted to free the Savior. The curse is named for him." Chapter 31, p. 305 - Michael.

"Shiro died. There was nothing pretty about it. There was no dignity to it. He'd been brutalized and savagely murdered - and he'd allowed it to happen to him in my place. But when he died, there was a small, contented smile on his face. Maybe the smile of someone who had run his course without wavering from it. Someone who had served



something greater than himself. Who had given up his life willingly, if not gladly." Ibid, p. 306

"Your path is often a dark one. You do not always have the luxury that we do as Knights of the Cross. We struggle against powers of darkness. We live in black and white, while you must face a world of greys. It is never easy to know the path in such a place. Trust your heart. You are a decent man. God lives in such hearts." Chapter 33, p. 329 - Shiro.

"When I'd first met Marcone, he'd tricked me into a Soul gaze. Though I hadn't known the specifics, I knew then that he had a secret - one that gave him the incredible amount of will and inner strength needed to run one of the nation's largest criminal empires. He had something that drove him to be remorseless, practical, deadly. Now I knew what that secret was." Ibid, p. 335

"It isn't good to hold on too hard to the past. You can't spend your whole life looking back. Not even when you can't see what lies ahead. All you can do is keep on keeping on, and try to believe that tomorrow will be what it should be - even if it isn't what you expected." Ibid, p. 338



Topics for Discussion

Discuss ways in which characters other than Harry are tempted by power - either good characters or bad characters, good power or bad power, paranormal or physical or sexual or moral power, or any combination thereof.

How easy is it for you to have faith in positive outcomes to challenging situations? Do you have such a faith, or do you tend to expect the worst? If you do have such a faith, is it grounded in Christian faith? In some other spiritual / religious teaching? In personal experience?

What is your experience of faith in general - religious faith? spiritual faith? faith in self? faith in others? faith in institutions? How hard is it to sustain faith? How is your faith rewarded?

What choices have you faced in which your personal integrity and/or identity and/or belief systems have been challenged? Have you made choices that compromised your integrity? What was the result? Have you made choices that have reinforced your sense of personal integrity? Again, what was the result?

At several times and under a variety of circumstances, characters conceal their identity under masks, their real intentions under "masks" of attitude and behavior. Search out and discuss the literal and more metaphorical manifestations of this aspect of the book and relate them to its title.

Charity Carpenter puts her personal feelings about Harry aside in recognition of her husband's very different feelings. Have you ever been in a situation where you have to support someone you don't like/agree with because someone you care for does (but hasn't necessarily asked you to)? What was your response? If you haven't been in such a situation, what do you think your answer might be if you were?

In battle with Ortega, Harry sees the true identity that lies beneath his foe's mask. Describe a situation in which you've discovered that someone's apparent persona or attitude conceals something different from what you've expected, either good or bad. How did you react? How did your relationship change?

At the book's conclusion, Harry realizes the value of letting go of the past and, in an act of faith, moving into the future. Under what circumstances have you realized that you had to a similar choice - to let go of the past and move into the future? What action did you take? What was the outcome?