

The Dark Is Rising Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Will Stanton discovers that he is an Old One, destined to protect the world against the Dark. Will must find and join six great Signs as a powerful tool in the eternal battle between good and evil.

On Midwinter's Eve, Will gets the first of the Signs as an early birthday present. Will wakes on his birthday in another time. He meets the Rider, his enemy, as well as the white mare, an almost magical horse that helps Will. Will also meets the Walker, a strange old tramp. Will goes into another time, where the Lady and Merriman Lyon explain that Will is the last of the Old Ones. They teach him about his powers and his quest to collect the six Signs. The Dark attacks them, and because of Will's impulsiveness, they are only saved through the Lady's sacrifice. When the Walker finds Will alone, Will gets the second Sign. Maggie Barnes, an agent of the Dark, arrives to try to take it. Merriman sends her away.

The Stantons go caroling at Miss Greythorne's Manor. While singing, Merriman and Will go to into another time unnoticed. Will attends the ceremonial renewing of the third sign. Will, Merriman, and his friend Hawkin retrieve the Book of Gramarye. Will absorbs everything from the book, learning his powers as an Old One before Merriman destroys the book. Hawkin, lured by the Dark, betrays the Old Ones. Will retrieves the third sign in his own time. Maggie and the Rider appear, but disappear when Will clumsily uses his powers. After church on Christmas, the Dark attacks again. The Old Ones hold the Dark off, only defeating it when Will uses his three Signs. After the battle, Will finds the fourth sign. The Stantons find the Walker unconscious in the snow and take him home.

The Manor serves as shelter during an intense winter storm. Will opens the Manor door to the Rider. Though Will's Signs send him away quickly, the Walker finds strength to begin summoning the Dark. The Dark forces burn as nine cold candles. Hawkin gets violent, and the doctor sedates him, breaking the Dark's link to the Manor. The Old Ones quickly gather the candles of the Dark and use them to create the fifth sign. Back in his own time, Will goes to look for his missing sister Mary. The white mare carries Will to an island in the river, where Hawkin tries to exchange the Signs for Mary. Even when the Rider appears, Will refuses to give in to the Dark. Mary lands safely on the snow, where Merriman whisks her to safety. A burial ship for an ancient king comes out of the island, and Will finds the sixth Sign. Merriman carries Will to the Great Park, where Herne's hunt vanquishes the Dark. The Rider discards Hawkin, who reconciles with Merriman before he dies. Will and Merriman take the Signs to John's smithy to be joined, completing Will's quest.



Part One: The Finding; Midwinter's Eve

Part One: The Finding; Midwinter's Eve Summary

Will Stanton and his brother James go to the barn to feed the rabbits. The rabbits all shy away from Will. The boys continue down the road to the Dawson's farm to get hay. Passing through Rooks' Wood, they notice the birds acting strangely, too. Will notices a tramp. Mr Dawson makes an odd reference to The Walker, and predicts a bad night. As Old George brings the hay, Mr. Dawson gets Will to come inside the house. He gives Will an iron ornament for his belt and tells him to keep it safe and secret. As Will and James are leaving the farm with the hay, one of the farm dogs snarls at Will. When the boys walk back through the wood, they see the tramp again. The rooks attack the stranger until he leaves.

The boys comment on the strange behavior, but James seems to forget about it as soon as they are home. Will senses that it is best not to report it, either. As Will walks by the radio, it screeches for the second time of the day and his sister Mary turns it off. Will stays away from his own dogs, realizing that something strange is happening and not wanting to be rejected by his dogs. Mrs. Stanton asks Will what he would like to eat for his birthday the next day. Will's father, Mr. Stanton comments on the significance of Will turning eleven. Max returns home while the rest of the family is eating and announces the arrival of the snow storm Will wants for his birthday.

Later that night, Will is getting ready for bed in his attic bedroom he inherited from his eldest brother Stephen. He thinks of the tramp and Mr. Dawson's strange words. He looks at the iron ornament and loops it onto his belt, as Mr. Dawson has instructed. Will begins to feel an ominous fear. He turns off the light and tries to sleep, but he just tosses and turns. He feels that something is wrong, but he is not sure what. He turns on the light when he hears a noise on the ceiling. When he switches the light off again, he feels even worse. Then the skylight in his ceiling crashes open, dumping snow all over the floor. When Will screams, Paul comes to see what is wrong. Will carries the snow to the bathroom and Paul latches the skylight with a wire. Paul sends Will to sleep in his room with Robin. Will takes his clothes with him, and finds a black rook feather.

Part One: The Finding; Midwinter's Eve Analysis

The first chapter, Midwinter's Eve, introduces Will and his large family, as well as the neighboring farmer Mr. Dawson and a stranger that Mr Dawson refers to as The Walker. The way the rabbits and rooks act on the way to Dawson's farm provides foreshadowing to what happens to The Walker later. Mr. Dawson is trying to warn Will. He makes more of the tramp than James does. He also predicts that Will will have a difficult night, and that the next day will be worse. He is trying to prepare Will, and gives him the iron ornament as protection. Mr. Dawson hints at the upcoming danger by making sure that



Will understands he needs to keep this ornament with him. He suggests that Will loop it onto his belt. He also wants to make sure Will does not talk about it.

Will understands that something strange is happening to him. The way the animals are all acting and the radio are clues, but he cannot quite hear the message or solve the puzzle. Will's father, Mr. Stanton, suggests some kind of rite-of-passage ceremony for the special eleventh birthday, providing foreshadowing that Will's life is about to change. Around the large crowd of his family members assembled for the evening meal, Will feels that it is somehow dangerous for everyone to be looking at him and thinking about him at once.

Alone in his room, Will inspects the ornament that Mr. Dawson gave him. After the rooks attack The Walker, Will feels the ornament's warmth. However, in his room it feels cold. As he tries to sleep, he cannot shake the fear and strange feeling that someone or something is pushing at his mind. He realizes later that the noise he hears must have been a rook trying to get into his room. He feels a terrible fear and dread. When Paul arrives to help him, Will feels relieved and glad to sleep near his other brother Robin.



Part One: The Finding; Midwinter Day

Part One: The Finding; Midwinter Day Summary

Will wakes from a dream-like state that he does not believe is a dream. He gets dressed and looks outside. He sees snow everywhere and hears the faint music he has heard before. The landscape looks different. There are no longer any buildings. Amazed, Will clutches the iron circle on his belt, which is now warm. Everyone in the house sleeps so soundly that Will cannot wake them. Will goes out on an unknown quest, feeling alone, but somehow understanding the importance of what he is doing. He walks down a changed Huntercombe Lane and hears the music again.

The village from Will's time is gone. He stops at a blacksmith, his senses energized. He recognizes the blacksmith as Old George's son John. John is shoeing a completely black horse for a strange man, known as The Rider. The Rider offers to eat a breakfast of freshly baked bread with Will. However, even though he is hungry, Will instinctively refuses. Will also refuses to ride with him. He tells the Rider that he is seeking the Walker, not realizing until he says it that that is his quest. The smith keeps Will from being snatched by The Rider. John also provides advice and confirms Will's instincts. He offers Will a safe breakfast. A white mare arrives. Will finds that he can easily mount the tall horse, seemingly magically. Will gets off the horse just as easily. He knows that for now, he must go alone. He notices that the white mare's shoes are the same symbol he carries on his belt.

Will is drawn to a place that would be the Dawson's Farm in his own time. He meets The Walker in a hut. The Walker does not answer Will's questions directly. He asks to see Will's sign. As Will shows him, it turns cold and The Rider arrives. The Rider sees the sign and makes threats that it will not help Will. Then the white mare arrives, and Will leaps onto the horse's back. They ride back to the safety of Hunter's Combe, where The Rider cannot follow. Will sees a sign like the one he carries on a hill. He gets off the horse and finds himself in front of two great doors.

Part One: The Finding; Midwinter Day Analysis

The music is a recurring image in this chapter. It signals change in Will's life. The family is in a deep trance-like sleep and cannot be woken. Will intuitively accepts this oddity and the disappearance of all the surrounding buildings and the village as if he is in another time, as well as the appearance of John Smith, a man he knows from his own time. He also instinctively grasps the iron circle for protection and comfort. When he meets The Rider, he knows to watch out. The Rider rides a dark horse, and wears a dark cloak, symbols of his association with The Dark. John prepares Will a little for the adventures that lie ahead, confirming the instincts to stay away from The Rider's tricks. He also tells Will that the white mare, a reverse image of the black stallion, can help him, and that the power of the Dark can do him no harm through Hunter's Combe.



However, Will must learn the rest of his quest on his own. The Walker provides no additional help, and even accuses Will of associating with The Rider. Will realizes that by leaving Huntercombe Lane, he is in danger from The Rider, but the white mare arrives in time to save him.



Part One: The Finding; The Sign-Seeker

Part One: The Finding; The Sign-Seeker Summary

As Will opens the strange doors, he finds himself in a great hall full of beautiful tapestries. An old lady and a tall man named Merriman Lyon greet him. Merriman lights a circle of candles, which repeats the symbol on the ornament Will wears on his belt. As Will explains the events of the preceding and current day, he finds he knows more than he realizes. Merriman and The Lady explain that Will is one of the Old Ones. Merriman illustrates Will's power of telepathy by imagining a scene and asking Will to describe it, then by describing a scene that Will imagines. Merriman asks Will to put out the candle flames with his thoughts. Will resists, thinking of a bigger fire, but succeeds anyway. Will relights the fire in the hearth mentally and Merriman tells Will of the burden of this power. Will must devote himself to the struggle between The Light and The Dark. Will must also find the six great Signs to help vanquish the powers of The Dark.

Merriman asks Will to look at the tapestries. Will sees images from the other Old Ones. Outside the hall, it grows noisy with awful sounds. Will hears a helpless dog and wants to find and help it. He sees a door materialize on one of the walls. Will starts to go to the dog, but Merriman warns him it will be the last thing he ever sees. The sound suddenly changes to Will's mother's voice, also arousing Will's sympathy. Merriman and The Lady remind Will that the voice is not really his mother's. Will rushes to the door anyway, but he stumbles on the way, burning onto his arm the sign of the ornament on his belt, which has grown incredibly cold with the presence of evil. Will realizes then that the voice is not his mother's, and manages to resist the urge to open the door. Finally, the sound and the door fade away. The Lady and Merriman warn Will that The Dark will continue to try to win Will over until he grows into his full power. They remind him not to be afraid, because The Dark cannot destroy.

As the noise outside the hall continues, The Lady, Merriman, and Will form a circle around the candles. The power of their joining causes the candlelight flames to grow in height and brilliance. The fire in the hearth goes out and the hall grows dark, except for the tree of flames in the circle formed by the three Old Ones. Will knows that the black stallion and The Rider are just outside, ready to strike him down. The three Old Ones use their mental power to increase the light, fighting the darkness that threatens to consume them. Will senses success and leaps forward in triumph, but he releases the circle too soon. He tries to open the doors. Merriman struggles forward to open the doors, and utters an incantation, but the doors stay shut. As Will drifts into a trance, he hears a silent music he knows comes from The Lady. She expends all her power in opening the doors. As the hall disappears, The Lady also fades away.

Will and Merriman go through the doors back into Will's own time. The doors disappear. Merriman explains that The Lady is not gone, but she will need to recuperate from such a strain against The Dark. Will finds himself on the grounds of Miss Greythorne's Manor. Merriman explains that the Old Ones are only loosely connected with Time and that



there are many ways for them to travel through the years. He tells Will that the kings five hundred years ago preserved the forest of Anderida for hunting, and that this forest also provided a haven for The Dark. Merriman also tells Will that the Walker will find him for the next stage of the quest. Will runs home, where everyone is waking from Will's yells before he left.

Part One: The Finding; The Sign-Seeker Analysis

In the great hall, Will begins to learn of his power and purpose in the struggle between light and dark. He is the last of the Old Ones, and the first to be born in five hundred years. The quartered sphere is still an important symbol, as this is one of the signs the Old Ones use against the powers of The Dark. Will understands that The Rider was chasing him before not because of the sign, but because he wants Will.

Will feels happy and calm in The Lady's presence. Merriman is also an important helper for Will to learn his purpose and powers. However, as Will learns about his powers, he begins to sense uneasiness. He resists the challenge of putting out the candles at first, thinking that if he thinks of a bigger fire instead of the candles, he will fail. However, the fire goes out suddenly and completely when Will wishes it. He then accepts the power and begins to learn to use it. Will's quest is to find and guard six signs of the Light, one of which he already carries on his belt. These six signs will bring a great force to life, which will help the Old Ones vanquish The Dark. Will understands that "The Dark is rising" is exactly what he has felt the previous day. He starts to feel it again.

When Will looks at the tapestries, he sees images of other old ones. The strongest image, a figure combined of human, stag, owl, wolf, and horse, foreshadows events later in the novel. Will begins to need the strength he gains from these images immediately, as The Dark begins trying to use his emotions to capture him. Although The Lady and Merriman try to stop him, they know that Will must decide on his own. Will almost fails and opens the door to his mother's voice. The Dark has made Will forget the presence of evil that he has been feeling. Will's fall and burn by the ice-cold symbol on his belt reminds him of the evil he has been sensing for two days.

In the circle, Will shows his immaturity, when he thinks they have succeeded against The Dark completely. He breaks the circle too soon. The Lady is strong enough to complete the current battle against The Dark, but it comes at a great cost. She must retreat a while, and may not be available if the other Old Ones need her. Will feels terribly guilty that he has caused such a catastrophe, but Merriman reminds him that it was The Dark, and that none of them but The Lady could have opened the doors alone. Merriman suggests that Will not worry, but not to do anything rash to draw trouble. He promises they will meet again soon.



Part One: The Finding; The Walker on the Old Way

Part One: The Finding; The Walker on the Old Way Summary

Will returns on the bus from Christmas shopping for his family. He decides to take the shortcut home through Tramps' Alley, lured by the undisturbed snow. He mischievously decides to light a branch on the path with his newly discovered power. The branch burns, but it does not go out. Will begins to fear this unusual fire he has started, when The Walker grabs him from behind. The Walker does not trust Will. In their struggle, Will commands The Walker to give him the second sign. The Walker is tired from carrying the burden, but he does not want to give it to the wrong person. Will insists that The Walker give him the sign or risk disobeying the Old Ones and carrying the sign forever. With that assertiveness, The Walker obeys like a child and hands Will a sign identical to the first, this time made of bronze. The fire in the branch flares and then goes out.

Maggie Barnes arrives and Will slips the sign into his pocket. While The Walker tries to slip away, Maggie catches The Walker out of time. Maggie tells Will that The Walker stole an ornament from her the other day. She accuses him of putting it into Will's pocket. She freezes Will's position as well, immune to his mental attempts to frighten her away, and takes the sign from Will's pocket. She puts the bronze sign on Will's belt next to the iron sign. Merriman comes, just as he said he would when Will had gotten the second sign. Merriman uses his power to remove Maggie from the road. He tells her that The Dark cannot have the signs. He calls her by her true name and she crawls away in pain. Merriman explains to Will that calling an agent of the Dark by his true name disarms him. He also says that the old ways, the paths of the Old Ones, provide some protection against the Dark as well. He also reminds Will that The Walker has been waiting for Will for a very long time. Merriman tells Will that both the Dark and the Light can catch others out of time, as suits their purpose or amusement. Merriman releases The Walker and sends him into another time to rest before his next quest. The he disappears just as Max comes to meet Will off the bus.

Part One: The Finding; The Walker on the Old Way Analysis

Things have calmed down a bit for Will. He thought little of the Dark during his birthday celebration and the animals are not acting strangely around him anymore. He is worried about not getting a birthday present from Stephen, who always sends a present on time. When Will walks down Tramps' Alley, he thinks about his gifts for his family, and soon regrets taking that path, as his ankles are sore from making a path in the snow. He



wants to play with his power, but he does not have enough control of it yet, and he cannot get the fire he lights to go out.

The Walker takes advantage of finding Will alone. He tells Will more about his power, warning that the fire will draw The Dark to them. Will senses that The Walker is reluctant to give up the sign, not wanting to make a mistake that could cost him dearly. His assertiveness is just what The Walker needs to understand that Will really is the right person. Then Will struggles with his first battle against The Dark, which he easily would have lost without Merriman's help. Merriman arrives just at the moment he promised, "when his circle is on your belt beside the first..." (p. 67). Merriman teaches Will more about his power and his danger, and Will takes the danger that he faces a little more seriously after his encounter with Maggie.



Part Two: The Learning; Christmas Eve and The Book of Gramarye

Part Two: The Learning; Christmas Eve and The Book of Gramarye Summary

On Christmas Eve, the Stanton family is busy preparing for their Christmas celebration. As Will and some of his brothers and father go to Dawson's farm, Will realizes that the farmer, Old George Dawson, is one of the Old Ones. He wants to warn him about Maggie and brings it up by teasing Max. Farmer Dawson lets him know that all is well when he reports that Maggie has had to leave. In addition to the tree and Yule log, George presses the Stantons into taking a huge bunch of holly. He whispers to Will that pinning holly over the doors and windows is good protection against the Dark. Back at home, Will helps with decorating the tree, and finds a long missing box of ornaments made by Frank Dawson. Each member of the family has an ornament of the first initial of his or her name. Will, as the youngest, actually has a symbol instead of an ornament, but his is missing. Will slips away from the celebrations later and puts holly over the windows and doors and fireplace.

Most of the Stanton children go out for caroling in the village, ending at Miss Greythorne's manor. Will expects the usual butler to open the door, and is surprised when Merriman opens the door. As the Stantons are signing their carols, Will notices that he is the only one singing, and his family and Miss Greythorne's servants are caught out of time. He and Merriman finish singing "Good King Wenceslas" together and walk down the hall, past all the other motionless people. The great doors appear and Merriman opens the door. Will hears the music signaling his change into another time and finds himself in the time of a different Christmas.

In "The Book of Gramarye," Will finds himself at a Christmas party in the late-1800s. A younger version of Miss Greythorne takes Will to the fireplace. Hawkin, Merriman's servant from his own time, gives Merriman and Will each a glass of Metheglyn, a drink of the Old Ones. Miss Greythorne opens a secret panel and retrieves the third sign, explaining that they must renew it every hundred years. It is the Sign of Wood, which they call the Sign of Learning. She takes out the fragile wood sign and Merriman casts it into the fire. Miss Greythorne pours the rest of the Metheglyn on the fire. When the fire goes out, she reaches in for a lump of wood. She peels away the outer part until it is a perfect replica, in wood, of the other two signs. She tells Will that she will give him the sign after he has finished his own learning, in his own time. Will tries to memorize how she opens the secret compartment where the sign waits.

As the music of the party swells, Hawkin takes Will to a small room, which is nearly empty. Hawkin answers Will's question about the mystery of being in another time and reveals that he is not one of the Old Ones, but Merriman's trusted friend from his own time, brought here for one special job. Will looks at the old books in the bookcase as



Merriman explains what methods the Dark sometimes uses. Merriman puts one hand on Hawkin, as he reaches into the clock without touching the pendulum and brings out a small book. Merriman explains that this book will teach Will what he needs to learn, and then it will be destroyed to protect it from the Dark. Merriman tells Will about the Old Speech, which Will can speak and understand, though he thinks it is English. Merriman leaves, supporting Hawkin, who looks ill from the effort of helping retrieve the book. Will must read the entire book, and when he closes it, Merriman will return.

Part Two: The Learning; Christmas Eve and The Book of Gramarye Analysis

The "Christmas Eve" chapter provides a deeper insight into the Stanton family. Will realizes that he needs to warn Farmer Dawson about Maggie Barnes, but as he works in bringing her up by teasing Max, George Dawson eases his mind by letting him know that she left. Old George also sneaks a little additional advice to Will about how the holly will protect him against the Dark, placing some in his coat. Will puts more over the windows in his room, as well as over the front and back doors, other windows, until Gwen complains. He puts the rest of the holly over the fireplace, the one opening he would not have remembered without her help.

Mrs. Stanton is very happy when Will finds the box of letters. Frank Dawson has made an initial for each member of the family to use as a Christmas tree decoration. There is one for everyone, including the Staton's first child, Tom, who died after three days, except Will. Mr. Stanton says that Frank must have grown tired of making initials by the time Will comes along, but Will knows that there is another reason he made a symbol instead of an initial. Will guesses that Frank Dawson did not use his initial, to avoid any agent of the Dark finding the ornament and using it against Will. Also, the symbol Frank made for Will sounds just like the first two signs he now carries on his belt. However, the ornament is missing.

The caroling in the village provides more information about the setting of the story. Will is momentarily surprised that Merriman is now Miss Greythorne's butler. The words of the carol that Merriman sings with Will speak to Will, as if they are describing exactly what is going on in Will's life. Once Merriman catches everyone else out of time, the great doors appear once again. The faint music again signals Will's approach to another time.

In "The Book of Gramarye," Will finds himself at a party, which turns out to involve the renewing of the Sign of Wood, done every hundred years. Hawkin, a trusted human who is allowed the privilege of going to another time, troubles Will. Will already understands that he can sense who is associated with the Old Ones, and who is associated with the Dark, but he cannot get a feeling for Hawkin. He thinks it is because Hawkin is an ordinary human. Hawkin is in this scene to help with retrieving the book, which Will needs to finish his learning. Hawkin is apprehensive about the task, and even has a moment in which he starts to object, but Merriman pays no attention. The simple

effort of Merriman placing his hand on Hawkin while Merriman retrieves the book seems to exhaust Hawkin and make him ill.



Part Two: The Learning; Betrayal

Part Two: The Learning; Betrayal Summary

Will absorbs the lessons of the Book of Gramarye. Merriman comes back and returns the book to the clock, this time taking no care not to touch it. With the power but not the destruction of an explosion, the clock and the book simply disappear. Will and Merriman return to the crowd in the other room. Will sees Maggie Barnes and The Rider and knows something is wrong. Merriman knows Hawkin will turn against him. Will listens to Maggie talking to Hawkin. She talks to Hawkin about the risk he took with the book. She promises that he can live like an Old One if he chooses to take the Dark and the Rider as his master. Merriman realizes how the Dark will use Hawkin against them.

Singing again, Will and Merriman return to their own time. Miss Greythorne offers everyone Christmas punch, and invites Paul to see the old recorders and flutes in her collection. Merriman and Will accompany him. Will finds himself in the same room as the ceremony for renewing the sign, though it looks different. Merriman tells him telepathically to get the third sign. Will manages to find the compartment while Paul plays the flutes. Will puts the third sign into his pocket. When the Rider and Maggie appear in the room, Will throws an invisible wall of resistance around he and Paul and Merriman, and shouts Merriman's name. Maggie and the Rider disappear, and Merriman helps Will cover for his yell by acting like Will stumbled and hurt his elbow. Merriman tells Will mentally that they can discuss the Rider and Maggie's presence later. Will walks back home with his brothers and sisters. As they enjoy the last bit of Christmas Eve, Mary notices the signs on Will's belt. Will tells her he made them in school, and manages to brush it off. Will goes to James' room to sleep for Christmas Eve, and threads the third sign onto his belt while James is not looking.

Part Two: The Learning; Betrayal Analysis

Will's time with the book feels like both a single moment and one hundred years. He learns the story of the Old Ones and the danger of the Dark always looming. He learns all about his powers, but the knowledge weighs him down, and makes him feel one hundred years old. Merriman explains the method of protecting the book and how it allows them to destroy it when it is no longer needed, now that Will knows everything in it.

Will and Merriman understand how Hawkin will betray them as they watch and listen to Maggie talking to him. Merriman realizes his mistake. He expects Hawkin to risk death, with no real reward. Although Hawkin expects no one from this time to know anything about him, Maggie seems to know everything, including the Old Speech, which Hawkin is forbidden to use to anyone but Merriman and Will. She makes promises that appeal to Hawkin's envy, but Merriman knows that Hawkin's betrayal comes at a great cost, both to he and Will and to Hawkin himself.



Will recognizes the tone of the flute Paul plays as the strange music that signals his entrance into another time. Will makes mistakes, with his new power. He causes alarm when Maggie and the Rider appear, although they disappear before anyone but Will and Merriman see them. Paul wishes for a flute like the one in the collection. Will responds like a grown-up. He talks about the stars in a way he would not have known before his lesson with the book, and he lets his family see the signs on his belt. He feels the weight of his new knowledge and power, but he also feels the wonder. He is excited about his quest, as he now has three of the six signs.



Part Two: The Learning; Christmas Day

Part Two: The Learning; Christmas Day Summary

Will opens his present from Stephen first and finds a strange carnival head with a story that an Old One told Stephen to send it. Will refrains from putting it on, knowing it is not the right time. A Mr. Mitothin arrives with a delivery from Mr. Stanton's jewelry store. Will sees that Mr. Mitothin is the Rider. He covers the carnival head and freezes his family and yell at the Rider. The Rider makes threats about the Dark rising and returns the rest of the family to normal. Will keeps the carnival head secret in his mind while Mr. Mitothin looks at the tree and the ornaments with the family. When Mr. Mitothin leaves, Will realizes his letter from Stephen is missing.

Will walks to church with his family. During the service, Will notices something wrong, later realizing that the Dark is gathering outside. After the service, everyone leaves except Paul and the rector, Mr. Beaumont, as well as Will and the other Old Ones, Frank Dawson, Old George, John and John's wife. Mr. Beaumont and Paul suddenly hear the noise of the Dark. Mr. Beaumont attempts to confront the evil he senses, but he has no power against it. Will closes the minds of Paul and Mr. Beaumont, who become as peaceful and silent as vegetables. As the Old Ones stand in the doorway of the church, the Dark attacks, sending hundreds of rooks, as well as invisible weapons, seeking to destroy the Old Ones. However, the Old Ones can do nothing more than hold the Dark at bay, without extra help such as the Lady provided before. Will lets go of the protection of the circle and removes his belt. He weaves a stray rook feather into the sign of Bronze. When he holds up the signs, the attack is suddenly over and all is silent. The signs start glowing, leading Will to the fourth sign, the Sign of Stone. Will releases Mr. Beaumont and Paul from their protection, and after a short, but deep discussion, Will makes the two forget the whole scene.

Outside the church, a rook leads Will to the Walker, who is unconscious in the snow. Against Will's better judgment, they take the Walker to the Stanton home until the doctor can come. However, the doctor is out delivering a baby. The snow and weather cause problems all over the country, and Will knows the Dark is behind it. That night, Merriman comes and takes Will to the Hunting of the Wren ceremony. The little bird on the bier becomes the Lady, and Will and Merriman mourn her passing. The boys in the procession warn Will, and tell him the rest of the prophecy about the signs of power. Will is back in his bed, not sure if the scene is a dream or not.

Part Two: The Learning; Christmas Day Analysis

Will understands about the carnival head Stephen sent for a present, and tries to explain it to his family without revealing his new self as an Old One. When Will sees that Mr. Mitothin is the Rider, he realizes with horror that he has now been invited into the house, past the protections Will has put into place. He knows that the Rider must not



see or know about the carnival head. Once he catches his family out of time, he yells at the Rider for coming there on Christmas. Will realizes that the Rider is afraid of his masters, but the Rider responds with threats that the Dark is rising. The Rider is pleasant to the family, but Will is cold and rude to him, anxious for him to leave. The Rider is interested in the carved ornaments, but leaves without further incident, although Will cannot later find his letter from Stephen. He wonders what the true purpose of the Rider's visit is.

Will knows that the heavy snow is from the Dark, and fears that it prefaces something worse. In church, he keeps sensing that something is wrong, but the signs on his belt give him no information. The feeling gets worse as everyone leaves, but Will is comforted by the presence of the other Old Ones, waiting to help him in the battle. Paul and Mr. Beaumont get caught in the battle, and Will is surprised that he is the only one with the power to protect their minds. Will also realizes that he is the only one who can overcome his fear. With this realization, he knows that the signs he carries, though only half the circle, are the key to driving away the Dark. He leaves the protection of the circle of Old Ones, momentarily unsure of himself, and alone sends the Dark away with the power of the three signs. As soon as the Dark is gone, the signs glow, leading Will to find the Sign of Stone.

Will's discussion with the rector is unsettling. Will speaks like a wise old soul, rather than an eleven-year-old boy, troubling both the rector and Paul. Unsure how else to handle his two worlds coming so close together, Will uses his power to make them forget. Things are barely back to normal when a rook leads Will to the Walker, in danger of freezing to death in the snow. Will fears bringing the Walker home, because he worries that will lead the Dark there. He wonders why the Walker is there, unable to use his powers to learn anything about the man.

When Merriman comes in the night for the ceremony, he reminds Will that the Dark's power is at its height. The agents of the Dark hope to break the Circle of light forever. The Hunting of the Wren ceremony is a strange dream-like scene. The bird the boys carry on the stretcher becomes the Lady, signaling that she has not survived her fight against the Dark. The boys tell Will and Merriman that the Lady will return, however. Another boy tells Will the rest of the prophecy concerning the signs. Most of all the boys tell Will to beware.



Part Three: The Testing; The Coming of the Cold and The Hawk in the Dark

Part Three: The Testing; The Coming of the Cold and The Hawk in the Dark Summary

The intense cold and excessive snow are making the Stantons really afraid. Will and Mary bring the Walker some breakfast. The Walker seems to not remember anything about who he is, but he still fears the signs Will carries on his belt. Mr. Stanton, Robin, and Will shovel a way out and walk to the village for food. Even the village store is low on supplies, as no one can deliver to the village in the weather. While the villagers share their fear about the awful storm, Merriman comes into the store and invites everyone to come stay at Miss Greythorne's Manor. Merriman tells Will privately to get the Walker to the Manor, despite Mr. Stanton's pride. Will convinces the Walker they must go to the Manor, and the Walker has a fit that convinces Mr. Stanton.

Mr. Stanton, Paul, Robin, and Will transport the Walker to the Manor and put him into the doctor's care. Will and Merriman convince Mr. Stanton to not leave right away. While Mr. Stanton talks with Miss Greythorne, Merriman instructs Will to look into the fire while he traces the shape of each of the signs on his belt with his finger. When he looks up again, he is in the great stone hall with the tapestries. The Lady is there, alive again. Will apologizes for his mistake when he broke the circle with her before. She tells Will vaguely what he must do. As Will looks at the candles to figure out what to do, he finds himself back at Miss Greythorne's Manor. Will, his father and the doctor talk about how Will is the seventh son of a seventh son. The doctor reports that the Walker seems fine, except for old and strange. Will and the Walker argue privately about the Rider.

Miss Greythorne has Will sing to start a bit of entertainment for the crowd she shelters in her home. After Will sings, Paul plays the old Manor flute. Will hears wind and a knock at the door, that no one else seems to hear. He answers and finds the Rider. Crying out, Will shields himself with his arm, where the first sign has burned him and left a scar. The sign sends the Rider away and the door closes. However, before he can be grateful, Will realizes that it is a trick. Now the Walker is strengthened and summoning various names of agents of the Dark. Will's consciousness changes again to the great stone hall, and the Walker comes with him this time. The other Old Ones come as well. The Old Ones stand around Will while the Walker continues his summons. As Merriman talks to the Walker, Will realizes it is Hawkin.

In The Hawk in the Dark, Merriman tries to convince Hawkin to come back to the Light. Hawkin refuses. The Dark he calls burns as nine cold, blue lights around the hall. Merriman commands the Dark to leave, but the Rider responds that Hawkin is there to let the Dark in. The Dark begins the spells of deep cold, as Will returns to his own time and Miss Greythorne's Manor, which grows colder and colder. The villagers fight the cold, but nothing seems to work. There is even snow in the chimney, preventing the fire



in the fireplace from warming the room. Hawkin threatens Will, saying that he plans to take the signs when Will has frozen to death. Will yells as Hawkin grabs his belt. Dr. Armstrong decides to sedate the violent old man. The Old Ones surround Hawkin as he falls asleep. With Hawkin asleep, the Dark loses its hold on the house and the cold lessens. Merriman tells the Old Ones telepathically to collect the cold, blue candles of the Dark before they fade. As Will grabs the last candle, they go to the great stone hall again. They place the candles in the empty candle holders in the iron ring of candles, completing the sign. The candle flames grow and change, and in a surge of power, all that remains is the Sign of Fire. With the fifth sign on his belt, Will returns to his own time, where it begins to rain outside Miss Greythorne's Manor. The Stantons have no time to be relieved that the cold is breaking, as Max arrives, telling them that Mrs. Stanton has had an accident.

Part Three: The Testing; The Coming of the Cold and The Hawk in the Dark Analysis

Everyone is becoming anxious about the weather, except the Walker, who has slept the previous day. His strange mutterings make the Stantons nervous. Will thinks he has lost his memory, until the Walker reacts strongly to the nearness of the signs. Mr. Stanton, Robin and Will brave the cold and snow to walk to get supplies, and discover the villagers at the store just as nervous about the weather. Will feels better immediately when Merriman arrives at the store. Merriman invites everyone to the Manor, which is receiving a food and fuel drop by air. Merriman uses the emergency situation to get Will to bring the Walker to the Manor, for the safety of both of them against the Dark. Merriman predicts Mr. Stanton's pride at accepting the offer, and prepares Will to work around it. Will uses the signs to press the Walker, who has a fit that convinces the Stantons he should get to a doctor. However, Will sees a moment of triumph in the Walker's eyes, foreshadowing the trick that he plays on Will.

The Lady tells Will to "Break the power of the cold. Stop the snow and cold and frost. Release this country from the hold of the Dark. All with the next of the circle, the Sign of Fire" (176). However, she does not tell him anything about when, where, or how he should find the next sign. He knows he must find the candles to finish the iron ring of the candle-holder that matches the signs, but he does not know where to find them. Will feels desperate. Back at the Manor, when Will sings, he hopes to show the Walker back to the Light.

When the Rider arrives, Will opening the door strengthens the Walker. He begins summoning the Dark, expecting the last battle between the Old Ones and the Dark. The Walker, Will, and the Old Ones assembled at the Manor return to the great stone hall, where the Old Ones stand in a square around Will to protect him. The Dark assaults them again. Merriman simply stands up from his big carved chair by the hearth and invites Hawkin back into the Light.

In *The Hawk in the Dark*, Hawkin expresses his rage, including the reason for his initial betrayal, and his feelings for his doom of carrying the sign of Bronze through six



centuries. Merriman gives him a chance to go back to his own time, as he once was, but Hawkin refuses and calls the Dark. Once the Dark gains access to the Manor, there are nine eerie candle-like flames glowing blue around the room, making it colder and colder. Merriman knows that their hope lies in the fact that Hawkin is only a man. When Hawkin threatens Will, Dr. Armstrong sees it is necessary to sedate the old tramp, despite the low pulse rate. When Hawkin is unconscious, the Dark no longer has access to the Manor, and the nine flames begin to fade. The Old Ones quickly gather the candles of the Dark, and use them to complete the iron ring of candles in the great stone hall. The Lady explains to Will how, in using the candles of winter that the Dark intended for destruction, the candles become stronger, unleashing the power needed to create the Sign of Fire. The Dark's power over the Manor quickly dissipates with the rain that arrives with the Sign of Fire. However, the Dark uses its power in a different way, somehow causing Mrs. Stanton to fall down the stairs.



Part Three: The Testing; The King of Fire and Water

Part Three: The Testing; The King of Fire and Water Summary

When Will returns home, James tells him that Mary has disappeared. Paul and Will go to look for her. Paul asks Will what is going on, but Will manages to avoid telling the whole truth. Paul accepts that he will not hear the whole truth, but they both realize that Mary has been kidnapped. The rooks separate Paul and Will. Will turns his belt of Signs into a sort of torch, until the water prevents its magic. The rain continues, and unable to soak into the frozen ground, it starts to flood.

Old George finds Will and tells him they must raise the Hunt. He gives Will a ride on his horse until they reach the road. Old George leaves to continue gathering the Hunt. As Will struggles to see in the dark, he sees his carnival head float past, reluctantly allowing it to go. The Old One in him knows that in the water, it is safe from magic. The white mare arrives and carries Will first to the river, and continues to a small island in the middle of the river. He explores the island, and then realizes the Dark has distorted his time when Hawkin appears next to him. Hawkin tries to exchange the Signs for Mary. Even though Will sees that they have Mary, he refuses. The Rider arrives, and shows the power he has over Mary. He shows the ornament he has stolen, actually Mary's and not Will's, woven with a strand of her hair. Will tells the Rider that he has no power over Will and still refuses to exchange the Signs for Mary. The black horse jumps over the river, and bucks Mary from his back. However, she lands safely on the snow. Before the Rider can reach her again, Merriman rushes over on the white mare and carries her away to safety.

The island breaks open, and out comes a long strange ship. The ship carries a king, Will can tell from the objects surrounding him. The king carries the Sign of Water in his dead hands. Will climbs into the ship. He resists taking anything from the king at first, but Merriman assures him that the Sign is for him and now is the time to collect it. When Will gets it, Merriman tells him the Dark's power over Mary is finished. Will scrambles off the ship, as the waters rise and start to carry it down the river. Merriman explains that the king is from the Dark Ages and one of the few who keeps the Light alive during those dark times. His burial is one of three great ship burials on the Thames. The Dark, in fury about Will having all six Signs, strikes the ship, setting it on fire. Merriman comments that it is a proper and respectful ending for the king.



Part Three: The Testing; The King of Fire and Water Analysis

Paul knows that something strange is going on with Will. Will makes him believe that the signs are valuable antiques that Mr. Dawson gave Will for his birthday. Even though it is not a very good story, he suggests that the people after him are antique chasers, and that is their motive for kidnapping Mary. Will is afraid at first when he and Paul are separated, but he realizes that this is his quest as an Old One, and that Paul will be okay. He also senses that the rain signifying that the deep cold is broken is actually worse, as the ground is too frozen and the rain will cause terrible flooding.

Old George says that Will must take the white horse to the Hunter. Will does not quite understand, but he allows himself to follow the senses of the Old One in him. Old George reminds him that he will be able to see in the dark if he counts to one hundred first and that moving water resists magic. Will's extra sense tells him that he will meet a great test on the island in the river. Then Hawkin is there, demanding the Signs in exchange for Mary. Will does not allow himself to be influenced by Hawkin's words. He stands firm. When the Rider comes, Will's test becomes harder. He sees the enchantment that holds Mary, risking that she might do something like jump into the swollen river. However, Will still stands firm in his resistance. His luck is that Mary falls onto the snow, instead of in the water, and Merriman comes to rescue her immediately.

The king's burial ship only shows on this night. Will is afraid to take the Sign from the king. However, Merriman reassures him and tells Will a little of the brave king's past. The Dark acts in vengeance in striking the ship, but Merriman says that it is actually the most fitting ending for the Viking king.



Part Three: The Testing; The Hunt Rides and The Joining of the Signs

Part Three: The Testing; The Hunt Rides and The Joining of the Signs Summary

Merriman carries Will away on the white mare to join the signs before the Dark can take Will. The Black Rider and the Lords of the Dark pursue them to the Great Park outside Windsor Castle. Will realizes that the hunt Old George goes to gather is the same as the hunt from the legend of Herne's Oak. He sees a shadow standing next to the oak tree and sends the white mare to him as he and Merriman dismount. Old George arrives and tells Will that Mary is now safe at home, already forgetting her incident with the Black Rider. He gives Will the carnival mask, which he has rescued from the flooding. Will nervously takes it to the Hunter. When the Hunter places the head on his shoulders, it becomes a real part of him. The Hunter asks to see the six Signs. The Hunter chants the words of the prophecy, adding a third verse that Will has not heard before. The Hunter raises the call for the hunt, summoning hundreds of ghostly dogs. As the dogs begin their hunt, Will feels the Dark coming for him. However, Herne and the Hounds of Doom vanquish the Dark, chasing their quarry to the ends of the Earth. Merriman says that since they have the six Signs, the Light will be that much stronger the next chance the Dark has to rise against them. Merriman walks over to where the Rider has dropped Hawkin on the ground. Hawkin's back is broken. Hawkin and Merriman talk briefly before Hawkin dies.

In The Joining of the Signs, Will, Merriman, Old George go through the doors to the time of the smithy, the same as Will's visit the morning of his birthday. Merriman explains that they are in a bubble of two times at once, because the joining of the signs happens in Will's time, but must be done by John Smith in that smithy, which is destroyed hundreds of years before Will's time. As John prepares to join the signs, hundreds of Old Ones arrive from all over the world. A procession of boys for a second Hunting of the Wren ceremony arrives. The boys carry their bier, carrying the Lady, and set it down on the ground in the smithy. The Lady wakes, and John joins the signs on his anvil of oak and iron. When John hands Will the connected chain of Signs, Will feels their power. The Lady explains that the Signs are for the future, the second of four Things of Power to protect them against the Dark. The Lady places the chain around Will's neck.

As she wishes him farewell for the time being, the ancient time and all of the audience disappear, and Will and Merriman are left in an empty Huntercombe Lane, at the back of the Manor. Merriman confirms that Miss Greythorne is one of the Old Ones for Will, while carrying two presents from her. Merriman and Will walk back to Will's house, noticing that the rooks are gone. Merriman explains that the Hunt drove all loose animals away in the night. Will returns home to find things returning to normal, with Mary safe. Paul opens his present from Miss Greythorne to find the old flute. Will's



package contains a small hunting horn. Mary comments on the geese she heard the previous night, and she and Will find the carnival mask caught in a tree. Merriman leaves, and Will watches as he disappears through the great doors, while Paul plays "Greensleeves" on the old flute.

Part Three: The Testing; The Hunt Rides and The Joining of the Signs Analysis

Will is astonished to find himself in the midst of an ancient legend regarding Herne the Hunter, who rides on the eve of Twelfth Night. Herne is an intimidating figure, but Will realizes that he is on the side of the light. When the Dark comes for Will, he is powerless against it, but the Hunt drives the Dark away.

Hawkin is amazed that the Black Rider discarded him, and feels grief in the understanding that Merriman knew the Rider would treat Hawkin that way. Hawkin longs for death, and Merriman tells him that Hawkin has been free since he finished his job for the Light as payment for his betrayal, but because Hawkin chooses a second betrayal, he still could not return to his time. Merriman stresses that Hawkin always has a choice. Hawkin chooses to rest, which comes with his death.

In *The Joining of the Signs*, Will experiences another strange merging of two time periods at once. Will struggles with the desire to return to his own time and just be a small boy again. However, he also feels a connection with the other Old Ones, knowing that they, too, are his family. The repetition of the Hunting of the Wren for Twelfth Night happens in some years, Merriman explains. This ceremony brings the Lady back to life, her strength returning with the collection of the Six Signs. The power from the signs, once joined, is quite noticeable to Will, but he is confused. He thinks that the Dark is vanquished, so they would not need the Signs. However, the Lady reminds him that the Dark will have another chance. The Signs will give them that much more power the next time around. Will is sad when the ceremony is over and the Lady and all of the other Old Ones disappear. However, the boy in him is quite happy to be reunited with his family and dogs, finding everyone safe. Mary is home, unaware of what really happened, and Mrs. Stanton only sprained her leg instead of breaking it. Will finds himself better able to reconcile the difference between his Old One self and his family self as he sees the family recover from the flooding. As Paul plays the music on the old Manor flute, Will recognizes it as the strange music that always accompanies a change in the lives of the Old Ones. The music continues in his head as he watches Merriman disappear behind the Doors.



Characters

Will Stanton

Will Stanton is the youngest of a large family, the seventh son of a seventh son, he later learns. On the day before his eleventh birthday, strange things begin happening. All of the animals shy from him, the rooks in the wood act strangely, and every time he goes near a radio, it goes out of tune, as if in between stations. Farmer Dawson gives him a strange early birthday present, with advice to keep it close for the difficult times that are coming. Will does have a difficult night, with a nameless fear consuming him. He wakes on his birthday in another time, and learns about his self as an Old One. He resists his lessons at first, not wanting to believe the truth about his powers. Instead of putting out the candle flame, as Merriman instructs, Will puts out the fire in the hearth. The demonstration convinces him of his true identity, and his resistance melts. However, he is still mostly untrained, young, and impulsive. When the first battle against the Dark appears over, Will breaks the circle of Old Ones too soon, causing the Lady to spend her powers driving the Dark away to protect Will. The Dark wants Will before he can complete his quest. Will is curious, and really still a young boy. He makes a mistake by using his power out in the open, which draws Maggie Barnes to him to try to take the second Sign from him.

Will seeks the signs with courage and valor, although he makes mistakes along the way, such as when he calls out to Merriman after the Rider and Maggie appear at the Manor. The Old One in him has an infinite wisdom and understanding of what he needs to do. However, some of his duties seem vague until the actual time arrives. Will carries anger towards the Dark, which he unleashes on Hawkin when Hawkin is in the Manor, and again when Hawkin tries to trade the Signs for Mary. In the end, Will wants to remain a little boy, which he can never really do again. Will struggles with reconciling his life as an Old One and his family life, but he quickly learns that his mortal family easily forgets encounters with the Old Ones and the Dark.

Merriman Lyon

Merriman Lyon is an Old One who is Will's helper and protector, and always available when Will needs him. They meet on Will's birthday in the great stone hall. Merriman is a tall man with deep set eyes, a hawk-like nose, and white wiry hair. Merriman instructs Will in his powers as an Old One. Merriman He is usually patient with Will, explaining all that he needs to know. On one occasion, he does show some impatience. Will makes a mistake by using his power out in the open to light a fallen branch. When Will cannot control the fire, it becomes a beacon to draw the agents of Dark to him, and Maggie Barnes soon arrives.

Merriman sends Maggie away, noting that they are on an Old Way and speaking her true name. Will tells Merriman that the fire also brings the Walker to him, but Merriman



responds that the Walker has been waiting for Will for centuries and just looking for the right moment. Merriman's place in Will's time is as a temporary butler, while Miss Greythorne's butler goes on holiday. This places him in the Manor for many key scenes, first when he and Will go to see where the third sign is hidden and obtain the gift of Gramayre. He encourages Will to bring the Walker to the Manor during the storm, where they eventually obtain the fifth Sign. Merriman rescues Mary when the Rider causes her to fall from the black horse. Merriman explains everything regarding the Lady and the Hunting of the Wren ceremonies. Merriman is Will's main guide, as he navigates his new role as an Old One.

Merriman feels like a father to Hawkin. Hawkin is a foster son in Merriman's own time, and becomes Merriman's liege man. To protect the Book of Gramayre from the Dark, Merriman creates a spell that includes Hawkin. It means that Merriman must bring Hawkin out of his own time when the book is needed. It also means that Merriman must risk Hawkin's life, because as a mortal, Hawkin could not survive any mistakes when retrieving the book. Although Hawkin is worthy of the trust, Merriman does not realize how Hawkin will respond to the risk. Merriman realizes his mistake too late, after Hawkin has already betrayed them to the Dark. Merriman realizes exactly what Hawkin will do. Though he encourages Hawkin to return to the Light and go back to his own time, he also punishes Hawkin with the betrayal by making him the bearer of the second Sign. Therefore, his request to bring Hawkin back to the side of the Light only has an effect when Hawkin is dying.

The Walker/Hawkin

Hawkin is Merriman's foster son and liege man from six centuries before. Merriman trusts him completely, and makes him an integral part of the process of retrieving the Book of Gramayre. However, the task is very dangerous for Hawkin, because of the spells in place to protect the book from the Dark. When Hawkin realizes that Merriman risks his life to obtain the Book for Will, he becomes resentful. He listens to the promises of Maggie and the Rider concerning his reward for helping the Dark. He allows Maggie and the Rider into the Manor, completing his first betrayal. Merriman punishes him by making him carry the second Sign through six centuries, his life unnaturally lengthened to complete his quest. He becomes simply The Walker, a tattered old tramp, who is fearful of both Old Ones and the Dark.

On the eve of Will's birthday, the rooks scare the Walker away. The Walker eventually finds Will alone to deliver the Sign. However, he does not want to give it to the wrong person. He has been waiting a very long time for Will to be born, and he does not hand over the sign right away. The Old One in Will commands the Walker to hand over the Sign, and the Walker must obey.

On Christmas Day, the Stantons find the Walker unconscious in the snow, and take him home to allow him to recover and have shelter from the cruel winter storm. They notice his strange language, but only Will recognizes the Old Speech, although it is just semi-conscious mumbling. When the Walker wakes, he acts as if he does not remember



anything, but the Signs strike fear in his heart. Merriman gets Will to bring the Walker to the Manor during the storm for protection. There, Will realizes that the Walker is Hawkin. Though Merriman gives Hawkin another chance to return to the Light and his former life, the Walker resists. He calls the names of the Dark at the Manor, completing his second betrayal. However, the doctor at the Manor sees his agitated state and finally decides to sedate him, severing the link the Dark has to the Manor. The Dark uses Hawkin to bargain with Will to trade the Signs for Mary. Hawkin is jaded by his resentment and boasts of the Dark's power. When his attempts with Will fail, Hawkin becomes angry and calls his master, the Black Rider.

Later, the Black Rider drops Hawkin in a fatal injury, discarding him as a useless prop. Hawkin and Merriman are reconciled before Hawkin dies. Old George returns Hawkin to his own time, and Will knows that if he were to look, he might find a six-hundred year old grave for Hawkin.

The Black Rider/Mr. Mitothin

The Black Rider is the chief Lord of the Dark. He is a tall man with red hair. He wears a dark cloak and rides a black horse. He speaks with an accent, which Will later learns is his limited ability to speak the Old Speech. The Black Rider chases Will, but the white mare helps Will escape. In disguise as Mr. Mitothin, Roger Stanton invites him to the Stanton home, where the Black Rider hopes to find a trinket to gain power over Will. He takes an ornament that is actually Mary's instead, as well as a strand of Mary's hair that he casually and politely removes from her sleeve.

When the Black Rider comes to the Manor, one look at the burn on Will's arm from the first Sign sends him away. However, he had only needed a moment to remind Hawkin of his duty. The Black Rider uses the stolen ornament and hair to cast a spell over Mary, taking her in the midst of the post-storm flooding. He wants to use Mary as hostage to get Will to hand over the Signs. When that plan does not work, he drops Mary, but she lands safely in the snow. Herne's Hunt chases the Rider and the Dark to the ends of the Earth, where it will take time before the next battle between the Light and the Dark.

The Lady

The Lady is one of the Old Ones who first greets Will with Merriman on his birthday. She is very old and frail, though upright and alert. She wears a huge marble-like ring. She suggests Will simply call her the Lady because she has had so many names in her time. She oversees Will's initiation as he begins learning about who he really is and his powers from Merriman. As the Dark tests Will and seeks to take him, the Lady's strong powers are all that can send it away. However, it comes at a great cost, leaving her like an empty shell. Merriman explains that she is gone to recover herself. Merriman regrets that the Lady will not be available to help them through the time of the Dark's greatest power, through Twelfth Night.



In the first Hunting of the Wren ceremony, the wren on the bier changes into the Lady's body, and Will believes that she is dead. However, one of the boys in the ceremony's procession says that she will return. She does return, although seeming more like a ghost in a faint outline, telling Will that he must break the cold power of the Dark by obtaining the Sign of Fire. Will apologizes for the impulsiveness that strained her, and she assures him that all will be well when they win the last battle of the Signs. The Lady oversees the Old Ones, as they place the candles of the Dark in the candle-sockets of the large mandaloring, creating the Sign of Fire. At the Joining of the Signs, another procession of the Hunting of the Wren arrives with the Lady's body on the bier. However, she wakes and Will helps her to her feet. She oversees the Joining of the Signs and explains to Will that the Old Ones will need the Signs in the next battle against the Dark.

Old George Smith

Old George is an Old One who works at Dawson farm. He presses Will to take plenty of holly with the Christmas tree to pin over the doors and windows to protect against the Dark. Along with the other Old Ones, he helps in the battle against the Dark before Will finds the fourth Sign. In the flooding after the winter storm breaks, Old George rescues Will on the big Pollux horse. Then he goes to raise the Hunt. Old George tells Will that he must take the white horse to the Hunter. When he returns to tell Will that Mary is safe and already forgetting her strange dream of riding with the Black Rider, he hands Will the carnival head, with instructions to give it to the Hunter. Old George goes with Will and Merriman to Hawkin's time, where the joining of the Signs happens. Old George delivers Hawkin's body back to his own time to be laid to rest.

Frank Dawson

Frank Dawson is the farmer down the road from the Stantons and an Old One. He makes intricately carved initials as Christmas tree ornaments for each of the Stanton children. However, Will's ornament is a symbol instead of his initial. Mr. Dawson gives Will the first Sign as an early birthday present, before Will knows about his true identity and his quest. Along with the other Old Ones, he helps in the battle against the Dark before Will finds the fourth Sign.

John Wayland Smith

John Wayland Smith is the son of Old George and an Old One. He is the black smith at the Manor's smithy, which has burned down many centuries ago. He helps protect Will against the Rider in their first meeting. He also introduces Will to the white mare. Along with the other Old Ones, he helps in the battle against the Dark before Will finds the fourth Sign.



Miss Greythorne

Miss Greythorne is an Old One, and owner of the Manor. The Stantons always visit her last when Christmas caroling. Miss Greythorne, other than being hostess at the Manor, is an important part of the ceremony for the renewing of the third sign. At the end of the novel, she gives Will a hunting horn to use sometime in the future, and she gives Paul the old Manor flute.

Maggie Barnes

Maggie Barnes is the dairy maid at Dawson's farm. She has a visible crush on Max Stanton, which the other children tease him about. However, she is also an agent of the Dark. She tries to get the second Sign from Will. When Merriman sends her away, she joins the Rider, showing up at the nineteenth century Christmas party at Miss Greythorne's Manor, and seducing Hawkin to join the Dark. She arrives with the Rider when Will is retrieving the third sign, but he quickly sends her away.

Roger Stanton

Roger Stanton is the father of the large family, who owns a jewelry store in Eton.

Mrs. Stanton

Mrs. Stanton is the mother of the large family, only child and one of a long line of farmers.

Tom Stanton

Tom Stanton is the first Stanton child, who died when he was only three days old.

Stephen Staton

Stephen Stanton is the oldest Stanton son. He has left home some time before to join the navy. He is stationed at Kingston, Jamaica at the Caribbean Station. He gives Will his attic bedroom, knowing how his youngest brother enjoyed it. He sends Will a strange Carnival head for a combined birthday and Christmas present, which he had promised he would never do. However, he was persuaded by someone Will recognizes as an Old One to send it.

Gwen Stanton

Gwen Stanton is the oldest Stanton daughter.



Max Stanton

Max Stanton is the college age Stanton son. Everyone teases him that Maggie Barnes has a crush on him, but he is seeing a girl from his art school.

Barbara Stanton

Barbara Stanton is the middle Stanton daughter, who is sixteen and bossy.

Paul Stanton

Paul Stanton is one of the twins. He is a genius who plays the flute. He fixes the latch on Will's attic bedroom skylight when the Dark tries to get into the room. He also helps Will search for Mary when she is missing. Paul is the one family member who recognizes that something is going on with Will. Will manages to convince Paul that his signs are antiques that are very valuable, hiding their true purpose. Paul seems to realize that Will cannot tell him the whole truth. Paul's flute playing impress Miss Greythorne, who gives him the old Manor flute on a permanent loan.

Robin Stanton

Robin Stanton is one of the twins. He shares a room with his twin, Paul. Will sleeps in the room with Robin on the night before his birthday, when the Dark tries to get into the attic bedroom.

James Stanton

James Stanton is the next-to-youngest Stanton son. At the beginning of the novel, he helps Will with chores. He sings in the choir with Will.

Mary Stanton

Mary Stanton is the youngest daughter in the Stanton family. She is the only one to notice Will's Signs on his belt, but easily believes they are a school shop project. She leaves the house during the winter storm, a victim of a Dark spell by the Rider. However, she stays safe and quickly forgets the supernatural ride with the Rider and its danger.



Objects/Places

First Sign

Farmer Dawson gives Will an iron ornament as an early birthday present. It is a smooth, black, and old, but not rusted circle quartered with a cross. This is the first Sign. It grows cold as a warning that the Dark forces are nearby, and in Will's first test, burns his arm with the cold.

Second Sign

The Walker gives Will the second Sign, with some reluctance. Will must command him to hand it over first. The second Sign is a replica of the first Sign, except the second Sign is made in bronze. The Walker has been carrying it through six centuries.

Third Sign

The third Sign is the Sign of Wood, also called the Sign of Learning. The same symbol as the first two Signs, it is made of Rowan (mountain ash) because of the magical properties of the wood to protect against the Dark. However, not being as strong as oak, it must be renewed every hundred years. Will goes back in time to see the renewing of the Sign ceremony at a Christmas at Miss Greythorne's Manor in the nineteenth century. When he returns to his own time, he knows exactly where to find the Sign. Once he has the Sign, he can complete his learning with the Book of Gramarye.

Fourth Sign

Will is guided to the fourth Sign, the Sign of Stone, after a battle with the Dark in which he has used the first three Signs. After the battle, the three Signs begin glowing. Then the Sign of Stone begins glowing in the church, allowing Will to find it. It is the same symbol in natural flint, which has not been cut into that shape.

Fifth Sign

The fifth Sign is the Sign of Fire. Using the cold candles called up by the Dark, the Old Ones complete the iron candle holder, which is a replica of the symbol of the Signs. Once the candle sockets are all holding their candles, the central candle flame grows into a kind of flower, holding the Sign of Fire inside. The Sign is made of gold and gems, and includes the inscription, "The Light ordered that I should be made." (The Hawk in the Dark, p. 194).



Sixth Sign

Will finds the sixth Sign in the funeral boat of an ancient king, hidden for centuries. Will reluctantly takes the Sign from the king's hands. The Sign of Water is made of glass, and engraved with things from the sea.

The White Mare

Will meets the white mare in his first visit to another time and discovers that he can almost magically mount the tall horse. The white mare carries Will to safety in times of trouble when the Black Rider chases him.

The Book of Gramarye

The Book of Gramarye is the oldest book, containing pertinent information about the Old Ones and their knowledge and powers. The Book is protected against the Dark, which knows only some of the knowledge and powers. Will must "read" this book for his learning. However, when he opens the book it is a much different experience than reading an ordinary book. Time is irrelevant, as he seems to absorb the knowledge in a single moment that lasts hundreds of years. Also, once Will looks at this book, he knows everything in it as an Old One, and the book can be destroyed. The Book of Gramarye is also what leads to Hawkin's betrayal, when he realizes that the spells that protect the book could kill him.

Old Speech

The Old Speech is the language used by the Old Ones, which Will can do as soon as he comes into his power on his birthday. Some of the Dark can use it as well, though the Rider speaks with an accent. Some mortals can use it as well, like Hawkin.

Carnival head

Will's eldest brother Stephen is in the navy. During the Carnival celebration, he is approached by an Old One, who gives him the carnival head to send to Will for a combined birthday and Christmas present. It is a large paper maché type head with the antlers of a stag, the ears like a wolf, a human face with owl eyes, and the beard of a goat. Will gives the head to Herne during Herne's Hunt, and the mask becomes a real part of him.

Herne's Hunt

Will knows the legend from his childhood of Herne the Hunter, who rides from the Great Park each Twelfth Night. With the white mare and carnival head that Will delivers to



Herne, the mythical hunt, including the Hounds of Doom, becomes a real force against the Dark, chasing it to the ends of the Earth.

Dawson's Farm

Dawson's Farm is a farm just down the road from the Stanton's home, where they get supplies such as hay for their rabbits, as well as their Christmas tree and Yule log. Mr. Dawson, as well as his hand Old George, George's son John, and John's wife are all Old Ones.

Rooks' Wood

Rooks' Wood is a wooded area near the church between the Stanton's and Dawson's farm. It is the location where the rooks attack the Walker.

Will's Bedroom

Will sleeps in the slant-roof attic at the top of the Stanton's old house. The room has previously been Stephen's.

Huntercombe Lane

Huntercombe Lane is in the same location as a place once called Hunter's Combe, where Will is safe from The Rider.

Forest of Anderida

The Kings of England preserved the forests in the area for hunting 500 years ago, accidentally providing a haven for The Dark.

Tramps' Alley/Oldway Lane

Tramps' Alley is the modern slang name of a small, unpaved track off the main road that joins with Huntercombe Lane. The Stantons often use it as a shortcut. Will is curious about his newly discovered powers and while on the way home, tests them by lighting a fallen tree branch. After getting the second Sign from the Walker and a confrontation with the Dark's agent Maggie Barnes, Will discovers the meaning of the real name of the road, which is Oldway Lane.

Hunting of the Wren

The Hunting of the Wren is a procession performed every year at the winter solstice, and in some years, again at Twelfth Night. During the first Hunting of the Wren ceremony Will witnesses, the bird changes into the Lady, who appears dead. At the second Hunting of the Wren ceremony on Twelfth Night, the Lady awakes, and begins the Joining of the Signs ceremony.



Themes

Will as an Old One vs. Will as a Child

Will awakes on his eleventh birthday and discovers that he is an immortal Old One destined to fight the Dark. He has a difficult time reconciling this very heavy adult responsibility with his self that is really still a child and the youngest child of a large family. Will understands that he inhabits a different time-scale from the people he loves. He perceives things quickly, like the longing that Paul has for the old flute, and identifies with the longing for things that are out of reach. Will counsels Paul in that longing for the flute when Paul suggests he would give anything for it. When Will responds like an Old One, he realizes that it is not the response of a small child, and covers it quickly.

After Will gains the Gift of Gramarye, which is a lifetime of discovery and wisdom, he knows that he is not the same person that he was before his birthday. The nameless fear that he feels the night before his birthday is the fear of a child. He senses on the first day in the novel, that things are about to change for him, but he does not have the language or understanding to express his fear. It is the Dark, coming for him, before he can join the Signs and the fight against the Dark, but as a small child, he does not yet know that. Once he comes into his knowledge and experience, he obtains a more adult fear. "This time, his fear was adult, made of experience and imagination and care for others, and it was the worst of all." (Christmas Day, p. 145) This makes him realize that to be an Old One is to be old before his time.

Will does not like it when his two selves come too close together. After the deep discussion in the church after the battle with the Dark and finding the Fourth Sign, the look that Paul gives Will troubles Will. However, Will discovers that his mortal family quickly forgets their encounters with the timeless world of the Old Ones and the fight between Light and Dark. Will is finally able to reconcile his two selves. He understands that he is more perceptive than his family, and that they are resilient in their encounters with his other self.

Light vs Dark

The battle between the Light and the Dark is an eternal battle. "But always the Dark was there, swelling and waning, gaining a new Lord of the Dark whenever a man deliberately chose to be changed into something more dread and powerful than his fellows." (Betrayal, p. 107) It is the classic battle between good and evil. The agents of the Dark represent evil, and the Old Ones, and tools of the Light represent good. Will thinks, "Every one of us is linked, for the greatest purpose in the world." (The Joining of the Signs, p. 233). He is thinking about how the Old Ones must continuously prevent the Dark from gaining dominion over the Earth. For this duty, they have the Gift of Gramarye, and four Things of Power, of which the joined Signs are the second. Will feels this responsibility is a heavy one, and the weight of that responsibility makes him



feel old before his time. However, he also feels hope, as the Dark is vanquished for now by Herne's Hunt. Another thing that brings hope is that the Old Ones now have the joined Signs as a tool against the Dark the next time it rises.

Time is Not What It Seems

The novel takes place in three different time periods. However, Will with his child-like clarity and simplicity quickly perceives that time is a man-made construct that is not really what it appears to be. Will says, 'There's not really any before and after, is there? Everything that matters is outside Time. And comes from there and can go there.' (Christmas Day, p. 149). The church rector suggests that the concept Will is trying to explain is infinity. While Will agrees somewhat, he suggests that there is more to it than infinity. Will goes on to explain that part of all of us exist on a different level from time. He understands that we can visit any part, at least in our minds, at any time. However, as an Old One, Will can actually go to that time or place and experience it again as if it is the present.

Will understands that this power is a great gift, although it carries the price of being a heavy burden. He recognizes that ability to exist apart from Time, even though he has just woken to his immortality. That ability is the 'space between waking and dreaming, yesterday and tomorrow, memory and imagining.'" (The Joining of the Signs, p. 244). He knows that this means that the Dark is not vanquished forever. The Old Ones will continue their battle against the Dark forever, which makes Will feel old before his time, as well as helpless and lonely.



Style

Point of View

The point of view of the novel is a limited third-person omniscient, focusing on the main character, Will Stanton. The narrator is a transparent storyteller. This storyteller has access to some of Will's thoughts and feelings. However, the other characters only show their thoughts through their dialog, and they only show their feelings through their actions. For example, when Will meets the Walker to get the second Sign, he realizes that the Walker is frightened and does not trust anyone. The storyteller provides these insights into Will's mind, which helps build the drama between Will and The Walker. However, most of the drama occurs with dialog. In this scene, Will tries to convince the Walker to give him the Sign, guessing what he does about how the Walker feels. The dialog exchange between the two characters provides the dramatic tension until Will commands the Walker to do his bidding. This limited omniscient point of view helps give depth to the main character, Will. It also provides insight into the growth of his character, as he learns about himself during his quest against the Dark.

The story is rich with dialog as the characters interact with each other. For example, the reader learns right along with Will as Merriman gives instructions and lessons. The novel also includes some description and exposition to deepen the story presented mostly in dialog.

Setting

Will lives in a small village in England in the mid-to-late twentieth century. The novel takes place in that area, once called the Forests of Anderida, in three different time periods, Will's time, or the present, a setting in the same area, but six centuries before, which is Merriman's and Hawkin's time, and the late nineteenth century, or Victorian times. Will hears a strange bell-like music whenever he is about to visit another time period. Will also goes through great stone doors when he goes to visit another time, although at times he is in two time periods at once and seems to go back and forth between the two quickly and seamlessly.

Many of the scenes take place in either the great stone hall, or Miss Greythorne's Manor or Manor grounds. Will discovers that the great stone hall is an earlier version of the same Manor house he knows in his own time. The great stone hall has a large fireplace, and the walls are covered with tapestries. It is the setting where he first learns about his powers from the Lady and Merriman. Will's first visit there foreshadows his meeting with Herne the Hunter, as Will sees the Hunter in one of the tapestries. It is also the setting of the creation of the Sign of Fire. Miss Greythorne's Manor changes from the Victorian version Will sees in the ceremony for the renewing of the third Sign to the version he knows in his own time from Christmas caroling. However, it is not changed enough to prevent him from finding the Sign when he returns to the present. Will discovers that the



smithy from six centuries earlier is on the Manor grounds. The smithy is the setting of Will's first meeting with the Rider, as well as the ceremony for the Joining of the Signs.

Language and Meaning

The novel is written in modern-day English, using British spellings and language. The prose is simple and straightforward, which allows the reader to escape into Will's world quite easily. The novel is written at a teen reading level, however, the author uses an expansive vocabulary, adding a richness to the simple language of the novel. The novel's characters, especially Merriman, explain the symbols, locations, powers, and other fantasy elements of the story to Will, thereby also explaining them to the reader. As Will learns, the reader becomes very familiar with the world of the Old Ones and the eternal battle between the Light and the Dark.

Structure

The novel is divided into three parts. Each part includes four chapters, except the third part, which includes five chapters. The chapter titles give information about what happens in the chapter. The first part, called *The Finding*, focuses on Will's discovery of his powers and role as an Old One. He learns about his quest and obtains the first two Signs. The second part, *The Learning*, follows Will as he learns more about his powers and the battle with the Dark. He collects two more Signs. The third part, *The Testing*, concludes the conflict between Light and Dark after Will obtains the last two Signs.

The pace of the novel is quick and straightforward. The plot is fairly simple with no subplots. Will learns about being an Old One, collects Signs to create the second Thing of Power, and does his part in the battle against the Dark. Along the way, he learns about himself and accepts his role as an Old One.



Quotes

"In the midst of all the din and the flurry, he had suddenly had a strange feeling stronger than any he had ever known: he had been aware that someone was trying to tell him something, something that had missed him because he could not understand the words. Not words exactly; it had been like a kind of silent shout. But he had not been able to pick up the message, because he had not known how." (Midwinter's Eve, p. 11)

"He accepted everything that came into his mind, without thought or question, as if he were moving through a dream. But a deeper part of him knew that he was not dreaming. He was crystal-clear awake, in a Midwinter Day that had been waiting for him to wake into it since the day he had been born, and, he somehow knew, for centuries before that." (Midwinter Day, p. 22)

"And though he did not know why, as he stared at the fierce, secret lines of that face, the world he had inhabited since he was born seemed to whirl and break and come down again in a pattern that was not the same as before." (The Sign-Seeker, p. 34)

"Long ago, when magic was the only written knowledge, our business was called simply Knowing. But there is far too much to know in your day, on all subjects under the sun. So we use a half-forgotten word, as we Old Ones ourselves are half-forgotten. We call it 'gramarye.'" (101)

"But always the Dark was there, swelling and waning, gaining a new Lord of the Dark whenever a man deliberately chose to be changed into something more dread and powerful than his fellows." (Betrayal, p. 107)

"An Old One, he suddenly knew, was doomed always to feel this same formless, nameless longing for something out of reach, as an endless part of life." (Betrayal, p. 123)

"He walked among them speechless, as if in a dream. They thought him tired, but he was floating in wonder. He had three of the Signs of Power now. He had, too, the knowledge to use the Gift of Gramarye; a long lifetime of discovery and wisdom, given to him in a moment of suspended time. He was not the same Will Stanton that he had been a very few days before. Now and forever, he knew, he inhabited a different time-scale from that of everyone he had ever known or loved..." (Betrayal, p. 125)

"Will realized once more, helplessly, that to be an Old One was to be very old before the proper time, for the fear he began to feel now was worse than the blind terror he had known in his attic bed, worse than the fear the Dark had put into him in the great hall. This time, his fear was adult, made of experience and imagination and care for others, and it was the worst of all." (Christmas Day, p. 145)

"There's not really any before and after, is there?" he said. "Everything that matters is outside Time. And comes from there and can go there." (Christmas Day, p. 149)



"I mean the part of all of us, and of all the things we think and believe, that has nothing to do with yesterday or today or tomorrow because it belongs at a different kind of level. Yesterday is still there, on that level. Tomorrow is there too. You can visit either of them. And all Gods are there, and all the things they have ever stood for. And," he added sadly, "the opposite, too." (Christmas Day, p. 149)

"There is the power seized from the Dark, Will Stanton. By cold magic they called up the candles of winter for destruction. But now that we have seized them for better purposes, the candles become stronger, able to bring you the sign of Fire." (The Hawk in the Dark, p. 193).

"But then a sudden terrible silence like suffocation came, blotting out all sound of the storm. In the moment of its last desperate chance, breaking across the barrier that had been holding it at bay, the Dark came for Will. Shutting out the sky and earth, the deadly spinning pillar came at him, dreadful in its furious whirling energy and utter quiet. There was no time for fear. Will stood alone. And the towering black column rushed to engulf him with all the monstrous forces of the Dark arrayed in its writing mist, and at its centre the great foam-mouthed black stallion reared up with the Black Rider, his eyes two brilliant points of blue fire. Will called vainly on every spell of defense at his command, yet knew that his hands were powerless to move to the Signs for help. He stood where he was, despairing, and closed his eyes." (The Hunt Rides, p. 227)

"Somewhere behind Will the music of "Greensleeves" broke off, with a laugh and some muffled words from Paul; but there was no break in the music that was in Will's head, for now it had changed into that haunting, bell-like phrase that came always with the opening of the Doors or any great change that might alter the lives of the Old Ones. Will clenched his fists as he listened, yearning towards the sweet beckoning sound that was the space between waking and dreaming, yesterday and tomorrow, memory and imagining." (The Joining of the Signs, p. 244).



Topics for Discussion

Discuss Will's feelings about being an Old One. How does he resist his power? How does he embrace it?

Discuss Merriman's role as Will's helper. How does he assist Will in his quest?

Will's journey into other times is always preceded by a phrase of haunting bell-like music. How does this music affect Will?

Discuss the following quote. "I mean the part of all of us, and of all the things we think and believe, that has nothing to do with yesterday or today or tomorrow because it belongs at a different kind of level. Yesterday is still there, on that level. Tomorrow is there too. You can visit either of them. And all Gods are there, and all the things they have ever stood for. And," he added sadly, "the opposite, too." (Christmas Day, p. 149). Does this describe infinity? If not, what is Will talking about?

Explain what effect the Dark has on Will. What does he do or feel when the Dark attacks? How does he resist temptation?

How does Will handle the questions from his family when they sense something is different about Will?

The Lady fades away from her solitary confrontation with the Dark, but later returns. What is the significance of her demise and subsequent return?