

The Floating Island Study Guide

The Floating Island by Elizabeth Haydon

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Plot Summary

The Floating Island by Elizabeth Haydon is a coming of age story of Ven Polypheme, a dwarf-like creature whose desire for adventure leads him on a journey that shows him not only adventure, but also leads him to discover friendship, and the real meaning of home. Through his journey, Ven is able to find his place in the world, and help those he loves.

At the beginning of the novel, Ven Polypheme sets out to do his first inspection of a ship as part of his father's business. The ship is attacked by pirates, however, and in trying to save the ship and its crew, Ven sets fire to the pirate ship and his own ship. Knocked unconscious, he wakes on a floating piece of debris, being helped by a mermaid, Amariel. Amariel is a kind creature, and she helps Ven survive long enough to be rescued by Captain Oliver Snodgrass. On board, Ven is treated well, and helped by a young chef apprentice, Char. Oliver takes Ven to a hidden world called the "Floating Island", where he takes a vial of Living Water and exchanges it with some very rare water of the world. Mr. Whiting, a man on the ship, is furious as he wanted to go instead. The Floating Island a perfectly balanced magical place, where voices spoken carry on the wind. Ven sends message to his family, alerting them he is safe. Oliver then takes Ven to Serendair, where he instructs him to go to the Crossroads Inn, but only to travel there during the day. Char and Ven arrive at the Inn only to discover it is run by Oliver's wife and that she is healed from heartbreak through the Living Water. The crossroads is an eerie place, and at night people traveling the roads are often killed by the mysterious evil forces surrounding the area, and those left alive hear wolves and horrible sounds of death.

Soon after arriving, Ven, Char, and a girl they have met named Ida are arrested, as Whiting has claimed Ven stole a ring and killed a man. On being taken to the king, however, Ven is declared innocent. The king asks him to be his reporter, traveling the world to find magical places. Ven offers to think about it, but on returning to the Inn, Char and Ven rescue a young boy from the crossroads and discover that the wolves heard in the mist are merely Whiting's dogs. When they hide, they learn from the ghost of the Snodgrass' son that the area really is plagued by an evil presence.

Ven and his friends, including Char, Ida, Clemency and Saeli, find and dig up the ancient evil, but when Ida uses her thieving skills to close a casket, she accidentally inhales its essence, becoming a Revenant. The group heads to the ocean, helped by Amariel, where Ven calls the floating island. He uses the Living Water to heal Ida, and she replaces it with her tears. The group travels safely back to the Inn to find it healed. Ven, upon receiving a letter from his father forgiving him and reminding him to make his own place in the world, takes the king up on his offer and becomes the king's reporter.



Preface, First Pages of Ven Polypheme's Journal, Chapter One through Chapter Three

Preface, First Pages of Ven Polypheme's Journal, Chapter One through Chapter Three Summary

The Floating Island is a fantastic story of Ven Polypheme's first adventure in the world, where he learns the value of friendship and the meaning of home. It is a story of hope, love, evil, and the power of the past to taint the present as young Ven Polypheme, a Nain, ventures far from home, where he must fight to save those he has come to think of as family.

The Preface explains that the book is a collection of Ven Polypheme's journal writings. Ven was a Nain explorer who wrote two books, comprehensive tales of the magic and people of the world. The Preface explains that although much of the journal was lost, the sections that are missing have been recreated in the book to tell the entire story.

In the "First Pages of Ven Polypheme's Journal", Ven discusses being thrown into the dungeon, where he sits writing his story for the king. He notes that being of a different race isn't helpful, and neither is being a stranger and a kid. He laments that the king will decide his fate, but that if he lives, he will have to return to the crossroads, which could be worse than a death sentence.

In Chapter One, Ven opens by discussing his great grandfather, Magnus the Mad, who threw aside expectations and moved above ground, where few Nain live, to build ships by the sea. The business became the family business. On this day, Ven's fiftieth birthday (which is equivalent to a human's twelfth birthday), Ven is heading to the shipyard to draw against his brothers to see who will inspect the latest ship. On the way, he catches an albatross feather. His father chastises him for seeing the feather and not the lucky bird. After a short amount of bickering on the dock, the Polypheme brothers draw straws and Ven loses, meaning he will do the latest ship's inspection. He is thrilled as he loves water, unlike most Nain. He sees the albatross and thinks the bird has given him luck, although the draw was actually rigged by his brothers.

Chapter Two finds Ven discussing his family, including twelve brothers and a sister, who all work in the shipbuilding business. Ven is the youngest but also the tallest at five feet. He also admits he is by far the most curious. Ven hurries to the office, where his father, Pepin, and their latest client, Mr. Witherspoon, are waiting for Ven to begin an inspection. Witherspoon notes they have already begun loading the ship with their weapons cargo. At the docks, the ship painter, Max, tells Ven the ship's name as a birthday gift, but Ven knows this is a sign of bad luck. He also comments on Ven's lack



of a beard, which is supposed to be a source of great pride, but Ven has yet to grow a single hair.

On the ship, Ven meets Captain Faeley and the rest of the crew. His father gives him his great grandfather's jack-rule, which is a measuring stick with a magnifying glass at the end, along with a knife and other surprises. After hugging his father, Ven begins the inspection as the ship sets sail. Below deck, he finds quicklime and other chemicals not meant to be on board a ship, so he promises to have them removed. On deck, when the captain asks if he wants to go into open water, Ven's curiosity gets the better of him and he agrees. Soon, however, the ship is attacked by Fire Pirates.

In Chapter Three, Ven wishes he would have learned to fight like his other brothers. He explains that his father had him go from job to job in the shop, and Ven never felt he was successful. When the pirates attack, Ven and some of the crew are told to go below deck to find weapons, but once he is passing them out on deck, the captain informs him they plan to sink the ship rather than let the pirates have it. Ven is sent to the galley to fill it with water, but instead, he and Krebs, another sailor, rig the pump to spray quicklime through the galley window onto the pirate ship. Once finished, Ven fires a flaming crossbow at the pirate ship, causing an explosion.

Preface, First Pages of Ven Polypheme's Journal, Chapter One through Chapter Three Analysis

The Preface serves to introduce the basic premise of the entire book, that it is a combination of sections from the explorer Ven Polypheme's missing journal, and reconstructed sections that have been lost from the journals, and restored. The preface also sets up subsequent books by noting there are other journals the scientists are just beginning to piece back together. This section helps to explain the format of the book, which is vital to understanding how it is written.

The "First Pages of Ven Polypheme's Journal, Written in the Dungeon of Castle Elysian" further sets the stage for the tale. The reader knows this section as written by Ven, based on the font of the writing, and that it was written while in the dungeon, so immediately, readers are aware that Ven is in trouble. This short section also introduces the idea that Ven is of a different race, a child, and far from home, all of which immediately help to garner sympathy for him. Further, his note that there is something at the crossroads that is worse than death helps foreshadow the telling of the haunting at the Crossroads. Finally, at the end of the section, the jailer's comments about the king disliking murderers and thieves implies Ven is being charged with these crimes, peaking the interest of the reader as well as foreshadowing the setting up of the situation through the rest of the novel.

In Chapter One, more is discovered about Ven and his family. The story of Magnus the Mad both helps explain Ven's odd family business, as well as explains some of Ven's own characteristics. The further explanation of the Nain race, with their propensity for underground living, their dislike of water, and their odd customs, all help to explain Ven



and his family. Ven's explanation of the life cycle of the Nain, combined with the knowledge this is his birthday, show he is merely a young teenager in terms of human years, which sets up the tone of the story. Further, Ven's brother's actions in this novel and the clearly genuine care they have for one another, shows the tight knit family Ven is used to having in his life. This sense of "home" is a powerful theme throughout the novel.

The albatross seen in Chapter One is a symbol of luck for Ven, both good and bad. The bird is seen throughout the novel, and the sighting here foreshadows the bird's use as a symbol of change of luck for Ven. The fact that Ven saw and retrieved the feather, rather than seeing the bird himself, is symbolic of Ven's nature. He often sees the smaller details instead of seeing the larger picture, a fact he adapts to throughout the story. This tendency is why his father was grooming him to become an inspector, although Ven was unaware of this.

Chapter Two continues this concept of family as Ven describes his brothers and sisters, and their work in the ship building business. It is again clear that all members of the family have distinct jobs, but that Ven seems to be all over the board. At the end of the novel, it is revealed that Pepin was grooming Ven to be the inspector, but Ven's lack of this knowledge meant that he often just felt as though he wasn't good at anything. This tendency to think negatively of himself is seen throughout the novel, but changes as Ven develops maturity. Further, his comments about his height, weight, and curious tendencies again helps the reader to understand Ven's character.

The scene between the painter and Ven seems minor, but it serves to give information used later in the novel. It is clear only the painter knows the name of the ship until after inspection, so later in the novel, when someone knows the ship's name, it becomes clear the attack on the ship by pirates was actually staged. Further, the fact that the painter comments on Ven's beard ties into the fact that, as discussed earlier in the chapter, all Nain have beards to be proud of, but Ven is still waiting for his to grow. This is a common irritant for Ven throughout the novel, but the fact he has none foreshadows the growth of one later in the novel. The lack of a beard suggests Ven's immaturity, which he overcomes through the novel.

The jack knife is important, as well. Being his great grandfathers, the jack knife is not only a prized possession, but a representation of Magnus, the man Ven very strongly resembles. The fact that Ven is given the jack knife, combined with his natural sense of curiosity, suggests that like Magnus, Ven is meant for larger things in life. Additionally, the comment from Pepin that the jack knife can be used to see things more clearly foreshadows the use of the object later in the novel to see beyond mere appearances.

Finally, the appearance of pirates, combined with the undesirable cargo on board, suggests at the end of the chapter that there will be serious problems for Ven. The fact that the cargo was not supposed to be on board foreshadows not only Ven's use of it in the next chapter, but also the knowledge that Mr. Witherspoon had planned the pirate attack to steal the ship.



Chapter Three serves to show Ven's character as highly resourceful, and determined. Although Ven points out again that he has no specific skill it becomes clear that Ven instead has many skills. His determination to fight even without training shows he is determined to stand up for himself, and his quick thinking and knowledge of quicklime shows he has learned much from his father's business. Unfortunately, the end result is an explosion, which foreshadows the beginning of Ven's adventure.



Chapter Four through Chapter Six

Chapter Four through Chapter Six Summary

Chapter Four finds Ven floating on a piece of driftwood in the middle of the ocean. He hears a voice near him, and the person brings him rum and then water to quench his thirst. Ven is finally able to turn toward his rescuer and finds a mermaid, or merrow. The two talk playfully, and Amariel, the merrow, shows a distinctively kind, but terse attitude. When Ven notes his guilt over the men killed in the explosion, she points out that he has friends watching out for him, including herself and the albatross still flying above him. Amariel notes his decision to burn the ships likely saved his life.

To keep him occupied, Amariel tells him about her life under the sea. She informs him he could breathe under water if he has a fisherman cut him gills or if he kisses a merrow. On the other hand, merrows wanting to stay on land have to give their caps to a sailor, which allows them to grow legs. She laughs when Ven notes she is too intelligent for that and Ven instinctively recoils, as her teeth are peglike and spaced, like a porpoise. Hurt, Amariel swims away, and Ven vainly calls to her to come back, feeling horrible as he hurt the only friend he had. As his driftwood begins to leak, he finishes his inspection sheet, wanting to complete the job before he dies, but Amariel returns with a life boat. Ven is thrilled at her return. She stays with him, giving him blankets of seaweed to keep him warm and talking to him through the night. When he wakes, he is in a haze, and doesn't notice he is near a ship.

In Chapter Five, Ven is awakened by being hoisted onto the deck of a ship. On board the ship Serelinda, he is given a blanket by Captain Oliver, who notes he found Ven as a result of the albatross. During conversation, Ven reveals he is of the shipbuilding clan of Polypheme's, and Oliver is impressed. The ship is sailing to Serendair, where Ven can get word to his family, but in the meantime, Oliver notes that Char, a young man about his own age, will watch over him. Char and Ven talk and Char notes he saw a seal near Ven when they pulled him from the water. Ven asks to see, knowing it was the merrow, but she has gone. He whispers a goodbye and suddenly finds himself ill. The captain notes he has the sea shakes, and to cure him, the captain takes him up the mast so he can see the whole ocean. Back on deck later, Ven is well fed and toasted as the first Nain to climb a mast at sea. The following day, a magalodon, or giant shark, is spotted. It passes quietly without incident, but although Oliver notes that they will soon be on land so he will never have to worry of such animals, Ven knows his curiosity is too great to stay away from the sea.

Chapter Six finds Ven working hard on the ship, but at night he lies awake, feeling guilty about the pirate attack. One morning at dawn, the Floating Island is seen in the distance. Ven and two other men board a life boat to cross over with Oliver, and when a man, Maurice Whiting, demands that the Nain be thrown off so he can go to island instead, Captain Oliver is clearly angered. On the way over, Oliver explains that the Floating Island is an ancient ship, of sorts, and is home to the wind. He further explains



that the island was the first land mass on the earth, and it floats on the surface of the water, delicately balanced. As he explains, a yelp indicates that Char is also on board, having hidden himself, claiming he was merely following captain's orders to take care of Ven. Once on the island, Ven notices the forest nature of the area and also notices that a collection of items have blown into the trees as a result of the constant wind. After saving a kite, the group climbs the mountain.

Chapter Four through Chapter Six Analysis

Chapter Four introduces one of the primary characters in the novel, Amariel. Amariel is a merrow, the first of the non-humans other than Nain's to be seen in the novel. It is clear Amariel is a caring individual, but she is also rather terse in her reactions, and seems to think Ven to be a rude individual. However, she does save his life, give him water, and rescue him countless times from the water, showing her to be a kind character. It is additionally clear that these characters like one another almost immediately, and Ven's reactions to her show he already cares about her. The appearance of the albatross again in this chapter, which led Amariel to Ven, shows the creature as Ven's luck charm.

Ven's guilt in this chapter is characteristic of his nature throughout the novel. Regardless of the situation, Ven always feels responsible for everyone else. Even Amariel's point that he had no choice but to burn the ship does not help, as Ven consistently sees himself at fault. Her stories, however, do serve to pique Ven's interest and keep him awake and alive. The stories of men who live in the sea and mermaids who give up their fins foreshadow the constant desire for these characters to come see the other's living space. However, Ven's reaction to Amariel's teeth, albeit somewhat understandable, threatens their new relationship. Yet Amariel again comes to the rescue with a life boat, showing her to be a forgiving creature. It is Amariel who allows Ven to live long enough to be rescued.

Ven's rescue in Chapter Five is again precipitated by the appearance of the albatross, again showing this creature as Ven's charm. Captain Oliver is clearly a kind character as he saves Ven, nourishes him, and helps keep him safe. His knowledge of the Polypheme family shows their namesake is one of great skill, and his offer to sail Ven to Serendair means Ven will be able to send word to his family that he is alive. Ven's fear of this foreshadows his constant guilt over the accident on the ship, as well as his eventual acceptance of what happened following his father's forgiveness.

Amariel's disappearance in this chapter is necessary, as one can guess she does not want to be seen by many. However, her already budding relationship with Ven suggests she will reappear later in the novel. The introduction of Char in this chapter, a young boy the rough age of Ven, indicates these two will also become friends, as they have much in common.

The curing of Ven's sea shakes seems innocent enough in this chapter, but has a much greater meaning later in the novel. Ven thinks Captain Oliver is merely being a good



friend, and he is, in fact, cured of his illness quickly. When it is later discovered that perhaps Oliver used Ven to call the Floating Island, it is still true that Oliver was kind to Ven, and that his remedy worked, despite there perhaps being a personal reason as well. The night of sailor tales, and the megalodon, both serve to show readers the dangers of the sea, but also foreshadow Ven's love for the sea throughout the novel. The appearance again of the albatross suggests another turn of events for Ven.

Chapter Six serves to introduce the Floating Island, which also serves as the name of the novel, as well as to introduce Maurice Whiting, a negative character in the novel. The Floating Island is a magical place, and one can tell from Oliver's description that the island is almost sacred in that it has existed since the beginning of time. As home to the wind, all words are carried to and from here, making it the communication hub of the world. The delicate nature of the island foreshadows Oliver's interactions with it as well as the problem later in the novel when Ven tries to visit it again.

Whiting's anger at Ven in this chapter is clear and venomous. This foreshadows his determination to harm Ven throughout the novel. On the other hand, Char's appearance in the boat and his reasoning that he is watching over Ven further shows the growing friendship between these characters. Char's desire for the kite shows he is still a boy at heart, and the captain's willingness to help, along with Ven's willingness to loan out his only possession, shows the group is becoming friends.



Chapter Seven through Chapter Nine

Chapter Seven through Chapter Nine Summary

Chapter Seven finds Ven, Oliver, Char, and the others in a cave on top of Floating Island, where they listen as the wind whispers voices from all over the world. Scroggins, one of the men, hears that his wife has had a child, and the other whispers that he is a great warrior. Oliver, Char, and Ven continue on until they come to where the winds of Vaarn blow, and Ven leaves a message for his father. Once finished, he, Oliver, and Char travel to the depths of the mountain, where Oliver takes a vial of water from his pocket, pours it into the moss, and fills the vial again from a stream. When questioned, Oliver notes he brings the island water from a well it cannot reach, and in turn, he takes some of the Island's special water. On the way back to the boat, Ven sees his albatross feather in one of the trees. He retrieves it happily, and returns to the ship, where Whiting is waiting for him, still furious. Later, Ven laments he is looking at stars far from his home.

In Chapter Eight, Ven finds himself afraid, as he knows he will soon have to face his father. By nightfall, the ship is in sight of Serendair, and Oliver tells Ven to write a quick letter to his father before they land. He informs Ven he will have to stay in Kingston for a few days until his rescue is reported and cleared by the authorities. When Ven notes that he doesn't know if his father even wants to see him, Oliver tells him that any father, regardless of circumstance, wants to see his son and know he is alive. Oliver tells him that while in Kingston he should stay at the Crossroads Inn, run by Gertrude Snodgrass. He tells Ven to never go to the crossroads at night, however, and asks that he take the vial of water to Gertrude. Ven then sits to write his letter, and after several attempts, manages a letter that is filled with remorse and regret. As he signs the letter, he finds he is crying.

Once the ship is docked, Oliver hands the sailors their pay. He invites Char to sail with him on any vessel and then pays Ven the same wage as Char. Ven protests, but Oliver insists. He explains that Char actually has an easier time coming, as he is human, and Ven is not. He reminds Ven that some people in town will not accept him, nor serve him, as a result of his race. Oliver shakes his hand and reminds him to repay his favor by saving someone in need and by thanking the albatross. Once off the boat, Ven runs into Char, who invites him along to the Sailor's Rest, an inn they can stay at until daylight when they can go to the crossroads. Above them they hear the cry of the albatross, but neither sees the shadow following them.

In Chapter Nine, Char takes Ven to the Confectionery, but Char is upset when Ven purchases his candy as well. When Ven tries to defend by noting his discomfort that he and Char were paid the same wage, Char does not budge. He reminds Ven that life isn't fair. He notes he doesn't have parents, but he still has more opportunity than those with no eyes, legs, or arms. On the street, they try to find a place to fly the kite they retrieved from the island. One area of the city is blocked off by stone, and Char notes it is the



Gated City, or the Market of Thieves. Ven thinks he sees someone beckoning him, but Char pulls him away, and the two reach a clearing by the dock to fly the kite. Near dusk, Char heads back into town, but Ven asks to stay a moment, watching the sea. When Char leaves, Ven walks the pier, and calls for Amariel, who he has seen in the water. The two talk briefly, but when Ven refuses Amariel's offer to take him to a fisherman who can cut him some gills, she is disappointed, and swims away. As Ven returns to find Char, he is stopped by Whiting, who threatens him. As he lays to sleep at the inn, he is plagued by harrowing thoughts.

Chapter Seven through Chapter Nine Analysis

In Chapter Seven, readers are introduced to the magic of the Floating Island. While awesome in its first appearance, the Floating Island is used later in the novel to save Ven's new friend, so its introduction here serves the purpose of explaining the island, and its origin. It is clear from Oliver's actions that the balance of the island is vital, in that he is only allowed to take if he first gives. This is important later, when Ven attempts to take the water without an exchange. Further, the power of the wind on the island, as shown through the messages the wind brings, are important, in that this is how Ven is able to get word to his father. The appearance of the albatross feather yet again shows the power of this animal in terms of Ven's luck in the story, as it keeps appearing when his luck is about to change.

Whiting's clear anger at the end of this chapter serves two purposes. First, it is very clear that Whiting is discriminatory against Nain. Secondly, it is clear he despises Ven because he took his place on the boat to the island. Now that readers understand the power of the island, as the sailor who spoke his name on the wind is suddenly famous, it is understandable why Whiting is so angry. This anger, however, foreshadows his fury and revenge seeking later in the novel.

Ven's comments about home again show this concept as a theme in the novel. Ven knows and loves his family dearly and holds them very close. However, his fear of his father's anger makes him question how he will return home, and this concept frightens him, as he only knows one home. His questions of where his home is now foreshadow his development of the concept of home as his journey continues.

In Chapter Eight, Ven experiences his first taste of life in the real world. Ven is very afraid of his father's anger, and as a result, he is unable to enjoy the world around him. His tears as he writes his letter to his family show the level of his guilt and show his sincere concern his family will no longer love and care for him. Even Oliver's reminder that all fathers want to see their sons brings only confusion to Ven instead of comfort, although this statement by Oliver, along with his sincerity, suggests he has lost a child himself, a fact that is later discovered.

The knowledge that Ven will have to remain in Kingston is also difficult, in that he knows no one in the city. Oliver's suggestion of the Crossroads Inn foreshadows the knowledge later that the inn is run by Oliver's wife. This is furthered by the need for Oliver to give



the water to the proprietor of the inn, and in the sadness Oliver shows when he notes he must immediately leave for sea again. However, the strong advice he gives not to visit the inn at night suggests something is amiss, foreshadowing the discovery of the haunting of the inn. Additionally, the shadow following the boys at the end of the chapter foreshadows a grim acquaintance with Whiting in upcoming chapters.

Oliver again shows himself to be a caring individual as he pays Ven a wage for his troubles. His concern for Ven's well being, considering his race, also shows him to be a caring individual, and foreshadows the few people in town who discriminate against Nain. This is something Ven has heard about, but has never directly experienced, and his concern is well justified. Finally, the albatross again appears at the end of the chapter, signifying a change in luck for Ven again, although his discovery of Char on the dock foreshadows a furthering of their relationship as well and signifies a constant companion for Ven, which helps him find his way.

In Chapter Nine, Ven sees a new city for the first time and is in awe. The many shops and many races of Serendair show the port city to be very different from Vaarn, as Oliver predicted. Ven's actions in the Confectionery are not intended to be disrespectful, nor condescending, but not having had friends before, Ven is unsure of how to act. He tries to be kind, but Char's immediate defense shows his actions to be misread. Char, for his part, is quick to assume people are feeling sorry for him, but in reality, Ven knows nothing of Char's life. When he does admit he has no family, Ven feels even worse. Char's attitude of thankfulness for what he does have shows a level of maturity Ven has not yet reached, which foreshadows his development of such thinking through the course of the novel.

Although the Market of Thieves has little role in this chapter, it does come into play later, necessitating its introduction here. Char's insistence that Ven hurry by not only implies the seriousness of the threat, but also shows Char is still watching out for Ven. Thankfully, this watchfulness does not impede with Ven's conversation with Amariel, as it is clear by this point that Ven very much enjoys her company. He angers her, however, in this section, but their interactions suggest she will return again. Finally, Whiting's threats at the end of the chapter foreshadow his continued attempts at revenge throughout the novel.



Chapter Ten through Chapter Twelve

Chapter Ten through Chapter Twelve Summary

Chapter Ten finds Ven and Char on the road, hoping to catch a ride to the Crossroads Inn. Ven is nearly pickpocketed by a young blond girl, but his albatross feather tickles her nose, making her sneeze and revealing her scam. Char finally finds a wagon, but the owner refuses to carry a Nain, so Char refuses the ride. The boys are eventually picked up, but once in the wagon, they learn the young blond pickpocket, named Ida, is traveling with them.

The group comes across the White Fern Inn, operated by Maurice Whiting, and Ven notices there is also a large pen for his guard dogs. Finally, they reach the Crossroads Inn, where a stout but tired and aging red-haired woman greets them. The boys discover she is Gertrude Snodgrass. After sending Ida inside, she greets the young men kindly, and informs Ven that Oliver is her husband.

Inside, Ven finds a singer next to the fire, along with Ida and a large orange tabby cat named Murphy. Ven gives Gertrude the water, and she thanks him, walking away as she offers the boys food. As Ven hears music again, he asks who the singer is singing too, and hears a voice inform him the man is singing to the Spice Folk, or faeries. When he attempts to find the speaker, he discovers it is Murphy, the cat.

In Chapter Eleven, Ven discusses Murphy's past as a mouser on Oliver's ships. Annoyed by his questions, Murphy tells him to speak with McLean, the singer. McLean explains he is actually a story singer, with a human mother and a Lirin father. He explains that the Crossroads Inn is not haunted, as some believe, but that the crossroads is, or at least is disturbed.

Soon, Mrs. Snodgrass returns, looking much healthier and youthful, and McLean notes Ven must have brought her the Living Water. He explains that the water helps Trudy, which is why Oliver spends all his time on the sea. Trudy herself stays at the Inn for her own reasons, which McLean will not reveal.

Later, Trudy takes the boys out back to their rooming house, Hare Warren, explaining that they will work for their food and boarding. Ven offers to weed the dandelions from the garden, but a small girl, Saeli, is horrified. Trudy explains that the dandelions belong to the Spice Folk, and the dandelions collect the sun for their power needs.

The group arrives at Hare Warren, where they meet Vincent Cadwalder, the steward. They are taken to their room, where Ven comments about the room being acceptable. Char, however, believes it is a palace, and Ven is again reminded how blessed he has been in life. The boys laugh and joke, not noticing the shadow outside.

Chapter Twelve finds Ven and Char arriving for the noon meal, famished. They meet several other tenants at the Inn, including Nicolas, the Inn's runner, and Clemency, a



curate in training. Clemency explains she is a missionary tending to the Spice Folk. She also explains that Saeli is a Gwadd, able to speak to animals and plants, and she invites Ven to the cemetery blessing.

After lunch, the two walk to the cemetery and Clem chats about the crossroads. She notes that the wind at the crossroads sounds demonic sometimes, and there are spirits visible in the night. Cadwalder's parents died at the crossroads when he was a young child, she says, as have many other individuals. She blesses the crossroads, and the two cross to reach the small cemetery.

At the cemetery, Clem points out the flowers Saeli has made on the graves of Trudy's family have died within a single day, due to the poisoning of whatever haunts the crossroads. Clem points to another grave, noting it is the grave of Gregory Snodgrass, Trudy and Oliver's son. Clem believes he was killed by brigands at the crossroads, and Ven realizes this is why Trudy remains at the Inn.

After dinner and a few songs by McLean, the children are hurried to their houses. Trudy walks them to their room and gives them flax seed, which will distract the Spice Folks who might visit them in the night. Once settled in bed, Ven begins to hear the demonic winds at the crossroads, and howls begin to fill the air.

Suddenly there is a banging on the door, and the sounds of claws splintering wood. Outside their room, Ven hears his name, and in the distance, shrill voices are heard screaming. In the silence that follows, Ven takes out his jack knife and looks through the lens at the crossroads, where he sees a mass of white wolves in the mist. Ven thinks to himself that home is where one feels safe, and is surrounded by loved ones. He realizes he is far from home.

Chapter Ten through Chapter Twelve Analysis

In Chapter Ten, readers can see the discrimination Oliver warned Ven about while still on the ship, as one wagon owner refuses Ven passage. Char, however, shows himself to be a good human being, as he refuses the ride. Ven, again, feels guilt as a result, but Char reminds him he makes his decisions based on how he feels, and not how things appear. Additionally, this chapter introduces Ida, the pickpocket. She is clearly a somewhat wild child, but also a person who is of great importance later in the novel. Her known thieving, as well as her clear disdain for everyone around her, suggests she has had a hard life.

The contrast between the White Fern Inn and the Crossroads Inn is clear in this chapter. The White Fern is, obviously, white and pristine, where no children are allowed. It is protected by wild dogs and by Whiting himself. The Crossroads Inn, however, is a little more rundown but homey and a welcoming place for children without families of their own. Mrs. Snodgrass, Oliver's wife, proves to be a stern yet extremely kind woman who loves the children at the inn as she would love her own. The signs of age and tiredness on Trudy suggest perhaps the water Ven gives her will help to revive her, while the Inn



proves to be a magical place, complete with a talking cat and faeries. This sense of magical atmosphere helps to set up the stories of the crossroads in the upcoming chapters.

Chapter Eleven serves to give more information about the Inn, as well as the crossroads. McLean's role as the storyteller of the Inn helps to clarify several points, including the story of the crossroads. His claims that the Inn is not haunted, but the crossroads are, shows that while inside the Inn, the children do not have anything to fear. Outside, however, there is something plaguing the area. This foreshadows the next chapter, as Ven and Char are introduced to the terror of the crossroads. Additionally, this chapter helps to clarify the issue with Trudy. It is clear already that the Living Water Ven brought her is helpful, and has rejuvenation properties. It is also clear that there is more to the story of Trudy than what McLean is willing to reveal, foreshadowing the discovery of this information later. This chapter also introduces Saeli, the keeper of the Spice Folk garden, and Vincent Cadwalder, the steward. Cadwalder comes into play later in the novel as a traitor, so his role in the house is important.

This chapter also helps to show Ven's realization that his life has been highly blessed. It was Char previously who showed Ven that he was blessed when he revealed he didn't have parents. In this case, it is Char again who, by his reaction to the room, reminds Ven that he has been rather lucky in his life. He has had a lifetime of family, and a constant home, and Char has never known such luxuries. This realization shows Ven is beginning to mature as a character, and beginning to see the world through the eyes of others. This is important, since one of the themes in the novel is the coming of age of Ven. Finally, the shadow at the end of the chapter foreshadows the upcoming events as Hare Warren is attacked.

Chapter Twelve is a highly informative chapter, tying together much of the information hinted at thus far in the novel. Clemency, the curate in training, is a vital character to the story, and she is already shown in this chapter to be a kind, caring, and considerate young woman who watches out for the other girls at the Inn. Nicolas, the runner, is also introduced here, providing a little background, as he is used later in the novel, as well. The knowledge that Saeli can speak to animals sets up her role later in the novel, too.

The conversation between Clem and Ven as they bless the cemetery is informative as well. Readers learn that the crossroads really are haunted, or at least damaged in some way, and that this damage is spreading to the ground as well as to the people of the Inn. The death of Cadwalder's parents explains why he works for Trudy, and the death of she and Oliver's son explains why Trudy is so sad, and why she chooses to stay at the Inn when she could go with her husband. The knowledge that Gregory is buried here foreshadows his introduction later in the novel as a protector of the Inn.

Back at the Inn, the lack of wind at the crossroads again contributes to the knowledge that it is a haunted place. This is proven, seemingly, when Ven and Char are awoken in the night by the horrible sounds and the snarls of animals. Ven's use of the jack knife here is also symbolic. His father had told him to use the glass to see things as they really were, and when Ven uses it, he sees white wolves in the mist. This, combined



with the knowledge of Whiting's hatred of Ven, his ownership of wild dogs, and his ownership of the White Fern, suggests he is perhaps somehow responsible for the wolves, a fact that is shown to be true later in the novel. At this time, however, Ven and Char are merely frightened of the situation, and do not realize the significance. They also hear the demonic sounds, suggesting the wolves are not the only creatures plaguing the Inn.

Ven's thoughts of home at the end of the chapter again show Ven to be developing a sense of belonging. Ven is beginning to understand what home means to him, which is important, as he will soon have to decide where to stay. His linking of safety and love is important, as these traits come into play later, as well, in terms of the concept of home.



Chapter Thirteen through Fifteen

Chapter Thirteen through Fifteen Summary

When Ven awakes the following day, he finds Char tied to his bed, with glitter all over him, sneezing. When Ven unties him, Char claims the Spike Folks are responsible, wanting to see fireworks of glitter. The two head to breakfast, but when Ven returns to the cottage after forgetting his jack rule, he finds Ida in his room. At breakfast, Ven questions the other children about the events of the night, but as they are used to it, they now sleep through it. Char finds himself in awe of the cook, as she cooks beautifully. Ven begins to think the Inn could be a home for him, when suddenly, Whiting appears with Constable Knapp, and Ven learns he is under arrest.

In Chapter Fourteen, the constable explains Ven is accused of thievery, as Whiting claims his ring was stolen on the ship. Trudy is furious, and even Ida sticks up for Ven. When Whiting goes to strike her, Ven intervenes and is hit instead. Cadwalder is sent to the rooms to search for the ring while Trudy tends to Ven's face as she pleads with the constable, but to no avail. When Cadwalder returns, he claims to have found the ring in Ven's room, and he is arrested. When Char claims the ring was found in his bed, not Ven's, he too is arrested, as is Ida. Trudy tries to reassure them, and Char explains to Ven he is still responsible for his well-being, hence why he lied to get arrested. Throughout the ordeal, Whiting continues to berate Ven for being Nain and continues to speak down to Trudy as the children are led into the jail wagon. Whiting even claims Ven may be responsible for a murder on the ship.

In Chapter Fifteen, Ven apologizes again for getting Char involved and Char exasperatedly reminds Ven that he himself is responsible for his own actions. Outside the wagon, they hear Whiting explaining they are carrying a thief and a murderer, one of which is a Nain. The individuals outside are horrified at the thought, but Whiting reassures them they can stay at his Inn instead, so they won't have to worry about such things, nor the ghosts at the Crossroads. Ven, Char, and Ida are furious, but can do nothing. Ven himself notes his curiosity has disappeared, and he merely wants to go home. Soldiers appear in the road, and Ven is removed from the wagon, as he is to be transferred to the castle to see the king.

Chapter Thirteen through Fifteen Analysis

Chapter Thirteen again shows Ven beginning to change his opinions about the idea of home. As he sits at breakfast, he realizes the Crossroads Inn is warm, and comfy, with his friends nearby, full of laughter and light. Even in spite of the Spice Folks who torment Char and Ida who continues to annoy Ven, the Inn is like home, with family who doesn't always get along, but always stands up for one another. There is even romance, as Char begins to eye the female cook. This concept, however, is shattered by the



appearance of Knapp and Whiting. Again, Whiting is always the bearer of bad tidings, and foreshadows hard times for Ven.

Chapter Fourteen solidifies the character of Whiting as a bad person. It is clear Whiting is lying, but what is unclear is how he managed to get his ring into Ven's room. This foreshadows information later the Cadwalder was used to plant the evidence. Since Ida was in his room, one could assume she is responsible, but her quick defense of Ven suggests she is not the one to blame. In fact, Ida shows great courage in sticking up for Ven, and he returns the favor by taking the blow Whiting meant for her. This shows that their friendship, although volatile, is beginning to grow. Char again shows himself to be a great friend, as he too defends Ven, even though he knows he will likely be taken to jail as well. Trudy's defense of all the children shows her again to be a mother figure. Combined, these are strong testaments to the growing relationships between the characters in the story. Whiting's constant berating of everyone simply shows he is a mean spirited man with nothing but revenge on his mind. The knowledge that he has accused Ven not only of stealing but of murder furthers the notion that Whiting will do anything to hurt Ven.

In Chapter Fifteen, Char again teaches Ven that he and he alone is responsible for his actions. Ven, as always, places blame on himself for the situation, but Char reminds him he makes choices that affect his life. Ven is learning, through Char's constant reminders, that everyone makes choices as to their actions, and they should take responsibility for those actions. Outside the wagon, the traveler's reaction to the idea of a Nain again shows that this land is not as kind as Vaarn, foreshadowing possible problems for Ven. Whiting's response, in telling the travelers to avoid the Crossroads Inn, suggests he may be partially responsible for the lack of guests at the inn, again showing his cruel intentions.

When Ven is taken from the wagon with his friends and given to the soldiers, there is a sense of dread, as he is to be seen directly by the king. However, Oliver's previous comments about the kindness of the King suggest he is simply trying to get to the bottom of the story. When the constable goes with him, it is obvious that he is concerned about Ven's well being. One senses that Knapp is the person Trudy believed him to be, but also that he has to do his job. The descriptive ride to the castle helps to set up the glory of the castle.



Chapter Sixteen through Chapter Eighteen

Chapter Sixteen through Chapter Eighteen Summary

In Chapter Sixteen, Ven is amazed at the beauty of Castle Elysian, where King Vandemere resides. He is taken to the dungeon, as the King is currently away. Once there, Ven finds he is relieved, as the cell is not the worst place he has stayed in his life. He is told to write his story for the king, who will return in a few days, and who will read his statement at that time. Constable Knapp tells him to tell the truth, as the King is good at detecting lies. Ven wishes he had died with the other sailors.

In Chapter Seventeen, Ven begins to write his story for the king, and after a time, he is visited by a hooded figure, who tells him he can help him get out. Ven warily agrees, but is shocked to learn the figure is none other than Whiting himself. Whiting explains that he is really Ven's friend, and that the others pretending to be are merely using him. He further explains that he is sorry for all the deception, but he had to get Ven away from the Crossroads Inn. He states that the Fire Pirate attack was orchestrated by Oliver himself, and that Oliver's taking of Ven up the mast was not to cure his illness, but to call the island for his own benefit. Whiting explains that, as a Nain, Ven has the natural ability to call forth places of the Living Water. He further claims Oliver needs the island water, because his wife is a Revenant.

In Chapter Eighteen, Whiting explains that a Revenant is a spirit of the dead who is unable to rest because of some lingering business. Ven remembers how Trudy improved following her drinking of the water, and is shocked. Whiting continues, noting that it is Trudy who haunts the crossroads at night. He claims he can help Ven leave the city and return home, and he even offers to free Char and Ida. On the way, he notes, they will stop at the Floating Island to check on it. Ven, confused, says nothing as Whiting goes to get the guard, torn between his desire to go home and his loyalty to his new friends. Ven looks at Whiting through his jack knife, and sees that Whiting has a diamond vial just like the one in which Oliver took the Living Water. Ven calls out, declining Whiting's offer to leave, and angrily notes Whiting is a liar who wants the water for himself. Whiting, knowing his charade is up, threatens Ven further, and when he mentions the killing of the sailors on his father's ship, he calls it by name. Ven realizes no one knew the name of the vessel outside of Vaarn, and when he presses for an answer, Whiting merely scoffs that he knows many things he isn't supposed to.

Chapter Sixteen through Chapter Eighteen Analysis

Chapter Sixteen serves two major purposes. First, it is clear from the description of Castle Elysian and King Vandemere himself that the king cares very much for the people of his kingdom. He even built a new castle to be closer to them, showing he



cares about what and who they are. The dungeon, although dark, is clean, showing that even his prisoners are treated well. They are kept warm, and given private cells. Further, the king's request that he write his story shows he is interested in hearing Ven's side of the tale. Ven's wish at the end of the chapter, however, shows he still feels tremendous guilt over the incident with his father's ship, and that he is very afraid of the future.

Chapter Seventeen shows Whiting again to be a character who cares only for his own well being. Whiting goes so far as to trick Ven into believing that everyone he cares about has been lying to him, and everyone is against him. He nearly has him convinced that Oliver and Trudy are unholy beings who used Ven for their own benefits. His claims that Oliver caused the Fire Pirate attack, that he used Ven to call the island, and that Trudy is a Revenant frighten Ven, as he is able to see, when looking through Whiting's eyes, how these things could be true. Ven's fear makes him easily convinced.

This trend continues in Chapter Eighteen, as Whiting continues to put fear into Ven, and doubt. Whiting makes it seem clear to Ven, as he is able to tie together many of the loose ends of the pieces Ven has seen thus far. His use of Char and Ida as bait even further helps to convince Ven, but the mention of Floating Island serves to further confuse him. When Ven heeds his father's words to use the jack knife to see things as they really are, however, he sees Whiting's true nature. Thankfully, Ven refuses to go with Whiting, and even the guard is able to see Whiting's quick change of character. Whiting's knowledge of the ship's name foreshadows the idea that it was Whiting, not Oliver, who was responsible for the attack on Pepin's vessel.



Chapter Nineteen through Chapter Twenty One

Chapter Nineteen through Chapter Twenty One Summary

Chapter Nineteen finds Ven finishing his tale for the king. Finally, the jailer comes for him with soldiers, and is surprised when Ven first asks his name, and then thanks him for his care. The soldiers take him to a room filled with puzzles, a man in dark robes, and another man in regular clothing. Ven accidentally bows to the man in robes, believing him to be the king, but he is quickly corrected by the constable. The king is very pleasant, and although Ven makes several mistakes in manner, the king continues to be patient, understanding Ven's nervousness. The king asks Ven to tell him his story, which he does, from beginning to end. The king listens intently, putting together a puzzle at the same time. When he is finished, the king points out that the barrels of quicklime Ven found on his father's ship were not the shipbuilders, but Witherspoon's, who was in on the attack. The king immediately dismisses the charge of murder, noting that Oliver's report said nothing of a man thrown overboard. He also examines the supposedly stolen ring, and mentions that, if it had really been at sea where it was stolen, it would be discolored. It isn't, so the ring could never have been on the ship for Ven to even know of its existence. The king dismisses all charges. Ven thanks him, but immediately notes the king owes him something.

In Chapter Twenty, Ven quickly explains that as a Nain, it is tradition that a tale of one's life be rewarded with the tale of the listener's life. The king dismisses everyone else in the room, and explains to Ven that he was born to be king, but it happened too quickly. His mother died giving birth to him, and his father died when he was only sixteen. Thus, Vandemere became king only two years ago. He tells Ven he is fond of puzzles, as his father explained that they helped the mind to think clearly. When he was young, the king traveled the kingdom to see the inhabitants of the world and to meet them not as a king, but as a simple man. He aimed to know the magic of the world so he could better rule. When his father died, however, he was forced to come back to the castle. He notes that he merely wants to know the real truth, and Ven interjects, noting that his father called it the hammered truth. The king says he has been searching for someone to travel the world for him, to bring him the true stories of the magic in the world. He asks Ven to audition for the position by telling him a story.

In Chapter Twenty One, Ven tells the king the tales of Amariel and her underwater world. He describes, in her words, the land of the underwater sea where her father once took her. It is a sour place, both the beginning and the end of the world, and it felt like death and murder. He describes it in perfect detail, and ends by noting that there are some places in the world that are dark due to absence of light, and some that are dark because of evil.



Chapter Nineteen through Chapter Twenty One Analysis

Chapter Nineteen introduces King Vandemere, one of the more important but less seen characters in the book. The king proves to be kind, generous, and as curious, perhaps, as Ven himself. The king's eye for detail is keen, and his ability to discern the truth is a gift. It is the king who realizes Whiting is a liar and that Witherspoon was responsible for the fire pirate attack. He is polite and always considerate, almost amused by Ven's clear lack of social skills. On the other hand, Ven is a nervous wreck, consistently violating norms in front of the king, but he does this on accident, as he has never been in the presence of royalty. It is clear from this chapter that perhaps the king and Ven have a lot in common, foreshadowing their business deal later in the novel. It is also clear from Ven's asking of the jailer's name that he is not only polite, but very interested in the details, a fact that his father noted too in the beginning of the tale. This tendency foreshadows his ability to be a good reporter for the king.

The king's interest in Ven continues in Chapter Twenty, when he indulges the boy with a tale of his own life. It is clear the king's life is one of privilege, but also one of suffering and stress. Losing his mother at birth, the king had only his father, who perished when he was only sixteen. His dreams of knowing and seeing the world were dashed as he was forced to become king so early. His natural curiosity, like Ven's, drives him, but unlike Ven, he is not free to do as he pleases. His puzzle abilities help him to discern the truth when he can, but his lack of freedom forces him to forgo his search for the truth. This honest outpouring to Ven shows not only that the king trusts him, but also foreshadows his request that Ven become his reporter.

The story Ven tells in Chapter Twenty One reminds readers of the efforts of Amariel to save Ven, but also tells of the sea under the ocean. Ven's depiction of the story, in the words of Amariel and not translated into his own, show that Ven would be a wonderful reporter, in that he tells the truth in the words of the teller of the tale. His story of evil and despair comes through brilliantly, and it is clear the king will ask him to become the reporter.



Chapter Twenty Two through Chapter Twenty Four

Chapter Twenty Two through Chapter Twenty Four Summary

Chapter Twenty Two finds the king offering Ven the position of court reporter. He points out that only Ven, in the entire castle, knows the name of the jailer, because he has an eye for detail. Ven, however, refuses, as he has to get home to take care of Witherspoon, who ruined his family. The king asks Ven to at least consider the position. He throws Ven a puzzle box, explaining that it belonged to a Rover, a man of a nomad race who travels the world, keeping his valuables in a hand crafted box so intricate, only the designer, or a clever thief, knows the solution. He asks that Ven let him know his answer by the end of the week. On returning to the Inn, Ven immediately accuses Ida of being the one who set him up. Trudy intervenes, chastising Ven for making accusations without proof. Ven and Char leave the Inn late as a result, and the fog begins to deepen, as wolves begin to form out of the blackness and attack something in the crossroads.

In Chapter Twenty Three, Char and Ven run to the crossroads, where they find the wolves attacking Nicolas. After distracting the creatures, they pick up the unconscious boy and run to the cemetery, hoping the fence will keep the creatures out. Char and Ven discuss Ven's option to become a court reporter as they wait, and Char notes that Ven drives him crazy, as he hasn't "had cause to grow" (p. 255). Ven reminds Char that he does realize he has had a good life, and good friends like him, but Char reminds him again that he can't always feel guilty for others' decisions. When asked why he isn't more mature, Ven thinks for a moment before the boys hear another voice, quieting them, and they see the form of a young boy their age solidify from the mist. The new boy explains that Ven hasn't had to grow up. The form tells the boys to lay down as the wolves approach, and as the rain starts, he tells Ven the rain may improve his sight. He then admits he is Gregory Snodgrass, the deceased son of Oliver and Trudy.

Chapter Twenty Four finds Ven and Char surprised, but Gregory explains he is not a bad ghost. When he tells Ven to look closely at the wolves, Ven pulls out his jack knife, and sees the howling animals are really Whiting's dogs. The dogs, Gregory explains, have collars on that make the wind blowing through them sound demonic. Gregory spreads into a thin mist, and frightens them away. As the boys speak, Gregory tells Ven that Trudy is not a Revenant, although he himself is, but instead, she is being poisoned by what haunts the crossroads. The inn, he says, is plagued by something that was buried at the crossroads long ago. The area has magical power, he says, but the evil residing there uses the power to raise more Revenants. He tells the boys to hurry home, as the evil is coming.

The boys take Nick's body and drag it to the crossroads, where they are attacked by unseen hands at their feet. Ven uses the blessing he learned from Clem, and the two



are able to make it back to the inn. Trudy asks what happened as she takes the unconscious Nick, and then calls for Clem, as she is trained in healing arts, and for McLean, who sings a healing song. While Char, Trudy, Clem, and the Spice Folk carry Nick to a room in the inn, Ven speaks to McLean about his healing song. McLean admits his song was merely Nick's name, as the name of a person has special powers. Ven tells McLean the story of their night, including Gregory's comments about the inn, and he suggests Ven should sleep on it, and examine the puzzle in the morning. As they part for the night, McLean blesses Ven's beard, and Ven, frozen, informs him he doesn't have one.

Chapter Twenty Two through Chapter Twenty Four Analysis

Chapter Twenty Two introduces Ven's own crossroads, the job offer from the king. Ven misses his family, and feels he has to return to them to face what he believes will be his father's wrath as a result of the pirate attack. At the same time, Ven realizes this opportunity would be perfect for him, as it might satisfy his curiosity, at least momentarily. The same train Ven's father chastised him for earlier, seeing the detail rather than the whole picture, is exactly the trait the king is looking for. His asking of the jailer's name is proof not only that he pays attention to such details, but that the people he encounters are highly important to him. The introduction of the Rover box here, combined with the lengthy description, foreshadows the discovery that it is a Rover box that is causing the problem at the crossroad. The mention that a clever thief could open the box implies later that Ida is a perfect choice for such a chore. At this moment, however, Ven clearly thinks that because Ida was in his room the day he was accused of the ring theft, she must have planted it. Her lack of interest and Trudy's comments imply there will be more details later in the novel about who the true traitor is. The closing of the chapter sets up the confrontation at the crossroads in the next chapter.

The decision of Ven and Char to attempt to save whomever is at the crossroads shows not only their bravery, but their willingness to help another in need. In Ven's case, this likely stems from the captain's order to save someone if possible. Their quick thinking, combined with the animal's fear of fire, gives them just enough time to save their friend.

The conversation between Char and Ven in the cemetery is vital to the coming of age theme in the novel. Char, roughly the same age as Ven, is much more mature, and thinks on a much higher level. Ven's response that he recognizes his blessed life ceases to be the point, as Char's comments show him to think on a much more worldly level. While Ven feels responsible for everyone else, Char understands that people make their own decisions, and that life doesn't always respond the way one wishes. When Gregory arrives, his point that Ven hasn't needed to grow up foreshadows Ven's need, and ability, to grow as his challenges in the novel require it. Gregory's comment that the rain can help their vision also foreshadows the realization in the next chapter that the wolves are merely dogs.



Gregory's appearance answers several questions presented in earlier chapters. First, he makes it clear Trudy is not a Revenant, as Whiting claimed. Second, it is Gregory's words that prompt Ven to look closer at the creatures, allowing him to see they are merely Whiting's dogs. This suggests someone is calling them, or encouraging them to attack, foreshadowing the knowledge later of Cadwalder and Whiting's involvement. Gregory also gives Ven the hint that something is buried in the crossroads, foreshadowing his decision to find it and dig it up. Gregory cares for his mother deeply, as is shown by his unwillingness to cross over and by his help in keeping Trudy inside later in this chapter. This, combined with his comment that he will not leave until the evil is dispersed, suggests that if Ven can fight the evil haunting the crossroads, Gregory can be at peace.

The scene between McLean and Ven in this chapter is also significant. Throughout the novel there have been hints that McLean is hiding something, as he never leaves the inn, and reports having spies throughout the inn. His magical hearing ability seems great, and his healing powers are also rather advanced. In his comment about Ven's beard, the author foreshadows the answer to the riddle, that McLean is in fact blind. Further, McLean's suggestion to Ven to study the situation like a puzzle implies that Ven should use the King's rules on the situation, which he does in later chapters.



Chapter Twenty Five through Chapter Twenty Seven

Chapter Twenty Five through Chapter Twenty Seven Summary

In Chapter Twenty Five, Ven informs McLean that he has discovered his secret based on his comment; McLean is blind. McLean admits he is and that the Spice Folk, Murphy, and Trudy all act as his eyes, as does the wind and the music. As the two then discuss Ven's options, McLean reminds him that he can always return home. Ven, still afraid of his father, claims he isn't sure he has a home, but McLean notes home is where one chooses to stay and chooses to fight for. Ven remarks that Oliver used him to call the island, and although McLean admits this is true, he also remarks that Oliver's trip to the island also allowed Ven to send word home to his family, and Ven is reassured. Ven offers to call the island for McLean so he can experience it, but McLean points out that such a tremendous gift should only be used in matters of life and death. That night, Ven, Char, Nick, and Clem are allowed to stay in a guest room in the inn, and once alone, they recount their ordeal to Clem, who offers to help them find and combat the evil.

Once they awaken, in Chapter Twenty Six, Ven suggests they look at the problem as the king would look at a puzzle. Clem goes to get Saeli, and when they meet back up at the crossroads, she notices there is a patch of ground where nothing grows. The children begin to dig, with Ven discovering he does have a knack for digging, as a Nain. At the bottom of the pit, the group finds a Rover's box, open, with a skeleton inside. Ven suggests that perhaps the Rover was robbed, forced to open his box, and killed, then placed inside. Now, the Revenant roams the crossroads, seeking revenge. He laments that only the Rover who made the box or a very talented thief could solve the puzzle, and the group all think of Ida. Clem goes to retrieve her, and she manages to close the box. In the process, however, she inhales the dust that rises from it, and she begins to disappear.

In Chapter Twenty Seven, Gregory's ghost informs them that because Ida inhaled the essence of the Revenant, she too is becoming a Revenant. Ven suggests asking McLean to sing Ida's name to help heal her, but Ida admits she doesn't know her real name. Suddenly, McLean's statement about the Floating Island returns to Ven, and he notes that Living Water could save Ida. The foursome run to the stables and borrow a horse and wagon from Cadwalder, in order to get to town and to the sea. Saeli is able to tell the horses where to go, and Murphy agrees to inform McLean of their plans if Ven agrees to being him a treat.

The group rides past the White Fern Inn, where Whiting's dogs go wild, and Clem secretly tells Ven she is worried, as Ida is disappearing faster. Ven reminds her she is a curate, and that she needs to be strong. At the gate to the city, Clem at first tries to reason with the guard, but when that fails, Saeli uses vines to entwine him. The group



travels to the sea side, where Ven looks out into the ocean, touching his albatross feather for luck.

Chapter Twenty Five through Chapter Twenty Seven Analysis

Ven's discovery that McLean is blind explains much of the mystery surrounding the character. As a blind man, it is clear why McLean is able to use his hearing so well, why the Spice Folk are constantly around him, why Murphy helps him, and why Trudy assists him. In turn, McLean's ability to use sound to "see" the world is a benefit to Ven, as he is able to understand that there are ways of knowing things without necessarily seeing them. McLean also teaches Ven a valuable lesson in Chapter Twenty Five about home. Ven thinks of home in terms of family and security, but McLean points out that home is really where one decides they want to stay. To McLean, the word home symbolizes the place a person chooses to fight for, and one can see Ven is already beginning to fight for the crossroads and the people he knows there. This not only shows Ven is beginning to grow, but also that he is beginning to adopt a new view of "home". McLean furthers his lessons through his comments about Oliver. His point to Ven is that Oliver didn't use him for an evil purpose, but simply as a tool to help save his wife. While being used isn't a preferable state, he did get something out of the situation, and he did help to save a kind woman who is now helping to house him. Finally, McLean's comments about calling the island suggest that Ven may need to call it later for a more dire cause.

The end of Chapter Twenty Five and Chapter Twenty Six show the children of the inn are beginning to act as a family. Working together, they are able to solve more of the riddle than any would individually. Ven's use of the king's puzzle logic works here, in that he needs to look at the situation in a logical way. This too shows Ven is beginning to develop more advanced and adult skills. This is further shown as Ven learns he really has a natural talent for digging. This idea of using natural talent becomes important in this chapter, as all the characters begin using their skills to advance the process. Clem is able to use her curate powers for Nick, and to help them at the crossroads. Saeli uses her powers to discover the location of the grave. Even Ida's thieving skills come into play in this chapter. The realization that the box in the ground is that of a Rover was foreshadowed by the king's comments earlier in the novel, as was Ida's ability to solve the puzzle. The danger she is in at the end of the novel, however, serves to introduce the next adventure for Ven and his colleges.

Chapter Twenty Seven focuses on the group's ability to plan Ida's rescue. Again, it is clear each character has specific skills that allow them to assist greatly with the plan, showing that each person has talent to use. Saeli uses her talent to speak to the animals, getting the group where they need to go. She also uses her ability to grow plants to restrain the guard without difficulty. Clem's ability is in her blessings, and in her status as curate, in that she keeps Ida calm. Ven's puzzle solving abilities allow him to recall the island, and McLean's comments, forming the plan that will eventually save

Ida. The addition of the albatross feather at the end of this chapter again signifies a change in luck for Ven.



Chapter Twenty Eight through Chapter Thirty

Chapter Twenty Eight through Chapter Thirty Summary

Chapter Twenty Eight finds Ven yelling across the ocean for Amariel, who tells him to find a boat if he wants to get out into open sea. Char, Clem, and Ven find a vessel suitable, although abandoned, and Clem points out that Ven has suddenly become a decision maker. He notes that he has found a necessity to do so. Saeli, however, is too afraid to go, so Ven asks her to stay behind with the horses. The group sets off, but their rowing seems to do nothing until there is a sudden jerk, and Ven feels the boat being pulled. Looking over, he sees Amariel helping them along. Once in the sea, Amariel asks if Ven is finally ready to explore with her, and when he declines, she leaves. Ven laments he has never been so sad, but he forges on, using the conch shell given to him by Oliver to call the island. The wind picks up, and a storm emerges, violently throwing the small boat. Char exclaims to Ven that the Island has appeared, but that it looks very different.

In Chapter Twenty Nine, the island appears violent in storm and looking very angry. They wrestle the craft to the island, but the boat accidentally lands on the now invisible Ida. Entering the cave, the wind's whispers are even angry, but Ven continues, knowing he has to save Ida. Reaching the stream of Living Water, Ven tells Ida to drink, and when she does, she becomes visible again. Soon, however, the ground begins to rumble, and rocks begin to fall as Ven realizes they have unbalanced the island. He remembers Oliver traded the water from the well with the Island, and now sees his mistake, but has nothing to trade. At the last moment, however, the ground stops moving, and Ven looks over to Ida, who is crying into the small stream. Ven realizes that Ida's tears, as rare as they are, rebalanced the island. Returning to shore is a quick trip with Amariel's help, and Ven makes sure to whisper a thank you as they land. On the way back to the inn, Ven stops for a barrel of fish heads for Murphy, and once they return, the group prepares to bury the Rover's box. Whiting appears, shocked that Ven is not in jail, and as he goes to pester Trudy, the group buries the box, and says a quick prayer. Saeli grows flowers which linger, and Clem wishes Gregory a peaceful rest as the group returns to the inn.

In Chapter Thirty, Trudy and Whiting are arguing over Whiting's involvement in the happenings at the crossroads when Murphy suddenly attacks Cadwalder. Clem surmises that Cadwalder has been working for Whiting, planting venison so the dogs come, and frightening Ven and Char their first night. Ida attests to this, as she has seen his room filled with paraphernalia from the White Fern. Trudy angrily tells Whiting she will have his Inn for the damage he has done. As Whiting leaves, Murphy reminds Ven he now owes him two favors, to which Ven replies that he should check the wagon for



fish heads. Trudy reports that Nick is feeling much better, and when the group speaks with him, he explains to Ven that he has a letter for him from his father that was carried over by an albatross.

In the letter, his father lets him know he is thrilled Ven is still alive and he holds no ill feelings toward him for his actions on the ship. He also explains that his reasons for having Ven work all the positions in the ship business was to groom him to be an inspector. However, he explains that Ven is at a crossroads in his life, and that he should take the time to decide how to spend his life. His father gives him permission to have a life outside the family, but reminds him to come home now and again. After reading the letter, the children are ushered up to wash, and Trudy takes a wet rag to Ven in particular. She, and Ven, are shocked to discover the dirt on his face is not dirt, but instead, a hair on his chin. Ven has finally begun to sprout a beard. When asked if he is planning to stay or return home, Ven recalls McLean's words, and explains that he will be doing both.

Chapter Twenty Eight through Chapter Thirty Analysis

In Chapter Twenty Eight, we again see Amariel coming to Ven's rescue. At first she seems unhelpful, but once on the ocean, it is Amariel who pulls their boat, getting them out to sea. Ven's character in this chapter is significant, in that he shows a new side to himself, one that is capable of making quick decisions. He himself points out that he needs to, solidifying Gregory's comments earlier that Ven simply hadn't grown up because he didn't need to. Now seeing a direct need, in the help of his friend, Ven is completely capable of making the decisions needed.

Ven's feelings for Amariel are more clear in this chapter, as well. He hates to have to keep putting Amariel off, but when she leaves, seemingly in anger, Ven is heartbroken. He has developed a love for Amariel, even if just as a friend, and his sorrow shows this. However, his new-found determination also keeps him moving forward, despite his own feelings, showing a selflessness that indicates maturity. Char's ending comments about the island foreshadow the island's anger at being called in the next chapter.

In Chapter Twenty Nine, this is shown further through the use of the wind, rain, and temperature that rips through the area. The island is clearly unhappy, as Ven and Char both point out, but again, Ven knows this is the only way to save Ida. He forgets, however, the balance of the area, and things come near a catastrophic end. The delicate balance of the island is representative of the balance in nature that Ven is beginning to realize. It is only when Ida cries that the island is again restored, because Ida's tears are rare. Having no family and few friends, Ida is tougher than most, and her tough exterior often keeps her safe, but with no feelings. It is because of the rarity of her tears that the island is satiated.

At the end of this chapter, we again see Amariel, knowing she is still helping Ven, and still holding out for him to join her. This foreshadows their meeting again later in the novel. The burial of the Rover, and the subsequent joyous celebration of the group



symbolizes the end of the danger at the crossroads, and the new friendship of the group. Clem's call to Gregory to rest well signifies that he is now able to rest, because his mother and the inn are safe. The flowers that linger also show the ground to be in good health once again. This happiness is only dimmed slightly by the appearance of Whiting, foreshadowing his confrontation with Trudy in the next chapter.

Chapter Thirty shows the end of Maurice Whiting. With Murphy's help, and with Ida's assistance as well, Cadwalder's involvement is revealed, much to the surprise of everyone. The White Fern items in his room and the venison in his pocket are sure signs of his betrayal. Trudy's anger is justified, and the evidence against Whiting is enough that even the constable understands that Whiting is in serious trouble. His threats to Ven now seem hollow, as it is clear Whiting has nothing left with which to threaten.

The letter from Pepin Polypheme is vital to the story. Pepin lets Ven know he is cleared of all guilt as a result of the pirate attack, something Ven needed to hear in order to forgive himself. His use of the crossroads concept shows this to be an important time in Ven's life, and symbolizes the transition Ven has made at the Crossroads Inn in terms of his maturity. Pepin's permission for Ven to live his life as he feels he should give Ven the confidence to move forward, without returning home to face his imagined consequences. Ven is free from his past to move forward. This is further symbolized by the growth of Ven's beard. Although it is slow to start, the growth of Ven's first facial hair shows he is maturing into an adult Nain.

Ven's thoughts at the end of this chapter solidify Ven's matured concept of home, as well. He now understands that McLean was right, that home is always where you make it, and home is where people you care about reside. People like Char in the novel, and Ida, and Clem, all come to represent home to Ven because they are loving, caring, people who look out for one another and help one another. This new concept of home also foreshadows Ven's acceptance of the king's offer of a reporter position.



Chapter Thirty One through Chapter Thirty Three

Chapter Thirty One through Chapter Thirty Three Summary

The following morning, in Chapter Thirty One, Ven returns to Elysian Castle, where he explains to the king that he seeks the ultimate adventure. When Ven accepts the position, the king gives him a blue binder in which to record his findings, and asks that he also draw images of things he sees. When the king offers items for his journey, Ven asks only that he be allowed to travel without restriction, and with his friends. He also asks to be allowed to continue to stay at Hare Warren, as he likes being part of the family there. Ven asks only for one thing, and that is for the king to deal appropriately and severely with Whiting.

Back at the inn, Ven tells his friends of his deal with the king, and they all agree to join him on his journeys from time to time. Ida, however, merely says she will think about it. Char is annoyed, but Ven points out that Ida is so alone in the world, she trusts no one. Char and Ven go to return to the kitchen while Char dreamily talks of his love in the kitchen, when suddenly flowers appear, courtesy of Saeli. Ven explains she likely wants him to give the flowers to his love, and he thanks her. The flowers remain beautiful, and Ven knows the evil at the inn is gone.

In Chapter Thirty Two, Ven waits by the sea for Amariel, who finally appears. He gives her candy for her help with Ida, but regretfully turns her down again when she asks him to come exploring. This time, however, he asks her the same, if she would like to come on land with him. She, too, refuses, but the two agree that someday, they will join one another. Ven returns to the inn, where there is a full house, as the inn is having a party, and the cemetery is again peaceful and quiet.

In Chapter Thirty Three, Ven is sitting in the inn, writing all the stories he has experienced thus far in the journal for the king. He writes the tales with the albatross feather, as he knows there is much to tell. He is convinced that the albatross dropped the feather to teach Ven that the smallest things in life sometimes have the most magic. He knows he owes the albatross his life, and although he misses his family greatly, he is excited about the job that lay ahead and about the books he will write.

Chapter Thirty One through Chapter Thirty Three Analysis

Chapter Thirty One serves to tie the "Preface" to the rest of the novel, and to tie up loose ends. Ven's acceptance of the position and his small requests to remain



anonymous shows again his new maturity. The new binder given to him shows how Ven managed to keep notes for the books mentioned in the preface, and the king's mention of drawing what he sees explains the second journal discussed in the "Preface". Ven's mention that Cadwalder had been spoken to, and his request that Whiting be handled, show Ven is still trying to make sure the wrongs committed to his friends are righted. Finally, his decision to stay at Hare Warren, where he feels part of a family shows too his new concept of home.

Back at the inn, his friends' decision to accompany him on occasion suggest that Ven's tale is not yet over, and shows them to be solid in their friendships. However, Ida's response also shows that, for some, the idea of home and trust is nonexistent. Even after their adventure, Ida still seems reluctant to be a part of the group. Her lifetime of living alone has taken its toll on her ability to relate to others, although she does want to be noticed. Saeli's flowers at the end of this chapter are symbolic, in that the crossroads is really cured.

Chapter Thirty-Two shows that the relationship between Amariel and Ven will continue, as well. They care for one another, and although neither can immediately join the other, their offers suggest that such an event may occur in the future. This chapter also shows that Trudy and the inn are healing, as a big party is thrown and the cemetery remains quiet and peaceful, implying that Gregory has finally passed over.

The final chapter of the book brings the reader to the present, with Ven writing his tale down in the beginning of the journal for the king. He is in his "new home", the inn, again tying together his new maturity with his new concept of home. His use of the albatross feather is symbolic, in that throughout the novel, the albatross has been symbolic for a change of luck, and Ven realizes now the albatross feather represents his ability to pay attention to small details. His excitement about the adventure ahead simply shows again Ven has entered a new stage in his life.



Characters

Charles Magnus Ven Polypheme

Charles Magnus Ven Polypheme, or Ven, is the primary character in the story. Ven is a Nain, a race of people commonly found underground. They live for hundreds of years, and thus, at fifty, Ven is still a teenager. He has a natural bursting curiosity, and has spent much of his life in the close care of his tight knit ship building family. Vaarn, the city in which he lives, is accepting of Nain, but Ven knows other areas of the world are not. Ven is young and has little experience dealing with those outside of his family. On his first inspection of a ship for his father's business, the ship is attacked, and Ven is thrown into the water, where his journey really begins.

Ven constantly feels guilty for the pain he inflicts onto others. He takes responsibility for the death of the sailors on the ship, even though the pirate attack was the cause of the problem. He feels guilty that he has a loving family while Char does not. He feels badly that Char and Ida are arrested, even though it is Whiting who creates the situation. Most of all, Ven is in a constant state of guilt when he thinks he has let his father down. Throughout the novel, Ven battles between doing what he wants to do and doing what he believes others want him to do.

Over the course of the novel, however, Ven becomes more proficient at making his own decisions, and basing those decisions on all factors. With the help of his friends, Ven slowly learns he is worth something, and is talented at many things. He comes to find that home is where one chooses to make it, and that friends are vital to survival. Finally, Ven learns that everyone has a talent, and in using that talent, one can be happy. It is only when his father releases him from his guilt, however, that Ven can forget his past and move forward with a future he himself chooses.

Char

Char is a young man in his teens who acts as assistant chef on the Serelinda. Char is an orphan, and Ven soon learns that Char has no family at all. He does not resent others who do, and refuses to allow anyone to feel sorry for him as a result of his circumstances. Char is assigned to look out for Ven by the captain, and he takes this responsibility very seriously. He watches out for him on the ship, and teaches him what he needs to know of being a sailor. He even sneaks onto the rowboat headed to Floating Island, claiming to do so out of concern for Ven, which the captain finds amusing. Char and Ven quickly become close friends on the ship, but when it lands, Ven expects Char to go on his way. He soon locates him in the crowd, however, and Char again helps him to find lodging, and sticks by his side. When Ven is arrested, Char sticks up for him, being arrested himself simply trying to save Ven. He also helps to save Nicolas at the crossroads, showing himself to be a caring individual, and continues to help Ven on his quest to save the Inn. His caring nature is further shown by his love



for the cook at the inn, Felicity. It is very clear by the end of the novel that Char is a good, caring, kind person, although he is a bit rough on Ida. Char teaches Ven that one person's life is not better than anyone else's, regardless of circumstance. He is a self-sufficient person, but one who is able to cherish friendship as a type of family relationship he himself is not accustomed to.

Amariel

Amariel is a merrow, or a mermaid. As a creature of the sea, Amariel is the first friend Ven meets on his journey in the novel, and perhaps the one that helps him the most, aside from Char. Amariel is responsible for saving Ven's life, as she keeps him afloat, and alive, until he can be rescued. Amariel is a good person, but is also curt and rather demanding. She knows what she wants and what she expects, and can become rather cross when those are not delivered. That being said, Amariel is also very kind, and seems to enjoy Ven's company.

After saving him, Amariel follows him to Kingston, where she informs him she has found someone who can give him gills so he can travel the water with her. When Ven continues to put her off, she becomes annoyed, but also continues to reappear when Ven needs her most. Amariel is the one who suggests Ven find a boat on which to sail Ida to the Floating Island, and then it is she who proceeds to carry the boat to the island when their rowing doesn't work. It is also Amariel who returns to boat to Floating Island after the children lose it, and who carries them once again back to shore.

At the end of the novel, although Amariel declines to come with Ven, it is clear the two will continue to see one another. Of all the friends Ven meets in the novel, Amariel appears to be the one he treasures most, as he knows he owes her his life, several times over. Amariel proves to Ven that even those most unlike him can quickly become friends, and that friends can be counted on, through anything.

Ida

Ida is a human girl Ven meets first in Kingston when she attempts to pickpocket him. Later, he rides with her on the wagon to the Crossroads Inn, where it is clear she is a regular. Ida has no last name and no parents, as she, like so many others, is an orphan. Ida gets by generally through pickpocketing, and trusts very few people. She is shrewd, and often rude to others. Ven finds her, at one point, in his room, and is very terse with her, but over the course of the novel, it appears perhaps Ida does the wrong things she does simply to be noticed. Alone in the world, Ida will do anything to have people pay attention, even if that attention is negative. However, Ida also has a good side, which she shows as she first defends Ven against the theft charges, and later, as she proves Cadwalder is actually responsible for framing him. Further, it is Ida who is able to solve the riddle of the Rover box, and in doing so, she inadvertently turns into a Revenant. It is at this moment that her new friends prove to her that they care, as they go to great



lengths to help save her. As Ven points out at the end of the novel, although Ida seems as though she doesn't need anyone, in reality, she is merely crying out not to be alone.

Clemency

Clemency is a human and is the female steward of Mouse Lodge, the girl's house at Crossroads Inn. Clemency is in training to be a curate, and she is in the position of being a missionary. At the inn, she tends to the congregation of the Spice Folk. Clemency is kind and cares very much for the inn and its surroundings, but she is also aware that something is very wrong with the Inn. She explains to Ven about Gregory Snodgrass, and about the small cemetery near the Inn, as well as about Cadwalder's parents. It is clear Clemency cares for Gertrude and knows that her anguish ties her to the sorrow of the Inn. Clemency helps Ven and Char as they cleanse the crossroads, as well. It is her blessing that saves Ven, and her continued work that helps the group put the Rover to rest, thereby putting Gregory and the crossroads to rest, as well.

Saeli

Saeli is a Gwadd, an ancient race of smaller human-type creatures who can speak with animals and use flowers to communicate, although they are capable of speaking. Saeli is very shy, and tends to turn red when she is spoken to, but she is highly intelligent and very kind. It is Saeli who proves the ground is tainted around the inn through the rapid death of her flowers, and Saeli who finds the Rover's box, as she is able to notice a lack of any vegetation around the area. Further, she is able to convince the horses to take them into Kingston when they need to save Ida. She even agrees to help Ven once he becomes a court reporter. Saeli is one of the characters in the novel that becomes close enough to Ven to show him true friendship.

Oliver Snodgrass

Oliver Snodgrass is the captain of the Serelinda. Oliver and his crew rescue Ven from the ocean following his narrow escape from the Fire Pirates. Oliver is a kind man, who harbors a terrible secret. His wife, Gertrude, has been living with heartache since her son's death, and since the haunting of the crossroads on which her Inn is built and her family is buried. Oliver must repeatedly locate the Floating Island, a magical island on which the Living Water flows. This water helps his wife to continue to live, even though her soul is broken. In return, Oliver replaces the water with rare water from a well in a place the wind can't reach. In this way, he keeps the balance of the island. Oliver uses Ven, a Nain, to call the island, but he does so out of necessity, and not malice. In return, Oliver houses, feeds, and even pays Ven, in addition to sending him to his wife for more food, lodging, and work. Oliver is good to Ven, and his actions show him to be a loving and caring man.



Gertrude Snodgrass

Gertrude Snodgrass is the wife of Oliver Snodgrass and the owner and proprietor of the Crossroads Inn. Gertrude runs the Inn, in part, to help house orphan children who have no where to live. Her own child, Gregory, was killed at the crossroads when he was fourteen years old, and as a result, Gertrude is heartbroken. In addition, her entire family is buried at the nearby graveyard, and she adores the inn and those that reside within it. As a result of this deep devotion to the land and the people of the crossroads, the poison burning the land is poisoning Gertrude as well. She is a loving, caring, honest woman who loves the children of the inn with all of her heart, and everything she does is in an attempt to better their lives. She is a strong woman, as well, with a husband who provides well for her. Throughout the novel, she cares for and helps Ven, and the other children, as a mother would, and it is her strength and conviction that helps Ven to succeed.

Gregory Snodgrass

Gregory Snodgrass is the deceased son of captain Oliver Snodgrass and his wife, Gertrude Snodgrass. Gregory died at the crossroads at the age of fourteen, killed by bandits, according to McLean, the singer. Gregory is a Revenant, or a spirit that continues to wander after death, kept active by unfinished business. Gregory is aware of the evil that haunts the crossroads, and he tries desperately to save his mother and the inn from the blackness. Gregory helps Ven several times in the novel, by saving him from Whiting's dogs, by helping him see the truth, and by showing him how to help heal the crossroads. Gregory knows he will only be able to be at rest once his mother and the inn are safe. He never appears to his mother, knowing that such an appearance would make her suffer, but he does help protect her. Once Ven and his friends put the Rover causing the problems at rest, Gregory is able to finally rest in peace.

Maurice Whiting

Maurice Whiting is a sailor on the Serelinda, the ship Ven is saved with. Whiting pays little attention to Ven until he is chosen by Oliver, the captain, to go to the Floating Island. Whiting is furious, and makes it clear he plans to take his revenge on Ven. Once they land, it becomes even more clear that Whiting is serious, as he verbally threatens Ven and as Ven learns Whiting owns an inn competing with the Crossroads Inn and owns a hoard of wild dogs. It is Whiting who has Ven arrested on suspicion of stealing and murder, and he does this so he can visit Ven in the dungeon. He nearly convinces Ven that he is really his friend and that the others are using him, but Ven is smart enough to realize it is Whiting who wishes to use him. Through Whiting's lies, Ven learns he was used by Oliver to call the Floating Island, although Oliver's reason of saving his wife's life was worth the effort. Whiting is furious when Ven realizes his plan, and equally furious when the king releases him. In the end, Whiting's plans are revealed, and it is discovered that he has been using his dogs to scare off potential



patrons of the Crossroads Inn. His crimes are reported, and he finds himself the one in legal trouble.

King Vandemere

King Vandemere is the king of Serendair, a large island. King Vandemere is a kind, caring king, who became a king far too early as a result of his father's untimely death. King Vandemere is extremely worried about the magic in his lands disappearing, and he has long sought to find someone who can wander the world, gathering information about all magic, so it can be preserved and maintained. When King Vandemere finds Ven in his dungeon, he immediately sets about hearing his story and uses his logical deduction abilities to determine that Ven is in no way guilty of the crimes he is accused of. As a result, King Vandemere sets him free, but also asks him to be a reporter for the kingdom. King Vandemere needs someone who is naturally curious to travel the world, documenting people and places, so that the king can be sure to equally rule over all his kingdom. It is only in the end, when Ven finds the courage to do what he wants, instead of what he is supposed to, that King Vandemere convinces him to become a court reporter.

Vincent Cadwalder

Vincent Cadwalder is the steward of Hare Warren, the boy's dormitory at the Crossroads Inn. He is an orphan whose parents were killed at the crossroads. Gertrude took him in and clothed and fed him his entire life. When he was able, she had him working for her, earning his stay. It is Cadwalder, however, who betrays her by working for Maruice Whiting, her competitor. Cadwalder plants venison outside the inn to draw Whiting's dogs, and tries to scare off Ven. It is also Cadwalder who plants evidence in Ven's room, allowing for his arrest. This backfires, however, when Ven finds the situation an opportunity to meet the king and when the king asks Ven to work for him. Cadwalder is discovered in the end, and although Snodgrass allows him to stay, he will have to regain her trust.

Magnus the Mad

Magnus the Mad, although only spoken of in the novel, was Ven's great-grandfather. A man of curiosity himself, Magnus the Mad was not content to live in the underworld, like many other Nain. His travels to the Great Overworld did not take him to mountain villages as a salesman, like other Nain, but instead to a seaside port town, Vaarn, where he began to build ships. This was a scandal, because Nain were not only known to live underground, but also known to dislike water. The fact that the Polypheme family continued the shipbuilding tradition set them apart from other Nain, but their ships were priceless in terms of their superior craftsmanship.



Pepin Polypheme

Pepin Polypheme is Ven's father. A shipbuilder by trade, it is very clear, even from the beginning, that Pepin loves his sons and is very proud of each of them. He worries, as all fathers do, but he trusts his children to always do the right thing. When the ship Ven is on is destroyed, Pepin worries endlessly, not for the continuance of his business, but for the well-being of his son. When he finds out he is alive, there is tremendous joy, but also a sense of understanding. Pepin knows his son is curious by nature and is different than his siblings. He also knows Ven is concerned about his father's wishes and hopes for him. It is because of this that Pepin feels the need to let Ven know he understands that shipbuilding may not be his choice of career. Pepin gives Ven permission to go out on his own, knowing his son needs that from him.

McLean

McLean is a singer, otherwise known as a story singer, who lives at the Crossroads Inn. McLean's occupation allows him to have many gifts, including the gift of healing through song, as well as hearing gossip and whispers in the wind. McLean, however, is also blind. He is able to use Murphy, the talking cat, and the Spice Folk, or fairies, as his eyes, to tell him everything that happens around him. It is McLean who suggests to Ven that the concept of "home" really just relies on being somewhere one wants to be. McLean helps to heal Nicolas after he is attacked in the crossroads, and he teaches valuable concepts to Ven throughout the novel about life, and happiness.



Objects/Places

Nain

The Nain, like Ven, are a race of people who are good at digging, short, live long lives, and prefer to live underground.

Merrow

A merrow is a mermaid, or a sea creature with features of a human, but the tail and gills of a fish.

Floating Island

Floating Island is a place called from the sea, where winds from all places blow, allowing those who set foot on the island to send messages all over the world. It is also the place of the Living Water.

Vaarn

Vaarn is a city by the sea in which Ven was born.

Lirin

The Lirin are a race of people who live in the forests and the fields.

Gwadd

The Gwadd are a race of people whose talents include speaking to animals, and nature, and helping flowers to bloom.

Revenant

A Revenant is a spirit of sorts, or a deceased individual who, due to unfinished business, is unable to move on in death.

Spice Folk

The Spice folk are tiny creatures, like fairies, who tend to the spices and the flowers of the fields.



Serendair

Serendair is the large island on which Kingston is located. Ven lands on this island following his rescue at sea.

Kingston

Kingston is the name of the city in Serendair where Ven finds himself on landing.

Crossroads Inn

The Crossroads Inn is a haunted inn located at a crossroad in Kingston.

Castle Elysian

Castle Elysian is the castle of King Vandemere, the King of Serendair.



Themes

Coming of Age

One of the primary themes in the novel is the coming of age of Ven Polypheme, the primary character in the novel. The plot follows Ven from his home in Vaarn, where he is part of a large family of shipbuilders, to the foreign island of Serendair, where Ven becomes an aide to the king, and learns to take control of his own destiny. Ven is a talented boy, being groomed by his father to become a ship inspector, unbeknownst to Ven at the opening of the novel. Ven has a natural sense of curiosity, and unlike other Nain, he loves to travel and loves the sea. His race, however, is not always popular above ground, as the Nain tend to live underground. But the Polypheme name is well known in Vaarn, where Ven lives, and thus, his life is commonplace and quite blessed.

An ill planned thieving expedition on a ship Ven is inspecting, however, quickly turns bad, and he is left floating in the sea to die. With the help of a mermaid, and a ship full of kind individuals including young chef Char and captain Oliver Snodgrass, Ven is rescued, and sent to Serendair. It is here Ven begins to learn of discrimination and sorrow, as he learns he is unwelcome in some places, and learns Char and many others he becomes friends with have never had real family or friends. Over the course of his adventures, Ven begins to realize that although he loves his family in Vaarn, his life is more meaningful, and he desires more than shipbuilding. His friends grow to become like family, and his journey leads him not only to accept his natural curiosity, but also to embrace it, and use it to benefit others. Ven is finally able to accept himself and his life.

Power of Friendship

Another theme in the novel is that of the power of friendship. In the beginning of the novel, Ven understands the power of his family, as this family is all he has ever known. At home, he is constant surrounded by loved ones, who help to watch over him and care for him. Once he is thrown to sea after the explosion on the ship, however, young Ven is left on his own. He is quickly befriended by a merrow, Amariel, who saves his life. He is helped by an albatross, who has followed him since he left Vaarn, as well, in that the sailors of the Serelinda found him floating as a result of the circling bird. Once on the boat, he is again befriended by Oliver Snodgrass, the captain, who assigns young chef Char to watch over him. Char, near Ven's own age, respectively, does so, and the two become fast friends. It is Char who helps Ven find a place to stay in Kingston and who leads him to the Crossroads Inn. Char continues to help Ven throughout the novel, showing himself to be a true friend. Snodgrass, too, helps Ven, in that not only does he save his life, but he also sends him to live with his wife, Gertrude, at the Crossroads. He knows Ven will be safe with her.



It is at the Crossroads that Ven meets several other characters who continue to be solid friends throughout the novel. Ida, although a bit of a hard friend to maintain, is necessary to Ven, and also understood by Ven. He sees that Ida has never had anyone who cared for her, and as a result, has difficulty trusting anyone. But when Ida risks her own life to save everyone, Ven repays the favor, solidifying their friendship. Clemency, another at the Inn, also proves a good friend as she helps Ven, Char, and Ida save the Inn, as well as the crossroads, from the evil that haunts them both. Even King Vandemere is a friend, of sorts, in that he and Ven find they have much in common, and it is their shared interests that allow the king to offer Ven a position.

These characters, along with many others, all serve to show Ven that, in his life, family is not the only important aspect. McLean, the singer, had noted that home was where one decided to stay, and Ven learns that his friends are a large part of what makes a home, and makes one willing to stay.

Use of Personal Skills

Another theme within the novel is the use of one's skills to do well in life. Although subtle, this theme is vital through the novel, as many characters struggle to find their place in the world. From the beginning, Ven is searching for his place as he moves from position to position in his father's shop. Ven sees this as not being able to learn a position well, but his father sees it as using his natural curiosity to position him as ship inspector. When Ven discovers this at the end of the novel, he is able to understand his father was merely using his skills in the best way possible. In addition, other characters in the novel are used for their talents, as well, including Ven. When Oliver Snodgrass discovers Ven is a Nain, he uses him to call the floating island. He does not do this to be mean, but simply because he requires the Living Water for his wife. Ven is also used later in the novel for digging, as his race is well known for their abilities. Char, too, has a knack for cooking, and uses his skills to make a living, both on the ship as well as at the Crossroads Inn. Ida's ability to steal both allows her to live, but it also helps the group later as she is able to solve the puzzle of the Rover box. Clemency uses her skills as a curate to assist in the blessings of the Crossroads and to get past the gate in town. Saeli is used for her ability to talk to animals and to grow flowers. In the end, Ven is able to use his curiosity to become a reporter for the king. Everyone in the novel uses their given gifts to help not only themselves, but also one another. As Maurice Whiting shows, however, individuals must be on their guard against those who would use others for their own personal gain.

Style

Point of View

The point of view in the novel switches between first and third person. The first person narrative sections are pieces of Ven Polypheme's journal, which serve as the basis for the book. In these sections, Ven discusses his own journey in his own words, and these first person narratives are vital to understanding what is happening in the novel. They allow the reader to hear Ven's thoughts and feelings first hand, and as they often contain information that is used in the recreation of Ven's whole story. Without these first person narratives to set up changes to the storyline, the story would seem much more distant from the characters, and would no longer seem to be Ven's own story.

While the first person narrative sections are vital, the third person connecting portions of the book are equally necessary. Ven's journal entries serve as launching off points for different sections, but it is the third person pieces of the tale that allow the reader to see what is going on outside of Ven's own mind. These areas provide the reader with the substantial portion of the story, and prove to be reliable. These sections, while focusing on Ven and his thoughts and emotions, also allows the reader access to other characters. Without these sections, the fundamental themes in the novel would be lost.

Setting

The novel is set in several key areas, all of which occur in the Great Overworld, or above ground. The Nain race commonly live in Castenen, underground, but Ven and his family live in Vaarn, a city positioned right on the edge of the sea, where not many Nain choose to live. Vaarn is a sailors city, and the Nain generally dislike water. Ven, however, enjoys the sea, and on his travels, he visits many places in the Overworld. His travels lead him into the ocean, where he learns there are entire kingdoms under the water. He also visits the Floating Island, a place of magic and intrigue where the winds blow from all areas of the world, allowing one to send messages through the air. Ven also visits Serendair, a large island that serves as home to many races. Here, he stays in the town of Kingston, which is a port city, filled with races of all kinds, and shops of all kinds. Ven and his friend, Char, stay at the Crossroads Inn, where much of the book takes place. The inn is a home for many orphans, provided by Gertrude Snodgrass. The Inn is lovely, but haunted by an ancient spirit that Ven and his friends help put to rest. Near the Inn is the graveyard, where Gregory Snodgrass, Gertrude's son, is buried. In addition, Ven spends some time in Castle Elysian, in the dungeon and speaking with the King.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel tends to be very casual in nature. As much of the novel deals with young adults, the language is often that of young adults. The tone and wording



differs slightly when adults are speaking, helping to differentiate the age of the speaker. This language adds depth to the novel, in that as it is geared for young adults, the reader does not get bogged down by stiff or formal sentence structure. As there is much dialog in the novel, it is helpful that, regardless of race or origin, the characters all speak much in the same tone and language, although again, there are subtle differences that help differentiate characters.

Since the time span covered in the novel is not great, the language of the novel helps to keep the sense of days, not weeks, passing, as the characters do not seem to age in their language or conversations. The use of Ven's own writings in the novel help to set the scene of the novel, while the dialog helps to imply the young adult nature of most of the characters. Their quick temper, wonder of the world, and strong desire to help others all lend to the idea of teenage audience. Additionally, the use of a combination of dialog and conversation helps to give the reader detail of the scene, without overloading with too many unneeded details.

Structure

The novel is comprised of thirty three chapters, in addition to an introduction. The chapters are of unequal length and are named according to what is happening within the chapter. Some chapters are very short, with dramatic events, while others are more descriptive, and thus considerably longer.

The plot of the novel is straightforward, without many subplots, and is therefore quite easy to follow. The primary focus of the novel is Ven Polypheme, a young Nain whose journey allows him to mature and to begin making decisions on his own. Ven is a caring, loving person, and although fifty, his race lives so long that fifty is really just a teenager. He is talented at many things, but feels constantly overshadowed by his brothers and sisters. As a result of always being around his family, Ven also rarely has to make his own decisions or fight his own battles. It is only when Ven is lost at sea that he has to learn to fend for himself. His travels to the distant island of Serendair, as well as his dealings with new friends and faces, forces young Ven to realize that home is anywhere one feels safe, and anywhere one would defend. Ven also discovers that a person always has family, but that friends can become a distant family, as well.

The novel's pace tends to be steady, with a constant mix of dialog, action, and description, making the novel a simply and enjoyable read. With magical creatures, different races, ghosts, and adventure, *The Floating Island* is an entertaining fantasy novel that adults and young adults equally enjoy.



Quotes

"Having your head cut off is bad, but it's over quickly at least. Rotting in a dungeon seems a nasty way to spend your life. But it might be better than being set free. If they set me free, and then send me back to the crossroads, it might be worse than dying."
"The First Pages of Ven Polypheme's Journal, pg. 14.

"Don't drink too much of the wind, young Master Polypheme...It's intoxicating; it will get you drunk more easily than you can imagine. And then you will be lost to it, as we are, and have no choice but to chase it over the sea for all your life."
Chapter 2, pg. 35.

"There are creatures in the depths that you could never imagine, and colors you have never seen. Water fairies and nymphs, sea dragons with great hoards of sparkling treasure taken from shipwrecks - there is nothing like the excitement of the carnival that is held on midsummer's day, with the crowning of the sea king and queen and the hippocampus races...."
Chapter 4, pg. 58.

"I had never imagined that a cat might be able to talk. But then again, I had never imagined that fairies might really exist, or merrows, or giant ship eating sharks. I had never imagined that a Nain might summit a mast on the high sea, or walk on a Floating Island, or fight pirates."
Chapter 11, pg. 137.

"There is something wrong there...I don't know if what disturbs the crossroads is a haunting, so I will not call it such. But there is something wrong there."
Chapter 11, pg. 141.

"Char, on the other hand, has no brothers to stink up his room. He has no room. He doesn't even have a last name. I suddenly felt luckier than I ever had before."
Chapter 11, pg. 149.

"You know you're home when your name is called out, sometimes in welcome, sometimes because you are in trouble, and it rings like a bell. Not spoken on the wind outside your window, hollow, with an unmistakable threat. Home was where I felt safe. At that moment, I never felt farther away from home in my life."
Chapter 11, pg. 165.

"The people who seem to be your friends, who smile at you and make you feel at home in a place you don't belong, are using you in ways you could not imagine, unholy ways that would make you fear for your life, and your soul, if you had any idea of them."
Chapter 17, pg. 201.

"Think about it lad - you're a Nain. For all that some humans consider people like you to be freaks, the truth is that you are of an ancient race, a race that still has a lot of old



magic in it. You are a creature of the earth, like the rest of your race."
Chapter 17, pg. 201.

"A Revenant is a person or thing that has died, but who lives on in an unnatural and unholy way after death...Something that returns from the grave-usually because there is something in their lives that remained unfinished when they died."
Chapter 18, pg. 205.

"Fathers. They make us crazy sometimes, but every now and then they tell us great secrets that no one else can. The last thing my father said to me before he died is the most important thing I have ever heard."
Chapter 20, pg. 230.

"There are places that are truly dark in the world, Ven, but this place here, this open stretch of sea where you are floating, is not one of them. It's not really dark here - it's just night."
Chapter 21, pg. 237-238.

"You can't bring my parents back, can't find me new parents, can't seem to understand that some things can't be replaced. You wonder what you can do to make my life better, as if paying for my candy helps. It doesn't. There's some things you just can't do anything about. Stop feeling sorry for me. This is my life, just as that is yours."
Chapter 23, pg. 256.

"Home is where you decide to stay...Where you decide to fight for what matters to you. A man can have many homes, but he has to be willing to stand up and call them his own. Then he is never again uncertain whether he has one or not."
Chapter 25, pg. 274.

"You're at a crossroads in your life, my boy, a place of decision-making. A moment of truth, so to speak. There are many paths you can choose, many opportunities in front of you. You're old enough now to set out on your own, to make your way in the world, to see its wonders. I wouldn't be much of a father if I didn't realize that might be the calling of your heart. Listen to that call."
Chapter 30, pg. 333.



Topics for Discussion

Compare Ven's character at the beginning of the novel to Ven's character at the end of the novel. What are similarities? What are differences? What events happened in the novel to cause these changes? Do you think Ven's character has matured? In what ways does the author indicate this?

Throughout the novel, the characters are put to use where their talent can be best utilized. Ven is able to call the Floating Island and can dig, Ida is used for her skills at thieving, and Clemency is used for her clergy skills. Discuss this, in terms of what the author was trying to say about using one's skills.

Many of the characters feel out of place or are lost in the story. For example, Char, without parents, often feels different than others, and Ven, as a Nain, not only feels differently but often is treated differently. What is the author saying about discrimination and loneliness in the novel? How do the characters combat these feelings? Do their methods work? Why or why not? What, in the end, makes them feel accepted?

Discuss the symbolic nature of the albatross. What does his repeated reappearance in the novel mean for Ven? Why does he follow Ven throughout the story? What does the feather come to represent to Ven? What does its appearance on the Floating Island mean to Ven?

At the end of the novel, Ven has an opportunity to do what he loves, travel, while he still earns a living. At first he decides to refuse, but by the end of the novel, he accepts. Why does Ven initially not accept the position? What causes him to change his mind? What does this show about Ven as a character?

Discuss the character of Maurice Whiting. Why does he originally dislike Ven? What does he do to try and trick Ven, and why? Why is he cruel to Mrs. Snodgrass? How does he attempt to get back at Ven? Is he successful? Why or why not? What does Ven mean when he says to Whiting on page 329 "It's never over with men like you..."? What is he saying about Whiting?

What does Ven discover is wrong with Mrs. Snodgrass? Why is she so ill? What cures her, and why? What does Ven do to help her, and how does it work? Is he successful? Why or why not? How do Gregory and Oliver Snodgrass fit into Mrs. Snodgrass' problems?

Discuss the Nain race. How do they differ from humans? What are their strengths? What are their weaknesses? How does Ven compare to the "normal" Nain, and to the "normal" human being? Why are some of the townfolk so cruel to Ven? How does Ven use his natural abilities in the book?