

Goblin Secrets Study Guide

Goblin Secrets by William Alexander

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Plot Summary

“Goblin Secrets” is a young adult fantasy novel by William Alexander. When the novel begins, Rownie is one of a number of stray and orphaned children the witch Graba has forced into working for her by offering them shelter. While on an errand for Graba in the City of Zombay, Rownie discovers a goblin troupe, headed by Thomas and Semele, will be putting on a play. Theatre is outlawed in Zombay under the knowledge that actors pretend, and therefore are liars. Rownie hopes to see as much of the show as possible before it is shut down by the Captain and the City Guard. Thomas explains to the audience that the play is indeed not illegal because goblins are not legally considered people or citizens, and therefore not bound by city laws. Thomas asks for a volunteer actor from the audience. Only Rownie volunteers. He feels empowered acting. It makes him think of how his brother, Rowan, missing for several months, was an actor before the ban against theater went into effect. Though he enjoys the show, Rownie earns the wrath of Graba for failing to carry out his errand.

Rownie escapes from Graba and falls in league with Thomas, Semele, and the other members of their goblin group, Essa, Patch, and Nonny. They invite Rownie to come along, offering to teach him their craft of theater in exchange for help in finding Rowan. They reveal that they need a human person who can wear and control a mask to help them prevent the River that flows through Zombay from flooding and destroying the city. Rownie, however, worries that his brother is dead. Semele assures Rownie that this cannot be so, because Graba is also looking for Rowan and would not look for Rowan if Rowan was dead. Meanwhile, Thomas and the goblins begin to teach Rownie the art of theater and bring him to their secret home in the Clock Tower on Fiddleway Bridge, which spans the Zombay River between the Northside and Southside of the city.

Rownie decides to confront Graba, to see if she knows anything about Rowan. He asks Vass, one of Graba’s strays, to deliver the message. She agrees, but brings the Mayor to meet Rownie instead. Rownie learns that the Mayor has outlawed theatre not because actors are liars, but because he has a devious plan to rebuild the disorganized Southside in the image of the orderly Northside. A flood is coming which actors, wearing masks, may prevent through the use of magical incantations. Without actors to protect the Southside, that section of the city will be destroyed and the Mayor may then rebuild. The Mayor reveals he has several actors who will protect the Northside, including Rowan. Rowan has had his heart surgically removed so that he is merely a puppet, doing only what he is told to do. Rownie is devastated.

Rownie escapes with Rowan to the Clock Tower just as the floods begin. Rownie puts an enchanted mask designed to be the River on Rowan, who then himself becomes the River. Rownie begs his brother not to let the River flood the city. Rowan leaps into the River, causing it to calm down at once. Rownie is elated that the city has been saved, but is saddened once more to have lost his brother again. Rownie then returns to live with Thomas and the goblins and to learn the art of theater.



Act I, Scene I – Act I, Scene V

Summary

Act I, Scene I – Graba, a witch with mechanical chicken legs, takes in stray children, calling them “grandchildren” and forcing them to work for her. They include three boys named Rownie, Blotches, Stubble, and a girl named Vass. Graba summons them to her loft where she keeps birds, mostly pigeons. She sends three of the children to market in nearby Zombay, where theater has been outlawed. Blotches and Stubble are to bring eggs to Haggot’s stall, Vass is assigned to hang a welcoming home bag full of a bird skull and other things on the Clock Tower door while singing a charm. Graba looks at Vass as her protégé. Graba tells Rownie, the smallest, to remain behind with her. He is assigned to help with the maintenance on Graba’s legs. Out of oil, Graba sends Rownie to Scud’s shop for a small flask, for Scud originally designed Graba’s legs.

Act I, Scene II – The Southside of Zombay is very dusty. Because Graba does not feed the children, they must look out for themselves whenever they run errands. Rownie’s current errand to get oil means he will be unable to obtain food. Rownie crosses the massive, house-lined Fiddleway Bridge, which connects the northern and southern halves of the city over the Zombay River. Fiddleway is home to musicians, criminals, and other people because it is a sanctuary section of the city just out of reach of the semi-mechanical Guard Captain and his unit, the Guard. At the center of Fiddleway is the much-admired Clock Tower, said to be haunted by clockmaker ghosts. There, Rownie sees Vass securing the charm bag while Blotches and Stubble wait nearby. Blotches tells Rownie that a wagon of goblins has come by. He explains that goblins live in wagons because they do not have homes, that they are allergic to sunlight, gold, and iron, and that they are thieves who eat the children they steal.

Blotches begins throwing things in the water below, but Stubble cautions him not to draw the wrath of the River floods. Rownie thinks about his missing older brother, Rowan, who used to drop rocks in the river with Rownie from Fiddleway. Rownie remembers Rowan teaching him that the dead speak in stones, so dropping stones in the River is like leaving a pile of stones on a grave: a mark of respect and the proper way to say hello. Graba, like Rownie, has been looking for Rowan for months now. As Rownie continues along, he discovers a sign tacked up by the goblins advertising a performance for the admission price of two coppers. Rownie is stunned and hopes to see some of the performance before the goblins get arrested.

Act I, Scene III – Rownie arrives at Scud’s workshop where Scud is at work on an automaton. Rather than purchasing oil, Rownie explains that Graba overpaid her bill last time, so she needs two copper coins back. Scud hands over the coppers, which Rownie then pockets and heads out. He moves through Northside, which is laid out in straight streets meeting others at right angles. He passes the old Northside Rail Station and the Reliquary. A baker freely gives Rownie some old bread. As Rownie sits down to eat, Vass interrupts him, requesting help carrying home chicken feed. Instead, Rownie



brings Vass to the old train station entrance, where the Mayor for years has been trying to build a rail tunnel linking both sides of the city, though the tunnel keeps flooding. The Mayor also seeks to tear down the Southside and rebuild it like the Northside. Vass tells Rownie to stay out of the rail tunnel or the diggers (workers who have had their hearts removed) will get him. Suddenly, Vass is possessed by Graba, who demands to know where her gear oil is. Vass fights the possession, grabs the chicken feed and heads home, leaving Rownie alone.

Act I, Scene IV – Rownie goes to the fairgrounds where a wagon has been set up like a stage. An old, wrinkled female goblin with white hair collects Rownie’s two coppers. Rownie is stunned to see a goblin—one of the Changed—step out onto the stage, for Rownie has never seen a goblin before. The goblin juggles while a paper dragon breathes fire. An old male goblin then addresses the audience. He explains that goblins, who are not citizens and who are not legally considered to be people, may perform because the law applies to human citizens. Therefore, the goblin asserts that wearing masks and performing is nothing illegal. The first play begins, aimed toward children. The goblin puts on a mask and declares himself a giant. Rownie is amazed by this. When the goblins call for a volunteer from the audience, no one comes forward. Rownie decides to volunteer, eager to command the attention of the audience like the goblins. An iron chain is given to Rownie and the first row of the audience to hold for those worried for Rownie’s safety. The goblin introduces himself as Thomas, the first actor and former resident of the City of Zombay from many years before. Rownie is thrilled to perform. After he is finished, a hand waves Rownie under the stage.

Act I, Scene V – Under the stage, the elderly female zombie congratulates Rownie on his performance, introduces herself as Semele, and gives him some honey lemon tea. Semele reveals that she knows Rowan, that Rowan is a decent young actor, and that she is looking for him. Semele invites Rownie to join their troupe. Rownie is eager to join but suspicious. While out watching the rest of the performance, Graba suddenly appears and grabs Rownie, asking him if Semele has brewed him Change tea. Rownie denies this, and Graba begins dragging him home. At home, Graba continues to interrogate Rownie about what he has consumed. She then utters charms and counterspells over Rownie just in case Rownie has consumed something dangerous. As Graba takes hold of Rownie, Rownie struggles, unhinges her legs, and escapes through the window.

Analysis

“Goblin Secrets” is a young adult fantasy novel by William Alexander. From the start, the theme of Magic becomes central to the plot, and will remain critical to Rownie and the goblins as the plot unfolds. When the novel begins, Rownie is one of a number of stray children collected and forced into servitude by Graba. Graba herself is a witch, making a living by magic and training Vass to be something of a protégé. Vass’s first assignment in the novel by Graba is to secure a welcoming home charm bag on the door of the Clock Tower. To do this, Vass must sing a magical enchantment to activate the spell. As Rownie comes to see soon after, the goblin performance itself is in some ways actually



magical, as the masks the goblins wear give them great powers and abilities to become the characters they portray, which transcends simply acting.

Mystery also becomes central to the novel as events progress. Some of the mysteries that perforate the work will be solved or revealed by the end; others will not be. (And indeed, some of the mystery merely has to do with magic.) There are several mysteries early in the novel. The purpose of the charm that Vass weaves on the Clock Tower is a mystery. The reason why Graba would want this done at all is a mystery. Rownie's brother, Rowan, has been missing for several months. Where he has gone, where he is hiding, or if he is even still alive are all mysteries relating to his disappearance.

The themes of Dystopianism and Bigotry also become central to the novel as events get underway. The City of Zombay is clearly and unequivocally run by the Lord Mayor. The Mayor has issued a number of edicts determining the behavior of citizens, and determining who may even be a citizen. Goblins are discriminated against, are not considered people, and are not even allowed to be citizens. Yet, they are still subjected to many of the laws and regulations of the city without having the rights to have a say about their treatment. Likewise, the vicious rumors that fly about goblins, including that they steal and eat children, are never challenged. The institutionalized bigotry the goblins face is a matter of dystopianism as well, as the reader will later learn, wherein the Lord Mayor is gathering more and more power to himself. Additionally, it is clear the Northside of Zombay has been made according to the Mayor's wishes, while it is known the Mayor wishes to tear down and rebuild the Southside in the image of the Northside. Among the reasons are for the ease of moving the Guard around, with the Guard and its Captain sworn to uphold the law and the Mayor.

Family is also an important theme as the novel gets underway. Rownie's only true family, his brother Rowan, is missing. Rownie wants desperately to find his older brother, for Rowan is Rownie's hero. Rownie loves his brother very much, and a sense of familial loyalty compels Rownie to want to find Rowan. The reader should here note a poignant memory recalled by Rownie, where Rowan teaches Rownie that the living can speak to the dead through the use of pebbles and stones. This will be crucial for Rownie much later in the novel.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Rownie decide to act onstage with the goblins even though acting is outlawed in Zombay? What happens as a result? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Although performances are illegal in the city, the goblins nevertheless put on a play. How do they manage to do this?



Discussion Question 3

In what ways do the themes of Dystopianism and Bigotry work hand-in-hand with one another in this section of the novel, especially when it comes to actions and laws toward Thomas and the goblins?

Vocabulary

hugeness, imitate, cobbled, dueling, cunning, mimicry, mummery, automaton, billow, ramshackle, clacked, quibble, delectable, impersonate, banishment



Act I, Scene VI – Act II, Scene III

Summary

Act I, Scene VI – Graba possesses all of her grandchildren, called Grubs when under possession, who give chase to Rownie as he flees through Southside. He rushes into the Southside Rail Station, more afraid of Graba's Grubs than the diggers and ghosts of the tunnel. The Grubs follow. Rownie hides beneath an iron bench while the Grubs search the station and the railcars. As Rownie glances up at the entrance, he finds Vass there, watching him.

Act I, Scene VII – Speaking to Graba through Stubble, Vass says Rownie is nowhere to be found. She also tells Graba the tunnel is not as flooded as it should be. Graba realizes the Lord Mayor must have ordered water pumped out of the tunnels once more. Rownie thanks Vass. Vass explains Graba can't wear him the way she wears the other children, because Rownie has a talent for wearing masks. She won't explain further. She cautions Rownie to be careful and avoid the riverbank, because the River is angry and the floods are coming. Vass then heads back to where the Grubs are still searching, and they leave.

Act I, Scene VIII – Rownie tries to understand what Vass has told him about a talent for wearing masks. He reflects back on the last time he saw Rowan, several months before. He remembers how Rowan was performing at a Southside alehouse show, and how the Guard went through the city, declaring acting to now be illegal at the order of the Lord Mayor because actors pretend and therefore lie about who they are. Rownie remembers how it was declared that citizens may not be anything other than who they really are. Rownie remembers his brother escaping from the guard, and how actors were rounded up and arrested across the city. Rowan has not been heard from since. Rownie spends the night in the station, dreams of the city being flooded, and feels lost in Zombay in the morning.

Act II, Scene I – Rownie is starving. He eats a discarded apple from Miss Mullusk. Rownie decides to begin looking for his brother, starting at the alehouse in the Broken Wall neighborhood where he last saw Rowan. There, he finds Thomas and the other goblins being kicked out of the alehouse. Thomas is furious. Rownie collects a fallen mask and brings it to the goblins. Thomas is grateful to Rownie for this. The alehouse keeper's daughter, Kaile, kindly brings the goblins some bread as payment for their performance. Suddenly, the Captain and the Guard arrive. They are investigating reports of an unChanged child wearing a mask at the performance the day before. Thomas denies this while Rownie hides under the wagon. The Captain says those with information about the child will be given a special license to perform in city limits. Thomas says he will pass along information should he hear anything. Thomas sees the mechanized mule the goblins have uses coal, which horrifies Thomas. Thomas is pulled up through the bottom of the wagon as the wagon begins to move out, surrounded by Guards.



Act II, Scene II – In the wagon, Rownie finds five goblins, Thomas, Semele, Patch, Nonny, and Essa. Rownie asks about the goblins using coal, but they explain they only use coal made from fish hearts for Horace the mechanized mule, not larger hearts. The goblins and Rownie decide to remain quiet because the Guards are still with them. The Guards escort the wagon to a Litchfield, a graveyard, where they leave it.

Act II, Scene III – Semele explains to Rownie that they will be camping out in the graveyard overnight because the Tamlin (a more polite word for goblin) are not allowed to spend the night in city limits. Dinner is prepared and served, consisting of riverfish. Thomas asks Rownie if Rownie knows where Rowan might be, because they have taught Rowan the language of masks. Thomas explains that by finding Rowan, they can prevent harm to him and countless other people. Rowan must be found before the floods come. Semele gives Rownie a small, greenish-gray egg-shaped pebble as a way of saying hello to Rowan since Rowan, though not dead, is lost and silent. Rownie is welcomed to the troupe. Semele says he will be taught the language of masks, and will be allowed to stay and perform with them in exchange for help in finding Rowan. Semele cautions Rownie to be on the lookout for pigeons in his dreams and in real life. Rownie will be given a disguise since, as a person, he is forbidden from acting.

Analysis

After Rownie flees from Graba's dystopian family, he determines that his primary concern will not be for himself, but for finding Rowan. Rownie's sense of loyalty and love of family is admirable and heartwarming, especially because it comes at the expense of his own safety and security. As Rownie begins his search for his missing family, he finds family as well, a kind of family he never expected in Thomas, Semele, and the goblins of their troupe. Thomas is readily accepted into the family-like troupe not only because of their desire to find Rowan, but because they see something morally and magically important in Rownie. Thomas and the troupe will here emerge as a family that Rownie never had.

Rownie's encounters with Thomas, Semele, and the troupe also bring about more mysteries. The reader should note that everyone—from Rownie to Graba to the goblins—is looking for Rowan. Whatever value Rowan has can only be guessed at, but because so many people are looking for him, the reader can safely surmise that Rowan is of critical importance. Why the goblins are looking for Rowan is not yet revealed, but they especially seem desperate to find him. Hints as to why they are so desperately looking for Rowan clearly have to do with magic, as they make it a point to explain to Rownie that they have taught Rowan the language of the masks, and that Rowan was a fine actor.

Magic herein remains critical to the plot of the novel. Hinted at in the first few chapters of the novel, the goblins confirm now beyond a shadow of a doubt that there is genuine magic in acting. The "language of the masks" is the magical craft relating to the masks and their use, which will in turn be revealed in full later in the novel. The reader will also remember how Rowan taught Rownie that the way to speak to the dead is through



pebbles, a kind of magic in itself. In this section of the novel, Semele gives Rownie a small pebble which ultimately comes to symbolize Rownie's hope that Rowan is still alive. He keeps the pebble; he keeps hope that Rowan is still alive.

Bigotry and Dystopianism again factor heavily into the novel in these several chapters. As it is explained to Thomas, the word "Tamlin" is the polite, or more appropriate word for goblin. Goblin itself is something of a cruder and more demeaning term commonly used by bigots who are opposed to Thomas and other Changed beings. Discrimination against the goblins continues, as Thomas and the troupe are thrown out of the alehouse without receiving fair pay for their performance. Likewise, the City Guards arrive to escort the goblin troupe to a graveyard, the only place the goblins may stay in or near the city. Their relegation to the graveyard is reflective of their status as citizens. Just as the living are no longer living or citizens, the goblins are no longer citizens and belong with the dead. It demonstrates just how poorly the Changed are treated in the Mayor's new city.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways do Thomas and the other goblins continue to be discriminated against in this section of the novel? How do they respond to the treatment they receive? Why?

Discussion Question 2

What becomes Rownie's central focus after escaping from Graba's clutches? Why?

Discussion Question 3

What deal do Thomas, Semele, and the goblins strike with Rownie? Why does Rownie agree to this deal?

Vocabulary

gaggle, roundabout, ornery, edicts, increments, immortal, synonymous, scorn, obliged, capable, proscribed, dour, unaccustomed



Act II, Scene IV – Act II, Scene VIII

Summary

Act II, Scene IV – Rownie dreams the city is his face. In the morning, he discovers Semele, Thomas, Essa, Nonny, and Patch preparing masks which they will use to walk through the city separately to meet together at the place they will perform that day. Those who follow the actors will become the audience. Rownie is given a fox mask and gloves to wear. Thomas urges Rownie to move the way the mask would prefer him to move. Thomas urges Rownie not to speak anything not written for him by Semele while wearing the mask because he is naturally gifted but untrained to properly use them. The world could change to fit Rownie's words like a charm or a chant, Thomas reveals. Curses and charms all have consequences. Rownie is warned to run if anyone puts a hand on him, because it will mean they know he is not a Tamlin since people never touch a Tamlin. The troupe then moves out.

Rownie makes his way toward the Floating Market, where boats and barges are drawn up beside each other to sell goods. As he moves, Rownie pays attention to any pigeons he sees, wondering if they might be Graba's. Though not everyone is affected by Rownie's fox mask, many others are, and begin following Rownie. However, Stubble, Blotches, Greasy, and other Grubs begin following him as well, breaking the spell. By the time Rownie reaches the Floating Market, only the Grubs are following him.

Act II, Scene V – The Grubs chase Rownie through the Floating Market. Rownie says aloud that the Grubs will never catch him, giving him the swiftness of a fox, and allowing him to cut loose a barge with the Grubs on board. Rownie then calmly continues through the market without the mask on. He arrives at Fiddleway Bridge, where the Tamlin wagon is floating on a barge. He explains what has happened to Thomas, who directs him to hide, put his mask back on, then make his way into the wagon, all which Rownie does.

Act II, Scene VI – Backstage in the wagon, Nonny and Essa race about to support the show onstage. Rownie is put to work pulling ropes and taking directions, the first part of his apprenticeship to the troupe. The play being performed is called "The Iron Emperor," a ghost story. Suddenly, everything begins to go wrong. The music box breaks, the backdrop catches on fire, then a massive flock of pigeons attack, spreading the fire and causing chaos. The wagon and its barge are put underway, allowing Rownie, Thomas, and the others to escape.

Act II, Scene VII – The wagon-raft heads upstream. Essa explains the River will flood soon, and encourages Rownie to listen to the River carefully. Rownie can hear the River's voice, low and angry. The wagon pulls in along a ravine, where a crane from above will lift the wagon back up onto land. While Nonny climbs up to operate the crane, Essa and Patch fish for dinner. She explains to Rownie that Tamlin can live to be a thousand years old, but rarely ever make it because they are so often accused of



thievery or stealing children, and are killed. Rownie asks Patch how he was Changed. Patch explains his father brought him to be Changed to keep in the barn as a guard of sorts, but he doesn't remember how it happened, or when it happened. Rownie secretly worries he will be changed after eating goblin food, just as Graba said. Suddenly, more pigeons attack, knocking Patch into the water.

Act II, Scene VIII – The Tamlin fight the pigeons off. Rownie sadly learns that Patch cannot swim. As Rownie and the Tamlin travel back toward Zombay, they reach a crossroads blocked by a fallen tree, upon which several children play. The children and their leader, Jansin, demand a show. Jansin is rich, and explains his family's wealth comes from coal. Thomas says the troupe plays for pay, but will not do so for someone like Jansin. Jansin throws a rock and knocks Thomas's hat from his head. Thomas draws a sword on Jansin and demands an apology. Semle defuses the situation by beginning a performance about an evil lady who steals the hearts of children to turn into coal to heat her house. Jansin is insulted and shouts that his family's company only takes the hearts of traitors, criminals, and people who deserve it. Meanwhile, the tree has been moved out of the way by Horace. Rownie kicks Jansin in the knee and leaps onto the wagon as it races past.

Analysis

As the novel continues, the discrimination the goblins face continues unabated. As Rownie learns, goblins have historically lived to be over a thousand years old, but the maltreatment they receive at present means rarely any of them ever live to be that old. They are accused of thievery and child abduction frequently, and are executed for these accusations. What is interesting to note is that some of the Changed, such as Patch, were Changed against their will. Patch himself was changed by his own father in order to use as something of a guard dog for the family's barn.

As Rownie, Thomas, and the troupe travel back to Zombay, they are stopped at a crossroads by a felled tree, the spoiled and cruel Jansin, and his lackey friends. Jansin cruelly taunts and harasses Thomas, demanding a show as if Thomas and his troupe were mere slaves to do as bidden by their masters. Rownie finally reacts against the bigotry that his new family members are receiving by kicking Jansin in the back of the leg. Rownie has made a clear stand in favor of those he is fast coming to accept as family. Family remains crucial to Rownie, not only insofar as he continues to seek out Rowan, but in that he recognizes the kindness, loyalty, and compassion that exist among the members of Thomas's troupe, and the love they have demonstrated toward Rownie himself. Rownie is especially grateful for meals shared with his family, for it is a time of togetherness and giving, something never experienced under Graba.

True to their word, the goblins begin to teach Rownie the magic of theater. As has been hinted at, there is genuine magic involved in theater in the novel. The masks themselves have a kind of power that can manipulate the world around them through words spoken by the mask wearer. This is critical for the reader to bear in mind, because it shall become central to the plot by the end of the novel. As Rownie comes to



discover, the fox mask he wears on the way to the Floating Market magically attracts followers. Likewise, magic can be seen in the way that Graba possesses her grandchildren in order to find and hunt down Rownie and the goblins. Magic can also be seen in Graba's control of the pigeons that ruthlessly attack the troupe.

The reader should bear in mind the encounter between Jansin and Thomas for another reason as well. Jansin's family has been made wealthy through the production of heart-based coal. In the novel, hearts are fired and used for coal. While the goblins use the hearts of fish for coal, other people cruelly use the hearts of human beings for coal. While Jansin contends that his family only uses the hearts of criminals and bad people, Rownie cannot get past the fact that human hearts are used at all. He considers it a barbaric practice. The use of human hearts for coal is specifically what the reader should bear in mind moving forward.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Rownie kick Jansin in the back of the leg? Do you believe Rownie is justified in doing so? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Despite having endured such traumatic experiences in the City of Zombay, the goblins continue to return to the city. Why does this appear to be so?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you believe Jansin behaves the way he does toward Thomas and the goblin troupe? Can Jansin solely be held accountable for his actions, or do you believe his upbringing in a society hostile to goblins has something to do with it? Or is there something else? Explain.

Vocabulary

heroic, poise, contagious, declaim, mongers, meager, chaos, distilled, sputtered, cavorting



Act II, Scene IX – Act III, Scene IV

Summary

Act II, Scene IX – Though safely away from the crossroads, Thomas is still angry over the encounter. Rownie is congratulated for his bravery. Rownie wonders how it is possible that Graba can keep finding him, but not Rowan. He worries that Rownie is dead. Semele does not believe so. Graba, she explains, is very good at finding things. If Graba didn't expect to find Rowan, she wouldn't still be looking. Semele goes on to explain to Rownie that they will never Change someone against their will. Rownie is not being changed. Besides, Semele goes on to explain, they need someone unChanged and masked. The troupe then eats dinner as they continue the journey down Riverside Road toward Zombay.

Act III, Scene I – Rownie the Tamlin return to Zombay. Semele and the others invite Rownie to stay with them in their home on Fiddleway Bridge. Semele invites Rownie to see the home by way of invitation enchantment, so that it is apparent to him. The wagon rumbles inside, and Rownie gets out. The home extends down through the bridge, down the central pylon. It also extends many stories overhead. There are rooms of books, tools, and masks. It is then that Rownie discovers a giant circular window at the top through which he can see all of Zombay. Rownie realizes he is in the Clock Tower.

Act III, Scene II – Rownie is amazed by the fact that the troupe lives inside the Clock Tower, and that the room of masks has hundreds and hundreds of masks that line the walls. He discovers the fox mask among them, and thinks he sees it move on its own. Semele and Thomas then carry in a stone mask with riverweed for hair. It is a mask of the River. The mask, Semele explains, is the River, and is also a mask. It is the first mask she ever made. Essa also reveals a box in which a mask of the city is carved. The Tamlin want Rowan to wear the mask of the city, but explain absolutely no one wears the mask of the River. While no one can control the River, sometimes it listens. Rownie is encouraged to try on the city mask and speak to the River, which he does. The River does not respond. Thomas believes the River will respond to Rowan. Part of their job as actors, it is revealed, is to speak for the city. But because the Tamlin are legally excluded from the city, they cannot speak for it. They need an unChanged person like Rowan to do this for them. Rownie hopes he can learn to do it as well. Suddenly, all the masks begin to move.

Act III, Scene III – The Iron Emperor mask attacks Thomas, who fights it off. Nonny appears a moment later with Patch, who survived the pigeon attack. Rownie is thrilled. Suddenly, all the masks except the River mask leap out to attack. Semele, Rownie, Thomas, Nonny, Patch, and Essa fight back. Semele explains that whatever curse they are fighting is a well-cast curse. Rownie then realizes the curse has been cast by Graba through Vass unknowingly, with the welcoming home charm tied to the door. Rownie announces he will break the curse.



Act III, Scene IV – Rownie rushes down to the Clock Tower doors where Graba's leather charm bag has been tied. Rownie removes the curse bag, then notices the fox mask is watching him. It does not attack, but gestures for Rownie to throw the bag into the River. The fox mask then lands on the ground, where Rownie picks it up and puts it around his neck before heading back inside. Semele and the others congratulate Rownie on breaking the curse. As everyone beds down for the night, Rownie begins to wonder if Graba actually knows where Rowan is, and decides on a course of action.

Analysis

The mystery of why Thomas and his acting troupe continue to return to the City of Zombay is made clear in this section of the novel. It is because they live there. Specifically, they make their home in the Clock Tower on Fiddleway Bridge. The mystery of why the goblins are so desperately seeking Rowan is also revealed in this section of the novel. Rowan is critical to the goblins' desire to prevent the City of Zombay from being flooded and destroyed by the River. Rowan's power and talent for acting, taken together with the magic of the masks, is believed will be effective against the River.

Interestingly enough, the reader should pay careful attention to the genuine selflessness of the goblins. They are seeking to save and preserve a city that wants nothing to do with them. They are seeking to save the lives of people who discriminate against them in every form imaginable. It demonstrates not only the utter selflessness of the goblins, but also demonstrates their lack of vengeance and their lack of reverse-bigotry. They could throw their hands up and let the City be destroyed, but they refuse to do so because they see a greater moral truth to things, and that is saving human lives, regardless.

Magic will be critical to staying the anger of the River. The mystery of the charm that Vass places on the Clock Tower at Graba's orders is also revealed. It is a curse designed to kill the goblins by having their own masks attack them. Only Rownie's quick thinking and recognition of what was done to the Clock Tower allows the magical curse to be broken. There is also a level of magic in the mask of the fox that assists Rownie in his eradication of the curse. Indeed, it is interesting to note the fox mask does not attack Rownie, but assists him. This is perhaps due to the fact that the fox mask and Rownie have bonded, but the truth of this remains a mystery.

Rownie's automatic reaction to break the curse on the Clock Tower is further evidence of how he has come to accept Thomas, Semele, and the other Tamlin as family. His loyalty and his courage shine through as he seeks to defend his family against Graba's curse. Just as the goblins are willing to risk their own lives and safety to protect the City of Zombay, Rownie is now willing to risk his own life and safety by being willing to confront Graba regarding Rowan. Much hinges on Rowan's efforts, but what exactly his plan will be is currently a mystery.



Discussion Question 1

Why does Rownie risk his safety to break the curse on the Clock Tower? How do the goblins respond to this act? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Why are the goblins so desperate to find Rowan? What do they hope he will help them to do?

Discussion Question 3

Why do the goblins want to save the City of Zombay, when the people and laws of the city are so cruel toward them? What does this say about the moral character of the goblins?

Vocabulary

insolent, constellations, illuminated, buttressed, tethered, revenant



Act III, Scene V – Act III, Scene X

Summary

Act III, Scene V – Rownie wakes early, eats, and prepares to depart with the fox mask when he runs into Semele, who is continuing to clean up damage from the fight with the masks. Semele wishes Rownie good luck in his efforts. He seeks out a pigeon to contact Graba, but comes across Vass instead. Vass is stunned that Rownie has broken the curse. Vass agrees to deliver the message that Rownie wishes to meet Graba in the Southside Rail Station immediately. As Rownie himself heads toward the station, is surprised to see so many members of the Guard in the Southside. In the station, a fancy railcar suddenly arrives. The Captain of the Guard emerges, and tells Rownie that the Lord Mayor of Zombay would like to speak to him.

Act III, Scene VI – Rownie is stunned. Vass also appears, saying that it would be worse for Rownie if Graba had shown up instead of the Mayor. The Lord Mayor is heavy but not fat, and stuns Rownie once more by asking Rownie to join his private troupe of actors. He points out three masked actors in the car, who begin to act. Rownie cannot believe what he is seeing because the Mayor has outlawed acting. The Mayor explains that just because something may not be good for everyone, doesn't mean it is not good for him. The Mayor goes on to say the floods are coming, and will cause terrible damage to the low-lying Southside. The Mayor plans to rebuild the Southside in the image of the Northside. Masked actors will deter the floods away from the Northside. Vass has thrown in her lot with the Mayor because she knows that Graba has stamped out all other witches, and Vass will be in danger when she gets older. Rownie then suddenly realizes that the only reason the Mayor arrested all the actors in the city was to prevent them from saving Southside. Suddenly, flocks of pigeons begin hurling themselves at the train car, blocking its path and bringing the car to a stop. A mask falls from one of the mayor's actors. It is Rowan. The lights go out.

Act III, Scene VII – Rownie tries to get Rowan's attention, but Rowan simply waits and stares at nothing. Rownie is pulled out into the train tunnel by the Captain, where they join the Mayor and Vass. The group is confronted by Graba, who utters a spell that destroys the Captain's mechanical eyes, rendering him blind. Graba says hello to Rownie, calling him her grandchild. Vass tells Graba none of them were ever truly her grandchildren. Graba knows the Mayor has promised Vass her very own home in Northside for her help. Her last gift of the day, she says, will be to spare the Mayor's life to ensure the promise is kept. She tells them to run because the tunnels will soon fill up with water as the floods will come that very day. The Mayor begins running north, followed by Vass who helps along the Guard Captain. Rownie is left behind with Graba.

Act III, Scene VIII – Rownie explains he wanted Graba's help to find Rowan, but that he has already found Rowan in the railcar. He explains Rowan appears empty, and he says he will do anything if Graba will make Rowan right again. Checking over Rowan, Graba sees a scar across Rowan's chest. His heart has been taken from him, making him a



puppet. Puppet actors do not have the power an actor with a heart has. Graba then tells Rownie to run back to Semele. Graba explains she herself will be moving her home – and most of the Southside with her –in order to avoid the floods. Rownie goes to Rowan, and orders him and the other actors to run and get out of the tunnel. The two actors head north, while Rowan and Rownie head south. Water begins rising in the tunnels. They head up through the central pylon of Fiddleway Bridge, and into the Clock Tower. Rownie calls for help.

Act III, Scene IX – Semele and the others are delighted to see Rownie and Rowan, but are saddened to learn what has become of Rowan. Rownie worries that Rowan does not remember him. Semele assures Rownie that Rowan does, for to be without a heart means he has no will, but still has all his memories and is still who he was. Below, the sound of the River's anger can be heard as the floods come closer. Thomas orders everyone to their posts, to ring the bells to warn people and to prepare the Clock Tower for the flood. The flood seems like it will be so bad that no one may survive. Rownie then puts the River mask on Rowan, wherein Rowan becomes the River itself. The Tamlin watch in astonishment, and retrieve the city mask for Rownie. Rownie does not wear the city mask so that his brother will know him. He asks the River not to flood. Rowan says he'll have to leave to manage things, but that Rownie will know where to find him. Rowan leaps into the River, which immediately dies down and returns to normal.

Act III, Scene X – Vass meets Rownie on the bridge. She tells him that because things didn't turn out as the Mayor had wanted, she will only receive a haunted house on Fiddleway. Vass apologizes to Rownie for whatever part she has had in everything that has happened. She also believes Graba will leave Rownie alone now that the danger is past. Rownie then throws the pebble from the graveyard into the River, to say hello to Rowan. Rownie then goes home to have dinner with his acting troupe.

Analysis

As the novel comes to a close, many of the mysteries remaining are finally solved. The greatest mysteries are dystopian in nature, and are revealed in fullness by the Mayor. The Mayor reveals his decision to outlaw theater had nothing to do with the stated reasons about lying, but everything to do with magic and the ability to use masks to save the Southside. The Mayor wants the Southside destroyed so that he may rebuild it in the image of the Northside, giving the Guard—and thereby himself—greater control and power. The Mayor is willing to risk the loss of life in order to gain more power. Nothing matters when it comes to the governing powers in a dystopian society, and this is certainly the case with the Lord Mayor in Zombay.

The mystery of what happened to Rowan is also revealed in this section of the novel. Rowan is one of a number of private actors the Mayor has forced into service who will be ordered to defend the Northside against the flood. Rownie learns that this is only possible because the actors—including Rowan—have had their hearts removed to make coal. The human heart is the central point of free will and decision-making.



Without a heart, a person has no will of his or her own. This should also be noted by the reader in light of acting itself. An actor without a heart has no passion for his craft. With no love for his craft, the actor cannot—in the novel or in real life—bring his characters to life. The Mayor's heartless actors will not have the passion needed to do the job the Mayor wants them to do.

A sense of family also shines through in this section of the novel again and again. It first occurs in his decision to confront Graba, risking his own life and safety in order to protect his goblin family, to find Rowan, and to save the city at large. When the tunnel begins flooding, Rownie could run and flee for his life, but he remains with Rowan, ensuring that Rowan is safe from the floodwaters. Third, Rowan (wearing the River mask) has regained some of his own free will because he is now one with the River. Rowan's decision to give his own life to save Rownie and the city is entirely his own doing. While Rownie asks the River through Rowan and the River mask not to flood, it is Rowan himself who sacrifices his own life for his younger brother. Rownie is deeply saddened by losing Rowan once more so soon after finding him, but recognizes that Rowan dying with free will is the price that must be paid to stop the River from flooding. It is better that Rowan should die with free will than live with no will. As the novel ends, Rownie goes to live with his family—Thomas, Semele, Nonny, Essa, and Patch.

The reader should also bear in mind one last important part of the novel: the scene where Rownie throws his pebble into the River. The pebble, symbolizing hope, now becomes a way for Rownie to communicate with and pay his respects to the dead, to his brother. The release of the pebble is the releasing of hope and the accepting of reality, while at the same time being Rownie's desire to speak with his brother. It is a way of Rownie saying good bye, accepting reality, and letting go of the things that weighted him down, and looking to the future.

Discussion Question 1

Even though Rownie manages to find Rowan, why is Rownie so devastated by the discovery? How does Rownie cope with this?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Graba refuse to harm or kill Rownie, Vass, or the Mayor when she confronts the three of them in the tunnels? How do all three characters react as a result?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Rownie put the River mask on his brother even though the goblins have said that no person may wear the mask of the River? What is the outcome of this? How does it affect Rownie? Explain.

Vocabulary

unadorned, bemused, smug, edicts, affronted, exasperated, diminished



Characters

Rownie

Rowan “Rownie” the Younger is a boy of about ten or 12, and is the younger brother of Rowan. Rownie does not know his own age, for he is one of the stray children collected by Graba the witch. Rownie is a curious and courageous boy who greatly admires his brother, and is devastated when Rowan suddenly disappears. Rownie’s desire to find his brother ultimately leads him to breaking away from Graba and falling in with Thomas’s goblin acting troupe. Rownie’s life with the goblins is a bit uncomfortable at first, as Rownie has lived his life fed by rumors and bigotry directed toward them. However, Rownie soon comes to feel at home, promising to help them find Rowan in exchange for learning stagecraft magic. Rownie ultimately comes to risk his life against Graba by choosing to confront her in order to find Rowan and protect his goblin family.

Rownie’s search for Rowan ends when he is brought to an audience with the Mayor. Rownie is devastated to learn that Rowan’s heart has been removed. Rownie then takes it upon himself to help Rowan escape the tunnels for the relative safety of the Clock Tower. Rownie knows there is only one chance to save both his brother and the city, so he puts the River mask on Rowan. Rowan gains some of his free will back, but must sacrifice himself to quiet the River. Rownie is deeply saddened by losing Rowan once more so soon after finding him, but recognizes that Rowan dying with free will is the price that must be paid to stop the River from flooding. Rownie then returns to the Clock Tower to live with his new goblin family.

Thomas

Thomas is the Tamlin leader of the troupe of actors that Rowan falls in league with. Thomas is kind, but prone to dramatic outbursts as he is both an actor and quick to lose his patience. Thomas is the first goblin to encounter Rownie at the show at the market, and he quickly recognizes Rownie not only for being Rowan’s brother, but for having serious natural talent for masks. Thomas readily agrees to invite Rownie to his troupe for his help in finding Rowan.

Semele

Semele is the oldest Tamlin among Thomas’s troupe. Described as short, wrinkled, and with white hair, Semele is unfailingly gentle, kind, patient, warm, and wise. Semele is one of the first to welcome Rownie into their troupe, and to recognize in Rownie a strong sense of morality. It is Semele who gives Rownie the pebble of hope that he holds onto through the end of the novel.



Nonny and Essa

Nonny and Essa are two of the Tamlin in Thomas's troupe. Both are kind and patient, and act as well as handle things backstage. Essa has a knack for fishing, while it is Nonny who rescues Patch and later brings him back to the Clock Tower.

Patch

Patch is one of the Tamlin among Thomas's troupe. It is Patch who Rownie questions about Changing. Patch explains he doesn't remember the particulars of Changing, but does know he was forced into it against his will by his father, for Patch was one of many children in his family. His father wanted a guard dog of sorts in the barn, so Patch was Changed and forced to live in the barn as such.

Vass

Vass is a pretty teenaged girl and is among those taken in by Graba. Graba is training Vass to be a witch, but Vass is under no illusions that she will only remain alive so long as she is useful to Graba. Seeking a new start and with the promise of a house in the Northside, Vass falls in league with the Lord Mayor to help him destroy the Southside. Vass repeatedly protects and allows Rownie to escape because she sees Rownie as a genuinely good kid and looks at him like a younger brother. When the plan to destroy the Southside is unsuccessful, Vass is only given a house on Fiddleway Bridge to live in. She later apologizes to Rownie for her part in everything.

Graba

Graba is the sole witch who lives in the Southside of the City of Zombay. Having lost her legs in an accident, she now gets around on mechanical chicken legs. She collects stray children, giving them shelter in exchange for acting as servants. Graba is aware of the Lord Mayor's plans to destroy the Southside, and she endeavors to find Rowan in order to stop the Mayor. However, Rownie continually foils her efforts, so Rownie becomes the focus of her antagonism. When Graba learns that the River cannot be stopped, she decides to save herself and the Southside by simply picking it up and moving it. She ultimately lets Rownie go because she realizes he is no longer any use for her.

The Guard Captain

The Captain is the commander of the Zombay City Guard, a unit of half-men, half-machines. The Captain is the right-hand of the Lord Mayor, and is dedicated to upholding the law and preserving the Mayor's power. The Captain is noted for his red,



mechanical eyes which Graba later destroys, blinding the Captain. When the tunnels are flooded, Vass helps the Captain to escape.

The Mayor

The Lord Mayor of Zombay is the ruler of the City of Zombay. Whether the office is one to which the Mayor has been elected for terms or for life, or has gained through means other than elections, is not clear. What is clear is that the Mayor's power is absolute. He longs to destroy and rebuild the Southside of the City of Zombay in the image of the Northside in order to gather more power and gain greater control over the people. He outlaws theater and removes the citizenship status of goblins to prevent them from saving the Southside, and conspires with Vass to hedge against Graba's power. The Mayor's plan is undone, and he barely escapes with his life as Graba confronts him just before the floods.

Rowan

Rowan is the older brother of Rownie. Rowan is handsome and about 16 years of age. He has a talent for acting, and befriends the goblins who help refine his craft. When acting is outlawed, Rowan defies the ban and later disappears. He reappears only very late in the novel, having had his heart removed and having lost his free will as part of the Mayor's bid to preserve the Northside of Zombay during the coming floods. Rowan is later made one with the River through the River mask, wherein he regains some of his free will. Seeking to save the life of his brother and the lives of countless residents in the City, Rowan gives his own life to quell the River.



Symbols and Symbolism

Leather charm bag

A leather charm bag containing a bird skull that is described as a welcoming home is secured by Vass at Graba's orders around the doors of the Clock Tower. The charm bag unleashes a curse on the goblin masks, causing the masks to attack and try to kill the goblins. The curse is only done away with when Rownie removes the bag and hurls it into the River.

Gear Oil

Gear oil is required to keep Graba's mechanical chicken legs functionally smooth. Graba sends Rownie to the market to purchase gear oil, but Rownie attends the goblin show instead. Graba becomes enraged that Rownie does this, demanding to know where her oil is, and dragging him back home.

Coppers

Coppers are copper coins used as currency in the novel. They are also referred to as pennies. The price of admission to the first goblin show in the novel is two coppers. Rownie obtains two coppers by telling Scrud that Graba overpaid on a previous order. Rownie then pays the two coppers to gain admission to the wagon.

Hearts

Hearts of living creatures are used to make coal in the novel. The goblins have a mechanized mule that runs on fish heart coal, while Jansin's family owns a company that extracts human hearts to turn into coal. Rowan has his heart extracted in order to force him into submission to the Mayor, who will use Rowan to avert the floods. When a person's heart is removed, his passion and his free will are also taken. An actor without a heart has no passion for his craft. With no love for his craft, the actor cannot—in the novel or in real life—bring his characters to life. The Mayor's heartless actors will not have the passion needed to avoid the flood.

Tamlins

Tamlins are goblins. Tamlin is the polite, proper word to use when describing a goblin. The word "goblin" itself is seen as mildly bigoted and used cruelly through the novel. It is evidence of the institutionalized bigotry present in the City of Zombay.



Coal

Coal is used to power machines, furnaces, and other devices in the novel. The most efficient coal comes from the hearts of living creatures. No coal is more powerful than human heart coal. This particular form of coal is especially efficient, but also considered barbaric by many people including Rownie.

Fox mask

A fox mask is the first kind of mask given to Rownie to make his own during the novel. Rownie bonds with the fox mask, wearing it through the Floating Market. The fox mask later presents itself in assistance to Rownie when Rownie is removing the curse from Clock Tower.

River mask

A River mask made of stone with riverweed for the hair is crafted by Semele many years before. The River mask is placed on Rowan's face by Rownie when the River threatens to flood the City of Zombay. Rownie speaks to the River through Rowan, asking the River not to flood the City. Rowan, one with the river, gives his life by diving into the River and preventing the flood. The River mask allows Rowan to have some of his free will once again, as the River is a will that cannot be controlled by anyone in particular.

City mask

A city mask carved from wood is among the masks created and owned by Thomas and his troupe. The mask of the city is to be worn when entreating with the River. However, the city mask is never used in the novel as Rownie uses the River mask on Rowan, and Rownie personally entreats with the River through his brother.

Pebble

A small, grayish-green, egg-shaped pebble is found in the graveyard by Semele, and given to Rownie. The pebble symbolizes Rownie's hope that Rowan is still alive. He keeps the pebble; he keeps hope that Rowan is still alive. The pebble ultimately becomes a way for Rownie to communicate with, and to pay his respects to the dead, particularly his brother. The release of the pebble into the River is the releasing of hope and the accepting of reality, while at the same time. It is a way of Rownie saying good bye, accepting reality, and letting go of the things that weighted him down, and looking to the future. It was Rowan who originally taught Rownie that the dead speak in stones.



Settings

Zombay

Zombay is a massive city that is built along both banks of the River Zombay. The City of Zombay consists of three major sections: the Northside, on the northern side of the river; the Southside, on the southern side of the river; and Fiddleway Bridge, which connects the two sides of the city. The City of Zombay is itself governed by the Lord Mayor, and policed by the City Guard under the command of the Guard Captain. Zombay under the Lord Mayor is a city where goblins are denied equality under the law and denied status as citizens. Theater and the performing arts in general are outlawed in Zombay by the Mayor under the pretense that actors are liars, though it is later learned the Mayor desires to see the Southside destroyed in a flood so that it can be remade uniformly in the image of the Northside.

The Northside

The Northside is the northern section of the City of Zombay, and is located on the northern side of the River Zombay. The Northside is noted as being the home of the Lord Mayor, and the headquarters of the City Guard. The Northside is also noted as being a model city, with carefully planned streets that run in straight lines and form right angles with intersecting streets. The Mayor favors the Northside, and longs to see the Southside remade as a mirror image to the Northside.

The Southside

The Southside is the southern section of the City of Zombay, and is located on the southern side of the River Zombay. The Southside is noted as being organic, with winding streets, hills, circular roads, and no clear pattern or layout. The Guard is frustrated in their patrols of the Southside by its lack of order. The Southside is home to Graba, Rownie, and the other children. It is targeted by the Mayor for destruction when the floods come. However, Graba refuses to let her home and the Southside be destroyed, so she simply picks them up and moves them away from the river.

Fiddleway Bridge

Fiddleway Bridge is a massive bridge that spans the River Zombay and connects the Northside and the Southside of the City of Zombay. Fiddleway Bridge is in and of itself a section of the city, as it is lined by houses, shops, and its central pylon is surmounted by the famous Clock Tower. Fiddleway Bridge is a section of the city that is a legal sanctuary for criminals, people in hiding, and people who don't seem to fit in well anywhere else. It is only natural that Rownie spends so much time on the bridge, feeling



as if he does not fit in with Graba. It is from Fiddleway Bridge that Rowan later jumps, giving his life to prevent the flood that threatens to destroy Zombay.

Clock Tower

A massive, several-story Clock Tower rises up from Fiddleway Bridge over the central span. The tower is crowned by a beautiful clock that offers cycloramic views of the city and the surrounding landscape, and extends deep beneath the river into the rail tunnel. The Clock Tower is the home of Thomas and his goblin troupe. The Clock Tower is cursed by Graba, a curse later defeated by Rownie. The Clock Tower becomes Rownie's own home. The fact that the tower is a home to the goblins can only be seen by those the goblins magically invite to see the place as it truly is.



Themes and Motifs

Family

Family is an important theme in the novel “Goblin Secrets” by William Alexander. Family involves mutual love, compassion, loyalty towards, and emotional, spiritual, and physical support of individuals who may or may not be blood-related, but who still behave in the fashion of the traditional family unit. Family can be found consistently throughout the novel, and family affects the plot of the novel in various ways.

When the novel begins, Rownie is a part of Graba’s so-called family of grandchildren. Graba has collected a group of children whom she shelters in exchange for doing her bidding. This ad-hoc family is not really family at all, as Graba won’t even feed the children. It is merely a collection of kids who have nowhere else to go. Rownie is not happy at all with the arrangement, but doesn’t believe there is anything better, especially now that Rowan has disappeared.

Finding Rowan becomes Rownie’s main goal as the novel gets underway. He flees Graba and falls in with a league of goblins in order to find Rowan. He will stop at nothing because Rowan is his only real family left. However, as Rownie soon learns, family isn’t only a matter of blood. Thomas and his troupe of goblins readily take Rownie in, sheltering him, feeding him, praising him, and teaching him. Rownie is especially taken by the fact that mealtime among the goblins includes him.

Rownie comes to love his new family tremendously, physically defending them against Jansin and Graba’s curse on the Clock Tower. Rownie is also willing to risk his freedom and even his life in confronting Graba over her possible knowledge of Rowan’s whereabouts in order to help his brother and protect his goblin family from more attacks at Graba’s hands. Likewise, when the tunnels begin to flood, Rownie risks his own safety by ensuring that Rowan gets into the clock tower safely. Rowan, who regains some of his free will when wearing the River mask, gives his life to calm the River primarily out of love for, and the desire to save Rownie’s life. When the novel ends, Rownie, though saddened by Rowan’s death, knows he has a place to call home and a family among Thomas, Semele, Nonny, Patch, and Essa.

Mystery

Mystery is an important theme in the novel “Goblin Secrets” by William Alexander. In the novel, mystery involves that which is unknown or unexplainable. There are mysteries in the novel that are revealed or explained, and there are those which are never truly revealed. There are multiple instances of mystery in the novel, with each one of them adding to, or fueling the plot in some way.

When the novel begins, the reader is confronted with the mystery of Rowan’s disappearance. Where Rowan has gone, and why he has truly left, are unknown to



Rownie and the reader. It is ultimately revealed that Rowan has been kidnapped and de-hearted by the Mayor for use as a puppet actor in protecting the Northside against the flood. The reader is also struck by Vass's assignment, courtesy of Graba, in securing a charm bag to the front doors of the Clock Tower. It is later learned this is a curse meant to kill the goblins upon their return.

As it turns out, the goblins and Graba are looking for Rowan as well. Why Graba is specifically seeking out Rowan is never truly revealed, though it can be guessed it has to do with the flooding of the city. The goblins, it is revealed, are seeking out Rowan because they need his help to stop the floods that are coming. When it is learned that the Mayor has Rowan in his possession, the mystery as to how this occurred in the first place arises, but is never explained. The mystery of what Rownie was willing to trade for his brother's safety is never fully revealed, though evidence suggests that Rownie was willing to give himself to Graba in a trade.

One of the more important mysteries in the novel that is never truly solved is that of the fox mask. Unlike the other masks that are affected by Graba's curse, and which attack Rownie and the goblins, the fox mask does not attack. Indeed, the fox mask helps Rownie in disposing of the curse. It is possible that the fox mask has bonded with Rownie, and therefore its loyalty is untouchable by the curse, but the truth is never known.

Bigotry

Bigotry is an important theme in the novel "Goblin Secrets" by William Alexander. Bigotry involves feelings, statements, and actions against an individual or group of people based on things like race, gender, age, and so on. In the novel, bigotry is an extension of the dystopian society of the City of Zombay, and bigotry is directed toward goblins.

Indeed, the very use of the word "goblin" is seen as bigoted, as the goblins refer to themselves as "Tamlins," a polite word for goblins. The social culture of Zombay holds goblins to be thieves, child abductors, child-eaters, allergic to gold and iron, and as non-people. The laws of the City of Zombay have stripped away citizenship from the goblins, and the goblins are therefore left up to legalized discrimination based on their identity.

Acts of bigotry are encountered numerous times throughout the novel. Jansin and his group of friends treat the goblins like dirt, forcing them to perform to pass the crossroads. The alehouse owner refuses to pay the goblins for a contracted performance. Goblins are forbidden from living in the city. Goblins are also only allowed to spend the night in the city in the graveyard, a reflection of their status as "dead," or having no rights under the law.

The goblins manage to skirt the laws and the bigotry of Zombay by living in the Clock Tower on Fiddleway Bridge, a legal sanctuary. They also skirt the laws against performing due to the bigotry of Zombay. Because they are not considered people and



are therefore not citizens (a nod to the Dred Scott Supreme Court Decision of 1857), the goblins are not bound by the city's laws, and may therefore perform. Rownie quickly grows tired of the racism directed toward his goblin family, and makes his move by kicking Jansin and later offering himself up to Graba to protect the goblins. The reader should also note the irony in the efforts of the goblins to save a city that hates them.

Dystopianism

Dystopianism is an important theme in the novel "Goblin Secrets" by William Alexander. Dystopianism involves a government, organization, association, or company that exercises tremendous or total power and influence in the lives of everyday people, often denying their human and legal rights in the name of the greater good. Those in power will do whatever it takes to retain power, and will do whatever is necessary to secure their own ends. On the surface, those with power have the stated goal of helping the people, but in reality, they are more likely to harm people than help them.

The City of Zombay is such a dystopian society. Zombay is ruled over by the Lord Mayor. Whether this is a temporary, elected position, or a lifelong position is unclear. However, what is clear is that the Mayor has absolute control over the City of Zombay. He uses the City Guard under the command of the Guard Captain to carry out his will and enforce his laws. The Mayor is ever eager to gain more power and more control, and to remake the entire city in the way that he so chooses. Everything is done to this end.

The Mayor seeks to rebuild the Southside in the image of the Northside. With its straight streets, the Northside easily allows the Guard to pass through and carry out the Mayor's will. The Southside, with its twisting and turning streets, is resistant to the Mayor's will. Therefore, the Southside must be destroyed for the greater good. This will be accomplished by flood. To prevent the Southside from being saved, legal bans on actors and acting are enforced, to deny actors the ability to use their magic to protect the Southside. However, the Mayor bans theater under the guise that it is to stop liars from ruining and making a mockery of civilization through pretending to be something other than who they really are.

Among those in particular that the Mayor has targeted are the goblins. The Mayor enacts a host of bigoted laws against the goblins, allows bigotry and hatred to flourish among the citizens, denies goblins personhood, and denies them citizenship. This is done to exclude them from the voting process, and to make it more difficult for them to be in the city. Goblins are noted for their magic and stagecraft, and could be a potential obstacle to the Mayor's plans. The Mayor therefore discriminates against the goblins to keep them down.



Magic

Magic is an important theme in the novel “Goblin Secrets” by William Alexander. Magic, the use of words or gestures to create supernatural responses, incidents, and actions, is central to the plot of the novel, especially as it relates to the performing arts.

The reader first meets Graba, a witch, who uses magical spells and enchantments to carry out her will. Graba is training Vass in the magic of witchcraft, and orders Vass to affix a curse to the Clock Tower that will later cause the goblin masks to attack and try to kill the goblins. Graba’s ability to possess her grandchildren, and to speak and act through them, is also a form of magic, one which Vass tries to fight. Vass herself knows she will only be kept around as long as she is useful to Graba, who is a one-witch woman, so Vass throws her lot in with the Mayor to save the city from the flood.

The Mayor believes that he will be able to solve the issue of the coming flood by removing the hearts of actors and forcing them to magically defend the Northside while leaving the Southside at the mercy of the River. Actors in the novel have great power, becoming one with the masks they wear, taking on the attributes, qualities, and aspects of the features of those masks, and being able to control and manipulate the world through those masks. One such instance of this mask magic is when Rownie dons the fox mask through the Floating Mask, being able to leap, bound, and move swiftly just like a fox.

The reason that Rowan is being sought out by the goblins, Graba, and the Mayor, is because they know he has tremendous talent for the magic of stagecraft, and may be able to stop the River. Rowan ends up magically regaining some of his free will when he is given the River mask to wear, becoming one with the River in the process. It is through Rowan that Rownie is able to convince the River not to flood. As a result, the city is saved.



Styles

Point of View

William Alexander tells his novel “Goblin Secrets” in the third-person limited-omniscient perspective revolving around the character of Rownie. The novel revolves around Rownie since he serves as the main character, while the third-person allows the author to include important contextual information more easily to the reader as Rownie seeks to find his brother, Rowan. For example, the narrator is able to explain to the reader what happened to Rownie when he put on the fox mask in Act II, Scene IV, even though Rownie himself cannot explain it. Likewise, the limited-omniscient aspect of the novel in which the reader only learns certain things as Rownie learns them adds a sense of suspense and mystery to the novel. For example, it is not until near the end of the novel that Rowan’s fate truly becomes known, or whether the River floods can be stopped.

Language and Meaning

William Alexander tells his novel “Goblin Secrets” in language that is simple and straightforward. This is done for at least two reasons. The first is that the target audience is young adults, so the language used in the novel is reflective of that age range and level of education. Secondly, the main character in the novel, Rownie, is a boy of about 10 or 12, and so the language used is fitting for a boy of his age and level of education. The simple and straightforward language thus adds a sense of realism and believability to the characters, particularly Rownie.

Structure

William Alexander divides his novel “Goblin Secrets” into three primary parts, with each part subdivided into chapters. Each part is designated an Act, while each chapter is designated a Scene. The arrangement of the play into acts and scenes is reflective of the important role that theater plays in the novel, and is reflective of the plays put on in the novel, which include acts and scenes. Each Act in the novel deals with a major set of events in the plot. For example, Act II deals with Rownie striking out on his own, leaving Graba behind and befriendng the goblins.



Quotes

Performances were outlawed in Zombay.
-- Narrator (Act I, Scene I paragraph 28)

Importance: Of all the unusual and strange things in the novel so far (such as a witch with mechanical chicken legs) among the strangest and most unusual is that plays, performance, and theater in general are all outlawed in the City of Zombay. No reason is initially given for the fact that theater is outlawed in Zombay. However, it is a detail the reader should bear in mind as the plot of the novel unfolds, because performance will become central to events that are coming.

Goblins were putting on a play. Nobody could put on a play... Maybe he could see some of the show before they all got arrested.
-- Narrator (Act I, Scene II paragraph 59)

Importance: While out running an errand for Graba, and while crossing Fiddleway Bridge, Rownie discovers a sign tacked up by the goblins which advertises a performance. Rownie is stunned since theater is outlawed in Zombay. He can't imagine why or how the zombies will manage to put on a show, but knows he wants to see some of it before the goblins are arrested.

The citizens of this fair city are prohibited from pretending to be other than they are. We, however, are not citizens. We are not legally considered to be persons.
-- Thomas (Act I, Scene IV paragraph 20)

Importance: Thomas the goblin addresses the audience. He explains he and his fellow goblins are putting on a play because of a legal loophole. Only people can be considered citizens, and citizens are prohibited from the performing arts. Because goblins are not people and are not citizens, they are not bound by the laws of Zombay and so therefore may perform. It is a brilliant, but dangerous position to take as Rownie will later come to see.

You've got a little talent for wearing masks.
-- Vass (Act I, Scene VII paragraph 15)

Importance: Rownie asks Vass why Graba bothers with him, and why she doesn't possess him the way she possesses the other children. Vass explains that Graba can't possess him because he has a talent for masks, something which makes no sense to Rownie, and something which Vass does not care to explain. Only much later will Rownie learn the significance of the ability to wear masks, especially as it relates to Graba.

The River's angry. The floods are coming.
-- Vass (Act I, Scene VII paragraph 19)



Importance: Vass cautions Rownie to avoid the River because it is angry, and because the floods are coming. Rownie doesn't know what to make of Vass's warning, since people have always spoken about the River and the floods. Vass does not explain further, but it is something the reader should bear in mind as the novel progresses. Only much later in the novel will Vass's warning make sense to Rownie.

By order of the Lord Mayor of Zombay, the business of plays will cease. Players are liars. Citizens may not be players and must not pretend to be other than they are.
-- Guard Captain (Act I, Scene VIII paragraph 26)

Importance: Rownie remembers how, several months before the events of the novel, the performing arts were declared illegal. This was done so under the auspice that anyone who wears a mask is pretending to be someone they are really not, and therefore are liars. It is considered in the best interest of the city that plays be done away with. Actors are rounded up and arrested, and plays are shut down wherever they appear. The truth behind the outlawing of theater will only later be learned.

She keeps finding us. She keeps sending birds after us. She must be looking for Rowan, and her pigeons are pretty much everywhere, but Rowan's been gone for months. Why hasn't she found him?
-- Rownie (Act II, Scene IX paragraph 25)

Importance: Rownie begins to wonder how it is possible that Graba continues to locate him and the Tamlin, but has been unable to locate Rowan in months. Rownie worries that this means that Rowan is dead. It seems to be the only possible explanation. Semele, however, disagrees, saying she does not believe Rowan is dead. Graba, she explains, is very good at finding things. If she didn't expect to find Rowan, she wouldn't still be looking.

To speak for the city.
-- Essa (Act III, Scene II paragraph 21)

Importance: Essa and the other Tamlin reveal to Rownie that their obligation as actors is in part to speak for the city, to encourage the River not to flood. However, because they are legally excluded from the city, they cannot speak for it in the present. This is why they need an unChanged mask wearer to speak for the city. It is why they need Rowan so badly.

Tell her to meet me at the Southside Rail Station.
-- Rownie (Act III, Scene V paragraph 34)

Importance: Rownie imagines that Graba must know where Rowan is. He is prepared to confront her to learn Rowan's location, and is willing to make a trade with her. What this trade is, is not yet revealed. However, the reader suspects that whatever Rownie is willing to offer is significant enough to compel Graba to do business, or at least for Rownie to imagine that she will be forced to do business with him. However, instead of meeting Graba at the station, Rownie is stunned to meet the Lord Mayor instead.



“You want Southside to drown, so you can make it like Northside, and just another part of Northside. You arrested everybody who ever wore a mask—even me—to make sure Southside will drown.

-- Rownie (Act III, Scene VI paragraph 31)

Importance: Rownie, speaking with the Lord Mayor, comes to discover his true plot and purpose for arresting all the actors in the city. It has nothing to do with players being liars, but everything to do with the powers that certain players have. With no mask-wearers free to stop the River from flooding the Southside, the Southside will be destroyed. With the Southside destroyed, the Mayor can remake the Southside in the image of the Northside.

Puppet.

-- Graba (Act III, Scene VIII paragraph 13)

Importance: When Rownie discovers Rowan in the Mayor’s railcar, he is stunned that Rowan appears lifeless. He knows something is wrong, but doesn’t know what. Graba reveals the truth: Rowan has had his heart removed and turned into coal. Rowan is now merely a puppet, who lacks a heart and therefore free will. He may now do only as he is told to do. Rownie is devastated.

You’ll know how to find me.

-- Rowan (Act III, Scene X paragraph 50)

Importance: When Rowan is given the River mask and becomes one with the River, Rownie worries that he will never see Rowan again because Rowan must leave and go into the River. Rowan explains that Rownie will know how to find him. This can be done through pebbles, just as Rowan taught Rownie many months before.