

Hex Hall Study Guide

Hex Hall by Rachel Hawkins

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Plot Summary

Hex Hall is the first in a series of novels by author Rachel Hawkins. It follows 16-year-old Sophie Mercer, who is struggling to gain control of her powers as a witch, as she navigates a new school where she finds herself among others with supernatural powers. In addition to the usual teen issues of boys, classes and petty jealousies, Sophie must also deal with a series of mysterious attacks on fellow students and a great-grandmother who has returned from the dead.

The book opens with Sophie, a 16-year-old witch, trying to help a girl who is crying because she has no date to the prom. Sophie does her best to cast a spell that will cause a desirable boy to fall for her friend, but things go awry and Sophie is exposed as a witch. This is not the first time her powers -- and her lack of control over them -- have gotten her into trouble, so the Council, the body that governs Prodigium like herself, sentences her to Hecate Hall, a reform school for wayward supernatural beings, until she turns 18.

When she arrives at Hecate, which students have nicknamed Hex Hall, she immediately runs into trouble. Elodie, Anna and Chaston, a trio of black witches, are unhappy when she refuses to join their coven so they become set on making her life miserable. She develops a crush on the handsome, charming Archer Cross, but he has already been claimed by Elodie, and her roommate is Jenna, the school's only vampire and an unwelcome presence at Hecate. The teachers also seem to have it in for her, especially the PE teacher, whom students have nicknamed the Vandy.

Things go from bad to worse when Sophie learns that her father, a warlock she has never met, is actually head of the Council, therefore the one responsible for sentencing all the students to Hecate. When she gets into trouble in class, the Vandy sentences her and Archer to organize various magic items in a dank cellar, but in time the two become friendly and Sophie begins to fall for him despite her efforts not to do so.

The situation takes a turn when Chaston is found nearly dead from blood loss, apparently the result of two small puncture marks that resemble a vampire bite. This event is eerily like the death of another student, Holly, the previous year and Jenna is the prime suspect, although Sophie cannot believe she is capable of such an act. Sophie's life gets more complicated when the ghost of a young girl turns out to be her own great-grandmother, Alice, who has returned from the grave and wants to help Sophie with her magic.

Despite another attack on a student, things are looking up for Sophie after Alice's arrival and even Archer seems to be turning toward her. As they begin to make out in the cellar one night, Sophie unbuttons his shirt, but when she touches his chest, the tattoo of an eye appears. It is the symbol of a powerful group that is set on destroying the Prodigium and Sophie realizes that Archer is a member, but he escapes through a window and disappears. Shortly afterward, Sophie also learns that Alice is actually an evil demon who kills Elodie and is narrowly brought down by Sophie with the help of a shard of

demon glass. As the book ends, Sophie tells her mother that she wants to go to London, headquarters of the Council, and have her powers removed.



Prologue through Chapter 4

Summary

Prologue

Hex Hall, by Rachel Hawkins, follows 16-year-old Sophie Mercer as she tries to find her way as a young witch. Along with other witches, faeries, shapeshifters and a lone vampire, she has been exiled to Hex Hall, a sort of reform school for young Prodigium, but rather than fitting in, Sophie inadvertently makes enemies immediately. However, she will need all the help she can get when she discovers a plot to destroy all Prodigium, especially her.

The book opens with a Prologue that introduces Sophie Mercer, who finds Felicia Miller crying in the restroom on prom night. No one asked her to the prom, so Felicia lied to her parents and said her date was meeting her. Sophie feels sorry for her and says she can help, then leads her to the parking lot and casts a spell to make popular Kevin Bridges Felicia's date. Soon after they go back inside, a car crashes into the gym and a slightly bloodied Kevin begins screaming for Felicia. Chaos ensues as Sophie is surprised that her spell has gone wrong since she thought she had gotten better, but when, in the midst of the confusion, Felicia points to her and says she is a witch. Sophie thinks, "Not again."

Chapter 1

Sophie and her mother are arriving at Hecate Hall, which students call Hex Hall, a school on Graymalkin Island off the coast of Georgia. Hecate is a school for Prodigium – witches, shapeshifters and fae (faerie) children – and the Council, the organization that makes the rules for Prodigium, has decreed that Sophie must stay here until her 18th birthday. Sophie's father, a warlock, works for the Council and has had little contact with Sophie's mother since their divorce before Sophie was born. She sees other students arriving, including fae, who can be identified by their wings. As they walk around the grounds, they hear a growl that is coming from a werewolf named Justin. When Sophie giggles, he charges at her.

Chapter 2

In Chapter 2, a good-looking boy named Archer casts a blocking spell, and Justin is stopped. Sophie is put off when Archer says she is an ineffective witch. She and her mother meet Anastasia Casnoff, the headmistress, who says students are discouraged from using their powers against each other. She introduces Sophie to Jenna Talbot, who will be her roommate. Sophie is surprised to learn that Jenna is a vampire, but Mrs. Casnoff explains that the school takes one vampire each year in the hope of eventually reforming them. The chapter ends with Jenna taking Sophie to the room they will share.

Chapter 3



In Chapter 3, Sophie is taken aback to find that Jenna has decorated the room entirely in bright pink, but the girls seem to get along well, although Jenna darkens a bit when Sophie asks about her former roommate, who was named Holly. Jenna reveals that she wears a bloodstone that negates her vampire tendencies and she goes to the infirmary regularly to get the blood she needs. Sophie reveals that she has never met her father although they have spoken on the phone and exchanged e-mails. When Jenna asks about her parents' breakup, Sophie snaps at her, causing Jenna to freeze up and leave the room. Sophie's mother comes to say goodbye. They talk about the fact that they have lived in nineteen states during Sophie's sixteen years. Sophie tries to keep her mother from feeling bad about that. After her mother leaves, she sits on her bed and cries.

Chapter 4

In Chapter 4, Sophie is exploring the building, most of which is dingy with worn furniture and poor lighting. In the lounge, she encounters a couple of fairies named Nausicaa and Siobhan as well as a young shifter named Taylor. Going outside, she is approached by Anna Gilroy, Chaston Burnett and Elodie Parris, who introduce themselves as fellow witches. During their conversation, Sophie learns that there are white witches who cast lower-level spells and dark witches who have stronger powers, including power over the dead. Apparently Sophie is a dark witch and the others want her to be the fourth member of their coven, but they are also rude to her and say she is worse than Holly, another dark witch. When Sophie asks if Holly graduated, they say that Jenna killed her.

Analysis

The Prologue of Hex Hall establishes not only the book's premise -- a teenage witch who has not yet gotten command of her powers -- but it also sets the tone. The author, who previously was a high school teacher, understands teenagers and is skilled in writing in the voice of a 16-year-old girl. Sophie is immediately established as funny and anxious to be helpful and fit in with her classmates even though she realizes that she does not.

This section also establishes the fact that Sophie and her mother have moved frequently -- 19 times in just 16 years. However, it is unclear whether this is because of Sophie's status as a witch or if there are other factors.

The book's first few chapters set the stage at Hecate Hall, which is portrayed as a gloomy, depressing place on an oppressively hot island -- a perfect location for a group of misfit monsters, as Sophie herself describes them. Despite the purpose of the school, the headmistress lends an air of Southern gentility to the environment. Much of this section is devoted to introducing the characters, many of whom are staples in young adult novels -- the beautiful Elodie, the handsome Archer, the somewhat awkward Jenna -- but in this case, they have the added element of being Prodigium. There are also some surprises, such as the fact that a vampire has decorated her room in bright



pink, but this is later revealed to be an effort to recall feelings from her former life before she was changed.

This section also establishes Sophie's relationship with her parents, including the father she has never met and who will become a major factor later in the novel.

Some of the characters introduced in the book's first chapters -- Nausicaa, for example -- do not become major players, but are shown simply as examples of the various groups to which they belong, primarily shapeshifters like werewolves and fae, or faeries.

Finally, the first section introduces the first clues in the book's primary plot -- the attacks on various students, the person(s) responsible for the attacks, and the larger story behind the incidents.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Sophie's reaction when Jenna questions her about the breakup of her parents' marriage. Why does she react this way?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Jenna disliked so much by the other students? How might this affect Sophie as the novel progresses?

Discussion Question 3

Describe Sophie's relationship with her mother. What factors have led to this kind of relationship? How do you think this has affected Sophie's personality?

Vocabulary

Distinctive, rap (verb), snort, pathetic, wary, deserted, torture, tremor, cower, flex, unleash, plummet, hysterics, stampede, garbled, cavernous, humidity, devour, carnivorous, compulsively, imperil, sullen, heft, insolent, mantra, discretion, reluctant, mill (verb), paranoid, discreetly, endeavor, saunter, provoke, regal, exotic, understatement, ascent, imposing, gesture, coexist, negate, abruptly, interloper.



Chapters 5 through 8

Summary

Chapter 5

In Chapter 5, Sophie expresses disbelief that Jenna could have killed anyone, but the three girls tell her that Holly was found dead with two holes pierced in her neck and the blood drained from her body. The Council let her stay at school because they determined that the holes could not have been made by fangs, but the girls insist that the Council was wrong. They try to convince Sophie to join their coven by demonstrating their powers but she asks for time to think about it and they leave. Later, Jenna finds Sophie and apologizes for butting into her family business, but Sophie says they are OK. Jenna realizes the witches have told her about Holly and says Holly told her they were trying to get more power. Sophie brushes it off and they head for dinner, but Sophie is a little bothered by the way Jenna stared at a bleeding cut on her arm.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 finds Sophie and Jenna in the dining hall, where a huge, delicious meal is served. They sit at a table by themselves and Jenna fills Sophie in on the teachers, including Lord Byron, the actual English poet, who she says is a vampire and therefore immortal. She also says that Archer Cross is the bad boy on whom all the girls have a crush. He had been dating Holly and was upset after her death, then he left school and reportedly went to London, headquarters of the Council, for a Removal ritual to have his powers taken away, but Sophie muses that sometimes the ritual does not work. As dinner ends, Mrs. Casnoff asks all students who are not new to leave but asks Archer to stay as well, seating him with Sophie, and the room goes black.

Chapter 7

In Chapter 7, Mrs. Casnoff shows the students a number of images, some of which seem to be holograms, and tells them about witches and other paranormal beings who have been persecuted and killed over the years. She says this is what they risk when they use their powers in front of humans. She then tells them about current dangers which include the Alliance (agents from various government agencies), the Brannicks (an Irish family) and L'Occhio di Dio (The Eye of God, depicted by the image of an eye sketched all in black except for a gold iris.) Mrs. Casnoff says it appears that the three forces might be joining together now. Then, she dismisses the group without further comment.

Chapter 8

In Chapter 8, Sophie catches up with Archer and says she doesn't believe all humans want to hurt Prodigium, but he says she is different because she's been raised by a human. When she says there must be dangerous Prodigium too, Archer warns her not



to say things like that at Hecate. Returning to her room, Sophie confesses to Jenna that she has a crush on Archer and Jenna agrees that he's hot but she is not attracted to him because she is gay. Jenna is surprised that Archer and Elodie are a couple because although she chased him last year, he avoided her until he returned to school this year. Around midnight, Elodie, Chaston and Anna sneak into the room and say they have come to induct Sophie into their sisterhood. Sophie says she has not yet made a decision, but they say she can back out any time so she goes with them.

Analysis

Although the seeds of friendship have been sewn between Sophie and Jenna, doubt begins to emerge when Sophie sees her roommate staring at her bleeding arm. This goes directly to the theme of trust that is woven throughout the book. No one is ever considered completely trustworthy in the dangerous world of the occult.

The book's humor continues when it is revealed that the school's English teacher is the poet Lord Byron, who is depicted as a vampire and therefore immortal. This is a subtle reference from the author, who previously served as a high school English teacher.

The character of Archer is a major focus in these chapters. He is again established as the quintessential class heartthrob and even Sophie finds herself developing feelings for him. The conversation between Sophie and Archer after Mrs. Casnoff's demonstration, the reference to Archer's recent withdrawal from school and the rumored reason for it, and Jenna's musings about the relationship between Elodie and Archer all provide foreshadowing for events to come later in the novel. The reader should also pay particular attention to Mrs. Casnoff's description of the three forces that pose an imminent danger to the Prodigium as the story will circle back to them at later points.

Discussion Question 1

What aspects of Holly's death have led others to suspect that Jenna was her killer? What evidence exists that she is not responsible?

Discussion Question 2

Describe the presentation Mrs. Casnoff gives to the new students. Why does she show them such disturbing images? What do you think might be the significance of Archer's comments about the new material that has been added since he saw the presentation when he first arrived at Hecate?

Discussion Question 3

What are the three groups that Mrs. Casnoff identifies as enemies of the Prodigium? Discuss the history and primary characteristics of each.

Vocabulary

Scowl, revoke, claustrophobic, interject, somber, levitate, cease, furrow, thwart, sarcastic, rapturous, devour, conspicuous, voluntarily, retaliate, sympathetic, bellow, resources, materialize, decade, instinctively, gallows, serene, persecuted, eliminate, mutiny, dismissive, imbued, sardonic, hypothesis, enlightened, empathetic.



Chapters 9 through 12

Summary

Chapter 9

In Chapter 9, the girls prepare for the induction ritual and ask Sophie about her first magic spell. Since each of the girls had done something dramatic for their first spell, they are disappointed when she says she accidentally turned her hair purple. They are even more disappointed when they learn of her love spell because the spells that got each of them sentenced to Hecate were destructive and hurtful. Sophie says she does not want to join them. Although they are not happy with her, they insist that they need a fourth dark witch for a mysterious plan that they do not share with Sophie. They tell her that she will find it hard to survive at Hecate between her dad and rooming with a vampire, but they refuse to explain what they mean about her dad. On the way back to her room, she witnesses a dispute between shifter Taylor and three fairies who are trying to conduct a ritual to communicate with the Seelie Court. Then, she meets a werewolf named Beth. Back in her room, she talks with Jenna, who is sucking on a bag of blood and does not know anything about Sophie's father.

Chapter 10

When Chapter 10 opens, Sophie has made it through her first week and a half of classes without incident and now it is time for physical education, called Defense at Hecate. The class meets only once every other week and Jenna says that is because if it met more often, the students would be in the hospital. On the way to class, Elodie, Anna and Chaston catch up with Sophie, apologize and ask to be friends and she agrees. They tell her that the Defense teacher, whom students call the Vandy, used to be a dark witch but got into trouble and was sentenced to teach at Hecate. They warn Sophie that she picks on new students, but say if she gets into trouble, Sophie should compliment her on the unusual tattoos on her arms. In class, the Vandy calls on Sophie and hands her a wooden stake, then asks Archer to disarm her using Skill Nine, and he is astonished.

Chapter 11

In Chapter 11, Sophie reluctantly obeys the Vandy's order to lunge at Archer with the stake and he responds by taking her down hard. The Vandy then tells him to use Skill Four on her, but Archer refuses and the Vandy is about to do it when Sophie kicks her hard and knocks her down. When the teacher threatens her with detention, Sophie blurts out that she likes her tattoos and the class gasps as the Vandy becomes livid, and Sophie realizes the girls tricked her. The Vandy gives her detention and cellar duty for the rest of the semester and when Archer protests, she gives him the same punishment. As they leave the class, Archer reveals that the tattoos are signs that she has gone



through the Removal and that Sophie's father is head of the Council and the one who has sentenced all of them to Hecate.

Chapter 12

In Chapter 12, Sophie begins to sob and runs away from Archer, running until she reaches a pond. She sits on a mossy stone and casts a spell to turn it into a comfortable couch. Then, she feels a little better although she is still dismayed about all the things she does not know. Suddenly she sees the ghost of a girl across the pond and they wave at each other, then the ghost disappears. Mrs. Casnoff arrives and is kind to her, Archer having told her that Sophie did not know about her father. Mrs. Casnoff says Sophie's presence at Hecate is a sensitive matter and takes her to her office, saying there is something they need to discuss.

Analysis

Chapter 9 contains considerable foreshadowing as Sophie learns that Anna, Elodie and Chaston are not only much more powerful and advanced than she is, but they favor spells that are hurtful to other people, whereas she was sentenced to Hecate for a simple love spell that she botched. This seemingly small detail will come around later when the real reason Sophie is at Hecate is revealed.

The nature of Sophie's background and upbringing also begins to come into focus in this section. She clearly has led a sheltered life -- although just how sheltered will not be revealed until later -- and the many things of which she is unaware are now coming around to confuse her and harm her relationships with others at her school. The full scope of the book's plot also takes shape in these chapters as Sophie and Archer are paired together in Defense and exiled to cellar duty, Sophie learns more about her father, and the ghost of the young girl appears to her again. All of these elements should be noted, but seemingly important scenes involving secondary characters are simply red herrings.

Discussion Question 1

When Elodie, Chaston and Anna talk with Sophie on the way to Defense class, what signs are there that they are not being sincere in their gesture of friendship toward her?

Discussion Question 2

When Sophie runs away from Archer, she is upset about more than what she has just learned about her father. Why is she so distraught? How might these feelings affect her future at Hecate?



Discussion Question 3

Discuss the various Prodigium who are students at Hecate. What similarities and differences are there among the witches/warlocks, faeries, shapeshifters and vampires?

Vocabulary

Pentagram, befitting, retort, glum, baffled, pariah, primitive, disdain, impassive, knell, outcast, legendary, reformatory, heinous, converted, impending, synchronized, conspiratorial, vain, sufficient, rhetorical, levity, hoist, sternum, enormity, homicidal, penchant, angst, privy.



Chapters 13 through 16

Summary

Chapter 13

In Chapter 13, Mrs. Casnoff tells Sophie about her father's family. Usually someone has to be born a witch, but Sophia's great-grandmother Alice was transformed into a witch by a woman named Thorne who was involved in black magic. Alice disappeared and was found by the Council in a London asylum. She was pregnant. After she gave birth, she and her baby were brought to Hecate. The baby was Sophie's grandmother, Lucy. Alice escaped and was murdered by the L'Occhio di Dio, who have a distinctive way of killing witches. Lucy stayed at Hecate to be observed by the Council because Alice had been the strongest Prodigium that had ever been recorded. Further study revealed that her high level of magic had been passed down to Lucy, Sophie's father, and to Sophie herself.

Chapter 14

In Chapter 14, Mrs. Casnoff gives Sophie the rest of the day off and she angrily calls her mother, who apologizes for not telling her that her father is head of the Council but refuses to discuss it further until she comes home on Christmas break. She also refuses to confirm Mrs. Casnoff's claim that her father put Sophie in Hecate because she is in danger. After hanging up, Sophie sees the ghost girl again but she walks away. Jenna arrives and says that cellar duty is terrible because the job is to catalog lots of old magical artifacts, which is pointless because since the items are magic, they move around. Sophie goes to the library and finds a book on L'Occhio di Dio but it does not mention her great-grandmother. However, she sees a picture with a caption saying members of The Eye have been known to kill by draining the victim's blood, which reminds her of Holly's mysterious death. However, when she mentions it to Jenna, Jenna says they are never secretive because they want people to know they were responsible, which she knows because she has seen them.

Chapter 15

In Chapter 15, Sophie and Archer serve their first evening of cellar duty, with the Vandy locking them in the cellar for the hour-long stint. Sophie asks Archer what he sees in Elodie and he says Holly's death really affected Elodie and they got close after that. He also reveals that witches and warlocks are betrothed to each other at age 13 and he was betrothed to Holly, and he says that Sophie's father has probably arranged a marriage for her also. After Sophie inadvertently makes a dirty remark, she and Archer share a laugh and she finds herself thinking about kissing him when the Vandy arrives and lets them go. Jenna is out of their room when Sophie returns so she decides to take a shower. She finds the shared bathroom enveloped in steam, then sees Chaston in a tub with the water pink from her blood, apparently dead.



Chapter 16

In Chapter 16, Sophie sees small puncture wounds below Chaston's jaw and slashes on both her wrists. She summons Mrs. Casnoff, who sends her to get Cal, the groundskeeper who lives in a house on the property and turns out to be a very hot guy about 19 years old. Cal takes Chaston to Mrs. Casnoff's office while other students who have gathered begin to accuse Jenna, but Jenna retorts by saying Holly told her the three black witches were trying to raise a demon and needed a sacrifice so the demon would have someone to feed on. Elodie dismisses the idea and when Sophie defends Jenna, Beth tells everyone that her father is head of the council and the one responsible for sending vampires to Hex. Just then Mrs. Casnoff appears and says Chaston will recover. She will go home for a while and hopefully return after winter break, and she has not said who is responsible. Sophie also learns that Cal is a powerful white warlock with healing powers but Holly was dead by the time anyone found her and he cannot raise the dead.

Analysis

Chapter 13 is a pivotal one because it reveals much about the history of Sophie's family. All of the information Mrs. Casnoff passes on, including the things that she says remain a mystery, come back around later. So, this is a particularly important chapter for readers to note.

The book's plot heats up considerably in these chapters as another victim is attacked in the same manner as Holly. Again there are many reasons to suspect Jenna, particularly the manner of the attack and the fact that Jenna is out of the room at the time Sophie returns from cellar duty. The theme of trust is raised again as Sophie, who truly likes Jenna and considers her the only friend she has at Hecate, must face the mounting evidence against her, as much as she wants to believe in her roommate.

Another theme that gets attention in this section is that of issues that face all teenagers, even those who possess magic powers. In particular, Sophie finds her crush on Archer growing despite her desire to dislike him. The beginning of a friendship grows and the scene in the cellar parallels a similar scene that will be pivotal in the novel's conclusion. Jenna's claim that the black witches were trying to raise a demon also is important and foreshadows events to come.

The author again interjects humor into the plot with the cellar scene in which amusing objects of magic are cataloged even as they move themselves around, making the entire effort a pointless exercise. These kinds of moments are used to lighten the mood in the midst of the novel's darker elements.

Discussion Question 1

What things has Sophie learned about her father at this point? Why is she so angry about what she has learned?



Discussion Question 2

How has Sophie's relationship with Archer evolved since the beginning of the novel? What factors have been responsible for the changes in their relationship?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the history of Sophia's family as related by Mrs. Casnoff. What things line up with what Sophie knows about herself and what things do not? What pieces of information are missing that might come into play later?

Vocabulary

Sturdy, gauge, brooding, monstrosity, primly, manipulate, stymied, imperative, transformation, aberration, asylum, contrive, alcove, grimace, exempt, imminent, artifact, jarring, reproduction, implicate, musty, precarious, tedious, betrothed, complementary, inscrutable, auditory, equivalent, unrequited, formidable, implore.



Chapters 17 through 20

Summary

Chapter 17

In Chapter 17, Sophie returns to her room to find Jenna very upset that she is being blamed for the attack on Chaston. She cries and wishes she were normal. Then, she tells Sophie that she was changed by a girl named Amanda, but The Eye killed Amanda shortly afterward. She says the dark witches were disturbed by Mrs. Casnoff's warnings about the dangers to the Prodigium, so they wanted to raise a demon to give them more power and make them safer. The girls go to sleep, but Sophie awakens to the sound of screams as the sun is streaming through the window and Jenna's bloodstone has disappeared. Sophie shoves her into a closet, then goes to Anna and Elodie's room and although they deny they took it, she casts a spell and finds it in a drawer. She returns it to Jenna, who refuses to report the incident. When Sophie pushes the matter, Jenna gets angry and her fangs come out but she quickly apologizes. Mrs. Casnoff arrives and asks to speak with Jenna, and as they leave the room, Sophie wonders about Jenna.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 opens a week later and nothing has changed. Chaston's parents came to get her and spent two hours in Mrs. Casnoff's office, then Jenna had been summoned, keeping her the prime suspect. When the chapter opens, Sophie and Archer are in the cellar again – something Sophie now looks forward to – and she tells him that Jenna is still very upset. As they are leaving the cellar, Sophie asks him if anyone could raise a demon and he says no because they are conspicuous. He also tells her that the only thing that can kill a demon is demon glass, which can only be obtained in hell.

Chapter 19

In Chapter 19, October has arrived and Chaston has sent written testimony to the Council that she does not remember the attack, so Jenna is allowed to stay at Hex Hall. Sophie has gotten closer to Archer, which makes his relationship with the seemingly-vapid Elodie all the more puzzling to her. When Sophie gets kicked out of class for interrupting the teacher, she runs into Cal outside and asks why he is not using his powers for more important things, and he replies that when he finished at Hecate last year, he offered his services to the Council and they thought the best use of his talents was protecting the students at Hecate. He also tells Sophie that the teachers are hard on her because they are trying not to show favoritism to her and she again blames her father. In her next class, she sits next to Jenna and notices that she is drawing the faces of Holly and Chaston in her notebook.

Chapter 20



Chapter 20 finds Sophie and Archer in the cellar again. When she asks whether his family likes her dad, he looks as if something is wrong, then says they stay out of politics and changes the subject. Later in the hall, Sophie overhears Anna and Elodie talking about her, wondering whether Archer could be interested in her, but they dismiss the idea and Elodie says that on the night of the upcoming All Hallow's Eve Ball, she plans to have sex with him. Sophie repeats this to Jenna and they end up laughing and talking for the first time in weeks. During the night, Sophie awakens to see the girl in green standing at the foot of her bed and she says, "Sophia Mercer. What trouble you've been."

Analysis

The issue of trust between Sophie and Jenna grows stronger when Jenna loses her temper and shows her darker side. Thus far, all evidence points to Jenna as the person responsible for the attacks, and the fact that she is the only vampire among the students and therefore considered untrustworthy to begin with does nothing to help her cause. Sophie wants desperately to believe that she has nothing to do with the attacks, partly because Jenna is her only friend at Hecate, but she is struggling a bit more as Jenna shows what can happen when she is provoked only a little.

The book's theme of teenage angst also appears in this section, but with a twist. While it is common for teenagers to feel that they are different and wish they could be more like everyone else, Jenna's situation (and in many ways, that of the other students at Hecate) is different because she literally wishes she was not a monster, but her tears and laments mirror the despair other teens feel about more typical issues like boys and acne.

While Sophie assumes that the dangers the Prodigium face come from outside Hecate, it is becoming increasingly clear that there are also dangers from within when Jenna's bloodstone is taken, putting her in mortal danger.

Sophie's conversation with Archer in Chapter 18 is of particular note because while it seems innocuous on its surface, it holds the key to the story's ultimate resolution. Similarly, Sophie's puzzlement about why he is attracted to Elodie holds clues regarding revelations still to come.

The story takes a dramatic turn in Chapter 20 when the ghost girl Sophie has been seeing from time to time finally speaks to her.

Discussion Question 1

What do we know about the nature of Archer's relationship with Elodie at this point? Are there clues as to how their relationship developed as it has?



Discussion Question 2

What purpose does Cal serve in the novel?

Discussion Question 3

In Chapter 20, Sophie overhears a conversation between Elodie and Anna that involves her. What is the significance of this conversation and its revelations? How does it affect Sophie?

Vocabulary

Evaporate, involuntary, console, plaintive, derisive, stupendous, futile, mandatory, justified, withering, abrupt, contemplate, hoist, contort, petition, disintegrate, conspicuous, sadistic, inadvertently, proximity, erupt, stifle, egregious, contempt, delusional, compensate.



Chapters 21 through 24

Summary

Chapter 21

In Chapter 21, Sophie soon realizes that the girl is the ghost of her great-grandmother, Alice, who has cast a spell over Hecate so they can leave without waking anyone. Sophie follows her into the woods, where they arrive at a small graveyard that also contains a tall statue of an angel and Sophie recognizes it as the one depicted in a stained glass window at Hecate. It is the angel that cast out the Prodigium. Suddenly Sophie feels a heavy blow and falls to the ground, and Alice says she should have been able to sense and block such a simple attack spell. Then she reveals that she has come to help Sophie sharpen her powers to prepare her to become head of the Council.

Chapter 22

In Chapter 22, Alice assures Sophie that she is not a bad witch, but she needs someone to guide her to become what she is meant to be. She gives Sophie a pendant that will keep her from being tired and tells her they will meet and work together every night. After many unsuccessful attempts at making a pencil appear, Sophie finally feels something like water rushing from her feet to her fingertips and a whole pile of pencils appears. Alice gives her some dirt from her grave and tells her to use it when she needs extra power. When it is time to leave, Alice produces two brooms and they fly back to Hecate Hall, but before she leaves, Alice warns Sophie that The Eye sees her all the time, even at Hecate.

Chapter 23

In Chapter 23, everyone is preparing for the upcoming ball and the witches are working in class on creating dresses for themselves. Elodie's dress is stunning but for some reason she cannot understand, everything Sophie creates is hideous, much to the delight of Elodie and Anna. Eventually Sophie gets fed up and mentions in front of the entire class that Elodie is planning to have sex with Archer at the ball. When Sophie mentions the feeling of water rushing up her body, the other witches are surprised and say magic comes from above and feels like snow falling on you. Alice does not approve of Sophie's friendship with Jenna but says it is her business. When Alice finds out about Sophie's crush on Archer, she offers to help her make Elodie's dress less beautiful.

Chapter 24

Chapter 24 takes place on the day of the ball. All the students have gone out for the day but Sophie is still trying fruitlessly to conjure up a dress when Jenna suggests that her mannequin might be cursed. Suddenly she realizes that she should not be having this much trouble and casts a spell that lets her know that someone indeed tampered with the mannequin. Although she had decided not to tamper with Elodie's dress, now she



changes her mind and tucks the small bone Alice gave her into the hem of the dress, which will cause it to change to an ugly color when she puts it on. Then she takes a little of the dirt from Alice's grave, rubs it on her hands and conjures up a beautiful dress for herself and one for Jenna. As they make their way through the crowd of students entering the dance, someone puts a hand on Sophie's back.

Analysis

The appearance of her great-grandmother Alice appears to be a very positive event for Sophie for several reasons. She has suffered from a lack of family throughout her life as her world has consisted of just her mother and herself. Her father is technically in the picture, but she has never met him and has limited contact, so this is a very important relationship for her. In addition, she finally has someone who can teach her the things she needs to know to take advantage of her powers, which she has been told are considerable despite the fact that she seems less capable than any of the other witches at Hecate. Her immediate attraction and attachment to Alice are understandable.

The author again interjects humor by having Alice and Sophie fly through the air on brooms as witches stereotypically do, but the tone quickly becomes somber when Alice warns that The Eye is always watching. It is becoming increasingly clear to Sophie and to the reader that while The Eye and other enemies want to destroy all Prodigium, Sophie herself is a particular target, although the entire reason has not yet been revealed.

The issue of Sophie's dress brings back the theme of teen angst combined with the occult. Sophie and Elodie are engaged in a battle that is typical of teenage girls who like the same boy or who simply do not get along, as they exchange biting words while also playing pranks designed to hurt each other in relatively harmless ways. In this case, however, both girls have magic at their disposal, taking the battle to new heights.

Discussion Question 1

How is Sophie's relationship with Elodie typical of real-life teenage girls? In what ways is it different? In addition to their attraction to Archer, what are some other sources of discord between them?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Sophie hesitate about tampering with Elodie's dress? What causes her to change her mind?



Discussion Question 3

Analyze Sophie's relationship with Alice at this point. What does she like about Alice? In what ways is Alice more like a friend than a great-grandmother? Why is this important to Sophie?

Vocabulary

Dismissive, encase, opalescent, undulate, smug, render, perceptive, veer, enigmatic, orb, heave, exhilaration, extinguish, antsy, bray, noxious, heinous, saunter, deflate, abhorrent, elaborate, revelation.



Chapters 25 through 28

Summary

Chapter 25

Chapter 25 opens with Sophie turning to see that the person who spoke to her is Archer and he is amazed at how beautiful she looks, just as Elodie is shocked to see her dress. Sophie and Jenna are enjoying watching everyone dance when suddenly Elodie seems to be in pain and leaves with Mrs. Casnoff. Archer follows and when he returns, he says that her dress suddenly became too tight and was choking her, and Sophie realizes that this was Alice's plan all along. She looks for Jenna but she appears to have returned to their room. Archer asks Sophie to dance and says that Elodie was right when she said he really wanted to spend the dance with her, and Sophie realizes she is in love with him. Suddenly Elodie bursts into the room and says that she thinks Anna is dead.

Chapter 26

In Chapter 26, we learn that Anna is not dead but she was found with the same puncture wounds as the first two victims and was unable to say who had attacked her. Later that night, Mrs. Casnoff comes to get Jenna, and Sophie finally falls asleep, but has strange dreams, including one about Alice in the cemetery, clutching the iron fence while three men descend upon her with silver knives raised. The following morning, an assembly is held and Mrs. Casnoff announces that Lord Byron and Jenna have been sent away until the attacks are solved, then she calls Elodie and Sophie to her office, where it is revealed that the girls joined Sophie to their coven without her knowledge. Sophie asks whether it is possible that The Eye has gotten into the school but she says it is not possible. She also reveals that Jenna has been sent to London to plead her case to the Council, and she tells Sophie and Elodie to look out for each other since they are the only members of the coven left. Later that night, Archer taps on Sophie's door but she does not answer. When she leaves to meet Alice, she finds Elodie standing at the foot of the stairs.

Chapter 27

In Chapter 27, Sophie keeps Elodie from reporting her to Mrs. Casnoff by telling her she has been secretly taking lessons from a ghost witch and takes Elodie with her to meet Alice, although she does not say she is her great-grandmother. Alice teaches Elodie to make things appear while Sophie fruitlessly works on transporting skills. When they tell her about Anna's attack, Alice immediately thinks of The Eye and opens her clothing to show where they had cut out her heart because they were afraid of her power. She tells both girls they might be in danger, then takes their hands in hers and puts them under a protection spell. She also gives Elodie a pendant like the one she had given Sophie earlier and the chapter closes with Sophie thinking that something unknown has come over the school.



Chapter 28

In Chapter 28, Elodie continues going with Sophie to learn from Alice, and the two girls begin to get friendlier as Sophie realizes that Elodie must be lonely. On her non-cellar nights, Sophie begins spending time in the library researching *The Eye*, but most of the books are in Latin. One night she approaches Mrs. Casnoff about her theory that a demon could be responsible for the attacks because they drain blood, but Mrs. Casnoff dismisses the idea and tells her that it seems clear that Jenna was responsible. When Sophie gets to the cellar, she and Archer, who have been uncomfortable with each other since the ball, finally begin to talk, then they begin kissing passionately, but when she puts her hand inside his shirt over his heart, a tattoo of *The Eye* appears under her fingers.

Analysis

Sophie's relationship with Archer heats up in the beginning of this section as he makes it clear that he is attracted to her when they dance at the ball. The author takes care to build up the relationship and imply that the two will become a couple before revealing the story's biggest shock -- the fact that Archer has a tattoo of *The Eye* on his chest. Up to that point, the plot was emerging as a standard underdog-gets-the-hot guy young adult novel, so the revelation about Archer's true identity comes as a surprise. It also begins to explain several things, including his relationship with Elodie, which was an attempt to get close to the coven.

Alice's true nature also comes forth in a small way when she lies to Sophie about the effects of the bone she gave her to put into Elodie's dress. While she lured Sophie into the plan by saying it would simply turn the dress into a hideous color, in fact it did much more than that and if Sophie had known this, she probably would not have participated in the trick.

Sophie also begins to feel more kindly toward Elodie in this section when she realizes she must be lonely now that all her friends are gone. Despite her status as a black witch, Sophie's personality is different from the others and she clearly displays a kinder side. She uses her magic entirely differently than Elodie and the other witches, which circles back to the earlier discussion of the mistakes that got them sentenced to Hecate in the first place. While Elodie, Chaston and Anna did spells that harmed other people -- usually for no reason -- Sophie's love spell was an attempt to help someone that simply went wrong. In the same manner, while tampering with Sophie's mannequin can be seen as a harmless prank, taking Jenna's bloodstone was a direct attempt to cause her bodily harm and even death.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the relationship among Alice, Sophie and Elodie. How does it begin to change Sophie's relationship with Elodie? What is the effect on her relationship with Alice?



Discussion Question 2

In what ways does the author set up the story to make the revelation about Archer more shocking?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Sophie so upset when she learns that she has been joined to the coven against her will? What previous events have led to this development?

Vocabulary

Audition, prerequisite, grimace, mandatory, disoriented, dais, encounter, appraise, usher (verb), subdued, contempt, plausible, deranged, tryst, inanimate, sacrifice, camaraderie, lore, exonerate, infallible, omnipotent.



Chapters 29 through 32

Summary

Chapter 29

In Chapter 29, Sophie is shocked to realize that Archer is an Eye. She knocks him down and uses some of the things she has learned in Defense to fight him off, then runs to the top of the stairs and yells for help. Archer pulls out a silver knife, but rather than attacking Sophie, he uses it to open a window and slips out just as the Vandy opens the door. In Mrs. Casnoff's office, everyone is incredulous and Mrs. Casnoff apologizes for not believing Sophie's suspicions about The Eye. A search of the grounds does not turn Archer up and Cal escorts Sophie to her floor, where Elodie approaches her. She is shocked to hear the news about Archer but when Sophie is unable to explain why she was touching his chest, she simply walks out.

Chapter 30

In Chapter 30, everyone is relieved that things should get back to normal at Hecate now, and Mrs. Casnoff tells Sophia that Jenna would be returning and her father would also be coming. She calls her mother to ask why he hasn't tried to see her before, but her mom says his reasons are his to tell, but adds that he loves her. Sophie stops meeting Alice, although she knows Elodie still goes, because she is a little afraid of her attraction to the dark side, and she also keeps wondering why Archer had not killed her when he had the chance. Jenna returns and says that Archer's entire family has disappeared, but she is shocked when she sees the necklace Alice gave Sophie, which Sophie has hung around the neck of Jenna's stuffed animal. Jenna says it is a bloodstone with demon blood and Sophie realizes Alice is a demon, therefore she must be one too. She tells Jenna to get Mrs. Casnoff and Cal and send them to the graveyard in the woods, then she runs toward it herself.

Chapter 31

In Chapter 31, Sophie finds Alice and Elodie and tries to get Elodie to go back to the school, but she refuses. When Sophie says she knows what happened, Elodie confesses that she, Anna and Chaston did summon a demon because they felt they had no choice. They killed Holly by accident because they needed blood for the demon, but they were unable to stop the bleeding. Alice reveals that when the girls summoned a demon, she came forth because she wanted to meet Sophie. Alice knocks Elodie to the ground, pierces her neck and drinks her blood. Afterward, Sophie goes to Elodie, who takes her hand and transfers her remaining magic to her before she dies. Alice intends for Sophie and herself to become an unstoppable team, but Sophie notices that the angel statue's black sword is made of demon glass, so she casts a spell to break it off and uses it to cut off Alice's head.



Chapter 32

Chapter 32, the book's final chapter, takes place the following afternoon as Sophie tells Jenna that she is a demon rather than a witch. Cal was unable to save Elodie, but he did repair most of the damage the demon glass did to Sophie's hand. Sophie learns that her grandmother, Lucy, had also been a demon, but her father was a half demon and she was a quarter demon, but still very powerful. Mrs. Casnoff says that Sophia will always be dangerous, as will her father, but many demons go for a long time without snapping. Sophie's mother arrives and as they are talking, the ghost of Elodie walks by, as she now will roam the halls like the other ghosts. Her mother says she plans to take Sophie home, but she replies that she wants to go to London instead and have the Removal, even though it will likely kill her.

Analysis

The book's final chapters bring the story to a conclusion while leading the reader into the second volume of this series. Some questions are answered while others are left open for future books. For example, Archer is revealed as a member of The Eye, but he passes up the chance to kill Sophie and still escape, keeping his identity secret, and there are hints that the character will re-emerge in future volumes.

The revelation that Sophie is a demon rather than a witch also explains some things, such as the reason her magic seems to come up from her feet rather than showering down as is the case with Elodie and the others. The possibility that she could snap at some point is obviously disturbing for her and also leaves open possibilities for future plot lines.

The plot to raise a demon backfires horrendously when Alice kills Elodie rather than protecting her as intended. This emphasizes the fact that the young Prodigium at Hecate, despite the fact that some seem to have advanced skills, are young and inexperienced and, like teenagers in other, more normal situations, often think they are capable of more than they actually should attempt.

Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of the pendant Alice gave to Sophie and Elodie?

Discussion Question 2

Now that it has been revealed that Sophie is a demon rather than a witch, what clues has the author provided prior to this revelation?



Discussion Question 3

Realizing that Hex Hall is the first book in a series, make at least three predictions about plot lines the author might use in future volumes and explain why these would be appropriate.

Vocabulary

Momentum, infiltrate, plausible, muffled, amends, scenario, purposeful, animated, corporeal, calculate, intruder, innocuous, horde.



Characters

Sophie Mercer

Sophia "Sophie" Mercer is a sixteen-year-old girl who just happens to be a witch. Like all witches, she came into her powers when she was twelve. But, unlike others, that was the first time she learned of her status. Her mother is a human and did not know she had married a warlock, and she divorced him as soon as she learned about it, so Sophie has never met her father, although they have exchanged e-mails and phone calls sporadically in recent years.

Sophie does not consider herself attractive because she has freckles and unruly hair, but she is kind and funny and in many ways a typical teenager. Perhaps because she has been raised by a human -- although her mother has learned as much as possible about Prodigium like Sophie -- she has difficulties controlling her powers, a fact that results in a sentence to attend Hecate Hall, a reform school for young people like herself. Again like a typical teen, she falls for the hot guy, feels envious of his girlfriend and struggles with roommate issues. However, Sophie's case is unusual because her fellow students are witches, shapeshifters, faeries and in the case of her roommate, vampires.

Sophie's family history has been somewhat murky and mysterious. During her first weeks at Hecate, strange things begin to occur on campus, leading to shocking revelations about her own ancestors and some of her fellow students. Through it all, Sophie works to understand who she is and what she is destined to become.

Archer Cross

Archer Cross is the handsome, charming warlock on whom all the girls at Hecate Hall have a crush. He and Sophie get off to a poor start, but she soon finds herself falling for him like all the other girls.

Archer's history, like Sophie's, is somewhat murky. After his girlfriend, a young witch named Holly, was mysteriously killed the previous year, Archer left school and was rumored to have gone before the Council that rules all Prodigium to have his powers removed. Now he is back at Hecate and dating Elodie, Holly's friend and Sophie's nemesis, but the pair seem oddly matched.

Before the book concludes, a shocking secret is revealed -- Archer is a member of The Eye, a group determined to wipe out all Prodigium -- and he disappears from campus and seemingly from the face of the earth.



Elodie Parris

Elodie Parris is a beautiful young witch who is a student at Hecate Hall. She is in a coven with two other dark witches, Anna and Chaston, a group that also included the now-dead Holly.

Elodie takes an immediate dislike to Sophie and makes it her mission to make her miserable at every opportunity. Despite all appearances, Archer insists that there is another side to Elodie that explains his relationship with her, and this seems to be true as the book reaches its conclusion and she gives her last bit of magic to Sophie before she dies.

However, for most of the book, Elodie is haughty and cold, particularly to Sophie. She makes no pretense about what she wants, including Archer, and she will stop at nothing to get and keep him.

Jenna Talbot

Jennifer "Jenna" Talbot is the only vampire student at Hecate Hall, and no one lets her forget it. She is small with a pink streak in her blonde hair and a bright pink dorm room to match, which help her recall her life before she was changed. Jenna is gay and had the misfortune to fall for a vampire named Amanda, who bit her shortly before being killed. Now, Jenna is trapped in a life she does not want.

Her status as a vampire causes Jenna to become the sole suspect when students are mysteriously attacked because the wounds appear to be fang marks and their blood is drained. Even her roommate, Sophie, has doubts because all signs point to Jenna. However, in the end she is cleared when the truth comes out.

Anna Gilroy

Anna Gilroy is a black witch and a member of the coven that also includes Elodie and Chaston.

Chaston Burnett

Chaston Burnett is a black witch and a member of Elodie's coven. Like Anna, she is attacked but not killed and has to leave school.

Anastasia Casnoff

Anastasia Casnoff is the headmistress of Hecate Hall and a powerful witch.



Alice

Alice is Sophie's great-grandmother and the first witch in the family. Although she has been dead for many years, she comes back to life and is revealed to be an evil demon.

Grace Mercer

Grace Mercer is Sophie's mother and a human.

Nausicaa and Siobhan

Nausicaa and Siobhan are faeries and fellow students at Hecate Hall.

Mrs. Vanderlyden

Mrs. Vanderlyden, whom students call the Vandy, is a disgraced witch who has been stripped of her powers. She now teaches at Hex Hall.

Students

Other students at Hecate who play minor roles include Justin (a werewolf), Taylor (a shifter who becomes a mountain lion), and Beth (a werewolf).



Symbols and Symbolism

Stained Glass Window

Hecate Hall contains a large stained glass window that depicts how the Prodigium were originally created by angels.

Death Images

On Sophie's first night at Hecate, Mrs. Casnoff shows the new students a number of disturbing images of witches and other Prodigium being put to death by various forces that are against them. This is meant to imprint the dangers they face on the minds of the young people and prompt them to be careful when dealing with humans.

The Eye

L'Occhio di Dio, or The Eye, is a group that seeks to wipe out all Prodigium. The group is symbolized by an eye with a golden iris, seen in paintings, tattoos, etc.

Puncture Marks

Holly, Chaston and Anna all have two small puncture marks on their bodies after they are attacked. Such wounds are typically the mark of a vampire bite and are the primary basis for accusing Jenna of the attacks.

Angel Statue

The Angel Statue that stands in the Hecate graveyard is a symbol of the angels from whom the Prodigium were created and the force that watches over the graves to prevent demons from escaping.

Dirt from Alice's Grave

Alice gives Sophie some dirt from her grave to use if she ever needs additional power.

Bloodstone

Jenna carries a bloodstone around her neck to ward off the typical vampire tendencies such as not being able to stand sunlight.



Pendant

Alice gives both Sophie and Elodie a pendant that turns out to be a black magic bloodstone.

Demonglass

Demonglass is the only thing that can kill a demon.

Sophie's Dress

At first, Sophie fails miserably at conjuring a dress for the school ball, but later learns that Elodie has put a spell on her mannequin. When she is able to conjure a beautiful dress, she attracts Archer's attention.



Settings

Green Mountain High School

Hex Hall's Prologue is set at Green Mountain High School in an unnamed Vermont town. This single scene takes place at the school prom and establishes Sophie's character as a novice witch.

Hecate Hall

With the exception of the Prologue, the entirety of the book takes place at Hecate Hall, nicknamed Hex Hall. It is a sort of reform school for Prodigium -- young witches, warlocks, fae, and shapeshifters who have caused problems by using their powers among humans. The school is located on a remote island off the coast of Georgia and appears shabby and dull until the main character, Sophie, realizes that the school's appearance changes with the perception of the Prodigium who is looking at it.

Various scenes throughout the novel take place in Sophie's room, common rooms such as the lounge and cafeteria, classrooms, the office of the headmistress, the grounds, and the graveyard.



Themes and Motifs

The Occult

The overarching theme of Hex Hall is the occult and the concept that witches, shapeshifters and other beings exist among humans.

The book's primary character, Sophie Mercer, is established as a witch in the book's first chapter. When Sophie arrives at Hecate Hall, she is surprised to see some of her fellow students, which include shifters like werewolves, faeries and fellow witches and warlocks, but only because she has been raised by a human mother and has never come into contact with her own kind before. Throughout the book, the existence of magic and its use for both good and evil is accepted as a natural concept, so the reader must suspend belief in order to understand and appreciate the plot.

One of the underlying themes is the fact that magic exists for both good and evil, and, sometimes, somewhere in between. Although Sophie is revealed to be a dark witch (and later a demon), she is portrayed as a kind, gentle person who uses her powers for good. Elodie, Anna and Chaston, on the other hand, are dark witches who are not afraid of causing harm and even death in order to increase their own powers. The ultimate epitome of evil in the book, the demon Alice, literally rises from the dead and kills a number of people before she herself is destroyed, and the handsome, charming Archer is revealed to be a member of a group determined to wipe out all Prodigium.

Trust and Betrayal

Trust – and the betrayal of trust – are pervasive themes throughout Hex Hall. The issue is raised on a small scale in the book's Prologue when Felicia trusts Sophie to get her a prom date and Sophie inadvertently makes a mess of it, and it grows as a theme as the plot progresses.

One of the primary examples of this theme is the relationship between Sophie and Jenna. They become friends immediately and even though Sophie initially is taken aback by the fact that Jenna is a vampire, she instinctively knows that she is a good person and trusts her. Small doubts begin to arise as evidence increasingly points to Jenna as the one who is attacking students, and Sophie makes a mental note of little things such as seeing Jenna staring at a bloody cut on her arm, but she continues to trust her friend and defend her to others. In the end, her trust is borne out as Jenna is proven to have nothing to do with the attacks.

Sophie's trust in others is misplaced, however. Her crush on Archer blinds her to the fact that he is a member of The Eye and she is crushed when she learns the truth. The ultimate betrayal comes from Alice, Sophie's great-grandmother, who purports to want to help Sophie learn to use her powers but eventually is revealed to be the demon force behind the attacks on Hecate students.



Throughout the novel, Sophie's trust in her father is also tested. Even though they have had a remote relationship, she is devastated to learn about his role in sending her and other students to Hecate, one of several revelations that cause her to feel betrayed by him and somewhat by her mother.

Teenage Angst

Teenage Angst is one of the themes that the author weaves throughout Hex Hall and one of the ways she brings humor into the story.

Sophie and her fellow students are special, to say the least, but despite the fact that they are witches, werewolves and faeries, they experience many of the same problems other teenagers face. When they are disruptive in school, they are given detention, which in this case involves cataloging an ever-shifting array of magic items that include severed hands and fragments of ceremonial robes. Other punishments include writing lengthy papers, but on topics involving various aspects of the occult, and P.E. class focuses on teaching the students to defend themselves against various forms of attack.

Growing sexual feelings are also the same as among "normal" teens as the characters develop crushes and consider becoming sexually active. The issue of gay teens is also addressed through the character of Jenna.

Loneliness, the need to fit in, rivalries, jealousy, conflicts with parents, difficulties with teachers – essentially any and all issues faced by teens in the real world also become issues for the students at Hecate Hall, but it is exacerbated by the problems unique to witches and other Prodigium

Styles

Point of View

Hex Hall is written in the first person with the lead character, Sophie Mercer, as the narrator. This technique is appropriate for the novel as it enables the reader to peek into the mind of Sophie and experience everything she experiences, including her private thoughts and feelings.

A first person narrator is omniscient in terms of his/her own thoughts and experiences, but can only offer outside observations regarding the other characters and the situations that occur. Therefore the reader has insights into how Sophie feels about her mother's failure to be forthcoming about her history, for example, but we cannot tell what her mother thinks or glean insight into her reasoning.

Having Sophie narrate the book also enables the reader to feel a great deal of empathy for the character because we are privy to thoughts that the other characters do not know about. It also provides opportunities to showcase Sophie's sense of humor as many of her amusing moments occur only in her own mind as she observes the world around her.

Language and Meaning

Hex Hall takes place in the present day so it is written in modern-day English. Much of the book is exposition, providing opportunities to gain information from Sophie's observations and thoughts, but there is an ample amount of dialogue to round out the personalities of the other characters.

While the author does not use phonetic spellings to emphasize various dialects, it is clear that Mrs. Casnoff and some of the other characters speak in a thick Southern accent typical of the region of Georgia where the book takes place. The dialogue is well written in terms of appropriateness; for example, teachers speak with more formality while the teenagers use slang and vocal features typical of that age group.

The story is straightforward with no flashbacks or other literary techniques.

Structure

The novel contains thirty-two chapters plus a Prologue. The chapters are numbered but unnamed and of varying length, but most are under a dozen pages.

The Prologue is the only chapter that does not take place at Hecate Hall. It sets the stage for the rest of the book as it establishes Sophie's age, general personality, status as a witch and propensity to inadvertently cause trouble with her magic.

The book moves at a steady pace. Some chapters follow the previous one immediately in time while others skip ahead a bit, but never more than a couple of weeks.



Quotes

Even over all the noise, Felicia's words echoed in the cavernous gym. "She's . . . she's a witch!" I sighed. "Not again."

-- Narrator and Felicia (Prologue paragraph 6)

Importance: This establishes the basic premise of Sophie's status as a witch as well as the fact that she has made similar mistakes in the past.

The purpose of Hecate Hall is to protect and instruct shapeshifters, witch, and fae children who have risked exposure of their abilities, and therefore imperiled Prodigium society as a whole.

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 2)

Importance: This clearly describes the purpose of Hecate and the types of beings who attend it.

This is why all of you are here. This is what you all risked when you recklessly used your powers in the presence of humans. And for what?" She looked around the room. "To gain acceptance? To show off?" Her eyes fell on me for a second before she continued. "We've been persecuted unto death by humans who will happily use our powers if it suits them. And what you just saw" -- she swept her hand around, and I could almost see those hanged witches again, their eyes cloudy, their lips blue -- "is just what normal humans have done. This is nothing compared to what is done by those who've made it their life's work to eliminate our kind."

-- Mrs. Casnoff (Chapter 7 paragraph 3)

Importance: This sums up the dangers the students at Hecate face and the ways in which their own actions can affect others.

Archer shrugged again. "Maybe not. But you've been living with one foot in each world, and you can't do that anymore. You're at Hecate now."

-- Archer (Chapter 8 paragraph 3)

Importance: This reinforces the fact that Sophie is half human and half witch, a fact that has shaped her life more than she realizes at this point in the novel.

Now I took a deep breath. "So all three of you did spells that hurt people." "No," Anna replied. "We did powerful spells befitting our kind. Humans just . . . got in the way."

-- Sophie and Anna (Chapter 9 paragraph 7)

Importance: This establishes the fact that Anna, Elodie and Chaston are careless not only with their powers, but also with their desire to increase them.

Your dad is the head of the Council. As in, the guy who sent us all here."

-- Archer (Chapter 11 paragraph 11)



Importance: This is an example of the many revelations about Sophie's father that she receives throughout the book, and it explains why everyone at the school seems to be against her with little reason.

I sat there absentmindedly rubbing my arms, the smoky smell of Jenna's burned skin still stinging my nose. And I wondered.

-- Narrator/Sophie (Chapter 17 paragraph 4)

Importance: This speaks to the growing mistrust of Jenna even by her best friend.

Yeah," I said as we reached the main staircase. "But you're a warlock. Couldn't you take a demon?" "Not unless I had that," he said, pointing to the stained-glass angel above the stairs. "See that sword? Demonglass. Only thing that can kill demons.

-- Sophie and Archer (Chapter 18 paragraph 2)

Importance: This provides information that Sophie will use later in the novel to defeat Alice.

She walked up to me and took my shoulders, pulling my head down to her mouth. For a second, I thought she was going to kiss me on the cheek or something, but then she whispered, "Be careful. The Eye sees you, even here.

-- Alice (Chapter 22 paragraph 7)

Importance: This hints at the danger Sophie is in from two separate forces that she does not yet suspect.

I looked back at the house and knew Alice was right. A shadow had fallen over the school and seemed to be creeping closer and closer to me. Overhead, clouds snaked across the crescent moon, and the night became even darker. I dreaded the thought of walking into the dark hallways by myself and up to an empty room.

-- Narrator/Sophie (Chapter 27 paragraph 5)

Importance: Sophie is correct that danger is growing closer and that she is a target, but she does not realize that one piece of the danger is Alice, from whom she is walking away, rather than the dark hallways she dreads.

And then the haze of desire clouding my brain gave way to a numbing wave of shock as I watched a tattoo -- a black eye with a golden iris -- appear under my fingers.

-- Narrator/Sophie (Chapter 28 paragraph 3)

Importance: Here Archer is revealed to be a member of The Eye.

Because now I understood how Alice had been corporeal, how she had all that power even though she was supposed to be dead. That black magic ritual Alice had gotten caught in hadn't turned her into a witch: it had made her a demon. You too, my mind whispered. If that's what she is, that's what you are.



-- Narrator/Sophie (Chapter 30 paragraph 2)

Importance: Here Sophie puts everything together and learns the real truth about her family and herself.

On the way back to the school, I'd been pretty out of it, but I remember Mrs. Casnoff telling me that Alice's body had been buried in the cemetery, along with a few other demons. That's why the angel had held the blade of demonglass -- just in case any of them ever managed to get out.

-- Narrator/Sophie (Chapter 32 paragraph 2)

Importance: This explains the significance of the large angel statue in the cemetery.

And in the end, it was seeing Elodie that gave me the strength to turn to my mom and say, "I'm not going home. I'm going to London, and I'm going through the Removal.

-- Sophie (Chapter 32 paragraph 3)

Importance: This establishes Sophie's plan to get rid of her powers and leads the reader into the second book of the series.