

The Hangman's Daughter Study Guide

The Hangman's Daughter by Oliver Potzsch

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

The Hangman's Daughter Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Prologue and Chapters 1-3.....	5
Chapters 4-7.....	9
Chapters 8-11.....	13
Chapters 12-14.....	16
Chapters 15-16 and Epilogue.....	20
Characters.....	24
Symbols and Symbolism.....	30
Settings.....	32
Themes and Motifs.....	33
Styles.....	35
Quotes.....	36



Plot Summary

The Hangman's Daughter is a novel by Oliver Potzsch. This novel follows the story of Bavarian hangman Jakob Kuisl as he attempts to prove that midwife Martha Stechlin does not practice witchcraft and has not killed a motherless boy. Jakob is aided by the son of the local doctor, Simon Fronwieser, who has befriended Jakob as much for his collection of medical books as for his beautiful daughter, Magdalena. As Jakob, Simon, and Magdalena work to clear Martha of all charges, they are sidelined by several more murders as well as Jakob's duty to torture the innocent midwife. The Hangman's Daughter is a fascinating look at Bavarian history in regards to the fears of witchcraft and the social hierarchy that made an honest working man such as Jakob an outcast in his community.

A young, motherless boy is found beaten and stabbed in the river. After the boy dies, a tattoo is discovered on his back that is thought to be a symbol of witchcraft. His grieving father blames the midwife, Martha Stechlin, who has befriended a group of orphaned children in the village. Martha Stechlin is arrested after the hangman and Jakob Kuisl calm the angry mob that pursues her. Jakob Kuisl deeply respects the midwife for the help she provided in the births of his children and believes she is innocent of the charges. This places Jakob in an uncomfortable position because it will be his job to torture Martha to get a confession from her. If Jakob refuses, he will lose his job and his family will be forced to leave the village.

Jakob begins quietly attempting to find the true killer of the young boy in hopes of freeing Martha Stechlin. However, the village, frightened by the brutal murder and the aftermath of the recently concluded war, embraces the idea of Martha's guilt and cry for her execution. Jakob manages to use the laws and a few other tricks to put off Martha's torture and conviction, but time is quickly running out.

With the help of the local doctor's son, Simon Fronwieser, Jakob tries to discover the truth in the boy's death. However, this investigation is complicated when first one and then another young orphan are killed. The two children who appear to have most of the answers disappear after a man with a bone hand, who is dubbed the Devil by the villagers, tries to kill them. Simon and Jakob struggle to find those children while following the evidence to a new leper hospital being built near the village that has recently been vandalized.

During the investigation, Simon and Jakob begin to learn that the former owner of the land where the leper hospital is being built once was rumored to have had a large fortune that was not found after his death. Jakob begins to think this wealth is the reason why the hospital was vandalized. For this reason, Simon and Jakob visit the building site several times. On one of these visits, they notice an old dry well that Simon saw noted in some paperwork about the site. They climb down into the well and find the children. However, the Devil has followed them. Jakob and the Devil fight while Simon manages to get the children out of the tunnels beneath the well.



In the end, Simon and Jakob are able to discover the true identity of the men behind the destruction of the building site and the deaths of the children. They are greedy men who knew of the fortune and wanted to find it. Jakob, who found the money, convinces the men to help free the midwife in exchange for the money.



Prologue and Chapters 1-3

Summary

Prologue and Chapters 1-3

Prologue

Jakob Kuisl is just a teen, but already he is an apprentice to his father, the Schongau Hangman. Jakob wakes his father from an alcohol fueled sleep on the morning of Elisabeth Clement's execution. Jakob prepares the cart and the necessary equipment, excited to be allowed to witness his first beheading. Jakob recognizes his father's compassion for the young girl whose only crime is that she allowed herself to be seduced by a local man in the potion he offers her before the execution. When all is ready, Jakob's father asks him to hold the young girl still as he makes the cut. Jakob fails, however, letting her slip at the last moment, causing a simple beheading to become a gruesome spectacle. In the aftermath of the blood and gore, Jakob makes a promise to himself that he will never become a hangman as he passes out.

Chapter 1

Magdalena Kuisl is the twenty-one year old daughter of the Schongau Hangman, Jakob Kuisl. Magdalena and her family are outcasts in their small village because of her father's profession, but this does not stop her from dreaming of the local young men, one in particular. Magdalena's mother chastises her and sends her off to do her chores.

A woodcutter on the banks of the Lech River spots the body of a young boy in the rough current of the river. The woodcutter and several others struggle to get the boy out of the water. At first it appears the boy fell into the water and was injured by the debris in the swift current. However, they soon discover that the boy's throat has been cut. The boy, Peter Grimmer, dies as his father reaches him. Angry and filled with grief, the father, who has now lost all eight of his children as well as his wife, immediately blames Martha Stechlin for his boy's death. The grieving father insists the midwife, who has befriended the boy and other orphaned children in the area, killed his son. When a mark is found on the boy's back that appears to be a witch's sign it only inflames the man's claims.

Chapter 2

A group of men go to the midwife's house and attempt to drag her out into the street. The woman manages to escape to her garden where the hangman appears and manages to calm the crowd long enough to see the woman properly arrested.

Simon Fronweiser, the local doctor's son, takes the body of the young murder victim to the hangman's house. Simon has examined the body and believes there is something wrong with what he has found. When the hangman arrives, he also examines the body. The two men agree that the weapon used was not a typical kitchen knife, but a soldier's



sword. This is contrary to the claims that a midwife killed the boy, a midwife who would not have access to such a weapon.

Sometime that night, two unidentified men discuss the murder of the first child and agree that several other children must also die.

Chapter 3

Jakob Kuisl is called to see the court clerk, Johann Lechner, early the next morning. Lechner wants a confession of witchcraft from Martha Stechlin as soon as possible in order to calm the people of the village. Jakob is convinced of Martha Stechlin's innocence and does not want to torture her, but Lechner insists. Jakob knows he could lose his job if he refuses and his family will become outcasts, forced to make their living on the road. For this reason, Jakob agrees to Lechner's demands.

After his meeting with Jakob Kuisl, Lechner goes to a meeting of the village council. The council is arguing over the new leper hospital being built near Schongau on land donated to the church by Alderman Jakob Schreevogel's deceased father. Most of the aldermen do not want the hospital built because they are afraid it will affect local trade and commerce. Lechner tables this discussion and speaks to the aldermen about the matter of Martha Stechlin. All but the youngest members of the council agree to torture the woman in order to end the matter as quickly as possible. There is fear that the claims of witchcraft could lead to the deaths of many women in the area if this matter is not concluded quickly. Something like that had happened once before in the village of Schongau.

Analysis

The prologue takes place thirty-five years before the rest of the novel. In the prologue, the author introduces the hangman, Jakob Kuisl. Jakob is only a teen in this prologue who has been apprenticed to his father, also a hangman. Jakob is excited because he has only witnessed a few of the executions his father has conducted, so the chance to witness a beheading is exciting for him. However, when all goes wrong, partially because of Jakob's nervousness, he realizes that being a hangman is not glorious, that it is a dark, depressing job. Jakob vows never to become a hangman like his father and grandfather before him, but it soon becomes clear to the reader that Jakob changed his mind at some point.

The first chapter begins with Magdalena. Magdalena is Jakob's twenty-one year old daughter. When the reader meets Magdalena, she seems like a typical young lady. However, it soon becomes obvious that her father's profession has caused Magdalena and her family some unpleasantness. The hangman is a person who is deeply feared in this time period, not only because of the executions he conducts, but because he is also responsible for torturing criminals in order to encourage confessions. For this reason, Magdalena is considered unsuitable for marriage to anyone but members of hangmen's



families in other villages. Magdalena is unfazed by this as she daydreams about Simon Fronwieser, the local doctor's son.

The first chapter also introduces Simon Fronwieser, an educated young man who attended university. He had failed to complete his education when money ran out. Simon has befriended the hangman because Jakob Kuisl is a self-educated man who owns multiple medical books that Simon's father feels are more heresy than educational. Jakob is happy to share his collection with Simon as well as discuss what he knows.

The death of a young Schongau child causes an uproar in the village. Murder is not a common event now that the war is over. The child bears a strange mark on his back that causes many to jump to the conclusion that a witch killed the boy. The father points his finger at a local midwife because she has befriended many of the local orphan children, a group this child was a part of because of the death of his mother. The midwife, Martha Stechlin, is arrested for the crime despite the fact she was delivering a baby the night the murder took place.

Over fifty years previous to this, a witch hunt took place in Schongau that took the lives of more than sixty women. No one wants a repeat of this witch hunt. Johann Lechner, the court clerk, wants Martha Stechlin to confess and be put to death before things get out of hand. Lechner orders Jakob Kuisl to make Martha confess with torture even though Jakob Kuisl thinks the midwife is innocent. This inspires Jakob Kuisl to find the real killer.

Discussion Question 1

Who is Jakob Kuisl? Why did he become a hangman? What does this profession require him to do? How does this profession make him and his family an outcast?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Simon Fronwieser befriend Jakob Kuisl? What impact does this friendship have on Simon's reputation? How does Simon feel about this impact on his reputation?

Discussion Question 3

Who is Peter Grimmer? What happened to him? For what reason? Why is Martha Stechlin arrested for this crime?

Vocabulary

Register, secretary, entourage, elector, expenses, squander, representative, sojourning, alderman, precisely, rumor, council, gravely, continued, dreadful, incident, solved, spurs,



contrast, witchcraft, innkeeper, intention, coriander, weightier, disaster, extinguish, raftsmen, transported, hangman, beheading.



Chapters 4-7

Summary

Chapters 4-7

Chapter 4

Jakob Kuisl goes to visit Martha Stechlin, informing her that the council has agreed to torture her for a confession. Jakob assures Martha that he believes she is innocent and is looking for the real murderer, but he is afraid he will not be able to prove her innocence in time to protect her from torture. Martha tells Jakob about the last time the orphan children came to see her. Afterward, Jakob goes to Martha's house to look for evidence, but the house has been ransacked and little remains to help the investigation.

Simon Fronwieser has an argument with his father because his father is unhappy with Simon's relationship with the hangman. Afterward, Simon is walking in the streets when he runs into a group of children taunting a young orphan girl named Sophie. Sophie is known to have been part of the group of kids who hung out at Martha Stechlin's house and for this reason the children are accusing her of witchcraft as well. Simon intervenes and tries to speak to Sophie, but she runs away.

Simon visits with the hangman. They discuss a substance found in the pocket of Peter Grimmer, a substance the hangman believes is sulfur. This, coupled with the mark on the boy's back and the missing mandrake root Martha Stechlin told Jakob Kuisl about, makes it seem more and more likely that something to do with witchcraft was going on. However, Simon and Jakob both refuse to believe it.

At the same time Simon and Jakob Kuisl are looking for the real murderer, the two unidentified men meet and discuss the situation.

Another boy, Anton Dratz, has been found dead. Simon examines the body, finding not only that the boy also died of a cut throat, but that he also has a witch's mark on his back, and talks with the boy's adoptive parents. It soon becomes clear that the parents blame Martha Stechlin despite the fact that she is in jail, a sentiment that quickly spreads throughout the village. Sophie seeks out Simon afterward and tells him of a man she saw watching Anton, a man with a bone hand, but Simon does not believe her.

Chapter 5

Magdalena goes to visit a midwife in another village. The woman is frightened by what has happened to Martha Stechlin and is preparing to leave the area for a while. Before she goes, however, the woman tells Magdalena about Walpurgis Night, a night in which witches supposedly celebrate their love of Satan. Walpurgis Night is only a few days away.



Simon, at Jakob Kuisl's request, has gone to the local saloon to try and get information about a brawl that supposedly took place there between rival drivers. The owner of the hotel refuses to give Simon any information, but one of his waitresses tells Simon that she saw a group of soldiers in the hotel go up to a room to meet with someone. She didn't know the name of the person that they were meeting. The waitress also describes a man with a bone hand, similar to the description of the killer Sophie gave him.

Jakob Kuisl goes to Martha's cell to prepare her for the first round of torture. Jakob tries to reassure Martha. The witnesses arrive. They include Lechner and three aldermen. To begin the torture, Martha is stripped naked and searched for evidence of a witch's mark. One of the witnesses indicates a birthmark on Martha's soldier that looks vaguely like the mark on the two dead boys. Just as the torture begins, an alarm sounds in the village.

Chapter 6

Simon and Magdalena are sitting together, talking, when they hear the alarm sound. Jakob Kuisl leaves the jail when the alarm goes off to discover that the Zimmerstadel, the warehouse, is on fire. Jakob Kuisl rushes to the Zimmerstadel to see if he can help. Instead, Jakob comes across a brawl between drivers from Schongau and drivers from Altenstadt. Jakob breaks up the fight, learning that the Schongau drivers believe the Altenstadt drivers started the fire. Lechner arrives a moment later and places one of the Altenstadt drivers, one Schongau driver, and the Zimmerstadel watchmen under arrest until the cause of the fire can be determined.

Clara, an orphan who is the ward of the Schreevogls, has been sick for several days. When the fire breaks out everyone leaves Clara alone. Clara hears a noise downstairs and realizes someone who does not belong in the house has come inside. Clara hides under her bed. When the footsteps pass her room, she makes a run for the downstairs door, but remembers she left her doll behind. Clara returns only to be spotted by a man with a bone hand. Clara has no choice but to jump out the window into a wagon below. The man follows.

Jakob Kuisl runs into his daughter and Simon. Jakob explains what has happened at the Zimmerstadel and the arrests. Later, Jakob goes to the jail and visits with Martha. Simon goes to the Schreevogls' home to check on Clara only to learn of Clara's disappearance. When Simon hears the description of the man who jumped from the window after Clara, he does not miss that it is strangely similar to other descriptions of the man with the bone hand.

The village becomes restless upon hearing of Clara's apparent abduction. A group of men goes to the jail in an effort to burn Martha Stechlin, but are stopped first by the hangman and later by Lechner. Nicknamed the devil by some, the man with the bone hand continues to search for Clara.

Chapter 7



Jakob Kuisl has spent the night drinking because he knows in the morning he will have to torture Martha Stechlin. During a conversation with his wife, Jakob Kuisl is inspired, but he does not tell anyone what he plans to do. Magdalena guesses and runs after her father. Across town, Simon has a hangover after spending much of the night drinking with Jakob Schreevogl. Simon's father comes into his rooms and once again argues with him. This time it is about his relationship with both Jakob Kuisl and Magdalena.

Jakob Kuisl becomes aware of someone following him and climbs a tree to surprise his would-be attacker only to discover it is his own daughter behind him. Jakob and Magdalena argue for a time, but then Magdalena convinces her father that she can find the herb he is looking for. At the same time, Simon speaks to the man who has taken Sophie into his home as a ward. The man is clearly not happy with his ward and speaks of her unkindly. However, he does help Simon when he shows him a sign he once caught the girl drawing. Simon is unsure what it might mean, but he believes it to be significant. Simon then goes to speak to an innkeeper in Altenstadt whose ward is also rumored to have been among those who befriended the midwife. This man tells Simon that his ward disappeared the day before, but the innkeeper is not concerned because the boy has a hideout he often visits.

Analysis

One boy dies, another disappears, and a young girl is attacked in her own home. All of this happens while Martha Stechlin is in jail, but the town remains convinced that she is a witch controlling the situation from her cell. In fact, many believe that Martha has called the devil to finish her work. This idea seems true when a man with a bone hand begins appearing in town around the missing or dead children. Martha's situation is becoming very dire as the town council continues to push for her execution as the murders add up and people become frightened. No one wants a repeat of the witch hunt that took place a generation ago, but no one is willing to listen to the truth, either.

Simon has devoted himself to helping Jakob Kuisl find the real murderer because he is an educated man who is interested in the truth, not witch hunts. However, Simon also has an interest in Jakob's daughter, Magdalena, that is causing him trouble with his own father as well as Jakob. Everyone knows that Magdalena is bad news for a man like Simon because she is an outcast, the daughter of a hangman who has no value to a good man with a good reputation. Simon shows his true colors, however, when he disregards this truth. For this reason, Simon not only finds himself having trouble with his own father, he is beginning to feel the wrath of the town as his reputation begins to become tarnished.

Jakob Kuisl is the hangman and therefore has a reputation as being ruthless, fearless, and unable to feel compassion. As the novel continues, however, the reader can see that Jakob is the complete opposite. Jakob remains a kind man like he was as a teen in the prologue. Jakob simply has chosen to do the only job available to him in order to provide well for his family. For this reason, Jakob does his job, but he drinks in excess when he has to torture and kill people that he feels are innocent. One such person is



Martha Stechlin. This, more than anything else, explains to the reader why Jakob is going out of his way to learn the true identity of the killer.

There were five orphaned children who went to see Martha Stechlin on a regular basis. Being orphans, these children were tormented by the others. Their treatment caused them to bond with one another. Now, two of these children are dead and three are missing. The reader has no clue as to what is happening to these children except for clandestine conversations between two men. One of the men is old and sick. The other one is young and ruthless. There is also the man with a bone hand, who has now been dubbed the devil. The reader can only hope that Jakob will unmask this devil before any more children are killed.

Discussion Question 1

Why does the city council want Martha Stechlin tortured and executed? What crime has she committed?

Discussion Question 2

Is Lechner a bad man? Why does he want Martha to confess? Will this end the murders and the fear that has taken over Schongau?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Jakob Kuisl trying to find the real killer? Why does Jakob not wish to torture Martha? Why does he not simply refuse to torture Martha?

Vocabulary

Interested, gloomy, watery, devil, hideout, mischief, remained, tradesmen, respected, linen, courtyard, weaver, recognize, reminded, believe, incredulously, noticed, interrupted, sabbath, upstream, narrow, amounted, restored, cathedral, hastened, startled, account, practicing, affectionate, attentive, biological.



Chapters 8-11

Summary

Chapters 8-11

Chapter 8

Lechner convenes the council so that they can discuss the imprisoned drivers. They discuss the fire and decide that their priority is to torture Martha Stechlin. However, Lechner says that if she does not confess to the fire as well as the murders, he will question the drivers.

Clara has a nightmare, but she wakes safe in the hideout she shares with her friends. Sophie is there, too. Sophie is worried about Clara because she still has the fever that had kept her in bed. Now, she also has a broken ankle and a bruised shoulder. To help Clara rest peacefully, Sophie gives her a drink of a potion that she has made.

Jakob Kuisl goes to the jail and gives Martha Stechlin a potion to drink. Later that afternoon when the witnesses arrive for the torture session, Martha is clearly not herself. The men insist the torture continue anyway. As Jakob places thumb screws on Martha's hand, she barely reacts. Jakob Schreevogel, one of the witnesses, objects, but several of the others seem to be enjoying the show despite Martha's clear incapacitation. Finally, Martha has some kind of seizure and blacks out. Simon is called and declares Martha unfit for further torture.

Chapter 9

While visiting with Jakob Kuisl and reviewing one of his books on herbs, Simon sees the symbol that Sophie was spotted drawing. It is the alchemist symbol for sulfur. Simon is sure this is significant, but he cannot figure out why. Jakob Kuisl decides they need to go check out the building site where the leper hospital is being built. The building site was recently vandalized. They see that several men took a tree trunk to the buildings and destroyed what progress had been made. They also talk to the workmen and learn that the land once belonged to the Schreevogls, but the old man donated it to the church upon his death. This is rumored to have upset his son because Jakob Schreevogel had wanted to build a second kiln there. As they talk, Jakob Kuisl spots a man watching them. When Simon and Jakob give chase, the man escapes.

Simon goes to the church to speak to the priest about the building site. The priest tells Simon that the land was once rumored to have been a place of satanic worship. When asked who might be behind the vandalism at the building site, the priest suggests it could be anyone from a witch to merchants who believe the leper hospital will ruin local commerce. Simon later goes to see Jakob Schreevogel and learns that he holds no ill will against the church or the leper hospital. As they talk, a boy shows up and tells them that Clara is alive and well, a message he was paid to deliver by Sophie.



Lechner interviews the Altenstadt driver who has been imprisoned since the Zimmerstadel fire. The driver admits that he and his friends were near the Zimmerstadel that day, but that they were not there to start a fire. The driver says they were there to get revenge for a brawl that left one of them badly injured weeks before.

Chapter 10

Simon goes in search of Sophie after speaking with Jakob Schreevogel. He finds her, but she refuses to allow him to look at her. Sophie expresses fear, but she refuses to tell Simon anything more. The man dubbed the devil suddenly appears and tries to kill Simon. Simon and Sophie both run. Sophie disappears in the woods while Simon runs until he reaches the banks of the river and civilization. Magdalena finds Simon there. Together they go off into the woods to pick herbs.

That night, the young, unidentified man searches the building site for some unknown item. Unbeknownst to him, the man is watched by the devil.

Chapter 11

Simon wakes in an abandoned barn where he and Magdalena spent the night after accidentally getting locked out of the city walls. Simon realizes someone else is in the barn and goes to find him, only to be beaten by Jakob Kuisl for spending the night with his daughter. Magdalena stands up for Simon, but Jakob is not persuaded. Jakob sends Magdalena home before inviting Simon to go to Altenstadt with him to view the body of another orphan.

On the walk to Altenstadt, Simon questions Jakob about his past. Jakob admits to leaving Schongau for a time and becoming a soldier. When they arrive in Altenstadt, the young orphan's adoptive father is angry and refuses to allow the hangman near his child. Simon talks him into it. The two men examine the child closely and discover that he has clay under his fingernails. The clay under the child's nails and the knowledge that he had a secret hideout suggest to Jakob where the missing girls might be hiding.

Lechner interviews the Altenstadt driver again. The man confesses to seeing soldiers near the Zimmerstadel shortly before the fire. A short time later, Lechner learns that Martha Stechlin has returned to consciousness. Jakob Kuisl reluctantly returns and begins to torture her again, but she does not confess. At the same time, Sophie hears voices near her hiding place and worries that she and Clara will eventually be discovered by the devil. At Jakob Kuisl's home, Simon waits for the hangman. Magdalena keeps him company despite the danger of their budding romance.

Analysis

Simon discovers that both Clara and Sophie are still alive, but the devil is hot on their trail. The girls are hiding in an unknown hideout. Clara is ill as well as badly injured, making it even more important that the children receive some help. However, Sophie



does not know who to trust. For this reason, the children continue to hide even as Jakob Kuisl and Simon try to find them.

Another child dies. Jakob and Simon go to see the child's body and learn some things of interest. Forensic science is still a very long time off in this novel, but Jakob comes as close as any modern day cop to a top forensic investigator as he searches the body for clues to where the child has recently been and to who might be his killer. Jakob does find clay under the child's nails, a clue that could lead to the whereabouts of the hiding place and the location where the two girls are currently hiding. It has become clear that it is desperately important to find these girls because they might have the answers everyone is searching for.

Even as the town continues to blame Martha Stechlin for the murders and the fire, Lechner interrogates the drivers in hopes of learning the truth about the fire. Lechner appears to have found out who started the fire, but he also does not appear to be too eager to do anything with the information. Lechner continues to push for a confession from Martha Stechlin. The reader is not sure what Lechner's motivation is at this point in the novel, but it seems clear that he wants a confession from Martha before the Landgrave arrives later in the week.

Discussion Question 1

What is the relationship between Simon and Magdalena? Why is this relationship important? Why will it most likely not survive?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Jakob Kuisl continue to pursue the real killer? What does he hope will happen when he finds the real killer? Do you think that he will get his wish?

Discussion Question 3

Who is the devil? Why is he called the devil? Why is he trying to find Sophie and Clara?

Vocabulary

Completely, continue, hiding, strange, obviously, scratching, allowed, scream, thumb screws, approaching, interrupted, litany, hostility, otherwise, utter, slaughtered, survived, massacre, practically, leveled, thrashing, glowed, evil, physicians, imagine, occasionally, remains, activity, regular, anxiously, unsteadily.



Chapters 12-14

Summary

Chapter 12

A group of soldiers sit at the building site and argue. The soldiers do not want to remain in Schongau any longer. However, the devil tells them that their employer is looking for a treasure at the site. The devil suggests they look for it and keep it themselves if they find it. They are soon joined by their employer who also asks for their help in finding his treasure.

Martha Stechlin wakes in her cell and begins to think about the children, trying to figure out who might want to hurt them. As she thinks, she draws the symbol in the dirt. The Schongau driver sees this and throws stones at her, hitting her in the head with one.

Simon and Jakob Kuisl break into the Schongau cemetery in order to dig up the bodies of the first two murdered orphans. They want to see if they have clay under their nails as well, and are pleased to see they do. As they leave, they run into Magdalena who followed them there.

Sophie is beginning to feel the effects of a lack of fresh air. Sophie worries that she and Clara may not survive in their hideout much longer.

Jakob, Magdalena, and Simon go to a pit where they believe the children have their hideout to search for it. Simon is covered in mud as he searches, but they have no luck. Eventually they realize that they are looking in the wrong place. Jakob takes them to the building site. Jakob believes the girls are hiding there, but when they arrive and find the soldiers there, he realizes they must get rid of them. Jakob sends Magdalena back to Schongau to get Lechner and the deputies. In the meantime, Jakob leaves Simon alone while he goes to take a look around. Simon accidentally runs into one of the soldiers. They begin to fight. Simon has an opportunity to kill the soldier, but does not take it. The soldier calls out to his friends just before Jakob arrives and kills him. Jakob and Simon hide when the soldiers find their friend and search for his killer. Before they leave, the devil calls out to Jakob, warning him that he will kill him soon. Lechner and his bailiffs arrive a short time later. Lechner agrees to have the site guarded day and night.

Chapter 13

Magdalena is in town buying beer and food for her father and Simon when she hears a group of kids reciting a song about her. Magdalena confronts them. With an offer of candy, Magdalena convinces the children to talk to her about the orphan children. When Magdalena learns how the children were outcasts, she is inspired. Magdalena goes to Martha's house where she finds an object that convinces her that the witch's sign on the children is not a witch's sign, but something entirely different. Magdalena is so happy on



the walk home that she does not realize she is being followed until the devil grabs her and knocks her unconscious.

Jakob Kuisl and Simon are called the jail to help heal Martha since the doctor's ministrations have done nothing to help. Afterward, Jakob returns home alone where he finds the devil waiting for him. The devil tells Jakob that he has Magdalena and that he will only return her if Jakob will find the missing treasure and give it to the devil and his soldiers. Jakob believes he recognizes the devil, but cannot decide from where.

At another council meeting, Lechner catches the group up on the recent events. Some council members want to do other testing to prove Martha Stechlin is a witch, but they are talked out of it by one of the older members, Matthias Augustin. However, no one is pleased with the fact that the Landgrave is due the following day and they still have no confession. The Landgrave could stay for weeks and the cost of his visit will fall on the council members.

The devil gives orders that Magdalena is not to be touched, but the other soldiers seem reluctant to follow the devil's orders any longer. At the same time, the unidentified old man and young man are watching the building site, trying to figure out how they will find their treasure with night and day guards posted to the site.

Chapter 14

Simon rushes to the Kuisl home when he learns that something has happened to Magdalena. When he arrives, Jakob tells Simon that the devil has taken Magdalena. Jakob tells Simon they must find Magdalena before the devil can kill her. Simon goes to Jakob Schreevogel in an attempt to learn more about the devil. Jakob Schreevogel tells Simon all he knows about the property where the leper hospital is to be built, but it is not much. Jakob Schreevogel that there are property records in the Ballenhaus next to the court clerk's office. Simon knows he needs to see those records.

Simon tricks two guards into leaving their post outside the Ballenhaus and then enters the building unseen. Simon finds the court clerk's office empty and quickly locates the records room. Simon is able to gain access to the records room when he notices a hollow tile on the wall. Simon finds the deed he needs, but the most important papers are missing. However, Simon does note a reference to a dried up well on the property.

Simon finds Jakob Kuisl at the building site. When Simon tells Jakob what he has learned, Jakob announces he has already come to the same conclusion: that the girls are hiding in the dry well. As Sophie continues to fear she will die in her hiding place, Jakob knocks out and ties up the guards at the site before he and Simon climb down into the well. At the bottom of the well, Jakob finds what he calls a dwarf hole, an entrance to a set of tunnels.

Simon follows Jakob into the tunnels. They run into a place where the tunnel divides into several tunnels. Jakob decides Simon should go one way while Jakob goes another and they will meet up again at a count of five hundred. Simon, however, loses his lamp and falls into a low chamber. Luckily, Simon finds Sophie and Clara in the low chamber.



Simon decides they should crawl back up to the tunnel where he left Jakob when someone suddenly comes into the chamber.

Jakob goes into a higher chamber where, after exploring for a few minutes, he finds the treasure hidden behind a marked wall. Jakob returns to the previous chamber and runs into the devil. Jakob suddenly remembers where he met the devil previously. It was during the war. Jakob witnessed the devil kill an infant and attempt to rape a young woman. Jakob scared him off, causing him to jump out a window and break his leg, causing his limp. Jakob and the devil fight. Jakob quickly realizes that he has met his match in the devil. For this reason, Jakob takes out both his lamp and the devil's and attacks.

Analysis

Jakob Kuisl, Magdalena, and Simon are focused on finding the hideout where the girls might be hidden. Sophie has given Clara something that has caused her to sleep continuously for several days, but wherever the girls are, they are not getting fresh air. Sophie is beginning to suffer from this lack of air, which implies that sick, injured Clara is also suffering. The reader is beginning to wonder if the girls will survive their ordeal.

There seems to be a treasure at the building site, a fact that explains why the site was vandalized by the soldiers. The reader can now guess that someone from Schongau hired the soldiers to vandalize the building site to give the unknown person time to find the treasure. The soldiers then began to kill the children, most likely because they saw something they should not have. However, the treasure has not been easy to locate and now the soldiers know about it. For this reason, they decide to take the treasure for themselves.

Magdalena is kidnapped by the devil in an attempt to force Jakob Kuisl to find the treasure. Jakob had already been intent on finding the true killer of the children. Now, he is sure that the killer is the devil. Jakob's own daughter is in danger; so, he does not change his plan. He continues to search for the children because he believes they have all the answers he needs to save both Magdalena and Martha.

Simon and Jakob find tunnels dug into an old well. This gives Jakob hope that he has finally found the place where the orphans had their hideout. Unfortunately, Jakob and Simon are followed into the tunnels. Even though they find the orphans, Jakob and Simon find themselves in a dangerous situation that could lead to the deaths of everyone involved.

Discussion Question 1

Where is there a treasure hidden? Who is looking for it? Why?



Discussion Question 2

Why does Sophie refuse to come out of her hiding place? What could happen if she does? Why does Jakob Kuisl need to find Sophie and Clara?

Discussion Question 3

Who kidnaps Magdalena? For what reason? What does the kidnapper offer in exchange for Magdalena? Can the kidnapper be trusted?

Vocabulary

Fortunately, opposite, hairbreadth, extinguished, continued, possibilities, adversary, movements, passages, directions, physician, concerned, leech, mentally, horizontal, crawled, considered, holy, rites, barbarians, human, origin, narrow, purpose, widened, ominous, cursed, convince, whimpering, entrance, cavern, chamber, equally.



Chapters 15-16 and Epilogue

Summary

Chapters 15-16 and Epilogue

Chapter 15

Magdalena has been left with two soldiers who have been drinking for hours. The two soldiers finally get tired of waiting for the devil to return. They decide they no longer care what the devil said and attack her. Magdalena, however, has managed to free her hands and run when the soldiers come for her.

Jakob Kuisl slips into the chamber where Simon waits with the orphans. Jakob tells Simon of his fight with the devil and that he left him in the upper chamber in an unknown condition. They decide they must get the children out quickly. They find a tunnel that has partially collapsed and begin digging it out. As they work, Sophie tells them how she and her friends were in their hideout when they came out and overheard a Schongau man telling the soldiers to vandalize the building site. The children made a noise and were discovered. Peter was killed by the devil when he tripped and the soldiers captured him. However, Sophie claims that neither she nor her friends recognized the local man.

The devil recovers and calls down to Jakob Kuisl that he is going to burn them out. They can smell smoke almost immediately. Jakob sends Simon and the children out the newly cleared tunnel while he goes back to find the devil. As Simon climbs into the tunnel, he notices the mark on Clara's shoulder and realizes what it really is.

Magdalena escapes the soldiers and runs, but they follow close behind her. Magdalena makes her way through the woods to the river, but there is a large drop. Magdalena manages to get down to the river's edge, but the current is so swift and so full of debris that she would break her neck if she tried to cross it. However, with the soldiers so close behind her, Magdalena makes the decision to walk across a log to a boat that is caught between two logs. One of the soldiers follows and dies immediately when he falls into the water and is crushed between the logs. Magdalena, however, makes it safely to the boat.

Simon leads Sophie, and carries Clara, through the tunnel into another chamber. However, the only way out of the chamber is too high above them. Simon and Sophie settle down to wait for help. As they wait, they talk about the night all this began. Sophie reveals that she and the other orphans conducted their own ceremony in order to protect themselves from the teasing from the other children. This is the origin not only of the marks on each of their shoulders, but also the sulfur in Peter's pocket and the missing mandrake. Sophie also reveals she fed Clara a mandrake potion, the origin of her long sleep.



Simon, Sophie, and Clara are soon rescued by Jakob Schreevogl who was alerted to trouble at the building site when the two guards were found tied up. Jakob Kuisl also makes an appearance, climbing out of the well on his own power after having killed the devil. Magdalena is also safe, arriving in Schongau by boat and reuniting with her father on the road.

Chapter 16

Lechner is pleased to learn that Clara has been found alive, but warns Jakob Schreevogl if he fights to free Martha Stechlin, his own daughter could be accused of witchcraft because of the secret ritual she and her friends conducted.

The Landgrave arrives just in time for the May Day celebration and announces his desire to remain for several weeks to hunt as well as dealing with the recent crimes. This is bad news for the council since they are responsible for footing the bill for the Landgrave's stay, as well as his entourage. Not only this, but they have not gotten a confession from Martha Stechlin. Therefore, it is possible the Landgrave might try to find other witches in the community as well.

The May Day celebrations begin. Simon and Magdalena dance despite the disapproval they know they will get from their neighbors. During the dance, Simon's father begins to argue with him about the embarrassment Simon is causing them both. Simon loses his temper and says things to his father he should not, causing not only his father to storm off in anger, but Magdalena to chastise him.

Simon finds himself alone at the celebration when something suddenly occurs to him. Simon speaks to the priest and then rushes off to the home of Matthias Augustin. Simon confronts Matthias about the murders of the children and the treasure. Matthias admits that he knew Ferdinand Schreevogl hid a large amount of money on the land somewhere and that he wanted it to replenish his family's depleted fortune. However, his son took control and went too far in ordering the deaths of the children. As they talk, Matthias's son Georg comes in and attacks Simon. Simon wakes tied to a chair. Georg is standing over him while Matthias writhes on the floor from an unnamed illness that is quickly taking his life. Georg expresses anger at Simon's interference as he describes how he plans to kill Simon. Jakob Kuisl comes into the room and knocks Georg out.

Simon tells Jakob how Matthias and Georg Augustin were behind the murders of the children. Jakob confronts Matthias and tells him that he will use his influence with the council to clear both Martha and the children of all charges. When Matthias refuses, Jakob reveals that he found the treasure and will give it to Matthias if he helps Martha. Matthias reluctantly agrees. The strategy works and Jakob is there when Martha is released. Later, Jakob confronts Lechner about his role in Martha's torture. Lechner admits to knowing that Martha has nothing to do with the Zimmerstadel fire. He says that he was willing to let her burn because he believed it was the best thing for the village.

Epilogue



The one surviving soldier is hung and left on display along with the devil's burned skeleton to discourage other criminals from coming to Schongau. Simon learns that Georg Augustin has contracted leprosy and will soon have to reside in the same hospital he vandalized to find his fortune. Matthias Augustin has died from his unnamed illness.

Simon visits the Kuisl home where Jakob gives him his own collection of books, purchased with a small fortune taken from the treasure he found in the tunnels. Simon pushes his luck by asking if Jakob might allow Simon and Magdalena to marry one day. Jakob leaves the idea open for a possible future date. Jakob then sends Simon home to read his books.

Analysis

Everyone survives the danger in the tunnels, except for the devil. Clara is happily reunited with her adoptive family, and Sophie finds a home with the Schreevogls as well. It is a happy ending for the children, especially when Jakob Kuisl goes out of his way to make sure the children are not prosecuted for their innocent witch inspired ceremony. Martha is also freed, allowing her to go home and live out the rest of her life, though the reader must wonder if she will live her life as peacefully as before. Despite proving their innocence, both Martha and the surviving children will have to live in a village with a long memory and a habit of harboring prejudice against those who are different.

Simon discovers that the true criminals are the men who hired the soldiers and allowed the devil free reign in Schongau. Those men were Matthias Augustin and his son Georg. Matthias Augustin is an alderman in Schongau who fought against the building of the leper hospital and for the torture of Martha Stechlin. Matthias was friends with Jakob Schreevogl's father, Ferdinand. He knew that Ferdinand had hidden money on the land that he later donated to the church before the war began. Matthias is one of a few who knows about the money. He wants it to replenish his family's fortune before he dies of an illness that is already ravaging his body. Matthias told his son about the fortune. It was his son who hired the soldiers, ordering them to kill the children when they overheard his orders to destroy the building site.

In the end, Jakob Kuisl not only proves he is a kind, compassionate man, but he also shows he is a very intelligent man. Jakob forces Matthias to use his influence with the village council to free Martha and stop any prosecution of Clara and Sophie. This trick works, especially after Jakob shows Matthias that he found the money and is willing to destroy it should Matthias not do as he asks. In the end, Martha and the girls are free to live their lives. Matthias dies of his illness, and his son develops leprosy. The remaining soldier is hung, and the devil's burned skeleton is placed on display to discourage other criminals.

Everything works out for the characters in this novel. The only thing that does not work out is the relationship between Simon and Magdalena. Jakob continues to refuse to



allow Simon to marry his daughter, but he has ended an engagement he arranged with a distant cousin. So, perhaps, there is also hope there.

Discussion Question 1

Who does Sophie claim to have seen discussing the vandalizing of the leper hospital building site? Why does this sighting lead to the deaths of her friends?

Discussion Question 2

Who saves Simon, Clara, and Sophie from the tunnels? How do they find them? Is this a happy rescue?

Discussion Question 3

Who does Simon discover is behind the deaths of the orphans? What was the motivation behind the murders? How does Jakob Kuisl use this motivation to force the clearing of Martha Stechlin's name?

Vocabulary

Drifted, leprosy, midwife, resolve, courteously, disappeared, powerful, interjected, consequences, massive, embezzled, unlawful, gossip, persuade, relations, attention, supposed, careless, curtly, regretfully, useless, arrived, swollen, torture, forehead, interested, agreement, astonished, feast, maypole, visited, spectacle, distinguished.



Characters

Jakob Kuisl

Jakob Kuisl is the hangman. As a hangman, it is Jakob's job to torture prisoners in an effort to get a confession and later act out the execution of prisoners who have confessed. Jakob did not want to be a hangman like his father because he had found the profession to be brutal and unconscionable. However, after living on the road as a soldier, Jakob discovered that there is honor in his family's profession, honor that was missing from the killings he saw committed as a soldier.

Jakob is gentle enough to be reluctant to torture those he knows are innocent. When Martha Stechlin is arrested and charged with being a witch, Jakob knows she is innocent because he knows Martha. Martha delivered all of Jakob's children, both the living and the dead. For this reason, Jakob fights to prove Martha's innocence before she is too badly injured by his torture.

Despite being an outcast, Jakob works within the society of the village to find the truth behind the murder of Peter Grimmer and two of his friends. In the end, not only does Jakob find the true killer, he also forces the elite of Schongau to free Martha and protect the two surviving orphans from further prosecution. Jakob is a good man who does what is right no matter what it takes to do so.

Magdalena Kuisl

Magdalena Kuisl is the twenty-one year old daughter of the hangman. As the daughter of a hangman, Magdalena is an outcast in the social hierarchy of her village. Magdalena will not be allowed to marry a local man. Instead, she is expected to marry a member of another hangman's family, often her cousin. In fact, Jakob Kuisl has arranged one such match for Magdalena, but she fights his choice. The chosen husband is an older, unpleasant man and she is in love with Simon Fronwieser.

Magdalena is a strong willed, stubborn young woman who fights to help her father find the true killer of the orphans in an effort to save Martha Stechlin. In the end, Magdalena is used as bait by the devil to force Jakob Kuisl to find the missing treasure when the devil kidnaps Magdalena. However, Magdalena is resourceful. She manages to escape the devil and his soldier companions.

Simon Fronwieser

Simon Fronwieser is the son of the Schongau doctor. Simon's father is an army surgeon, an untrained doctor who uses old techniques to treat wounds and is better suited to treating battle wounds rather than colds and flu. Simon looks down on his father because Simon has attended university and read extensively about modern



medical techniques. He thinks his father does more harm than good. This fact and Simon's relationship with the hangman and his family cause great tension between the two men.

Simon is friends with Jakob Kuisl because Jakob has an extensive knowledge of anatomy and medical techniques. Simon often borrows books from Jakob and speaks with him at length about what he has learned. Despite the stigma of such a relationship, Simon has also fallen in love with Jakob's eldest daughter Magdalena. Normally a marriage of this sort would not be allowed because the hangman's family is considered outcast, unsuitable. However, Simon is unconcerned with his reputation and continuously pushes Jakob to allow the union. The reader is left with hope that it will one day take place.

Simon, as Jakob's friend, works with Jakob in an attempt to find the real killer of the orphans. It is Simon who first notices the witch's mark on Peter Grimmer's shoulder, later recognizing it on the shoulders of each of the orphans. It is also Simon who eventually realizes that the children are hiding in the dry well beneath the leper hospital building site. In the end, Simon rescues Clara and Sophie from the tunnels while Jakob fights the devil in a battle to the death.

Martha Stechlin

Martha Stechlin is a midwife who works and lives in Schongau. Martha is an older woman, therefore she has delivered most of the people living in the village as well as their children. Martha has recently befriended a group of orphans whom she believes are looking for a mother figure since their own is not available. Martha teaches these children about alchemy, something several of them appear to be very interested in. However, when one of these children is murdered, the grieving father immediately points a finger at Martha. Martha is branded a witch and taken to jail. As subsequent murders are discovered and a fire destroys the Zimmerstadel, the large warehouse that houses many of the goods brought through Schongau on the trade route, Martha is further accused of using her witch spells to cause these events.

While in jail, Martha is ordered to be tortured in order to force her to confess to her crimes. Jakob Kuisl tries to spare Martha the pain of the torture, first by going easy on the torture and later by feeding her a potion that will block the pain and cause her to fall unconscious. However, the torture is unavoidable even as Jakob continues to search for the real killer. In the end, Jakob Kuisl insures Martha's release by bribing an alderman to help her.

Johann Lechner

Johann Lechner is the court clerk, a sort of mayor, in Schongau. Lechner is the driving force behind the torture of Martha Stechlin in an attempt to get a confession. It becomes apparent that Lechner's main concern is the welfare of the village. When the people of the village become frightened as they are convinced that Martha Stechlin is a witch, he



understands that her execution could be the only thing that will put the town at ease. For this reason, Lechner pushes for her confession and execution even though he knows that she did not commit most of the crimes for which she is charged.

Jakob Schreevogl

Jakob Schreevogl is Clara's adoptive father. Jakob is a kind, gentle man who cares deeply for his ward despite the fact that many who are forced to take in these orphaned children are often bitter and unkind. Jakob is at first a suspect when it becomes clear that whoever is killing the orphans has something to do with land donated to the church by Jakob's father. However, Jakob is honest and upfront, even helping in the investigation when Simon comes to him with questions. In the end, Jakob helps rescue Simon, Sophie, and Clara from the underground tunnels where they have become trapped.

Ferdinand Schreevogl

Ferdinand Schreevogl is the father of Jakob Schreevogl. Ferdinand is a very rich man who is not very trusting. When war begins, Ferdinand takes the bulk of his fortune and buries it under some land that belongs to his family. Ferdinand tells no one specifically where the money is, but hints at it to his close friends, including Matthias Augustin. Shortly before his death, Ferdinand has a falling out with his son, Jakob, so he leaves the land to the church for the purpose of building a leper hospital. Jakob, who has every reason to be bitter about this, is not.

The Devil

The devil is a former soldier by the name of Christian Braunschweiger. Braunschweiger was injured in the war and his hand was amputated. Braunschweiger took the bones from his own hand and made a prosthetic hand. This bone hand is what earns Braunschweiger the nickname the devil in Schongau.

The devil and three soldiers he travels with are hired by Georg Augustin to vandalize the leper hospital building site in order to delay the construction long enough for Georg to find a treasure he believes is buried there. On the night they are hired, the devil and his crew are spotted by a group of orphans. Georg orders the devil to kill the children to keep them from telling what they have seen. The devil takes uncommon glee in killing these children, causing him to become unduly committed to the job even when it becomes evident that the children have no intention of telling anyone what they have seen.

The devil becomes aware of Jakob Kuisl's pursuit of him and vows to kill him. In the end, however, it is Jakob who kills the devil after a prolonged fight in the tunnels under the building site. The devil's remains are then placed on display to discourage other criminals from stopping in Schongau.



Matthias Augustin

Matthias Augustin is an elderly man who has served as an alderman on the Schongau village council for many years. Matthias is a businessman who has worked hard all his life to ensure his family's good name and fortune. However, business has taken a downturn in recent years and Matthias finds himself dying without a fortune to leave his family. As a good friend of Ferdinand Schreevogl, Matthias is aware that Ferdinand hid a large fortune on land that belonged to his family for many generations before the war. Upon Ferdinand's death, he left the land to the church for the purpose of building a leper hospital. However, Ferdinand did not tell the church, nor his son, that the fortune was there. For this reason, Matthias sends his son to find the fortune before the building is complete. It was not Matthias' intention that so many people be hurt, but he is desperate to find the money in order to protect his family's good name. In the end, Jakob Kuisl uses the fortune to bribe Matthias into helping free Martha Stechlin and protecting the two surviving orphans. Matthias dies shortly after Martha is freed.

Georg Augustin

Georg Augustin is the son of Matthias Augustin. It is Georg who hires the soldiers in an attempt to slow the building process at the leper hospital in order to find the treasure thought to have been buried there by Ferdinand Schreevogl. It is also Georg who orders the deaths of the orphans in order to protect his identity. In the end, Georg is not prosecuted for his crimes but instead is allowed to keep the treasure. However, Georg is ironically diagnosed with leprosy soon after his father's death.

Sophie

Sophie is one of the five orphans. Sophie lives with a family who is more interested in using her for free labor rather than raising her as one of their own. Sophie and Peter Grimmer have a strong interest in alchemy and midwifery, which is part of the reason why she and her friends spend so much time with the midwife, Martha Stechlin.

Sophie witnesses the murders of two of her friends. For this reason, she is reluctant to trust anyone other than her friends. Sophie avoids Simon throughout most of the novel despite the fact that he only wants to help her. In the end, however, Sophie trusts Simon and tells him the truth of what happened the night her friends began dying. Sophie and her friends decided to conduct their own ceremony to bind them together and protect them from the cruelty of the other children. As part of this ceremony, they stole a mandrake from Martha Stechlin as well as a small amount of sulfur. The children marked one another with an alchemist symbol, but it was written upside down and looked like a witch's symbol. After their ceremony, the children were leaving their hideout when they heard a local Schongau man hiring the soldiers to vandalize the leper hospital building site. They made a sound and were seen. The Schongau man instructed the soldiers to kill the children to protect his identity.



Sophie is afraid that she, too, will be accused of being a witch because of the ceremony she conducted with her friends. It is because of this that she refuses to seek help and does not tell anyone her story from the beginning. In the end, however, Simon, the Kuisls, and the Schreevogls take in and protect Sophie.

Clara

Clara is one of the five orphans. Clara lives with the Schreevogl family. The Schreevogls seem different from some of the other families who take in orphans in the fact that the parents seem to really care for Clara. Clara, however, still feels like an outcast in the family.

Clara is, in part, the reason the Zimmerstadel burns. The devil and his soldiers start the fire in the Zimmerstadel because they know that the members of the Schreevogl family will rush to the Zimmerstadel to check on the welfare of goods stored there for Jakob Schreevogl's business. Clara has been ill and stuck in the house, so this is the only way to guarantee everyone will leave long enough for the devil to kill the girl. The devil, however, underestimates the intelligence of the young girl. Clara manages to escape the house before the devil can get her and runs to the hideout she shared with her friends despite her illness and serious injuries. Clara is then cared for by Sophie until Simon and Jakob Kuisl find them at the end of the book.

The Soldiers

The devil travels and works with three soldiers who help him vandalize the building site of the new leper hospital, and kill the orphan children. These soldiers are men who took part in the war, but found themselves with little to do and few skills after the war, men who enjoyed the violence and mayhem of the war. These men have become thugs for hire who make money creating mayhem. These men have followed the devil, but they are quickly becoming annoyed by his orders and soon begin to disregard them. For this reason, two of these men decide to attack Magdalena even though ordered to leave her alone. The attack leads to the death of one soldier. One of the other two soldiers is killed by Jakob Kuisl when he attacks Simon. The last soldier is tortured and hung for his crimes.

The Orphans

The orphans are a group of five children living in Schongau and Altenstadt who have befriended one another in large part because of the teasing they endure from the other children of their villages. The orphans live with families that are often unkind to them, leaving the children feeling doubly persecuted. For this reason, the children are drawn to one another, as well as the midwife, Martha Stechlin. The children often spend time with Martha, learning about alchemy or just spending time with the matronly woman. It is because of this relationship that Martha is accused of murder when one of the orphans, Peter Grimmer, is found with his throat cut and what appears to be a witch's



mark on his shoulder. This is followed by the deaths of two other orphans and the burning of the Zimmerstadl, as well as the disappearance of the last two orphans, Sophie and Clara. If not for these orphans, the murders, and the fire, there would not have been a witch hunt against Martha Stechlin, inspiring the hangman to find the real culprit.



Symbols and Symbolism

Witch's Mark

On all five of the orphans is found a mark that resembles the symbol for Venus, a symbol that at the time was associated with witches. It is later revealed that it is the alchemy symbol for hematite written upside down. The children used the symbol to bind themselves together and protect themselves from the cruelty of other children.

Burghers

The burghers are the good people of Schongau.

Thumb Screws

Jakob Kuisl uses thumb screws to torture Martha Stechlin in order to force her to confess.

Mandrake

Mandrake is a root that is used by witches in potions. The mandrake is also used by some to make a potion to reduce pain and induce sleep. Jakob Kuisl makes a potion with mandrake to help Martha through a torture session. Sophie also uses mandrake to treat Clara's illness and injuries while they are hiding from the devil.

Books

Jakob Kuisl has a large collection of books on herbs, roots, and medical knowledge. Simon Fronwieser often borrows these books to expand his understanding of medicine and anatomy. In the end, Jakob buys Simon a collection of his own books.

Deed

Simon searches for the deed of the land that Ferdinand Schreevogel donated to the church for the leper hospital in hopes of finding where the children might have made their hideout. Simon finds the document has been torn, the important sections stolen, but learns from what is left that there is a dry well on the property, an ideal place for children to hide.



Potions

Jakob Kuisl makes and sells potions made from herbs and roots to help heal people. This causes some trouble for Jakob among the elite of Schongau who connect these potions to witchcraft.

Birthmark

Martha Stechlin has a birthmark that looks vaguely like a witch's mark, making the witnesses of her torture take it as proof that she is a witch.

Saber

Jakob Kuisl and Simon are able to determine that the weapon used to kill the orphan boys was a soldier's saber, suggesting that the murderer was not someone local, but a soldier.

Zimmerstadel

The Zimmerstadel is a large building near the Lech River that houses many of the goods traveling through Schongau to larger cities for sale. This building is burned to the ground in order to lure the Schreevogls from their home so that the devil can get to Clara, who has taken ill, and kill her. Clara, however, manages to escape. Martha Stechlin, despite being in jail at the time, is accused of the arson.



Settings

Schongau

Schongau is the village where Jakob Kuisl and his family live. It is in Schongau where Peter Grimmer is found murdered and Martha Stechlin is arrested for being a witch. Schongau is a small village in Bavaria, but it is the hub of trade route, a fact that is seen with much jealousy by nearby village, Altenstadt. It is this fight between the two villages that causes a great deal of tension in the novel, especially when the Zimmerstadel is burned.

Altenstadt

Altenstadt is a nearby village that is in competition with Schongau for the trade route. Altenstadt is also where one of the young orphans lives, necessitating a trip to the distant village for Simon and Jakob Kuisl.

Leper Hospital

Ferdinand Schreevogel has owned land on the road to Hohenschwangau for many years. When he dies suddenly of a fever, Ferdinand leaves this land to the church for the purpose of building a leper hospital. Despite the fact that this hospital is controversial among the merchants in Schongau who fear it will impact commerce, the leper hospital is planned and building begins. However, the building site is vandalized. Later, it is discovered that Ferdinand Schreevogel had hidden a fortune at this site before the war. Another prominent member of Schongau society wants to find the money. This is also the site of the hideout the orphans have used and where Sophie and Clara hide when they find themselves targets of the same devil who killed their friends.

Jail

Martha Stechlin is taken to the jail when she is accused of witchcraft. It is here that Jakob Kuisl is ordered to torture her to make her confess. Jakob is able to put off the torture for a short time, but eventually is forced to torture the innocent woman.

Lech River

The Lech River runs through Schongau and is part of the reason that Schongau is a major part of the local trade route. It is in the Lech where Peter Grimmer's body is found, not far from the hangman's home.



Themes and Motifs

Superstition

Superstition is the belief in supernatural causality. In this novel, the good people of Schongau believe in witchcraft, in the idea that one woman could have the power to call on the devil to kill multiple times and cause a fire even while she is in jail.

Superstition was common in the 1600s, the time period in which this novel is set. During this time, people were deathly afraid of witches because they believed that these witches could do things that are beyond explanation, bringing death or plague down on the people around them. It was during this time that many innocent women were put to death because of the belief that they had the power to cause illness or death.

In this novel, the village of Schongau suffered a witch hunt a generation before in which more than sixty women were put to death, some of them the wives of rich and powerful men. For this reason, people are frightened when they are told that there was a witch's mark on the body of a murder victim and a woman has been arrested for the crime. There is an immediate outcry and every unexplained death or tragedy from that moment on is blamed on the hapless woman despite the fact that she is in jail when each event takes place.

Without superstition, Martha Stechlin might not have been arrested and most likely would not have been tortured in an attempt to get a confession. Without superstition there would not have been the rush to put the matter to rest as quickly as possible. Without superstition, much of the plot of this novel would not have been possible, making superstition an essential theme of the novel.

Justice

Jakob Kuisl is a hangman. It is Jakob's job to torture criminals to force a confession and then execute them. However, there are times when Jakob finds himself forced to torture and execute people who are innocent. It is these times that cause Jakob to drink to excess and search for a way to soothe his guilty conscience.

When Martha Stechlin is accused of witchcraft in the death of Peter Grimmer, Jakob comes to her rescue before a lynch mob can kill her. Jakob makes sure that Martha is safely arrested and placed in jail. However, Jakob soon finds himself ordered to torture Martha to get a confession even though he knows in his heart that Martha is not capable of such a crime. For this reason, Jakob sets out with his friend Simon to find the true killer.

As Martha suffers in jail, first from the aftermath of torture and later from an assault by another inmate, Jakob and Simon hunt down each clue in order to learn the truth. In the end, Jakob and Simon manage to prove that Martha is not the killer, but the true killer is



dead and the only witnesses could be accused of witchcraft themselves if they come forward. For this reason, Jakob is forced to bribe a man into clearing Martha's name without causing any further harm to anyone else. In the end, justice is done in a round-about way that allows the driving force behind the crimes to go free. However, karma is just, and that man is left to suffer a different kind of justice when he is diagnosed with leprosy.

Greed

Greed is often a motivating factor in modern novels. This is true about this novel, as well. Matthias Augustin is a wealthy merchant who has been an alderman on the Schongau village council since his own father's death. Matthias has shaped the policies of the town in his lifetime, as well as been witness to many of the ups and downs of the village. As Matthias becomes ill and faces his own mortality, he comes to the conclusion that his family will suffer should he die and leave behind the pile of debt he has amassed in recent years. For this reason, Matthias wants to find a treasure he believes his friend Ferdinand Schreevogel left buried on property he donated to the church for a leper hospital.

Matthias puts his son, Georg, in charge of finding Schreevogel's hidden treasure. Georg hires a group of soldiers to vandalize the site to stop building long enough for them to find the treasure. At the same time, Georg and the soldiers are seen by a group of orphan children, so Georg ruthlessly orders the deaths of all the children. This sets off a chain reaction that ends in the arrest of Martha Stechlin for witchcraft.

If not for Georg's greed and lack of compassion for other people, none of the events that take place in this novel would have happened. In the end, it comes down to justice versus greed. Jakob Kuisl finds the treasure, but rather than keep it for himself, he uses it to force Matthias to help free Martha. Jakob proves to be a better man than the alderman or his son.



Styles

Point of View

The novel is written in the third person omniscient point of view. The author uses the third person so that he can tell his story from the point of view of multiple characters, including Magdalena, Jakob Kuisl, Simon, Sophie, the devil, and Georg Augustin. By using this many characters and allowing the reader to see the different parts of the plot through the eyes of so many characters, the author is able to tell a more rounded story.

The point of view of this novel works well with the plot because it is a complicated plot that necessitates the reader being able to see events taking place through multiple eyes. The reader needs to know, for instance, how Clara escaped from the devil even though she is the only one who is able to tell this story. For this reason, the point of view works well with this novel as a whole.

Language and Meaning

The novel was originally written in the author's native German and translated by an independent translator. For this reason, some of the language of this novel tends to be unusual with some foreign words left in their original position. Also, some of the grammar is a little different from what some modern readers might be accustomed to reading.

The language of this novel is not what was originally intended by the author. However, it has been translated carefully and left with a language that is easy to comprehend and enjoy. The language can be stiff in some sections of the novel and there are some words that the modern reader might not be accustomed to, but overall the language fits with the plot, setting, and characters of the novel.

Structure

The novel is divided into sixteen chapters, an epilogue, and a prologue. The chapters are fairly long, most of them comprising a large number of scenes. The novel is told in a linear fashion with only a few days of time passing from the beginning to the end of the novel. The novel is written in both narration and dialogue, showing a full story rather than simply telling one.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot follows Jakob Kuisl as he attempts to prove Martha Stechlin's innocence. One subplot follows Simon and Magdalena's relationship. Another subplot follows the plight of the orphans, particularly Sophie and Clara. Another subplot follows the actions and motivations of the court clerk. All plots come to a satisfactory conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

October 12 was a good day for a killing.
-- Jakob Kuisl (Prologue paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote opens the novel and touches on the profession of the Kuisl family.

Just before he mercifully blacked out, Jakob Kuisl made a decision. Never would he follow in his father's footsteps; never in his life would he become a hangman.
-- Jakob Kuisl (Prologue paragraph 61)

Importance: This quote illustrates Jakob Kuisl's disgust at his father's job, the job he is meant to do, and his desire to do anything else.

He had marched off to the Great War and only later felt the call to return to Schongau. When little Magdalena asked what he had done in the war and why he would rather cut people's heads off than put on his armor and take up his shining sword and march off to foreign lands, her mother simply fell silent and put her finger to her lips.
-- Magdalena Kuisl (Chapter 1 paragraph 3)

Importance: This quote hints to some of the reasons why, despite his promise to himself in the prologue, Jakob Kuisl had become a hangman like his father.

Nearly seventy years ago during the famous Schongau witch trial, dozens of women had been burned at the stake. What had started as an angry outburst and a few unexplained deaths had ended in mass hysteria, with everyone accusing everyone else.
-- Jakob Kuisl (chapter 3 paragraph 33)

Importance: This quote illustrates why it is so important to Lechner that they get Martha Stechlin to confess before witchcraft fears spread.

Often it was sufficient just to show the instruments to break the victim's spirit. But with Martha Stechlin the hangman was not so sure.
-- Jakob Kuisl (chapter 4 paragraph 16)

Importance: This quote shows Jakob Kuisl unhappiness with having to torture Martha Stechlin when he knows she is innocent and will not quickly confess.

Simon could not stop thinking about the man with the hand of bone. If he really existed and was responsible for what happened to the children, why had he killed them? What connection was there between the two victims, apart from their having been at Martha Stechlin's on that night of the full moon?
-- Simon Fronwieser (chapter 6 paragraph 34)



Importance: This quote introduces the possibility that the man with the bone hand is the killer, and it begins to explore the motivation he has for the murders.

In their small, beautiful town the devil was loose, and they could do nothing about it.
-- Johann Lechner (chapter 8 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote describes the fear that the alderman show at a meeting of the town council, a fear that causes Lechner to hate them more than ever. This quote also suggests to the reader that Lechner could be a possible suspect behind the murders.

The physician had heard of cases where even much younger children had been put to the stake as witches. Why, then. Should Sophie come forward now?
-- Simon Fronwieser (chapter 10 paragraph 6)

Importance: This quote gives the reader a reason why Sophie trusts no one and refuses to come forward with what she knows about the murders and Clara's whereabouts.

I've just about had enough of this, and I've had more than enough of you!
-- Soldier (chapter 12 paragraph 9)

Importance: This statement shows that the three soldiers working with the devil are beginning to tire of his orders and might soon ignore those orders.

They were buggers, real pests,' the boy in front of her said. 'Nobody here misses them. Nobody wanted to have anything to do with them.
-- Boy from Schongau (chapter 13 paragraph 24)

Importance: This quote shows what the children of Schongau think of the five orphans. It gives the reason for why the five orphans keep to themselves and befriend an adult rather than other children.

The devil followed us...stupid fools that we are.
-- Jakob Kuisl (chapter 15 paragraph 42)

Importance: This quote shows the danger that exists in the dwarf tunnels with Simon, Jakob, Sophie, and Clara.

The body of Andre Pirkhofer, killed on the building site, was hung in chains next to his countryman, as was the corpse of Christian Braunschweiger, whom the townspeople, even after his death, referred to as 'the devil' while crossing themselves three times.
-- Jakob Kuisl (Epilogue paragraph 3)

Importance: This quote shows how superstition lingers in the village of Schongau, even in the aftermath of the false accusations against Martha Stechlin.