

# **The Joining of the Stone Short Guide**

## **The Joining of the Stone by Shirley Rousseau Murphy**

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## Overview

The forces of good and evil battle one another in *The Joining of the Stone*, which is the conclusion of the five-part epic fantasy about the children of Ynell. However, the book easily stands on its own; one does not have to read the four previous fantasies to be captivated by this mysterious tale.

Ramad, the hero in the previous epic tales, is now dead, and his eighteen-year-old son Lobon is driven to avenge his father's death. Lobon must battle the same evil force that killed his father, the dragon-man creature Dracvadrig. Much of this adventurous tale is told through the eyes of Lobon's mother, Skeelie, who mysteriously "Wavers" through Time. A young Seer, Meatha, to whom Lobon is drawn for strength and love, plays a major role in this battle of good and evil. And the sinister Seer Kish, who joins forces with Dracvadrig, also adds to the suspense of the novel.

Readers in grades six through nine will enjoy Murphy's tale of Ere. It is a must for avid Wolf Bell series fans.

Murphy skillfully describes a menagerie of characters, some human, some animal, some a mixture of each. As Lobon seeks to avenge his father's death, he must not lose control of the shattered shards of the runestone; rather, he must gather all of the runestones together for the joining of the stone and a victory of good over evil.

Many of the descriptions are beautiful and quite detailed, such as those of the lovely winged horse-beings.

## About the Author

Shirley Rousseau Murphy was born May 20, 1928, in Oakland, California. Her father, Otis Francis Rousseau, was a horse trainer, and her mother, Helen Hoffman Rousseau, was an artist. Her parents' occupations and interests later influenced Murphy's writing, for one will note horses throughout her fantasies and lavish, artistic descriptions of scenery that only an artist's eye could capture. Commenting on her childhood, Murphy notes:

I grew up in California with the rhythm of the sea filling my days, and the rhythm of hooves: a small child riding alone along the shore and along the back country roads. My father trained and sold horses, and I rode from the time I was five, spent every possible moment, not with other children or toys, but cleaning stalls, doing stablechores, and riding. The times when it rained too hard to ride were interludes of solitary fantasy games, of reading fairy tales, and most of all reading ALICE over and over.

Murphy, like her mother, began her career as an artist. She studied at the California School of Fine Arts and received an A.A. in 1951. She also married Patrick J. Murphy, a U.S. probation officer, that same year. Murphy worked as an art designer for several years before becoming a full-time writer of books for young people. In fact, from 1957-1963 she won seven awards for sculpture and five for paintings at the San Francisco Museum and other exhibitions.

In 1967 Murphy published her first book, *White Ghost Summer*, and this was the beginning of her lifelong career as a writer for young people. A glance at her impressive list of publications reveals that she has written twenty-two books in twenty-three years. And according to Murphy, she will never quit writing fantasy: I live beside a small lake in north Georgia with my husband, a Weimaraner, and a calico cat. I often rise before daylight to write . . . .

One day soon I will have a horse again to carry me into the mountains. And I will never stop writing fantasy.

# Setting

The story takes place in various locales of the land of Ere. There are many civilized nations that make up this land. The reader first meets the main character Lobon as he approaches the abyss where his enemy and destiny lie. The abyss is deep and dangerous.

Within its walls are lava flows, falling rocks, and treacherous fire ogres.

As the story advances, the reader is transported outside of Time, back to Carriol, to the Bay of Pelli, to Zandour, then to the high desert where a crystal dome stands alone. It is at this crystal dome that the climax of the story grips the reader. To aid the reader, Murphy includes a map of the land of Ere at the beginning of the book.

Because this book is fantasy, the time may be either the future or the past. It is a time of dragons, Seers, flying horses and lizards, and spells from the evil powers.



## Social Sensitivity

The violence and sexual content may be of some concern to readers and parents. The violence is not extremely graphic, but it runs through the story as Lobon battles Drac, puncturing his eye and later killing him. The wolves are constant protectors as they kill and attack various creatures who try to harm Lobon. The final battle with Kish is full of violence as she and Lobon strike at one another with their swords and often hurt the winged lizard and horse who carry them. Meatha also has to battle with the flying lizards alone as Lobon and Kish battle. Horses and lizards fall from the sky dead and litter the land with their bodies. In almost any fantasy story where there is good conflicting with evil, there will be violence as the two fight for dominance.

The sexual content is not pornographic or vulgar. Some parents may not want their child exposed to the sexual tensions between Meatha and Lobon even though the two do restrain themselves. For teen-agers this might be especially meaningful because they are awaking sexually and learning how to control their feelings. Even so, this is tame stuff for teen-agers. The fact that Kish does not put much merit into sexual relationships or a relationship at all may offend some readers or parents because Kish's attitudes seem to lead toward sexual promiscuousness.

## Literary Qualities

Murphy employs a variety of literary techniques in this tale of adventure and fantasy. For example, figurative language is used throughout. Similes and metaphors are found on almost every page, and each chapter is filled with rich descriptions of characters and scenes. Murphy's artistic talent is evident as she paints with words a lavish tapestry of the forces of good and evil in her fantasy land of Ere, and readers can almost see the tiny winged horses that Murphy aptly describes.

Two other literary devices used by Murphy include flashbacks and diary form. She often goes back in time to give the reader a glimpse of the past, and when an explanation or more history is needed to weave a tighter plot, she uses Skeelie's diary. The diary adds to the story's plot and mystery.



# Themes and Characters

The *Joining of the Stone* presents a variety of characters in a fantasy battle of good versus evil. The major character or epic hero that the reader first meets is Lobon. The very first words of the novel are: "Lobon stood tall above the boulder-strewn valley, his sword sheathed, his leather cape thrown back, looking down coldly upon the waste of lifeless stone."

Lobon is the eighteen-year-old son of Ramad and Skeelie; he is a hot-headed youth who is bent on avenging his father's death; he does not yet fully understand or accept his true destiny of the joining of the stone.

Skeelie is Lobon's mother and Ramad's wife. She had tried to abate her son's anger but to no avail; she is outside of Time and is unsure whether she should interfere with her son's quest.

Meatha is a young Seer of Carriol; she is a pawn in the evil plot to overrun the land of Ere with darkness; in previous years, she helped to find a shard of the runestone.

Wolves also play a role in the story.

Perhaps the most important wolf is Shorren—the wise female wolf. The two male wolves are Feldyn and Crieba. These three wolves have telepathic ability and travel with Lobon as companions; they too have a quest of vengeance against Drac, but they also understand Lobon's destiny and the importance of the stones.

Chief among the evil characters is Dracvadrig, the man-dragon who killed Ramad; he is hunted by Lobon, yet he in his turn also hunts Lobon and Meatha. He has a master plan to help the dark forces rule over Ere and to join the stones for evil. Rilken Dal is the evil leader of the murderous Kubalese; he possesses the power to turn animals into cowering servants; and he is part of Drac's plan. Kish is an evil woman with serpent eyes; she is the warrior queen who rules over her cults of people in the nations of Farth and Aybil and is also involved in Drac's plan.

The main theme throughout the book is one common to many fantasy books: Good versus evil. The reader encounters the Dark Seers of evil and the Seers of good. Throughout the story, dark and light constantly clash in an attempt to obtain all the shards of the runestone, which will give magical power to whoever puts it back together.

The battle of good versus evil is fought on many fronts. Lobon fights with Drac both mentally and physically in the abyss. Drac continuously plays with Lobon's mind as he lures him deeper into the abyss by laying false tracks of his presence. When they do confront one another it is a battle of wits and strength between the two. On actual battlefields, Rilken Dal and his Kubalese soldiers ransack the smaller nations across the land of Ere. Forces from Camol try to battle the evil through their Seer powers, healing





and feeding the sick. They also win the people over by using the Seer powers to show them peace and comfort.

Meatha fights against the evil mindhold that Drac has put upon her but realizes too late what has happened to her when she is tricked into stealing and bringing the two shards of runestone from Carriol to Drac.

Internal conflict is important in the book. Three different characters fight to do what is right. Lobon knows his anger and hatred have led him astray in his quest. Even after he kills Drac, he realizes revenge was not all that he wanted. He knows that he must fulfill his father's quest. Skeelie still blames herself for Ramad's death because she did not go down into the abyss with him the day he was killed. Now she is torn between leaving Canoldir and stepping back into Time to help her son or remaining outside of Time and simply observing Lobon and allowing him to fight his own battle. She knows her son can destroy himself if he persists in facing Drac for vengeance only, but she comes to terms with herself and finally decides to aid Lobon only from a distance.

Meatha was one of the children of Ynell who were drugged and put into a cave. She and the others were rescued, but the effects of the drug still linger with her after two years. She is pressed slowly but persistently by Drac to steal the shards of the runestone from the Carnol people. Various times during Drac's probing of her mind, Meatha awakens to find herself standing before the runestone in Carnol wondering how and why she was there during the night. She soon is convinced that she has every right to the runestone, with Drac's help, and decides to use them to overcome the Kubalese soldiers that are killing her people. It is not until she has the stones and is atop her winged horse, being pulled to Scar Mountain by Drac, that she realizes she is nothing but a pawn and is being lured into an evil trap.

Death is another prominent theme.

There are senseless deaths as the evil Kubalese ride across the land of Ere killing and destroying everything good in their path. The deaths of Ramad and Shorren sting Lobon's heart and push him on further to continue his quest.

For the Seers who have powers greater than others, death is an outlet to another Time or peace for final rest.

Sexual attractions and tensions are also evident. Kish thinks often of lovers. It is often this thought that keeps her from leaving Drac and Rilken Dal to carry out the plan alone. She is involved with Drac at the beginning, but upon his death he is out like the wind with no mourning. She immediately thinks of Rilken Dal and his ability as a lover. Kish also puts a spell on Meatha and Lobon as part of the plot to rule the land in Darkness. Lobon and Meatha were to mate, and the child born to them would be taken and raised to be the ruler of darkness over Ere. Lobon and Meatha are forced to stay in a cave cell together under Kish's spell. They understand what has overcome them and try to suppress their emotions to keep from fulfilling Kish's plan.



## Topics for Discussion

1. Do you think Lobon was prepared for his quest? Why or why not? How could he have been better prepared?
2. Do you think Skeelie made the right choice to help Lobon near the end? Was her aid really helpful? Why or why not?
3. Who do you think was the strongest of the three evils—Kish, Drac, or Rilken Dal? Why?
4. What caused Drac's downfall and death (besides Lobon's sword and knife)?
5. How were Meatha and Lobon able to escape the cave cell? Who dies in that escape? How?
6. Do you feel Lobon was always a good character? Why? If not, then what made him bad or evil?
7. Do you think Canoldir was right in not wanting Skeelie to go help Lobon? Why or why not? What was his main reason for wanting her to stay?
8. Who was set free finally at the end due to the quakes? How was Jaspen related to this person?
9. What happened to the land of Ere in the end? Describe in detail.
10. What did Crieba and Feldyn do at the end? Why?
11. How many shards of the runestone were there? Who had each piece at the beginning of the story?
12. How was Alardded able to retrieve the piece of runestone from the sea at the Bay of Pelli? Describe his method in detail. Tell how it worked.
13. What was the purpose of the runestone? Why do you think it was marred at the end? What did this signify?



# Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Compare one character of good with one character of evil. Show how they are similar and different.
2. Choose one character, good or evil, and do an in-depth character sketch. Analyze his or her actions and thoughts.
3. Write another chapter to this book.

It may be the next day, next year, or many years from the end.

4. Imagine yourself as a young Seer of Carriol. Write how you might have seen the events as they took place in the story. Do not forget to use your special powers.
5. Make a map of Lobon's quest throughout the abyss. Give details about where he slept, fought, was captured, and escaped.
6. Make a map of Lobon's entire quest from the abyss to the crystal dome. Use details.
7. Pick a very descriptive scene in the book and draw or sketch the image it calls to your mind.
8. Imagine you are one of the winged horses or lizards during the final battle between Lobon and Kish. What are your thoughts throughout the events that take place? Do you live through the raging battle? Give a commentary from your point of view.
9. How do you think life would be for us if some of us were Seers? Would you like to be a Seer? Why or why not?

What would be the benefits? Disadvantages?

10. Put together an outline of the whole story of Ramad from the journals of Skeelie and other clues given throughout the story.



## For Further Reference

Commire, Ann, ed. In *Something About the Author* Vol. 36. Detroit: Gale, 1984: 142-145. This article gives a brief biography about the author and comments by Murphy about her writing. A list of Murphy's novels and awards is also given.

Review. *Booklist* 78 (November 15, 1981): 440-441. A synopsis of *The Joining of the Stone* is given. The reviewer makes favorable comments on style and theme and recommends this concluding novel in the five-part epic as a "must read" for fantasy fans.

Review. *School Library Journal* (February 1982): 91. The reviewer summarizes the plot and notes, "Though the plot seems inevitable and some writing forced, there are some surprises and vividly imagined portraits of the fire ogres; the lovely winged horse-beings; and of Dracvadrig, shape changing."

## Related Titles

The Ring of Fire (1977) is the first of the five-book series about the Children of Ynell, who have telepathic powers that put them in danger of being kidnapped and drugged by the Kubalese.

A wise Seer named Anchorstar appears to Thorn and Zephy, who also have the Seer powers, and tells them to hunt for the lost runestone and to free the children who are captive. They rescue the children and escape with the aid of the winged horses of the gods.

The second book, The Wolf Bell (1979), introduces Ramad, who is the bastard son of Tayba. Ramad is given the wolf bell which enables him to rule the wolves, and soon he has many faithful friends and companions to help him on his quest for the runestone.

The Castle of Hape (1980) takes place twelve years after The Wolf Bell. Ram is captured by the enemy and falls in love with a woman out of Time named Telien. A new enemy arises called Hape. Ram battles Hape and finally overpowers him. Telien disappears, and the book ends with Ram searching for her. Skeelie, a childhood companion of Ram's, follows him on his search.

In the fourth chronicle of the series, Caves of Fire and Ice (1980), Ram, Skeelie, and the wolves travel back and forth through Time in search of Telien and the scattered pieces of the runestone. Of course, they face the evil Seers and the powers of Darkness along the way.

According to the book reviews in Booklist and School Library Journal, Murphy's writing becomes better and more advanced with each addition to her Children of Ynell chronicle. Any fantasy lover would enjoy this series. The recommended reading levels for these books range from seventh grade to twelfth grade.



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