

The Merlin Conspiracy Study Guide

The Merlin Conspiracy by Diana Wynne Jones

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Contents

The Merlin Conspiracy Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Section I: Roddy.....	5
Section II: Nick.....	6
Section III: Roddy.....	7
Section IV: Nick.....	8
Section V: Roddy.....	9
Section VI: Nick.....	11
Section VII: Nick Continued.....	12
Section VIII: Roddy.....	13
Section IX: Nick.....	15
Section X: Roddy and Nick.....	17
Section XI: Roddy and Nick.....	18
Section XII: Roddy and Nick.....	19
Characters.....	20
Objects/Places.....	24
Themes.....	27
Style.....	29
Quotes.....	31
Topics for Discussion.....	32



Plot Summary

"The Merlin Conspiracy" is the story of a young boy and girl, who must protect their different worlds from a magical conspiracy. The book begins from the point of view of Roddy, an adolescent girl who lives in a magical world and has a close friend, Grundo, who she looks after as he is considered rather slow. At a meeting of the English king with the Scotch king, however, the Old Merlin drops dead, and the Scotch king takes it as an insult and retreats. There are suggestions of foul play, but nothing definitive.

Meanwhile, in a world resembling our own, Nick goes with his father to a writing conference, where he is swept away into Roddy's world and mistaken for a guard. Captured by a group looking after the Prince of Wales, Nick must go into a trance-like state to look out for psychic enemies. There, he meets Romanov, an older and very clever wizard.

In Roddy's world, the King's procession goes to a nearby castle, where Grundo's mother, Sybil, fools everyone with water from an enchanted stream. Grundo and Roddy don't drink it, and later hear Sybil and the new Merlin, among others, plotting; however, because everyone else has been enchanted, nobody believes them. At this point, Roddy is summoned to her grandfather's house in Wales; he makes her very uncomfortable, but she nevertheless tells him about the plot.

Nick, meanwhile, overhears that he has been spotted as a fake, and flees the guards, looking for Romanov. He ends up in the woods, where he runs into an old drunk who helps him by giving him a light. He then sees Roddy, who has summoned him to help with the overthrow of the conspiracy; however, he doesn't understand.

Roddy and Grundo explore an old village nearby, where Roddy picks up the strong magic of a witch who used to live there. When they return to the house, they go to sleep; Gwyn, the grandfather, is gone by the time they wake. Roddy tries to call the Little People for help, as well as the wizard (Nick), but isn't sure about any of their help. She tries to return to the King's procession, but they have moved on and nobody knows where they are.

Nick then gets trapped in his alternate world, but escapes with the help of an elephant he finds trapped between worlds. He and the elephant, Mini, go to Romanov's world, where the older wizard has fallen ill. Romanov's wife calls angrily on the telephone, but Nick ignores her. Romanov gets worse and worse, and a flying machine lands on his lawn. It is Maxwell Hyde, a Magrid who travels between worlds to help keep them in order. He tells Nick that he's under a spell to get Romanov sick, and tells him to bathe himself in salt water. Afterward, Hyde and Nick talk, and Nick realizes that Roddy is Hyde's granddaughter.

Not sure of where to go, Roddy goes to her relatives in Dimber, but finds that a pair of annoying twins as well as some enchanted objects cause annoyances and deep problems. Nobody can reach Hyde. When Roddy tries to help the creatures caught in



the objects to get a more fair bargain, her grandmother sends her off to the Lady of Governance. However, although Roddy tries to explain about the conspiracy, the Lady does not believe her.

Nick accompanies Hyde to Blest, Roddy's world, and stays with him in London. He has magic lessons, and Hyde reprimands his daughter Dora for using salamanders, dangerous magical creatures. Fires are breaking out all over the country, and death, in the form of Gwyn, comes for Hyde.

Roddy goes to London, and finds Nick there. She discovers that her parents are no longer with the King. Meditating, Nick realizes that Hyde is still alive. The twins show up, and Nick realizes that they will need Romanov's help. With his goat, they travel to find Romanov, and then back to the world of the arcade. There, they find many people trapped by strong binding spells used by a trainee Prayermaster who earlier tried to kill Romanov. Roddy uses her new magic to help unbind all of the trapped magic people. Nick then calls on the white dragon of England, and it is revealed that the new Merlin is actually a fake one.

At the end of the book, Grundo is in the running to be the new Merlin, and Roddy will go with Maxwell Hyde before beginning training as the next Lady of Governance.



Section I: Roddy

Section I: Roddy Summary

"The Merlin Conspiracy," the story of a corrupt magical world and the children who save it, begins from the point of view of Roddy. A young woman in the King's entourage, Roddy spends most of her time with her friend Grundo, who most of the other characters consider to be slow, especially his mother Sybil and sister Alicia. The two of them go to watch Roddy's father at work as the weather wizard, arranging fine weather for the King's meeting with the Scotch king the next day. In the second chapter, the meeting takes place, and the weather is exactly right. However, as the two kings and their entourages approach one another, the Old Merlin, or master of witchcraft within the world, drops dead. Sybil goes into false dramatics, pretending to be distraught, and the Scotch king considers the death a personal insult, retreating immediately. Later, there are inquiries into the death, and even Roddy's father is a suspect. Nevertheless, though there are traces of a spell around the Merlin, nothing is conclusive. The section ends with the selection of a new, young Merlin, who makes a prophesy that seems vague and unclear but later turns out to have forecast the book's events and especially Sybil's betrayal.

Section I: Roddy Analysis

This first section is important on several levels. It does more than simply establish the magical world of Blest, where Roddy lives, although the reader immediately sees the magic at work and gains some understanding of Roddy's life near the king. However, the action moves very quickly, and the introduction to the Merlin, followed immediately by his death, pose a great problem as corrupt court influences (particularly in the form of Sybil) can already be seen. The Merlin's death, though not the insult the Scotch king thinks it to be, is nevertheless a bad omen, and foreshadows the troubles to come. The fact that Blest's magical powers are now in the hands of a very young Merlin, who shows himself to be weak through his sobbing, is also a sign of problems ahead in the kingdom.



Section II: Nick

Section II: Nick Summary

In the second section, Nick takes over the narration. He lives in a world much like our own, without any outward signs of magic. He is accompanying his adoptive father to a writing conference. Nick will later hint that he left behind a powerful position in another world for this life, with his father, the mystery writer. At the conference, Nick's father meets his favorite author, Maxwell Hyde, at the very point when Nick is whisked away into an alternate reality, where he enters "periphery security." He joins a group of men who seem to think he has been sent as a guard, and is rather late. Nick's job will be to guard the Prince of Wales during a cricket match, by keeping the periphery clear. After a ceremony with the men to protect the prince, Nick retreats and follows the instructions of the other guard (Arnold) on how to fall asleep in a way that protects the periphery. Arnold mentions that he will find his totem animal within the trance.

When Nick does fall asleep, he meets a panther with whom he communicates. They seem to have a friendly rapport, and Nick looks to the panther for protection when a man comes to find him. Nick worries that he is a hunter, and the man, Romanov, explains that he has been informed that Nick will try to kill him, and he wanted to see how much of a threat he actually was. Seeing that he is none, Romanov decides that he'll leave Nick alone. Romanov also finds the totem animal a funny concept, and tells Nick that the jaguar is not his totem animal, though Romanov himself is followed by a cat.

Section II: Nick Analysis

In Section II, the narrative goes to a much more familiar world. Note that it would be easier for the reader to follow the story had it begun in this world; nevertheless, the author chose to begin immediately with Roddy's story to demonstrate the importance that her world will have in the upcoming narrative and to establish different aspects of its environment, as well as introducing early plot problems. Nick's journey into the world of Blest quickly unites the two worlds, though, and his mistaken identity provides another obstacle that will eventually have to be overcome. In addition, the mysterious appearance and disappearance of Romanov, as well as the man's suggestive name (see "Characters"), suggests that he will reappear and play a larger role in the story, as he is at this point the only character presented by the book who can master travel between worlds.



Section III: Roddy

Section III: Roddy Summary

Section III returns to the Scottish King's retreat, and the King's procession back to his camp. Sir James, a courtier who is also a close friend of Sybil's, suggests that they take the procession to his castle on a nearby hillside. The King agrees, and Roddy and Grundo arrive with the rest of the court. Roddy is struck by the beauty of the courtyard, which has a flowering garden. However, Sybil insists that a ritual should take place there. Everyone holds candles and drinks water from the stream. However, suspicious of her intentions, Roddy and Grundo fall back and avoid drinking the water. Later, as everyone happily goes about their business, it is clear that the water held some kind of enchantment. Roddy comes across Sybil, Sir James, and the new Merlin in conversation about how they enchanted everyone, and how Sybil will have to summon other Powers once she has recovered her strength. Though Roddy tries to tell over adults in the court about what she's heard, nobody believes her, being enchanted.

The next day, Roddy wakes up to find that a message is waiting for her. Her mother's father, who is Welsh, has summoned Roddy to his home in Wales. Roddy tries to tell her mother about the plot at court, but her mother does not listen, instead packing Roddy off with her father's driver. Roddy insists on bringing Grundo with her, and is glad to as her grandfather (Gwyn) is cold and hard to talk to, but seems to have some connection to Grundo. Gwyn quizzes Roddy on what she knows about Wales, and she talks about the Pendragon. He tells her there are many dragons, including the red dragon of Wales and the white of England. He then sends the two children to explore, but tells them not to get on his mare. Grundo tries, but cannot manage to stay mounted. Later, Roddy tries to tell her grandfather about the plot, and he believes her. He is not surprised, either, but disappointed; he says that the coming events will make him vulnerable.

Section III: Roddy Analysis

Section III presents not only further complications to the earlier events, but also the possibility of their resolution after some struggle. The unpleasant character of Sybil is shown to be truly conniving and dangerous as she enchants the entire court, and the replacement of the Old Merlin is proven not to be accidental but rather of her own doing. However, the problem this presents is obvious immediately: nobody will believe that it is true. For a moment, it looks as though the two children (one of whose magic is "backwards") will have to work on their own to fix things, which is nearly impossible. The possibility of resolution comes in the form of the mysterious Gwyn. In this book, no element is introduced that does not have a purpose. Gwyn has his own role in the magic of the Islands, along with his mare. The dragons will also prove crucial to the plot as it develops.



Section IV: Nick

Section IV: Nick Summary

At the beginning of this section, Nick wonders if Romanov was sent by his former world to make him rule, though he has relinquished the throne in favor of his half-brother. However, he quickly has to wake up and go to dinner with the other guards. There, they are curious, as the guard who was supposed to arrive was named Maurice. Nick makes up a lie that Maurice is his last name. On his way to the bathroom, he overhears a conversation that leads him to believe that his presence has been detected as wrong by the training academy, and he knows he has to run. When he leaves the restaurant and sprints through the woods, he falls down the side of a cliff.

In Chapter 2, Nick stays down, hoping the group will not see him and he can escape. Unsure of what to do, he decides to go find Romanov. On his way, he comes across an old drunk, who says that Nick is the third person he has found on his way, and if he helps Nick, he will be able to escape the forest. Nick asks for some light, and the drunk gives him witchlight, a flame that is hard to extinguish. Nick learns how to keep it going on his own, and goes on his way. There, he is summoned by Roddy, who he sees as though in a vision. She tries to explain about the conspiracy, but Nick doesn't understand anything about the Merlin, thinking she is referring to King Arthur's Merlin, but says that he will try to help her all the same.

Section IV: Nick Analysis

Section IV is important in that it shows the two narrators coming together for the first time, and gives an inkling of how Nick may be relevant to Roddy's story. As the story stays with Nick's narrative for greater lengths of time, the reader comes to learn and understand aspects of Blest along with him, as everyone is new to the world. Things that Roddy might take for granted are new to Nick, and subsequently for the reader as well.

In addition, this section makes earlier conflicts more complex, as Nick will somehow have to escape from Blest; as he looks for Romanov; as he must find his own three people to help; and as he tries not to get caught by the guards he foiled earlier. The sense of danger therefore increases. Also, though the reader may understand the world better at this point, the presence of various elements, such as Nick's journey to Blest, Romanov's presence, and the connection between Nick and Roddy, remain mysterious.



Section V: Roddy

Section V: Roddy Summary

In Roddy's life, the weather is getting hotter and hotter, even in Wales. Gwyn gives her and Grundo a map of the nearby village, and they go to explore. Mostly, they just find abandoned buildings. When Roddy splits off on her own, however, she finds the hut that used to belong to a witch. She feels the spirit of the witch, who communicates with her. Through this exchange, Roddy comes to understand that the witch had been scorned and even hurt by her community when she was alive, but nevertheless gained a huge volume of knowledge. She has been waiting decades to share her knowledge with the right person, for witches are required to pass on their knowledge. Therefore, she gives it to Roddy. As Roddy later explains to Grundo, it is not as though she knows everything all at once, but rather can search for the information in her mind and find it there.

Chapter 2 describes a dream of Roddy's, in which her grandfather is summoned against his will to the court, where he has to appear in front of Sybil, Sir James, and the new Merlin, who keep talking about Gwyn as though he is not like them; they refer to him as "it" and imply they will need him to do their work. He says that they can only summon him three times, but leaves bloody skulls in his wake, as he is so displeased at being used by them. This makes Sybil happy, though, as she thinks it shows their real power.

Roddy wakes up in Chapter 3 to find that her grandfather is truly gone. Terrified, she uses her new knowledge to figure out who can help her now, and decides that she will call on the Little People in the hills. Outside, she calls them, and one emerges from the hill, impressed that she is speaking in their old language, but insists on addressing her in English. He tells her to use the "outside path" first, but then to raise the land if necessary, though the latter way is dangerous as it will tear up the roots of magic in the land.

In Chapter 4, Roddy decides to follow the Little Person's advice, and goes to try to summon a wizard on the outside path, but only gets Nick, who of course has no powers and is not really helpful. By the time she returns home, Gwyn is back, but she tells him that they should return to the King's Progress. When she and Grundo return to the castle, however, nobody is there except for an unhelpful butler.

Section V: Roddy Analysis

Section V is important structurally as it is the first longer section, divided into more than two sections. In addition, it raises the stakes by placing Gwyn, the only adult helper the children had, under the command of Sybil and her cronies. It also presents ways for Roddy to help get the world out of its predicament; however, the first option doesn't seem to work, conjuring only Roddy, and the second option seems unnecessarily dangerous.



Roddy has also been given a gift that will help her immensely on her way: the old witch's powers and knowledge. This immediately useful as she summons the Little Person, and will prove to be of great use as she continues.

The section finally works to establish the characters' personalities even more. In times of strife, Roddy takes charge and does all she can, while Grundo gets upset that he can do so little in comparison. Gwyn is irate at being used for another's purposes. Finally, Roddy's courage and individuality come through as she tells her grandfather that they must go back to the Progress.



Section VI: Nick

Section VI: Nick Summary

Still on his quest to find Romanov, Nick ends up in another world, chased by the guards. There, he thinks he spots Romanov at an arcade, but is mistaken and quickly arrested for vagrancy, though he is half asleep and has a hard time defending himself. He goes to eat in the canteen, but soon decides to escape, and comes up with a plan in Chapter 2. Meeting some of the workers of the airfield, he stays on the stairs until one of the little girls tells him the way is clear. He talks with the people who work in textiles for a short time, and they help him get back to the arcade. There, he tries to get into Romanov's world. In doing so, he finds an elephant who is trapped. She is called Mini, and he helps her to get free. In Chapter 3, he gets them out of the dangerous world into Romanov's world, which seems to be a combination of many different worlds. However, once inside Romanov's house, Nick finds that the wizard is ill. Romanov tells him how to get food for Mini and his goat, and Nick leaves to take care of them. The phone rings, and he answers it to find Romanov's wife on the other end, shrieking her head off. He says that he is just the assistant, and hangs up.

Section VI: Nick Analysis

Like in other sections of the book, Section VI presents a solution that turns out to be flawed. Most of the section sets up Nick's journey to Romanov, providing a strong sense of relief once he actually finds the older wizard. However, Romanov's illness presents some cause for concern, which will later turn out to be well-founded as Romanov becomes nearly fatally ill. Although the telephone call from Romanov's wife seems to be nothing more than an amusing diversion, it is in fact of vital importance, as the reader learns much later that this wife is Sybil.

This section is also important in that it forces Nick to confront some of the dangers he has been running from, as well as some new dangers, such as a radioactive airfield. Again, this setting will prove to be key later on, and the unease that Nick feels here serves as foreshadowing for the troubles that he and others will later face on this same ground.



Section VII: Nick Continued

Section VII: Nick Continued Summary

At the beginning of Section VII, Nick dreams of Romanov, and of salamanders. When he awakes, Romanov's wife is calling again, and this time mistakes Nick for Romanov. Mini, meanwhile, is hungry and eating the gardens, while Romanov is getting even worse. At the same time, the grounds of Romanov's estate seem to be shrinking, which Nick and Mini both notice. At the end of Chapter 1, a flying machine lands on the front lawn.

On guard, Mini protects the front door at the beginning of Chapter 2 as Nick approaches the man, a Prayermaster, and two boys who descend. He asks if they are assassins for him, but they are trying to kill Romanov instead; they used Nick as a means of getting to Romanov, as they followed him through the dangerous world. At this point, the goat appears, along with a new person: Maxwell Hyde. The first group retreats, and Nick invites Hyde in to give him coffee. A Magrid, Hyde turns out to be the same person who gave light to Nick earlier, in the woods.

While Hyde sleeps, Nick finds the Prayermaster dead in the water. The boys, who were mistreated by him, did it. When Hyde awakes, he realizes that Nick has a strong spell on him, making Romanov sick, and has him bathe in salt water to remove it. Later, during a discussion, Nick and Hyde realize that they have Roddy in common.

Section VII: Nick Continued Analysis

Various threads of the novel are tied together in this section, while other, new, problems, are introduced. Nick and the reader finally realize why Romanov has been so progressively ill, as well as why his self-made world has been shrinking. Hyde has come just in time to save him, and to allow him to help the group save the world from the misuse of magic. The connections between the worlds of Roddy and Nick are further strengthened here, through Hyde's presence.

However, new characters present new difficulties. The tension between the Prayermaster and his boys is evident immediately, and though the Prayermaster's assassination attempts are thwarted by the boys themselves, the boys have escaped and will return, later in the book, in important roles.



Section VIII: Roddy

Section VIII: Roddy Summary

Uncertain where she and Grundo can go, having missed the King's Progress, Roddy decides to take them to her mother's relatives at Dimber. There, she meets Judith her aunt, and Heddy her grandmother, who refuses to call her Roddy. Roddy finds them unnecessarily vulgar, and especially does not get along with Heddy.

In Chapter 2, the family and Grundo have tea, with Judith's daughters, twin girls who make fun of Grundo for being a boy in their house. Normally, the house at Dimber is occupied by only three women of the family, and cannot host men for very long. The women show Roddy the family regalia, which is a collection of jewels and objects used in magic. Meanwhile, the annoying twins are arguing over who will stay at Dimber once they are old enough to count as the third woman.

In Chapter 3, nobody can reach Hyde in London. Roddy finally cracks and tells off the twins, before she alone sees a woman floating through the garden, talking about how the land must be anchored but is in peril. Later, Roddy is awoken by a variety of creatures who have been trapped in the regalia. Grundo, who was spying earlier, noticed that the spirits were trapped in the objects against their will. In this chapter, the spirits ask Roddy if they are really enslaved. After a long discussion, she helps them come up with a compromise, to be asked for permission to be used, and so on. However, in Chapter 4, Heddy reacts very badly to this compromise, and decides to ship Roddy off to the Lady of Governance.

When Judith and Roddy arrive there, Judith realizes that her twins have had her under a spell for years to overlook their bad behavior, and immediately turns on them and goes away, leaving Roddy and Grundo with the lady. Roddy tries to explain the Merlin conspiracy, but the Lady refuses to believe it, saying that the Merlin by definition could only be good. They finally call Hyde, and Roddy and Grundo go to stay with his wife, Dora, in London.

Section VIII: Roddy Analysis

Section VIII reinforces the power of heredity, while also showing how different families can be. More importantly, however, it shows how difficult it is for Roddy and Grundo to convince any adult of the real conspiracy threatening their world. Even the powerful Lady of Governance does not see how much danger they are in.

The introduction of the Lady also reinforces the power of women in the story. While many traditional magical tales may give preference to the male perspective, "The Merlin Conspiracy" is careful to balance the powers, not just having the Merlin, but also giving him a female counterpart, who is not found in traditional myth.



Finally, this section reinforces Roddy's sense of justice, as she must decide what to do with the spirits, and how to advise them. Importantly, though she deals with the matter judiciously, she is not the one who realizes that they are trapped, but rather Grundo. This is another hint that he is not as simple as he seems, and portends well for his ultimate (though as of yet unknown) future as the Merlin.



Section IX: Nick

Section IX: Nick Summary

In the first chapter of this section, Maxwell Hyde and Nick return to the "real" world to check in with Nick's father, who gives the boy permission to go with Hyde to the Islands of Blest. There, Nick is astonished to see London, but a different London from the one that he knows, with different passageways, monuments, and so on. They go to Hyde's house, where he meets Hyde's daughter, Dora, and her son, Toby. Nick tries to understand the different geography of the city, as well as the different history the country has. Meanwhile, he has magic lessons with Hyde, and notices transparent creatures crawling about the house.

In Chapter 2, Nick and Toby go exploring London, and come home to find Romanov's goat in the garden. They go inside and have dinner, playing games and watching the television. On the television, however, the news is covering a supposed dispute between the King and some of his wizards. Hyde is more concerned with Dora, at the moment, who has been collecting salamanders for her magical circle. These animals are very dangerous, and Hyde must find out who has supplied them.

In Chapter 3, Nick accompanies Hyde to the homes of the others who have salamanders, and go back home with them. However, they can't call the police, as the police won't be able to see the largely invisible creatures. Nick has a good handle of them, though, and soothes the scared animals.

Therefore, in Chapter 4, there are salamanders everywhere. Not by chance, fires are springing up all over the country, as the flammable creatures have escaped from various places. Hyde takes Nick to a man called Jerome, who is Toby's father and has apparently been supplying them. Pulling Nick aside, Jerome offers him a part in the "uprising." Later, Nick discovers the White Dragon of England, which he takes for a fossil at first, but does not raise him. Finally, the section ends with Gwyn coming against his will to take Hyde with him.

Section IX: Nick Analysis

Section IX is notable for several things: the juxtaposition of two worlds, the profundity of the damage Sybil has brought, and revelations about Gwyn. In the first place, Nick's journey between the two worlds first takes the reader back to a recognizable reality before plunging again into the world of Blest, though this time into the city of London. The changes to the city are interesting to note, as they show the profound effects history and especially different histories can have on the experience of a place.

Secondly, Sybil's damage is beginning to show in the lives of everyday people in Section IX. Here, this is evident not only through the uprisings reported on the news and the escaped salamanders, but also by Jerome's part in the uprising. He is not one of the



central members of the original plot, and therefore demonstrates that the magic is working to recruit others to turn against the King.

Finally, the plot thickens when one of the only helpful adults, Hyde, is taken away. The fact that Gwyn comes, and that Dora recognizes him as Death, clarifies some of the mystery surrounding his earlier actions. The book never entirely states that Gwyn is or isn't Death himself, but rather that he is one of the Powers, who can be controlled only to a certain extent.



Section X: Roddy and Nick

Section X: Roddy and Nick Summary

In the first of the "blended" sections, Roddy begins Chapter 1 by describing the Lady's help in sending her and Grundo to London to see Maxwell Hyde. The Lady puts them in the hands of Salisbury, the personification of that city, who hands them over to Sarum to take them to London. Reinforcing Nick's narrative, they find a salamander in the car. Once the group arrives in London, however, they find that London too is personified, and does not want to let them in. The group spends a good amount of time trying to convince London, and is finally allowed to enter. However, once they get to Maxwell Hyde's house, they realize the reason for the delay: London would not let them enter until Gwyn had taken Hyde.

In Chapter 2, Nick mostly comments on Roddy's presence in the house, and how, though he seems to have a fondness for her, her personality can sometimes be too strong. This is particularly apparent in terms of Grundo, who she seems to be obsessed with, and on whose behalf she can sometimes become overbearing.

In Chapter 3, Roddy once again takes over the narrative and tries to call her father. However, she does not reach him, and instead gets Alicia, who tells her that her family is all gone. Panicked, Roddy calls the Lady only to find that Salisbury answers the phone, and tells her that the Lady has been removed, just as Maxwell Hyde has been. However, Nick, who is meditating, predicts that Hyde is still alive.

In Chapter 4, narrated by Nick, the two twins show up as Judith and Heddy have both disappeared as well. Deciding that they need to find Romanov, Nick and Roddy use the goat to try to get back to him.

Section X: Roddy and Nick Analysis

Section X is important on two levels, structural and narrative. Structurally, this is the first time that Nick and Roddy show up in the same Section, just as it is the first time that they are literally in the same place in real life. This emphasizes their growing affinity for one another (despite some annoyances), their growing similarity, and the importance of teamwork as they forge ahead. Moreover, it reinforces the close links between structure and plot that appear throughout the book.

Narratively, this section is important as it drives the characters to a crisis point: all of the main, powerful adults have disappeared, seemingly leaving the children on their own. Now, left to their own resources, they are truly at the book's climax.



Section XI: Roddy and Nick

Section XI: Roddy and Nick Summary

This long section is broken down into six medium-to-short chapters. In Chapter 1, Helga, the goat, takes Roddy, Nick, and the twins to go find Romanov. However, the goat misleads them and takes them to places where they might find Maxwell Hyde instead. In Chapter 2, however, they are back on track and arrive in Romanov's world to find Mini and Romanov. Helga goes into labor, being pregnant without any of them having noticing. In this chapter, Romanov explains that Grundo has had Roddy under a spell that requires her to look after him, and has had since they were very small. He also explains that Sybil is his ex-wife. Romanov does not just talk, but also listens to the tale that the children have. Hearing Roddy's version, he reprimands her for not taking the advice of the Little Person right away and raising the earth. Chapter 3 simply recounts, from Roddy's point of view, how badly she feels about the spell Grundo had on her, and how she is not actually a good person after all.

In Chapter 4, Nick decides they should go back to the Arcade World, but this time with Romanov. When they arrive there, in Chapter 5, they find a host of magicians, including Roddy's close family members and other members of the court, who have been bound up and cannot do anything. They also find the REAL new Merlin, who has been trapped this entire time and replaced by an imposter. Using spells that the Hurt Witch gave her, Roddy works on unbinding everyone. Meanwhile, in Chapter 6, Nick talks to a man called Joel, who is in charge of the operation, and finds that he is one of the boys who was with the Prayermaster. However, Joel does not recognize him, and Nick quickly talks his way out of the blunder.

Section XI: Roddy and Nick Analysis

Events begin to resolve in this section. Notably, it is with the help of an adult that Roddy and Nick can free the wizards and witches, though they themselves are so powerful. They still need the aid of Romanov, who as a free agent - and a hard one to track down - has escaped the fate of his peers. Earlier foreshadowing is satisfied in this section, as there is finally a use for the goat (whose kids reinforce the theme of heredity), Sybil is revealed as Romanov's wife, Grundo's spell comes to light, and so on. Importantly, the characters all make choices that help to decide the fate of the world. Roddy is able to use the knowledge that she gained from the Hurt Witch to set the trapped magicians free.



Section XII: Roddy and Nick

Section XII: Roddy and Nick Summary

At the beginning of Chapter 1, Roddy is continuing with her unbinding and is bothered both by the twins and worried about Nick's confrontation with Joel. Therefore, she sends the twins over to Joel. Later, when they are arguing, Romanov explains that neither one of them has to live at home, and they can make their own choices in life. After the unbinding, Roddy knows they must go to a place of power to set the rest of the magical interference right; Dora, unbound, says that she will drive them to one.

In Chapter 2, Roddy writes that Nick has asked her to take over. She describes how Dora bypassed the closest place of power and is taking them to Stonehenge. Nick's narration then returns, and describes calling the White Dragon to come help them. However, he has not come by the beginning of Chapter 4, which Roddy narrates. They arrive into Alicia's company, and takes them up to see the false Merlin, who is the other boy who was with the Prayermaster in Romanov's yard. He calls Nick a sacrifice, along with the salamanders he has summoned as well. Prince Edmund, who is present, balks at the sacrifice, though it will mean he ascends to the throne, but the group, including the false Merlin, threatens him that he has many brothers who would take his place. At that moment, however, Roddy summons the earth to rise into a vortex, into which the cities go loose. The woman she saw in the garden comes and thanks her, as the spirit of the land. Meanwhile, the White Dragon arrives and wreaks havoc. Panicked, Sybil calls Gwyn, but it is the fourth time she has called him, and he takes her instead. Finally, the dragon sets the land back into place, but with a twist that Nick describes as a "90 degree difference."

In the third and final chapter, Grundo's magic works perfectly in this new world, and he is in line to become the next Merlin, while Mrs. Candace (the Lady of Governance) thinks Roddy should be her successor. Romanov agrees to take Nick home with him. They all first spend one month with Maxwell Hyde, though, which is when they have been writing this book.

Section XII: Roddy and Nick Analysis

This final section ties up all of the loose ends from earlier. The use of everything, from binding to salamanders, becomes clear, as well as the presence of the Prayermaster's boys, now grown up (due to the time difference in different worlds, they are ten years older now).

Because of the satisfactory use of everyone's magic together, things are happily resolved, with the two protagonists, and Grundo, set up for some of the most important and desirable positions in the country (or, in Nick's case, between worlds).



Characters

Nick

Once the heir to the throne of an alternate universe, Nick is happily settled with an adoptive father at the beginning of the book, and seems to desire no more than normalcy. After all, he is the one who renounced his throne in favor of his half-brother. When accompanying his adoptive father to a writing conference, though, Nick is captured by workers in Blest and forced to take part in the various escapades that this involves him in. Though none of the work he has to do was his choice, he takes it on admirably and stoically. He is brave, but not as carelessly so as Roddy can be. In comparison to Roddy, he is more level-headed and better at making plans, which helps him to escape from various dangers and traps he encounters along the way. He is also caring, as he looks after Mini and the goat, as well as astute: he realizes that there is something wrong between Grundo and Roddy almost from the beginning. Though the book does not dwell on his attraction to Roddy, he clearly admires her and thinks of her as close to being his "dream girl," falling in love with her at first sight. At the end of the novel, Nick goes to live with Romanov. He wants to be a "free operator," and hopes to learn how to do this from the elder wizard, with whom he has a strong connection that penetrates the book.

Roddy

Though "Roddy" may seem to be an unusual name for a girl, it comes from a longer version: Arianrhod Hyde. The daughter of two court wizards, Roddy does not realize how important her lineage is. On one side, her grandfather is Gwyn, who controls and sometimes embodies death; on the other, it is Maxwell Hyde, a kind of inter-world detective. From this heritage, Roddy has inherited a curiosity, a strong sense of right and wrong, and a bit of a temper. She can often be single-minded in her pursuits, and doesn't have patience for those who can't help her. For example, she dismisses Nick after summoning him, as soon as she realizes that he can't help her set things right. However, Roddy is not invulnerable herself. As the book goes on, it emerges that Grundo has had her under an enchantment since they were three years old, requiring her to look after him, for he is afraid that nobody else will. This combination of vulnerability and strength allows Roddy to help set things right in the kingdom, especially with Nick's help. Her fate is to become the next Lady of Governance, the female version of the Merlin who looks after the proper use of magic in the islands.

Grundo

The son of Sybil (and, it later turns out, Romanov) and Alicia's brother, Grundo is mostly ignored in court circles, as his magic tends to come out "sideways," almost a magical version of dyslexia. This makes him sensitive and overlooked by most people, except



for Roddy. Of course, it emerges that he has had a charm on her to make her look after him. Nevertheless, he is very loyal to her and accompanies her on her many adventures around the kingdom. His affinity for Gwyn is the first sign of his true powers, which really only emerge after the magic of the country has been turned around and his coincides with it. However, he can be very bitter about his lack of magic, and gets very upset when Roddy ignores him. Despite all of this, he is good-hearted, and at the end of the novel is in line to become the next Merlin.

Gwyn

Roddy's grandfather, who lives in Wales. One of the great powers, he can embody death on his mare. Unfortunately, as a power, he can also be summoned by those who know how, which here includes Sybil. Roddy's mother is terrified of him, and Roddy has not met him before the events of the book.

Romanov

A "free operator" who many dislike and many admire. Once married to Sybil, he now has his own estate which he uses as a base to go between worlds.

Sybil

Grundo's mother and the center of the plot to overthrow the King and change the magical powers of the kingdom.

Alicia

Sybil's daughter; Grundo's sister; Roddy's enemy.

Sir James Spenser

A contributor to the plot against the country.

Roddy's Mother

A witch working for the court.

Roddy's Father (Daniel)

The court's Weather Wizard.



Prince Edmund

The Prince of Wales.

Scotch King

The King who the English King goes to meet when the Merlin dies.

Old Merlin

The Merlin who dies at the Kings' meeting.

New Merlin

A young, sensitive man chosen to replace the old Merlin.

Maxwell Hyde

Roddy's other grandfather, and a magical Magrid.

Nick's Dad

His adoptive father; a writer.

Maurice

The guard for whom Nick is mistaken.

Dave, Pierre, and Arnold

Other guards of the Prince of Wales

Rob

Nick's half-brother, now leader of their planet.

Drunk

The man in the woods who gives Nick light.



Hurt Witch

The witch who gives Roddy her knowledge.

Little Person

One of the magical creatures who helps Roddy.

Prayermaster

The evil man who tries to kill Romanov.

Joel and Japeth

The young apprentices of the Prayermaster, who end up killing him.

Mrs. Candace

The Lady of Governance.

Judith

Roddy's aunt.

Heppy

Roddy's maternal grandmother.

Dora

Maxwell Hyde's daughter, Toby's mother, and Roddy's aunt.

Isadora and Ilsabil

The twins; Judith's daughters

Salisbury, Sarum, and London

Personifications of these cities.



Objects/Places

The King's Progress

The procession that the King makes around the Islands of Blest, followed by his entourage.

Nick's World

The everyday world of the reader.

Roddy's World

The magical world of Blest.

Wales

Outside the realm of Blest, a mystical place where Gwyn lives.

Mini

The elephant who Nick saves and who subsequently helps him. Perhaps his "totem animal".

White Dragon

England's dragon, who ends up saving the country.

Weather

Roddy's father's specialty.

Magrid

An inter-world magical peacekeeper.

Waymaster

The practical head of logistics for the King's Progress.



Islands of Blest

The territory where Roddy lives, and over which the King reins.

Periphery Security

The forces that keep the Prince of Wales protected on all levels.

Goat

An animal belonging to Romanov.

Romanov's Cat

His pet, and perhaps his totem animal.

Sir James's Castle

The place where the King's Progress goes under Sybil's enchantment.

Garden

The location of the enchanted water.

Dragons

Symbols, and real protectors, of each country.

Mare

Gwyn's animal, which he rides when capturing people as a Power.

Gwyn's Home

His estate in Wales.

The Empire

Nick's former home.



Widdershins

An unlucky direction.

Little People

Hill-dwellers, who possess old magic.

Arcade City

The dangerous place where Nick is arrested.

Airfield

The hazardous zone of Arcade City.

Romanov's World

A world created by Romanov in which he can live as he likes.

Prayermasters

Leaders of religion.

Dimber House

The home where Roddy's maternal family lives.



Themes

Magic

Magic, and its proper use, is the dominant theme of "The Merlin Conspiracy". As such, it touches upon many smaller themes, as well. Through the exploration of magic, the book leads to question of justice, of power, and of balance. The magical world, the first the reader sees, is immediately thrown into relief by being shown in comparison to the everyday world the reader is already used to. However, as the book continues, the reader sees a variety of worlds, all of which have magic: even when it is not necessarily apparent. Importantly, magic is not simply something with which one must be born, but also something that one can learn, as Nick learns from Hyde, and something that one can master, as Roddy masters the Hurt Witch's knowledge. Moreover, there are different forms of magic, which correspond to different talents that people in our world actually do have. Roddy's father is in charge of weather, Sybil is in charge of the earth, and Roddy picks up a store of botanical knowledge, which she can apply to many different challenges that she faces.

However, the balance of magic is equally important, as is regulating its power for the purposes of justice. This is reflected in the fact that there are two heads of magic, in charge of controlling it: the Merlin and the Lady of Balance. This balance of powers can be read as a metaphor for the real world, in which one power, group, or faction must never be allowed to dominate to the detriment of others.

Heredity

In a book that uses foreshadowing heavily, it is not surprising that heredity proves to be important, as the fates of characters can be seen or inferred from various elements in their family's pasts. Roddy, for example, is descended from Gwyn and Heddy, and from Maxwell and Dora, a combination of the fearsome and powerful, the silly and domestic, and everything in-between. However, she begins the book ignorant of her roots, which some characters make passing reference to. Likewise, it is important to see that Grundo must have some kind of important power given the power of his mother, Sybil. This is even more apparent when the reader learns that his father is Romanov, an extremely powerful wizard, who also balances some of Sybil's intensity and evil-doing. The book reveals these familial relationships slowly, often as surprises, and leaves the question of the next generation (a possible alliance between Nick and Roddy) in question.

However, as with magic, the book reinforces the point that it is not simply what you are born with, or whom you are born to, that matters, but also what you do with it. This can be seen most clearly in Roddy's encounter with the Hurt Witch. Though she gains a vast amount of knowledge, she has to think about how to apply it, when to apply it, and what methods are best for specific situations. Therefore, hard work and cleverness are equally valued, though less emphasized, throughout the book.



Good versus Evil

The interplay between magic and heredity leads to larger questions, and most importantly the question of good versus evil. The book does not question so much what is good and what is evil, as it is for young readers and not overly concerned with such heavy philosophy. However, it does show the power of good over evil, and the struggles that accompany the quest for good and the denunciation and eradication of evil. As with the other themes, the question of balance is of utmost importance here, and what is "good" is often that which is balanced. Interestingly, though, the characters must resort to drastic remedies, such as raising the earth and calling upon dragons, in order to restore this balance, showing exactly how nefarious the evil worked by Sybil and her cronies is.

The book's exploration of good versus evil also complicates the earlier theme of magic, by showing that magic in and of itself has no "charge": it can be positive, negative, or neutral, depending on who use using it. Because of this, the power of individual personalities and choices comes into play, making the theme applicable to the real world as well as the magical world inside the narrative.



Style

Point of View

The point of view in "The Merlin Conspiracy" alternates between two characters in the first person: Roddy and Nick. This not only provides two perspectives on some of the same events, such as when Roddy summons Nick in the forest, but also supports the theme of balance that the book promotes in nearly every plot line. Roddy and Nick balance each other in important ways, as she is more impetuous and powerful, while he has a cooler head on his shoulders but is equally clever. They are reliable narrators, as can be seen by their reinforcement of the others' accounts of the situation. The fact that many other characters do not believe either of them is particularly important, as they believe each other and so convince the reader.

Structurally, the point of views become increasingly interwoven as the book continues, which also makes the narratives more self-conscious and self-referential. At the end of the book, the reader learns that this is because Maxwell Hyde has suggested they write their own accounts of the events, which is the book the reader now holds.

Setting

The setting of "The Merlin Conspiracy" is so rich that it might easily overpower the events of the story, and yet simply reinforces them. The setting alternates between two worlds: our own, and the world of the Islands of Blest. However, the narrative implies that there are other worlds, and briefly takes the reader to some of them, such as Romanov's world, while mentioning others in passing, such as the Empire that Nick refused to rule. The juxtaposition of these various worlds gives the reader perspective on the events happening in Blest, and the eventual consequences for all worlds should Sybil's plans come to pass. The worlds have similarities, and yet important differences in history have led to various differences in geography and culture.

Several cultural references suggest that the book is set in the present day. While some technologies, such as Gwyn's car, imply that the events could take place any time after the beginning of the twentieth century, other references, such as Roddy's mother using a laptop, make the setting definitively more current.

Language and Meaning

The implications of language and meaning vary greatly, depending on who is narrating at the time. Roddy's language is far more emotional, and she uses complex words and phrasings to express sometimes simple thoughts. In addition, her dialogue is quite colorful, and often uses what appear to be curse words in her world. On the other hand, Nick's narration is more straightforward and solid, and usually simpler to follow. His great complications come when he is confused by events, as he often is; however, he



usually speaks as simply and concisely as possible. This juxtaposition of word choice and language shows the balance that the two characters create, and demonstrates another way in which it must be necessary for them to meet up to be able to work productively. Though they are at first antagonistic, the two characters become more and more alike as the book goes on, and this is visible in the structure of the book, as well.

Overall, the book does not underestimate the power of words, which are in themselves often the most important magical ingredients. As Roddy notes at one point, the important thing about magic is the words themselves; everything else simply serves to accentuate or amplify the power of the language. Therefore, the pairing of Roddy and Nick's language should not be underestimated.

American readers should also note that the characters are British and therefore often use British terms, such as "quid" for pound (currency) or "lorry" for truck.

Structure

The structure of the book mirrors the development of Nick and Roddy's collaboration, as well as the complexities of the challenges they face together. It begins with a simple alternation between Roddy's point of view and Nick's, taking the reader back and forth between different worlds. However, as the book continues, the narrative sometimes deviates from this structure, as Nick takes two sections in a row, as some sections blend both voices, and so on.

Moreover, the sections become longer as the events become more complex. While the early sections start out with simply two chapters each, they soon evolve by the middle of the book to contain four or more chapters. This allows for a deeper understanding of each character's motives and rationales, as well as demonstrating the complex nature of the events and magical undertakings the children are trying to prevent. Each chapter, therefore, presents a variety of obstacles stemming from the very beginning of the book, and further complicates their resolution through various means. It is only once Roddy and Nick's narratives have been wound together, ironically, that the obstacles themselves can be unwound - or literally "unbound," as Roddy describes her freeing of the magical people.



Quotes

Blame is - where blame lies - blame rests - where dragon flies. (Section 1, Chapter 2, p. 27)

"I owe you nothing," he said. "I was interested to know why someone thought you worth eliminating, that's all. And I don't think you are." (Section 2, Chapter 2, p. 56)

I am about to become vulnerable, in a way I very much resent, and will be able to do nothing directly for a while. (Section 3, Chapter 2, p. 91)

"Oh, good," she said. "You're a wizard. I asked for a wizard particularly." (Section 4, Chapter 2, p. 118)

"We've REAL power to draw on now!" I heard Sybil say. (Section 5, Chapter 2, p. 142)

He looked more than just a bit tired to me. He looked ill. (Section 6, Chapter 3, p. 202-3)

I was about to point out to you, my lad, that you seem to have unfinished business, but his clinches it, I think. What did my granddaughter ask you to do? (Section 7, Chapter 3, p. 252)

This Merlin is very new and young, so new that I haven't met him yet, but he'd be simply incapable of the kind of treason you describe. (Section 8, Chapter 4, p.301)

"He's taken Daddy!" she shrieked. "that was Gwyn ap Nud! He's Lord of the Dead and he's TAKEN DADDY!" (Section 9, Chapter 4, p. 348)

My parents have only been expelled from court, the King's going to abdicated, and Mrs. Candace and the Dimbers have been kidnapped too. (Section 10, Chapter 3, p. 375)

. . . I didn't know any more than that. It was hopeless. (Section 11, Chapter 6, p. 425)

And it has taken me the entire month to write everything down, but I think I've finished now. . . (Section 12, Chapter 3, p. 471)



Topics for Discussion

The differentiation of the two worlds, Roddy's and Nick's, plays an important role in the book. Beyond magic, in what ways are they the same? Different?

The two main boys in the book, Nick and Grundo, both become extremely important to Roddy. Compare and contrast them, particularly in regards to their relationships with Roddy.

At the end of the book, each young character seems to have a future role selected for them. In your opinion, are these roles fitting, given the events of the book and the characters' personalities? Why or why not?

In Section 11, Romanov scolds Roddy for not listening to the Little Person right away. Given her personality and knowledge at that time, did she make the right decision? Support your claim with textual evidence.

Roddy's sense of justice evolves over the book. Discuss the Dimber regalia in relationship to Roddy's developing character. Did she make a fair decision? How might this affect her future career?

Adult help is of vital importance, but often missing, throughout the book. In terms of this help and of heredity, compare and contrast Maxwell Hyde and Gwyn of Wales. How do the characters function in the book, and are they at all similar?

Compare Roddy's position at the beginning of the book to her position at the end. Is her transformation the result of outside forces or her own personal choices - or perhaps a combination of the two? Support your opinion with at least three examples from the text.