

A Reign of Steel Study Guide

A Reign of Steel by Morgan Rice

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



Contents

A Reign of Steel Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1-7.....	4
Chapters 8-14.....	8
Chapters 15-21.....	9
Chapters 22-28.....	12
Chapters 29-33.....	15
Characters.....	17
Symbols and Symbolism.....	20
Settings.....	21
Themes and Motifs.....	23
Styles.....	25
Quotes.....	26



Plot Summary

A Reign of Steel is a fantasy novel by Morgan Rice. The novel is the eleventh installment in her Sorcerer's Ring series. The story begins immediately where the previous concluded. King's Court is under attack by the forces of McCloud, while Reece has had his revenge on Tirus for killing Serese. Gwendolyn realizes quickly that her efforts at peace with the McClouds and the Upper Isles have failed miserably, because her opponents, enemies, and certain allies view her desire for peace as weakness, of which they quickly take advantage. Gwendolyn decides that she must have a reign of steel at the urging of Argon. She resolves to abandon King's Court to the evil forces of Romulus, guided by Gwendolyn's traitorous sister, Luanda. Gwendolyn brings her people and her military to the Upper Isles by way of boat, using them to reinforce Reece and her naval fleet already battling Tirus's men. A victory is had by Gwendolyn's forces, and they prepare for the coming invasion by Romulus's legions and dragons, which appear on the horizon at the end of the novel. Gwendolyn sets her infant son Guawayne adrift in a small boat, praying that God will keep him safe and give him a chance at life.



Chapters 1-7

Summary

Chapter 1

Reece has his revenge on Tirus for Selese's death. After killing Tirus, he feels both satisfied and numb. In the great hall, Reece realizes that it is only he, Matus, and Srog against dozens of Upper Islander troops. Reece knows he will die; but, he is determined to take out as many enemy soldiers as possible before his death. Stara appears from out of nowhere. Using a bow and arrow, she breaks the rope that holds the massive chandelier over the room, causing the chandelier to crash down and crush many of the soldiers beneath. More men pour into the room, blocking all exits. Reece, Matus, Srog, and Stara fight their way through the enemy soldiers up to the wooden bleachers that line the room. There, they all hold onto the rope which suspends another chandelier. Stara cuts the rope with a sword. Hanging high over the room, the four swing until they are able to crash through a stained glass window to escape.

Chapter 2

Godfrey and a few dozen soldiers of average caliber defend a shell of a city against the forces of McCloud. Thousands of McCloud soldiers are charging the walls of the city, and Godfrey and his men do their best to defend the walls. McCloud's soldiers begin to scale the walls. Hand-to-hand combat ensues. Godfrey is knocked down. Before passing out, he sees an unstoppable stream of McClouds pouring into King's Court.

Elden, Conven, and O'Connor stand before the new Legion recruits which Thorgrinson has left them to oversee. The recruits who are training with horses are very young. Merek points out to Elden that King's Court is on fire. Black smoke can be seen coming from the direction of the city. It is apparent that a professional enemy army has invaded on Pilgrimage Day when most of the people and the soldiers are away. Elden leads the Legion recruits, about a hundred or so, on horseback to defend the city. A battle ensues. Just as things look bleak, over a thousand elite Silver knights led by Kendrick come driving toward the city, slamming into the McCloud troops.

Chapter 3

Luanda prepares to leave the Ring to bring down the Shield, while just before her are Romulus and a million Empire soldiers. Luanda tells Romulus that her sister has betrayed her and now she will betray her sister. Though Luanda hopes Romulus will kill her, he is impressed with her. He kisses her, smacks her, and then orders her put in chains and kept close to him. Romulus then orders his men to invade. They fly above the Canyon to do so.

Chapter 4



Alistair lays in the arms of Erec. As she and Erec travel to his homeland in the Southern Isles to marry, Alistair thinks of her brother Thorgrinson, who is out searching for their mother. Erec's father is king, but he is dying. Eric tells Alistair that his sister is territorial and his younger brother Thorgrinson is competitive. Thorgrinson sees Erec as standing in his way. Erec's mother, however, will love Alistair. On the ship, a gruff sailor throws the guts of a simka fish overboard, to poison other fish, so he can watch them die. This unsettles Alistair. Erec is then tied up in a net, while the entire crew of the ship seeks to have their way with Alistair.

Chapter 5

Thorgrinson finds his father Andronicus on the field of battle. Thorgrinson accidentally kills him by splitting him in two. Thorgrinson then travels to his mother's castle in the Land of the Druids on the back of Mycoples. The Land is protected by a force field, so Thorgrinson must enter alone.

Chapter 6

Queen Gwendolyn is among those evacuated from the City of King's Court. She is pleased with how the evacuation is going. Her people must cross the Western Crossing of the Canyon to the shores of Tartuvian and use her fleet to get to safety in the Upper Isles. They are fleeing because of the McCloud invasion and the prophecies by Argon that the Ring will fall to the enemy. Gwendolyn hopes that Thorgrin will marry her and that he will find his mother. In the distance, she sees the flag of the MacGils being raised over King's Court. Steffen and Aberthol believe they have won and that they must celebrate. The people want to turn back, but Gwendolyn opposes this. Still, hundreds turn back. She tells Steffen not to stop the ones who turn back. Ultimately, she heads back with them.

A short time later, Gwendolyn's brother Kendrick arrives to tell her of the victory. Godfrey, her younger brother, also arrives, flushed with victory. Gwendolyn knows that peaceful overtures to the enemy have led to a surprise attack on the holiest day of the year. Kendrick and his men have captured several McCloud generals and have kept them alive. She orders them killed and their bodies thrown out of the gates. She knows the city must be evacuated, but her brothers and the citizens believe this is not necessary. She worries about whether or not she is overreacting and if the attack was not just a freak occurrence. She prays to God for guidance, and Argon tells her that prayers are a powerful thing. Argon confirms a great darkness is coming. Argon confirms the Ring will be destroyed. Argon explains that approval is an elusive thing. Sometimes, people must be forced. He tells her she will have a Reign of Steel. Argon also confirms she will see Argon again.

Chapter 7

Stara, Reece, Srog, and Matus crash to the ground with shattered glass flying everywhere. They go into a cave in the driving rain. There, they light a small fire and try to dry off. They are safe, but still trapped like prisoners. Stara wonders if Reece will ever



love her again after the death of his bride Selese. The death was orchestrated by her family. She does not feel remorse that her father is dead. Reece tells Stara that she saved his life, and she tells Reece that he saved hers. Reece suggests that they escape to the ships in the harbor, the last McGil territory in the country. Though Srog is injured and wishes to stay behind, Reece will not let him. They decide to give it a try, and Stara feels heartbroken, knowing she no longer has Reece's love.

Analysis

Morgan Rice's eleventh installment in her Sorcerer's Ring series, *A Reign of Steel*, continues where the tenth stopped. The reader is in the midst of two battles. One is for control of King's Court and the other is for Reece to escape the Upper Isles following his assassination of Tirus. Reece was originally sent on a mission by his sister, Queen Gwendolyn, to make peace with Tirus. Instead, Reece kills Tirus because of the death of his wife Serese at Tirus's hands. At the same time, Gwendolyn's city of King's Court has come under attack by enemy forces of the McCloud family on the holiest day of the year for Gwendolyn's people. The assault is met by only a few dozen ordinary caliber troops commanded by Godfrey. Elden and the raw recruits of the legion ride to offer help, and are later joined by the elite Silver Legion knights of the kingdom, who make the difference in battle against the McClouds, defeating them.

Gwendolyn realizes upon her return to King's Court that everything that has happened is her fault. She understands that her attempts at peace with both Tirus and the McClouds have borne no fruit whatsoever. Indeed, her opponents, enemies, and some allies look at Gwendolyn's attempt at peace as an incredible weakness. McCloud exploits this by way of invasion. Tirus exploits this by way of political intrigue and murder of Serese. Romulus exploits Gwendolyn's desire for peace by reorganizing his army and using the traitorous Luanda to invade the Ring across the Canyon. Gwendolyn realizes that, from hereon in, she will need to be strong.

While Gwendolyn struggles with the difficulties that being a leader of men entails, her brother Reece struggles with the loss of his wife Serese. Stara struggles with the loss of Reece's love for her. Stara's father –Tirus –is dead, but she doesn't care. She knows that Tirus was a bad person. There were no real ties of family affection or loyalty between them. While Reece and Stara struggle with their feelings for one another, Thorgrinson struggles with his love of himself. He is in the Land of the Druids, seeking out his mother. His struggle will ultimately be with himself in ways he cannot yet comprehend. From Reece to Stara to Gwendolyn to Thor, it is a time of learning for all.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Gwendolyn decide she needs to be a stronger ruler? Why is she particularly upset by the assault on King's Court?



Discussion Question 2

Do you believe striving for peace is a weakness or a strength? Why? How do Gwendolyn's enemies perceive her desire for peace? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Stara feel no remorse for the death of Tirus, her father? Is she justified in feeling no remorse? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

Vengeance, valiant, chivalry, grotesque, territorial, luminescent, luminescent, adamantly, futile, despondent, beleaguered, elusive, veneer, subterfuge, interminable.

Chapters 8-14



Chapters 15-21

Summary

Chapter 15

As Erec and Alistair are in the lifeboat, Erec wonders what Alistair's newly found powers will mean for her and their life together. Up ahead are the Southern Isles. When they land, Erec's people warmly embrace both Erec and Alistair, welcoming them happily. Erec realizes he must now serve his people, for he is a fine warrior. As they head to the castle, Erec's younger brother Strom greets him warmly. Then, Strom contends that he can beat Erec at sparring and that he may be the better brother for Alistair to choose. Dauphine warmly welcomes Erec, but not Alistair. She turns and walks out because Alistair is a foreigner. Erec's mother happily embraces Alistair, welcoming her. Erec must then go and see his father, who does not have long to live.

Chapter 16

The exodus from King's Court continues. They are headed southwest. The people are unhappier still, and Kendrick reminds Gwendolyn that ruling is not always an easy or a painless thing to do. Kendrick says he trusts her, even if he doesn't always agree with her. Finally, at the crossing, the people shout and rebel and refuse to go—until they see the dragons come screeching through the sky toward them.

Chapter 17

Reece, Strata, Matus, and Srog are treated by doctors on the Queen's ship. Wolfson, the grizzled commander of the Queen's fleet, thanks them for saving them from death by fire. He says he will continue to hold the position near the harbor as ordered by the Queen, until the Queen says otherwise. Reece and Stara later talk. Stara explains she does not hate him for killing her father, but likes him even more now. Reece explains he married Serese because he loved her, though in a different way from Stara, and he had to keep his word to her. Reece blames himself, mainly, for Serese's death.

Chapter 18

Gwendolyn's people now begin fleeing across the bridge for their lives as the dragons swoop down toward the Canyon. Gwendolyn offers her life to God if He will save her people. But suddenly, Ralibar, larger than all the other dragons, comes swooping in, and Romulus's dragons turn their attention to him. Across the bridge, Gwendolyn looks back as Argon makes his way onto the bridge. He is commanding Ralibar, who is fighting the dragons. Ralibar draws the enemy dragons into a light shield generated by Argon, which fries the enemy dragons, but causes Argon to collapse from the effort. Ralibar lifts up Argon and brings him to safety.

Chapter 19



Thor continues on through the Land of the Druids, into the darkness and the wastelands. He realizes he no longer wears armor or wields weapons. Instead, he is dressed in the rags of a peasant. He comes upon thousands of dead Silver Legion knights, including Reece, Elden, and O'Connor. Beneath his feet and the mud move thousands of snakes. Eventually, he comes upon the Destiny Sword, but he cannot remove it from where it has been planted. Suddenly, Andronicus appears, evil and ominous. He engages Thor in a swordfight. Andronicus gains the upper hand and says that he must kill Thor.

Chapter 20

Erec climbs the mountains with Alistair to his father's fort, located on the highest part of the island. Erec's father is bedridden. He is glad to see Erec. He also approves highly of Alistair. The king reminds them that the Southern Isles were once a colony for prisoners and those the people of the Ring did not want. They became a people in their own right. They are friends with the MacGils, now, but most will never consent to defending the Ring. Erec's father reminds him that it is difficult to be king.

Chapter 21

Gwendolyn and her fleet sail out through the rain and stormy weather. She has no idea what kind of reception she will receive from Tirus and the Upper Isles. But news comes by way of an intercepted messenger raven that their brother, Reece, has killed Trius, when Gwendolyn had originally sent Reece to apologize to Tirus. They also know that Romulus will come after them, but Gwendolyn says first, they must find a home. Godfrey, meanwhile, converses with Illepra, who tells him that he will become greater than his father. Then, they kiss. Steffen and Arliss converse as well. She is saddened by all they have left behind and the kiss. Suddenly, a spy attempts to kill Gwendolyn, but Steffen rushes to save her. Kendrick and the others call him a true soldier.

Analysis

Gwendolyn's decision to relocate her people despite their protest soon pays off for her as well as her people. The arrival of Romulus's dragons convinces the people in a heartbeat that their Queen was correct in her decision to flee. The people then voluntarily rush over the bridge to safety, while Argon arrives to put up a shield which blocks the dragons from getting through. This allows Gwendolyn and the others to get to safety, but also severely weakens Argon. Argon is rescued by Ralibar, who goes to pick Argon up off the bridge.

At the same time that this occurs, Erec and Alistair make it to the Southern Isles, to Erec's homeland. His father is dying. His mother is thrilled to see that Erec has brought home a woman to marry. However, his sister Dauphine is not thrilled that Erec desires to marry a foreigner. Erec's father is thrilled with Erec's choice for a bride. He explains to Eric that leadership is never an easy thing to handle. Alistair is determined to stand by Erec no matter what happens in life. Erec's father also reminds him of the history of



their people and that any all-out attempts to defend the Ring may lead to civil war among their own people.

Thor, meanwhile, seeks to confront the demons in himself as he has been instructed to do so by King MacGil. These demons include not only the darkest parts of his life, but the darkest people as well, including his own father. Between Erec, Godfrey, and Thorgrin, the reader understands that in the world of the Ring, sons must always strive to be better than their fathers. Godfrey is told he will be greater than his father; Thor must literally defeat his own father in order to overcome him; and, Erec must become a ruler even wiser and more decisive than his father, for the danger that is befalling the Ring threatens to consume the entire world.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Thor's father present such an obstacle to him?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Dauphine so reluctant to embrace Alistair? Why does she become so opposed to Alistair? Why do Erec's mother and father react differently to Alistair, choosing to embrace her instead?

Discussion Question 3

What is the most pressing concern Gwendolyn has for her people as they travel by boat to the Upper Isles? Why is this?

Vocabulary

Tutelage, impeccable, grizzled, reluctant, vanquish, liege, relishing, monotony.



Chapters 22-28

Summary

Chapter 22

As Andronicus is about to kill Thor, Thor gets out of the way, and is able to lift the Destiny Sword out of the mud. Thor tells his father that sons have the power to choose their fathers, and he does not choose Andronicus. Thor realizes he must overcome his father in his mind, and does not have to actually kill him. Suddenly, he sees a road and a cliff-side castle, and he decides to follow the road, down which he knows his mother waits.

Chapter 23

Erec's mother gives Alistair a tour of the Southern Isles. Alistair feels at home here. She and Erec are to be wed the following day. Weddings occur quickly in the Southern Isles as a matter of superstition. They bathe in the purifying hot springs of the island, where they run into Dauphine, who is not happy to see Alistair. She storms out on them. Bells then ring, which Alistair's mother explains are death bells –and everyone celebrates because in the Southern Isles, death is celebrated.

Chapter 24

Thor heads to his mother's castle. But Thor's father and three brothers confront him. His father attacks him, but Thor forces his mind to accept that his father and brothers are not really there, and they vanish. Thor then comes to face himself, who will not let himself pass. He cannot pass until he conquers himself. Thor is defeated by himself, who says he is still not strong enough to see his mother.

Chapter 25

Commander Wolfson has only about a dozen ships left under his command. Hundreds of Upper Isles troops line the shores, preparing to burn the MacGil fleet. Reece and the others know they need a plan. Reece and Wolfson decide they will attack the shoreline rather than wait to be picked off or overwhelmed by the recently arrived Upper Isles navy. Reece pulls Stara to the deck as an arrow intended for her hits Reece's shoulder instead. Reece yanks out the arrow and puts a makeshift tourniquet onto Reece's shoulder. The ships, run aground, are boarded by enemy soldiers. Reece, Wolfson, and the others light their ships on fire, and then ditch them by diving into the water. Hundreds die. The MacGil troops then wade ashore to fight the other enemy troops. Reece believes he will indeed die.

Chapter 26



Gwendolyn arrives with her fleet to see the battle raging ashore. She decides they will attack the rear of the enemy's closing fleet, and then use ropes and spikes to destroy the ships as they turn to fight. Gwendolyn orders her fleet to full speed. They put in the roped spikes by way of boulders into the water, connecting them to the jetties, and then attack the enemy's rear. As the enemy turns to attack, their ships fall into the trap. With the enemy fleet crippled, Gwendolyn orders her troops into battle on shore.

Chapter 27

Romulus watches enraged as his dragons attempt to get past Argon's shield, but cannot. Luanda explains that Gwendolyn has probably brought her people to the Upper Isles. Romulus then uses dark magic to shatter the shield, and sends his dragons after Gwendolyn, along with half a million men.

Chapter 28

Erec prepares for the contests in which men will challenge him to be king. He will have to face the victors of each of the twelve islands, who will challenge him for the throne. Erec's own brother, Strom, will also be challenging him for the throne. They joust, and Erec knocks his brother out of the saddle. They then engage in hand-to-hand combat. Erec tries to get his brother to listen to reason, to stop the fight, but Strom refuses. Strom is forced to yield. Erec then proceeds to defeat the twelve victors, from one fight to the next. His opponent, Bowyer, nearly beats Erec, but Erec still manages to come out on top by forcing Bowyer to yield. By the end of the day, it is clear that Erec will be king.

Analysis

There are three major battles undertaken in the latter half of the book. One is for control of Tirus's island of the Upper Isles; one is fought by Erec for regency; and, the other is fought by Thor in the Land of the Druids. Gwendolyn's struggle to be a better and decisive leader leads her to be bold and courageous against the enemy fleet confronting Reece and Wolfson and their men on shore. She lays a trap for the enemy fleet, wrecks it, and then orders an amphibious landing so that her troops may reinforce her men already battling on shore. Gwendolyn understands that she is now in a do-or-die situation, that the survival of her people depends on her ability to lead them. They have no home, they are pursued by, and confronting innumerable enemies. Any chance of hope and salvation means finding a new home, and she believes the Upper Isles will give her people such a home.

The battle in which Thor engages is not with any external enemy or threat, but internal. Thor's battle is against himself. He is his own strongest opponent. He must overcome his demons in order to see his mother. It is what his entire journey through the Land of the Druids has come down to. Erec, meanwhile, must participate in the tradition of the Southern Isles to fight victors from the twelve isles in order to retain the throne. Erec manages to do that, having to even fight his brother for control of the throne. He nearly



loses to the victor, Bowyer, but manages to defeat him in the end, sparing Bowyer's life for Bowyer deciding to yield. This will have resounding consequences in the coming chapters as Erec prepares to marry Alistair and assume the throne.

Discussion Question 1

Why must Erec fight for the throne? What is the purpose of this custom?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Strom decide to fight Erec for the throne? What could Strom possibly hope to gain by challenging his brother?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Gwendolyn decide to risk everything in a pitched battle with Tirus's fleet, and his men on shore? What are the consequences if she fails?

Vocabulary

Demarcated, disoriented, flummoxed, flabbergasted, indicative, vulnerable, visage, topography.



Chapters 29-33

Summary

Chapter 29

Gwendolyn, victorious, oversees the hanging of the evil members of Tirus's family, including Falus. She orders the bodies to be left up, so the Upper Islanders know who rules their domain, now. Reece and Stara go for a hike to the highest cliff on the island. Yet, Gwendolyn and the others know that the invasion is coming, as Romulus will most assuredly come after them. They light a mourning candle for Serese and set it down the Stream of Tears. They apologize to each other. Gwendolyn goes to see Argon, protectively watched over by Ralibar. Argon is alive, but weak. Argon tells her the island cannot be saved, and that Thor has his own destiny. He tells her there is nothing left to do but prepare to die.

Chapter 30

Romulus's fleet streams for the Upper Isles. Luanda feels hollow, almost remorseful, rather than satisfied. She begins to hate Romulus. She attempts to kill him, but the blade bounces off his skin. He laughs and tells her that he is invincible for the current moon. Romulus then kills her.

Chapter 31

Thor realizes that he can harness the darkness within him for goodness instead. Thor returns to his mother's castle and demands to be let in. He is finally admitted.

Chapter 32

Alistair dreams of the destruction of homeland in the Ring and of her brother, Thor, and of Erec bleeding from the mouth in a nightmare. The following day, it is time for her wedding. She looks beautiful. She wears her mother-in-law's dress. As she is to be wed, Bowyer suddenly appears to stab Erec in the back, and Alistair holds Erec in her arms as he dies.

Chapter 33

Gwendolyn, standing on the ramparts of Tirus' castle, sees the dragons appearing on the horizon. She orders Steffen to sound the alarm bells. Behind the dragons, Gwendolyn sees the fleet of Romulus. Ralibar flies out to confront the enemy dragons alone, and it impresses Gwendolyn. Hoping that Guwayne will have a chance at life, she sets him adrift in a small boat. She asks God to be with her son.



Analysis

As Morgan Rice's novel *A Reign of Steel* comes to a close, a number of important events occur which will set the stage for the next novel in the series. First, Gwendolyn's strategy and daring add up to a stunning victory for her, her military, and her people as they come to make the Upper Isles their home. She engages in executions of enemies, and she is unforgiving of those who have crossed her. This resolves in the minds of the people that she is a worthy and decisive leader who is not afraid to commit to the sword. This will be especially important given that Romulus's dragons and fleet appear soon afterward on the horizon.

Meanwhile, Reece and Stara come to common ground where they not only honor the memory of Serese, but come to understand there are feelings between them, and that each of them did what they had to do given the circumstances. Meanwhile, Alistair suffers tremendous tragedy as a disgruntled loser murders Erec on their wedding day. This leaves the future of the Southern Isles in dire uncertainty. At the same time, the conclusion of the novel assumes a Biblical parallel, as Gwendolyn returns to her faith in God. As Moses is set down the river for a chance at life, so, too, does Gwendolyn put her infant son Guwayne out to sea in hopes that he might live and escape the coming bloodshed.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Gwendolyn commit to executing her enemies and leaving their bodies on display?

Discussion Question 2

After Gwendolyn speaks with Argon, why does she believe that there is no hope for her people?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Gwendolyn put Guwayne out to sea in a small boat? What parallels are present here?

Vocabulary

Contrite, inscrutable, subservient, luxurious, chided.



Characters

Gwendolyn

Gwendolyn MacGil is Queen of the realm of the Ring, and the daughter of deceased King MacGil. She is the sister of Luanda, Kendrick, and Reece. Gwendolyn also has an infant son named Guwayne, and is in love with Thorgrin. She is young and beautiful. She is loved by her people because she is not a very forceful leader. As such, her desire for peace is perceived and exploited as weakness by her enemies, opponents, and even some allies. She realizes during the repulse of the Pilgrimage Day assault by the forces of McCloud that she can no longer be seen as weak and ineffective. Rather, she resolves to be a strong and decisive leader, forcing her people to do what is best for them by evacuating the city of King's Court for the Upper Isles to escape Romulus.

Gwendolyn frequently turns to her faith in God, her visionary dreams, and the counsel and prophesy of Argon for information on how to handle her reign of steel. Gwendolyn ultimately leads her people and military to victory in a naval and land battle against the forces of Tirus, coming to inhabit his lands. As the novel ends, she and her people prepare for battle with Romulus, and Gwendolyn sets Guwayne out to sea on a boat in the hopes that he will survive and live a happy life.

Reece

Reece MacGil is the brother of Gwendolyn and widower of Serese. Sent to the Upper Isles to make peace with Tirus, Reece instead ignites war by killing Tirus for murdering Serese. He, Srog, Matus, and Stara flee to the safety of the Queen's naval fleet, and engage in the epic final battle between Tirus's forces and Gwendolyn's forces. Reece, who was in love with Stara, begins to repair his relationship with her by the end of the novel.

Stara

Stara is the daughter of Tirus. She is deeply in love with Reece. Following her family's traitorous actions and the murder of Serese, Stara is glad to see that Reece has killed her father. Stara continues to love Reece and saves his life following the assassination of Tirus. She goes on to fight alongside Reece and the forces of Gwendolyn in the epic showdown between her father's forces and Gwendolyn's forces.

Thorgrinson

Thorgrinson (Thor) is a might warrior who has killed his father and is searching for his mother in the Land of the Druids. He is in love with Queen Gwendolyn, but has left her to in order to learn about who he is and what his past has been from his mother. To do



this, Thor must overcome the darkness and his personal demons, all within him, as he proves to be his own greatest enemy. He successfully defeats himself, and prepares to meet his mother at the end of the novel.

Erec

Erec is the crown-prince of the Southern Isles who has gone to train and learn the ways of the warrior in the Ring. There, he has fallen in love with Alistair, and is bringing her back as a bride to his homeland, for his father is dying. Erec is told that he must be a good king, and that he must not attempt to commit to defending the Ring, for the people of the Southern Isles are not all fans of the Ring. Erec later defends the throne against challengers, defeating them all in combat according to Southern Isles customs. But on his wedding day, he is assassinated by a defeated challenger. He dies in the arms of Alistair.

Alistair

Alistair is a native of the Ring and the sister of Thorgrin. She is young, beautiful, and very much in love with Erec, to whom she is engaged to be married. Except for Erec's sister Dauphine, Alistair is welcomed warmly by Erec's family in the Southern Isles. Dauphine opposes her because she is a foreigner. Alistair discovers while under threat of gang-rape that she is actually a sorcerer. She sinks the ship on which she and Erec are traveling, and the two escape in a lifeboat. Alistair later watches as Erec is assassinated on their wedding day. She holds Erec in her arms as he dies.

Steffen

Steffen is an adviser to Queen Gwendolyn who is also capable of fighting. He saves her life from an assassin's blade by killing the assassin while the fleet travels to the Upper Isles. He also apparently begins a relationship with Arliss, as the two end up kissing while en route to the Upper Isles.

Kendrick

Kendrick is the brother of Gwendolyn. He is also the brother of Reece and Luanda. He is the first son of King MacGil, and the people believe he should rule instead of Gwendolyn, though she is older. Kendrick instead publicly proclaims his loyalty to his sister. Kendrick is also the commander of the elite Silver Legion knights who defend the Ring. He and the Silvers carry out the orders of Gwendolyn, from defending the Ring to evacuating its people to invading the Upper Isles. Kendrick remains steadfast beside his sister at the end of the novel.

Romulus

Romulus is the evil ruler of the Empire. With a million men in his army, he is seeking revenge and uses the betrayal of Luanda to ravage the cities of the Ring, killing all he finds before him. He follows after Gwendolyn with dragons and a fleet of ships manned by half-a-million men. He is determined to erase Gwendolyn from the earth. When Luanda attempts to assassinate Romulus, he kills her instead.

Luanda

Luanda is the sister of Gwendolyn, Kendrick, and Reece. Feeling betrayed by Gwendolyn, Luanda betrays Gwendolyn by helping Romulus invade the Ring. She directs Romulus, and gives him information about the movements of her sister. Luanda, however, ultimately comes to feel remorse for her actions, seeing the death and destruction she has caused. She attempts to assassinate Romulus and fails. She is the one killed.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Evacuation

The evacuation is a Biblical reference to the Exodus of the Old Testament of the Bible where Moses leads the persecuted Jews to freedom in the Promised Land. The evacuation of the persecuted people of King's Court, led by Gwendolyn to the Upper Isles for safety and freedom, is strikingly similar to Moses. While Pharaoh followed Moses with a powerful army, Romulus follows Gwendolyn with a powerful army. Moses puts his faith in God, as does Gwendolyn.

Guwayne

Guwayne is set adrift by Gwendolyn in the final pages of the novel for the purpose of giving him a better life and in the hopes that he will survive Romulus's invasion. This mirrors the Biblical account of Moses's mother setting him adrift in the Nile in a basket so that he might have a better life and escape the murder of the firstborn males by Pharaoh. Moses is put in God's hands by his mother. Guwayne is put in God's hands by his mother Gwendolyn.

Spiked ropes

Spiked ropes are large, metal spikes attached to ropes and anchored in the water. They are attached to jetties for use in combat as a trap against enemy naval vessels. Spiked ropes are used with brutal efficacy by Gwendolyn's ships in the battle for the Upper Isles. The spiked ropes are deployed and used to cripple and destroy the fleet of Tirus.

Corpses

Corpses are a convincingly effective symbol in the novel used by Gwendolyn. Accused of being weak and ineffective herself, Gwendolyn commits to a reign of steel. She executes captured enemies both in King's Court and in the Upper Isles. She has their corpses thrown out of King's Court in a symbolic gesture of dominance. In the Upper Isles, she has the corpses of hanged enemies left hanging so that others may see her strength and power and locals will accept that she now rules the Upper Isles.

Swords

Swords are the main choice of weapon for combat by both good and evil alike. Swords are used in battles and to assassinate others. They are carried by nearly all characters in the novel. They are instruments of death and of maintaining peace. They are symbolic of war and are integral to warriors, soldiers, and recruits alike.



Settings

King's Court

King's Court is the capital city of the MacGil lands within the Ring. It is a beautiful and prosperous city of good-intentioned people ruled over by Queen Gwendolyn, and protected by a strong military force including the elite Silver Legion knights, led by Kendrick. King's Court has stood for thousands of years against many enemies, and so its people are reluctant to abandon the city in the face of the evil Romulus. King's Court's gates are left wide open as an insult to Romulus, and Romulus vows to pursue Gwendolyn to the ends of the earth to vanquish her and her people.

Upper Isles

The Upper Isles are a host of island nations located in the cold, stormy northern reaches. The Isles are currently under control of Tirus' family and troops, having risen against Gwendolyn. Gwendolyn decides that the Upper Isles will become the new homeland of her people after their evacuation from King's Court. The Upper Isles become a battleground between Tirus' forces and her own, which ultimately fall under control of Gwendolyn. At the end of the novel, Gwendolyn has established her rule of the Upper Isles, and prepares to defend the place against Romulus's army.

The Southern Isles

The Southern Isles are a chain of a dozen or so islands that comprise a singular nation. Originally founded as a prison colony for the unwanted members of the Ring, the Southern Islanders became a people in their own right. They are warm, friendly, and welcoming people, even to outsiders, though they harbor some distrust of people from the Ring, though they are friendly toward people from the MacGils despite this. The Southern Isles people have various unusual customs, such as allowing people to challenge the heir apparent to the throne when the reigning king dies, and celebrating death rather than being saddened by it.

The Land of the Druids

The Land of the Druids is a magical place inhabited by Thor's mother. The Land of the Druids is a sort of netherworld between Heaven and hell, between the living and the dead. It appears differently to each person who enters, based on their own memories, emotions, feelings, and thoughts, as well as their morality, character, and strengths and weaknesses. Thor travels to the Land of the Druids in order to seek out his mother and learns that he is his own biggest obstacle.



Tirus's Castle

Tirus' Castle is where the novel begins as Reece exacts revenge on Tirus for the death of Serese by killing Tirus. Tirus' castle is manned by hundreds and hundreds of soldiers who do the bidding of Tirus and his family. The castle ultimately becomes the target of Gwendolyn's attack, and she comes to execute members of Tirus' family nearby. She makes Tirus' castle her own and prepares for the coming battle with Romulus and the Empire.



Themes and Motifs

War and Peace

War and Peace are competing themes in the novel *Reign of Steel* by Morgan Rice. Both themes demonstrate their symbiotic nature and the necessity of war sometimes, despite the best intentions and best efforts for peace. War and peace, as themes, revolve primarily around the character of Gwendolyn, as she is the Queen of the MacGil lands and the Ring.

Gwendolyn, as a Queen, is resolved to oversee a reign of peace and prosperity. She makes tremendous efforts to secure peace with Tirus and the McClouds, believing that diplomacy and goodwill will ultimately win the day and avoid a costly and unnecessary war. But her striving for peace is seen as inefficacy and weakness on the part of enemies, opponents, and even allies. Despite her best efforts to secure peace, war is on the minds of others, and this illustrates the sad reality that peace through strength is the only option, as peace through weakness invites disaster.

The McClouds take advantage of Gwendolyn's desire for peace, and the most religious day of the year, to launch a surprise attack on King's Court which is only at the last moment repelled –through combat. Tirus, rather than seeking to make peace with Gwendolyn, makes war unavoidable by killing Serese. In turn, he is killed by Reece. Gwendolyn realizes that war is unavoidable, and she resolves then to have a reign of steel. She executes captured enemies as an example to the enemy, and then prominently has the bodies of Tirus' family members displayed as a reminder to locals and her own people that she is not weak and ineffective. She will do what she must in order to survive. Peace attained through war is the only sort of peace achievable in the novel.

Family

Family is a dominant theme in the novel *Reign of Steel* by Morgan Rice. Family involves the mutual love, affection, emotional, physical, and spiritual support of, and loyalty between, individuals who may or may not be blood-related, but who behave and operate within the confines of the traditional family framework. As such, family can either be a good or bad thing. In the novel, it appears in both ways.

The goodness of family is clearly exhibited between the loyalty and support between Gwendolyn and her brother Kendrick. Kendrick supports and defends his sister no matter what her choices, and no matter whether he trusts her choices or not. The goodness of family also exists between Erec and his mother and father, who warmly and happily embrace Alistair upon the couple's arrival in the Southern Isles. They welcome Alistair as family immediately and support her marriage to Erec unconditionally. Thor, on the other hand, grows in character and in inner strength as he



seeks out his mother for answers to his own life, as he becomes the recipient of something akin to tough love which helps him grow as a person.

Family also fails in several instances as well. From what can be gleaned in the novel, Thor had a tempestuous relationship with his father and brothers at best, as they repeatedly come to block his way in the Land of the Druids. Family also fails when it comes to Tirus and Stara. Tirus' machinations and murder of Serese, causes a rift so great between father and daughter that the daughter does not care the father is dead. Dauphine refuses to accept Alistair as family or as queen because she is a foreigner, despite her supposed love for her brother, Erec. But by far the greatest failure of family comes between Luanda and Gwendolyn. Believing Gwendolyn has betrayed her, Luanda betrays Gwendolyn –and in so doing not only betrays her family, but an entire kingdom and population of people. Yet, Luanda attempts to redeem herself at the very end by attempting to kill Romulus, but she is herself killed by Romulus instead.

Courage

Courage is a major theme in the novel *Reign of Steel* by Morgan Rice. Courage involves the summoning of inner strength and integrity to confront and face problems, troubles, or evil, even if such a stand will ultimately fail. As such, courage is in no short supply and is found throughout the novel, affecting each of the major characters in different ways and for different reasons, including heroic and inner courage.

Among the more heroic displays of courage are those of Elden and the hundred or so recruits who boldly charge headlong into the McCloud troops as they assault King's Court. Godfrey's men also display tremendous courage by defending the city. Even the Silver knights under Kendrick display great courage by charging straight ahead into the McCloud forces to defend the city. Gwendolyn also displays great courage by ordering her outnumbered fleet to attack the fleet of Tirus off the Northern Isles. Courage is also greatly displayed by Argon and Ralibar, who confront the entire dragon army of Romulus alone, allowing the MacGil people to escape to safety. Reece, Stara, Wolfson, and the others of the Queen's fleet blockading the Northern Isles also display tremendous courage by facing down the wrath of Tirus and his men, nearly dying in the process.

Great inner courage is also on display throughout the novel, and revolves mainly around the characters of Gwendolyn and Thorgrin. Each of them have their own demons to confront in their own ways. Gwendolyn, faced with the disastrous consequences of her peace through diplomacy policies, must summon up the courage to lead and force her people to do things even when they don't want to do them. It takes courage to stand up to herself, and to her people. Thorgrin, on the other hand, must also confront the darkness of his past and his own demons in order to be worthy of seeing his mother. Indeed, his own greatest enemy is himself. It takes great courage to become a better person by facing one's own self.

Styles

Point of View

Morgan Rice tells her novel *A Reign of Steel* from the third-person, omniscient perspective. This is done for at least two primary reasons. One reason is that the great number of diverse characters, places, and back stories would make the first-person perspective difficult to follow along for the reader. The third-person presents a unifying voice which links the characters, places, and events. This allows the reader to follow the plot far more easily. Secondly, the omniscient aspect of the third-person narrative allows both reader and narrator to be aware of all the events going on, even when the characters themselves do not have the gift of such knowledge. This creates an air of suspense and urgency for the reader. For example, the reader dreads what they know is coming for Gwendolyn. The reader wills her to handle or avoid the catastrophe with Romulus.

Language and Meaning

Morgan Rice tells her novel *A Reign of Steel* in language that is simple, straightforward, and at times, anachronistic. Though the novel is a fantasy novel, it is set in times similar to that of our own Medieval Era. The simple, straightforward language allows her to evoke emotions and make clear points to the reader, about war, peace, leadership, courage, and other ideas. Yet, she also brings words and phrases decidedly modern or contemporary (such as “relationship” or “freak out”) into the vernacular. This allows the reader to become immersed in the world she has created, allowing them to easily follow along in the plot.

Structure

Morgan Rice divides her novel *A Reign of Steel* into thirty-three consecutive, linear, and chronological chapters that each revolve around specific points in the plot, around the characters chiefly associated with those events. The chapters alternate between Reece and Stara, Gwendolyn, Thorgrin, and even Romulus. This simple and straightforward approach to the layout of the novel allows readers to more easily follow the plot, especially given the nature of fantasy of the novel, and the depth and scope of the plot, rather than causing the reader to become distracted by the actual structure of the novel itself.



Quotes

King's Court was under attack, and he would give up his life to defend it, to defend these Legion boys whom he was so proud to fight with.

-- Narrator (Chapter 2 paragraph 47)

Importance: As King's Court comes under attack, Godfrey and his few dozen men seem to be the only possible defense force of the city walls against the army of McCloud. Yet, nearby are Elden and his Silver knight recruits, who come to the rescue of the beleaguered city. The narrator explains that Elden will even give his life to defend the city. He is proud to fight alongside even untrained boys in defense of King's Court, demonstrating his fidelity and his courage.

My sister has betrayed me," she answered softly. "And now it is time for me to betray her.

-- Luanda (Chapter 3 paragraph 9)

Importance: In the greatest act of betrayal and failure of family in the novel, Luanda voluntarily chooses to betray Gwendolyn by selling Gwendolyn out to Romulus of the evil Empire. Luanda feels no remorse or regret by doing this. She thinks only of revenge against her sister, no matter the cost.

All of her efforts at peace had culminated in this: a surprise attack. And on Pilgrimage Day, no less, the holiest day of the year.

-- Narrator (Chapter 6 paragraph 58)

Importance: Gwendolyn quickly discovers that her attempts at peace have been taken by others to be a sign of weakness. As such, her kingdom is attacked and invaded by McCloud, and Tirus engages in political intrigue and murder against the MacGil family. Diplomacy is not working, and Gwendolyn has a rude wake-up call to this effect.

Romulus threw back his head and roared with triumph. For however long the spells lasted, he was invincible. And as long as he lived, nothing, and no one, in the world would stop him.

-- Narrator (Chapter 10 paragraph 14)

Importance: Here, the reader learns that Romulus is not only powerful and a force to be reckoned with, but he is also invincible by way of dark magic. There is nothing that anyone can seemingly do to stop Romulus, but may only slow him down temporarily. City after city, town after town falls to Romulus, who heads toward King's Court.

Ruling is not always painless.

-- Kendrick (Chapter 16 paragraph 3)

Importance: Following the decision to evacuate, Gwendolyn worries about the job she is doing. Kendrick reminds her of something their father used to say. Their father had



said that ruling is not always painless. Tough choices have to be made. Leading is not an easy thing to do, but it must be done.

It is yourself you have not yet conquered.
-- Thor (Chapter 24 paragraph 42)

Importance: In his quest to find his mother, Thor ventures through the Land of the Druids. He must face many obstacles, all coming from within himself. He faces down spectres of his father, his brothers, and finally, himself. While he is able to overcome the darkness, he is not able to overcome himself. He must defeat himself before he can make it on through to see his mother. To do this, he will have to become a new person, and leave his old self in the past.

They had survived. Victory was theirs.
-- Narrator (Chapter 26 paragraph 78)

Importance: The victory achieved by Gwendolyn, Reece, and the troops of the MacGil lands over Tirus and his minions on the Northern Isles is dramatic, important, and concisely summed up. This victory gives the soldiers and civilians of MacGil a much-needed boost of courage and confidence as they prepare to face down what they know is coming: Romulus and his million-man army.

I did not choose to be King; I do not desire to be King; but I shall never yield in combat – not to any man, and not even to my brother.
-- Erec (Chapter 28 paragraph 43)

Importance: Erec, who is the heir-apparent to the throne of the Southern Isles, must challenge twelve victory contenders for the throne, not including his own brother, Strom, who is determined to outdo Erec. Though Erec clearly bests Strom in battle, he explains to Strom that he did not seek, nor want to be king, but he will not yield in battle, and so he must be king. Erec's do-or-die mentality will be invaluable in the coming time when Romulus will undoubtedly move against the Southern Isles.

Could life change so quickly? He wondered. Could anyone hang onto anything?
-- Narrator (Chapter 29 paragraph 53)

Importance: Here, the narrator illuminates Reece's thoughts on life and how quickly things change. Only a short time before, he and his sister and their people had been safe and content behind the city walls of King's Court. Now, they are essentially refugees seeking a new homeland, and persecuted all the while by the evil army that Romulus is bringing to bear upon them. Nothing, it seems, can be held onto: not love, not home, not anything, and it begins to wear on Reece's mind.

It was death, she knew, coming for them all.
-- Narrator (Chapter 33 paragraph 7)

Importance: As Gwendolyn watches the arrival of Romulus' black fleet and dragons on

the horizon, she realizes that what she and her people are facing is not a final showdown, but death. All hope seems lost. There seems to be no way that she, or any of her people, may survive.