

Realm of the Reaper Short Guide

Realm of the Reaper by K. A. Applegate

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



Contents

Realm of the Reaper Short Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Overview.....	3
About the Author.....	4
Setting.....	6
Social Sensitivity.....	7
Literary Qualities.....	8
Themes and Characters.....	9
Topics for Discussion.....	12
Ideas for Reports and Papers.....	13
For Further Reference.....	14
Related Titles.....	15
Copyright Information.....	16

Overview

In Everworld, the gods of ancient mythologies live and rule over their human subjects, brought with the gods when they left the Old World, Earth. Some of the wandering nature of L. Frank Baum's Oz stories is found in the fourth Everworld novel, *Realm of the Reaper*. In this novel, Jalil, David, Christopher, and April roam the countryside and enter a city called Her City that in its own way is as weird as the city of upside-down people in Oz. Her City is a place in which people live in fear and men are never allowed to leave. A beast stalks the city at night, leaving death in its wake, and men are the preferred prey. Jalil (the narrator) and his companions solve the mystery of the Terror Queen, and in the process find themselves unwillingly delving deep into the mysteries of life and death in Everworld.

About the Author

Katherine Alice Applegate is simultaneously one of America's most famous authors and one of America's most mysterious.

She guards her privacy, as does her publisher, Scholastic, which has brilliantly marketed her *Animorphs* and *Everworld* series for astounding sales. Applegate was already a well-established writer of books for young readers, mostly romance novels, when she proposed the *Animorphs* series to Scholastic, where the proposal was met with enthusiasm. She wanted to write a series of books that showed how the world might look from the perspectives of different animals; the result has been a series of fascinating novellas for late elementary to junior high school students.

Having moved several times around the United States, the Michigan-born writer now resides in Minneapolis. She has published more than one hundred books, and she has written them at an amazing pace. Begun in 1996, her *Animorphs* series numbered more than forty books plus several spin-offs by 2001. Her twelve-volume series intended for adolescents, *Everworld*, begun in 1999, was completed in 2001. Sally Lodge, in *Publishers Weekly*, quotes Applegate: A series writer has to develop plotting and pacing that become a well-oiled machine.

You don't have the luxury of spending a year on a book and absolutely cannot indulge in writer's block. Yet I knew I had to write in perfect language and choose just the right images, to make sure that my middle readers fell in love with the characters and returned again and again.

The two hundred letters from young readers that Applegate receives per week, as well as the one hundred e-mails she receives per day, attest to the success she has had in reaching her intended audience.

Readers love her characters.

In spite of the success of Applegate's writings, they have received scant attention in the press, perhaps because of a prevailing view that books written so quickly cannot be worth writing about, or perhaps because of the immense difficulty in keeping current with all the books Applegate publishes. But despite the great pace at which Applegate has written her books, they tend to be of higher quality than other mass-market writings. The *Animorphs* series provide artful and informative perspectives of characters as animals, whether fleas or birds. The *Everworld* novels offer suspense and tales of adventure with fine introductions to the mythologies of the world.

Applegate does not shy away from the tough questions about growing up and building sound, honest relationships with others. For instance, the non-series title *Sharing Sam* deals with the prospect of a close friend dying and how to love in spite of the pain of the loss of loved ones. In *Everworld*, the relationships among the principal characters are essential to the appeal of the novels. Applegate has mastered the art of

characterization, and this is perhaps the most important reason her rapidly-written works are considered both good literature and entertaining reading.



Setting

Jalil and his companions wander into Her City, an Everworld city that is surrounded by huge walls and guarded by fierce eunuchs. Her City is an embodiment of anti-maleness, guarded by men who have been neutered, and housing men to be given to Her. But even in a city where men are victims, April does not get a break. The Terror Queen wants all the men for herself, and, as one man says, "She's [April is] a beauty, and hell will brook no competition."

Jalil, David, Christopher, and April not only visit a hellish city, they end up in hell itself—as the ancient Norse viewed it—run by Hel, daughter of Loki. There are horrors aplenty in it. For instance, there is a floor paved with living, suffering heads and a great pit filled with people, one of them Senna, whom the four had followed into Everworld in the first novel of the series, *Search for Senna*, dangling from its walls.

Hel imprisoned two important Norse gods: The first god is Baldur. As Hel pauses to admire her captive, she describes Baldur: "Most beloved of the gods of Asgard. Odin's favorite. And now? All mine. A pity he isn't more cooperative. He is such a fine figure of a god." The other god is Thor: It was a god, not a man. Big. Bigger than Loki at his most extreme. Bare arms like tree trunks. Booted legs that could have supported a brachiosaurus. He had long, wild red-blond hair, a full blond beard, blue eyes, and angry, feral mouth.

Matters already looked bad in Everworld.

With the discovery that Thor is trapped in hell, matters appear even bleaker than before.

As in the previous novels, the Everworld setting is contrasted with the real world.

The four teens find that when they go to sleep in Everworld they are back in their old lives on Earth. In fact, they are living two lives, one of everyday experiences at home on Earth and the other of fantastic adventures in Everworld.

Jalil asserts that Everworld is a "lunatic asylum," because he suffers from a mental disorder on a supposedly sane Earth but does not in the supposedly insane Everworld.

This contest of sanity and insanity, taking place between Earth and Everworld and associated with Jalil's mental state, gives the narrative much of its tension.



Social Sensitivity

Jalil's atheism is significant to understanding his personality, but it is not a theme in *Realm of the Reaper*. April's own belief in God has more influence on her behavior in *Enter the Enchanted* than Jalil's atheism has on his behavior in *Realm of the Reaper*. Of more importance for the narrative is the obsessive-compulsive disorder that is the source of his atheism and of his insistence on being a rationalist. This disorder was identified by Sigmund Freud, who characterized it as a form of "objectification," in which an object is substituted in the mind for another object or emotion; in obsessive-compulsive disorder the compulsive behavior would be a substitute for something else, perhaps another form of behavior. Views on compulsions have become more complex since Freud's time, with the behavior being seen sometimes as a substitute for a memory (or memories) or an emotion (or emotions). In Jalil's case, the reasons for his compulsive behavior are not clarified in *Realm of the Reaper*. In terms of literary technique, this use of suspense in regard to the source of Jalil's disorder and whether he can overcome it provides another reason among many for continuing to read the *Everworld* series. It seems likely that, since *Everworld* affords Jalil relief from his disorder, *Everworld* provides answers to questions about his condition.

Literary Qualities

Applegate likes to experiment, and her novels tend to be lively exercises in ideas and techniques. In the case of *Everworld*, she creates a place where all the world's ancient mythologies coexist, and she has fun creating adventures that involve mixing the mythologies. For the *Everworld* series, she creates four adventurers who are snatched from fairly ordinary teenaged American lives, although Jalil's psychological problems are somewhat out of the ordinary. Through these characters she experiments with techniques of narration by having each one narrate novels.

The personality of each narrator shows through in the telling of each book, and Jalil proves himself an able narrator whose analytical approach to narration helps to explain how events in *Everworld* may be related to one another. The shifting of narrators allows *Everworld* to be described through David's love of action and interest in logistics in *Search for Senna*, through Christopher's acidic humor and tendency to see below the surface of events to find what is really going on in *Land of Loss*, through April's good sense and practicality in *Enter the Enchanted*, and through Jalil's analytical mind that finds the logic linking events in *Realm of the Reaper*.

In *Search for Senna*, David notes that the stars in the sky of *Everworld* are different from the ones he would see from earth. This serves to assure him that he truly is in a different world from the one of Lake Michigan and Chicago. For Jalil, looking at the heavens is an experience different from that of David. He sees stars, and he doubts they are stars at all, but he offers no good reason why the sun, moon, and stars should not be real, thereby undercutting his own claim to rationality.

Applegate's detailed description of *Everworld* in *Realm of the Reaper* works in two ways. First, it informs about *Everworld* and outlines a few of its mysteries. Second, it tells about the state of mind of Jalil.

Always doubting, always wondering what is real and what is a product of his obsessive-compulsive disorder, Jalil provides a narrative not only of an amazing adventure, but also of a young man's struggle to redefine himself, to defy the bizarre demands of his own mind.



Themes and Characters

In *Jalil*, Applegate presents an extraordinary figure whose contradictions motivate him and can destroy him. Jalil suffers from obsessive-compulsive disorder, a disorder that he recognizes and is educated about, that compels him to wash his hands seven times in a row. It is part of what makes him miserable while on Earth, but it does not afflict him in *Everworld*: Over there, in *Everworld*, in that mad place, that lunatic asylum, that universe where gods feed on human hearts, where wolves could grow to the size of city buses, that universe of dragons where Senna Wales had drawn me, over there I could lie asleep, aware of the itching of fleas, aware of the dirt under my fingernails, aware of the filth all around me, and still sleep.

Yet, *Everworld* makes Jalil miserable because it defies his desire for logic and order in life, both reactions to his obsessive-compulsive disorder. Even where he should feel free, he feels bad. Further, when Senna offers him lasting relief from his compulsions, he refuses her help because it means that he would have to do her bidding.

Jalil responds to his disorder by trying to place everything in order, and he takes pride in being a rationalist probably because he knows that his behavior is fundamentally irrational. Thus, when he proclaims his atheism and demands proof of God, it is not so much a conviction that there is no God as it is a matter of having no neat, clean, orderly place into which he can fit God. Jalil offers a notable contrast to April, who believes in God and who narrated the previous novel, *Enter the Enchanted*.

Jalil, in *Realm of the Reaper*, does not seem to grow as much as April does in *Enter the Enchanted* as she learns to take the initiative— something that saves her companions, Jalil especially—when she takes action against Hel. Perhaps Jalil's mental disorder requires 365 too much work to be overcome in only one novel. He whines a bit, but he is not all gloom. His understated humor lightens his narrative: "We were dirty. We smelled. We were four nasty teenagers in lousy moods."

In any case, after what Jalil and the others have achieved, they are four teenagers not to be messed with, as Hel learns.

Largely unknown to the other teenagers, Jalil has his own special contest with Senna.

Senna is only a teenager on Earth but the focus of titanic rivalries in *Everworld*, where she supposedly can open a passage from *Everworld* to the Old World, Earth. When Senna offers Jalil freedom from the "voice" in his head that tells him what to do, in exchange for her controlling him, he surprises her by refusing her. "'You think I'm weak, Senna,' I managed to say. 'You think I'm weak because I can't control this part of myself. You're wrong. My own brain messes with me, but I am still who I am.'" Until *Realm of the Reaper*, it has been a mystery why Senna chose Jalil as one of the four teenagers she took with her to *Everworld*.



He seems to have been selected because Senna thought that he would submit to her control in exchange for release from his unending mental torment on Earth.

Before *Realm of the Reaper* even begins, Jalil is already a complex figure, and, as he narrates the novel, his complexities deepen, resulting in a portrait of a full, three-dimensional character.

According to Jalil, Senna is the crux of the conflicts in *Everworld*, "And it all comes down to possession of Senna Wales, the gateway between universes." Through three novels in the *Everworld* series, Senna has managed to keep much of herself private, but April and Christopher have noted some qualities of her character, such as her manipulation of others and her arrogance. In *Realm of the Reaper*, more is revealed because she is finally in a position in which she is helpless, stripped of her defenses: "Senna hung helpless above Hel's own Hell." She asks Christopher and April to kill her rather than leave her hanging; she is in despair, and at that moment she is not the witch Senna, but the teenaged girl Senna.

She later shows herself to be a good observer of her surroundings, as she figures out where she and the others are and explains some of the figures beneath hell.

Even so, vulnerability does not mean that she has lost her cunning or her penchant for verbal contests. "Power. That's it for you, Senna. That's the drug for you, isn't it? You want the power. You've gone crazy with it," Jalil says to her. She fires right back with, "It's reasonable, Jalil—that's your drug, isn't it? Reason? Everything has to be neat and orderly and make sense?" During her verbal sparring with Jalil, she reveals her own deep plans for *Everworld*, proclaiming that it is only reasonable that she should rule the world rather than Loki or Merlin. How she intends to deal with "Ka Anor: the god eater" is not clear.

Of himself, David, Christopher, and April, Jalil declares, "We are four high school kids from a suburb north of Chicago." Four "nasty" kids, he means. David narrated the first novel in the *Everworld* series and is big and tough. He puts up with a large amount of sarcasm from Jalil, but Jalil admits, "Maybe David isn't a hero but there are times when he sure looks like one."

Although David wants to be the hero, in *Realm of the Reaper* April steals some of his thunder. By the end of *Enter the Enchanted* April had made the choice to take action on her own behalf and on behalf of others by defying Senna's sarcastic putdowns and walking forward to battle the trolls. She is quick-witted and quick to seize opportunities. Before, David had been the one to size up opponents and assess their weaknesses, but when Hel leaves herself open for a moment, April is at her with Galahad's sword, stabbing and hacking like any noble knight. It is one of the highlights of *Realm of the Reaper*.

Christopher thinks of himself as a spearcarrier in a movie about everyone else, so it is not entirely surprising that he spends more time commenting on the action than taking action. As is typical of him, he makes wisecracks and sarcastic jokes but, whether he



realizes it or not, often sizes up what is actually happening in Everworld. He even can be prophetic. "Where are the leprechauns?" he asks, only later to have Nidhoggr proclaim that leprechauns had stolen four of his most valued treasures. The other teenagers look at him in surprise, and Christopher says, "Sooner or later, there had to be leprechauns."

The reaper of Realm of the Reaper is Hel, a supernatural figure from Norse mythology. The right side of Hel is incomparably beautiful, the other so hideous that Jalil is paralyzed by his own screaming. The Terror Queen shouts "I am Hel! Ruler of Nifleheim! Daughter of Loki! No mortal tells me I must!" when April tries to appeal to her womanly side. She is suitably wicked and terrifying, so frightening that "Hel doesn't have a lot of friends. Even Loki is afraid of her."

Nidhoggr the dragon makes a brief but important appearance. When he sees that he has Senna in his power, he realizes that he can use her to bargain for the return of items stolen from him. His hoard is already immense, but, like the dragons of medieval European folklore, he lusts after more wealth.

In exchange for Senna, whom they do not wish to fall into the clutches of Loki, the teenagers promise to find four mystical items stolen from Nidhoggr by leprechauns.

They will pay a terrible price for this promise at the beginning of the next novel, *The Destroyer*.



Topics for Discussion

1. Would you have gone into the city if you were with Jalil, David, Christopher, and April? Why or why not?
2. What does April's attack on Hel say about April's personality?
3. Does Applegate exploit Jalil's obsessive-compulsive disorder?
4. How dangerous does Senna seem at the end of *Realm of the Reaper*? Explain.
5. How does Hel control Jalil's mind even though he is able to resist Senna?
6. Is Senna on the side of good or of evil, or some other side altogether? How do you know?
7. Do you miss anything in Jalil's descriptions that you wish he had told you? If so, what?
8. Are there dreamlike passages in *Realm of the Reaper*? Describe them.
9. Does Jalil's character grow at all during *Realm of the Reaper*? Why or why not?
10. Why would Nidhoggr give Senna to Loki even though he despises Loki?
Does this reveal a weakness in Nidhoggr that could be exploited?
11. Why is Hel obsessed with men?



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. What is Niflheim in Norse mythology? Where would it be found? What happens there?
2. Who is Hel in Norse mythology? What are her powers? How did she come to have Baldur as her captive? In Norse mythology, who is Jormungand? Why would he be associated with Hel?
3. What characteristics does Nidhoggr have in common with the dragons of medieval European folklore? Or in common with the dragon in Beowulf? Or in common with dragons in Norse mythology?
4. What is rationalism? What are its strengths? What are its weaknesses?
5. Compare the narratives of *Realm of the Reaper*, *Enter the Enchanted*, *Land of Loss*, and *Search for Senna*. Are there notable differences in how the stories are told?

Are there notable similarities? What does this tell you about Applegate's artistic achievement in *Realm of the Reaper*?
6. Draw a picture of Her City, including all the notable places and what the walls and buildings would look like.
7. What are the common characteristics of dragons in medieval European folktales?

Are any of these characteristics reflected in *Realm of the Reaper*?
8. In what ways is Her City like a police state?
9. Describe the similarities between Jalil's view of Everworld and C. S. Lewis's description of the world of Narnia in *The Chronicles of Narnia*.



For Further Reference

"Applegate, K. A. (K. A. Applegate)." In *Something about the Author*, Vol. 109.

Detroit: The Gale Group, 2000. An essay that includes biographical information about Applegate and information about her writing.

"K. A. Applegate." In *Authors and Artists for Young Adults*, Vol. 37. Detroit: The Gale Group, 2000. A biographical essay with comments on Applegate's life and work.

Lodge, Sally. "Scholastic's Animorphs Series Has Legs." In *Publishers Weekly* 244, 45 (November 3, 1997): 36-37.

Publishers Weekly 246, 25 (June 21, 1999): 69.

In this review of *Search for Senna*, the reviewer says, "With her blend of accessible story and mythological cast of characters, Applegate is sure to attract a host of new fans."



Related Titles

The Everworld novels introduce mythologies, and in the process, Applegate creates a new mythology of her own, in which human endeavors are placed in a vast cosmic scheme in which everyone is important, even though in any individual novel they may seem like pawns. Search for Senna introduces Vikings, Loki, and Norse mythology. Realm of the Reaper delves more deeply into Norse myths about life and death and the underworld. Land of Loss focuses more on Aztec mythology than Norse mythology and introduces the Coo-Hatch, aliens from yet another world. Enter the Enchanted tells of the survival of Arthurian culture in Everworld and shows how the various cultures and their gods know about each other and mix with each other. This helps explain the intrusion of leprechauns into Nidhoggr's den, even though the leprechauns come from Irish folklore while Nidhoggr comes from Norse mythology.

Once the teens meet Merlin in Land of Loss, the grand contest of universe-shaking powers begins to reveal itself, and dreams in fact do seem more real than real life.

Realm of the Reaper advances the unifying plot of the Everworld series by showing some of Senna's vulnerability. When she is hung from the wall of Hel's pit, although she is still arrogant and manipulative, she is seen to be not only human, but at least partly the teenager she appears to be.



Copyright Information

Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Editor

Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Cover Design

Amanda Mott

Cover Art is "Pierrot," 1947, by William Baziotès Oil on Canvas, 42 1/8 x 36 Donated by the Alisa Mellon Bruce Fund, ©, 1996 Reproduced with Permission from the Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Includes bibliographical references and index

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for the works of authors of popular fiction. Includes biography data, publishing history, and resources for the author of each analyzed work.

ISBN 0-933833-41-5 (Volumes 1-3, Biography Series)

ISBN 0-933833-42-3 (Volumes 1-8, Analyses Series)

ISBN 0-933833-38-5 (Entire set, 11 volumes)

1. Popular literature—Bio-bibliography. 2. Fiction—19th century—Bio-bibliography. 3. Fiction—20th century—Bio-bibliography. I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952-

Z6514.P7B43 1996[PN56.P55]809.3—dc20 96-20771 CIP

Copyright ©, 1996, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing Corp., P.O. Box 830, Osprey, FL 34229-0830

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1996