

The Rithmatist Study Guide

The Rithmatist by Brandon Sanderson

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Plot Summary

The Rithmatist is the first novel in the Rithmatist Series by Brandon Sanderson. In this novel, Joel Saxon is fascinated with the Rithmatists, but he lost his chance to become one when his father was in an accident the day before he was to be incepted during the religious ceremony that determines which children will become a Rithmatist. Instead, Joel watches from the sidelines. However, when someone begins killing Rithmatist students, Joel finds himself in the middle of the investigation as both an investigator and a potential victim. The Rithmatist is an exciting beginning to a series that should prove to be a unique adventure.

Joel Saxon wanted to be a Rithmatist, but missed his chance when his inception was delayed. For this reason, Joel finds himself on the sidelines as he watches other students learn to become their nation's protectors. Instead, Joel throws himself into the possibility of being a Rithmatist scholar. The principal, impressed with Joel's determination, makes him an assistant to one of the professors who recently was out duelled and demoted to tutor.

The professor, Fitch, has been given a mysterious assignment by the professor to look for clues in the disappearance of several Rithmatist students. Joel is bored with his role in this investigation, but goes out of his way to prove to Fitch that he can be an invaluable service. At the same time, Joel finds himself drawn to Melody, a Rithmatist student who would rather be anything but. Joel and Melody do not get along at first, but their daily meetings in Fitch's office draws them together. When Joel discovers that Melody has a unique way with chalklings, the small creatures Rithmatists draw to attack their opponents, he encourages her to keep working at her studies.

As Fitch continues to try to find information that could help the criminal investigation into the disappearance of a Rithmatist student, another student goes missing. When a third goes missing, Joel and Fitch travel to the scene of the crime to try and help interpret the drawings left behind by the criminal. While there, Melody shows up. Joel is the first to notice the unusual way in which Melody is able to control her chalklings when she uses one to spy on the crime scene.

Joel finally remembers where he saw one of the drawings the kidnapper left at the scenes of his crimes. Joel's father, a chalk maker, studied Rithmatists closely and the symbol was among his things. Joel learns that his father thought there were other Rithmatist lines out there and he spent much of his life trying to find them. It appears that Joel's father was successful, but was never able to make the line work because he did not know how it was supposed to work. Now, Joel knows that the line works to silence noises nearby.

A short time later, Melody suggests that Joel have another inception since his first one did not go as it should have. The night before Joel's second inception, he is attacked by the same person who kidnapped the other Rithmatist students. Joel survives the attack, but a clerk in the principal's office is arrested for the crime. Joel does not believe the



clerk had anything to do with the attacks, but cannot convince anyone of this. The following day, Joel attends his inception and is disappointed when he is not chosen to become a Rithmatist.

That night, Joel and Melody are walking across campus when they see that the police officers who are supposed to be watching over the Rithmatist dorms have been knocked out. Joel sends Melody for help while he goes to investigate. Joel finds Professor Nalizar in the hallway. A second later, Inspector Harding, appears. The Inspector is different, clearly not himself. As Joel watches, Harding attacks Nalizar, knocking him out. Harding then turns his attention to the sleeping Rithmatist students, destroying them with wild chalklings.

Melody comes to Joel's rescue, but they are trapped against Harding's chalklings. Fitch appears and battles Harding. With Joel and Melody's help, Fitch wins the duel. Harding suddenly collapses and the wild chalklings expand, releasing all the missing children, plus several others.

In the aftermath of Harding's attacks, the principal decides to hold the Melee to encourage things to return to normal. As Joel arrives to watch the proceedings, he runs into Nalizar. In the course of their conversation, Joel becomes aware the Nalizar is not human, that, like Harding, he is possessed in some way by a Forgotten. Joel also realizes that Nalizar plans to make his own students succeed so that he can send a group of Rithmatists to the war that he can control. To prevent the first step of this, Joel helps Melody win the Melee.



Prologue and Part 1: Chapters 1-6

Summary

Prologue

Lily is running through her home in the dark. She is frightened, convinced she is going to die. As something comes through her bedroom door, she begins to draw the Matson Defense, so scared that it comes out sloppy. These chalk lines begin attacking the circles around her, breaking through and coming after her.

Chapter 1

Joel explains Matson Defense to a classmate in order to excite him about the Rithmatists, but no one shares Joel's enthusiasm. Everyone who gathered, wanders off to get to their next classes. Joel goes to the office where he spends his open period running messages. Joel delivers his messages quickly so that he can slip in Professor Fitch's class to deliver a note he has written himself. Professor Fitch is a Rithmatist professor, and Joel is really not supposed to be in the classroom, but the message gives him an excuse. As Joel watches Fitch lecture on the Easton Defense, a newly hired tutor barges into the room and challenges Fitch to a duel. Although Fitch is older and more experienced, Andrew Nalizar has just returned from the fighting in Nebraska. Nalizar easily wins. By the rules of such duels, Nalizar now has the right to Fitch's tenure at the school.

Chapter 2

Joel returns to the office where news of the duel has already reached. Florence, the secretary, and Exton, the clerk, are shocked to learn Nalizar won. Florence then pushes Joel to choose his summer elective on behalf of his mother. Joel puts her off, promising to choose soon.

Chapter 3

Joel is in math class when he realizes that he has not done the homework from the night before. The teacher asks Joel to stay after class to discuss his grades. The teacher tells Joel that he will have to take a math course during the summer because he is going to fail this class. Joel does the homework in front of the teacher to prove he knows the information, finally impressing the teacher with how he can do the calculations in his head when the teacher writes a difficult problem on the board and Joel solves it before the teacher is finished. The teacher relents and promise a passing grade.

Chapter 4



Joel leaves the math building and finds Melody, a Rithmatist who is in his math class, waiting. They talk for a minute before she goes back inside to speak to the teacher. As Joel crosses the school grounds, he catches up with a friend. The friends are talking about a Rithmatist student, Lilly Whiting, who did not show up for her history final. The students are annoyed that this seems to be another example of the extra privileges the Rithmatist students seem to get. Joel then hears that a federal inspector was seen in the principal's office.

Joel spends the rest of the day reading some of Fitch's Rithmatist books under a tree. Joel is something of an outcast at the school because his mother is an employee there and he attends on scholarship. Most of the students are the children of the wealthy and politicians. Joel even feels secluded when he eats in the cafeteria because it is divided into sections according to social status, with the Rithmatists and Professors at the top. After talking to his mother about choosing a summer elective, Joel goes to speak to Professor Fitch.

Chapter 5

As he waits politely, Fitch overhears a conversation between Nalizar and some of the others about the traditions of the duel. Joel then asks Fitch if he could be his student for the summer, but Fitch tells him now that he is a tutor, he can only take the students the principal assigns him.

Chapter 6

Joel's mother works nights, so he often has to spend his nights alone. Joel and his mother share a tiny room in the family's dorm since his father died. Before they lived in the chalk maker's basement rooms, but his mother could not stand to be around so many memories after his death. Joel lies awake wondering how he could take a Rithmatist class over the summer when he gets a brilliant idea. The following morning, Joel purposely fails his history exam in the first few minutes of class. The teacher sends Joel to the principal. When Joel tells the principal he failed the test so that he might get Professor Fitch as a tutor, the principal agrees to assign Joel to Fitch as an assistant, but only if he can pass the history exam. Joel returns and passes the exam in the remaining time in class.

Analysis

The early chapters of this novel introduce the main character. Joel is a teenager attending a private school that caters to the rich, the famous, and Rithmatists. Joel wants to be a Rithmatist, but he lost his chance to be one. Instead, Joel spends most of his time on the outside, in part because he is the son of a cleaning woman at the school and in part because he is a Rithmatist want-to-be. Joel is clearly highly intelligent, as illustrated by his ability to do his math homework primarily in his head. Joel would have been a good Rithmatist, giving the reader some hope that he might find a way to be one in the future.



Fitch is a professor at the school. Fitch has been at the school for many years and had tenure. In fact, Fitch is considered one of the best teachers at the school. However, a new tutor, a man who has been fighting in Nebraska against the wild chaklings, has come to the school and used an old tradition to steal Fitch's job with the school. Now Fitch is a tutor and this other man, Nalizar, is a tenured professor. No one really likes Nalizar because he comes off as arrogant and opinionated, but they have to honor tradition. For this reason, Fitch now has a great deal of time on his hand and his future is a little less secure than it was before.

Joel clearly likes Fitch and he wants Fitch to teach him about the Rithmatists. However, it is unusual for a non-Rithmatist to be allowed to learn their skills and traditions. For this reason, Joel has been denied access to the classes and the knowledge he craves. The suspects, though, that Joel will find a way to get what he wants. This seems to be underscored by Joel's ability to find a way to make the principal assign him to Fitch as an assistant.

Discussion Question 1

What is a Rithmatist? How do their skills work? What is the purpose of a Rithmatists in this society?

Discussion Question 2

Who is Joel? Why is he an outsider? How does that define his character as this novel begins?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Joel want to be a Rithmatist? Why is he not? Could this change?

Vocabulary

Dismissal, negative, unconventional, accepted, thoughtful, education, ellipsoid, segments, decisive, effective, attack, duel interest, hesitant, determined, inception, ceremony, mysterious, exciting, request, chosen, scribbling, interspersed.



Part 2: Chapters 7-10

Summary

Chapter 7

Joel is very excited on his first day as Fitch's assistant, but somewhat disappointed when Fitch wants him to cross reference school graduates with census records and death records. Joel had hoped he would be allowed to do something more related to Rithmatists. Joel is further disappointed when he learns he has to share Fitch with Melody, the Rithmatist from his math class. Melody is having trouble drawing the all-important circles for the defenses the Rithmatists draw, the very basic of Rithmatist skills. For this reason, Fitch assigns Melody to tracing Rithmatist defenses.

Melody becomes frustrated with the tracing, so Joel draws a circle to prove that everyone's free hand drawn circles are flawed. Melody then tells Joel that all her siblings and her parents are Rithmatists. It is unusual for so many people in one family to be chosen, so Joel is impressed. Melody, however, is not. Melody would rather be anything but a Rithmatist, especially since she is so bad at it and everyone in her family is very good.

At the end of the class period, Joel talks to Fitch about the missing girl, Lilly. Fitch admits that the project he is working on has to do with the disappearance, but he refuses to say much else.

Chapter 8

Joel goes to the cafeteria and takes sandwiches to Florence and Exton in hopes of hearing some gossip. Florence tells them that she read Lilly's file and does not believe she ran away, as the papers are saying. Florence thinks she was murdered. Joel decides to get the census records done quickly so he can help in the investigation.

Chapter 9

Joel dislikes the census records work, but he works at it very quickly. One day in Fitch's office, Melody gets tired of tracing defenses, so Fitch begins to teach her a defense. This leads to a quick discussion on the proper defense against specific defenses. The next thing Joel knows, he's drawing defenses against Melody. Joel wins most of the matches, making Melody even more convinced she should not be a Rithmatist. When it is over, Joel makes a snide comment that hurts Melody's feelings. Fitch keeps Joel behind and chastises him for being a bully. As they walk across campus, they find Nalizar teaching his class outside. Nalizar asks Fitch to duel with him again, but Fitch refuses. Joel disagrees with Fitch's decision but cannot make him change his mind.

Chapter 10



Joel has finished all the census records. Joel rushes to tell Fitch he is done. Fitch absentmindedly sets it aside. Fitch tells Joel he would like him to find the whereabouts of each local Rithmatist. When Joel begins to argue, Fitch tells him that another student has disappeared. Fitch blames himself because his project is to identify a possible Rithmatist who might be the culprit. Fitch then shows Joel several drawings of Rithmatist-like drawings left at the scene of the crimes. As they are discussing these, Inspector Harding arrives with new drawings from the current crime scene. Joel and Fitch look through the new drawings. Joel suggests that it would be helpful if they could see the crime scene and not just a cop's rendition of the drawings. Joel also suggests that one of the drawings is familiar to him, but he cannot remember where he has seen it.

Analysis

Joel manages to become Fitch's assistant, but discovers that the work he will be doing has little to do with the Rithmatists and gets him no closer to learning about his beloved Rithmatists. However, he does manage to involve himself in a game with another student and Fitch as Fitch tests their knowledge of the various Rithmatist defenses. This is close to the kind of study Joel had wanted to do and might give Fitch a reason to teach him more.

As Joel pursues his dream of learning all he can about the Rithmatists, he also finds himself drawn into a kidnapping investigation. Someone is kidnapping Rithmatist students. Fitch and the investigators think it might be a Rithmatist because there are odd, Rithmatist-like chalk drawings left at the crime scenes. Fitch has been investigating local Rithmatists, trying to build a profile of someone who might do such a thing. Joel learns that he has been helping with this investigation and convinces Fitch to allow him to become a bigger help in his end of things. Joel has a quick mind and a fresh set of eyes, the reader suspects he might be a benefit to Fitch in his investigation.

Discussion Question 1

Who is Melody? Why does she not want to be a Rithmatist? Why is she?

Discussion Question 2

What does Joel think of Melody? How can the reader see this? Where might this relationship take Joel?

Discussion Question 3

What happened to Lilly? How does the investigation grow more important? What role is Fitch playing in the investigation?

Vocabulary

Dormitory, insomniac, beginning, pattern, obviously, properties, nervously, disappeared, sketch, design, potentially, imagined, controlled, pattern, contained, discovered, sketch, forbiddance, corners, bind, bunker.



Part 2: Chapters 11-14

Summary

Chapter 11

As Joel makes his way to Fitch's, he finds a group of adults outside the principal's office. They are parents wanting to take their children home. Joel suggests to Exton that someone call Inspector Harding. Joel continues to Fitch's office to find him still sleeping. As Joel leaves, he runs into a woman who was with the parents. Joel gives her directions to Fitch's office.

Joel goes to the library to search through books he has recently read, hoping to find the symbol that seemed familiar to him. As Joel prepares to leave, he sees Nalizar go into the Rithmatist part of the library. Joel wants to see what Nalizar is looking at, but he cannot go into that part of the library without an escort. For this reason, Joel finds Melody and asks her to take him there. They find Nalizar looking at books about the lines of Rithmatics. When Nalizar leaves, Melody gets a list of books he checked out. Joel then talks Melody into checking out a book for him on the same topic. To pay her for her kindness, Joel shows Melody a defense she could use that does not depend heavily on circles, but more on the chalkings that she draws so well.

As Joel and Melody make their way to Fitch's for class, they run into Inspector Harding. Harding asks Joel if he has seen a particular woman, and Joel recognizes her as the woman he sent to Fitch. It turns out the woman is a reporter. At the same time, Melody becomes aware that Joel and Fitch are helping in the investigation of the student disappearances. They left her out.

Chapter 12

Harding is upset that Fitch talked to the reporter, but he does not blame him. Harding then tells them that he has gotten permission to set up security on the campus to protect the remaining students. Joel tries to suggest to Harding that Nalizar might be involved in the disappearances, but Fitch chastises him for making accusations against his elders. Nalizar, too, refuses to believe it because he was part of a squad at Nebrask that Nalizar actually helped save. After Harding leaves, Fitch sends both Joel and Melody home.

Joel spends the day under a tree reading the book Melody checked out for him. Joel is surprised by some of the things he reads in the book, especially that Rithmatists are supposed to be secretive about what happens in the inception chamber. Joel then goes to dinner where Melody joins him and his mother at the servant's table. Joel tells Melody about his father's death in a train accident when he was eight. Melody then invites Joel out for ice cream, something he has never done before.

Chapter 13.



Joel and Melody make their way into the city of Jamestown to the local ice cream parlor. As they walk, they talk about Joel's desire to be a Rithmatist. When they reach the parlor, Joel realizes he cannot afford the ice cream. Melody refuses to leave, however, and gives him the money to pay for it. She insists that she gets such a large allowance she could never spend it all. Joel is reluctant, but finally takes it. Joel and Melody continue their discussion about Rithmatists, including Melody's own struggles.

Chapter 14

As Joel and Melody eat their ice cream, they become aware that the reporter's story about Fitch has been published in the evening edition. They quickly go to find a paper. The story tells mostly the facts. Joel leaves a copy for Harding when he returns to campus. Joel walks Melody to her dorm and then wanders the campus for a time. Joel sees a light on in Nalizar's office and thinks he would like to steal the book Nalizar checked out of the library. Joel changes his mind before he goes into the building. It turns out to be good luck because Nalizar comes out a moment later.

Joel goes to find his mother where she is scrubbing the dueling arena where they hold the Melee, a dueling competition, each year. Joel asks his mother why she works so hard, something he had not noticed until Melody said something. Joel's mother tells him that his father left them in deep debt. However, she does not want him to worry about it. Joel goes to their room to sleep. The next morning, he wakes to the news that another student has disappeared.

Analysis

Things are quickly heating up in the investigation into the disappearance of Rithmatist students. Parents want to take their children home where they think they can protect them better. The government has given permission to Harding to increase security at the school. Fitch has spoken to a reporter, letting most of the details of the investigation escape into the public eye.

Joel is convinced that Nalizar is involved because he is an unpleasant man who seems to have a dark side. Joel is even more convinced when he sees Nalizar checking out books on the origins of the Rithmatists and the possibility of the existence of more than the basic lines of Rithmatists. It seems odd, but not damaging. The reader believes it is possible that Joel has focused on Nalizar simply because he does not like what Nalizar did to Fitch. However, there could also be some substance to Joel's suspicions.

At the same time, Joel and Melody get to know one another a little better. Joel also learns more about the death of his father and the financial mess he left them in when he died in a train accident. It is information that Joel has never heard about his father, but it could play a role later in the novel as Joel continues to learn about his own past and investigate the disappearances.



Discussion Question 1

What kind of books is Nalizar checking out of the library? Why does Joel find this suspicious?

Discussion Question 2

Who is Harding? What role does he play in the investigation? What relationship does Harding have with Nalizar?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Joel believe he is not a Rithmatist? Why does Melody believe he should be?

Vocabulary

Civilians, recognized, basically, intending, possibility, debt, changing, exhausted, realized, remember, affable, worried, eventually, stomach, inception, despite, remembered, sterile, hospital, traveling, projects, derailed.



Part 3: Chapters 15-20

Summary

Chapter 15

Joel rushes to Fitch's office, arriving just as Fitch is preparing to go to the crime scene. Harding escorts both Joel and Fitch out of the office to the train station. Before they leave campus, they run into Melody, but are forced to leave her behind. Joel is excited to learn that he will be riding on a train to one of the other islands. He has never been outside of Jamestown, New Britannia. As they wait to leave, Harding and Fitch tell Joel that the victim's father was a politician, meaning that this death could cause a drive to open more Rithmatist schools which might fracture the spirit of teamwork in Nebrask. When they arrive in East Carolina, they quickly walk to the home of the latest victim. They learn that the victim's father slept just a few feet away and was unharmed, but four servants who were playing cards downstairs were killed.

Joel and Fitch proceed to the bedroom where the victim put up a strong fight. Fitch has to remove a line that prevents them from entering the room. Then they examine the odd swirl drawing on the wall outside the upstairs hallway, the same drawing that appeared at the other two crime scenes. Neither recognizes it or its purpose. Fitch draws a chalking on the wall and it is stopped by the lines of the drawing, suggesting it is a Rithmatic drawing even though it is not one of the four known Rithmatic lines.

Chapter 16

Joel, Fitch, Harding, and several police officers enter the room of the victim where they can immediately see the fight the victim put up by the drawings on the floor, but also see that he was defeated by the breaks in the lines and a small amount of blood on the floor. Joel wonders how the kidnapper got his victim out of the house when he could not have left the room through the door and did not appear to leave through the window. Also in the room, they find a note written by the victim that describes the kidnapper as a man with no eyes. Harding remarks on the similarities of the description and a Forgotten, a creature from Nebrask. As they continue to discuss the crime scene, Joel spots a chalking in the hallway. Thinking it belongs to the criminal, Joel calls the attention of the police to it and follows it outside. It turns out to be a unicorn. Melody is outside and she has drawn it to spy on Joel and Fitch. After Joel vouches for Melody, Harding sends them to the train station to wait for the next train.

Chapter 17

Joel has begun reading through old books on Rithmatists in order to try and identify the strange line at the crimes scenes. He has little luck, but learns a great deal about the history of the wild chalkings that are trapped in Nebrask, those that the Rithmatists fresh out of school are sent to fight. Melody comes to the room with a note for Joel to go



to the office. Joel goes to see the principal and gives him a report on the work he has been doing with Fitch. Joel also tells the principal his suspicions of Nalizar and learns that the principal is also suspicious of Nalizar. The principal tells Joel that Nalizar was involved in the disappearance of a young Rithmatist in Nebraska and that is why he was sent back to New Britannia. Joel then shows the principal a drawing of the odd line at the crime scenes and he recognizes it as well.

Chapter 18

Joel rushes out of the principal's office and runs into Melody. Joel does not want to talk, but Melody is insistent. Joel takes Melody along with him. They go to his rooms and then to the chalk maker's rooms in the basement. Joel immediately begins searching through his father's things and finally finds the line. Joel brings Fitch to the room and shows the drawing to him. Fitch thinks that Joel's father was trying to discover a new Rithmatist line and this was it, but he was never able to get it to work even with a Rithmatist's help. Joel's father would have gotten a stipend from four Rithmatist schools had he been able to make the line work. Melody then pushes Joel to go to the vicar and ask to do his inception over again. Joel reluctantly agrees.

Chapter 19

Joel goes to church with his mother and Melody. After services, Joel and Melody approach the vicar with their plan until he agrees to speak to the bishop.

Chapter 20

Joel and Melody take a break from studying and discuss the increasing tension between Rithmatists and ordinary people. There is even graffiti on one of the school buildings. Melody takes Joel to the building where Nalizar's office is and returns with the books Nalizar checked out, giving the one to Joel that he had been most suspicious of. Then they discuss the upcoming Melee and Melody tells Joel she has to participate. She does not want to because she knows she will make a fool of herself. Melody then tells Joel how her brother, William, won each time he entered. That makes Joel realize that Melody's brother was a Rithmatist who died at Nebraska a short time ago.

Fitch finds Joel and Melody walking. Joel asks Fitch about the use of clocks in Rithmatism. They discuss it, but Fitch does not believe it has much to do with the origins of Rithmatism. At the office, Joel discovers that the bishop and vicar have agreed to allow Joel to go into the inception chamber.

Analysis

Joel goes with Fitch to see the Rithmatist lines at the scene of the most recent disappearance. They are both surprised to find proof that the strange swirling lines are Rithmatist lines even though they are not recognized lines. They are also shocked by the defense the victim put up and the fact that he still lost. It makes everyone concerned for the person they are trying to find. If someone is that powerful, how could they



possibly beat him? At the same time, there begins to be some concern that the culprit is a creature from Nebraska that is thought to be locked up in the tower there. This could add an interesting twist to the story as these creatures are thought to be contained and the danger to general society if they are not could be overwhelming.

Joel finally realizes that he is familiar with the swirling lines of the new Rithmatist line because his father had drawn it over and over in his papers. Joel discovers that the line is a new one that his father discovered before his death, but was never able to make work because he did not know what it did. This explains a great deal to Joel about his father, however, including the reason why he built up such debt before his death. It was because he thought he was going to get stipends from four schools for the discovery, money that would have left his family quite comfortable.

At the same time Joel puts most of his energy into the investigation, Melody also suggests she has found a way for Joel to become a Rithmatist. Joel never entered the inception chamber where Rithmatists are chosen because he was late for his ceremony due to his father's accident. Now Melody wants Joel to have his chance and he has just learned he will be able to go into the chamber. It is exciting for Joel, and the reader, because they both hope his dream will finally come true.

Discussion Question 1

What is a chalkling? How does a chalkling determine if a Rithmatist line is real or not?

Discussion Question 2

Why did melody send a chalkling into a crime scene? What did she want to do with it? How did Melody's chalkling act differently from other chalklings?

Discussion Question 3

What is the inception chamber? Why did Joel never enter it? Why does he want to do so now?

Vocabulary

Opportunity, contain, promptly, foundation, scholarship, invaluable, clockwork, interesting, continuing, metaphor, reasons, spring work, errands, company, origins, history, battlefield, melee, complain, politics.



Part 3: Chapters 21-25

Summary

Chapter 21

Joel lies awake in bed worrying about what might happen during his inception ceremony the following day. Joel decides to read to keep his mind busy. He reads the diary of a frontier woman who was attacked by wild chalkings. As he reads, Joel catches sight of a shadow out his window. Joel goes outside, thinking it is vandals. Instead, Joel is nearly attacked by chalkings. Joel begins to run, but realizes that the kidnapper will know which way he is running, so he changes direction just as he spots a Line of Forbiddance on the ground in front of him. Joel runs to the main office where Exton is working late. Exton brings Joel into the office and begins to draw a defense on the floor, revealing that he is a failed Rithmatist. Joel has discovered that the chalkings are afraid of his dollar because of the clockwork visible inside it. They also dissolve with weak acid. Joel decides to make a run for it. Joel runs to the front gate and alerts the police officers there. Several hours later, Joel is safe. Harding tells him he might have solved the case, but will not elaborate. Joel then tells Fitch that he knows what the mystery line does. It dampens sound so that those near it cannot scream.

Chapter 22

Exton is arrested the next day, but Joel is positive he is not the kidnapper. Unfortunately, Harding found enough evidence against Exton to make it look like he is the criminal. Later, Joel, his mother, and Melody go to the church for Joel's inception ceremony. Joel goes into the chamber and immediately sees a chalk creature, but the creature seems frightened and disappears. Joel stays in the chamber for over an hour hoping it will return, but it never does. When Joel emerges, he is not a Rithmatist.

Chapter 23

Joel sleeps all day, so he spends the night going over his father's notes and other literature, in hopes of finding something to save Exton. Melody comes to Joel's room. Joel immediately walks her back to the dorm when she says the guards are gone. Joel insists they go to Fitch to tell him, but Fitch is busy and does not want to talk. For this reason, Joel walks Melody back to the dorm. Once there, they discover the guards are there, but they have been attacked. Joel sends Melody for help while he goes to investigate. Joel goes to the second floor of the dorm and runs immediately into Nalizar. At first Joel thinks Nalizar is the one who attacked the guards so he throws acid on him, but then Harding appears.

Nalizar quickly draws a box to protect Joel and then turns to duel Harding. Harding almost immediately knocks Nalizar out. Harding then turns to the dorm rooms where he sends wild chalkings into the rooms to attack and eat the students. Joel works at



breaking his way out of the box so that he might go for help, otherwise he is powerless. Melody sends a chalkling to help Joel escape his box. Joel and Melody try to escape through the window in Melody's room, but her room is filled with chalklings. Joel and Melody escape further down the hallway, but find themselves trapped. Then Fitch appears.

Chapter 24

Professor Fitch begins drawing a defense on the ground to fight Harding. At the same time, Joel directs Melody to draw specific lines on the ground to protect them. Joel and Melody manage to trap a bunch of the wild chalklings behind a maze while Fitch fights against Harding. As Fitch fights, Joel directs him to find a clock and show it to the creature. When Fitch does, the creature balks. That makes Fitch think it is a Forgotten. The best way to kill a Forgotten is with acid. Joel runs to get some and splashes it on Harding. It seems to do the trick as Harding falls to the ground. The wild chalklings begin to spasm, growing larger. Joel orders them released. Moments later, they burst and release the missing Rithmatist students as well as soldiers and Rithmatists from Nebraska, including William, Melody's brother.

Chapter 25

The principal decides to hold the Melee despite the events of the night before in order to show unity to the community. On the way to the arena, Joel sees the principal and talks to him about the events of the night before. They both feel they should apologize to Nalizar. At the same time, they wonder about Harding who has no memory of his own actions last night or the other nights. The principal then tells Joel that some of the schools, Armedius included, will fulfill part of the stipend agreement they made with his father so many years ago.

In the arena, Joel runs into Nalizar. At first, Nalizar seems like a normal person, lacking the arrogance of before. However, Joel quickly recognizes something wrong with Nalizar. To Joel's surprise, Nalizar practically admits to being a Forgotten, a more advanced creature than the one that possessed Harding. As they talk, Joel realizes that Nalizar has a plan and it involves his students, particularly the ones fighting in the Melee today. Joel thinks that Nalizar wants to control all the Rithmatists who go to Nebraska. For this reason, Joel seeks permission to fight with Melody in the Melee. To everyone's surprise, including Joel's, they win.

Analysis

Joel does not become a Rithmatist. However, something different happens during his inception ceremony that does not happen with those not chosen. For this reason, the reader is left wondering if Joel might have been chosen had he been allowed in the chamber at the proper age. The reader also wonders if Joel was chosen for something different, something new.



Joel is attacked by the kidnapper, but he manages to outsmart him and survive. Unfortunately, Exton is accused of being the kidnapper because he is in the office when Joel runs there looking for help. There also seems to be evidence against Exton, but it appears later that the evidence was planted. In the end, Joel discovers that the real kidnapper is Harding. Harding has been possessed by a creature from Nebraska who has somehow managed to find a way out of the tower. Harding is defeated by Fitch with Melody and Joel's help. This proves that Fitch is as brilliant as everyone has thought and that he can fight when necessary. It also proves that Joel knows more about being a Rithmatist than most Rithmatists.

In the end, however, Joel realizes that his suspicion about Nalizar was true. Unfortunately, it is too late for Joel to make accusations. Instead, Joel must remain one step ahead of Nalizar, something he proves himself capable of doing during the Melee. Joel is smart and capable. With Melody as his partner, he is unstoppable. It leaves the reader anxious for the next book in the series.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Joel attacked by the kidnapper? What has Joel done to catch the kidnapper's attention? How does Joel outsmart the kidnapper?

Discussion Question 2

What does Joel see in the inception chamber? What might it mean about Joel? What does it mean about his desire to become a Rithmatist?

Discussion Question 3

What does Nalizar practically admit to Joel in the final chapter of the book? What does Joel think Nalizar wants to do? Why?

Vocabulary

Events, honor, persuaded, contracts, media, publicize, apology, chaos, creature, breathless, acid, graduates, release, forming, surrounded, happening, treated, fantastic, actually, inspector, dissolved, forgotten, proffering.



Characters

Joel Saxon

Joel Saxon is a young student at Armedius, a private school. Joel is a loner not because he cannot make friends, but because his mother is a cleaning woman at the school so he has nothing in common with the often rich and privileged children who attend there. Joel is also obsessed with the Rithmatists, a subject many of the other students find boring.

Joel manages to get himself involved in the investigation into the disappearances of several Rithmatist students from Armedius. Joel proves himself to be quite helpful in this investigation, providing a fresh perspective to the clues. Joel proves to be so good at helping with the investigation that he makes himself a victim of the kidnapper.

In the end, Joel helps to stop the kidnapper. However, Joel also helps the mastermind of the plot to escape. Joel knows that Professor Nalizar is not human, that he is some kind of creature from Nebrask, and that he wants to control the Rithmatists who go to Nebrask. For that reason, Joel begins a campaign to stop Nalizar, beginning by helping Melody win the Melee.

Melody Munn

Melody Munn is a Rithmatist student at Armedius. Melody is not good at Rithmatist fundamentals, so she is forced to go to tutoring over the summer with Professor Fitch. For this reason, Melody and Joel are forced together on a nearly daily basis.

Melody may not be good with circles and Rithmatist defenses, but she is brilliant when it comes to chalklings. Melody can not only draw very detailed chalklings, but she can control them in ways that no other Rithmatist has ever mastered before. This gives Melody a strength that others do not have.

Melody and Joel become good friends over the course of the summer. Therefore, when Melody is forced to fight in the Melee, Joel is able to not only help her survive, to help her win by showing her what to draw and where to do it. Joel and Melody make an amazing team, suggesting to the reader a new direction in the Rithmatist traditions.

Professor Fitch

Professor is the quintessential, absentminded professor. Fitch is defeated in a challenge to his job, so he finds himself beginning the summer as a simple tutor rather than a tenured professor. This does not seem to bother Fitch as he quickly buries himself in helping with the investigation into the disappearance of Rithmatist students. At the same time, Fitch takes on Melody and Joel as student and assistant.



Fitch does not feel he is a good Rithmatist. Instead, he thinks of himself as a historian. Fitch grows nervous whenever he is required to duel. However, when Joel and Melody find themselves in danger when confronting Harding and his Forgotten, Fitch rises to the occasion and helps save them. Fitch, in the end, proves to not only be a good teacher, but a very talented Rithmatist.

Professor Nalizar

Professor Nalizar is a young Rithmatist who has spent many years fighting in Nebrask. Nalizar has recently been released from duty in Nebrask for mysterious reasons in the aftermath of the death of a fellow Rithmatist, who turns out to be Melody's brother. Nalizar has taken a job as a tutor at Armedius, but within a week of taking the job he challenges Professor Fitch to a duel. In the traditions of Rithmatists, if one professor battles another in a duel and wins, the winner gets to take the other's job. For this reason, Nalizar moves up to tenured professor, while Fitch is forced down to tutor.

Joel dislikes Nalizar and begins to suspect him when Rithmatist students begin to disappear. Joel's suspicion grows when he learns that Nalizar has been reading about the history of Rithmatists and the origin of the lines. To add to his suspicion, Joel sees Nalizar go out on the same night the third student disappears. In the end, when Joel walks in on Harding trying to kidnap the Rithmatist students at Armedius in one fell swoop, Joel finds Nalizar there as well. Nalizar appears to prove his innocence by allowing a blow from Harding to knock him out, but when Joel talks to him later, Nalizar practically admits he is a more advanced Forgotten than the one that possessed Harding. For this reason, Joel attempts to discover Nalizar's motives and defeat him.

Inspector Harding

Inspector Harding is a federal inspector who is in charge of the investigation into the disappearance of several Rithmatist students from Armedius. Harding works with Fitch in hopes of discovering a Rithmatist who could be capable of committing the crime based on evidence found at the crime scenes. Joel learns that Harding once served in Nebrask with Professor Nalizar. Later, this proves important when Harding is proven to be the kidnapper, working under the spell of a Forgotten, a creature from Nebrask that has possessed him.

Principal York

Principal York is the principal of Armedius. York is a kind man, but he is not a Rithmatist, a fact that many parents and politicians think is a mistake for a school like Armedius. York is a good friend of Joel's, watching over him like a surrogate father because of his friendship with Joel's father. When Joel finally realizes where he has seen the mysterious Rithmatist line at the crime scenes, it is because York recognizes it as well. The only thing the two of them have in common is Trent.



Trent Saxon

Trent Saxon is Joel's father. Trent was a chalkmaker who was obsessed with the Rithmatists. Trent liked to make unique chinks that worked well for everything the Rithmatists were required to do, once making a belt with multiple chinks on it that many of the professors of Armedius wore. Trent was also interested in finding new Rithmatic lines. For this reason, he traveled a great deal in the final years of his life. Trent, it turned out, did find a new Rithmatic line, but he could never get it to work because he did not know its purpose. Trent died when Joel was eight when a train he was on derailed.

Mrs. Saxon

Mrs. Saxon is Joel's mother. Mrs. Saxon works as a cleaning woman at Armedius. Mrs. Saxon works mostly nights, therefore Joel does not get to see her often. Mrs. Saxon is a hardworking woman who is working mostly to pay off debts her husband left behind after his death.

Florence

Florence is the young secretary that works in the principal's office at Armedius. Florence is flirty and a gossip. Joel finds out much of what he knows about the school and the missing students from Florence. Florence is also friends with Joel's mother, who is a cleaning woman at the school.

Exton

Exton is the clerk in the principal's office at Armedius. Exton was once a Rithmatist student at the school, but he was deemed to be a danger to himself and others. So, he was moved to the regular studies. Exton is a kind person who has a gruff personality. Many think that Exton is unkind, but he is simply a man who likes order. Joel and Exton become friends because of the time Joel spends in the office as a messenger. Later, when Joel is attacked by the wild chalkings, Exton quickly comes to his rescue. Unfortunately, Exton is arrested as the kidnapper because of his apparent dislike of Rithmatists and evidence found in his desk that later proves to have been planted.



Symbols and Symbolism

Chalklings

Chalklings are drawn creatures that are used to attack other Rithmatist's defenses during duels. These creatures can be anything from blobs to snakes to small warriors. Melody's chalklings of choice are unicorns. Chalklings act according to written symbols by the Rithmatist. Most chalklings can only do a small number of things before growing confused. Melody, however, can control her chalklings with only thought and make them do many more things than regular chalklings.

Rithmatic Defenses

Rithmatists fight one another and wild chalklings with specific defenses. These defenses are made of circles and lines that interact to protect the Rithmatist. The circles provide a place for the Rithmatist to sit defended while drawing chalklings to attack their opponents' circles. These circles can consist of anywhere from one to nine circles.

Lines of Forbiddance

Lines of Forbiddance are lines that Rithmatists draw to defend themselves. Once one of these lines is drawn, no one can pass through them, even the one who drew them. These lines are for defense only.

Lines of Vigor

Lines of Vigor are lines that are drawn to shoot out at a Rithmatist's opponents in order to break through their defenses. At each of the crime scenes, Joel and Fitch discover a new kind of Lines of Vigor that are faster and can create more damage.

New Rithmatist Line

Joel and Fitch recognize a new Rithmatist line at the crime scenes, but they do not understand what it does. Later, Joel discovers that the line absorbs sound to keep those near it from screaming. Joel learns in his investigation that his father first discovered this line, but he did not know how to make it work because he did not know what it was supposed to do.



Chalk

All Rithmatists carry chalk in their pockets everywhere they go because chalk is the medium of their profession.

Books

Joel reads many books on Rithmatists in this novel. At the same time, Joel becomes suspicious of Nalizar because of the books he sees him reading.

Clocks

Joel discovers that clockworks inside clocks, money, and many other works in his world causes fear in some of the wild chalklings and creatures he comes across in this novel.

Springworks

Joel's world appears to be a world that is founded on the inventions of da Vinci. This includes lamps, trains, and money that include springwork machines.

Cloaks

The professors at Armedius are identified by their cloaks. Tenured professors wear red cloaks while tutors wear grey cloaks.

Settings

Jamestown, New Britannia

Joel lives in Jamestown, New Britannia. Jamestown is a thriving city on an island that exists in what should be the Eastern United States. In Joel's world, the United States is not made up of states. It is a collection of islands called the United Isles. There are multiple other islands in this federation, including East Carolina. However, many of the islands harbor hostility for other islands, causing political unrest among the United Isles. Joel has never left Jamestown until the day he visits a crime scene in East Carolina. Travel between the islands is by a train that runs on batteries and runs under the tracks.

Armedius

Armedius is the name of the private school Joel attends. Armedius is both a school for regular students and a school for Rithmatists. There are only a handful of Rithmatist schools in the United Isles, a fact that promotes unity among the Rithmatists. However, when Armedius is the target of someone kidnapping Rithmatist students, it causes a great deal of hostility from the normal citizens. There is talk of opening a Rithmatist school on each of the islands to avoid having to send students to distant islands.

Nebrask

Nebrask is an island in the western region of the United Isles. In pioneer days, wild chalklings were discovered in the West. The chalklings were captured in a tower in Nebrask. Now Rithmatists are sent to Nebrask upon graduation from a Rithmatist school to fight wild, escaped chalklings and to assure they remain in the tower. Both Harding and Nalizar have recently returned from Nebrask at the beginning of the novel.



Themes and Motifs

Ambition

Joel Saxon really wants to be a Rithmatist. Unfortunately, Rithmatists are chosen at the age of eight when a child goes through his inception ceremony. Joel missed his inception ceremony because his father was in a train accident the day before the ceremony and Joel chose to remain at his side. Joel had his inception ceremony six months later, but he did not enter the inception chamber because it was being repaired. For this reason, Joel lost his chance to become a Rithmatist.

Eight years later, Joel continues to be obsessed with Rithmatists. Joel's father used to tell him all kinds of information about the Rithmatists. This has created a deep fascination with the Rithmatist. Joel hopes to become a Rithmatist scholar and historian. To do so, however, he needs to learn more about the Rithmatist. However, much of the information Joel craves to learn is forbidden to none Rithmatists.

Melody comes up with a plot to make Joel a Rithmatist. She convinces the vicar of the local church to allow Joel to go through his inception ceremony again. However, even though Joel sees a chalk creature in the chamber, he is not chosen to be a Rithmatist. This leaves Joel frustrated, but he continues his studies. In the end, Joel helps Melody win a Melee, a contest against Rithmatists, proving he has what he needs to become a Rithmatist. This leaves the reader hopeful that Joel might have discovered a new kind of Rithmatist.

Coming of Age

Joel is only sixteen when this novel begins. He is an awkward high school student with few friends. For this reason, Joel spends much of his time reading and studying about the Rithmatists. However, as the novel continues, Joel finds himself drawn into an investigation concerning the disappearances of Rithmatist students.

As Joel becomes involved in the investigation, he finds himself in dangerous situations, including an attack by the kidnapper as well as a battle against the kidnapper. At the same time, Joel discovers things about his father that he never knew. Joel learns that his father left his mother and he was in deep debt when he died. He also learned that his father discovered a new Rithmatist line before he died. These things combine to make Joel not only realize more about his father, but to discover how difficult the adult world is and that he needs to grow up to help his mother deal with it.

In the end, Joel becomes more mature, not only because of the danger he has confronted, but because of the realities of the world around him. For this reason, coming of age is a theme of the novel.



Friendship

Joel has known Melody Munn for a long time because she is a student in his math class. However, Joel has never spoken to her because she is a Rithmatist and he is not. Melody reaches out to him once, but Joel does not reciprocate. Then, when summer begins, Joel is surprised to discover that Melody is Professor Fitch's student for the summer, forcing them to spend nearly every day together.

At first Joel and Melody are like oil and water, impossible to get along. However, as they get to know each other and discover that they complement each other's weaknesses, they begin to get to know one another better. Joel and Melody have a lot in common, including deaths in their families and sense of failing those who care about them.

As the novel progresses, Joel and Melody become friends. However, by the end of the novel, they are more than friends. They become partners, a team, strengthening each other's weaknesses to make them one invincible pair. Joel and Melody win the Melee even though Joel is not a Rithmatist and Melody cannot draw a simple circle. This friendship has made them whole, suggesting a new kind of Rithmatist and a lasting friendship.

Styles

Point of View

The novel is written in the third person point of view. The narrator is Joel Saxon. Joel is a sixteen year old high school student who finds himself pulled into a criminal investigation. Joel is not a Rithmatist, but he knows more about the traditions than most Rithmatist students. This combined with Joel's basic intelligence makes him an invaluable part of the investigation.

The point of view of this novel works well with the plot because the author tells the entire story through the eyes of only one character. The reader gets to know this character intimately and becomes concerned for his overall safety and success. This also keeps the narration tightly focused so that the reader is not confused by information that is superfluous to the plot and unnecessary.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is simple English. The intended audience of this novel is young adults. The main character is also a young adult. Therefore, the language of this novel is authentic to both the intended audience and the main character.

The language of this novel is appropriate to the plot because it does not try to be more than what it is. The language is simple and direct. The novel's genre is fantasy, therefore there are multiple words in the plot that are from the author's imagination. However, each of these words is easily defined by its use in the plot and does not represent a problem for the reader.

Structure

The novel is divided into three parts, a prologue, and twenty-five chapters. Each chapter varies in length, but some are quite long. The chapters sometimes cover only a few minutes in time while others cover days at a time. The novel is written in both narration and dialogue, showing a complete story rather than telling.

The novel contains one main plot and multiple subplots. The main plot follows Joel as he tries to find a way to become more involved in Rithmatic studies. Instead, he finds himself in the middle of a criminal investigation. One subplot follows Joel's discoveries about his father. Another subplot follows the suspicions Joel has about Nalizar that eventually prove to be true. Other subplots follow the relationships between Joel and Melody and Professor Fitch. All plots come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

It was as if the entire city had gone dead.
-- Lilly (Prologue paragraph 3)

Importance: This is Lilly's sense as she runs from danger in her own home. This gives the reader a sense of the setting, as Lilly perceives it, and the danger that lurks outside her door.

Lines of Vigor,' Joel said. 'Duelists shoot them at each other. That's the point; it's how you breach the circle.
-- Joel (Chapter 1 paragraph 16)

Importance: This is a statement Joel makes to fellow students that both introduces his enthusiasm for Rithmatists and explains to the reader the basic purpose of a Rithmatist's profession.

Honestly. Who reviewed after the final exam?
-- Joel (Chapter 3 paragraph 7)

Importance: This quote shows Joel's exasperation and boredom in his math class. Joel has an advanced understanding of math that causes him some trouble in this novel.

We are warriors. It's been years since most of you held the circle in Nebrask, but I was there just a few months ago, on the battlefield itself! Too many academics forget that we are the ones who train the next generation of defenders. We can't have sloppy teaching threatening the safety of the sixty isles!
-- Nalizar (Chapter 5 paragraph 4)

Importance: This is a conversation Joel overhears. This is Nalizar's opinion of the Rithmatic schools and partly his motive for challenging Professor Fitch and stealing his classes. This also explains, in part, the purpose of the Rithmatists.

Murder. That made sense - after all, a federal inspector was involved. Yet, it felt different to have it spoken out loud. It made him remember that they were talking about a real person, not just a logical person.
-- Joel (Chapter 8 paragraph 40)

Importance: This quote is Joel's first real understanding the Lilly might have been killed by whomever attacked her in her home. It makes the whole investigation a little more real and important, to him.

I feel useless. If I'd been able to figure this out earlier, then perhaps poor Herman wouldn't have...well, who knows what happened to him?
-- Fitch (Chapter 10 paragraph 48)



Importance: This quote shows the stress that has been placed on Professor Fitch's shoulders to try to identify a Rithmatist who might be kidnapping, or murdering, Rithmatist students.

So, what's it about Rithmatists that makes you so keen on being one?
-- Melody (Chapter 13 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote shows that Melody has really noticed Joel and begins a quest on her part to find a way to help Joel.

Springrail trains hung beneath their tracks, and so the track was high in the air, about ten feet up; it ran through the building and out the ends. The train cars were long and slender, designed like ornate carriages.
-- Joel (Chapter 15 paragraph 27)

Importance: This describes the trains that run between the 60 islands of the United Isles. This design is based on clockwork inventions, like most of the mechanical items used in Joel's society.

The Tower of Nebrask is, of course, a central feature in early records. Of obviously ancient date, the Tower was one of the wonders of the islands, as it was the only freestanding structure of apparent human design to be discovered there.
-- Narrator/Joel (Chapter 17 paragraph 7)

Importance: This is a description of the Tower of Nebrask, the tower where the wild chalklings are imprisoned and where the Rithmatists fight routinely to keep them locked up.

Even the most oblivious of men knew of the connection between Rithmatics and the Monarchical Church. No man gained Rithmatic powers without first agreeing to be incepted.
-- Joel (Chapter 19 paragraph 10)

Importance: This quote describes the connection between the religion of Joel's society and the Rithmatics.

They could have gotten through to Melody if they'd known that the section of the lines that Joel had drawn wasn't Rithmatic--but, just like before, chalklings seemed as fooled by a fake line as a human might be, at least at first.
-- Joel (Chapter 24 paragraph 27)

Importance: This quote describes not only the difference between a Rithmatic's lines and lines drawn by non-Rithmatics, but it also shows Joel's ability to outsmart the wild chalklings in his fight with Harding.

It became six on two. Even that should have been impossible odds. It wasn't.
-- Narrator (Chapter 25 paragraph 219)

Importance: This quote shows how strong a team Melody and Joel make together in the Melee.