

Steal the Dragon Study Guide

Steal the Dragon by Patricia Briggs

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Plot Summary

Rialla is a young girl taken as a slave. Years later, after her escape, she finds an opportunity to end slavery in the land.

Rialla is a natural empath, so her father teaches her how to use her ability with horses. When slavers attack the entire group, they torture and kill almost everyone, keeping Rialla for a slave. Rialla loses almost all of her empathy. She is trained as a dancer, but she runs away and goes to the nearby city of Sianim. Rialla makes her home in Sianim, city of mercenaries and spies, and gets a job as a horse trainer.

Years later, there is a possible alliance between Darran and the nearby country of Reth. This alliance will probably end slavery in Darran. The Spymaster asks Rialla if she will return to Darran as a spy, posing as a slave. Rialla agrees, going dressed as the slave of Laeth, who is her best friend. They go to Darran, and while they are there, someone tries to poison Lord Karsten, Laeth's brother. Only the talents of the healer, Tris, save his life. Tris uses medicine and healing plants to hide the fact that he uses magic to heal people. While Rialla is at Lord Karsten's estate, she bumps into her old master, who turns out to be Lord Winterseine, Laeth's uncle.

On the night of Karsten's birthday party, a huge, nasty swamp monster materializes in the ballroom. The monster is distracted by Rialla's empathy, and attacks her. Rialla fights the monster, giving it all the negative emotions she can find. The monster dies, but during the distraction, someone stabs Karsten to death. All suspicion points at Laeth, because Karsten has married Marri, the woman Laeth loves. The unconscious Rialla is brought to Tris's house, because she has a huge wound on her leg from the fight. Her powers seem stronger than ever, because of the fight with the monster. When Marri shows up, and tells them that Laeth is to be executed the next day, they know they have to act. Tris magically heals Rialla's leg, and they go to rescue Laeth. Tris gets him out while Rialla steals their horses, and then she leads their pursuers on a wild goose chase.

Laeth and Marri make it to Sianim, but Rialla is returned to Winterseine, her old master. Beforehand, Tris telepathically bonds her to him, using a ceremony involving the exchange of blood. Rialla does not realize that this makes them married in the eyes of the sylvans, or tree-folk, of which group Tris is a member. Rialla and Tris find Winterseine's spellbook, and the dagger used to murder Karsten. They steal these and make their way to Sianim. Rialla gets caught, but uses her empathy to drive Winterseine insane. Rialla presents the evidence for Winterseine's guilt, and the official who receives it tells her he will try to help the alliance that will end slavery.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Rialla is a young girl living with her family near the fictional country of Darran. Her family is part of a small clan of nomadic Traders, and her father trains horses for a living. He is very skilled, and gains prestige for their clan. Young Rialla is born an empath, someone who can sense the feelings of others, so her father brings her into the stables when he is training horses. This way, he can use her gift to train horses more easily and also teach her to control it. She learns a lot about taking care of horses. When Rialla is a teenager, her parents betroth her to a young man from another clan, and there is a big gathering to celebrate the engagement. Rialla dances for her betrothed, and she notices a strange man there looking at her. She is unnerved because she can sense nothing from him.

A few days later, slave traders attack Rialla's clan. They kill all the men, and take a few of the women and girls as slaves. Rialla recognizes the stranger as the head slave trader. As is the custom, each of the slaves receives a large tattoo on the left side of their face. While Rialla listens to their screams, she empathizes with them, feeling their pain, and it is so bad that her talent for empathy shuts down almost completely.

She is trained as a dancer for two years in the country of Darran, then tattooed. As a dancer, she is a very valuable slave, and she makes a lot of money for her Master. One day, Rialla sees a chance for escape and she takes it, even though she has to kill a man in order to get out. She steals the man's money, knife, and horse, and runs away to nearby Reth, where slavery is illegal. She heats the knife in a fire and uses it to cauterize the tattoo on her face.

Rialla heads to the town of Sianim. There she gets a job training horses. Even though it is rather obvious, most people do not mention that her scar reveals her as an escaped slave. Rialla lives in Sianim for seven years, taking care of horses for the many soldiers and mercenaries who come through the town. Although many of the mercenaries try to date her, Rialla beats up any who grope her. Her best friend is Laeth, who is the younger son of a noble. Laeth is the black sheep of his family, especially since his older brother, Lord Karsten, has married Marri, the woman that Laeth loves.

One day, Rialla is summoned by Ren, the Spymaster of Sianim. Ren tells her that Lord Karsten and some other lords are encouraging a union between the kingdoms of Reth and Darran. Ren tells her that there is a religious leader called the Voice of Altis, who has been gathering followers all over the area, amazing people with his miracles. The Voice of Altis could gain so many followers that he could take over and cause widespread civil war. The only sure way to overpower the Voice of Altis is to unite Reth and Darran. Ren has heard that Rialla speaks Darranian, the language of Darran. He wants to send her into Darran as a spy, posing as a slave. Ren wants Rialla to listen and report back anything that might give them a foothold in the fight, or a clue as to



what the enemy will do next. He tempts Rialla by telling her that if the two kingdoms unite, Lord Karsten plans to abolish slavery in Darran. Rialla asks if she can think about it overnight.

Back at the stables, Rialla is moved to tears as she remembers details of her earlier life. She decides that she must go back to Darran because she has a chance to end slavery. She is especially worried because she knows that if she is abandoned there, she will just be a slave again. Laeth comes to the stables, and the two of them go to the Lost Pig, the local tavern. Over dinner, Laeth tries to persuade Rialla to go with him to Darran, and she agrees to do it. She tells him that part of the reason she is willing is because she does not think he will ever leave her behind or just keep her there as a slave. Laeth assures her that he would do nothing of the kind. Ren gets a magician to put an illusion on Rialla's face that makes her scar look like her old tattoo. Rialla borrows some dancing costumes from some prostitutes, and the two of them get ready to go.

Chapter 1 Analysis

This chapter introduces the reader to the characters of Rialla and Laeth, and gives a sense of the fantasy world that they live in. Little is said about Rialla's background, except that her family is part of a small clan of Traders and trains horses. Apparently, in this world, a few children are born with the valuable gift of empathy. There is also magic, since the Voice of Altis seems to be a rogue mage who is going around using his magic. However, many other details seem similar to Europe in the middle ages, such as the systems of government and the level of technology. Laeth, as the dissolute younger son of a noble, is basically a stock character from novels taking place in such a setting.

Rialla has lost most of the talent for empathy that she was born with. Although her father was teaching her to control her talent, the experience of captivity is too much for her, and she loses most of her ability. Since this is only the first chapter, this is basically foreshadowing that she is going to get her talent back somehow.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Rialla and Laeth arrive in Darran, in the town of Westhold, where Lord Karsten has been living. Lord Karsten is kind to servants and those around him, and cares a lot about propriety, but Rialla knows that he does not care what cruel measures Dram, his overseer, uses to ensure that Lord Karsten's supplies are kept well-stocked. It is strictly forbidden for peasants to hunt in Lord Karsten's lands, even if they are starving, because he wants to make sure that there will be something to hunt when he feels like it. Lord Karsten understands that by supporting the alliance between Reth and Darran, he is making himself a target for assassination, and in fact, there has already been an attack on his life. Ostensibly, Laeth is there to celebrate Karsten's birthday, although really he wants to find out who is behind the attack. Laeth claims that Rialla is a slave that he has recently purchased.

Shortly after they have arrived, Karsten collapses because someone has poisoned him. They quickly send for the healer, who lives in the nearby village of Tallonwood. The healer, Tris, comes and ministers to Karsten, saving his life. Although everyone thinks that Tris is merely a gifted healer, he actually uses a bit of magic to heal people, but magic is taboo in Darran, so he keeps this a secret. Tris is a foreigner, like Rialla. When the healer sees Laeth pretending to beat Rialla, he steps in to defend her. He notices that there is something strange about her.

That evening, when Laeth and Rialla are in Laeth's quarters, Marri, Karsten's wife, comes to see Laeth. She warns him that he must leave, because whoever is trying to kill Karsten is clearly setting it up to look like Laeth is guilty. Laeth tells Marri that she must leave his quarters right away, lest someone think that they definitely are plotting against her husband. She is just about to exit when Rialla's empathy tells her that there is someone outside the door. She goes into the hall and finds a guard with a dog. She senses that someone has bribed him to spy on someone who is in the hallway, and she convinces him to walk away. Marri goes back to her own quarters, and Laeth asks Rialla how she knew that there was someone in the hall. Rialla confesses that she is empathic, and reveals to him how she lost most of her ability by sensing the torture and murder of her family and friends.

Rialla decides to spend the night in the slave quarters, in the hope of getting information out of the other slaves. On her way into the communal slave bedroom, she hears the voice of her old Master, and she is filled with terror. He is instructing a young slave girl to wait there for him. Once the slave trainer has left, Rialla enters the room and goes to bed. She is tempted to comfort the crying girl, but tells herself that she can help all slaves a lot more if she does not compromise her mission. That night, she dreams about the girl's family, and is jolted awake by an empathic surge of pain. The young slave girl has stabbed herself with a kitchen knife, and as she dies, Rialla realizes that the other girl is an empath too. Rialla suddenly knows many things about the girl's life,



seeing that she has freely come in order to serve the Voice of Altis. Instead, the girl has been used for a sex slave. Riiala and all the other slaves sneak out of the slave quarters, not wanting to be witnesses to the tragedy.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Before Tris is summoned to heal Lord Karsten, he is talking with Trena, the town wisewoman, who trained him in the ways of healing. Trena also has magical abilities, which she hides for fear of persecution. Trena goes into a trance, prophesying that two people will come, a man and a dancer, and that Tris must help them, because their mission is good. The last part of her trance is a recitation of the beginning of the marriage vows, in Tris's native language. After her trance, Trena can not remember what she has said, but Tris recognizes that this foreshadows that he might be getting married soon, possibly to the dancer. This seems like a good match, since both of them have magic.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Rialla returns to Laeth's room and sits in silence until morning comes. When he wakes up, she tells him about the other slave girl, and how she has assimilated many of the girl's memories. From what she has received, Rialla realizes that the girl thinks that her old Master, the slave trainer, is none other than the Voice of Altis. Now that Rialla's mind has been opened to the other girl's, some of her empathic ability is coming back, and many of the mental barriers that she has built up come down, leaving her little protection against the emotions of those around her. When she has some free time, Rialla meditates and tries to work through her old memories, as well as those provided by the girl, so that she will be able to function normally later.

At a social function, a man comes up behind Rialla and grabs her neck, and she recognizes her old Master. He also recognizes her, and tells Laeth that he wants her back now. When Laeth realizes that the man who has hurt Rialla so badly is his dear uncle, Lord Winterseine, he is enraged. Laeth points out that legally, the slave is now his, leading Lord Winterseine to vow revenge on Laeth and Rialla. Laeth, rubbing it in, tells Rialla to go put on a dance costume, because he wants her to perform at dinner. Rialla puts on a green outfit with many veils and bells, which is appropriate for public performances. After dinner, Rialla dances for the nobles, to the delight of all.

There is a huge ball for Lord Karsten's birthday. The ballroom is packed with various nobles, as well as wealthy farmers and merchants from the nearby towns. Rialla runs errands for Laeth, trying to pick up information as she does so. Suddenly, a huge swamp monster materializes out of thin air. It is terrifying, a rotten, floating thing with tentacles and six glowing red eyes. It is clearly attacking Lord Karsten, but it is distracted by Rialla. She quickly senses that the monster has empathic abilities, and it is excited at the prospect of eating an empath. Rialla tries to fight the monster off with a sword and then a candle holder, but her weapons do no good. Finally, feeling the seductive pull on her thoughts, she invites the monster all the way in to her mind, because she knows what sort of terrifying, painful thoughts lurk there. She willfully lowers every mental barrier she has ever created, and also opens herself up to all the pain and confusion around her. The monster stabs her in the leg, but it cannot take the torrent of emotion that she unleashes upon it. As a final death blow, she gives the monster her own terror at fighting it, and the monster dies a screaming death.

Unfortunately, the monster has killed Lord Karsten by stabbing him in the heart. The healer, Tris, confirms this, but wants to see what he can do for Rialla. Rialla tells everyone to stay away from her, because she knows that she has no control over all of these raging emotions, and she worries that if anyone touches her, they will receive the same blast that killed the monster. Laeth, however, does not heed her warning, and touches her. The two of them endure a moment of agony before they both pass out.



Chapter 3 Analysis

So far, most of the action has been building up to a political coup, with most people being concerned with alliances, etiquette, and betrayal. Now, however, it becomes apparent that magic is a powerful force, capable of transforming the kingdom. Obviously, some evil magician has sent the monster. It seems likely that this magician is Lord Winterseine. The man calling himself the Voice of Altis is known to be a mage, but in all her years being owned by him, Rialla has never suspected any magical ability in her Master. This should tip her off anyway, since he has been one of the only people that she has ever met whom she could not read emotionally. Especially since Lord Winterseine has been able to locate and enslave not one but two empaths, this indicates that he has some great power, allowing him to find those with magical ability, and at the same time, mask his own abilities.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Rialla wakes up in the house of Tris, the healer. As she wakes up, she feels great, except for the huge, festering wound on her thigh. Rialla realizes that all of her original empathic abilities have returned to her. She feels a nearby presence that she can only describe as beautiful, and certainly not human. Tris enters and checks on her leg, and she sees that he is very good at healing. Tris tells her that Laeth has been blamed for murdering his brother, Lord Karsten, and he is being held prisoner. Since Lord Winterseine is his closest living relative, Lord Winterseine wants to reclaim all of Laeth's valuables, especially his slave. Tris indicates that he knows that Rialla is not just Laeth's slave, so she tells him everything.

Lord Winterseine arrives, wanting to check on the progress of Rialla's healing. Tris tells him that it will be some time before she is healed, especially if they want her to dance again. That evening, Tris and Rialla play a board game called Steal the Dragon. Rialla observes that Tris definitely has magical powers, which he uses more and more casually as time passes. Later, they receive a visit from Marri. She tells them that Laeth is scheduled to be executed the next morning, and he is being held in a tower, heavily guarded. Rialla and Tris decide to break him out, so Tris heals Rialla's leg as fast as he can. However, he warns her that she will have very little energy until she has had time to rest.

Rialla and Tris go to Westhold, where they must climb the town wall. Tris is to rescue Laeth from the tower, using his magic, while Rialla fetches their horses from the stables. As they part ways, Rialla spontaneously calls Tris a shapechanger, and he acknowledges that he is distantly related to shapechangers. Rialla sneaks into the barn, using her empathy to soothe all the horses so that they will be quiet. She gets her and Laeth's horses out, and by putting the guards to sleep, is even able to get the horses through a small opening in the wall.

Rialla is about to climb the wall when someone dies nearby, and she accidentally projects the pain of death into the dreams of the guards all around her. They wake up, and she has trouble fighting them off. She does not want to kill any of them, because she worries that the empathic exchange will kill her, too. Finally, she manages to jump off the top of the wall, although there is a guard sounding the alarm.

Chapter 4 Analysis

It is obvious that Tris is falling in love with Rialla. Tris's first interaction with her is to defend her from Laeth's abuse, and later to make sure she is all right. When Tris asks her what her relationship with Laeth is, he is visibly relieved to hear that they are not lovers. Also, Tris is risking his life, as well as revealing his taboo magical powers, in



order to help her. Tris makes it clear that he has no interest in helping Laeth for his own sake. The question is, what is Tris? He clearly has magic of a magnitude and type that is unheard of for these people, and no one knows where he comes from. He practically admits to being a shapeshifter, and Rialla realizes that the beautiful, non-human presence she feels in his house is Tris himself. Rialla does not seem to realize that she is also falling in love with him. All she notices is how strange it is that she giggles around Tris, and feels more comforted by his presence than by that of her best friend, Laeth.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

While Rialla is getting the horses, Tris sneaks to the tower where Laeth is being held. Tris is very stealthy from years of poaching in the forest, and he easily sneaks past a few of the guards. He uses the cloak of magic to sneak past the others, and makes it to the top of the tower, where Laeth is being held in a cell, bound with many chains. There is a spell on the lock, so that magic can not open it, so instead Tris uses magic to turn the wood of the door to powder. He uses a key stolen long ago from the prisons to unlock Laeth's bonds, and then uses his healing ability to help him bring circulation back to Laeth's hands and feet. They hear a crash below them, and slowly go down the stairs.

Tris sneaks into the dark guardroom, and can tell that some swamp monster has killed the guard. He can see the monster, looking like a naked woman with claws and fangs, eating the dead guard. The monster wears a magical collar, which keeps her from finishing her meal until she has gone after the men on the stairs. Together, Laeth and Tris manage to kill the creature. They easily make their escape, since the swamp monster has killed all of the guards in the tower. When they return to Tris's house, Marri greets them with relief. Since Lord Winterseine has raised charges of conspiracy against Marri, her life is in danger, too. They decide that Marri will have to go to Sianim with Laeth.

Meanwhile, Rialla takes the horses all over the place, making sure to leave obvious tracks for the guards to follow. She leads the guards far away from where Laeth really is, evading several different groups by running around in the woods. One horseman is almost able to catch her and traps her in a ravine, but her horses just barely manage to scramble up the bank, causing a rockslide. Once Rialla can see that her pursuer cannot catch her, she waits at the top, wanting to know who it is. She recognizes Lord Jarroh, who has been Lord Karsten's councilor and constant companion. Lord Jarroh thinks that Rialla is Laeth, and demands to know why he has murdered his own brother. Rialla disguises her voice, and tells him that Laeth is innocent, and that he should instead suspect Lord Winterseine.

Rialla finally heads back to Tris's house, where the others have been waiting anxiously. She tells them that she has realized that Lord Jarroh is the only person left who can preserve the alliance that could end slavery. Although she could escape now with Laeth and Marri, Rialla decides to stay in Darran, and go back to being Lord Winterseine's slave, in the hope of uncovering proof that Lord Winterseine is behind Karsten's murder. As Laeth and Marri escape, Rialla is suddenly hit with a wave of exhaustion. Tris insists on cleaning her up, since she is filthy from the chase, and they do not want anyone to know that she was involved. Tris points out how suspicious it will look if her leg is suddenly healed, and she understands that he needs to open up her wound again. He cuts her open and stitches her shut, and she passes out.



Chapter 5 Analysis

When Tris encounters the second swamp monster, he notes to himself how very wrong and evil she seems. The monster that attacks Rialla is also a swamp creature. According to the legends, long ago there were many wizards who had a bloody war. Most of the monsters created by the wizards ended up in the swamps, so they always smell like a stinky, rotting swamp. These monsters can be controlled by someone who is practicing evil magic. This explains the magical collar worn by the female monster. This creature sounds a lot like the Sirens from Greek mythology. She is like an underwater woman, and she uses her singing and moaning to lure men to come to her, so she can eat them. Her singing is so sexy that if a man resists her, it shows that he has a lot of control over his sexual desires. Both Laeth and Tris apparently possess this self-control, since they defeat the swamp woman together.

Rialla tells the others that she has to complete the mission, because as long as the situation stays the same, she is still a slave and will always be a slave. They contradict her, saying that she is certainly not a slave because of the way she has just led the guards on a wild goose chase while her friends waited and worried. They tell her that she is not nearly docile enough to be a good slave. Rialla thinks to herself how hard it is to lose the slave mentality, but her determination and bravery show that she obeys her own orders, and she is her own Master.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

The next day, Lord Winterseine comes by Tris's house to check on Rialla's condition. Just to be sure it is stitched up properly, Winterseine presses on the wound, eliciting a surge of rage from Tris. This is the only emotion that Rialla can ever sense from him. Tris tells Winterseine that Rialla should be able to travel in a week, and Winterseine says that he will be back in a week, and pay Tris. The week passes quickly. Tris and Rialla play many games of Steal the Dragon but she is distracted, trying to prepare herself for what lies ahead. From now on, she will not be merely pretending to be a slave. Tris tells her that her illusory tattoo is not foolproof enough, so he uses his magic to make a tattoo that even smooths the scar on her face.

The night before Winterseine is to pick up Rialla, Tris reveals to her that he is a sylvan, which is a type of tree-folk. He explains that over the years, magic has been abolished in the land to the point that enclaves of sylvans have gone undercover, pretending to be old-fashioned religious cults. Sylvans are magical, and in tune with all the plants of the forest, so when magic is outlawed, they all vow never to do magic in the presence of humans. One day, Tris finds a small girl lying on the ground after being beaten and gang-raped by some noblemen. The girl is dying, and he heals her body, making her mind forget what has happened to her. When word of what he has done gets back to the other sylvans, they banish him for breaking their law. They bind him with magical ropes, and leave him on the ground in the forest of Darran. This is where Tenna, the wisewoman, finds him.

Tris asks Rialla if she will be able to communicate with him empathically once she has gone with Winterseine. She answers that Tris is one of the only people she has ever met that she cannot read. Tris tells her that he is going to follow her surreptitiously in the woods and watch over her. Then he cuts his finger and puts it to her lips, and with a quick motion, nicks her neck and licks off the blood, then heals her neck. Suddenly, she is flooded with telepathy, and receives all of his memories at once. The experience is immediately too intimate, and she tries to draw back and give him some privacy. He tells her that sylvans usually communicate telepathically, so it is easier for him to control his thoughts than it is for her. She asks him if it is always like this, giving him a glimpse of the flood of memories that she has just received. He reveals that this is far more intimate than typical sylvan telepathy.

When Winterseine comes to pick up Rialla, he chains her hands behind her back and leads her on a leash. His servant, Tamas, leads Rialla's horse, and Tamas takes every possible opportunity to grope Rialla, often painfully. He is a sadist, and he tells her that if she cannot dance again, he gets to have her before she is sold to a brothel. They stop at a monastery for the night, and Tamas locks Rialla in a tiny room for the night. Somehow, Tris sneaks in to be with her and conjures a light so that they can play Steal the Dragon on his portable gameboard. Tris takes the cuffs off of her wrists and offers to



protect her from Tamas. She tells him that she can come up with something. In the morning, he binds her again, and when Tamas comes in to get her, Tris fades completely into the wall.

While they are riding, Tamas continues grabbing Rialla's wounded thigh. When a burst of thunder startles the horses, Rialla sends waves of fear over the horses, making everyone scatter, and making Tamas's horse rush off in the opposite direction. Rialla easily controls the horse she is on, but Tamas is thrown into a thornbush by his horse. As he is getting up, Rialla sees that his arm is broken. A few moments later, his arm is healthy and fine. Later, Rialla talks empathically with Tris, wondering how Tamas has been healed so easily. The spell seems outside of most of the magic that they are familiar with, and Rialla wonders if Lord Winterseine healed Tamas instantly, from a distance. She begins to wonder just what they are dealing with.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Tris tells Rialla that he is a sylvan, which is a type of tree-person. The sylvans in this story commune with the trees, and can use wood as a sensory organ, such as when Tris looks directly through the wood of Laeth's cell. Tris has other magic, too, and healing magic comes easily to him, because he deals with medicinal plants, and because his power involves helping things grow. There are characters similar to sylvans in various mythologies, such as Daphne from Greek mythology, dryads from Narnia, Ents from Middle Earth, or even Dr. Seuss's Lorax. These creatures are usually seen as guardians of the living, and as healers who are very wise. Tris specifies that he is not the same as a shapeshifter, which is a similar type of magical being, which is aligned more closely with the animals of the forest, and tends to behave like a vicious, seductive predator.

Even though Rialla and Tris are different types of creatures, they are still compatible enough that they can become blood brothers. This is an old type of ritual, sometimes practiced in real life, that is meant to symbolize that the same blood flows between two people, indicating that they are completely loyal to one another. In this case, not just loyalty, but all of Tris's thoughts and memories are communicated. In modern times, the ritual of becoming blood brothers has become much less popular, because now people understand that this ritual can spread disease.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Rialla knows that she will be punished for running away, but Lord Winterseine does not want to damage or scar her. After he makes her wait in chains for several hours, Rialla is taken to a place for solitary confinement. She is forced into an earthen hole in the wall, about the size of a coffin, and locked in for a day. It is not as bad as it could be, for her empathic ability makes her able to extend her consciousness out to the people and animals around her. In the next cell is another slave, frantic with fear. Rialla practices her skills by calming the girl and letting her sleep. When they are pulled out of their holes, the other girl looks terrible, but Rialla is all right. When Lord Winterseine sees that she is fine, he comes up with a more creative torture for her.

The next day, Rialla is blindfolded in the communal punishment chamber and tied to the side of a huge wheel. Before she realizes what is happening, she is lowered into icy water, over and over. Because the drowning is so terrible, she is unable to block the pain and despair emanating from all the other prisoners. The only thing that keeps her going is Tris, talking to her telepathically to distract her. When she is taken to her cell, Tris uses his powers to sneak in and massage her. Soon, Rialla is back at dance practice, although she has to be careful to avoid damaging her leg further. Although she is not fully healed, Lord Winterseine insists that she perform with a group on a certain occasion. Rialla tries to pick up information from the other slaves, but the other dancers are nervous around her, and say little.

In the evenings, Tris comes and tells Rialla what he has learned from sneaking around all day, and from posing as a woodcrafter serving the town. He mentions that there is a ridiculous number of cats in the castle grounds. He also notes that the entire inside of the private section of the castle is decorated with the cat emblem of the god Altis. This is evidence that Lord Winterseine is, or is involved with, the Voice of Altis. Rialla knows that Lord Winterseine has good reason to oppose the alliance that could end slavery, because he gets his income from trading slaves.

One night, Tris tells Rialla the story of the sylvans. They are the children of the forest god, and long ago were the guardians of the forest, practicing green magic. When humans continue to reproduce, and farmers clear forests for fields, the sylvans go into hiding. Tris recounts a story that he feels very guilty for, of a time an escaped slave comes to his enclave for sanctuary. The sylvans hold her until her master comes for her, and Tris does not try to protect her. He tells Rialla of the wizard wars, and hints that not all the dragons were destroyed. He tells Rialla that he has seen a dragon.



Chapter 7 Analysis

When Tris is telling Rialla about the encroachment of humanity on the forest folk, he says that all the magical beings hide or run away except for the dryads, who are tree-nymphs. The dryads welcome the humans, and when they lose most of their power through the destruction of the forests, most of the dryads are taken as slaves. Tris hints that there are descendants of dryads still among the humans, and that once in a while, it shows up in a woman who can commune with nature in a special way. Rialla does not agree with him that she is part dryad.

Tris mentions to Rialla that he has noticed that she wears a different expression on her face than most of the slaves he has seen. Whenever Rialla is acting as a slave, she puts on an expression that she thinks of as her slave mask, because she knows that her Master does not want her to show any intelligence or feeling. Rialla tells Tris that the other slaves he has seen are pleasure slaves. These are girls who serve only as sex partners to their masters, or who work in brothels, with their masters keeping all the revenue. The other kind of slave is a dancer, like Rialla. Rialla tells Tris that men like their pleasure slaves to appear to enjoy their work, so they tend to have a frozen smile on their faces. A dancer is more valuable, and is supposed to still have some spirit, so that she can dance passionately. Thus, there is no need for her to pretend to be happy, so her face is completely blank. In Rialla's opinion, a dancer performs in exactly the same way as a pleasure slave, and she thinks that one job is no worse than the other.



Chapter 8-9

Chapter 8-9 Summary

Back in Sianim, Ren the Spymaster has a meeting with Lord Kisrah, the Archmage. Lord Kisrah is concerned because there are several important Master Spells missing from the sacred book of the wizards. Lord Kisrah is concerned that without those pages, they will not be able to defeat the Voice of Altis and his army.

Meanwhile, at Winterseine Manor, Lord Winterseine notices that Rialla is holding back in her dancing, not wanting the other girls to look bad. To punish Rialla, Winterseine flogs another dancer, breaking her ribs, and makes Rialla dance perfectly. She dances so well that she arouses Winterseine's son Terran, who insists that he wants Rialla brought to his room after her bath. Rialla finds Terran especially creepy, because he is the only person that she can not sense in any way. Terran rapes her, and it is like being with a corpse. While Terran is sleeping, Rialla steals his journal from his room, and gives it to Tris in her cell. When Tris realizes that she has been raped, he is filled with rage. In order to comfort her, he sends her a dream, which is his memory of the day he saw the dragon.

The next day, the other dancers are very angry at Rialla, blaming her for what happened to their fellow slave. When a servant tells her that Terran wants to see her again, Rialla knows that she can not face sex with Terran again. On the way to his room, she attacks her guard, knocking him unconscious. She and Tris sneak into the study, and find the dagger that was used to kill Karsten. They also find Lord Winterseine's grimoire, or book of spells. There are several loose pages sticking out of the book. They steal these as evidence that Winterseine is practicing magic and that he is guilty of Karsten's murder. Tris and Rialla sneak out of the compound and into the woods.

Travelling in the woods, they have to be on the lookout for Uria, which are zombies that are vicious predators. They find a place to stay for the night, and Tris leaves Rialla to rest. He can travel very fast using magic, so he backtracks, looking for the other Uria, so they can avoid the monsters. Tris finds Terran and Winterseine camped, following them. Terran can track Rialla easily, using the help of the god Altis. They especially want to get back the dagger and the grimoire. Tris goes back to Rialla. He reads Terran's journal, which reveals that Terran really is a prophet of Altis. This is why he is so powerful.

Tris and Rialla decide that they should split up, since Terran is only tracking Rialla. Tris is to take the evidence right away to Sianim. The magic pages fall out of the grimoire, and there is so much magic in them, that Tris decides that they should destroy the pages. Fire does nothing, so Tris sets a puffball mushroom on it, releasing spores. Soon the pages have rotted away.



Chapter 8-9 Analysis

Tris feels very guilty because he has not yet explained to Rialla that they have now been bonded, which is like marriage, but closer and more telepathic. By exchanging blood, they now share a tight bond, and he knows that this is similar to slavery. Once again, Rialla belongs to someone else, without her consent. Rialla is horrified to have to interact with the other dancers, because their willing, docile attitude reminds her so much of how she used to be. She thinks to herself that the worst part of being a slave is not the desire to be free, but having no desire at all to be free. The other slaves want to be a credit to their master, and are proud to be some of his favorites.

Terran has very strong power, because it has been given to him by a god. Some types of magic can be used to overpower others. The magic of all the wizards is contained in the pages with the Master Spells inscribed on them. These pages cannot be destroyed by ordinary means, or even by powerful magic. However, Tris finds the most powerful type of magic, which is decomposition. This indicates that there is a sort of magic in the way dead things are broken down by nature into their components, to be used again as raw materials. It also points at the way we all must die. No matter how strong someone's magic is, the force of death will eventually overtake them.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Rialla and Tris split up. Rialla knows that Terran and Winterseine are on horseback, so she deliberately takes the roughest, most overgrown path she can, in exactly the opposite direction Tris is taking. On the second day, they catch her, and ask her why she ran away. Rialla pretends that she is only obeying her legal master, Laeth, who told her to go with a certain man. Winterseine lashes Rialla one time with his whip before Terran stops him, reminding him how valuable she is. They tie her hands, and leash her so that she is walking behind their horses. Rialla's leg is not healed enough to endure the fast, constant travel, and when it cramps, she falls down, strangling herself with the leash. Winterseine's horse drags her for several paces before Terran cuts the leash. Rialla is covered with scrapes and bruises, but as she and Terran watch, her wounds quickly heal. He demands to know how she has healed herself, but she has no idea.

Tris makes it to Sianim, and delivers the grimoire, journal, and dagger to Ren and Laeth. He explains that Terran is the Voice of Altis, much to their surprise, because Terran has always been a shy, awkward boy. They are worried, because they do not know how to counteract the power of a god.

At night, Rialla is tied to a stake in the camp, when the Uriah come and surround the campsite. Terran says that they have come to see him. He feels sorry for them, because they are the remnant from a hideous curse that animates human corpses. Terran calls upon the power of Altis, and tells the Uriah that they are released from their curse. The monsters fall to the ground, and revert to decomposed human bodies. The next night, they are camping close to Winterseine Manor. Terran asks Rialla to gather plants for a stew, and she finds a plant that is a powerful sleeping drug. Rialla puts this into the soup, and then pretends to eat, pouring her soup on the ground. Terran seems to fall fast asleep, but Winterseine recognizes the flavor of the plant, and does not eat it. He tells Rialla that he is happy to have this opportunity to have power over his son, because Terran has grown so powerful that he dominates his father. However, Winterseine knows that if he kills his son, he will bring the wrath of Altis upon himself. He casts a spell on Rialla to force her to stab Terran in his sleep. Rialla resists, and only finds the strength to disobey when Tris is close enough to touch her telepathically. She instead throws the knife into the fire, shocking Winterseine.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Although Rialla pretends to be nothing but a slave who only thinks of pleasing her master, she often reveals her rebellion through her actions. There are obvious things, like running away and putting the sleeping drug into Terran and Winterseine's stew. Rialla also rebels in less obvious ways, such as by dancing at less than her ability, or by pulling away in disgust from Terran's dead touch. When Terran sees that Rialla can heal



herself, he understands that she is no ordinary slave, and not just an empath. When Winterseine tries to force Rialla to kill Terran by putting a spell of obedience on her, she does not even obey that, showing that she is doing worse and worse at pretending to submit to the will of others. Winterseine, shocked, asks her who she is, and she tells him that she is the horse trainer from Sianim. This is the first time that she has identified herself in this way, with no reference to slavery.



Chapter 11 & Finis

Chapter 11 & Finis Summary

Rialla reveals to Winterseine that she is a spy from Sianim. He continues trying to force her to kill Terran, but instead she grabs hold of him, enhancing all of his pain and fear. They fight, with Winterseine beating Rialla as she tries to touch him. As power flows from Tris into her, Rialla takes off her tattoo, and this time there is no scar on her face. She touches Winterseine again, and sees how afraid he is of his own son. Rialla gives him not just her own pain, but also the pain of every death she has ever empathized with, including her own family, whom he killed. She also gives him Tris's crushing loneliness from being banished from his own kind. The flood of emotion drives Winterseine insane, and nearly drives Rialla crazy too, but Terran separates the two just in time.

Terran tells Rialla that he has only been pretending to sleep, listening as Rialla got his father out of the way for him. He thinks that she has just done this in order to serve Altis. Rialla realizes that many of the evil things that are being done in the name of Altis have been caused by Winterseine, and that Terran does not approve of the misuse of the god's name. Terran suggests that Rialla could stay with him and serve Altis, but Rialla answers that Altis plans to bring about peace and harmony by making everyone into slaves. Terran allows her to go free, so she goes and meets up with Tris.

Tris confesses to Rialla that they are basically married now, and he does not know how to undo the bond. He feels very guilty that he has done this to her without her consent. He explains that a prophecy indicated that he could marry her, and he tells her that she is the first person he has ever known with whom he could belong. When Rialla thinks about his immense loneliness, she does not mind being joined with him for the rest of her life.

Rialla goes to visit Lord Jarroh, bringing with her the evidence against Winterseine. When she has shown him that Winterseine is a powerful enough magician to create the illusion that Laeth stabbed his brother, Lord Jarroh agrees to let Laeth go. He also agrees not to stand in the way of the alliance that will end slavery.

Chapter 11 & Finis Analysis

The ending is a little unexpected, since the villains (Lord Winterseine, Terran, and Lord Jarroh) are still alive, although Winterseine is completely insane. Terran turns out not to be the same type of threat that was expected. He is powerful, given magic by a god, but he only wants to bring peace and prosperity, not evil like his father. Lord Jarroh is just a politician, although he is a cruel man, and when he is confronted with convincing evidence, he is willing to drop the case against Laeth.



Rialla submits willingly to the telepathic bond that she has with Tris, and because of this, it does not feel like slavery to her. On the other hand, the utopia that Terran hopes to bring about through Altis does require enslaving most people, in order to make them behave. To Rialla, it is not in the actions a person does, whether they are unpleasant or easy, that makes someone a slave, but whether or not the person has a choice in the matter.



Characters

Rialla

Rialla is the child of the nomadic Traders. She is raised with her clan, helping her father train horses. Rialla has the talent of empathy, meaning that she can sense and communicate with the emotions of the people and animals around her. When Rialla is a teenager and engaged to be married to a boy she has met once, slave traders attack her clan and kill almost everyone. As most of her friends and family are tortured and murdered, Rialla is in so much pain that her empathic talent shuts down. Rialla is a beautiful girl and an amazing dancer, with emerald-green eyes and red hair. She is trained as a dancer, the most valuable kind of slave, and her face is tattooed. Rialla escapes from slavery, and is brave enough to burn off her tattoo with a hot knife. She trains as a mercenary, becoming a good fighter. When the Spymaster asks Rialla to return as a spy, she is afraid, but she decides to do it in the hope of ending slavery for everyone.

When Rialla gets bonded with Tris, she gains much of his magic, becoming telepathic with him, and she is suddenly capable of doing magical spells. It is very important to Rialla that she is not really a slave, because she can make her own decisions. She does not care what kind of work is expected of her as a slave, whether it is dancing or sex, because just having to submit to someone else's will is bad enough. Rialla is headstrong and crafty, often deceiving people who chase or enslave her.

Tris

Tris is a sylvan, which is a type of tree-folk who are the children of the god of the forest. Tris is a guardian of the forces of nature, especially plants, so he can use plants for magic. This includes wood, so he can use wood as a sensory organ, or make it turn into powder, and then re-form. Tris loves to use his magic powers for healing people, but magic is forbidden among humans, so he pretends that he is just using medicine. Tris originally lives in an enclave with other sylvans, but he never really fits in, because they are only motivated by fear of discovery by humans. The sylvans once had huge forests to rule over, but humans have destroyed many of the forests, driving them back.

One day, Tris finds a little girl dying after being gang-raped. Tris uses his magic to heal the girl, physically and spiritually, and the sylvans banish him for breaking their law. Even though he is cast completely alone and helpless into the world, Tris does not regret helping the child. He cares a lot about protecting the people who are close to him, but he does not like noblemen. Whenever he is summoned by the aristocrats, Tris is insolent to them and charges exorbitant fees because everyone knows that he is the best healer around. Tris feels guilty after he secretly marries Rialla without telling her. However, the bond that develops between them is so intense that she understands the way she heals his loneliness, so she does not mind.



Laeth

Laeth is Rialla's best friend, and Lord Karsten's brother. He is in love with Marri, Karsten's wife.

Lord Karsten

Lord Karsten is Laeth's brother, and married to Marri. Lord Karsten is murdered because he supports an alliance that will end slavery.

Isslic, Lord Winterseine, the Slave Trainer

Lord Winterseine is Laeth and Karsten's uncle, and Rialla's former Master. He is an evil slave trader, and Rialla drives him insane.

Terran, the Voice of Altis

Terran is Lord Winterseine's son, and he turns out to be a prophet of the god Altis. Rialla can never sense Terran, so it is especially unpleasant when he rapes her.

Marri

Marri is in love with Laeth, but they never get engaged. When his brother Karsten asks her to marry him, she does, because she is a good, submissive daughter.

Ren, the Spymaster

Ren is the Spymaster of Sianim. He sends Rialla and Laeth to Darran as spies.

Lord Jarroh

Lord Jarroh is a close advisor to Lord Karsten, and he is a cruel man, who beats a slave girl to death for fun. However, he listens when Rialla explains the evidence that shows that Laeth is innocent.

Tamas

Tamas is Lord Winterseine's servant, and a cruel man. He takes any chance he can to hurt or grope Rialla.

Sora

Sora is another dancer who Riella dances with. Since Sora is the best dancer in the group, other than Riella, Riella holds back, not wanting to make Sora look bad.



Objects/Places

Darran

Darran is a fictional country where slavery is legal. This is where Rialla is held as a slave dancer.

Reth

Reth is a nearby country to Darran, and an alliance between the two could mean the end of slavery.

Sianim

Sianim is a city of mercenaries and spies. This is where Rialla goes after escaping slavery.

Tallonwood

Tallonwood is a town in Darran, next to Westhold. Tris lives in Tallonwood, working as the local healer.

Westhold

Westhold is the fortress where Lord Karsten lives, ruling his region of Darran. Laeth and Rialla go there to celebrate Karsten's birthday.

Winterseine

Winterseine is where Isslic, Lord Wintersiene, takes Rialla when he gets her back as a slave. There are a plenty of torture facilities there.

The Bonding Ritual

Tris performs a ritual with Rialla in which they are both cut and drink one another's blood. This ritual makes them telepathic together, and means that they are married for life.



Altis

Altis is an old god, who rules over the creatures of the night. He is symbolized by a cat, and Terran becomes a prophet of Altis, spreading worship of the god throughout the land.

Laeth's Dagger

Lord Winterseine steals Laeth's dagger and uses it to murder Lord Karsten. Later, Rialla and Tris find the dagger in Winterseine's study.

Rialla's Empathic Talent

Rialla is born with the rare talent of sensing what the people and animals around her are feeling. She can also project feelings onto the people around her.

The Wizard Wars

Many years before this story takes place, wizards fight one another, destroying much of the countryside. As a result, magic is banned.

The Great Swamp

There is a huge swamp near Reth and Darran, and it houses the hideous monsters conjured in the wizard wars.



Themes

Magic

The countries of Darran and Reth have been ravaged by magic, long ago, to the point where magic has been forbidden, and they have driven out nearly all the magical beings. The few who are left, like the sylvans, go into hiding. Magic is so taboo that some have forgotten its existence, and Rialla tells Tris that, "The people of the East apparently do not believe in magic; it's been so long since they've had wizards that they've long since dismissed the existence of magic as a child's fable" (p. 138). This could be considered to be a self-referential joke: the reader of the novel is pretending to believe in magic, but lives in a world that has stopped believing that magic has ever existed. Although magic is only practiced in secret, many of the characters turn out to have magical abilities, of various different types. Sylvans like Tris practice green magic, which involves plants, and includes abilities like healing, making light, hiding in shadows, and making plants grow quickly. They are the cousins of the shapeshifters, magical monsters that can change from one animal to another, in order to prey on innocent girls.

Rialla's own magic is a natural talent for empathy that she is born with. This is treated more like a mental ability and less like magic, but her talent becomes more magical and more telepathic after she is magically bonded with Tris. Besides those born with magic, there are quite a few secret magicians who use spells to deceive others, force others to obey their will, or conjure monsters. Tris explains that "many creatures of the swamp were things created by one of the old human wizards—the ones who had very nearly destroyed the world with their uncontrolled use of magic" (p.112). A stronger type of magic than this petty, evil, wizard magic, is that provided by the god Altis, who allows Terran to do miracles far beyond the scope of most human magicians, such as instantaneous healing.

Soulmates

Rialla loses her family and friends at a young age and ends up being very lonely as a slave. Even after she escapes, she has no clan or people, even though she is close friends with Laeth. Tris is also incredibly lonely after being banished from the sylvans for showing compassion to a human child. Tris goes a long time thinking that he will never find anyone with whom he can truly belong. When Trenna goes into her trance and recites part of the bonding ceremony to him, Tris has hope that Trenna's prophecy will lead to him finding someone to love. As soon as he sees Rialla for the first time, he knows there is something special about her, although he claims that he just likes being around her because she can beat him at Steal the Dragon.

When Rialla first senses Tris empathically, she does not even recognize that it is him, because she thinks that he is human, but she understands that what she is sensing is



not human, as shown by the statement: "She received no emotions, no thoughts; just beauty-as if a sculptor had learned to work in a new medium and created something extraordinary. Something just for her" (p. 77). This suggests that Tris has been born specifically to spend his life with Rialla, so it is not so surprising that she is not angry when she finds out that they are married.

As a contrast to Rialla and Tris's relationship is the love triangle of Karsten, Marri, and Laeth. Laeth and Marri love one another, but because he puts off committing and because she is a dutiful daughter, Marri ends up married to Laeth's brother. Laeth realizes that he has let his soulmate slip away, but he does not want to break up his brother's marriage. He loves Marri and Karsten too much to wish misfortune on them. When Karsten is murdered, Laeth and Marri finally have a chance to be together, and this time, they appreciate it.

Slavery

Several times in the book, Rialla is enslaved or freed in different ways. Sometimes she willingly submits to taking on the role of a slave, like when she pretends to be Laeth's slave in order to spy, or when she decides to stay in Darran while Laeth and Marri escape. She is willing to enter again into slavery, in the hope of ending slavery for good. As she tells Tris, "I choose to act like a slave, so they can't make me feel like one" (p. 163). When she is initially enslaved, she hates it at first, but she gets used to it, and tries to be a good slave, and make money for her master. Later, when she is masquerading as a slave, she reflects on this, saying, "The hardest memory of slavery that Rialla had to bear was not the lack of freedom; it was the lack of desiring freedom" (p. 184). She feels that what defines a slave is a broken spirit, and a feeling that one is merely an extension of the master's will.

In addition to literal slavery, there is the slavery of compulsion without consent, often connected with magic. Lord Winterseine puts a spell on Rialla that is meant to force her to kill Terran, and she is only able to resist by drawing on all of Tris's magic. In a totally different way, Tris takes possession of Rialla without permission, when he performs the bonding ceremony without explaining its meaning. Rialla does not immediately realize that this simple ritual means that they belong to one another for life. This time, though, she does not mind, because she and Tris get along so well together, and because he apologizes to her, indicating that he wants her to have free will.



Style

Point of View

The story is told from the point of view of a third-person narrator, who can see into Tris and Rialla's heads. Since Rialla is empathic, she has access to the emotions, and sometimes the thoughts, of the people and animals around her, which provides a unique point of view. Sometimes Rialla can be aware of only very strong feelings of the people around her, but other times she has intimate understanding of the thoughts of the dogs and horses around her, although she may not be able to tell if they are animal or human. This viewpoint is a mixed blessing to Rialla, who tends to receive all the pain of any deaths that happen around her. Rialla's widespread viewpoint helps her maintain her sanity when she is locked in a coffin-sized hole in the wall, because she can spread her awareness all around her and uses this to calm the other slave that she knows is hysterical with fear. When Rialla and Tris are bonded, they become telepathic together, so that Rialla's viewpoint also includes many of Tris's memories.

In addition to being an empath, Rialla also has the viewpoint of a slave. One thing that frightens her about pretending to be a slave is how easy it is to start seeing everything from a slave's point of view. Even after she is raped by Terran, she thinks to herself that she knows "that she wouldn't cry now, because slaves don't, and she felt more like a slave right now than a horse trainer or spy" (p. 192). Rialla's viewpoint greatly influences her actions.

Tris has the point of view of an outsider, who does not think especially highly of humans. He helps them when he can, being compassionate, but he has a viewpoint outside of humanity. It takes some effort for him to adjust to the thought of being bonded to a human.

Setting

Steal the Dragon takes place in a fictional world, in the two countries of Darran and Reth. Darran and Reth have long been at war with one another, and have destroyed much of the countryside with their fighting, as is described with the statement, "Several once-fertile fields lay barren, the salt from the mines that were the region's greatest source of wealth turning the rich earth into sterile soil that drifted in the winds, a silent testament to the centuries-old feud between Darran and its neighbor Reth" (p. 23). Many years before, wizards fought one another, transforming the land with their magic, and an entire desert has been turned to glass. In this world, magic is real, and there are many magical creatures like gods, sylvans, dryads, and dragons. However, humans have pushed back the magic and forbidden it in many places, so it is only practiced in secret. This country appears to be a typical "Dungeons & Dragons"-style setting, being very similar to Europe in the middle ages. In fact, there literally are dungeons and dragons in the book.



Darran is ruled by fashionable aristocrats, who think etiquette is very important. Slavery is legal, although it is considered a luxury, so almost all slaves are young girls, kept as sex objects, or as dancers. In Reth, slavery is illegal, so an alliance between the two countries would mean an end to slavery in Darran. The city of Sianim is peopled with mercenaries and spies, which is why Rialla is sent from there as a spy.

Language and Meaning

The language in *Steal the Dragon* is straightforward and easy to read, with enough difficult vocabulary words to challenge many readers. Although the world in which it takes place is foreign to the reader, Briggs makes her magical setting seem real without filling it with arcane details that are confusing to a modern reader. There are a lot of detailed descriptions of the settings and of people's feelings, which make a somewhat predictable plotline come alive. The title, *Steal the Dragon*, is the name of a board game in the book, which is similar to chess but with different pieces and a theme of deceiving one's opponent.

The imaginary languages in the book are significant, for Rialla is selected as a spy because she speaks Darranian, the language of Darran. However, she is suspicious, because although she speaks Rethian, the language of Reth, quite well, her Darranian is not that good. She also speaks a little bit of Common, which is a language developed by merchants, and consists mostly of gestures and made-up words. Tris speaks Darranian, but his native language is Sylvan, the language of the tree-folk. When Trenna goes into a trance and prophesies that Tris should help the dancer who is coming, she then says the first few lines of the bonding ritual in Sylvan. Since she does not speak his native language, Tris knows that magic is involved, and he knows that he will marry Rialla.

Structure

Steal the Dragon is divided into eleven chapters and an epilogue. The first chapter starts out with a dream memory of seven years in the past, and then quickly shifts to the present, explaining who Rialla is and how she has gotten to this point. Her story is slowly revealed over the first half of the book, with each chapter explaining more details of Rialla's past. In the same way, later chapters slowly tell Tris's full story, so that over the book, the reader has a good sense of how Tris and Rialla are getting to know one another.

In chapter two, Tris is introduced, although at this point he is only identified as a healer, and seems to be human. Rialla and Laeth travel to Darran in this chapter. In chapters four and five, Rialla and Tris get acquainted, and rescue Laeth from certain death. In chapters six through eight, Rialla returns to being Lord Winterseine's slave, and in chapter nine, she escapes. In chapter ten, she allows herself to be captured again, in the hope of ending the war, and in chapter eleven, she has a mental and physical battle with Lord Winterseine and Terran, making it out alive by drawing on her magical bond

with Tris. Tris and Rialla have a honeymoon, with the assumption that they will live happily ever after, since this is a fairy tale. In the epilogue, or Finis, Rialla visits Lord Jarroh to make sure that slavery will come to an end in Darran.



Quotes

"Automatically her hands went to her neck, but the slave collar had been gone for a long time, and the scar on her face still replaced the hated tattoo." Chap. 1, p. 2

"The place she'd spent most of her time as a slave was a private club where all the young, rich men went to sow their wild oats, away from proper company." Chap. 2, p. 28

"She would never have thought she would be as frightened by the threat of her talent's return as she had been by its loss." Chap. 3, p. 57

"If we live through this night, perhaps I'll tell you about my people." Chap. 4, p. 98

"Stone was cold and dead to him, but wood was like an old friend." Chap. 5, p. 108

"It appeared that another swamp creature was loose in Westhold: someone wanted to make sure that Laeth didn't miss his appointment with death." Chap. 5, p. 111

"Stupid young girls who get caught alone in the forest fall prey to anything that crosses their paths, be the beast animal, human, or shapeshifter." Chap. 6, p. 133

"It is an evil thing to have the power to help others, and not to do so." Chap. 6, p. 136

"He is so caught up in his own myth he forgets more mundane issues." Chap. 10, p. 255

"He doesn't believe in giving wounds time to heal; says that it makes for easy excuses." Chap. 7, p. 168

"It can be more dangerous to have the wrong person command absolute control of all magicians than to have the possibility of a battle between wizards." Chap. 8, p. 183

"The most destructive force in nature, huh? Rot."
Tris grinned. 'Exactly.'" Chap. 9, p. 231



Topics for Discussion

What are the various ways in which Rialla is enslaved during the story? Which is the worst?

What influences from popular trends in science-fiction and fantasy can you find in *Steal the Dragon*?

Lord Jarroh is painted as both a villain and a hero. Which do you think is closer to the truth? Why?

What are some lessons about love and romance that can be learned from this book? What does the love triangle of Marri, Laeth, and Karsten imply?

What are some of the different kinds of magic used in the story? Are some of them more good or evil than others?

Why does Rialla consent to go back into slavery, not once but several times? Why does she submit to Terran's rape?

What do you think you would do if you were in Rialla's position? Would you consider remaining in the relative safety of a dance club?

What are some differences between Rialla and other slaves?