

Trickster's Choice Study Guide

Trickster's Choice by Tamora Pierce

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Introduction

Trickster's Choice is the first in a four-part series about Alianne, the daughter of Alanna the Lioness, Champion of the King of Tortall and protagonist of Tamora Pierce's "Song of the Lioness" quartet. Like the protagonists of Pierce's many other novels, Alianne—Aly for short—is a strong young woman in a book full of capable, empowered female characters. *Trickster's Choice* takes Aly from her home in Tortall to Lombyn, where she is offered an opportunity to help restore a raka queen to her rightful throne, and prove her abilities to her skeptical parents.

Set against the backdrop of racial turmoil between the copper-skinned raka and the pale-skinned luarin, Aly's struggle to find her place in the world is a difficult one. As the daughter of a legendary warrior (her mother Alanna) and a master of spies (her father George), she is intelligent, inquisitive, clever, and charming. But she is also of aristocratic blood, and her parents believe the life of a spy, one that she has chosen, is beneath her.

Pierce has said that she writes for teenagers because she likes to help those who feel, as she did at that age, misunderstood or alienated. For Aly, the experience of being kidnapped and sold into slavery actually becomes the opportunity Aly has hoped for. In her young protagonist, Pierce offers a heroine who is both textured and genuine.

Trickster's Choice, however, is more than an adventure novel. Aly's success depends on her ability to negotiate a harrowing landscape of political and racial animus, and she must overcome obstacles created by both humans and immortals. In the end, her choice is a familiar one to readers of Pierce's other works: should she embrace a risky opportunity for greatness, or revert to a more comfortable life of wealth and privilege?

Author Biography

Tamora Pierce was born in 1954 in South Connellsville, Pennsylvania, deep in the heart of coal country. Pierce's mother pursued her college degree while Tamora and her two sisters, Kimberly and Melanie, were still very young. Pierce's father worked for the phone company, a job that resulted in the family's relocation to San Mateo, California, in 1963.

Pierce developed a love of reading at an early age. Her poor but supportive family supplied her with books of all types, which she readily devoured. Recognizing her love of good stories, Pierce's father suggested she try writing her own. She began writing short stories when she was in the sixth grade. She credits her seventh grade English teacher for introducing her to J. R. R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy. Through these books she discovered the power of fantasy fiction to transport readers into imaginary realms. However, even as she sought solace in worlds of fantasy during the emotionally trying times of adolescence, she recognized the lack of strong female protagonists in the books she read. This realization planted the seeds for the heroes of her novels.

Pierce and her sisters moved back to Pennsylvania with their mother when her parents divorced in 1969. Her affinity for fantasy and science fiction grew as she looked for momentary escapes from her tumultuous family life. She excelled in school and was accepted into the University of Pennsylvania. In her junior year in college, Pierce wrote "Demon Chariot," the first short story she had written in five years. When she took a creative writing course the following year, her teacher recommended that she work on a novel. After a failed attempt to write a book about her childhood, Pierce returned to the fantasy stories she had loved since she was an adolescent.

This original book, titled *Song of the Lioness*, eventually became the four-volume "The Song of the Lioness" series. The book was rewritten and expanded, and the intended audience was shifted from adults to teenage readers. The first volume, *Alanna: The First Adventure*, was published in 1983 by Atheneum Books. *The Hand of the Goddess* was published in 1984, followed by *The Woman who Rides Like a Man* in 1986. The final volume of the quartet, *Lioness Rampant*, was published in 1988.

Following the "Song of the Lioness" quartet, Pierce wrote the "Immortals" quartet, the "Circle of Magic" quartet, the "Protector of the Small" tetralogy, and the "Circle Opens" quartet.



Plot Summary

Chapters 1-4

Trickster's Choice opens with Aly returning to her home in Tortall after a sojourn. Her father, George of Pirate's Swoop, the second-in-command of spies, greets her. From her first appearance on the page, Aly is playful, precocious, and witty. She is also brilliant. Having been taught the tradecraft of a master spy by her father from the time she was a little girl, Aly, now sixteen, is eager to become an agent in the service of the king. Her father scoffs, believing the life of a spy is not suitable for his little girl. Her mother Alanna the Lioness—King's Champion, legendary warrior, and the first female knight in the kingdom of Tortall—reacts similarly upon her return from the battlefield in Scanra.

Alanna's visit to Pirate's Swoop marks the first time Aly has seen her mother in a year. Alanna and George cannot imagine why their daughter would want to be a spy. Instead, they believe her stated desire is a smokescreen masking her lack of ambition. Aly is frustrated and disheartened by her parents' wariness; she decides to set out on her own for several weeks to give her parents some time alone before her mother is called back to the war.

Aly's fortunes take a turn for the worse when the ship on which she sails is caught by pirates, and she is sold into slavery. After weeks in a holding pen, Aly is sold to the house of Duke Mequen Balitang in Rajmuat on Kypriang Island. Luckily, the duke and his family are amiable royalty who treat their slaves and servants with dignity and respect.

Bad news comes to the Balitang family by way of Prince Bronau from the Copper Isles. The family is forced to leave their home in Rajmuat because the ailing King Oron believes the duke is plotting against him. The family must move to a distant land holding. Aly is selected by the Balitangs to go with the family rather than be put back on the slave market because, as Aly finds out, the god Kyprioth has chosen her to help protect the family from harm. Kyprioth offers Aly a wager: if she protects the family, then he will tell her father of her abilities as a spy. Aly accepts the agreement, and along with the family, moves to the Lombyn.

Aly begins to suspect the true nature of her challenge along the road to Tanair. The island is inhabited by the copper-skinned raka people, who are deeply wary of the pale-skinned luarin because of the luarin history of oppressing the raka. Aly, a luarin, does not know what to make of the animosity between the two groups. The Balitangs are luarin as well, but the duke's two daughters—Dove, an inquisitive twelve-year-old, and Sarai, a beautiful sixteen-year-old—are half-raka. While Mequen is their father, their mother was Sarugani, a raka queen to whom the duke was married. Sarugani died prematurely in a riding accident. As the caravan proceeds on the road to their new



home, Aly notices the raka people taking great interest in the girls. Although she is initially concerned, the raka are merely fascinated by the half-raka Sarai and Dove.

Chapters 5-8

Duke Mequen and Duchess Winnamine have discovered that Aly is the god's messenger. They offer to remove the metal collar from around her neck and free her from slavery. Aly, however, knowing her responsibility to watch over the family, decides it would be beneficial for her to maintain the disguise of a slave. According to Aly, she can move more freely throughout the castle and the lands as a slave because very few people will suspect her of grander schemes. She is assigned to carry messages for the duke and duchess at night, and to herd goats during the day; this gives her full access to both the castle and the territory surrounding it.

As they settle into their new environment, Sarai and Dove frequently come to Aly to hear stories about Tortall. They want to know about her family; rather than tell them that she is daughter of the famed Lioness, she says her mother is a traveling musician. The girls are very interested in the Lioness, and Aly realizes that Dove, the younger of the two sisters, is as curious and intelligent as her sister Sarai is beautiful. Aly is also befriended by Nawat, a crow who has transformed himself into a boy. Nawat teaches Aly to speak the crow's language and shows her how to use the crows as allies in her quest to protect Dove and Sarai. In time, Aly and Nawat become good friends, and Nawat practices kissing with Aly as he has seen other humans do.

Kyprioth comes to Aly and, in her dreams, shows her scenes from home. In one, Aly sees her mother positioned at her military post. Alanna has learned that Aly is missing, and is angry with George for not telling her sooner. Her mother's concern is frightening to Aly, because she knows her mother needs to concentrate on her preparations for war. One slight misstep and her mother could be injured or killed. Aly suddenly worries that she might have endangered her mother by leaving home.

Aly maintains her cover as a slave until she discovers four raka servants meeting and discussing a conspiracy. She reveals herself to Ulasim, Chenaol, Fesgao, and Lokeij and learns the true nature of her charge. She is meant to protect Dove and Sarai, not the duke and duchess. The girls are raka royalty, and must someday reclaim their throne.

Chapters 9-12

Aly and the raka conspirators decide that it is best for Aly to be armed. Aly has been thoroughly trained in daggers, so Chenaol, the head cook at Tanair, obtains a set of knives for her. Aly meets Junai Dodeka, a mysterious raka woman who appears to be following her. She learns that Junai is the daughter of Ulasim, and is a fierce warrior. Aly is unsure of why Junai is watching her, but assumes she is also part of the team of raka protecting Dove and Sarai. As Aly herds the goats, she is met by Dove, who has come to see her and discuss her mistrust of Prince Bronau. Although the prince is attempting



to make inroads with the family under the guise of courting Sarai, Dove believes he has scandalous ulterior motives.

Aly rides with Dove, Sarai, Prince Bronau, and their servants into the countryside in Pohon. The people of Pohon are known to have a deep-seated hatred of the luarin because of the luarin's oppressive regimes. To protect the Balitangs, Aly believes they must find a mage that can avert any magical attacks. The Mage of Pohon is known to be powerful and wise. She is also known to hate the luarin fiercely.

Aly disguises herself by darkening her skin, and slips away from the riding party to find the mage. She is attacked in the village, but to her surprise, Junai intervenes, revealing herself to be Aly's guard. Junai tells the raka in the village that Aly has been chosen by a trickster to protect Dove and Sarai. Although she does not meet the mage, Aly finds out that Ochobu, the Mage of Pohon, is actually Junai's grandmother and the mother of Ulasim. Both Ulasim and Junai tell Aly that Ochobu will never help a luarin, even if it means coming to the aid of the raka girls who would be queen.

Soon after her trip to Pohon, Aly uses her gift of sight and spots a group of merchants approaching Tanair. Four undercover assassins are traveling with the merchants. Aly identifies them by their rugged appearance and scars from battle. Aly works with Ulasim and Fesgao to come up with a plan to protect the family. She notices herself becoming nervous for the first time, but when the assassins make their move, Aly, the raka conspirators, the family, and men-at-arms are ready. They kill all but one of the assassins.

The last of the assassins springs out, and Sarai runs him through with her sword before her father can be killed. Aly questions her own effectiveness during the attack. She thinks she should have been in position to save the Mequen herself. During the exchange, the duke and duchess learn that Veron, their sergeant-at-arms, is a spy for King Oron. However, they decide not to kill him right away as Aly suggests.

After the assassination attempt, the duke and duchess, as well as Aly and the rest of the family, turn their attention to Prince Bronau, who is becoming increasingly affectionate toward Sarai. During a secret rendezvous, Prince Bronau tells Sarai that he is in love with her and wants to marry her once he establishes himself back in the Copper Isles.

Kyprioth transports Aly to watch the death of King Oron. He does so because the king's death will result in turmoil for Sarai, Dove, and the rest of the Balitang family. The raka do not like Sarai being courted by Prince Bronau, and Mequen and Winnamine believe that the prince is really only interested in gaining the crown. If he marries Sarai, he will be the next in line should the duke assume his position as King Oron's successor. Bronau returns to the Copper Isles. Sarai is upset with her family for being so intrusive, and for doubting her ability to handle her own personal life.

Aly is convinced she must persuade Ochobu to join her in her quest to protect the girls. She rides to Pohon with Nawat, Ulasim, and Junai. The mage does not receive Aly amiably, but Kyprioth appears and engages in a sharp confrontation with the mage. Aly



is steadfast, showing little fear in the face of the mage's hostility and revealing her own resolve to protect the girls. Kyprioth and Ochobu get into an argument about Kyprioth losing the battle with the luarin three hundred years before. In the end, Kyprioth is forced to demonstrate his power, making the old woman double over in pain. Ochobu comes back to the castle with them to protect the future raka queen.

Chapters 13-16

During the summer, it is common practice for Dove, Sarai, and their entourage to go for long horseback rides where the girls can greet the adoring raka people. Aly becomes a full time member of the riding party so she can watch over the girls. On one of these rides through the countryside, Dove tells Aly and Sarai that she is worried about Prince Bronau. She says that he is not trustworthy. Aly agrees, and in Sarai's ambivalence toward him, she realizes that Sarai might have been angry with her parents because they did not trust her—not because they prohibited her relationship with Prince Bronau. When the riding party returns, Ochobu tells Aly that she knows of the agreement she has with Kyprioth. The two have a long conversation about the state of the raka, and Aly learns of many atrocities committed by the luarin people as they conquered the raka.

Nawat and Aly's affection for each other grows. They do not have an official or exclusive relationship, but Nawat says he will follow Aly anywhere. He says that he belongs with her. Aly thinks Nawat is a great friend, and likes the attention from the attractive and awkward crow-boy. She also recognizes his ability as a warrior. He plays games with the archers in which he snaps arrows from the air. Sarai is amazed by Nawat's prowess, and as he makes mage-killing arrows with stormwing feathers, Aly knows Nawat is preparing for a major battle.

Over the course of the summer, Aly and the raka conspirators continue their battle preparations. Kyprioth sends Dove and Sarai on more horseback rides on Lombyn to expose them to the raka people. Many people come out of their homes to see the beautiful girls that they know will someday be the rulers of their land. In the heart of the summer, however, the Balitang family receives messages and gifts from Prince Bronau. He sends a beautiful necklace to Sarai intended to seduce her from afar.

In a vision, Kyprioth transports Aly to Fort Mastiff, Tortall, on the Scanran border. There, Aly watches her mother spar with Keladry of Mindelan, the first woman to be considered for knighthood since her mother. A messenger says that Aly's father is going to Rajmuat, because he has heard news of Aly's whereabouts. Aly believes it is only a matter of time before her father tracks her down and takes her back home.

In a later dream, Kyprioth takes Aly to recently crowned King Hazarin's bed chamber. As Aly and the trickster watch, the king wakes with a start, gasps for air, and then dies. Aly talks to Hazarin's ghost before the Black God comes to take the spirit away. He says that he is happy to be dead, away from the petty bickering, jealousy, and envy in the king's court.



Following the death of Hazarin, Dunevon, King Oron's youngest child, is made king. The new king is just a child. Aly is stunned as she watches Bronau attempt to kidnap the young king. Bronau is stopped before he can take the child, but he manages to flee without being apprehended. Kyprioth and Aly are frightened as the trickster's powerful brother (Mithros) and sister (The Great Goddess) appear. The two question their brother's involvement in the Copper Isle affairs, but Aly protects Kyprioth by saying that she is the one interested in the events, not him.

Kyprioth is grateful to Aly, and in return for her good deed, he offers to call off the wager and take her back home. After much contemplation, Aly does not accept. She decides that she should see the bet through so her father will know her skills as a spy. She also wants to help the raka queen reach her rightful throne.

The vision in which Aly watches the king's death and Bronau's grab at power is no ordinary dream. Aly wakes up after five days of sleep, fully expecting Bronau to come to Tanair to hide out after his failed kidnapping attempt. Aly is correct, but it takes Bronau several weeks to do so. As they wait, Aly directs the family and men-at-arms in weapons training.

A young Rittevon family messenger boy on a winged horse delivers the news from Rubinyan that Prince Bronau is being sought and charged with treason. It is news that Aly has suspected all along. The duke and duchess, however, do not want to believe the truth about their old friend. Days later, Prince Bronau shows up and tells the family that he suspects that his sister-in-law, Imajane, may have done something to poison King Hazaran. He says that he was attempting to protect the new young king, not harm him, and Mequen agrees to return with him to Rajmuat to help the prince plead his case.

Prince Bronau stays at the castle for a week before trying to convince the duke to take his place as the heir to the throne. The duke refuses, so Prince Bronau takes action. The duke and duchess are in bed when Bronau attacks. There is a fierce battle; in the climactic conflict, Prince Bronau and his men are all killed. Dove and Sarai are safe, but the duke dies from his wounds. Aly declares that she will put a half-raka queen on the throne if it is the last thing she ever does.

Following the duke's funeral, Rubinyan retrieves his brother's body and invites Winnamine and the girls to come back home. Winnamine says that she wants to wait until spring. Rubinyan's party is followed by a merchant caravan, and a man of indistinguishable origin. The man says he wants to buy Aly and requests to see her. When Aly arrives to meet the merchant, she realizes it is her father. George talks to Kyprioth and demands that Aly be allowed to go home. Kyprioth agrees, acknowledging Aly's victory in the wager and confirming for George her masterful skills as a spy. Aly, however, decides to stay in Tanair. She has found her place in the world and a worthwhile mission to which she can dedicate her efforts.



Characters

Alan of Pirate's Swoop

The son of Alanna the Lioness and George of Pirate's Swoop, and Aly's twin brother. He is sixteen years old, and is a page.

Alanna of Pirate's Swoop

Although not a central figure in this novel, Alanna is a towering figure in the culture of Tortall and in the life of her daughter, Alianne. Alanna, the protagonist of Pierce's "Song of the Lioness" quartet, was the first female knight in the kingdom of Tortall, and has risen to the high position of King's Champion. Alanna is a legend in Tortall and the surrounding kingdoms, and Aly has difficulty finding her own identity in the shadow of such a remarkable figure.

Alianne of Pirate's Swoop

Aly, as she is called throughout *Trickster's Choice*, is the sixteen-year-old protagonist of the novel. She is the daughter of Alanna the Lioness and George of Pirate's Swoop. Aly has learned all of the skills of a master spy from her father, who is second-in-command of spies. In the beginning of the story, however, neither her father nor mother take her ambitions to become a spy seriously. When she is sold into slavery and taken away from everything she has ever known, Aly is not disheartened by the hardship. Instead, she takes her adventure as a challenge to prove herself. She is able to protect the raka heiresses in the Balitang family from harm and win a wager with Kyprioth, the trickster.

Aly of Pirate's Swoop

See Alianne of Pirate's Cove

Dovasary Balitang

Dovasary, usually referred to by her nickname Dove, is the daughter of Duke Mequen and his first wife, the raka queen Sarugani. She is the younger sister of Saraiyu (Sarai) and shows the skills and inquisitiveness of a young spy. Dove possesses a keen instinct for understanding people's motives. She frequently eavesdrops through doors and down dark hallways. Dove befriends Aly, and Aly decides that, although Dove is crude in her methods, she can be much more than a passive participant in her own defense. Dove is a strong young woman who will one day be a tremendous leader in her own right.



Dove Balitang

See Dovasary Balitang

Elsren Balitang

Elsren is the son of Duke Mequen and his second wife Winnamine. Aly is charged at various times with taking care of Elsren and his siblings.

Mequen Balitang

Mequen is a duke in the luarin line of succession to King Oron's crown. Duke Mequen is regarded as a fair man who treats servants and slaves with dignity and respect. Mequen trusts Aly and her wisdom as a master spy, even though she is only sixteen years old. He is assassinated at the end of the story by Prince Bronau, who betrays Mequen's goodwill and trust.

Petranne Balitang

Petranne is the first child of the duke and duchess. Aly takes care of Petranne and Elsren as part of her responsibilities in the Balitang household.

Saraiyu Balitang

Saraiyu is a leading character in *Trickster's Choice*. She and her sister Dove are considered the heirs to the raka throne. Protecting Sarai is Aly's primary responsibility. She is a beautiful, intelligent girl who is pursued desperately by Prince Bronau. She also shows surprising prowess with a sword when she kills an assassin who attacks her father. Sarai is a complex character, and reveals a clever maturity in her relationship with the scheming Prince Bronau.

Sarai Balitang

See Saraiyu Balitang

Winnamine Balitang

Duchess Winnamine is married to Duke Mequen, and she is the mother of Petranne and Elsren. She is Dove and Sarai's stepmother, and although there is tension between Winnamine and the half-raka daughters, she proves to be a great ally in protecting them. Dove comes to respect Winnamine and her keen insights about people. After the



duke's death, Winnamine assumes the head of the household and decides to stay in Tanair through the winter.

Chenaol

Chenaol is a central figure in the raka plan to protect Dove and Sarai. She serves as a weapons smuggler for the raka, since her position in the kitchen allows her to buy and transport knives without raising suspicion. Chenaol befriends Aly early in the novel and protects her from harm from the other slaves.

Junai Dodeka

Junai is the mysterious raka who reveals herself as Aly's guard when Aly is forced into battle. Junai is the daughter of Ulasim, who is of one of the four primary raka conspirators protecting Dove and Sarai. Junai is a fierce warrior, and proves to be invaluable in helping Aly contact the Mage of Pohon to obtain protection for Dove and Sarai.

Ochobu Dodeka

Ochobu is known as the Mage of Pohon, and is as inhospitable as she is powerful. With the help of Kyrioth, Aly convinces Ochobu to help protect Sarai and Dove; Ochobu moves to Tanair to help fend off a possible attack against the girls from other mages. Ochobu is Ulasim's mother and Junai's grandmother. She has lived hundreds of years and has seen the destruction caused by the luarin conquerors.

Ulasim Dodeka

Ulasim is a central member of the raka conspiracy to protect Dove and Sarai. He works as the Balitangs's footman. He is also the father of Junai and son of Ochobu. Ulasim helps Aly convince his mother to join them in their quest to put a raka queen on the throne.

Fesgao

Fesgao is one of the four conspirators protecting the two half-raka girls, Dove and Sarai. At Tanair, he serves as man-at-arms for the Balitangs.

George of Pirate's Swoop

George is Alianne's father and the husband of Alanna the Lioness. He is a caring, noble man, and he is also the second-in-command of spies. George uses his vast network of



contacts to find Aly on Lombyn. Disguised as a merchant, he comes to get Aly at the end of *Trickster's Choice*, but not before he learns from Kyprioth of her successes as a spy and military leader.

Gurhart

Gurhart is a merchant that leads a caravan into Tanair. The assassins that first attack the family are hired on by Gurhart when his regular workers go missing. They ride into the castle as part of Gurhart's caravan.

Hazarin

Hazarin is the luarin heir to King Oron's crown, and the king's half-brother. Shortly after assuming the crown, Hazarin dies under suspicious circumstances. Aly sees King Hazarin's ghost before he is whisked away by the Black God. King Hazarin says he is glad to be dead, spared from the duplicitous dealings of the king's court.

Husui

Husui is a slave that works in the Balitangs's kitchen. She is also a spy for King Oron. When Chenaol finds out that Husui is a spy for the crown, Aly advises her to keep her in the kitchen and provide false information about the dealings of the Balitangs when necessary.

Prince Bronau Jimajen

He is known as Prince Bronau throughout the novel; however, he is not in the royal succession to the throne of the Copper Isles. Bronau is a handsome, rugged figure who befriends the Balitang family and attempts to seduce Sarai. He betrays Duke Mequen Balitang, and his greedy ambitions for power are exposed in a climactic battle.

Imajane Jimajen

Imajane is married to Prince Bronau's brother, Rubinyan. She is King Oron's half-sister and enemy of Prince Bronau. Bronau accuses Imajane of being behind a plot to poison King Hazarin when he assumes the crown from King Oron.

Rubinyan Jimajen

Rubinyan is Prince Bronau's brother and sworn enemy. He is married to Imajane and is in the royal line of succession. Mequen is friends to both Rubinyan and Prince Bronau.



Rubinyan comes to Tanair at the end of the story to retrieve his brother's body, and invites Duchess Winnamine to come back to Rajmuat.

Jonathan of Conté

Jonathan is the king of Tortall, Aly's homeland.

Keladry of Mindelan

Known as Kel, Keladry trains with Aly's mother and aspires to be the next female knight. Kel is a formidable warrior and Aly admires not only Kel's fighting ability, but also the relationship she has with Alanna.

Kel of Mindelan

See Keladry of Mindelan

Kyprioth

Kyprioth is the trickster god referred to in the novel's title; he challenges Aly to protect Dove, Sarai, and the rest of the Balitang family in exchange for her own family's recognition of her deeds. He is the less-powerful brother of Mithros and The Great Goddess, both of whom chastise Kyprioth for involving himself in the affairs of the Copper Isles. Kyprioth transports Aly to various locations during the story as a means of showing her important events that she needs to be aware of to protect the girls effectively. When Aly wins the wager, Kyprioth keeps his end of the bargain and tells George about Aly's achievements as a spy and raka protector.

Lokeij

Lokeij is an old raka man who serves as the Balitangs's hostler. He is also one of the four raka conspirators protecting Dove and Sarai.

Nawat Crow

Nawat is a crow that befriends Aly as she herds goats, and then turns himself into a young man. Nawat teaches Aly the language of the crows, and organizes them to help protect the Balitangs. Over the course of the story, Aly and Nawat become close friends, and Nawat practices kissing with Aly. He is an awkward boy who walks strangely and picks bugs from Aly's hair, but he is also a fierce warrior who can catch a flying arrow right out of the air.



Pembery

Pembery is a slave who, among other tasks around the household, helps care for the children.

Rihani

Rihani is a healer who lives with the Balitangs at Tanair. She is not a very good healer, and Aly frequently worries that she is not up to the task of facing a more powerful mage, or caring for the family should a major battle result in serious injuries.

Oron Rittevon

Oron is the ailing king of the Copper Isles. His paranoia causes him to believe Mequen is plotting to kill him; he is the cause of the Balitangs's exile to Lombyn. Oron's impending death throughout much of the novel drives the political intrigue involving Prince Bronau and Duke Mequen.

Sarugani of Tamaida

Sarugani is the mother of Sarai and Dove, and Mequen's first wife. She was raka royalty, and she died tragically in a riding accident. It was after Sarugani's death that he married Winnamine.

Maude Tanner

Maude is the housekeeper of Pirate's Swoop. Although she is a healer and has great respect in the family, Aly frequently plays jokes on her.

Thayet of Conté

Thayet is the queen of Tortall. She and her husband King Jonathan rule the kingdom together.

Thom of Pirate's Swoop

Thom is Aly's brother, and son of George of Pirate's Swoop and Alanna the Lioness. He is eighteen and in training to become a mage.

Veron

Veron is a luarin and the sergeant of the men-at-arms under the Balitangs. He is also a royal spy for King Oron. When Duke Mequen discovers Veron's duplicity, he is tempted to kill the spy. Aly, however, convinces the duke that Veron can be of help to them, since he is a committed defender of the Balitangs even as he reports to King Oron. Veron is killed in battle with Prince Bronau's men.

Visda

Visda is Chenaol's young niece, and a goat herder. She proves valuable as she keeps Aly's goats while Aly goes on rides to various parts of the island with Dove and Sarai.



Themes

Ethnic Conflict

Race relations between the raka and luarin play a crucial role in the political backdrop of the story. The luarin are the "pale-skinned easterners" that have ravaged the dark-skinned raka's land for centuries. The raka nobility was removed from power; the raka people were then tricked out of their land and riches, brutally killed, or enslaved as a means of perpetuating luarin power.

Aly gets an opportunity to view race relations between the luarin and the raka firsthand during her enslavement, and the wager in which she engages with Kyprioth is intended to return a raka queen to the throne. Aly is an intelligent observer of the racial dynamics in the Copper Isles, but being a luarin, she is not passive in her considerations on the matter. She has complex beliefs about race relations, and this adds depth to her character.

Pierce's strategy of using the relationship between the raka and the luarin as a metaphor for race relations in contemporary culture is a clear one. The history of the warring cultures mirrors that of the Europeans and Africans, and the present uneasy stasis, or balance, that is reflected in contemporary America. The book calls for the triumph of a half-raka, half-luarin queen, and an integrated society in which both cultures are celebrated.

Gender Roles

Aly is the latest in a long line of Pierce's female protagonists. Unlike her mother Alanna the Lioness, Aly rarely uses her physical power and strength to battle the enemies of the Balitangs. Instead, she uses her wits and cunning to protect the family from harm. It could be argued that Aly's father does not allow her to be a spy because she is not a boy; what makes this a particularly interesting twist on gender roles is not the obstacles that Aly must overcome as a young female spy, but what she does *not* have to overcome.

Once Aly is recognized as the trickster's choice, she has the complete trust of the family and raka with which she conspires. As in many novels that explore gender roles from a woman's perspective, women frequently hold positions of power in the novel. Chenaol is the head cook, but she is also a fierce warrior and master of weapons procurement. Ochobu, the mage of Pohon, is perhaps the most formidable character in the story because of her magical power. Mequen is acknowledged to be the head of the Balitang household, but he defers to Aly on most issues of importance concerning the family's security. When he chooses not to heed Aly's advice and gives Prince Bronau sanctuary, he dies.



Aly has very few obstacles put in her way specifically because of gender, and perhaps that is what makes *Trickster's Choice* a fresh view of the feminist heroine. In her essay "*Amor Vincit Foeminam: The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction*," Joanna Russ writes that earlier heroines of fantasy and science fiction shared worlds with men who assumed power "without intelligence, character, humanity, humility, foresight, courage, planning, sense, technology, or even responsibility." Aly possesses each of these qualities, and therefore, is able to overcome all challenges presented by man or woman.

Two issues complicate this notion, however. Aly's primary objective is still to convince her father of her worth—not so he will love her as a daughter, but so he will accept her in her chosen calling. George maintains the position of authority as second-in-command of spies, and it is to that position which Aly appeals. Secondly, it can be argued that Aly's path to authority is free from male obstruction in Tanair not because of the culture's celebration of gender equality, but because she has the blessing of Kyprioth, a male god.

In the end, the story is not one in which a young woman must fight her way to reach a social position she should rightfully maintain; instead, she assumes that position and operates effectively from it without her abilities being called into question.

Womanhood, Motherhood, and Family

In the *Song of the Lioness* quartet, Alanna the Lioness assumed an archetypal, or an original model after which similar things are patterned, place in feminist fiction. She was the physical embodiment of power, fighting her way with both fist and cunning through a masculine military world. She did not succumb to traditional ideas of romance and sexual propriety; instead, she blazed a trail that earned her knighthood and a position as the King's Champion. Because *Trickster's Choice* introduces Alanna's sixteen-year-old daughter as the main character, the reader views Alanna as a mother for the first time. It is a role that high-lights some fascinating challenges for the archetypal feminist heroine.

When *Trickster's Choice* opens, Aly has not seen her mother in a year. Aly does not appear distraught or affected by her mother's absence in any remarkable way; she is, however, concerned that her mother does not know her very well or understand her career goals. Alanna's inability to understand her daughter's desire to become a spy contributes to Aly setting sail on her own.

Alanna's role in the family is somewhat like the traditional role of a male in that she is expected to be away from home often, and therefore cannot be the primary caregiver. Unfortunately, Aly's father George does not play a traditional caregiver role, either. Although he lives at home, his position as second-in-command of spies does not lend itself well to this role. Perhaps this is a uniquely modern conception of the fantasy family; nevertheless, Aly's upbringing consists of various housekeepers, nursemaids, and part-time parents that help her along the way.



A poignant moment in the story occurs when Alanna becomes a noticeably worried mother, wringing her hands over the fate of her daughter. Alanna is certain of Aly's abilities, which comes as a surprise to Aly; however, she cannot overcome her natural concern as a mother. This image does not touch Aly; instead, she is concerned about her mother's ability to prepare for war—a traditionally male role—when she is busy worrying. While this might emphasize Alanna's roles as both mother and warrior, Aly seems to believe that the two are not entirely compatible.

Romance

There is a central tension in the story between Aly's coming of age as a spy and that of her coming of age as a young woman. As a spy, Aly seems far more mature in her development than her sixteen years would warrant. She is capable of developing complex military strategies, orchestrating guard duties and searches, and setting traps for suspected assassins. As a teenager, however, she wears her infatuation with Nawat, the crow-boy, in a manner as awkward as any young person might.

This is a difficult point to negotiate. On one hand, Aly refers frequently to her considerable, if not innocent, experiences with boys at home. On the other hand, Aly's lack of sophistication in her romantic relationship with Nawat suggests the awkwardness of adolescence. These complexities make Aly more engaging and authentic.

Style

Third-person Limited Point of View

The novel is told from a limited third person point of view, with the reader following events in the story as Aly sees and interprets them. The author's choosing this point of view allows the story to unfold before the reader just as it does for the main character, and provides opportunities for the author to expand on certain aspects that would not be available to the reader in a first-person narrative. The point of view of the story enables the reader to become deeply engaged in the young girl's understanding of race relations, gender roles, and intimate relationships.

Aly seems somewhat removed from the events around her. This makes her appear both emotionally strong and emotionally distant. When she finds herself in a slave holding pen, for example, she seems to barely recognize the dire nature of her situation. Instead, she views it as an opportunity to use her skills to escape and, ultimately, impress her parents. This narrative distance enables Aly to think analytically in the face of such danger, and resolve to use her training to gain the respect of her parents.

Although magic does not play a major role in this novel, Pierce uses Kyprioth's ability to transport Aly through her dreams across various kingdoms as a means of informing both Aly and the reader of events that will have a significant impact on Aly's mission. Pierce uses this technique effectively to address the concerns of her main character and those of the reader. In essence, it serves as a way of providing the main character and the reader with material normally associated with an omniscient point of view. Instead of switching to an omniscient point of view, the author uses the trickster as a mechanism for providing information that would otherwise be unknown. Kyprioth has the ability to take Aly to wherever she would most like to be, as when he takes her to see her mother and father while they discuss Aly's disappearance. He also takes her to places where she must go in order to understand the political turmoil occurring outside Tanair, which will ultimately determine the events back in the castle.

Plot Frame

The events in *Trickster's Choice* begin on March 27, 462 H.E. (Human Era) and conclude almost five months later at the end of the summer. The wager between Kyprioth and Aly, in which Aly agrees to help the Balitang family for the duration of the summer, is established early in the novel as Aly begins her new life as a slave. The wager serves as an organic narrative frame for the events of the story, meaning it signals the beginning and ending of the plot. This frame provides a propulsive element to events, so even as the plot pitches and shifts, the reader senses that the action will culminate in a major climax before the term of Aly's wager has expired.

Fantasy

The success of a fantasy story depends in part on whether the reader finds the setting of the story believable. Fantasy books often take place in other worlds full of mystical creatures, characters, and events. However fantastical, these books also have a familiar element that allows readers to identify with the story. In order to ensure the setting's authenticity, Pierce textures the story with copious detail, capturing the sensual essence of her scenes. The book includes maps of The Copper Isles and the Kingdom of Tortall, a "Cast of Characters" section that gives a brief description of all characters, and a glossary of terms and places to help the reader follow along in the novel's unfamiliar world. Pierce introduces every character, no matter how secondary, by describing the physical appearance of each in thorough detail.



Historical Context

The Feminist Movement

Following in the turbulent wake of the civil rights movement, the Second Wave feminist movement in the 1970s marked an effort to ensure equal pay for women who performed work equal to that of men. To address this fundamental issue of equality, feminists first had to challenge preconceptions about women's capabilities in the workplace.

According to Susan Estrich's *Sex and Power*, feminism scored a major victory in 1972 when the Supreme Court of the United States first recognized that legal rights for women were specifically mandated by the Constitution. As gender roles were being challenged by more women moving into the workplace, the notion of men's and women's roles in fantasy fiction were being called into question as well.

Feminist writers like Marion Zimmer Bradley, author of the "Darkover" novels, and C. J. Cherryh, who wrote *Gate of Ivrel* (1976), influenced a score of young writers and readers. The works of these authors were groundbreaking because the books featured strong female characters as the protagonists; this challenged the traditional preconceptions of gender roles, and power.

This movement was something completely liberating for a community of writers and fans that had known only men in positions of authority. Myra Jehlen writes in her essay "Gender" that Americans were awakening to the ways misconceptions and faulty assumptions about gender were being perpetuated, and art and literature were helping expose the patriarchal formulations of power. Just as the biological determinism was being tested and dispelled, so too were those traditional roles granted to feminine characters in fantasy and science fiction.

To that end, it is difficult to determine whether the broader cultural shifts of the 1960s and 1970s served as the impetus for a new feminine hero, or whether feminine heroes in fantasy literature and elsewhere were actually facilitating change in the cultural landscape. Perhaps the best argument, as Jehlen writes, is that literature reflects the cultural pulse of the time by lending itself to challenging the reader's own points of view. The central conflict of the fantasy fiction hero in the 1970s is the same conflict at the core of gender dynamics in American culture, and therefore, the two are impossibly intertwined.

Colonialism in Hawaii

The history of the Hawaiian Islands bears at least some resemblance to the history of the Copper Isles in *Trickster's Choice*. The archipelago collectively known as Hawaii was originally inhabited by a large native population composed of warring chiefdoms. These warring factions were united under a royal family led by King Kamehameha the Great at the beginning of the nineteenth century. By the end of the nineteenth century,

however, American businessmen backed by military forces had gained control of the government and stripped the royal family of its power. These businessmen were interested in obtaining Hawaii's valuable resources, especially its fertile land. The vast majority of native Hawaiians were subsequently denied the right to vote, while wealthy foreigners were allowed to vote simply because they bought large amounts of Hawaiian land.

An attempt to reinstate the royal family failed, and the United States assumed the island group as an official territory in 1898. Hawaii's rich history was largely suppressed and undervalued for many decades; now, however, it is recognized as one of the main assets of the state's largest industry: tourism.

Critical Overview

Many reviewers of *Trickster's Choice* have found the novel to be a promising fantasy tale for young adults, and a worthy successor to Pierce's "Song of the Lioness" quartet. Numerous critics have commented on the charismatic appeal and texture of Alianna, the complexity of the fantasy world the author creates, and the depth generated by the issues of race and colonialism tackled in the book. *Kirkus Reviews* refers to the novel as "a ripping good yarn that introduces a new series."

Critics also noted a major difference between Alianna and her mother Alanna, the heroine of Pierce's "Lioness" quartet. Alianna depends on her wits and intelligence to overcome the difficult challenges she faces, while her mother relies on her physical skills and magic. In showcasing Aly's skills as a spy, writes Kathleen Karr in *Children's Literature*, "Pierce overcomes her former over-emphasis on magic and allows the non-gifted Aly to solve each challenge through sheer intelligence alone (mostly)."

At the core of the novel is the same type of strong female protagonist that has made Pierce's other books critical and commercial successes. As Elizabeth Devereaux writes in the *New York Times*, Pierce's heroines are appealing because "they faithfully reiterate an ideal—of feminine power that relies on brains, not beauty; of feminine attractiveness that relies on competence, not helplessness; and of feminine alliances that grow stronger, not weaker, in the face of conflicts." *Kirkus Reviews* refers to Aly as "an accomplished flirt—and brilliant at the intelligence work learned from her spymaster father."

Some reviewers have mentioned that the characters may not exhibit enough depth or growth. According to *Kirkus Reviews*, "Unlike Pierce's earlier protagonists, Aly arrives fully formed, a snarky, talented uber-heroine." Anita Burkam writes in *Horn Book Magazine* that the fullness of Aly's talents, which might strike some readers as implausible, are sufficiently explained by the author as the product of her upbringing. What Burkam considers problematic, however, are the anemic descriptions of the secondary characters in the novel, which inevitably consist of simply "the person's height, eye and hair color, and clothing." In Burkam's view, the banal descriptions slow the narrative force inherent in Aly's adventures on Lombyn.

Nevertheless, Burkam concludes that the author firmly establishes a set of characters that will continue to intrigue readers for the extent of her newest quartet. In addition, while there are conflicting opinions about the author's use of characterization in the novel, there is almost unanimous praise for the plot. According to *Kirkus Reviews*, "Aly's difficulty with the complexity of colonialism adds surprising, welcome depth." This is a sentiment repeated in many reviews of *Trickster's Choice*.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3



Critical Essay #1

Harry Harris is an English instructor at The Ohio State University. In this essay, Harris examines the relationship between racial identity and character development in Pierce's novel.

In a critical scene in *Trickster's Choice*, Aly, the protagonist of the novel, tints her pale luarin skin with brown sap so she can go undercover in the raka village of Pohon. Aly believes she must enlist the Mage of Pohon to protect the Balitang family from other powerful mages who might try to bring harm to her charges, Dove and Sarai.

The dark-skinned raka have endured centuries of oppression from the luarin. Even with her darkened skin, Aly has no chance of convincing the Mage of Pohon to help her without the support of her raka conspirators. At one point, five villagers attack Aly, and her raka traveling companions must intercede. Eventually, the raka people allow her to pass and give her their trust. However, this is only after Junai, her bodyguard, convinces the attackers that her intentions are good and that she has been chosen by the trickster to protect the future raka queen.

Trickster's Choice is a novel full of metaphor, but no metaphor is more fully wrought than the one illustrated in the scene in which Aly darkens her skin to pretend to be raka and find the mage. While Aly's story in the novel is one of self-discovery and individual empowerment, it is set against a tragically vivid backdrop of inequality, oppression, and racial tension. Aly is brilliant, witty, skilled, and clever, but she will not succeed without the collaborative relationships she must forge with her raka conspirators. Triumph is defined for Aly as her success in reinstating the raka queen to her rightful place as the monarch of the Copper Isles.

The message of racial reconciliation and cooperation is ever-present in *Trickster's Choice*, but its power depends on young Aly's evolution and the way her character develops an understanding of this broader social theme. While this definition of success for Aly is a powerful one, it is somewhat incongruous with the definition of success that Aly, as a character, maintains for herself. The reader's challenge is to reconcile the heavy thematic overtones of racial reconciliation and social justice with the somewhat more modest ambitions of a young girl seeking, first and foremost, to prove herself to her parents.

Tamora Pierce describes the relationship her fantasy stories have to the real world this way in an interview on Powells.com:

You serve them (the audience) and yourself best by making everything as real as possible. That way, when you ask them to make that big suspension of disbelief, when you ask them to believe, at least for the space of the book, that this sort of magic works, they've saved all their imaginative energy for that particular leap.



This quote effectively captures Pierce's approach to storytelling. Her world is one in which stormwings—mythical creatures with the heads of humans and legs and wings of birds—inhabit the same landscape as ordinary animals like goats and squirrels. Her crows can turn into boys, and although Aly does not possess magical abilities, she has sight that enables her to view far-away occurrences as if they were happening in her own room. Pierce's rendering of racial conflict is no different. The people in Lombyn are novel as raka and luarin, but they are as familiar to the readers as people in their own neighborhoods.

The parallels to the real world do not end there; in her use of a trickster figure, Pierce draws on tropes from the cultures that she finds analagous, or similar. The trickster figure is a staple of African folklore and became an integral part of the African American slave narratives and folktales, according to Lawrence Levine in *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*. In slave folklore, the trickster had the ability to shift shapes, frequently taking the form of an animal. These figures frequently subverted the power of oppressors and communicated messages of hope and rejuvenation to slaves aware of the hidden messages. Kyprioth, the trickster in Pierce's novel, has the same ability to speak to selective listeners, and to use his powers to manipulate conventional hierarchies. In drawing on the trickster trope, Pierce makes clear her analogy between real world and fantasy world racial tension. Still, although her novel uses fantasy to explore real world issues from a fresh perspective, her protagonist never fully comprehends the racial dynamics in the fantasy world of the novel and, therefore, never understand that her own purpose is much more than simple self-discovery.

Pierce's world is one in which the luarin rule, often tyrannically, and oppress the raka for the sake of perpetuating an imbalanced and unjust power structure. These are cultural dynamics that Aly has only studied in textbooks. As she leaves her home at Pirate's Swoop and is taken into the tumultuous world of slaves and masters, the reader experiences race relations in a fresh manner, right along with the young protagonist. This experience is strengthened and made resonant by the author's use of the limited third person point of view.

The relationship between the raka and the luarin springs to life when Aly is sold as a slave to the Balitangs in the city of Rajmuat. For a well-educated girl of royal descent, meeting people of various backgrounds and gaining valuable experience outside the confines of Pirate's Swoop is intriguing. Some of what she has learned from books about the real world is accurate, and some of it is not. She is continually forced to reconsider the beliefs she holds true: "After years of lessons in the Isles' history, detailing the thorough job of conquest done by the luarin, or white, ruling class [Aly] had expected to find all luarin in service and all the brown, or raka, folk as slaves."

Instead, Aly found a world that challenged her expectations from the beginning. Not all raka were slaves, nor were all luarin free. She is a slave-of-all-work, meaning she is the lowest of the low. She learns much about the luarin and their oppressive manner, but her own journey is complicated by the fact that her status is not as low as some, as she is bought by the fair and just Duke Mequen and Duchess Winnamine.



When Bronau meets Aly for the first time, he says that he does not "like the precedent, keeping luarin slaves. It gives the raka ideas ... you can't trust the raka to behave themselves unless they know there's a whip close to hand." In response to Bronau's racism, Aly thinks to herself, "Bronau obviously didn't know that Chenaol, who could juggle razor-sharp cleavers with ease, had discouraged most problems of that sort." This is a revealing passage, because the author at once shows Aly's fond relationships with the raka slaves as a means of contrasting her experiences with her expectations, and as a means of contrasting the young girl with the prince. However, her response shows that she understands that Bronau's ideas are factually wrong, but it does not show that she has a sense of the inherent inappropriateness of Bronau's statements. For a book rife with racial tension, Aly seems untroubled about the need for social justice in the boorish, racist behavior of other characters. Aly's lack of concern is present throughout the novel, and as such, ultimately undermines the author's broader message of justice.

Pierce calls her writing process a "paleontological method of writing," and states, "You sit there with a little brush and maybe a little pick, and you keep excavating until suddenly you discover you've dug up a T Rex.... Then you can go back and saturate the metaphor." The racial metaphor in *Trickster's Choice* has been sufficiently saturated, exploring many aspects of race relations between the white luarin and the dark-skinned raka. In the end, however, Aly lacks any true conversion or deeper understanding that her role is not just putting a raka queen on the throne, but also healing the deep wounds of history. It is this missing element that undermines the book's powerful message of racial reconciliation.

Even as the novel pulses with an overarching theme of social justice, Aly does not seem moved by it. Instead, it is her own ambition to prove her self-worth that seems to inspire her to remain with the raka in the end. Pierce has written a complex character in Aly; perhaps her obliviousness to the larger questions at hand is meant to convey the character's emotional immaturity. Nevertheless, the relationship between theme and character in the novel seems to be a tenuous one.

Is Aly's story a frame on which Pierce hangs her views of race relations in contemporary America? It is virtually impossible not to feel the heavy hand of the author's convictions at work in the plot. Or is it the other way around, with the backdrop of racial discontent and inequality being the best vehicle for author to tell Aly's coming of age story? The complexity of these issues make *Trickster's Choice* a rich read, and one in which Aly's adventure may not be the most exciting part of the novel after all.

Source: Harry Harris, Critical Essay on *Trickster's Choice*, in *Literary Newsmakers for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2006.



Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Devereaux examines the author's emphasis on heroic female leads as role models for young female readers.

If you have not heard of Tamora Pierce, chances are that you do not have a preadolescent girl in your life. Enormously popular, Pierce is a best-selling and prolific author of girls' fantasy novels, loved for her strong female heroines and quasi-medieval magical realms. Her characters are not literary cousins to *Harry Potter* (whom they precede, having first appeared in 1983) but a more particular type, featured also in the works of Robin McKinley and others: the girl warrior. They know their way around dragons and shape-shifters, jousts and to-the-death battles, and they are relative strangers to anxieties about their looks, status and power.

To date, Pierce's novels have come in "quartets," or series of four; three linked quartets have followed three girl warriors in the land of Tortall (two other quartets, set in a different world, are for slightly younger readers). Alanna, subject of the first cycle, *The Song of the Lioness Quartet*, typifies the model. Like so many leading characters in children's books, Alanna is liberated from the tyrannies of family life, with her mother long dead and her father distant.

First met at 10, Alanna easily figures out a way to switch roles with her twin brother: he wants to go to the convent to learn sorcery, and she wants his place at court, to train for knighthood. Disguising herself as a boy, she earns her knight's shield, and Pierce eventually lets her have a romance (and sex) with the handsome crown prince. But Alanna's love life takes second place to her stirring performances on heroic quests and on the battlefield, and she declines to become a queen. Instead, she chooses an unconventional husband and keeps her career as king's champion, the best knight in the land.

Like Daine, the orphaned heroine of *Wild Magic* in *The Immortals Quartet* (who can communicate with and heal animals and, eventually, take on animal forms), and Kel, of the *Protector of the Small* books (the first girl to openly enroll for knighthood at the Tortall court), Alanna is loosely constructed, more a set of ideals than a flesh-and-blood character. Readers can't compare themselves to these girls. Their physical attributes are undistinguished or impossible (Alanna, for example, has purple eyes), and they regard their bodies as assets to be managed (they train for strength and bind up those inconvenient breasts). They are said to have their faults. Alanna's chief fault is a hot temper. Free from psychological conflict and with extra freedoms granted by magic, these characters are easy vehicles for vicarious adventure.

With *Trickster's Choice*, it is Alanna's 16-year-old daughter, Aly, who generates the action, and suddenly Alanna is a problem, a critical mother who wishes Aly would make something of herself, while vetoing her well-founded desire to become a spy like her father. Aly has to achieve distance from her mother (and father) and to grapple with the examples they have set.



But Pierce quickly collapses the mother-daughter tensions and casts Aly as even more of a superheroine (or "shero," in the parlance of the dedicated followers of the Web site Pierce maintains with Meg Cabot, author of such pro-feminist fantasies as *The Princess Diaries*) than her counterparts. Aly sails off on her boat, only to be unceremoniously captured by pirates and sold into slavery in the far-off Copper Isles.

Does Aly gnash her teeth, or even weep? No—she looks at her enslavement as an opportunity to prove her talents as a field agent. She keeps a preternaturally cool head, even arranging to be disfigured in order to ward off slave buyers looking for a "bed warmer." She has unswerving faith in her abilities, even before the trickster god of the Copper Isles shows up to tap her for a pivotal role in the kingdom's embattled history.

The god's appearance will not puzzle or even startle readers, who, thanks to a preface, will know more about the trickster's plans than Aly does. The Copper Isles, once inhabited only by "raka" (dark-skinned people), have been conquered by "luarin" (whites from other lands) and, over the 300 years of luarin rule, the raka have been steadily oppressed and the trickster god banished. But, as Aly slowly discovers for herself, the trickster god has secretly promised the raka that a scion of the old raka kings and queens will reclaim the throne. Aly realizes that she has been charged with the care of the One Who Is Promised; the only question left is which of two sisters the One might be.

Knowing the outcome of a plot line does not necessarily diminish the suspense (does anyone doubt for a moment that Cinderella will land the prince?), but in this case being a step ahead of the heroine causes problems. Aly, after all, is heroic by dint of her brains—where Alanna, Daine and Kel engage in all manner of combat, Aly's weapons tend to be cerebral, ranging from her understanding of diplomacy and spycraft to the use of her magic "sight."

Alanna, Daine and Kel work within the ordered structure of their kingdom; Aly has to discern the rules of a foreign land for herself. Giving readers a leg up on Aly compromises the alacrity ascribed to her; to some extent, it also slackens the narrative tension. And while luarin-raka relations sound close enough to Western history to serve as a political theater for modern conflicts or issues of race, Pierce does not develop the theme. Instead, she relies on her time-tested material. The trickster god sends Aly dreams that supply news of the other Tortall heroines. Aly also gets a suitor, a magical crow who assumes human form, but Aly develops more chemistry with the trickster god; her divine confidence marks Aly as worthy of a supernatural partner.

While *Trickster's Choice* does not wholly exploit its potential, it's unlikely that fans will mind. The lure of the Tortall heroines is not in their infinite variety nor is it in their verisimilitude. Rather, they faithfully reiterate an ideal—of feminine power that relies on brains, not beauty; of feminine attractiveness that relies on competence, not helplessness; and of feminine alliances that grow stronger, not weaker, in the face of conflicts. Given the utopian quality of that ideal, is it surprising that Pierce needs magical creatures and mythical gods to bring it to literary life?

Source: Elizabeth Devereaux, "Woman Warrior: *Trickster's Choice*," in *New York Times*, November 16, 2003, p. 39.



Critical Essay #3

In the following excerpt, Pierce herself likens fantastic literature to "fuel" essential for the imaginations of young minds.

I wonder why readers choose to read fantasy; rather, I wonder why more of them *don't*. Until they reach school age, children are offered little else on almost a continuous basis. The groundwork for a love of the fanciful is laid by children's literature, from A. A. Milne to Dr. Seuss, and from Curious George to Max and his Wild Things.

Once children enter school, however, emphasis shifts from imaginative to reality-based writing, and many youngsters grow away from speculative fiction—but not all. Those who stay with it do so for many reasons, and it comes to fill a number of needs in their lives.

One of the things I have learned about YAs is that they respond to the idealism and imagination they find in everything they read. They haven't spent years butting their heads against brick walls; the edge of their enthusiasm, and of their minds, is still sharp. Some of the most perceptive social and political commentary I've heard in the last eight years or so has come from my readers. Young people have the time and emotional energy to devote to causes, unlike so many of us, losing our revolutionary (or evolutionary) drive as we spend ourselves on the details and chores that fill adult life. They take up causes, from the environment, to human disaster relief, to politics. We encourage them, and so we should: there is a tremendous need for those who feel passionately and are willing to work at what they care about, whatever their cause may be. YAs are also dreamers; this is expected and, to a degree, encouraged as they plan for the future. Their minds are flexible, recognizing few limits. Here the seeds are sown for the great visions, those that will change the future for us all. We give our charges goals, heroes whose feats they can emulate, and knowledge of the past, but they also need fuel to spark and refine ideas, the same kind of fuel that fires idealism.

That fuel can be found—according to the writings of Jung, Bettelheim, M. Ester Harding, and Joseph Campbell—in the mighty symbols of myth, fairy tales, dreams, legends—and fantasy. Haven't we felt their power? Remember that flush of energy and eagerness we felt as Arthur drew the sword from the stone? It's the same as that which bloomed the first time—or even the fifth or sixth time—we heard Dr. King say, "I have a dream." An eyedropper's worth of that energy can feed days of activity, hard and sometimes dirty work, fund raising, letter writing. It can ease an idealist over small and big defeats.

Here is where fantasy, in its flesh and modern (i.e. post-1990) forms, using contemporary sensibilities and characters youngsters identify with, reigns supreme. Here the symbols of meaningful struggle and of truth as an inner constant exist in their most undiluted form outside myth and fairy tale: Tolkien's forces of Light fighting a mind-numbing Darkness; Elizabeth Moon's lone paladin facing pain and despair with only faith to sustain her (in *Oath of Gold* [Baen, 1989]); Diane Duane's small choir of deep sea creatures holding off the power of death and entropy at the risk of the world's life



and their own (*Deep Wizardry* [Delacorte, 1985]). These stories appear to have little to do with reality, but they do provide readers with the impetus to challenge the way things are, something YAs respond to wholeheartedly. Young people are drawn to battles for a discernable higher good; the images of such battles evoke their passion. (I would like to note here that some of the writers mentioned herein normally are considered to be adult writers. Fantasy, even more than other genres, has a large crossover audience, with YAs raiding the adult shelves once they deplete their part of the store or library, and adults slipping into the youth sections.)

Fantasy, along with science fiction, is a literature of *possibilities*. It opens the door to the realm of "What If," challenging readers to see beyond the concrete universe and to envision other ways of living and alternative mindsets. Everything in speculative universes, and by association the real world, is mutable. Intelligent readers will come to relate the questions raised in these books to their own lives. If a question nags at youngsters intensely enough, they will grow up to devise an answer—to move their world forward, because ardent souls can't stand an unanswered question.

Source: Tamora Pierce, "Fantasy: Why Kids Read It, Why Kids Need It," in *School Library Journal*, October 1993, p. 50.

Adaptations

- *Trickster's Choice* was released in 2003 as an unabridged audiocassette format by Listening Library Audio. It is narrated by Ora Pierce and Trini Alvarado.



Topics for Further Study

- How might the events in the story be different if the protagonist were a teenage boy? Would he face the same kinds of obstacles that Aly faces in the novel? Would the other characters treat a male protagonist in the same way? Create a male character with attributes and skills similar to Aly's. Identify four scenes in the novel that might be altered by the presence of a male protagonist and rewrite the scenes.
- Compare the relationship between the raka and luarin in *Trickster's Choice* with the relationship between different ethnic groups and races in the United States. Write a two-page essay in which you compare the history of the raka people as outlined in the novel with the history of African Americans in the United States. Make sure to address what lessons might be learned about the relationships between African and Anglo Americans by studying Pierce's metaphor of the raka and luarin in the novel.
- Aly desperately wants her mother and father to acknowledge her remarkable abilities and recognize her desire to become a master spy. Write a one-page journal entry from Aly's point of view, exploring issues such as why her parents try to discourage her from becoming a spy, whether they are being good parents in doing so, and how her parents are either being supportive or unsupportive.
- In your opinion, what is the value of setting a story about a young girl and her adventures in a fantasy world? Research the life of a real woman who has achieved greatness in some way. Write a two-page essay in which you compare Aly's experiences to that of your research subject. As you are writing, think of why an author might choose to use the fantasy genre to tell a story about a dynamic young woman. What does fantasy allow the author to do that other genres or even nonfiction might not?
- Aly is very young to be in charge of security for the Tanair estate. Make a one-page list of how Aly's age affects her ability to protect Dove and Sarai. In what ways does it make her more effective? In what ways is it a hindrance? Use specific examples from the book.

What Do I Read Next?

- In *Trickster's Queen* (2004), Tamora Pierce returns to the saga of Alianne and the Balitang family. Following the death of Mequen, the Balitangs return to their home in Rajmuat with Aly serving as Dovasary's maid. A raka rebellion has begun, and Aly must put the skills she learned in Lombyn to use in the treacherous political world of the king's court.
- Pierce's first book in the "Immortals" quartet, *Wild Magic* (1992), introduces readers to a brave young heroine named Daine. She is a thirteen-year-old orphan who has a burgeoning special ability to communicate with animals. Daine is a sullen girl and must learn to trust adults again following her own abandonment. As she grows, she develops her own power and learns to use it to defend the kingdom against the vicious stormwing creatures.
- The heroine of *First Test* (1999), the first in the "Protector of the Small" quartet, is Keladry of Mindelan, a ten-year-old who begins her rigorous knight training as a page in Tortall. Keladry's story as a knight reflects those of most young people. She faces torment from boys in her class and doubt from her teacher (in this case, the trainer of knights). Although Keladry will eventually become a worthy successor to Alanna the Lioness, her first year in training is anything but easy. Keladry must develop maturity beyond her years to survive on the battlefield and in the schoolhouse.
- In *Lady Knight* (2002), the fourth book of the "Protector of the Small" quartet, Keladry of Mindelan has been knighted, and the Kingdom of Tortall is under attack by a mysterious man using an army of insect-like creatures that subsist on the souls of dead children. Keladry is put in charge of the refugees in the kingdom, a posting that disappoints her. Soon, however, she finds her hands full as she must defend children and families from the creatures. When she recklessly pursues the nefarious villain and his creatures alone, she is in for more adventure than she bargained for.
- J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954) is the first book of the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy. Tolkien's work is often cited as the inspiration for many fantasy and science fiction writers, and it has seen a resurgence in popularity in the 2000s with the success of the "Lord of the Rings" movies.



Further Study

Bradley, Marion Zimmer, *Darkover Landfall*, Penguin Group, 1972.

The "Darkover" series begins when a Terran ship crashes on the planet of Darkover and alien cultures collide, throwing relations between worlds into deep turmoil.

Cherryh, C. J., *Gate of Ivrel*, Penguin Group, 1976.

This novel introduces Cherryh's seminal character Morgaine as a central feminist heroine in a novel that explores bizarre time-space gates left over from an extinct alien race.

Pierce, Tamora, *Alanna: The First Adventure*, Atheneum Books, 1983.

This is Pierce's first novel, and the one that introduces Alanna the Lioness. There has never been a female knight in the land of Tortall, so Alanna must hide her gender to train and become the warrior she knows she is meant to be. She is brilliant in battle, but must face discrimination and apprehension her male brothers-in-arms need not worry about.

Pierce, Tamora, *Lioness Rampant*, Atheneum Books, 1988.

The fourth book in the Song of the Lioness quartet follows Alanna as she becomes the King's Champion, and finds unexpected love in George of Pirate's Swoop.



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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's "For Students" Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on "classic" novels frequently



studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel; and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals—helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized



Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- **Introduction:** a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- **Author Biography:** this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- **Plot Summary:** a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- **Characters:** an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in *Invisible Man*—the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. • Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- **Themes:** a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- **Style:** this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- **Historical Context:** This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- **Critical Overview:** this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- **Criticism:** an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).



- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author’s time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes “The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,” a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children’s Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.



Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

“Night.” Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234–35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the “Criticism” subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on “Winesburg, Ohio.” Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335–39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. “Margaret Atwood’s “The Handmaid’s Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,” Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9–16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133–36.

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The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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