

Trickster's Choice Study Guide

Trickster's Choice by Tamora Pierce

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Plot Summary

"Trickster's Choice" is a young adult novel by Tamora Pierce and follows the adventures of sixteen year-old protagonist, Aly of Pirate's Swoop.

After a holiday with relatives, Aly returns home to her mother and father. Aly is young and precocious, and aspires to be a spy in the service of her father. But her father wants a better life for her, to see her happily married, and following a safe path in life. He is well aware of the dangers of spying. Aly's mother returns home as well after a long trip, and Aly decides to give her parents some alone time. She decides to sail to visit a friendly lord. But she is accosted by pirates, and sold into slavery.

Aly is purchased by the Balitang family, which is under suspicion of disloyalty by the aged and infirmed king. The Balitang family is exiled to their island estate and castle until their loyalty can be determined. Aly's ability to read people (her gift of sight), and her ability to commune with the gods -especially Kyprioth, the trickster god- earns her a special and trusted place with the family. Aly makes a wager with Kyprioth, that if she protects the four daughters of the Duke of the family, that she will be returned home at the end of the summer. If she fails, she will be pressed into service for a year as a servant to Kyprioth.

Through the spring and the summer, Aly does everything she can to protect the girls and their family, from rallying the local population to reading the faces of visitors to the castle. She befriends the crow-person Nawat, and the two develop romantic feelings for one another. At the same time, Aly's father is journeying to find her. In an epic battle against the traitorous Prince Bronau, Aly upholds her end of the wager. She is free, but refuses to return home with her father, intending to stay with the family, because a revolutionary war is pending.



Chapters 1-6

Chapters 1-6 Summary

In Chapter 1, in the kingdom of Tortall, Alianne -Aly- returns home to her father after spending a holiday with relatives who enjoy dance and the theater. Aly's father, George Cooper, is the baron of Pirate's Swoop. Aly, who is sixteen, has had her hair dyed a shade of sapphire. Aly wants to become a spy, but George does not want his daughter to live a dangerous life. He would rather her be married, but Aly disagrees. Aly is very skilled at decoding secret messages and translating important documents. Aly dreams of an exciting life, and enjoys helping her father with his correspondence. Three days after her return, it is discovered that Landfall, one of George's spies, may have been outed by the inhabitants of Scanra, warring enemy of Tortall.

Aly's mother, Alanna, also feels as though her daughter should begin getting her life in order, for Aly is a young woman. Alanna does not want her daughter spying, either. Aly decides to sail to Port Legann, to visit Lord Imrah, to give her parents time alone. But while Aly is sailing, she is captured by pirates and has her head shaved to get rid of the blue hair. Aly is then taken to Rajmuat, on the island of Kypriang, the capital of the Copper Islands to the west, home of the copper-skinned people. Aly is already thinking about what can be done. She doesn't want to be sold as a sex slave, a bed-warmer. During feeding, Aly starts a fight, and has her face bruised on purpose to avoid being sold as a bed warmer. Meanwhile, George and Alanna receive a message from Imrah, that Aly has not arrived.

In Chapter 2, bought as a slave by the house of Duke Mequen Balitang, of Rajmuat, on the Island of Kypriang, Aly is already plotting to escape. Aly wears a collar which is bewitched with magic that will choke her if she attempts to leave the city. She plans to break out of her collar, and flee. Nevertheless, Aly finds the Balitang family home interesting, for it has over 100 slaves of all races. Upon her arrival, Aly had been taken under the wing of the head cook, Chenaol, after agreeing to purchase Aly with Ulaism, the head footman of the house. The Duke is married to a raka (Copper Islands native) noblewoman, and married to a luarin (any white person from the East) as a second wife. His two children from the first marriage are sixteen year-old Saraiyu and twelve year-old Dovasary; and his two children from the second marriage to Duchess Winnamine are four year-old Petranne, and three year-old Elsren.

In the middle of the night, Prince Bronau arrives with the royal news that Aly wishes she could know about. The next day, the Duke and Duchess tell the staff that the King worries about the loyalty of the Balitang family. Until they can prove their loyalty with presents, the family must head to their estates on the island of Lombyn. Civil war may come between the people of the Copper Isles, and this intrigues Aly. Some of the Balitang slaves will be sold, and some of the slaves will journey to the island.



It is revealed Aly has the gift of sight, which she can use to detect if someone is being dishonest, pregnant, lying, or is a god. As the slaves are examined, Aly sees that the examiner is really the local god Kyprioth, a trickster, and a god of the sea. Kyprioth tells Aly that if she protects the children through the end of the summer, she will be taken home. If not, she will be forced to serve Kyprioth for one year. She then becomes a god's messenger.

In Chapter 3, Aly becomes the governess for Petranne and Elsren. The girls are rambunctious, and like to hear stories from Aly. The older girls, Saraiyu (Sarai for short) and Dovasary, are very interested to learn that Aly is from Tortall, as they are interested in Tortall's legends and heroes. Aly lies, telling them that she was a maid in a nobleman's castle when she was captured as a slave. Sarai explains that if she lived in Tortall, she would be a member of the warrior group, the Queen's Riders. Later, among the slaves, Aly learns that Ulasim has voluntarily decided to stay with Duke Menquen, because he believes the Duke to be a good man. Aly realizes that Ulasim is a good man, and wants him on her side. Ulasim had served the first wife of Menquen, who was killed while riding and jumping horses.

In Chapter 4, the Balitang home, Tanair Castle on Lombyn Island, near Tanair village, is a mountainous island with many highlands. The island's skies are full of winged horses, which are a symbol on the Balitang family crest. There are two other nearby towns, Inti and Pohon. Pohon is an isolated village of rough people. The island, like most of the world, survives on slave labor. Aly is not happy with this, but keeps up a happy appearance for Petranne and Elsren, who believe they are on an adventure. Fesgao, second-in-command, and part of an advance scouting team, concurs with Aly that something is not right up ahead -perhaps robbers are there- because the animals have all gone silent. Up ahead, the scouts reveal, are fourteen renegade jungle raka peasants. Six of them are captured. Sergeant Veron believes they should all be executed. Instead, they take blood oaths to exchange their loyalty for their lives.

In Chapter 5, having arrived at Tanair, everyone begins settling in. The castle is in a state of disrepair, and needs to be worked on. The slaves and free servants realize their lives will be less comfortable for now. Because Aly is a messenger for a god, Duke Mequen and Duchess Winnamine decide to free her. Aly refuses, and explains her situation. The Duke and Duchess are a little stunned, but impressed with Aly's determination. Aly becomes a goatherder and has the magic taken off her collar so she can roam about the island freely, and receives the job as messenger for the Duke and Duchess, so she can travel unchallenged at night. Meanwhile, in her dream, Aly understands that Kyprioth has enlisted crows on the island to spy for Aly in exchange for food, but Aly suspects a trick somewhere.

Awake, Aly feeds Nawat, one of the crows, so that she can learn crow language. She breaks into Veron's room, and discovers that he is the spy of King Oron in the Balitang clan. She doesn't know whether or not to tell the Duke and Duchess, or keep the secret to herself. That night, Aly dreams of Frarslund, on the Vassa River, on the northwest border of Tortall. A search is underway for Aly. Also in Aly's dreams, Nawat convinces his crow cohorts that Aly is doing very well with crow language.



In Chapter 6, Aly brings the goats out to graze. Nawat introduces the crow families to Aly over the next few days, and they fly out all over the island to spy and observe and report what they see. Aly also begins mapping out the island and the towns. Sarai and Dovasary (Dove) ride out to see Aly, for they are tired of working in the stillroom at the castle. The girls believe Aly is too educated to be a simply maid, but Aly replies that most Tortallan maids these days are educated. Lokeij, another slave, cautions Aly to play dumb, or someone will find her suspicious.

Aly comes to admire the intelligence and resourcefulness of Sarai and Dove. She is also startled to discover that Nawat has taken on human form, of a boy her own age, and Nawat reveals that all crows can do it, but they choose not to. Nawat brings Aly gifts, and offers to be her friend. Aly finds the idea of having a friend to be wonderful. Nawat disguises himself as a new apprentice at Falthin's workshop, and becomes very popular with the girls.

Chapters 1-6 Analysis

Sixteen year-old Aly is headstrong and self-confident at the beginning of Tamora Pierce's novel "Trickster's Choice." Having grown up in a kingdom at war, and in her father's household which manages a spy network, Aly wants nothing more than to become a spy in the service of her father. Aly is very sure of her capabilities, but her father wants a quiet, peaceful, and successful life for his only daughter. Even Aly's mother wants Aly to settle down, as at sixteen, she is a young woman in the kingdom.

If the old adage that one should be careful for what one wishes should be heeded by anyone, it should be Aly. She is captured by pirates after setting off to visit another lord, and she is sold into slavery, where her quick thinking and maturity lead her to starting a fight among her fellow slaves. This leads to her face being bruised, and saves her from a fate as a sex-slave. Indeed, the reader becomes convinced there is more to Aly than just Aly's boasting about her capabilities. Though she is emotionally distraught by her capture, she is nevertheless able to rationalize her situation and plot a way out of it.

When she becomes a slave to the Balitang family, she plots not only to escape, but to make good use of her time as a slave, becoming a spy and learning all she can about her family and the Copper Isles. Not only does she become a spy, but she makes a wager with the trickster god Kyprioth to guarantee the safety of the girls of the family, in exchange for her freedom at the end of the summer.

Interestingly enough, the plight of Aly is mirrored by that of the Balitang family at large. Their loyalty in question, they are exiled to their home island, populated by a handful of peasant villages, and their rundown family estate. Upon their arrival, the family seeks to rebuild their estate, which can also be viewed in a metaphorical sense as though the family is also seeking to rebuild its reputation, and thereby, their freedom. Furthermore, Aly is seeking to return her freedom to herself, hopefully through a bargain with the gods.



On the island, Aly's mind begins working. She begins feeling out the other slaves, and begins enlisting allies. Among them is Nawat, the crow, who has the power to transform into a human. Nawat is immediately enamored with Aly, and begins attempting to romance her. Aly gently refuses his advances for the time being, because she has other work to do. Nevertheless, the relationship that is forming between Aly and Nawat will prove crucial in the coming chapters.



Chapters 7 - 12

Chapters 7 - 12 Summary

In Chapter 7, three weeks after the arrival of everyone to the island, Aly continues taking her goats around, including to the rocky land that led to Kellaura Pass. Visda, Chenaol's nine year-old niece, meets up with Aly, Sarai, and Dove to play games. Through the pass rides a contingent of armed men led by Prince Bronau. The Duchess asks Aly to read Bronau. The Duchess reveals that the Kind has had entire households murdered because of bad dreams. The household trusts Aly's instincts. Bronau reveals he is currently suspect by the King, and that an old friend of Mequen's -Chancellor Athan Fajering- has been executed for wrong thoughts. Indeed, Bronau believes his own brother, Rubinyan, has turned the king against him, but Mequen believes Rubinyan is a good man. Aly later tells the Duke that Bronau is being truthful, refusing to reveal her gift of sight, but telling the Duke that she could see it in Bronau's face and mannerisms.

At dinner, Bronau gives gifts to the Duke's family. Bronau and Sarai also seem to hit it off. Bronau also brings news of the world, including the fruitless Scanra attacks on Tortall's forces. Later, while talking with Chenaol, Aly learns that people -free and slave- are fiercely loyal to the Duke and Duchess because they treat all people as people, not property or peasants. Chenaol, suspecting that Aly is a royal spy, is stopped by Kyprioth, who informs Aly that Chenaol is also part of the grand scheme. Meanwhile, Dove and Sarai grow closer to Aly.

In Chapter 8, Nawat and his flock offer to destroy Bronau and his men, because they pose a danger to the family. Aly says they shouldn't, because Bronau's forces are much larger than the company that brought him to the island. Meanwhile, Aly tells Kyprioth that if he attempts to fool her, or betray their agreement, she will bring the matter before all the gods. Aly tells her trusted slave friends, including Lokeij, that Veron is the King's spy. Some sixty warriors begin assembling from the village to defend the Duke and Duchess, and Nawat offers to teach them the ways of crowd fighting. Ulaism is less convinced of everything, but he nevertheless agrees to assign a female guard to watch over Aly, and to run errands for her. Aly knows the turmoil in the Copper Isles means that the island now has an excuse to strengthen defenses.

At dinner, Aly discovers two royal spies among the Prince's men. Aly goes through Bronau's possessions, to find old past-due invoices, a book about the god Mithros, old letters, and blank paper. Aly reveals to Duke Mequen that Rubinyan is a royal spy, but Mequen can't believe it.

In Chapter 9, Aly begins collecting weapons for the warriors. Visda, and another young boy named Ekit, are given to Aly to help her. Nawat believes he and Aly should mate through offering her grubs, but rather than reject Nawat and hurt his feelings, Aly tells him they aren't at the mate-feeding stage yet. A woman named Junai Dodeka arrives to watch out for Aly. Junai is Ulaism's daughter. Meanwhile, Dove agrees to get Aly a set of



maps of the island. Dove comes to admire Aly, and trust her. As the days pass, and Junai watches over her, Aly begins practice, training to fight. Bronau continues to flirt with Sarai. When Bronau goes on a tour of Pohon and Inti, Aly accompanies them, under the pretense of caring for potions to be taken to the villages. Nawat goes along as well.

First, they travel to Inti, along the western coast of the island. As they head through the town, Bronau promises to do everything he can to return the Balitang family to the capital. In the village of Pohon, Aly slips into a disguise and seeks out the village mage, who does everything from helping with births to treating illnesses. But the Pohon people notice that Aly is a stranger, and several of them stop her. But Junai and Nawat arrive to protect her, stopping the villagers. Later, Ulasim tells Aly there is no mage, but Aly does not believe him. Ulasim comes clean and says his daughter is working on bringing out the mage from being a recluse.

Midsummer's Day, June 22, rolls around. Aly has a dream of her mother's old home, and monstrous creatures, including a basilisk, her parents, and the gods. Aly wants to get word to her mother, but Kyprioth says that that would be a violation of the wager if other gods got involved to save her.

In Chapter 10, the rest of June moves on. Aly falls into a routine of goathearding, pouring wine at dinner, and keeping an eye out for the children. But Aly notices that Prince Bronau is becoming more and more restless, more and more distracted. Aly also seeks out news from trade caravans that come and go. Gurhart, Aly's main source of information, explains he has had to hire new crew because five of his crew had vanished. Aly, Fesago, Ulasim, and Lokeij believe they are hired assassins. The Duke and Duchess, as well as the girls, are herded off and protected while Ulasim and the others take out the assassins. Ulasim reports the interior of the castle is secure, but there may be other assassins outside. Veron is ordered to clear out the castle and the castle grounds, to root out any other assassins. Suddenly, an assassin tries to attack the family, but Sarai cuts the woman down, and upon seeing her bloodied, faints.

As Aly surveys the damage, Nawat reveals he has killed two assassins, protecting Aly from a trap. Aly is very happy about this. Later on, Duke Mequen says that Sarai's sword lessons, which had been taken away, will be restored.

In Chapter 11, the caravan is searched for clues about the identity of the assassins, and who may have hired them, but nothing is found. Aly and Lokeij talk about combat later on, and Aly talks about her mother, Lady Alanna of Pirate's Swoop and Olau, without revealing her as her mother. Shortly thereafter, Aly comes across Bronau asking Sarai to marry him. Sarai wants to leave it up to her father, and Bronau says they should wait to get married since they are both under suspicion. They kiss, and Bronau leaves. This causes Aly to reflect on her mother telling her that kisses are serious things.

That night, Kyprioth visits Aly. He takes her for a trip, through the sky, to Rajmuat. There, she sees King Oron is dying, and his oldest living son, Prince Hazarin, is present. He is named as Oron's heir. Aly tells the Duke and Duchess of the King's



death, and Hazarin's ascension to the throne. The Duke tells Sarai she cannot marry Bronau, for they suspect him, and Sarai is beside herself.

Three days later, royal messengers arrive, bearing official news of Oron's death. Bronau seeks to head back at once, promising to return to marry Sarai when he is a wealthy man. Sarai is unsure. Aly also knows that Nawat might fall prey to Sarai's advances, as she seeks to get herself ready for womanhood. She decides to warn Nawat.

In Chapter 12, Aly watches Bronau and his men leave the following morning. Aly, Ulasim, Nawat, and Junai head to Pohon, seeking the mage - Ulasim's mother, Ochobu. Kyprioth appears at the meeting as well. They discuss the dangers to come with Hazarin's kingship. Kyprioth says the Chain's time has come. The Chain is a network of Raka mages who will take back what is theirs, to drive out all the luarin invaders. Aly realizes she, and the children, are just pawns on a centuries-old vendetta. Ochobu is convinced to return to the castle, which she does, and she gifts Aly with even better sight.

Chapters 7 - 12 Analysis

As the family seeks to rebuild its reputation, its freedom, and its estate, Aly continues seeking to do her best to learn about and study the island and its inhabitants, in order to protect the children. Interestingly enough, the Balitang family is very kind toward their slaves, which is what earns them so much loyalty from their slaves, and the peasants who live on the island. Aly herself begins to grow closer to the Balitang girls, who in turn look up to and admire Aly. Indeed, something of friendship begins developing between Aly, and Sarai, who is Aly's age. What Aly once took to be an objective job -protecting children to secure her own freedom- becomes a personal quest as well, because she has become emotionally and personally invested in those she is trying to protect. Indeed, this spurs her on to double-down and work even harder to maintain their safety.

As the days and weeks pass by, Aly begins enlisted more and more allies, from the local villages, and from the Balitang household staff. Indeed, the Duke and Duchess themselves begin to trust Aly more and more, seeking her advice and her counsel. As Aly moves among the various circles of friends she has mad -from the crows to the slaves to the family to the villagers- she begins to learn more and more about the island and the Balitangs. It is all information she intends to use in the future for one reason or another.

As the novel continues on, the reader recognizes the dangers that Aly finds herself a part of, being enmeshed with different parties with dubious loyalties, all on the cusp of a potential revolution. The warnings of Aly's father -that the life of a spy is dangerous to the point of death- is seemingly ignored by Aly, or accepted and acknowledged as she seeks to continue as a spy. The death of the King further complicates the situation, and Prince Bronau leaves to return to the capital city to clear his name, and to seek to clear the Balitangs. But Aly is suspicious of Bronau and his motives.

As events move on, the reader is confronted by the age-old question of fate and human freewill. Certainly, the constant meddling of Kyprioth means that much of human freewill is nonexistent; yet, there is much that goes on stands to underscore the point that the people in the novel do indeed have freewill, whether they are fully human or not. The people in the novel, such as Aly, have the ability to defy the gods, but oftentimes, do not. This can be seen as both a blessing and a curse, as an argument for and against freewill. The reader will have to decide for his or herself.



Chapters 13 - 16

Chapters 13 - 16 Summary

In Chapter 13, the next morning, Sarai, Dove, their body guards, Aly, and Navat go riding. Aly learns from Dove that Sarai loves riding, and the Duchess doesn't trust Bronau. Back at the castle, Aly goes to see how Ochobu is settling in. Ochobu says she has come to help protect Sarai, and help Aly win her bet. Aly confronts Ochobu, telling her that to kill the luarin on the Isles would be to kill countless people, including half-bloods. Later, below the walls, Aly watches the soldiers and Dove practicing archery and javelin throwing. The next morning, Nawat happily greets Aly, who feels emotions tugging at her heart. Nawat reveals that obsidian can cut the feathers of Stormwings. A few days later, some of Bronau's men arrive with thank-you gifts.

July begins in earnest, bringing a lot of heat. Riding, and visits to the villages continue. As they ride, Sarai befriends many of the rakas, which Aly hopes might prevent rebellion. That night, Aly dreams of Fort Mastiff, on the Scanran border with Tortall. She dreams of her father coming to search for her, having arrived at Rajmuat. She hopes she has enough time to complete her mission.

In Chapter 14, Raja groups begin arriving on the island to see Sarai. Kyprioth arrives to give Aly a vision of King Hazarin, fat and slovenly. He dies in the night, and the servants all fear for the lives, believing they will be blamed. The servants decide to flee. Aly converses with Hazarin's ghost, who is happy to be dead, and happy to be done with having to worry about who is a friend and who is an enemy. After his ghost leaves, Kyprioth and Aly play chess until the king's body is discovered. Aly sees that Bronau believes Imajane, half-sister of the former King Oron, is to blame. Bronau, attempting to kidnap the king's heir, Dunevon, Oron's youngest son, is found out, and flees through a secret passage.

Suddenly, Mithros and the Great Goddess appear, challenging Kyprioth's intentions away from the sea. They warn Kyprioth not to break the peace, or he will lose his power. Aly wonders what Bronau is up to, especially now that he is a man on the run.

In Chapter 15, Aly wakes up, having been kept away by the gods for five days. Nawat cares for her as she recovers. Aly calls for Ulasim, Chenaol, Lokeij, and Fesago, telling them there will be trouble. Aly finds more and more that she enjoys Nawat's company. They kiss, and Aly is very happy. The people of Tanair also begin to prepare for the winter that everyone knows is coming. A winged messenger arrives, royal in origin. The message states that Dunevon is king, and Rubinyan and Imajane are regents. Rubinyan asks Duke Mequen to tell Bronau to return to Rujmuat if he arrives at the island. Rubinyan says he fears for Bronau's life. The rakas all sense war is coming, and they long to be free of their luarin masters. Aly asks Kyprioth for help, but Kyprioth tells her it is no longer up to him what happens.



Bronau arrives three days later with a handful of men. The Duke allows him in to tell his side of the story. Bronau claims he wanted to save Dunevon from being killed by Rubinyan. Both the Duke and Duchess urge him to return to stand trial. The Duke even considers returning to the capital with Bronau. Bronau makes it a point to tell the Duke that if anything happened to Dunevon, the Duke would become king. The Duke does not want to hear of it.

In Chapter 16, the Duke has decided that in one week's time, he would return with Bronau to the capital. For the day, Bronau will be hunting with the girls. That night, the Duke and Bronau play chess. All seems quiet, but Nawat isn't convinced. Aly sleeps inside the Duke and Duchess's room that night, which is broken into by Bronau, who demands that the Duke declare his claim to the throne. Bronau reveals he has forty more men and three mages. Fighting breaks out between Bronau's men and the household staff, but the Duke is stabbed, and Sarai stands between him and Bronau. This allows Aly to help overpower him, even with a broken arm. Dove launches an arrow into Bronau, killing him. The crows all transform into people to fight and kill Bronau's men. Ochobu, meanwhile, has fought off all three mages. Veron is killed defending the gate. Lokeij is also killed. Many more have died, including the Duke.

A week later, the collar is taken off Aly. One hundred men, led by Rubinyan, come for Bronau. When Reubinyan learns of what has happened, he offers to bring the Duchess and her children back to the capital, but the Duchess declines for now, to care for the villagers. A stranger to the Duchess arrives, asking for Aly. It is Aly's father. Kyprioth arrives, happy to see George, but George is not happy to see Kyprioth for obscuring his daughter's location. He confronts Kyprioth, and Kyprioth backs down, declaring the wager won by Aly. Aly decides to stay with the Balitangs for the time being, to be a part of the revolution that is coming.

Chapters 13 - 16 Analysis

The final few chapters of the novel deal with the explosive conclusion of the plot. Everything that Aly, Kyprioth, and others have set in motion, continues to gain traction and speed. This is evident in the failed kidnapping of the young king and the return of Prince Bronau to the island. Yet, each of the players has the freewill to defy those events, as everything Aly has been planning will conspire against the traitorous actions of Bronau. Bronau, in a maddened quest for power and the restoration of his reputation and wealth holds the Duke hostage in order to force the Duke to claim the king's throne.

By the end of the novel, the Duke has been killed, but his children have survived thanks to Aly, as well as to the resourcefulness and bravery of his eldest children. The battle that has ensued because of the treachery of Prince Bronau has led to the deaths of many others beside the Duke, and it is out of this wreckage that Aly decides she will remain on the island, in service to her father.



Characters

Aly/Alianna of Pirate's Swoop

Alianna "Aly" of Pirate's Swoop is the beautiful and fiercely intelligent daughter of George Cooper and Alanna. Ali is precocious and courageous, as well as clever and resourceful. She longs to be a spy in her father's service, but her father and mother have other plans for her: marriage, and a comfortable and secure life. Ali refuses to accede to their desires, and is captured while out on a boat to visit another lord.

The pirates whom capture Aly sell her into slavery, where she is purchased by the Balitang family. When the Balitang family is exiled based on suspicion of disloyalty, Aly goes along as well, making a deal with the trickster god Kyprioth that in exchange for protecting the Balitang children, Aly will be given her freedom at the end of the summer.

Through the spring and the summer, Aly works as a spy, helping to defend the Balitang family and their island against the forces of the treacherous Prince Bronau. Aly becomes a trusted member of the household, and finds friends in every circles, from the slaves and peasants of the island, to the crows and members of the Balitang family. Aly even begins a gentle romance with Nawat, a transfigured crow-person. Time and time again, Aly protects the Balitang children, earning her freedom. Yet, even with freedom, and the arrival of her father to bring her home, Aly decides to stay on the island and continue spying, especially because the smells of revolution and war are in the air.

George Cooper of Pirate's Swoop

George Cooper of Pirate's Swoop is the husband of Alanna, and father of Aly. He is the baron of Pirate's Swoop, manages a massive spy network, and is kind, gentle, and caring to his family. He wants his only daughter, Aly, to have a peaceful life happily protected by marriage. Aly plans to be a spy instead, against George's wishes. When George discovers Aly has been sold into slavery, he leaves his country to track her down, ultimately finding her in service to the Balitangs. He is saddened, but proud of his daughter's decision to stay on the island in service to the Balitangs for the foreseeable future.

Alanna of Pirate's Swoop

The wife of George Cooper and mother to Aly, Alanna is a beautiful woman, a strong warrior, and a good mother. She, like her husband, wants a peaceful life for her daughter, Aly. In addition to being a baroness, Alanna is also the King's Champion and a female knight, very much admired by Aly.



Duke Mequen Balitang

Duke Mequen Balitang is the luarin head of the Balitang family, and is the widower of a raka wife, and the current husband of luarin Winnamine. Duke Mequen has four daughters, two from his first marriage, and two from his second. He is a competent, caring, and wise father, and he loves his entire family deeply. Mequen commands enormous respect from slaves, peasants, and noblemen alike. Mequen always treats others as people, even if they are slaves or peasants.

Duke Mequen also has royal connections, and is slated for kingship, a job he doesn't want. When he is confronted by Duke Bronau about acceding to the throne, Mequen refuses, and is killed defending his family.

Duchess Winnamine Balitang

Duchess Winnamine Balitang is the second and current wife of Duke Mequen. She is kind, beautiful, and very caring. She has two blood daughters, Elsren and Petranne; and she has two step daughters, Saraiyu and Dovasary, whom she cares for and loves as if they were her own daughters. Winnamine teaches all of her children to respect all people, regardless of their station in life, and this, she reveals, is what earns the Balitang such loyalty from its supporters, be they slave or free. At the end of the novel, Winnamine secures Aly's freedom by removing Aly's collar.

Saraiyu/Sarai

Saraiyu is the beautiful sixteen year-old half-blood daughter of Duke Mequen and his first wife. Like Aly, Sarai is headstrong and courageous, and longs to be a warrior. Sarai saves her father's life on at least one occasion, by cutting down a female assassin -after which she faints. Saraiyu has a whirlwind romance with Prince Bronau, planning to marry him. Sarai befriends Aly, and the two often discuss history and legends together.

Dovasary/Dove

Dovasary is the twelve-year old daughter of Duke Mequen and his first wife. Dove is kind and patient, and has a strong skill for archery. She recoils at the romance between Sarai and Bronau, and ultimately kills Bronau with an arrow, saving countless lives in the final battle.

Nawat

Nawat is a close friend and romantic interest of Aly. A crow, he has the ability to change into human form, which he does in order to be near Aly. His constant advances on Aly eventually win her over, and the two share a kiss. Nawat saves Aly's life on at least one



occasion, and serves as a guardian for her, as well as a medium between her and his crow family and friends.

Prince Bronau

A nonroyal prince of the Copper Isles, Prince Bronau is a good friend to the Balitang family at the start of the novel. Bronau has a brief romance with Saraiyu, daughter of the Duke Balitang. When the Balitang family is exiled, and his own loyalty is questioned, Balitang goes to the capital of the Copper Isles to press his case. While there, he attempts to kidnap the youthful king, leading to a warrant for his arrest. Bronau flees to the Balitang family estate with dozens of armed men in the attempt to force the Duke to claim the throne. When the Duke refuses, Balitang kills him, and is himself killed by Dove.

Kyprioth

Kyprioth is the local god of the sea between the Copper Isles and the Kingdom of Tortall. He is known the world over as a trickster god, for his chicanery and his duplicity. He wagers Aly her freedom for the safety of the Balitang children, a wager which Aly accepts and carries out.



Objects/Places

Pirate's Swoop

Pirate's Swoop is a coastal town in the Kingdom of Tortall, on the Emerald Ocean. It is overseen by the Baron George Cooper and his wife, Alanna.

Kingdom of Tortall

The Kingdom of Tortall is situated on the coast of the lands of the East, and borders the Emerald Ocean to the west, the Kingdom of Scanra to the north, and Galla, Tusaine, and Tyra to the east, and the Great Inland Sea to the South. Tortall is at war with Scanra, and is the location of Pirate's Swoop.

The Copper Isles

The Copper Islands lie to the east of Tortall, and are home to copper-skinned natives known as the rakas. The Copper Islands were once heavily-colonized by whites from the east, and are still ruled by whites.

Rajmuat, Kypriang

Rajmuat, on the island of Kypriang in the Copper Isles, is the capital of the Copper Isles. It is where the monarchs reside, and from which all political activity emanates.

Scanra

Scanra is the kingdom that lies to the north of Tortall. Scanra has been at war for years with Tortall, and each year brings renewed conflict.

Lombyn Island

Lombyn Island is the ancestral home of the Balitang family, and is populated by several villages of people. Lombyn is mountainous and full of jungles, as well as numerous places of highlands. Lombyn Island is the furthest Copper Isles island north, and is the location of the town of Tanair and Tanair Castle.



Tanair Castle

Tanair Castle is the ancestral home of the Balitang family, and is located near the town of Tanair on the island of Lombyn. Tanair Castle becomes a refuge for the Balitang family in exile and in war.

Tablet

A tablet of paper is given to Aly by the Duchess Winnamine so that Aly may take notes and make a map of the island. The map becomes Aly's source of information which she keeps about the island and its defenses, inhabitants, and places of interest.

Weapons

Weapons are smuggled in from all over the island to the raka defenders of the Balitang family and Tanair Castle. The weapons are used in combat against Prince Bronau, his henchmen, and various hired assassins.

Bows and Arrows

Bows and arrows are some of the weapons that the local raka warriors train with to defend the castle, including Dove. It is a bow and arrow that Dove uses to kill Prince Bronau when he attempts to kill Aly.



Themes

Friendship

Friendship is one of the major themes of the novel "Trickster's Choice" by Tamora Pierce. Friendship occurs in many places of the novel, between many different characters at different times. Friendship plays an essential role in the novel, helping to structure and lead to the explosive climax of the plot.

When Aly arrives at the Balitang household as a slave, she is without a single friend and ally. Her sole purpose is to escape and return home, but as the days wear on, she makes a good impression on some of the slaves and free servants, including Chenaol. Chenaol takes Aly under her wing and protects her. At Tanair Castle, as the days go by, Aly grows closer to, and ultimately befriends the four Balitang girls, including Sarai and Dove. The friendship here transcends the line of master and slave. Indeed, Dove looks up with such reverence to Aly that Dove's admiration and friendship can be considered sisterly. At the end of the novel, this friendship is defended, when Dove comes to the aid of Aly with a bow and arrow, killing Aly's would-be-assassin, Prince Bronau.

Friendship does not only transcend class and social distinctions in the world of people, but also in the realm of animal-human relations. Nawat, a raven who transforms himself into a human being, instantly befriends Aly, admiring both her beauty, intelligence, and warrior spirit. Nawat becomes a constant companion and friend, saving Aly's life on at least one occasion. The friendship that exists between Aly and Nawat ultimately becomes romantic, leaving the door wide open for possibilities in future novels.

The friendships that grow between Aly, her masters, her equals, and her animal friends, all serve one purpose or another beyond the regular blessings of friendship. Indeed, that Aly has become friends with the Balitangs, and the people of their island, means that she is even more invested in their safety and well-being, and she goes through every expense to see they are secure.

Slavery

Slavery is one of the major and dominant themes in the novel "Trickster's Choice" by Tamora Pierce. It appears in every part of the book, and is essential to the plot. Slavery mainly concerns the raka people, and their enslavement by their luarin masters from the East as a consequence of heavy colonization of the Copper Isles.

In the novel, slavery is presented as an ambiguous institution. It is lamented by Aly, who is sold into slavery, as something that is wrong, but is necessary for the survival of the world. In other words, it is seen as a necessary evil by most, but it is something which in the novel serves a much more utilitarian purpose than mere economics. Indeed, the Balitangs are decent people who treat their slaves as people, and this earns them tremendous respect and loyalty from their slaves, whom upon they rely. In this vein,



slavery appears almost bucolic. However, the raka people resent slaveholders and the luarin, and want to rid their home of those people.

Indeed, the existence of slavery provides the vehicle for Aly's transfer from freedom to captivity, and serves therefore as a catalyst for the events of the novel. If Aly had never been captured by pirates and sold as a slave, she would never have become a part of the Balitang family and seen to the safety of the Balitang children. If slavery did not exist at all, neither would the events of the book, or Aly's pressing into slavery. Slavery therefore becomes a useful and necessary evil, for the events of the novel.

Family

Family is one of the major and more significant of the themes that appear in Tamora Pierce's novel "Trickster's Choice." Family -a sense of close-knit unity between various people, sometimes blood-related, sometimes not, in the guise of sibling and parent-child relationships- occurs primarily between Aly and her father, and the Duke and Duchess Balitang and their children. Indeed, the sense of family is strong with both families.

Aly's father and mother want her to settle down happily married, and to live a good and peaceful life. Aly does not want a quiet life, and would rather work for her father as a spy. Though her parents humor her, they refuse to let her serve in so dangerous a fashion, because she is their daughter. When Aly is captured by pirates and sold into slavery, Aly's father, George, out of love and concern for his daughter, travels innumerable miles and undertakes innumerable hardships to find Aly. When he at least finds her in service to the Balitangs, he realizes that she is a young woman, capable of her own choices, and sadly lets her stay behind when he returns home.

In terms of the Duke and Duchess of Balitang, family is a very important concept. Members of the extended Balitang family are permitted to stay with, and cared for by, the Balitangs. The Duke and Duchess of Balitang especially take pride in their four daughters, Saraiyu, Dovasary, Petranne, and Elsren. They carefully see to their daughters' education and potential marriages. What is especially telling about the Duchess is that she cares for all four children, including Sarai and Dove, who are not her blood relations. They are the daughters of the Dukes first marriage, but the Duchess treats them as if they were her very own blood relations. When the time for war comes, Sarai and Dove defend the Duke and Duchess without hesitation, out of love and a sense of familial completeness.



Style

Point of View

Tamora Pierce tells her novel "Trickster's Choice" from the point of view of the third-person and omniscient narrative. Since the world in which Aly lives, and her adventures take place, is one of fantasy, and because of the vast lands, beliefs, and people who populate the novel, the third-person omniscient works best. This allows Pierce the ability to tell her readers of everything that is essential or important to the plot, rather than letting one character narrate and perhaps omit more important pieces of information that the character might not deem necessary to relate.

Setting

Tamora Pierce chooses to set her novel "Trickster's Choice" in a fantasy world that comprises the Kingdom of Tortall, and the island nation of the Copper Isles. Because the world which Tamora writes about is populated by magical people and interfering gods, a fantastical world makes for a much more solid plot and narrative. Rather than attempting to compel the reader to believe the fantastical in a real-world setting, Tamora removes the real world and places the fantastical and in a fantasy world, thereby making the plot real and believable to the reader.

Language and Meaning

Tamora Pierce tells her novel "Trickster's Choice" in language that is simple, yet educated. This is done primarily for at least two reasons. The first is that, because of the sheer amount of information in the plot with respect to fantasy lands, peoples, gods, and events, focusing the reader's attention on the plot rather than the prose enables Pierce to tell an engaging story that is not bogged down by the composition of the story itself. The second is that, because the characters of the novel are highly educated, uneducated prose would seek to dissociate the realism and believability from the novel. Educated prose that is simple reinforces the characters in the novel as educated and well-rounded.

Structure

The novel "Trickster's Choice" by Tamora Pierce is divided into sixteen chronological chapters. The purpose of structuring the novel in a straightforward way encompasses at least one very important reason. Pierce clearly aims at guiding the reader swiftly and engagingly through the plot, with the intent to focus the reader's attention on the story, rather than confusing the reader with a complicated structure, and making the reader unable to more adequately navigate the events of the novel. Readers entering fantasy worlds must acquaint themselves with an entirely new reality, and a complicated

structure would only deter the reader from traversing the novel. Indeed, Pierce's structure perfectly suits the immensity of her novel.



Quotes

The thought of his only daughter living in the maze of dangers that was ordinary spy work, with torture and death to endure if she were caught, made his hair stand on end.

-Chapter 1, p. 7

Aly felt as if she was reading a book from which every second page was missing. She needed to learn more about the raka and their politics.

-Chapter 4, p. 78

There is no better spy than a slave. No one notices them. They may go anywhere, look into anything, if they are careful. They can ask questions that would be suspicious to others, because everyone believes a slave is stupid, even given evidence he is not.

-Chapter 5, p. 98

"Really, Aly, you have an imagination and a sense of the real world. You shouldn't have to ask. Their family is out of favor with a monarch whose grip on sanity is loose, they've been sent to live in a country far from any serious kinds of defenses... would you like me to add a flock of hurroks or a hed of robber centaurs? Spidrens, perhaps? Rival nobles looking to gain favor with King Oron?"

-Chapter 5, p. 113

"If I were you, little parrot, I'd rub dirt in my bright feathers and work harder to pass for a sparrow."

-Chapter 6, p. 138

"...the gods never build without a foundation. A crooked eye like yours takes years of work."

-Chapter 10, p. 242

"Because as long as you and others like you find only obstacles, you can put off actually having to do something. You can just talk about it and dream of someday. We'll all die of old age."

-Chapter 12, p. 294

"You are beautiful in the new light," he told her. "If I were the Dawn Crow, I would bring you the sun to hatch as our first nestling."

-Chapter 13, p. 314

"It is the hour of mortal choices. It is your turn to dictate the course of fate. I can do no more."

-Chapter 15, p. 366

"Most humans think the appearance of quiet is quiet. They do not see that sometimes the enemy is as quiet as the serpent."

-Chapter 16, p. 379



Topics for Discussion

The events of the novel "Trickster's Choice" by Tamora Pierce both run in conjunction with fate and freewill. Are characters, such as Aly, bound to fate as orchestrated by the gods, or are those characters free to shape events around them? Or, do the characters experience a mix of freewill and fate? Provide evidence to support your claim.

Discuss the theme of friendship in Tamora Pierce's novel "Trickster's Choice". How does friendship appear in the novel? Who are friends and in what ways? Why are these forms of friendship important? What impact do these friendships have?

Why does Duke Menquen not want to make the claim to the throne of the Cooper Isles? Is the decision political, personal, or a mixture of both? Explain, and provide evidence to support your claim.

Discuss the theme of family in the novel "Trickster's Choice" by Tamora Pierce. How is the theme of family presented, especially with respects to the characters of Aly and the Balitang household? What are the results of these presentations of family with respect to the plot?

Slavery is a major theme in Tamora Pierce's novel "Trickster's Choice". What is slavery like in the novel, and where does it occur? Is it viewed as a good thing, a bad thing, or a necessary evil? How does Aly view her own status as a slave?

Discuss the fantasy world that Tamora Pierce has constructed in her novel "Trickster's Choice". What is this fantasy world like in terms of places, people, and beliefs? Is this world a believable world? What elements of style either add or detract from the novels' believability? Why?