

Children of Blood and Bone



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF TOMI ADEYEMI

Tomi Adeyemi, a Nigerian-American California native, knew she wanted to write from the time she could read. In fact, Adeyemi knew that she wanted to write a young adult novel and eventually see it made into a movie—a dream she is in the process of achieving with *Children of Blood and Bone*. As a teenager, Adeyemi wrote hundreds of pages, but never completed a novel. As a senior in high school, moved to action by instances of police brutality against African Americans, Adeyemi got serious about writing a book that could help alleviate some of the anguish she saw in the world. She began reading writing guides, studied English at Harvard University, and solicited advice from professional authors. After graduating, Adeyemi traveled to Salvador, Brazil, where she studied West African culture and mythology on a fellowship. It was there that she gained inspiration for *Children of Blood and Bone* and the magical, dangerous world of Orisha.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Instances of police brutality against people of color in America catalyzed Adeyemi's debut novel, *Children of Blood and Bone*. In 2012, a police officer fatally shot African American high school student Trayvon Martin as he was walking home from a convenience store. In 2015, Freddie Gray, a young black man, died from injuries sustained when police arrested him, allegedly for possessing a knife. Despite murder chargers, juries acquitted the police officers involved in these situations. Incidents like these sparked protests and catalyzed the Black Lives Matter movement, which is in part aimed at combatting police violence towards African Americans. Many more similar incidents have happened just since the time Adeyemi began her novel in 2017. The injustice of these events and the fear they can inspire in young African American people are paralleled in the world of *Children of Blood and Bone*.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Adeyemi's young adult fantasy novel, *Children of Blood and Bone*, is a conscious pushback to the prevailing whiteness of so-called staples of the genre, as well as a reaction to those who reject the introduction of more diverse characters into young adult fiction. When Adeyemi was a teenager, she watched as fans of [The Hunger Games](#) books opposed the casting of a black actor to play the character Rue. Adeyemi realized that the genre, as well as readers of color who had to search for representation, were suffering. Rather than drawing inspiration

from high fantasy works like *Lord of the Rings* and *Game of Thrones*, which are dominated by white characters, Adeyemi looked to works of fantasy by and about other people of color to inspire *Children of Blood and Bone*. In particular, she points to Daniel José Older's young adult fantasy novel *Shadowshaper*, which is about an African-Puerto Rican teenager, and the fantasy novel *An Ember in the Ashes*, by Pakistani-American writer Sabaa Tahir as the primary sources of inspiration for *Children of Blood and Bone*. Adeyemi also draws inspiration from her childhood love of anime, with its sweeping narratives and heroic protagonists.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Children of Blood and Bone*
- **When Written:** 2017
- **When Published:** March 2018
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young Adult Fantasy
- **Setting:** The fictional country of Orisha, inspired by West Africa
- **Climax:** The centennial ceremony
- **Antagonist:** King Saran
- **Point of View:** First person, alternating between Zélie, Amari, and Inan

EXTRA CREDIT

A Dream Come True. Adeyemi was able to carry out her lifelong dream of publishing a hit Young Adult fantasy novel after *Children of Blood and Bone* won Pitch Wars, a competition in which writers submit their book ideas in order to be matched up with agents and editors.

Inspired by Art. Tomi Adeyemi often draws writing ideas from striking images. *Children of Blood and Bone* was inspired in part by a single image of a young black girl with glowing, pale hair.



PLOT SUMMARY

Zélie Adebola, a headstrong teenage girl, practices sparring with a classmate. Unlike her classmate, Zélie is a divîner, meaning she has luminous white hair and, in theory, the ability to do magic. In Orisha, the fictional, West Africa-inspired country where this story takes place, divîners are still suffering from a horrific event that happened more than a decade ago, when the monarchy, helmed by King Saran, carried out the systematic murder of all divîners over the age of thirteen. On

that day, the group lost their connection to the gods, and with it, their ability to do magic—and Zélie lost her mother, a deeply painful memory that still haunts her. Now, diviners are feared and reviled, treated by the nobility as second-class citizens. Zélie practices fighting so that she can protect her family and herself from the brutal royal guards who are ostensibly there to protect them, but really, with their crude ways and **snow leopard**-emblazoned armor, are just a threat.

Zélie's older brother, Tzain, bursts into the practice space to tell Zélie they need to go home immediately. There, they find their father, Baba, badly shaken after an encounter with the guards. They came demanding payment from households containing diviners. Levying ever-higher taxes on diviners is just one way that Saran keeps them under his thumb and unable to fight back. Zélie and her brother travel to the capital city of Lagos, hoping to make a trade that will help them cover the new taxes.

Meanwhile, Princess Amari sits in Orisha's palace enduring her mother's usual harsh criticisms. Amari feels confined and stifled by her life. Her only source of solace is Binta, a young diviner serving girl who is Amari's only friend. Realizing Binta is missing, Amari creeps into the throne room only to see a strange and horrifying sight: her father's adviser Admiral Kaea forces Binta to touch a scroll, which activates her ability to do magic. When colorful light begins to pour from Binta's hands, the king brutally stabs her, killing her instantly. Later, Amari secretly steals the scroll, and, concealing her identity, Amari slips out of the palace and runs into the bustling market.

There, she collides with Zélie and begs for her help. Zélie is reluctant, but knows she has a responsibility to help those who cannot help themselves. She helps Amari weave through the guards in the city. Just as they are cornered by guards led by Amari's brother—the soldier prince, Inan—Tzain leaps the city wall on Nailah, a lionaire, and grabs Amari and his sister. They escape and hurry back towards the coastal city. Zélie is angered when she discovers Amari's identity, but feels she has no choice but to help her. Touching the scroll seems to awaken Zélie's powers, too. She feels she may be a Reaper like her mother, with power over the spirits of the dead. They consult with Mama Agba, Zélie's staff instructor. She reveals that she is a Seer, and that Zélie is fated to carry out a quest to restore magic to the land. Zélie is reluctant.

At that moment, Inan and a group of guards, sent by Saran, arrive and set fire to the city. In the ensuing chaos, Zélie, Mama Agba, Tzain, and Amari barely escape with their lives. Zélie, Tzain, and Amari begin the journey to Chândomblé, a temple where they believe they can find help. In hot pursuit, Inan starts to have strange visions of Zélie, and they seem to be able to meet in a field-like dreamscape that he has inadvertently created. He worries that he has become infected with magic as a white streak appears in his hair.

Zélie, Tzain, and Amari arrive in Chândomblé where they meet a *sentâro*, or priest, named Lekan. He is the last surviving

member of his order. He tells the group of the great myths of the gods, stories that remind Zélie of her mother. He also tells them that the scroll, along with two other artifacts—the bone dagger and the sunstone—must be brought to a special island and used in a ceremony to restore magic on the exact moment of the solstice, which is fast approaching. He performs a strenuous ceremony of his own to awaken Zélie's magic fully. Inan and Kaea arrive and attack, murdering Lekan—but the three escape and destroy a rope bridge behind them, leaving Inan and Kaea stranded at the temple. Inan begins to feel his magic more and tries to suppress it out of fear of the hatred it will bring from his father. However, he also thinks it may be helpful in his quest to kill Zélie and destroy magic. When Kaea sees him attempting to use magic, Inan loses control of his fear and anger, and accidentally kills her with his newfound powers.

Zélie, Amari, and Tzain arrive at a bustling town in the desert. A massive arena has been constructed there, where nobles force diviners to fight to the death over a mysterious prize. When the three learn that the prize is actually the sunstone, they decide that their only choice is to enter the competition themselves and try to win it. The competition is incredibly fierce, and Amari is forced to kill, which makes her think of the training her father forced her to endure growing up. But eventually, they are victorious, and secure the sunstone, the last artifact they need to perform the ritual.

As they head for the coast, Inan catches up them and Zélie decides to face him. As the two begin to fight, Tzain and Amari are captured by masked diviners and carried off into the jungle. They are taken to an encampment of diviners who torture Tzain for information, not believing the remarkable tale that Amari tells them. Meanwhile Inan and Zélie decide reluctantly to band together to try to save their siblings. As they are devising a break-in strategy, Inan's powers suddenly allow him to experience a vision of all that Zélie has experienced in her lifetime—her memories of the Raid, her suffering under Saran's oppressive regime, and her fight to bring magic back. He is struck with a wave of empathy and affection and begins to question his father's policies.

Feeling ill-prepared but desperate, Inan and Zélie launch their attack on the encampment. They are surprised when a swarm of diviners, including some who can use their powers, begin to fight them. Suddenly, the fighting is stopped by a young girl, Zu, who is the leader of the encampment. Seeing Inan and Zélie has made her realize that Amari and Tzain were telling the truth: they are all allies. She uses healer powers to help Tzain's injuries and says that she wants to help Zélie and her friends restore magic.

Zélie tells Inan to stop holding on to a **pawn** that he carries as a reminder of his father—the game piece is actually made out of majacite, a special metal that burns diviners. As he gets more comfortable, Inan realizes he's falling for Zélie, and she for him. They start to kiss, but Tzain furiously interrupts them. That

night, a massive troop of guards attack. Ignoring Zu's attempt at peacemaking, the guards slay the young girl, and violence erupts. Sacrificing himself to protect his friends, Kwame, a diviner who can control fire, explodes himself and many guards around him in flames.

The next day, Tzain and Amari are in shock. Their siblings are nowhere to be found, and they fear Zélie may be dead—possibly by Inan's own hand. But, they think she may be captive at a nearby fortress. They recruit a group of Tzain's diviner friends to help them free Zélie and join their quest to restore magic. Using the scroll, they awaken their powers and plot to break into the fortress. Meanwhile, Zélie is restrained painfully with majacite. She thinks that Tzain must have betrayed her and is relieved to find that he didn't—but hurt in a different way when Inan says that after seeing Kwame, he thinks magic is too dangerous. He tries to convince her to destroy the scroll in exchange for her freedom, but she refuses. Saran enters and begins to torture Zélie for information. He has his guards carve the word "maggot" into her back.

Just as Inan has secretly taken Zélie out of the torture chamber to try to bring her to safety, Amari and the group of diviners use their magic to break into the fortress. They kill many guards instantly. When Amari catches sight of her father, she has the urge to strike him down, but decides to wait. Inan hands a weakened and bloody Zélie over to Tzain, and stays behind as the others leave the fortress. Privately, he has decided magic must be stopped at all costs. He tells his father he has an idea.

A maji with power over healing stops the bleeding from Zélie's back, but the scars—both physical and emotional—feel like they will be permanent. Even worse, Zélie can no longer access her magic. Without it, there's no way to do the ceremony. She hides that from the group, and they decide to make a final effort. They head to Jimeta, a port town outside the long reach of the monarchy. It is free from oppressive rule, but also fairly lawless, full of mercenaries and criminals. When Zélie approaches a group of mercenaries to ask for their help, she is surprised to find Röen, a dashing foreigner she met at the diviner encampment. He agrees to help her because deep down, he believes in the gods as well. On Röen's ship, the heroes make their way to the island where the ceremony must be performed. At the temple, Zélie still can't feel her magic, but she keeps that concealed, thinking the power of the temple may help her. Suddenly, Inan and Saran appear, flanked by guards. With them is Baba. Zélie feels a pang of betrayal and fear. Immediately, she hands over the artifacts, thinking only of protecting her father.

As they walk away from the site of the ceremony, an arrow suddenly embeds itself in Baba's body, killing him instantly. Fighting breaks out as Zélie struggles to gather the artifacts and attempt the ceremony. In the fray, Inan manages to trick her into using her own magic to destroy the scroll, which contains an incantation she needs to do the ceremony. Saran is

proud of Inan until he sees Inan use his own magic, and then he immediately disowns Inan. Amari, meanwhile, starts to fight her father. She does not want to kill him, but when he slashes open her back, Amari realizes he is ruthless and will never change, and plunges her sword into his heart. Zélie, meanwhile, is running out of time to complete the ceremony. Turning to the gods, she realizes she can use Baba's sacrifice to reactivate and fuel her magic. Without the scroll, she improvises an appeal to the gods, calling on the power of her ancestry and her connection to all other diviners to feed the ceremony. It seems to work, igniting bright lights in the room. Zélie passes out.

She has a vision of Oya, her patron god, comforting her—but soon realizes it isn't Oya at all, but her mother. Zélie embraces the peace of death, where she will be reunited with her family. However, her mother says it is not yet Zélie's time. Although Zélie wants to stay, her mother pushes her back to consciousness. Zélie awakens on Röen's boat, surrounded by her friends. When she asks if the ceremony was successful, Amari simply shows her a streak of brilliant white that has appeared in her hair and a swirl of light magic emanating from her hand.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Zélie – Zélie, the protagonist of the novel, is Tzain's younger sister and Mama and Baba's daughter. Ever since the Raid, when her mother was violently killed before her eyes, Zélie has lived in a state of perpetual fear and anger. She has trained with the staff so that she can defend herself and her family against attack. Even amidst the unfair taxes that King Saran constantly levies against diviners and their families, Zélie has worked hard to feed her family. Despite these noble intentions, Zélie is also headstrong and short-tempered, especially with guards who threaten or harass her, and this attitude has put her family in danger. Zélie feels as if she is never doing enough to keep her family safe. At the same time, she knows that she is part of a wider cause: the only way to end the oppression of diviners like her is to overthrow the monarchy and put power back in the hands of those who can do magic. Because of this violent past, Zélie is reasonably mistrustful of nobles like Amari and Inan, though Zélie and Amari eventually develop a deep friendship, and Zélie and Inan share a brief romance. Zélie slowly lets her guard down once she sees that other people have good intentions. Zélie is also guided by her love for her mother and the traditions of magic and faith that bind them together. Harnessing the power of all her ancestors, Zélie succeeds in restoring magic in the kingdom.

Amari Raised in the luxury of the palace in Lagos, Amari is the Princess of Orisha and Inan's sister. She lives in the lap of luxury but is subject to the strict rules of her mother, who criticizes

Amari's every move and dictates everything from what she eats to how she carries herself. Even worse, Amari is petrified of her father, King Saran, a cruel man who long ago gave up trying to teach Amari how to fight with a sword because she abhors violence. Her only solace is Binta, a diviner serving girl who is Amari's only friend. Amari dreams of life beyond the palace, but she knows little of the injustices and dangers that plague the kingdom. After Saran murders Binta, Amari's world is shattered. As she travels across Orisha with Zélie and Tzain, she witnesses firsthand the extreme suffering her father's ways have caused. It casts him in a new light, showing her the evil within her own family. She also begins to see herself differently—though she thinks of herself as someone who is weak and useless because of her disdain for violence, she learns that she can also be loyal to her friends, true to her beliefs, and physically stronger than she could have imagined. She is the one to eventually murder Saran.

Inan —Inan is the loyal, level-headed heir to the throne of Orisha and is Amari's brother. Trained by his harsh, merciless father, King Saran, to put his duty to the monarchy above his own interests, Inan is well-practiced in pushing down his own emotions and desires. Violence sickens him, but years of training have convinced him that it is a necessary evil. There is nothing that Inan hates or fears more than magic—except, perhaps, the thought of letting his cruel father down. He is horrified, then, when he realizes that he is also a diviner and begins falling for Zélie, who can also do magic. As a Connector, Inan has the ability to influence and create dreams. After witnessing Kwame harness his power over fire to brutally attack the guards, Inan is certain that magic is too dangerous and must be abolished.

Tzain —Tzain is Zélie's older brother and Mama and Baba's son. He is a level-headed, cautious boy who is also strong and fiercely loyal. Tzain's first priority at all times is protecting his family. As a result, he is often exasperated by Zélie, who will sometimes take unnecessary risks or let her anger get the better of her. But he is sensitive and caring, too, and is far more patient with Amari than Zélie is. Despite the ways that King Saran has hurt Tzain and his family, Tzain feels compassion for Amari and understands that her father's crimes are not hers.

Binta —Binta is a servant in King Saran's palace and is Amari's only friend. From the time they were young, the princess and the diviner were very close, imagining someday escaping the palace and seeing Orisha together. Binta comforted Amari when her family was cruel to her, one day finding and gifting an old headdress to Amari. One day, King Saran brought Binta to the throne room to see the effects of the scroll firsthand. When it unleashed her ability to do light magic, Saran killed Binta immediately. In that moment Amari, watching from behind a curtain, steeled herself against her father and realized that she would need to fight back.

Admiral Kaea —Kaea is the fierce, no-nonsense second-in-

command to King Saran. She is also the only person the King truly loves and trusts. Kaea is willing to commit any violence necessary to get the job done and dutifully serve her king. Like most nobles, Kaea is disgusted and terrified by magic, referring to diviners as maggots.

Oliamilekan —Oliamilekan, who goes by Lekan, is a sêntaro—a sacred high priest of the maji religion. In keeping with tradition, he has swirling white Yoruba markings all over his body (Yoruba is the language of the gods) and possesses a deep knowledge of maji ritual and history. He is extremely wary because, thanks to the Raid, he is the last of his kind.

Mama Agba —Mama Agba, Zélie's teacher, trains young women in Illorin to wield the staff—a self-defensive weapon she hopes they will never have to use. She helps sustain memories of the gods and other traditions that existed before the Raid. She carefully conceals her status as a powerful maji and was able to escape the Raid by disguising her true identity as a seer.

King Saran —The iron-fisted ruler of Orisha, King Saran carried out the deadly Raid against the diviner people and continues to do everything in his power to destroy all traces of magic in the kingdom. He even murders his daughter's servant and only friend, Binta, when he discovers that she can do magic. He is obsessed with making sure his family is physically strong enough to protect themselves, and forces his children, Amari and Inan, to fight each other with real swords. He only cares about Admiral Kaea, who also despises magic and is comfortable with violence. Amari eventually murders Saran when she realizes the extent of his cruelty and bloodthirstiness.

Mama —Tzain and Zélie's mother and Baba's wife was an extremely powerful Reaper, a maji with power of the dead. Although she possessed fearsome magic, she was also extremely kind, nurturing Zélie and Tzain and preparing Zélie for her future as a diviner. She was murdered in King Saran's Raid—a deep scar that haunts her children.

Baba —After King Saran's Raid, Tzain and Zélie's father became a shell of the strong man he once was. In the wake of his wife's murder and the everyday struggle of life under Saran, Baba has become frail and forgetful. Still, he draws strength from the thought of Tzain and Zélie's mission. He believes fiercely in their ability to protect each other and carry out their mother's legacy. He is murdered by King Saran and his guards, which catalyzes fighting and leads to Amari killing Saran.

Kwame —Kwame lives among the secret diviner encampment in the jungle. He is a Burner, meaning he is a maji with power over fire. He can be headstrong and hot-tempered, turning towards violence when he thinks it will help the outlaws' cause. Witnessing Kwame's extraordinary power is what makes Inan certain that magic is too dangerous and must be destroyed for good.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Nailah – Nailah is Zélie’s faithful ryder, a huge lion-like creature (or lionare) who Zélie raised. She is fiercely protective.

Zu – A girl no older than thirteen, Zu is wise beyond her years. She is a Healer and the leader of the outlaws at the divîner camp. She is murdered by Saran’s guards while trying to make peace with them.

Yemi – Yemi is a privileged girl from Zélie’s home village. She is rumored to be half-noble, which is a status that she flaunts. She is rude to Zélie and other divîners.

Roën – A dashing foreigner, Roën is primarily known for flirting and pickpocketing, which Zélie experiences firsthand at the divîner camp. Despite this, he also has a good heart and is willing to take risks to help his friends.

TERMS

Divîners – Divîners are people who have the ability to do magic, but their powers may not yet be activated. All divîners who are under thirteen cannot yet use their power, which is why **King Saran** spared them in the Raid. Divîners all have luminous white hair and silvery eyes, which makes them easy to identify. They worship the gods, a pantheon of deities with the Sky Mother at its head.

Maji – Maji is the term for divîners whose powers have been activated, meaning that they can perform magic. There are many different kinds of Maji with unique powers.

Kosidán – The kosidán are common citizens in Orîsha who do not possess the ability to do magic.

Orîsha – The fictional kingdom of Orîsha is the setting for the book, inspired by West Africa. It is comprised of a number of cities and includes regions in the desert, in the jungle, and on the coast. Many people in Orîsha, especially divîners and those who aid them, live in crippling poverty, while the monarchy reaps their taxes and labor.

Illorin – A floating city on the coast of Orîsha, Illorin is sustained by a bustling fishing industry. **Zélie** and her family make their home there.

Lagos – Lagos is the rich capital city of Orîsha. It is far more opulent—and heavily patrolled—than other cities.

Ibadan – A northern lakeside town where **Zélie** and her family lived before **King Saran**’s brutal Raid.

Ibeji – A town in the middle of the desert. Wealthy nobles have set up a massive arena in the town where they force divîners to fight each other to the death to win the sunstone.

Sokoto – A bustling town perched on the edge of a lake.

Jimeta – A port city overrun by mercenaries and other lawless types. It is outside the oppressive rule of the monarchy, but also dangerous because it is said to be full of criminals. Jimeta is where **Zélie** must perform the ceremony to bring magic back.

Chândomblé – A sacred temple which once served as a center of worship for the divîners. It was inhabited and cared for by sêntaros, high priests of the divîners.

Sêntaros – High divîner priests who helped preserve the stories of the gods and helped divîners to understand and use their magic. They performed the annual ritual necessary to keep the connection to the gods strong and keep magic alive.

Sunstone – One of three artifacts that is needed to bring magic back to Orîsha. The other two artifacts are a scroll and a dagger made of bone. The sunstone is about the size of a coconut and shines with a brilliant luster. **Zélie**, **Tzain**, and **Amari** win the sunstone in a competition in Ibeji.

Yoruba – The language spoken by divîners, which **Saran** has outlawed as part of his campaign to keep divîners weak, powerless, and afraid. Yoruba holds special significance because it is the language that divîners use to do magic and pray to the gods.

Àyojo – A traditional divîner festival in honor of the gods. Like all other divîner traditions, Àyojo was outlawed by **Saran**.

Ryders – Massive, mystical creatures similar to jungle cats but larger and with unusual horns on their backs and heads. Ryders are fast, powerful, and intelligent, and may serve as companions, steeds, and fighters for humans.

Panthenaire – Ryders that resemble panthers.

Snow Leopanaire – The most ruthless of all Ryders. The snow leopanaire is **King Saran**’s royal seal.

Lionare – Ryders that resemble lions, like **Nailah**, the ryder belonging to **Zélie** and her family.

Majacite – A special metal designed to sear the skin of any divîner it touches. **Saran** has used majacite to torture divîners and keep them captive. **Inan**’s **pawn** is made out of majacite, which is why it’s so painful for him to hold on to it.

Grounder – Maji who have the ability to manipulate earth and the ground. They sometimes create fantastical structures.

Burner – Maji, including **Kwame**, who can manifest and manipulate fire.

Reaper – Maji with control over death and the afterlife. They can summon the spirits of the dead to take on physical form or help the dead move on to a peaceful afterlife. **Zélie** and her **mother** are both reapers.

Connector – Maji with the ability to influence dreams and create dreamscape-like artificial worlds. **Inan** is a connector.

Healer – Maji, like **Zu**, with the ability to heal wounds.

Seer – Maji, like **Mama Agba**, with the ability to see the future.

Sky Mother – The most powerful and central of the deities worshipped by the divîners. She is seen as the source of all life and magic.

Oya – The patron goddess of reapers, worshipped by **Zélie** and

her **mother**.

Ori – The patron god of connectors.

Sênét – A game similar to chess involving small game pieces and a board. **Inan**'s **majacite pawn** is from sênét.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



PREJUDICE AND INEQUALITY

Tomi Adeyemi's *Children of Blood and Bone* was inspired in part by the ways that prejudice and bigotry drive fear and violence in the real

world—for example, she points to contemporary instances of police brutality against black people in America. In the fictional country of Orísha, society is sharply stratified by a system that pits maji, who do magic, and diviners, who have the potential to do magic, against kosidán, who cannot perform magic. Because those with magical abilities are seen as dangerous, diviners are treated as inferior and even inhuman, and they are frequently exploited, abused, and denied rights. Assumptions based on this caste system cause characters to judge and mistrust one another. Prejudice is rooted in fear and creates more fear; ultimately, as long as prejudice exists, it is impossible for society to be fair and just.

One reason that prejudice is so pervasive and powerful is that it both feeds off of and generates fear. The Raid was a horrific event that shattered families; King Saran ordered for the death of all maji over the age of thirteen. Because of the Raid, citizens are now terrified of the king's power, but the Raid was actually driven by Saran's own fear of the maji. Thus, the raid was catalyzed by fear of diviners' power, but now those motives have driven all diviners to be treated as second class citizens. Saran is aware that keeping diviners isolated and afraid is the best way to keep them under his control. He has created a system of institutionalized prejudice by forbidding maji and kosidán from being in relationships and by heavily taxing those who associate with diviners. The caste system is designed to cut off diviners from their traditions, which is another way of ensuring that they remain powerless and fearful of Saran. As a result of these practices, diviners live in a state of constant fear. Inan, the sheltered crown prince of Orísha, realizes this once he begins to interact with citizens beyond the confines of the palace. For many citizens of Orísha, there is no such thing as true safety—there are only degrees of danger. Because he fears the maji, Saran uses prejudice to keep the maji afraid of him.

Furthermore, this systematized prejudice creates major

imbalances in Oríshan society, showing the ways in which prejudice, and, by extension, dehumanization, are tied to economic inequality. In an effort to keep them under control, Saran levies heavy taxes on the diviners. Taxes are one way of preventing the diviners from asserting their rightful place in society. Most diviners are trapped in poverty because the taxes against them are so high. If diviners fail to pay their taxes, they are punished severely. In addition, because they are seen as dangerous, second-class citizens, diviners are exploited for labor. In the "stocks," diviners are treated like animals or slaves. The prejudice against them allows them to be seen as less than human, and they are exploited for economic gain.

Adeyemi demonstrates that there can be no peaceful rule when prejudice exists, because dehumanization justifies many forms of injustice. Not only are diviners feared and oppressed, but their place in society is cemented by the fact that they are routinely dehumanized by those in power. This dehumanization is embodied by the slur "maggot," which the nobility uses to refer to diviners. Guards and nobles who throw the word around have an easier time seeing diviners as nothing more than threatening animals that must be conquered, and treat them accordingly. Because she is a diviner, Zélie, a teenager who lives in poverty in a coastal village, faces constant harassment at the hands of the guards who are ostensibly there to protect citizens. Since they view her as a second-class citizen, the guards have no problem verbally and sexually assaulting her. The diviners aren't fully protected by the law, and in fact must fear the guards in their own kingdom. Unlike her brother, who is a kosidán, Zélie believes from first-hand experience that it is impossible to reason with the guards, because they act based on prejudice and not on justice. Zélie believes that the only way to overcome such deep-rooted oppression is not to reason with the government, who view them as maggots, but to overthrow those in power.

Throughout *Children of Blood and Bone*, Adeyemi demonstrates the insidious and far-reaching effects of prejudice. Prejudice is often driven by fear, but it only creates even more fear. Ultimately, because prejudice leads to dehumanization, oppression, and exploitation, it is impossible for a just society to exist as long as it operates on such a foundation.



DUTY TO FAMILY VS. SELF

The tension between responsibility to family and being true to oneself runs through *Children of Blood and Bone*. Connections between family members are undoubtedly some of the strongest in the novel. At the same time, blind commitment to family can get in the way of a personal sense of right and wrong. Ultimately, learning when to prioritize personal belief over duty to blood family is one of the most important lessons for characters in the book. For example, the young adults in *Children of Blood and Bone* slowly come to learn that they must prioritize their own needs alongside—and

sometimes over—those of their families. Commitment to family should not overshadow the need to protect and fight for oneself.

Because they have lost so much, Zélie's family members prioritize protecting one another at all costs. Zélie is plagued by fear that she's letting her family members down and believes that she is a failure because of this self-critical voice. As a result, she constantly loses faith in herself and believes that she is not capable, when in reality she is extremely strong and resourceful. In contrast, Inan and Amari's father, King Saran, demands absolute loyalty—a call that Inan has taken to heart. Inan puts aside his own desires and concerns to fulfill his father's endless demands, becoming a soldier and committing atrocities that he feels sick about in order to remain loyal to his father. Inan also suppresses the magic he feels growing within him in order to please his father, but doing so slowly poisons him. Both Zélie and Inan demonstrate that fixation on being faithful to family over protecting and advocating for oneself can be harmful.

Similarly, at many points in the book, characters have to choose between doing what they personally know to be right and doing what they believe their family members wish them to do. Their actions demonstrate that commitment to family should not overshadow a personal sense of right and wrong. After Zélie angers the guards, she believes that she has let her family down and must try to do what they would think best from then on. When a desperate Amari asks Zélie for help escaping, Zélie hesitates, even though she personally believes that she has a responsibility to help those who clearly need it. Even as she imagines her father's disappointment, Zélie wisely decides to follow her own morals. Zélie decides to help Amari even though she knows it will hurt her family, because she believes she has a bigger responsibility—to do what is morally right. In addition, Amari realizes that she has been letting her connection to her family cloud her sense of right and wrong when she sees her father kill her friend Binta, a divîner. Amari realizes that there is no justification for such violence, even when committed by a close family member. Trusting her own integrity, she immediately leaves the palace and begins a quest to avenge Binta. As they travel across the country of Orïsha, both Amari and Inan slowly realize the horrors that their father, King Saran, has committed. They see divîners suffering under the harsh economic conditions he has imposed and hear stories of faiths and families ripped apart by the violent Raid. Although they both struggle to turn against their family, the siblings soon realize that the suffering they see in the kingdom far outweighs the loyalty they once felt to their father. They begin to work against King Saran, choosing to follow their consciences rather than bending to their father's will.

In addition to demonstrating why it may sometimes be necessary to question or go against the wishes of family, Adeyemi shows that forging new families outside of the limits

of blood can be healthier than blind commitment to literal relatives. By building new bonds, characters are able to form strong connections with one another while still prioritizing their own senses of right and wrong. In this way, the characters become stronger. For example, it is only after teaming up to save both of their siblings that Zélie and Inan are able to succeed. Even though their families would reject the alliance, Zélie and Inan understand that teaming up makes them more powerful. Indeed, the new alliance allows them to begin to understand each other more fully, and form a deep connection that would have been impossible if they stayed within the confines their families demanded of them. In addition to becoming closer to Zélie, as Inan moves away from his father's harsh demands, he begins to see how he could find a new family among other divîners. By rejecting his father and allowing Zélie to help him embrace his identity as a maji, Inan begins to harness his power and understand more about the world. The divîner community itself exists outside the confines of family ties, but is very strong because it consists of a group of people who are committed to helping one another and fighting for what they believe is right while maintaining individual integrity.

Even as it celebrates the strong bonds of family, *Children of Blood and Bone* pushes back against the idea that connections based on blood alone are the most important factor in any decision. Instead, Adeyemi demonstrates the dangers of prioritizing family over self-worth, the wisdom of acting based on morality rather than family obligation, and the power of choosing new families not necessarily based on blood.



FAITH AND TRADITION

For the people of the country of Orïsha, faith is very complicated. The divîners' magical powers are intimately linked with faith in the gods, so religion is one of the central threads connecting divîners to one another and to the past. At the same time, many divîners feel that their faith has been shaken by the horrific events of the Raid and the subsequent hardships under King Saran, when their magic abandoned them and the gods seemed to have turned a blind eye to their suffering. But, as Zélie will discover, turning her back on her belief in the gods and magic is also, in a way, turning her back on her family and community. When she participates in religious festivals, tells stories of the gods, and begins to use her magic, Zélie feels connected to her mother and to other divîners around her. Ultimately, the novel shows how practicing faith and tradition provide powerful ways of connecting with others.

As *Children of Blood and Bone* shows, there are many reasons to reject faith and turn one's back on the past. In fact, faith may not seem compatible with the harsh reality of everyday life. Even though faith was central to her Mama's identity and Zélie's own early childhood, after the raid, Zélie rejected her faith. Zélie does not believe the gods still exist, because they

would have to be cruel to allow so much suffering in the world. Even though some people hope that the gods have turned their backs but will someday return, Zélie thinks she knows otherwise: she believes that the gods died the day of the Raid. By rejecting the existence of the gods, Zélie does not have to do the difficult work of reconciling faith with an unjust world. Instead, she abandons faith altogether. Zélie does not believe in protecting gods; she relies on her own strength to save herself and protect her family. Nobles like Amari also reject the existence of the gods. This rejection is embodied by their use of the exclamation “Skies!” rather than something invoking the divine, to indicate that they do not believe in a higher power. However, this is because King Saran has outlawed such belief. He thinks that religion would threaten his absolute power. In a different way, the nobles’ rejection of faith stems from the fact that gods do not fit into a world of cruel absolute rule. Nobles do not believe in gods; they only believe in their own power.

Another reason to turn away from faith is that it requires commitment and sacrifice, which can be difficult, especially in a kingdom governed by an oppressive regime. In order to preserve a link with the gods and to magic, special stewards of the faith must perform elaborate ceremonies every hundred years. Such acts of devotion are difficult to keep up and easy to suppress. It is important that the tradition is passed down through generations, forging a connection to the past and ensuring that traditions are not lost. In *Children of Blood and Bone*, gods demand not only complicated ritual, but at times literal sacrifice. In desperate moments, Zélie performs blood magic by offering her own flesh and blood to the gods. This grants her incredible power, but each time she is left physically depleted, even close to death. This fantastical relationship is a dramatic version of the more mundane ways in which faith is demanding: Zélie must closely learn the history of the gods, perform ceremonies for them, and trust the gods in critical moments in order to truly benefit from her faith. Faith can be a source of great comfort, but it also requires much work on the part of the faithful.

However, doubtful characters including Amari and Zélie begin to turn towards faith as their journey continues. As they learn more about the gods and the traditions of the diviners, they form new connections with each other and with strangers. Faith also brings Zélie closer to her family. Faith in the gods ultimately brings strength because it connects the believers with one another. As Zélie becomes more closely connected to the gods and the traditions of magic, she also feels a very deep connection to her lost mother. When Zélie dresses like the patron god both she and her mother worship for a festival, Oya, she feels as if she resembles both the god and her mother. For Zélie, who frequently mourns her mother’s violent death, such moments of connection are extremely important. She feels comforted by her mother’s presence and bolstered by the strength of the connection. At the festival, Zélie also feels

connected to the many diviners around her. Because Saran oppressed the diviners and outlawed their traditions, Zélie always felt isolated, but now, sharing her faith with others, she is part of a large community or extended family. Reconnecting with the stories of the gods and the traditions of the festival give Zélie a sense of belonging and hope by reminding her of her lost family members and showing her a new kind of family. Previously, Zélie felt kinship with other diviners only because they had suffered the same pain. Now, she sees that they also share joy, hope, and faith.

Despite the many harsh realities of life in Orisha, and the many reasons to doubt the gods, faith also has an important impact on the community. Faith is bound up in tradition and ceremony and therefore links Orishans to the past and to their ancestors. Faith may not be able to explain every hardship, but it can help believers to form communities and feel more connected to one another. For these reasons, faith is worth working for even though it requires devotion and sacrifice.



CYCLES OF VIOLENCE

Children of Blood and Bone tells the story of a kingdom tarnished by a violent past and the ongoing acts of cruelty that oppress diviners (those with the potential to do magic). Yet even some of the characters who have suffered the most under this system, like Zélie, are compelled to use violence as a path to possible peace. Rulers believe they must use violence to keep violence at bay, while revolutionaries hope to overturn the violent regime with bloodshed of their own. Ultimately, Adeyemi demonstrates that imbalanced power is irrevocably tied to violence, and that violence often exists in a self-feeding cycle.

In the hardscrabble world of Orisha, with the memory of the Raid still lingering, many characters are deeply concerned with protecting themselves and those around them at all costs. Many characters equate violence with strength, and they see violence as a path to protecting themselves from those with more power. Although she abhors violence and is scarred by violent memories, Zélie commits herself to training to fight. She practices long and hard with the staff, because she believes that the only way to be strong is to be able to hurt others who threaten her. When she feels threatened by the guards, her first impulse is to physically fight them. In contrast, Zélie judges Amari because she does not initially resemble someone capable of violence. Even though she, too, has been trained as a fighter, Amari often chooses not to commit violence or behave in a way that showcases her fighting abilities—something Zélie interprets as a weakness. King Saran is the ultimate example of someone who believes violence is a virtue and strength. Saran is obsessed with training his family to fight, because he believes that this will keep them safe. He even forces his children to hurt one another to show that they are strong, believing that experiencing and committing violence will make his children

better rulers.

On a larger scale, however, such attitudes lead to widespread cycles of violence. The only way to break the violence of oppression is by committing more violence. As long as there is imbalance of power, quests for peace will likely result in more violence. The Raid itself, an incredibly violent stain on Orisha's past, and a stinging memory for many people, grew in part out of a desire to combat the rise of power and violence. Saran believed that he could put an end to the maji's powerful and sometimes violent magic, but he did so by enacting widespread violence himself. Zélie, Inan, and Amari wish to create a more just kingdom by putting an end to the violence and fear that runs rampant in the country. However, throughout their quest, they leave casualties in their wake. Sometimes, as when they participate in a large gladiator-style competition to gain tools they need for the ceremony, hundreds of innocent lives are lost. They rationalize such losses because their end goal is peace. In their plan to bring peace, Zélie and her friends repeatedly commit acts of violence, a fact that leaves Zélie deeply unsettled even as she recognizes that it is the only way to overthrow the oppressive monarchy.

The history of magic in Orisha perfectly demonstrates the way that imbalanced power gives rise to cyclical violence. After some maji began to exercise their power to gain control over those who could not do magic, even killing the king's first family, the king believed that the only way to correct the imbalance was by killing all adult diviners. Then, in their quest to restore diviners to a better place to society, Zélie and her friends themselves leave a wake of bloodshed. Finally, even Zélie begins to question the danger of giving magical powers to others and contemplates limiting the numbers of those with magic powers. Magic, after all, has the potential for great and horrific violence. This is why some characters, including Inan and even Zélie, start to believe the only way to prevent violence is by abolishing magic altogether. The struggle over magic shows that struggles for power almost always lead to violence.

However, the novel also suggests that there are more ways to be strong than simply by committing unrestrained violence. Unconventional forms of strength may be ultimately more productive in the end. Furthermore, when violence is tempered by restraint, it becomes a more effective tool in the quest for justice than when it is used recklessly. For example, Zélie realizes that diviners derive strength from their status as a community more than their ability to commit violence. Her fears about the potential of diviners to hurt others with their magic are quelled when she sees the strength and organization in the diviner refugee camp. There, diviners heed orders, listen to one another, and use their magic with restraint. Although they use violence, it is only a last resort to protect each other and further their quest for peace. Similarly, Zélie begins to recalibrate her assessment of Amari as she gets to know the princess better. Although Amari is reluctant to fight, she uses

violence when she absolutely has to. She is brave and caring, and ultimately strong enough to turn against her family in order to do what it is right. Rather than drawing strength from the ability to hurt others, Amari is strong because of her commitment to those she loves and her refusal to commit violence blindly. Although there is much bloodshed in *Children of Blood and Bone*, as Zélie learns, the mere ability to commit violence is not an indication of strength, nor does it provide a path to peace.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



MAJACITE PAWN

The pawn, which is a rusted game piece made of majacite, symbolizes Inan's unwavering loyalty to his father, King Saran, and the way in which this loyalty is harmful to Inan. The game piece is a memory of Inan's father, and he clings to it in times of stress—ostensibly for comfort, but in reality just to remind himself of all the ways he's falling short of his father's plans for him. This self-inflicted emotional torture is mirrored by actual physical pain: because the pawn is made of majacite, it stings Inan's skin as he begins to develop powers. Being loyal to his father is actually just hurting Inan, both literally and emotionally, and will never provide him with the love and approval he craves. In fact, blind loyalty has caused him to commit violence and suppress his identity as a connector, hurting others as well as himself.



SNOW LEOPANAIRE

The snow leopanaire is King Saran's royal seal, which he adopted following the Raid. The leopanaire is a symbol of the oppressive, terrifying nature of absolute rule, which governs through fear. It also points to the particular ideology of the monarchy, which is rooted in dehumanization and discrimination. The snow leopanaire as a logo was chosen because it symbolizes purity, demonstrating the ways in which the caste system enforced by the nobility is steeped in dehumanization and oppression. The nobility views the maji and diviners as "maggots," unclean, second-class citizens. The leopanaire also demonstrates the way in which the monarchy's strength and control is maintained through violence and fear, because it is a fearsome predator meant to inspire awe and terror.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Henry

Holt and Co. edition of *Children of Blood and Bone* published in 2018.

Chapter One Quotes

☛ Deep down, I know the truth. I knew it the moment I saw the maji of Ibadan in chains. The gods died with our magic.

Related Characters: Zélie (speaker), Mama Agba

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

After guards arrive and demand new, higher taxes for diviners in Zélie's village, Zélie is full of anger and despair. Mama Agba reminds her of the day diviners lost the ability to do magic, saying that only the gods know why. Zélie, however, believes otherwise. At the beginning of her journey, Zélie is convinced that the gods have not just forsaken the people of Orisha, but that they no longer exist whatsoever. Daily life is extremely difficult for Zélie and her family, and it is far easier for her to believe that the gods have died than trying to understand why a higher power would cruelly abandon them or turn a blind eye to their immense suffering. Zélie's painful memories of the past seem to confirm her lack of faith.

Chapter Two Quotes

☛ He wants to believe that playing by the monarchy's rules will keep us safe, but nothing can protect us when those rules are rooted in hate

Related Characters: Zélie (speaker), Tzain

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

When guards come to their village demanding taxes, Tzain urges caution and restraint. Zélie, however, feels that there is no point in playing along with the guards, as the guards are protectors and peacekeepers in name only. In actuality, they have no qualms about treating diviners roughly or outright harassing them, because diviners are seen as dangerous, lowly second-class citizens. The guards openly use fear tactics to ensure that diviners remain obedient and afraid. Zélie knows that any appearance of peace, then, is merely a thin veneer over a system rooted in hatred,

prejudice, and oppression. The same prejudice that allows the guards to roughly demand taxes allowed for the genocide that King Saran carried out during the Raid. For Zélie, there can be no meaningful peace in a kingdom rife with injustice.

Chapter Five Quotes

☛ You must protect those who can't defend themselves. Mama Agba's words from this morning seep into my head.

Related Characters: Zélie (speaker), Amari, Tzain, Mama Agba

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 58

Explanation and Analysis

After Zélie manages to sell the sailfish in Lagos for a hefty sum, she knows she has done her brother and father proud. Zélie often feels as if she is letting them down—by being impetuous or neglectful, or simply by drawing attention to the family because she is a diviner—so this feels like a rare chance at redeeming herself. But when a clearly terrified girl begs her for help, Zélie can't help but break away from her brother's instructions to stay out of trouble. Zélie feels herself pulled to obey a moral code that extends beyond simply keeping herself and her family safe. While she undoubtedly has a responsibility to her family, and one she takes seriously, she also has a responsibility to herself to do what she believes is right and help those in need. However, what she doesn't know is that the terrified peasant girl in the market is actually the vicious King Saran's daughter, Princess Amari.

Chapter Eleven Quotes

☛ Yemi meets my eyes with a hatred that impales me like a sword. Though her mouth never opens, her voice rings in my skull. "Safe ended a long time ago."

Related Characters: Inan (speaker), Yemi

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 108

Explanation and Analysis

In pursuit of his sister, Amari, and the scroll, Inan has

ventured outside the cloistered safety of the palace. He hoped to cause minimal damage, but chaos has already broken out: one of the guards set a torch to the village of Illorin, burning it to the ground. For the first time, Inan has come into contact with the citizens he has been charged with ruling and protecting. Previously, Inan always believed that the monarchy ruled with an iron fist in order to keep the citizens safe. Now that he sees the casual destruction wrought by the guards and the fear of the people, Inan wonders if that can be the case. What he believed to be peace was actually a time of constant fear for the people. Inan begins to see that because the kingdom is built on a foundation of oppression, inequality, and fear, it is not creating peace at all—the citizens themselves are scared and destitute. He also begins to question the worldview and directives put forth by his family, which he always followed without question in the past.

Chapter Thirteen Quotes

🗨️ I arch my eyebrow at Amari and think back to her mention of a training accident. I assumed the scar came from her brother's sword, but was she holding a sword, too? Despite her escape from Lagos, I can't imagine the princess locked in battle.

Related Characters: Zélie (speaker), Inan, Amari

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 129

Explanation and Analysis

When Zélie and Amari buy new supplies, Zélie is surprised to see Amari pick out a sword—and wield it with apparent practice. Zélie had assumed that Amari, brought up in the privilege and safety of the royal palace, would have no need for learning to fight. She has no respect for Amari, because of this background, and therefore assumes that Amari doesn't possess any respectable skills, either.

Zélie has a complicated attitude towards violence. On the one hand, the violence that shattered her family is her most potent and devastating memory. She abhors the casual cruelty of the guards, who use violence to keep the citizens fearful and obedient. At the same time, she has come to view violence and the ability to fight as vital tools for protecting herself and her family. She also imagines using violence to avenge the many injustices of the monarchy, hurting the very guards who hurt her. In this way, she respects those who can fight and defend themselves. Because of this, Zélie gains a modicum of respect for Amari when she sees that Amari knows how to inflict some

damage with a sword.

Chapter Twenty-Two Quotes

🗨️ Though the royal seal is etched into the clay wall, it waves in my mind like the velvet banners in Father's throne room. After the Raid, he abolished the old seal, a gallant bull-horned lionaire that always used to make me feel safe. Instead, he proclaimed that our power would be represented by the snow leopanaires: ryders who were ruthless. Pure.

Related Characters: Amari (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 195

Explanation and Analysis

As Amari and the others arrive in the desert town of Ibeji, the sight of the monarchy's crest is a jarring reminder of Saran's reach. The seal embodies Saran's harsh ruling tactics. He does not rule with a just hand, but rather with the threat of violence, directed towards those whom he hates. The leopanaire is a dangerous animal, ready to strike at any time with claws and fangs—just as Saran and his guards offer a constant threat of ruthless violence. The "purity" of the snow leopanaire also reflects the prejudiced ideology at the core of Saran's rule. He has painted the diviners as dirty and inhuman, unworthy of mingling with the rest of the people in the kingdom. The snow leopanaire reflects the blend of violence and prejudice with which Saran frightens his citizens into obedience.

Chapter Twenty-Four Quotes

🗨️ Growing up, Father led me to believe that those who clung to the myth of the gods were weak. They relied on beings they could never see, dedicating their lives to faceless entities.

Related Characters: Inan (speaker), King Saran

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 210

Explanation and Analysis

In the temple at Chândomblé, Inan comes across a mural depicting the gods. He is overwhelmed with their beauty and power: they seem so real and alive. Previously, Inan didn't question his father's attitude towards the gods.

Driven by his intense fear of magic and hatred for those who practice it, Saran always taught that magic was evil and dangerous, and the religion associated with it was foolish, a sign of weakness. Inan has always trusted his father, but now that he has strayed from the palace, he has begun to gain a deeper and more nuanced perspective on life in the kingdom. He questions whether his father's prejudice has shielded Inan from the reality of the gods, which is that they are complicated, beautiful, and strong.

Seeing the mural also makes Inan wonder if faith is about more than simply putting blind devotion into faceless entities. Instead, it seems to be more about personal connections and using faith to bolster one's own sense of courage.

Chapter Twenty-Five Quotes

☞ After I perform the ritual and bring magic back, after Baba is safe and sound. I'll rally a group of Grounders to sink this monstrosity into the sand. That announcer will pay for every wasted diviner life. Every noble will answer for their crimes.

Related Characters: Zélie (speaker), Baba

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 212

Explanation and Analysis

As they walk through the arena in Ibeji, Zélie is nearly overwhelmed by the thought of all of the innocent diviners who have been needlessly slaughtered there. Her instinct is clear: the people who have wrought this injustice, as well as those who have sat idly by, deserve violent deaths. Zélie desires peace more than anything, but in her quest for that peace, she also feels the pull of righteous violence. In order to achieve justice in the kingdom, Zélie sometimes feels that those who have perpetrated oppression must suffer in kind. However, she also sees that such thoughts and desire for vengeance can lead to cycles of violence—just like the one created by the monarchy. Throughout her journey, Zélie struggles to define for herself when violence is necessary and just, and when it is simply a way of satisfying her own desire for vengeance.

Chapter Thirty-Four Quotes

☞ I don't know what disturbs me more: that I killed him, or that I could do it again. *Strike, Amari.* A thin whisper of father's voice plays in my ears.

Related Characters: Amari (speaker), King Saran

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 261

Explanation and Analysis

After the dramatic battle in the arena in Ibeji, Amari is haunted by memories of the captain she killed. His death is deeply disturbing to Amari for a few reasons. Having seen the pain and anguish her father's violent tactics have caused throughout the kingdom, Amari has always tried to willfully choose another path. When she was young, she refused to fight her brother, although her father commanded it. Now that she has left home, Amari has grown even more convinced that her father's cruelty is not just or productive. She is reasonably afraid of fighting and does not like to think that she is capable of causing pain. As the mission to bring back magic wears on, Amari is sometimes forced to use violence. She worries that doing so makes her more like the father she has grown to hate, even as she hopes that she is fighting only as a last resort and for the right reasons.

Chapter Thirty-Six Quotes

☞ “Those are Father's words, Inan. His decisions. Not yours. We are our own people. We make our *own* choices.”

“But he's right. Inan's voice cracks. “If we don't stop magic, Orisha will fall.”

Related Characters: Inan, Amari (speaker), King Saran

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 275

Explanation and Analysis

After many days of pursuit, Inan startles Amari and the others when he comes upon them in the jungle. He is ready to carry out his goal of killing Zélie in order to ensure that magic never makes a comeback. However, Amari steps forward to try to stop him. She wants to show him that there is an alternative to their father's hate. Instead of falling to the blind fear and prejudice that motivates their father, Amari wants to communicate that Inan, like her, can take the time to learn about magic and decide for himself. Since Amari has left the palace, she has learned a great deal about magic and the world, and has started to trust her own instincts and decisions. But for Inan, loyalty to his father still prevails. Like Saran, Inan is consumed by fear of magic, and uses that fear to justify ignorance, hatred, and violence.

Chapter Thirty-Nine Quotes

☝☝ Zélie's memories don't hold the villains Father always warned of. Only families he tore apart. *Duty before self*. His creed rings through my ears. My father. Her king. The harbinger of all this suffering.

Related Characters: Inan (speaker), King Saran, Zélie

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 286

Explanation and Analysis

When Inan and Zélie finally meet and face off, Inan is shocked by what happens: because of his newly acquired magic, which allows him to access memories and dreams, he sees a rush of memories from Zélie's past. As often happens when memories and perspectives are shared, the rush of images inspires newfound empathy and awareness in Inan. Unwittingly, he has opened himself to a perspective other than his father's, and it changes how he feels about Saran's rule. Inan sees that his father's policies have brought great pain in the name of supposed peace. He also sees that his father's casting of the diviners as dark and evil is misguided and wrong. Questioning his father's perspective allows Inan to also poke holes in his prejudice.

Finally, the onslaught of Zélie's memories gives Inan the chance to question his reasons for trusting his father in the first place. Inan had always equated loyalty to his father with loyalty to the kingdom, because that was how Saran justified his tactics. But now, seeing the experiences of actual Orishans, Inan realizes that the people his father claims to protect are suffering. Inan realizes that his duty to his father is not more important than his duty to what is right for the greater good, for the citizens of the kingdom he rules.

Chapter Forty-Seven Quotes

☝☝ This pawn was the only piece I managed to salvage. Shame ripples through me as I stare at the tarnished metal. The only gift he's ever given me, and at its core is hate.

Related Characters: Inan (speaker), King Saran, Zélie

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 324

Explanation and Analysis

As Zélie and Inan prepare to try to attack the encampment and rescue their siblings, the tensions between them boil to the surface. When Inan says that he hates who he is because of the magic he possesses, Zélie points out that the game piece he carries with him as a reminder of his father is made of majacite, a special metal used to hurt diviners. The realization changes how Inan sees his relationship to his father. Inan always believed that if he worked hard enough and exhibited enough loyalty to his father—even by going against his own desires and beliefs—he would someday gain his father's approval. On some level, he believed his father was a just and well-intentioned ruler, and Inan wanted to be the same. But now, he questions all of that. He sees that his father's rampant prejudice against diviners is at the core of Inan's own hatred for himself. He sees that his father's rule is motivated by the kind of fear that would celebrate harm to diviners, not strive for their safety in the kingdom. He realizes that his father will never accept him, and that it's time to question his loyalties.

Chapter Fifty-One Quotes

☝☝ Zu's tears make my own eyes prickle. Kwame's face pinches with pain. I want to hate him for what he did to Tzain, but I can't. I'm no better. If anything, I'm worse. If Inan hadn't stopped me, I would've stabbed that masked diviner to death just to get answers.

Related Characters: Zélie (speaker), Kwame, Zu, Amari, Tzain, Inan

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 343

Explanation and Analysis

After Zélie and Inan launch their attack on the encampment, Zu realizes that they are allies and lets them in. She also releases and heals Tzain and Amari, and apologizes for torturing them to try to get information. Listening to her, Zélie realizes a few things. The constant threat of violence in the kingdom has forced everyone to be defensive and quick to hurt one another—even those like Zu who do not relish violence in the least. In this way, Saran's rule perpetuates cycles of violence. Zélie also sees that devotion to family members can be an extremely compelling force, even driving people to go against their beliefs and commit wrongs if they think they need to in order to protect their families.

Chapter Fifty-Four Quotes

☞ A pit of guilt opens in my chest, tainted with the smell of burning flesh. The fires I watched from the royal palace resurface, the innocent lives burned before my young eyes. A memory I've pushed down like my magic, a day I longed to forget. But staring at Zélie now brings it all back: the pain. The tears. The death.

Related Characters: Inan (speaker), King Saran, Zélie

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 364

Explanation and Analysis

In the dreamscape, Zélie and Inan talk about life before the Raid. Inan had grown up with a single perspective on the violence carried out against diviners in Orisha. He trusted the monarchy's rule, which held that the Raid was a necessary evil to bring safety and stability to the kingdom. But speaking with Zélie, Inan sees the violence of the Raid not as an abstract tool of politics but as a horrific act of genocide with an intense human cost. Zélie's perspective forces him to question the logic put forth by his father. It makes him see the murdered diviners not just as a faceless scourge to be purged from the kingdom, but as humans with families who suffered dearly because of Saran's intense hatred for them. It also allows Inan to understand the true cost of using violence as a means to so-called peace. Inan sees that for those who are the targets of such policies, it is not possible to simply suppress memories of violence. They continue to burn brightly, bringing new fear and pain.

Chapter Fifty-Six Quotes

☞ The children of Orisha dance like there's no tomorrow, each step praising the gods. Their mouths glorify the rapture of liberation, their hearts sing the Yoruba songs of freedom. My ears dance at the words of my language, words I once thought I'd never hear outside my head. They seem to light up the air with their delight. It's like the whole world can breathe again.

Related Characters: Zélie (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 377

Explanation and Analysis

Zélie watches as the diviners at the hidden encampment celebrate their link to the gods and the potential return of

magic. The sight of this simple, joyous celebration is amazing to Zélie. Previously, Zélie had a fairly one-dimensional relationship to the gods. Because she had suffered so much pain and hardship, she believed the gods had simply died. She took the return of magic as proof that they hadn't died after all, restoring some of her faith. Now surrounded by other diviners, Zélie sees that faith can be much richer and multi-layered, and not simply defined by doubt and hardship. Faith in the gods has brought these diviners together in a community, helping them to have hope of liberation and to support one another. For the first time since the Raid, Zélie sees a model of faith that revolves around community, celebration, and hope.

The beauty of the celebration also drives home how damaging and extensive the oppressive tactics of the kingdom have been. In order to suppress the diviners, the kingdom has outlawed many of the most integral parts of their identity. Even being able to exercise basic freedoms like speaking in their own language and worshipping their gods feels like an enormous relief to the diviners. Under the monarchy's rule, every aspect of their lives is closely regulated.

Chapter Sixty-Three Quotes

☞ "I thought things could be different. I *wanted* them to be different. But after what we just saw, we have no choice. We can't give people that kind of power."

Related Characters: Inan (speaker), Kwame, King Saran, Zélie

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 412

Explanation and Analysis

Trying to talk Zélie into destroying the scroll to save herself from captivity—and torture—Inan reveals that in some ways, he now agrees again with the monarchy. Seeing Kwame erupt into flames, killing himself and many guards around him, Inan now believes that magic is just as dangerous as his father always said, if not more so. His fear reveals the ongoing fight over how magic is perceived. Some, like Inan, fear that it creates a power imbalance which drives cycles of violence and suffering. But others, like Zélie, know that that view is steeped in prejudice against diviners and unfounded fear that what makes them different also makes them evil. Zélie believes that diviners like Kwame use their magic for violence only when it is absolutely necessary to combat the many wrongs that have been perpetrated against them and

seize some power that has long been taken away.

In this moment, Zélie sees that Inan is reverting to some of the fears that were ingrained in him by his father, fears that previously started to erode as he moved away from Saran's influence. Now, Zélie worries that this is who Inan really is deep down, and that there's no way to change his mind.

Chapter Sixty-Six Quotes

☝ In that instant it hits me: Zulaikha's death. Zélie's screams. They don't mean a thing to him. Because they're maji, they're nothing. He preaches duty before self, but his Orisha doesn't include them. It never has.

Related Characters: Inan (speaker), Zélie, King Saran

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 432

Explanation and Analysis

After his harsh interrogation and brutal torture of Zélie, Saran calls Inan into a command room to debrief. Thinking of the pain he just witnessed, and seeing his father's crossed out map of the divîner encampment, Inan suddenly realizes the extent to which his father devalues diviners' lives. That realization allows Inan to see why his father's philosophy will never work. In the past, Inan found it difficult to recognize his father's wrongs and distance himself from them because in theory, Inan and his father shared a goal: for a peaceful and unified Orisha. Saran always said that goal should come first, and Inan agreed. But now, Inan sees why his father's desires and methods were never things for Inan to emulate: because of his intense hatred for diviners, Saran's vision of Orisha never really included them. His version of peace would always include violence and oppression towards those he feared and wished to keep under his own control, the diviners. Inan realizes now, that their visions aligned in name only. He does not want to be the same kind of ruler as his father after all.

Chapter Sixty-Eight Quotes

☝ Binta's voice rings loud. The sight of her blood fills my head. I can avenge her *now*. I can cut Father down. While the maji take out the guards, my sword can free Father of his head. Retribution for all his massacres, every poor soul he ever killed [...].

Related Characters: Amari (speaker), Binta, King Saran

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 443

Explanation and Analysis

As Amari and her new friends storm the fortress where Zélie is being held to try to free her, Amari is suddenly confronted by the sight of her father. Usually loath to use a sword, Amari seriously considers striking him down then and there. Amari's conviction shows a major shift in her attitude in the beginning of the book. Not only did she fear her father, but she also associated the use of violence with him, since he had tried so hard to instill his own ruthless bloodlust in his children. Every time she found herself forced to fight, even for a just cause, Amari was awash with guilt and fear at the thought that she might be fulfilling her evil father's wishes. Now, however, she sees that she can use his own weapons against him. She realizes she can use her ability to avenge and prevent the suffering of so many others—because in moments like these, violence is actually just.

Chapter Seventy-One Quotes

☝ The ache that cuts through me is sharper than the blade that cut through my back. It's like losing Mama all over again.

Related Characters: Zélie (speaker), Mama

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 456

Explanation and Analysis

After her friends rescue her from the fortress where she was kidnapped and tortured, Zélie feels broken. Not only does she have to contend with the physical and emotional pain of her injuries, but she can no longer summon her magic. The devastation that Zélie feels is a testament to all magic has come to mean to her since she started her quest. Magic and faith are now central parts of Zélie's life, connecting her not just to the gods but also to a community of diviners fighting alongside her. Now, she fears letting them down. Reconnecting with the practices of magic and the traditions of the gods has also made Zélie feel closer to her mother, who died in the Raid. Their shared love of magic and the goddess Oya makes Zélie feel closer to her mother, even though she's gone. Now that it seems like her connection to the gods might be waning, Zélie worries that she will lose that connection to her mother, too.

Chapter Seventy-Four Quotes

☝☝ I stare at the blade; the inscription gleams in the moonlight. Its words simplify my mission, creating space for my pain. A soldier. A great king. That's all I've ever wanted to be. Duty over self. *Orisha over Zélie.*

Related Characters: Inan (speaker), Zélie, King Saran

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 476

Explanation and Analysis

Unexpectedly, Inan's father seems pleased with the ways in which Inan has changed and grown since he left home. Saran presents his son with the blade that Inan always keeps by his side, a sword inscribed with the motto, "Duty before self." It provides yet another challenge and opportunity for Inan as he tries to determine which aspects of his father's philosophy he agrees with. His father's gift is a rare sign of his approval, something that Inan has always craved. It challenges his recent conclusion that Saran's vision of peace is incompatible with his own. Inan rationalizes that both he and his father want what's best for Orisha. He pushes aside his grave concerns about his father's many prejudices, mistakenly conflating the idea of "duty over self" with an excuse for ignoring his conscience. It would be extremely difficult for Inan as a young leader to confront and combat the many injustices and imbalances of power that riddle the kingdom. It is much easier for him to simply obey his father just as he always has.

Chapter Seventy-Five Quotes

☝☝ I don't want to be alone. Not when tonight could be my last night. Blind faith in the gods may have taken me this far, but if I'm going to get on that island tomorrow, I need more.

Related Characters: Zélie (speaker), Amari

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 481

Explanation and Analysis

Zélie and her team speed towards the mysterious island where they will try to carry out the ceremony to restore magic and reestablish the connection with the gods. Zélie, who is still cut off from her magic, thinks about the limitations and true meaning of faith. While she believes wholeheartedly in the gods, she has also seen again and

again on her journey that faith in the gods alone is not the only tool she can use to sustain herself, nor is it actually sufficient on its own. Rather, it is forging connections with other diviners, and making new friends and allies—even very unexpected ones, like Amari—that has given her more strength, comfort, and help in times of need. Now, as the end of the journey nears, Zélie realizes she must supplement her faith in the gods with something more: friendship and human connection. Connecting with others in this way is a vital part of faith and tradition.

Chapter Seventy-Eight Quotes

☝☝ Minutes stretch into hours, an eternity that drags like death. Each second that passes is another second my mind tumbles in guilt. What if they're captured? What if they die? I can't have more people perish for this. I can't have more blood stain my hands.

Related Characters: Zélie (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 494

Explanation and Analysis

As Zélie and her friends arrive at the island to perform the ceremony, part of the team breaks off to distract the guards stationed on the beach. Zélie listens with an unexpectedly strong sense of anxiety—she is not worried that something will go wrong for her allies, but rather that guards themselves will get hurt in the process. Zélie's view towards violence as a tool or strategy has shifted over the course of her journey. Before leaving home, Zélie was keen to hone her fighting skills, believing that well-executed strikes were necessary to fight back against an oppressive regime that was itself unjust and unafraid to use violence against citizens at every turn. The guards were not only knowing cogs in this oppressive machine but also enacted their own specific brand of cruelty and objectification and were therefore deserving of any harm she could throw their way. However, Zélie's quest brought more than enough violence to satisfy any desire for vengeance she might have felt. She has killed many people, both guilty and otherwise, in hopes that it might advance the cause of peace. She also saw magic swiftly annihilate huge swathes of guards—an act that, though necessary, was still horrifying to watch. Wary of causing pain in the name of peace, Zélie now hopes only that they can accomplish their ends with minimal loss of life. This reflects an evolving view towards violence having experienced firsthand how traumatic and cyclical fighting

can be.

Chapter Seventy-Nine Quotes

☛☛ As I approach Inan, Baba's shaking grows frantic. I can't let him break my resolve. *I don't want them to win, Baba.* But I can't let you die.

Related Characters: Zélie (speaker), Baba, King Saran, Inan

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 499

Explanation and Analysis

At the last minute, Inan, Saran, and a group of guards burst into the chamber where Zélie is about to attempt the ceremony. With them is a secret weapon: they have Baba prisoner. The sight of him freezes Zélie in her tracks, and her resolve melts away. Immediately, she abandons the idea of attempting the ceremony. In this moment, her single-minded aim is to protect her family from harm. Ever since the Raid, Zélie and her family have survived only by banding together and putting their own safety first. In this critical moment, when Zélie must choose between her blood family and the newfound community of diviners relying on her, she feels as if she has no choice. Zélie chooses her responsibility to her family over her other responsibilities—to her friends, to the diviners, and to what she hopes to accomplish. Saran's actions leave Zélie with no choice.

Chapter Eighty Quotes

☛☛ *As long as we don't have magic, they will never treat us with respect, Baba's spirit booms. They need to know we can hit them back. If they burn our homes—I burn theirs, too.*

Related Characters: Zélie (speaker), King Saran, Baba

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 503

Explanation and Analysis

As Zélie attempts to perform the ceremony, she senses her father's powerful spirit surrounding her. His spirit delivers a clear and powerful message. Zélie realizes anew that the diviners need to have the power to strike back in order to combat the ruthless oppression enacted by the monarchy.

Even though there are dangers and drawbacks to magic, ultimately it is the best and most powerful tool the diviners have to overthrow their oppressors and to build their own communities and support one another. The prejudice against diviners seems likely to continue unabated unless the diviners can overthrow those in power and establish a new, thriving society for themselves, one in which they can use their magic creatively and for good. Paradoxically, the only way to break the current cycle of violence and achieve that peace is by using magic to fight back.

Chapter Eighty-Three Quotes

☛☛ I cannot end it like this. If I do that, I'm no better than him. Orisha will not survive by employing his tactics. Father must be taken down, but it is too much to drive my sword through his heart—Father pulls back his blade. Momentum carries me forward. Before I can pivot, Father swings his sword around and the blade rips across my back.

Related Characters: Amari (speaker), Inan, King Saran

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 513

Explanation and Analysis

As Amari spars with her father, she grapples again with the question of when—if ever—it is appropriate to kill someone. Just as she has an opportunity to strike the killing blow, she holds back, thinking that killing Saran would be perpetuating the exact same violence he creates and encourages. She thinks that his violence has only created pain and inequality in Orisha, and this fight is a microcosm of that. If she kills him, she will be accepting the same conclusion that he has drawn: that killing is the only way to solve conflict. If nothing else, Amari's travels have shown her that is not the truth. She has also realized that it is possible to break away from all that her father has taught her, and that doing so will actually make her stronger. She wants to differentiate herself from him any way that she can.

However, Saran's ruthlessness prevails, and he slashes across her back. Amari realizes the same lesson that Zélie has long held close: there is no point in trying to combat cruel and unjust people with logic or mercy, because they do not possess those qualities themselves. Instead, it is sometimes necessary to overcome violent oppression with more violence.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PROLOGUE

An unnamed narrator recounts white-haired Mama and their joyful home they once shared. The narrator remembers when Baba was chained and dragged away, and Mama was hung and taken away.

The intensity of this memory demonstrates the haunting power of violent images and memories. Such violence is especially impactful when it is directed against loved ones. It leaves a lasting memory of fear and pain.



CHAPTER ONE

Zélie, a white-haired diviner, is selected from a group of students to face off against formidable Yemi in a sparring match—a test to determine whether she is ready to graduate. As the two girls begin to spar with carved staffs, their personal animosity is apparent.

Physical markers like Zélie's white hair and Yemi's slightly lighter skin set the two girls apart from each other and encourage them to see each other as enemies. In addition, the girls' graduation is predicated on their ability to fight, which suggests that they live in a world of violence, and being able to defend oneself is of utmost importance.



Yemi, who is a privileged Orishan, looks down on Zélie and calls her a “maggot” as they are fighting—which only excites fiery Zélie's anger more. Ignoring the warnings of their teacher, Mama Agba, the two girls fly at each other with more passion, both landing powerful hits.

“Maggot” is a slur that Yemi uses to dehumanize Zélie. Such language makes it easier for Yemi to accept and perpetuate stereotypes about people like Zélie, because it increases the distance between them. It is also designed to reduce Zélie's self-worth, which is one of the many ways that prejudice is perpetuated and reinforced.



Suddenly, the match comes to a halt as a girl warns that guards are approaching. Mama Agba and the students swiftly hide the fighting materials and make it appear as if they are sewing. The guards, sent by the king, demand money from Mama Agba because of a new higher tax on diviners.

The higher tax on diviners implies that they are second-class citizens. The tax may also be a way for the king to keep the diviners from rebelling or fighting their oppressors. Regulating tradition, by outlawing things like staff fighting, is another way of doing this, because such traditions connect people to one another and allow them to form strong networks of community and shared skill. Outlawing staff fighting also ensures that the diviners don't have the skills or physical strength to fight their enemies.



When Zélie bursts out in protest, a guard threatens her. Mama Agba pays the guard, narrowly avoiding a confrontation. Afterwards, Mama Agba scolds Zélie, who says she was just trying to protect them. Zélie questions the point of training if they will never fight.

For Zélie, the only way to fight the violence and injustice that the guards inflict upon the diviners is to challenge the guards with physical violence of her own.



Mama Agba begins to tell a familiar story: in the past, the land of Orísha was home to white-haired maji who could perform all kinds of magic from the gods. As some maji became corrupted, all maji suddenly lost their power eleven years ago. On that day, known as the Raid, King Saran took over, and Zélie's mother was taken. Although they no longer have magic, those with white hair are still seen as dangerous diviners.

Mama Agba's story reveals that misguided fear is what drives the caste system and prejudice that is rampant in the kingdom. The king feared the maji, who he perceived as more powerful than he, but now he has exploited his own power to assert control over them. That fear has since been used to justify large-scale oppression and violence.



After the other students leave, Mama Agba holds Zélie back. She expects to be beaten for her impulsiveness, but instead, Mama Agba presents her with a masterfully carved iron staff and tells her she has earned her graduation. Suddenly, Zélie's older brother, Tzain, enters the tent and says they must go home to see Baba, their father, immediately.

Mama Agba rewards Zélie instead of reprimanding her further. This suggests that, even though Mama Agba cautions against violence and anger, she also recognizes violence can sometimes be useful, even necessary.



CHAPTER TWO

Tzain and Zélie dash across the floating city of Ilorin. Tzain scolds Zélie for leaving their Baba alone while she practiced sparring. Feeling urgent and guilty, Zélie races across a string of boats in the floating market, only to see Baba thrashing in the water far beyond the floating city. Unable to do magic, she feels powerless. Tzain dives into the water and pulls Baba up just in time.

By practicing fighting with the staff, Zélie was perhaps strengthening to defend herself and her family. Yet those efforts seemed to come at the cost of protecting her father more immediately.



Baba says that he was trying to go out fishing to make money for the recently increased taxes, but he ended up nearly drowning. Ever since the raid, when his wife was killed and he was severely beaten, Baba has been weak and confused, sometimes blacking out. Baba says the guards threatened to force Zélie into the stocks, or forced hard labor, if he could not pay the taxes. Feeling scared and helpless, Zélie remembers Mama's death. To make matters worse, Baba says that he lost the boat in his panic, so the family has no way to fish and make more money.

The social inequality the maji experiences is compounded by the economic inequality the monarchy inflicts upon them. By levying high taxes against them, Saran keeps the maji trapped in economic distress, while he uses the stocks to exploit their labor. The memory of violence also serves as an ongoing source of pain and fear for Zélie and her family, reinforcing the monarchy's power.



Zélie feels responsible for all of this misfortune because of her identity as a diviner. In a last-ditch effort to raise money for the taxes, Zélie says she will take a valuable sailfish to a market in Lagos. Because it is dangerous for a diviner to go alone, Tzain says he will go with her. They saddle up Nailah, a huge lion-like creature with horns behind her ears.

Through his policies, Saran has effectively linked the maji with a sense of shame, which Zélie feels powerfully.



CHAPTER THREE

In Lagos, Princess Amari sits through a stuffy meal with gossipy nobility as her mother criticizes her every move. A servant warns Amari that Binta, a diviner servant and Amari's only friend, was escorted to Amari's father, King Saran.

Amari's mother compliments Samara, a young, rich girl who is betrothed to Amari's brother, Inan. Amari knows that what her mother values is Samara's lighter skin, which is seen as a mark of nobility. In fact, in the past, she subjected Amari to painful beauty regimens aimed at lightening her skin.

Worried that Binta may be in trouble with her father, King Saran, Amari excuses herself from the room and sneaks into a hiding spot in her father's throne room. Surprisingly, she sees the king lecturing Admiral Ebele and Commander Kaea. She overhears as Kaea explains that some artifacts—a scroll and a sunstone—washed ashore in a village and activated the powers of some local diviners, turning them into maji.

Horrified, Amari watches as Binta is dragged into the room by guards. When Kaea forces her to hold the scroll, brilliant multi-colored light pours over the room from her hand. Although she has been warned that magic is evil, Amari thinks it looks beautiful.

Suddenly, King Saran stabs Binta in the chest with his sword, killing her instantly. Amari runs out of the room and throws up. Then, she steals into Kaea's room, where a guard has deposited the scroll. King Saran's cloak is also there. She takes both.

Amari's day-to-day existence is confined to her responsibilities to her family. She lives in fear of her parents, who seem to demand her absolute loyalty and obedience.



The cast system in Orisha, which places darker-skinned, white-haired maji on the bottom rung of society, leads to obsession with appearance and discrimination against those who possess certain attributes.



Amari's fear of her father further shows how her parents have kept her under their control. Amari is so afraid of disobeying and getting in trouble that she has a regular hiding spot she can use to keep out of her father's sight. The unexpected appearance of artifacts challenges Saran's strategy of wiping out diviner culture, which is one way of keeping them from building communities and gaining strength against him.



Saran has no qualms about treating Binta harshly. Since Binta is a diviner, Saran sees her as inferior. Amari has been taught that magic is wicked and dangerous because such beliefs help to dehumanize the diviners and justify violence against them.



Due to his firmly held belief in the inferiority of diviners, Saran doesn't hesitate to kill Binta, even though she is his daughter's only friend. Witnessing this horrific act immediately causes Amari to feel disgusted and disconnected from her father. She literally cannot stomach this act of gratuitous violence.



CHAPTER FOUR

Barely speaking to one another, Zélie and Tzain arrive at the bustling capital city, Lagos. Tzain is angry that Zélie left home alone, saying that she put him in unnecessary danger. But from Zélie's perspective, the wider problem is a society in which guards attack their own people and the kingdom levies ridiculous taxes—the factors that prompted her to leave home and learn how to fight in the first place. Cautioning her to try harder not to make mistakes, Tzain gives Zélie a small dagger. The siblings make amends before parting ways.

Despite the prohibition against relationships with diviners, the guards at Lagos' gate are all too eager to harass Zélie, making lewd remarks and touching her inappropriately. Containing her rage, Zélie makes her way into the busy city, where the shining palace sharply contrasts the diviner slums on the town's outskirts.

In the market, Zélie identifies a pushy nobleman interested in the sailfish. By bargaining hard, Zélie convinces him to pay five hundred silver pieces for it—enough for a new boat and a year's worth of taxes. Zélie feels as if she's finally done something right for her family. Suddenly, a troop of royal guards burst into the market. A girl in a cloak grabs Zélie's wrist and begs Zélie to help her escape.

CHAPTER FIVE

Zélie attempts to shake the girl off, knowing she will be killed if they are caught. But, thinking of her training with Mama Agba, she realizes she has a responsibility to help those who can't defend themselves.

When Zélie and the girl are stopped by two guards as they try to leave town, Zélie knocks them unconscious with her staff. The girl pulls her into a side alley where they hide as the troop passes.

At the gate, the girls are confronted by a line of guards mounted on panthenaires. Zélie fashions an explosive out of a torch and a bottle of liquor, throwing it at the guards to create a diversion. Zélie slips through the gate, but the girl trips just before she can make it through. Zélie's instincts tell her to run back to her family, but she also feels a responsibility to protect the girl.

Tzain and Zélie's fight shows a tension between protecting one's family in the short term versus the long term. Zélie believes she must fight for what is right in order to bring long term peace for her family, while Tzain thinks that those goals are pointless if the family is in immediate danger. Regardless, their commitment to each other is strong enough that they can put aside this difference of opinion, at least for now.



Zélie does not fight the guards, even though she wants to, which shows that she's keeping her brother's warning in mind. The guards can harass her without guilt or consequence because of the deeply stratified nature of society in the kingdom. The contrasting architecture of Lagos, where very few diviners live, except in servitude, highlights the deep-rooted economic inequalities that accompany the social inequality and discrimination in Orisha.



The fact that some in the kingdom can afford such an expensive fish is another testament to the economic inequality driven by the prejudice in Orisha. The girl in the cloak signals a challenge to Zélie's attempt to be obedient to her family and stay focused on the task at hand.



In this moment, Zélie must choose between her commitment to keeping her family out of trouble, and her commitment to a code of morals that dictates she help those in need.



By attacking guards, Zélie is certainly bringing more danger to her family, but she is selflessly helping a stranger in need.



Again, Zélie's commitment to helping a stranger versus her commitment to defending her family is tested. Once again, she commits to helping the girl because she believes that it is the right thing to do. The fact that the guards cannot be trusted reflects the degree to which the monarchy is an oppressive regime.



Fighting her instinct to run, Zélie dives back through the gates, expecting to be killed on the spot. She thinks of her mother. Suddenly, Nailah comes flying over the gate, Tzain astride her. Zélie and the girl clamber on. As Nailah leaps back over the fence, Zélie locks eyes with a young captain (Inan) below and feels as if an electric shock has gone through her body.

Zélie's commitment to her family is shown in what she thinks are her final moments, as she imagines joining her mother in death. Meanwhile, Tzain's unflinching loyalty drives him to put himself in grave danger to protect his sister.



CHAPTER SIX

Inan heads inside to face his father, King Saran, preparing for his wrath. He is intercepted by his mother, who pulls him into the throne room and demands everyone else leaves. She pleads with Inan and the king, saying that it's too dangerous for Inan to be out fighting as he did today.

Like Amari, Inan's loyalty to his father is driven by fear. He is also at the whim of his parents, who argue over Inan's fate without even consulting him. He does not have the ability to exercise his own will or act on his own desires because of his parents' control.



Inan suddenly remembers Zélie's face, and feels a sensation like electricity under his skin. The King orders Inan's mother to leave, and she does so. Both she and Inan fear that he is in for a beating at the hands of his father. Inan, knowing that he failed, expects to hear his father's familiar refrain: "Duty before self."

Saran controls his son through violence and fear because he believes that violence is equivalent to strength. Ostensibly a call to selflessness, the expression, "duty before self," ensures that Inan remains obedient and willing to use violence.



Inan braces himself for punishment. Instead, King Saran tells him that he knows only Inan can catch the fugitive. He reveals the fugitive's identity: it is his sister, Amari.

Saran is using the control he has over Inan to demand that he go on a quest to capture his own sister. Ironically, he is calling on Inan's loyalty to one family member, Saran, to justify the hunting down of another family member, Amari.



CHAPTER SEVEN

Having made it a safe distance from the capital city, Inan stops Nailah and begins to reprimand Zélie for putting them in danger. Zélie is angry, until Amari reveals the scroll and claims to be able to bring magic back. But Zélie believes that magic is long dead.

Tzain reprimands Zélie for doing the very thing they bickered about earlier that day. From Tzain's perspective, Zélie once again put her own desires before the safety of the family. From Zélie's perspective, however, she was honorably putting her morals first. Because her daily existence is difficult and dangerous, Zélie has long found it easier to give up on the idea of magic altogether, which is why she is quick to affirm that magic is dead.



Zélie reaches for the scroll. The moment she touches it, a shock seems to travel through her body. The sensation of magic in her veins makes her think of her mother, and she wonders if she might become a Reaper, with power over death, like her mother. But she quickly suppresses her hopes. She doesn't want to think about how abandoned by the gods she felt during the Raid.

Still, Zélie can't help but imagine how things would have gone differently if her mother had possessed magic during the raid. She vividly imagines her mother using the power of the gods to fend off the guards and protect the family.

But Tzain worries that if Zélie has magic, she will be a target. He says they need to get back to Baba and go into hiding. They decide to take the scroll—and with it, Amari, because they worry that otherwise she'll simply lead the guards to them.

When Zélie thinks of magic and religion, she also thinks of her mother, showing that there are strong ties between tradition and family. A return to faith could be a source of strength for Zélie because it would make her feel more connected her mother. At the same time, the very pain of that memory of her mother makes Zélie reluctant to put her trust in any higher power. Thinking about her mother is painful, and reconciling gods with the cruelty of the world is too difficult.



Zélie sees that if the diviners had been able to fight back, they may have been able to prevent the slaughter and oppression at the hands of the guards.



The ability to perform magic is part of what marks diviners as dangerous, justifying their oppression. Staying focused on the protection of the family, Tzain rejects the vision of a future revolution and makes a plan to bring the family to safety in the short term.



CHAPTER EIGHT

Inan is shocked that Amari is the fugitive who took the scroll. King Saran says that in the past, his own father tried to be fair to the maji, but they were too powerful. Saran believes magic is the root of all pain, destined to destroy empires. In fact, a number of other civilizations were destroyed when their magic-users were allowed to do magic unchecked.

Heeding these warnings, Saran began to use the alloy majacite, a special metal that burns magic users. But it wasn't enough: Saran realized the only way to really control the maji was to sever their connection to the gods. So he ordered his men to destroy the artifacts that allow maji to commune with the gods.

Inan is shocked: shocked to find that the gods are real, and shocked to discover that his father was able to take magic away. He asks why Saran still killed so many in the Raid if he was able to abolish magic. Saran responds that he thinks for magic to truly die, all maji have to die as well.

Saran's story shows that an imbalance of power has led to damaging cycles of violence in other places, just as it has in Orisha itself. However, Saran makes a sweeping generalization by equating magic with destruction.



In order to break this cycle, however, Saran resorted to oppression, cutting off the connection between the maji and the gods. Saran saw all diviners as a class that needed to be controlled and cut off from power, just because a few magic users were reckless.



Saran's response shows that his solution to the imbalance of power in Orisha has brought about widespread injustice and pain. Not only did he outlaw faith, damaging the connection the diviners had with one another and with the gods, Saran also committed genocide in order to secure his own power.



Saran says that Inan must go with Admiral Kaea, his second in command, to find Amari. Because Zélie passed through the control gate on her way into the city, they know her name, as well as that she's from Ilorin. Inan says he will set out with a handful of men to capture the two girls. Afterwards, Saran says, he should burn Ilorin to the ground.

Saran has no qualms about innocent townspeople dying in Ilorin, because, in his mind, they are diviners and therefore unworthy of regard or protection. Inan seems uncomfortable at the thought of the mission and the violence it will bring, so he tries to minimize it by taking only a few men. Ultimately, however, Inan is still under his father's control and must agree to his wishes.



CHAPTER NINE

Zélie, Tzain, and Amari arrive at Mama Agba's home in Ilorin. They find Baba asleep there. Tzain scoops up his father and returns home to gather their belongings before they escape. Zélie explains all that has happened, handing Mama Agba the scroll.

Despite the presence of the magical artifact, Tzain has a single-minded determination to protect his family, and he continues to set that plan in motion.



To Zélie's surprise, the scroll awakens Mama Agba's magic. Zélie had assumed she was a *kosidán* because she lacks the diviner's characteristic white hair; in fact, her power is the ability to see the future, and she was able to escape the Raid by removing her hair.

Mama Agba had to hide her physical appearance in order to escape the violence directed at diviners. This is a sign that diviners have been broadly singled out, attacked, and discriminated against based on their appearance.



Mama Agba says some words in Yoruba, the language the *maji* use to communicate with the gods. Since the Raid, everyone has been forced to speak only Orishan. Hearing the old language is overwhelming for Zélie. She is filled with longing. Using the incantation is clearly exhausting for Mama Agba—the price of magic.

Saran outlawed the Yoruba language as a tactic to keep diviners from communicating with each other in a language Saran (presumably) cannot understand and therefore cannot monitor or control. Traditions like language help people to support one another, and, potentially, organize privately against oppressors.



Light explodes between Mama Agba's hands, and Zélie suddenly feels that the gods have been with them all along. In the light, they see a vision of Amari, Zélie, and Tzain climbing a mountain with Nailah. Mama Agba says that Amari and Zélie are meant to go on a quest to bring back magic—for good. Mama Agba says they must go to the temple of Chândomblé to discover what to do next.

Zélie has not wanted to believe that magic or the gods could exist because of the cruelty of her day-to-day life and the serious misfortunes that have befallen her family. However, the undeniable reemergence of magic gives her a sense of hope and purpose.



Suddenly, they hear shouts from outside. The village of Ilorin is ablaze. Zélie fights her way home through the chaos, desperate to find Tzain and Baba. When she can't see them, but only their home in flames, she assumes the worst. When she thinks her brother and father have perished, she tries to drag Amari into the flames so that King Saran, too, will suffer loss.

Believing her family members to be dead, Zélie can think only of bringing more death, as if that will settle the score. In this moment, Zélie is motivated by a desire for revenge. Seeing that her family has suffered, Zélie wants to use violence to ensure that those who have hurt her suffer too—even if that means sacrificing Amari, who had no part in setting the town on fire.



Suddenly, Zélie sees her family afloat in a small boat, safe. Just then, the floating village breaks apart, and Zélie and Amari plunge into the water. For a moment, Zélie considers letting herself sink. But she knows the gods have other plans for her, and she kicks to the surface.

Already, Zélie's newly returned faith has made her feel committed to a broader goal, as well as a sense of self-worth that she will preserve by staying alive and continuing to fight for what's right.



CHAPTER TEN

Once she gets to the shore, Zélie thinks about those who perished in the fire. Because of her magic, she could feel their deaths. She feels responsible for endangering her family and village. She wants to give up.

Zélie worries that once again she has put her own goals and desires before the safety of her family, since helping Amari catalyzed the events that led to Saran's men burning the village and murdering innocent people.



Baba tells Zélie she can't stop fighting. He says their homes have been destroyed twice by the monarchy, and the only way to ensure their safety is to fight back. Tearfully, Baba and Mama Agba bid goodbye to the three teenagers. On Nailah's back, they ride into the night.

Instead of blaming his daughter, Baba now believes it is more important for Zélie to fight for what is right than to focus solely on staying safe and avoiding trouble. The only way to effectively break the cycle of oppression and violence that the monarchy perpetuates is to show that the diviners can fight back, restoring a balance of power to the kingdom. Zélie must fight back in order to prevent the diviners from staying powerless to the king's atrocities.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

Inan stands shaken on the edge of the ruined village of Illorin. His plan has gone horribly awry. He watches as villagers weep among the ruins and corpses. Thinking of his father, King Saran, he repeats to himself, "Duty before self." He must put the safety of Orisha before his conscience. Yet he also thinks that these citizens *are* Orisha.

The widespread destruction challenges Inan's internal sense of right and wrong. Normally, he equates loyalty to his father with duty to his kingdom, and he puts that responsibility above everything. But seeing the chaos around him, Inan wonders if his father can truly be right. He begins to question if his father's will is actually aligned with what is best for the people of Orisha.



A strange cloud of turquoise air floats towards Inan, bringing with it a vision of Zélie sinking into cold water. Admiral Kaea can't see the cloud or the vision. Inan worries that magic has infected him, a thought that makes him sick.

Saran has demonized magic to the point that Inan sees it as an infectious disease. This further dehumanizes diviners, as they are equated with danger and physical corruption.



Inan tells Kaea that the fugitives are nearby with the scroll. Desperate to hide the fact that he is infected with magic, he lies and says a villager gave him the information. Mustering his strength, he feels he must hide his magic and command the terrified villagers—after all, he is their future king.

Inan feels that he is diseased with magic, which shows the disgust and fear he has towards diviners. He frantically tries to hide this newfound magic, which shows that he's also scared of being associated with the diviners, and that his status as the king's son wouldn't protect him. These prejudiced thoughts also realign him with his father, and Inan recommits to his duty of commanding and intimidating the villagers.



Kaea and Inan threaten the villagers until a girl comes forward. She says she'll tell them everything they want to know, if they leave the rest of the village alone. Inan says that if she gives the information, the village will be safe, but he can see in the girl's eyes that she feels they will never truly be safe again.

Inan is obedient to his father because he believes his father's claim that they are committing unthinkable acts of violence in order to keep peace. However, in witnessing the reactions of the scared villagers, Inan sees that this violence is not creating peace at all.



CHAPTER TWELVE

Exhausted and scared, Zélie, Amari, and Tzain make camp for the night. In the dark, Zélie tentatively reaches out to Oya, the patron god of her magic. She's still scared, but even thinking the gods might still be listening gives her comfort.

Although Zélie has many reasons to doubt the gods and turn away from her religion, she also sees that faith can be a source of courage. Zélie comes to the important realization that the gods can still exist and be a source of comfort even if there is much suffering and injustice in the world.



When Zélie awakens, everything is wrong. Instead of being where she fell asleep, she's alone in a field of reeds. She turns to see Inan. Confusingly, he demands that she release him from the dreamscape. He believes that she is attacking him with magic. But she knows it must be his own magic pulling them there.

Inan has been taught his whole life to fear magic and squash it. He has also been taught to see magic as inhuman and wicked. As a result, when Inan experiences magic—even his own magic—he assumes it is something hostile that someone else is using to attack him.



Zélie notices a shock of white in Inan's dark hair. She realizes he must be a Connector, a maji with power over mind, spirit, and dreams. But, he doesn't have any idea. Thinking of all those Inan's father has killed, Zélie begins to taunt him. Inan lunges forward and begins to strangle her.

Because he is totally cut off from the traditions and lore of the maji, Inan has no way to understand what is happening to him, which only compounds his fear. Zélie tries to take out her anger towards all the violence Inan's father has committed on Inan himself, which only excited his rage and makes him feel justified in attacking her.



Zélie wakes up beside Nailah, where she fell asleep. Now that she knows the Inan's secret, she fears he will hunt her down.

Inan and Zélie have something very important in common now—unlike most people in the kingdom, they can do magic. However, instead of making them allies, this new connection only widens the gap between them. Because of his deep-rooted prejudice against magic users, Inan now hates himself, and Zélie, even more than before.



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Zélie is angry to see that Tzain gave Amari his cloak to use as a blanket. The trio decides to head to Sokoto, a town on the way to Chândomblé, but they need something they can trade for food. When Zélie suggests that they trade Amari's dress for food, Amari is reluctant. Zélie is furious with Amari's privileged attitude, and Amari agrees to give up her dress.

Zélie's desire to protect her family has now surpassed any charity she felt towards Amari before she knew her identity, and is angered to see that the same is not true of Tzain. The clear privilege and wealth Amari possesses exacerbate Zélie's anger. It is unjust that the royals have lived in luxury while their people suffer. Amari's reluctance to give up her dress, which is representative of her plush life, only reinforces that injustice.



As Amari is changing, Tzain and Zélie catch a glimpse of a huge, ragged scar running down her back. Embarrassed, Amari says that it is from an accident with her brother when they were young. Zélie is chastened, imagining what other scars Amari might bear.

Because of the caste system in Orisha, Tzain and Zélie have made many assumptions about Amari—and vice versa—that the presence of the scar begins to subvert. On some level, Zélie's reaction also reflects the fact that she equates the ability to fight with personal strength.



When they arrive at the lakeside town of Sokoto, Amari and Zélie split off to trade the dress. As they walk, Amari asks if Zélie's mother died in the raid. Zélie says yes. Amari begins to apologize, saying she understands why Zélie hates her father, King Saran, and, by extension, her. Zélie feels herself softening towards Amari, but fights it.

Amari's loyalty to her family does not keep her from recognizing of the intense pain that her father has caused. Understandably, Zélie is wary to put aside her beliefs about Amari.



Zélie asks Amari about her scar. Amari reveals that Saran forced her and Inan to fight with real swords to make them stronger, because his first family was "coddled," and died as a result. Zélie can't understand how Amari can still be loyal to a family that has inflicted so much pain on her.

Saran was obsessed with the idea that he could protect his family from harm by forcing them to harm each other. It was an act of violence motivated by fear that left Amari broken and afraid. For Zélie, there can be no justification or forgiveness for such behavior, even if it's ultimately intended to protect the family.



Zélie and Amari enter the tent of an elderly kosidán to trade the dress. They can get a decent amount of supplies and new clothes for the dress, but they worry it won't be enough for the whole journey. Amari pulls out the headdress Binta once gave her and offers it. Zélie, seeing her sadness, feels a wave of empathy and tells Amari not to give up the treasured possession that reminds her of her lost loved one, but Amari insists. With the money, they are able to buy more than enough supplies. Amari also takes a collapsible sword. Zélie is shocked and intrigued to see that the princess knows how to fight.

Amari willingly parts with the trappings of her former life in order to aid Zélie and her cause, which Amari believes is the right thing to do. Zélie has great respect for those who can fight. Because she did not respect Amari, Zélie assumed Amari was physically weak. To the contrary, she seems to be adept with a sword, which earns her some grudging respect from Zélie.



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Inan and Kaea ride on in pursuit of Amari and the scroll. Inan battles the magic he feels within himself with every fiber of his being, knowing he will be an outcast if his identity is revealed. He lies and tells Kaea that he is worried about Amari. His only thought is that he must kill Zélie.

Because diviners are reviled and deeply abused by the monarchy, Inan is consumed with horror at the thought that he could be one. Rather than giving him a sense of empathy, though, it drives him to war with himself and commit to killing Zélie.



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

As Amari, Tzain, and Zélie clamber up a mountainside, Amari reminisces about Binta. With a pang, she remembers their dream to travel the world together, a dream that will never be realized.

As a diviner and servant, Binta was looked down upon by Amari's family. But Amari recognizes that Binta was a true friend and a beautiful soul, which is far more important to Amari than her family's long-held prejudices.



As they rest on a ledge, they suddenly see broken human skulls among the grass. As Zélie touches one, a chill passes through the group, and Zélie says she can see the life of the man who died. It must be a sign of magic. Sure enough, they soon come upon Chândomblé. It is a series of ruined temples.

As a way of stamping out the diviners and completely suppressing their power, Saran not only committed genocide, but also destroyed meeting places and religious sites like Chândomblé, which could be sources of strength for the community.



Leaving Nailah outside, the Zélie, Amari, and Tzain enter a metal temple that is still standing. In the dark passageway, their torches are suddenly extinguished. A hiss of air surrounds them, clouding their thoughts. Just as they realize it is poison, the three collapse and black out.

Chândomblé should be a safe place, but, in light of a world where violence and conquest are the norm, it is necessary for the temple to be heavily safeguarded.



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Inan and Kaea arrive at Sokto. Inan feels exhausted and tense from concealing his new identity. Inan watches as a mother glares fiercely at the guards, holding an infant to her chest. He feels shocked to realize how much she fears them.

As he leaves the seclusion of the palace, Inan slowly begins to see the true effects that Saran's policies have wrought. Rather than creating peace, Saran has created fear and animosity.



Inan and Kaea search the tent of a merchant, and find Amari's headdress. Inan's heart is in his throat as he remembers the day he cut Amari's back, when Binta slipped into the infirmary and brought the old headdress to comfort Amari. Inan thinks that Amari must be dead to have parted with her most treasured possession.

Inan threatens the merchant until he reveals that he saw the two girls headed for Chândomblé. When the merchant tries to flee, Kaea kills him, and Inan feels a shock of horror.

Because of his overwhelming fear and loyalty to his father, Inan did something totally abhorrent and went against his own beliefs by hurting his sister.



Inan, wanting to avenge the violence that he believes was perpetrated against Amari, threatens violence against the merchant. However, Inan is horrified when Kaea actually kills the merchant, which suggests that Inan is comfortable with threats of violence but can't stomach the violence itself.



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Amari, Tzain, and Zélie awake to find themselves tied together in a cave. Their weapons and the scroll are gone. A man with white patterns painted on his skin appears (later revealed as Lekan). He accuses the teenagers of stealing the scroll from his people, directing his ire at Amari, who he says stinks of noble blood.

It seems that the man (Lekan) is going to kill them, until Zélie begins to talk about the vision she saw outside—of Chândomblé full of other people. Amari realizes with horror that her father, Saran, destroyed this place, filling her with shame. Moved by Zélie's words, the man removes their restraints and beckons them to follow.

Reasonably, the atrocities perpetrated by Amari's family have made others wary of her, especially in a former diviner stronghold.



Talking about magic and tradition helps Zélie to quickly form a bond with this stranger, gaining his trust. Evidence of Saran's violence gives further support to Amari's growing sense of alienation from him. As she travels, she gains more and more perspective on the wrongs he has committed, which she has been shielded from in the palace.



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Zélie, Amari, and Tzain follow the man down a dark passageway. Zélie knows he is a sêntaro, a kind of high priest to the maji. He introduces himself as Olamilekan, or Lekan for short.

Lekan leads Zélie, Amari, and Tzain to a vast central chamber decorated with beautiful murals of the gods. As he speaks, telling the stories of the Sky Mother and each of the children gods, the walls swirl with color and light. When he reaches Oya, Zélie's patron god, he asks her to tell the story. Telling the story reminds her powerfully of her mother.

Even though magic is outlawed, Zélie's knowledge of faith and tradition helps her forge a connection to this stranger and understand his powers and place within the larger maji community.



Again, Zélie feels a sense of kinship with Lekan and the temple because they invoke shared traditions—something Saran has tried to erase. Zélie learned those traditions from her mother, so she also feels a sense of connection to her lost family when she speaks about the gods.



Lekan also explains that, every century, the scroll, the sunstone, and the bone dagger must be carried to a sacred temple for the binding ritual. King Saran found out about the ritual and slaughtered the sêntaros before carrying out the Raid, so that the connection to the gods and magic would be lost.

Lekan says that the centennial solstice is approaching, and it will be a final chance to restore a connection to the gods. On this solstice, an island will appear. If the artifacts are taken there and the ancient incantation recited, magic will be restored for all diviners. But it's only a month away.

The ritual must be performed by a woman. If Lekan performs a ceremony to connect Zélie to the Sky Mother, he says, she can be the one to carry out the ritual. Zélie is terrified. She feels like the gods must have made a mistake—there's no way she's strong enough to do the ritual. But she knows that without the ritual, the monarchy will continue seeing and treating her people as maggots forever.

Lekan begins the ceremony to connect Zélie to the Sky Mother: he cuts Zélie's hand with the bone dagger and submerges her in a bath. She feels a sensation of electricity in her veins and sees a vision of Oya spinning in red silk. She feels an overwhelming sense of magic and connection. After the ceremony, Zélie is almost too exhausted to stand. As she is about to sink into sleep, Lekan shouts that someone is coming—they have to flee.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

As they approach Chândomblé, Inan's magic grows stronger, allowing him to hear the disgruntled thoughts of the guards buzzing like flies in his head. Fighting his powers is physically painful, but Inan feels that he must.

Inan has a vivid memory of Saran telling him to fight Amari. Amari refused to raise her sword, which Saran took as a sign of weakness. Saran said that Inan must chose Orïsha over himself by fighting when he does not want to. So, Inan lunged at Amari with his sword. Inan thinks that he failed his sister once, and cannot do it again.

Saran used his fear of magic to justify the murder of priests and the destruction of a powerful faith. Killing the ntaros made the maji less connected to the gods, but also less connected to each other, because they lost powerful community leaders.



The faith of the diviners requires constant renewal, practice, ceremony, and sacrifice. The diviners' faith is also a source of both personal power and a strong sense of connection to other diviners. This, as well as the restoration of a balance of power in the kingdom, is what is at stake with the upcoming ritual.



Zélie is still not sure in her own faith and power. She is not convinced that the gods are behind her, especially after she has suffered for so many years. But, she also feels a growing sense of purpose. She believes that the only way to subvert the injustice and oppression of the monarchy is by restoring some power to her people, and she knows that if she doesn't perform the ritual, no one else can or will.



Although the ritual to connect Zélie to the Sky Mother is painful and demanding, it also gives her a sense of connection to others, just as practicing faith can help communities to form. Lekan's warning is a reminder that there is no time to rest—they are still on the run, and the religious site is still at risk of attack.



Knowing that his father would be disgusted by Inan's new identity as a member of a reviled group, Inan fights the magic he feels brewing inside of him. Considering that Saran killed his daughter's only friend (Binta) for being a diviner, Saran would possibly kill his own son, too.



Inan's most powerful, haunting memory involves choosing to follow his father's commands over his own sense of right and wrong. The memory also shows again that Saran conflates the ability to commit violence with one's strength, and even leadership abilities.



CHAPTER TWENTY

The group runs through the temple's passageways, Tzain carrying a weakened Zélie. As they break outside, Zélie is overwhelmed by the magic she can now sense thrumming all around. Zélie, Tzain, Amari and Nailah creep across a rickety bridge as Lekan holds off Inan and the guards with powerful magic. As Zélie is crossing the bridge, it snaps, forcing her to climb up the planks towards Tzain. As she is about to reach him, the remaining rope snaps, and Zélie plummets.

Suddenly, Zélie finds herself lifted by white light—Lekan's magic. But while he is turned towards her, Admiral Kaea plunges her sword into his heart.

Although Zélie's powers still feel new and foreign to her, in Lekan she sees an example of someone using their powers for good, to support other diviners and help preserve diviner traditions.



Lekan sacrifices himself for Zélie, emphasizing his belief that she must go on to perform the ritual and save the diviners.



CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Having witnessed magic for the first time, Inan stands shocked. He feels that he finally understands Saran. He knows Orisha cannot survive if that kind of power exists—but, he also thinks he may be able to harness magic to get the job done. He reminds himself of his father's words, that duty must come before all else. For the first time, Inan allows his magic to unfurl. With it, he sees visions of Lekan's life in the temple.

Admiral Kaea approaches, and Inan convinces her that they should rebuild the bridge and pursue Zélie and Amari. Privately, Inan thinks that he will explore the temple to try to amplify his magic and aid their plan.

Having observed firsthand the true extent of the power of magic, Inan now understands his father's fear and his desire to stamp out magic. Saran perceives magic as a power imbalance threatening his rule and the stability of Orisha. Inan now hopes to harness his own power in the service of suppressing others, much as Saran has done. Using his father's mantra is a way for Inan to justify his loyalty to his family and his role as prince while ignoring his own conscience. Seeing Lekan's life unfold gives Inan a glimpse into the sense of community and tradition provided by the maji, but Inan rejects that, focused only on the distribution of power.



Inan continues to keep his powers a secret because of the prejudice against diviners. His only thought is to destroy them, and with them, the magic within himself.



CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Amari, Tzain, and Zélie have been traversing the desert for days now. As they walk, Amari remembers dreaming with Binta about traveling the world. She remembers that her father warned her that Grounders, diviners with power over the earth, filled the desert with danger. But Binta told her that the Grounders used magic to make settlements out of sand.

In the differing accounts of the Grounders, there is more evidence of Saran's fear and prejudice. In order to cast diviners as a dangerous enemy worthy of suppression, his every association to the diviners was grounded in fear and violence. Amari now questions her family's doctrine because she has formed important connections that extend beyond her immediate relatives.



Now those settlements are gone, but many still make their way across the desert to Ibeji. Zélie and Amari split off, looking for food. They are shocked to see the streets full of laborers, most of them young. They look half-starved. Amari is struck by her privileged life in the palace, where she sipped tea while others suffered deeply. She sees King Saran's royal seal etched into the wall, depicting a **snow leopard**.

Zélie and Amari start to fill their canteens at a fountain, but a guard slashes his sword down to stop them. He tells them that the cost for a cup of water is a gold piece, calling Zélie a maggot as he does. Though Amari tries to hold her back, Zélie is outraged. She takes her full canteen over to a girl in the stocks, urging her to quickly drink.

Zélie asks the girl why so many laborers are there. She tells them the nobles send them to compete in a vast arena, where they fight for a precious relic. The relic, she says, is like a great stone.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Tzain, Amari, and Zélie go to the arena that evening. Zélie can feel many deceased spirits around them. As the competition is about to begin, floodgates open to let the arena fill with a huge wave of water. Ten wooden ships float in, each carrying a noble captain and a crew of divîner laborers. Among them is the girl who accepted water from Zélie outside. An announcer holds up the prize—the sunstone. In two months of fighting, so far, there has been no winner—every night, everyone dies. As the competition begins, the pain of each death rips into Zélie. Once again, there are no survivors.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Inan wanders through Chândomblé, experiencing visions of Lekan's life. He enters the room decorated with murals of the gods and is shocked by their beauty. Saran always said that the gods were weak and immaterial, but here they appear beautiful and strong.

Like Illorin, Ibeji is not a place of privilege, and it highlights the economic inequality that accompanies social inequality in the kingdom. Most diviners here are laborers, showing how the kingdom has institutionalized the exploitation of labor from those it deems less valuable. Traveling to new places and observing the experiences of others helps Amari see the problems with her family and question the justness of their rule.



Further codifying the economic prejudice in the city, most who work there cannot even afford to drink the water they need to survive. The guards openly use slurs to refer to diviners, showing how little they value diviners' lives or consider them worthy of protection. As usual, Zélie does not hesitate to put herself at risk in the name of standing up to a larger injustice.



Diviners are seen as so disposable in this city that they are made to fight for the death as entertainment for those more privileged than them.



Spectators are able to enjoy the grim competition because the kingdom and in Orïshan society at large have dehumanized diviners. The fact that the ships are captained by nobles emphasizes this point, showing that those with the power to make decisions and pit the diviners against one another are chosen by birth and class. Having seen this slaughter night after night, the spectators are desensitized to violence and even large-scale death. There are many in the kingdom who profit off of violence, and those who run the stadium are among them.



Because of his fear and hatred, Saran cast the diviners as evil and dangerous, lacking morality and culture. That casting makes it easier for Saran to oppress them. However, Inan begins to see otherwise. He also sees that the stories and beauty associated with the gods are part of what made the diviners powerful.



When he comes to the portrait of Orí, the god of mind, spirit, and dreams, Inan realizes that this is his patron god. He shouts at the portrait in anger, vowing that his magic will be magic's undoing. More committed than ever to fighting magic, he closes his eyes and gives in to his own powers.

The diviners' traditions offers strength and a sense of belonging, but Inan's hatred of runs so deep that he rejects that possibility.



CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Zélie, Amari, and Tzain sneak into the backstage area of the arena. Zélie imagines bringing back a group of Grounders to exact revenge on the whole city. She can sense that the sunstone is nearby.

Using their powers, diviners are potentially able to exert outside power and destruction, killing large numbers of people in an instant. It is tempting to think about using this power of violence to enact revenge on those who have oppressed and abused the diviners for so long.



With much effort, the three break open the lock on the door to the sunstone. But just as they do, a young diviner boy dashes by, followed by a group of guards. When they see the door open, they start to beat him violently. Tzain tries to hold Zélie back, but she bursts out of their hiding place to stop the beating.

As she often does, Zélie chooses to put herself and her friends at risk in order to fight injustice, despite warnings from her family members.



The guards deliver a final, killing blow to the boy, but oddly, Zélie can't feel his spirit. Forcing her gaze back on the guards and the announcer, she says that they want to compete in tomorrow night's games.

The guards casually hurt and kill diviners because Orishan society has determined that diviner lives are worthless. The guards know they will not be punished for hurting a diviner, as his death is meaningless in Saran's kingdom.



Outside town, Amari and Tzain argue that Zélie's plan will never work. But she has a secret weapon—she says she can learn an incantation to reanimate the dead as soldiers, a spell her mother performed many times.

Zélie's can draw a special kind of strength from her magic: not only does it connect her to the gods and to other magic users, but it also connects her to her mother, whom Zélie sorely misses. Now that Zélie can do the same kind of magic that her mother could, it's almost as if she can turn to her mother for advice in times of difficulty.



Zélie practices the spell unsuccessfully for many hours. She feels abandoned by the gods, as well as the clan scholars who could have helped her before the Raid.

In moments of difficulty, Zélie finds it hard to maintain her faith in the gods. It is difficult to understand why they seem to help her at some moments and abandon her in others. Zélie's frustration with the gods echoes and feeds her frustration with the injustices of the real world, where so many that could have helped her have been killed.



Zélie focuses on the girl she offered water to. As the girl died, Zélie was able to see some of her memories. By focusing on them now, Zélie conjures the form of the girl in sand.

Zélie is able to reconnect to her magic by focusing on that which is most important to her: overturning the injustice that led to the death of so many innocent people, like the girl Zélie met earlier.



CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Inan finds himself back in the dreamscape of reeds. He feels overwhelmed by a sense of peace, but he fights it back. He must focus on his mission. He looks at the sênet **pawn** Saran gave him, a reminder to stay focused and kill Zélie.

Inan is actively fighting to suppress his own instincts and desires in favor of fitting in with his family and pleasing his father. The sênet pawn serves as a reminder to always put his father's wishes first, even when doing so means painfully suppressing an increasingly important part of himself.



By imagining Zélie, Inan is able to summon her to the dream space. Zélie taunts him, asking if he's proud that his father, the king, destroyed Chândomblé. He fights back the shame he feels, reminding himself, "duty before self." Zélie reminds him that King Saran will kill Inan when he discovers his identity.

Zélie drives home the increasing sense of alienation that Inan feels from his father. He knows that his father's murderous regime is wrong, and the thought brings him pain. Inan works to ignore that feeling, trying to justify his and his father's actions by convincing himself that they are simply putting the kingdom first. Zélie's sharp comments reveal that Saran's prejudice against diviners is so intense, that he will not hesitate to kill his son if he finds out his identity.



Inan and Zélie realize that as Zélie steps away from him, new reeds sprout under her feet. Zélie begins to run, making not just reeds but ferns and trees sprout in her wake. Ignoring Inan's protests, she runs until she stands at the edge of a waterfall overlooking a lake. Zélie leaps into the water, smiling. Inan is distracted by her smile and her body.

Because of his beliefs about diviners—beliefs doubtless shaped by his father's attitudes—Inan never realized that magic could be beautiful and creative, seeing it only as a dark and destructive force. In much the same way, he is surprised to notice the beauty of Zélie herself.



Zélie says that if water cost Inan a gold piece per cup, he'd want to swim, too. From that accidental hint, Inan realizes that she must be in Ibeji.

The astronomical cost of water in Ibeji, still a shock to Zélie, is evidence of the economic oppression faced by diviners and other commoners.



Inan comes out of the dream to find Kaea staring at him, sword outstretched. She just observed as he had a vision, clearly using magic. Shaking, Kaea asks how long he's been a maji. Clearly terrified, she accuses him of being a traitor. Inan pleads that he's still him, and on her side.

Even though Kaea and Inan are close allies, when she realizes that he can use magic, she immediately assumes he is an enemy who must be destroyed.



Calming slightly, Kaea says that the new bridge is complete and that she will take a team to track Amari. Inan, she says, is a liability. She must force him to return to the King, because it is her duty.

Kaea does not believe Inan and his magic are assets to their mission. Instead, she fears him. Like Inan, she is also blindly loyal to Saran and automatically does what she believes he would want, rather than listening to Inan's appeals.



Panicked, Inan tackles her. Kaea screams for help, saying that Inan is a maji. Without meaning to, Inan sends turquoise energy swirling around her head. He tries to release her, but can't. Blood trickles from Kaea's ears. She collapses to the ground and utters one last word: maggot. Her hair is full of turquoise crystals, a mark of Inan's magic. Inan knows his father will never forgive him now.

Kaea's fear caused her to threaten Inan, but now his fear has led him to attack her. This illustrates that fear, prejudice, and violence are cyclical. Kaea's dying word, "maggot," shows how deep the hatred for maji runs in Orisha.



CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Amari, Tzain, and Zélie board their boat. Secretly, Amari prays they won't have to compete. The crew of laborers assigned to them is also wary, suspecting that they will simply try to win the prize and then kill the crew. Mustering her courage, Amari steps forward and tells them that she wants them all to live. The strongest man comes forward and says he is willing to try.

Amari feels weak in some moments because she does not want to hurt others or risk getting hurt herself. At the same time, she is strong in that she can muster the courage to lead and inspire others, as she does in this moment on the ship.



CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Everyone on the boat gets in position. Tzain tells Amari that she doesn't have to fight. She's tempted, but, thinking of Binta, Amari swallows her fear and says she wants to stay. The boats surge into the arena. There are three times as many boats as the day before. She wonders if her father, King Saran, knows or cares about these brutal games.

Amari feels weak because she does not want to fight, but she draws strength from another source. Amari feels she has a responsibility to Binta, a thought she holds onto for motivation. Amari also feels more distant from her family than ever, thinking about how they have turned a blind eye to the slaughter she is about to witness. Her responsibility to her true friend is far more important than her connection to her father.



CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Overwhelmed by the number of boats, Zélie feels like she's losing faith in herself. Tzain looks into her eyes and says that their mother was strong, and so is Zélie. Gathering her strength, she summons an animation of a spirit and commands it to help take down a nearby ship, wishing her mother could see her.

Zélie's faith wavers when she is faced by extremely difficult situations. But, once again, her connection to her mother strengthens her faith and gives her confidence in her abilities.



CHAPTER THIRTY

Amari is frozen in the chaos. Even though her father trained her to fight, she feels motionless and weak. As Amari cowers, Tzain blocks an attack aimed at her, earning a slash on the arm in the process. He yells at her to get out of the way. She is full of shame. Then, their ship begins to sink.

Amari's father always made clear to her that the ability to fight is the only marker of strength. Now, faced with a fight she does not want to join, Amari can't help but feel weak and useless.



CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Zélie's magic is beginning to dwindle, but she knows she must save Amari and Tzain. Knowing she is disobeying her mother's wishes, she decides to use blood magic to save the others. She bites into her hand to release some blood, and with it, a swirl of powerful, intensely draining magic.

The diviners' traditions require trade-offs and even literal sacrifices. In this case, the price of power is intense pain. In addition, choosing to use this dangerous magic to help others also means disobeying her mother's wishes, which implies that in life, Zélie's mother only used her powers for good.



An army of reanimated spirits do Zélie's bidding, but, at the same time, she feels as if her skin is being torn apart. She thinks of her mother as water rushes into her lungs.

In order to use her power and do what she thinks is right, Zélie must pay the dual price of sacrificing her body and ignoring her mother's desires.



CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Only two ships are left. But when Zélie doesn't surface, Tzain leaps overboard and drags her to the surface. As the other ship's crew boards theirs, Amari thinks again of her father's training. All she wants is for this fighting to end.

As always, Tzain's first priority is the protection of his family above all else. Amari's father valued the ability to fight and kill, but Amari cannot make herself feel the same. She simply wants to stop the violence around her.



The captain of the other ship comes running forward, preparing to attack Zélie. Before she realizes what she's doing, Amari stabs the captain. Everything goes silent, and then the announcer says that they have won.

Even though she has been feeling weak and unable to fight, when it is absolutely necessary to use violence to protect others and do what is right, Amari is capable of fighting.



CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

The thrill of victory is tainted by the thought of all those who died in the competition, many of whom perished at Zélie and Tzain's own hands. In Amari, who killed the other captain to save her, Zélie sees a warrior for the first time.

Zélie, Tzain, and Amari want to see an end to needless suffering, especially the deaths of so many innocent diviners. But in their pursuit of that goal, they have just killed many diviners. The pursuit of peace has its own extremely difficult costs. Although she abhors that kind of violence, Zélie does think of Amari's newly demonstrated ability to kill as an impressive asset.



The announcer presents them with the glowing sunstone. Touching it fills Zélie with a surge of warmth and energy. She knows that she could summon unlimited animations and take down the announcer and the bloodthirsty spectators—but she knows it's not what the gods would want.

Zélie considers using her powers to exact violence on all those who have harmed the diviners for so long, but she recognizes that such an action would not bring the peace she hopes for.



CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

That night, the three teenagers are hailed as heroes in the city. Zélie is called “The Immortal,” Tzain “The Commander,” and Amari “The Lionaire.” Amari feels like an imposter. She is disturbed by the fact that she killed someone, an echo of King Saran’s commands.

On the one hand, when Amari didn't want to fight, she felt weak and helpless. But now that she has actually killed, Amari feels that she has gone against her moral compass and has wrongly contributed to the already significant body count in the struggle for power in Orisha.



Amari also feels heartened that they are closer to bringing back magic and to avenging Binta. Tzain tries to convince Amari that she should go home to avoid having to kill again. But thinking about how she's followed her family's orders all her life, Amari rejects his suggestion. She tells him she wants to stay, to fight for what's right. She's also heartened when he says that he wants her to stay, too.

Amari also recognizes that in certain moments violence is warranted, especially in a fight to bring justice and peace. Hoping to continue on the path of fighting for what she believes is right rather than following her father's wishes, Amari decides to stay and help Tzain and Zélie.



CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Inan travels alone through the desert, missing Kaea. He sends a message home that maji killed Kaea. He can't stop thinking of Kaea's last word, “maggot.” He tries to push thoughts of her aside, focusing on his quest to end magic.

Kaea's final word stings because it links Inan to the people he has reviled and denigrated his entire life. It drives home the need for him to complete his self-assigned mission.



Inan arrives in Ibeji, where the townspeople are celebrating. He senses that Zélie is close. He finds a man and presses his sword to the man's throat, demanding information.

Where he once hesitated or relied on others, Inan doesn't hesitate now to use violence to get what he wants. He has seen how effective it can be, and, as his mission intensifies, he feels less guilt about hurting others.



CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

Zélie, Tzain, and Amari travel through the lush Gombe River Valley. They come upon a river and take a moment to splash in it, laughing and playing. Suddenly, the river is gone—for just a moment, Zélie is in Inan's dreamscape. When she returns to reality, she tries to warn her friends that Inan is near.

When Zélie, Tzain, and Amari experience just a moment of lighthearted fun, it emphasizes how miserable and afraid they have been for so long. The prejudice and inequality in Orishan society generates fear and prevents people from leading normal, happy lives.



Zélie's warning comes too late: Inan is speeding towards them on a panthenaire. They prepare to escape, but Zélie suddenly realizes he has no guards. He's alone, and she can fight him. She realizes that trying to suppress his powers has weakened him.

Amari pushes past Zélie and approaches Inan. She says that they won't hurt each other, and that fear of magic is their father's burden, not theirs. She says that they can make their own decisions for themselves, as well as for the future of Orisha.

Inan pushes Amari aside and lunges for Zélie. He says that killing her will kill the magic within him, too. They begin to spar.

Zélie sees that placing his loyalty to his father above his new identity has taken a toll on Inan. He is tired from fighting himself. Although Tzain and Amari beg Zélie to focus on escape, she thinks once again that she may be able to right a larger wrong if she lingers behind to fight rather than running to safety with her family.



In the time since she left the palace, Amari has changed a lot. She has realized that it is possible to reject her father's teachings and follow her own path towards what is right. She has begun to understand his prejudices and fears, and see how to overcome them, by learning more about the many ways that magic can be used. She encourages Inan to make the same liberating choices.



However, Inan is unable to break free of his father's thrall, and the strong prejudice against magic that comes with it. He believes the only way to secure the future of the kingdom is to keep the diviners oppressed and powerless.



CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

Amari and Tzain watch helplessly while their siblings fight. As they follow Inan and Zélie through the jungle, they are suddenly caught up in nets. Amari tries to fight back, but a cloth is pressed to her face, and she blacks out.

Amari and Tzain are both motivated by a desire to protect their family members, specifically their siblings.



CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

Zélie hears Amari's screams, and she and Inan freeze midway through their fight. Realizing Tzain has been taken as well, Zélie takes off in pursuit of Inan and both of their siblings. Suddenly, she finds herself tangled in ropes as two masked figures start dragging her away. Inan fights them both off. He knocks one of the masked boys unconscious, and the boy falls at his feet. Then, blade raised, Inan turns to Zélie.

Although Zélie and Inan are in the midst of an extremely important fight, when they realize their siblings are in trouble, they fly to their aid. They are both extremely loyal to and protective of their siblings.



CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

Inan feels his goal of killing Zélie tantalizingly close. He presses down on her arms and raises his sword, preparing to plunge it into her heart. But then his magic rips through him, showing him a powerful vision of Zélie's life. He sees the incredible pain his father's rule caused Zélie.

Inan is committed to killing Zélie because it is what his father would want, and Inan also thinks that killing Zélie will somehow free him from the magic that plagues him. Saran thinks that all diviners, and all magic, are evil, values he has instilled in Inan again and again. However, when Inan sees the other side of the story—the human cost of Saran's hatred, and the actual feelings of an innocent diviner—he questions his loyalty and his beliefs.



King Saran's instructions ring in Inan's ears. But with this new perspective, he can't bear to bring more death in his father's name. Instead he, slashes off Zélie's restraints. Realizing Tzain and Amari are gone, they both feel shattered and collapse on the ground.

Now that he has seen the actual impact of his father's prejudice, Inan can't bring himself to continue following his father's orders.



CHAPTER FORTY

Zélie is awash with guilt. If she hadn't tried to fight Inan, none of this would have happened. Tzain is always paying for her mistakes. She is filled with determination to defend her family. She sees Inan leaning winded against a tree. She can't understand why he's suppressing his magic, or why he's not trying to fight her.

Zélie was trying to do the right thing by fighting Inan. She hoped that in fighting him, she would be one step closer to overthrowing the oppressive regime and protecting all diviners. But, as she was occupied, her family was in danger. Now, she feels that in trying to do the right thing, she actually betrayed her family.



Zélie is determined to find Tzain as quickly as possible. She slams her staff against the hand of the masked boy, crushing his bones, and she yells for him to tell her where Tzain is. She slashes and stabs at him with her dagger, threatening to kill him if she doesn't get information. Inan yells at her to stop.

In this moment, all Zélie can think of is finding and protecting her brother. Once again, Zélie uses violence to combat violence. Here, she justifies the use of violence because she is doing it to try to protect her family.



CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

Inan grabs Zélie's hand and feels magic thrumming in his skin. Now that he's seen her past, he can't take his eyes off of Zélie. He suddenly knows he cannot be a king like his father, Saran. His father is everything he doesn't want to be.

Inan's new awareness of Zélie's experiences has given him a deep sense of empathy and powerfully reshaped how he sees the world and his role in it. He realizes that he does not want to cause the pain that his father caused, and, for the first time, sees that he can choose another path.



Inan tells Zélie they have to work together to save their siblings. Zélie does not want to trust him, but he points out that she has no choice. Zélie lifts the bloodied, masked boy and Inan asks again where their siblings have been taken.

Zélie is conflicted. She wants to protect her family, and reasonably, sees Inan as a threat to herself and her family. But because their interests are temporarily aligned, working with Inan may actually be the best way to fulfil her responsibility to protect her family.



CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

Amari awakens to find she is blindfolded and tied to a tree. A diviner boy rips off her blindfold; behind him, she sees Tzain, also tied to a tree and bloodied. The boy, Kwame, interrogates Amari about who they are. She tells him the truth, but he doesn't believe her. She realizes that Kwame has already touched the scroll, and can use his magic as a result. Kwame moves towards Tzain, threatening to hurt him if Amari doesn't tell the truth.

Amari is a noble, and, like all nobles, she was raised to hate and abuse diviners. Although Amari happens to be different, Kwame is reasonably distrustful of her. Like other characters in the story, he uses the threat of violence to try to protect himself and his friends.



A young diviner girl named Zu enters. She reprimands Kwame and the others for taking hostages and leaving one of their friends behind. She orders them to bring Tzain to get cleaned and bandaged, but says Amari will stay right where she is.

The young diviners have formed a strong community, working together and doing their best to ensure that no one gets left behind. They seem to trust Zu's authority. These diviners are an example of a strong network that transcends the bonds of blood family.



CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

Zélie and Inan trudge through the forest, following a series of hidden symbols at the direction of the boy they have captured. Inan fights with all his energy to keep his magic suppressed. In flashes, he sees the pain and fear of Zélie's life, as well as moments of beauty. He wonders what she would see in his life.

Inan continues to fight his magic, which shows that he's still holding on to his family's expectations. Giving in to his magic pushes him further away from his father in two ways: not only does magic mark him as something his father would hate, but it also allows Inan to see more glimpses of Zélie's past, which reveal how destructive Saran has been.



They come upon a grove of trees in the valley, arranged in the symbol of the outlaws. Zélie wants to attack immediately, but Inan warns against it. There are masked soldiers stationed all around the camp.

Zélie is focused on finding her brother and believes that an all-out attack will be the best way to achieve that.



They argue about how to proceed. Inan wants to call guards from a nearby town, but Zélie scoffs, saying the guards would kill them both, as they are diviners. Instead, she says she will learn how to summon enough animations to fight for them.

Inan does not fully understand what life is like for Zélie and people like her in Orisha. Because of the prejudice against diviners, they fear the guards who should be serving to protect them.



CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

Zélie tries desperately to summon enough animations to take down the guards, but Inan easily takes them down, demonstrating that they won't be enough. She knows that using blood magic or the sunstone would make her stronger—but she fears what would happen if she tried blood magic again, and she doesn't want to reveal the sunstone to Inan.

Zélie says that Inan should use his own magic to attack, but he refuses, panicked. He says that he must keep his magic secret to save Orisha, because it is the root of all Orisha's problems. But she counters that it is King Saran, not magic, that causes so much suffering. Inan maintains that his father did the right thing by taking magic away.

Zélie has another perspective: she says that lack of power has led to the maji's oppression. Without power, the monarch is free to see and treat them like maggots. Inan says more magic, meaning more power, will only intensify the conflict. Zélie hits him with a hard truth: because of the guards, she lives in constant fear.

Magic can be extremely frustrating and disheartening. In moments like these, Zélie's connection to the gods only makes her feel more alone. She feels abandoned by the gods, alienated from Inan, and doesn't know where to turn.



Inan's loyalty to his father is evident in his stubborn confidence in his father's teachings. Despite personally witnessing and possessing magic, Inan continues to believe his father's deeply held prejudice that all magic is evil and bad. By refusing to use his powers, Inan is actively standing in his own way.



Zélie explains the way that power works in the monarchy: in order to keep control, the monarchy resorts to violence, fearmongering, and the dehumanization of its own subjects. In an ostensible bid to bring peace, the monarchy has instead seized absolute power and actively worked to keep diviners living in fear.



CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

Inan feels Zélie's pain sharply, causing him to question his father again. Zélie says that the only possible salvation from tyranny is the redistribution of power. As she walks away, Inan realizes he will never truly understand her pain.

The empathy that Inan feels because of his magic connection with Zélie gives him a new perspective on his father, showing him that his father may not be the just ruler Inan imagines him to be. Zélie sees that the only way to combat oppression is by abolishing the massive power imbalance that Saran has created.



CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

Amari and Tzain are still tied up in a tent. There are only a few days left until the solstice. Zu enters the tent and, wordlessly, uses Healer magic to heal Tzain's wounds. Amari tries to tell her story and again Zu does not believe her. Amari realizes they must be in a settlement of diviners who had their powers awakened by the scroll, and somehow managed not to be killed by Admiral Kaea.

Kaea, like Saran, killed most of the diviners she encountered with the scroll because she believed that they would all use their magic for evil. Zu's use of magic to heal someone she considers an enemy shows that violence is not the only way to use magic, and that evil is, of course, not the primary characteristic of maji.



Zu says that though she can't remember the Raid, she can remember the horror of watching her family cut down by Kaea after the scroll resurfaced. Because Amari is a noble, Zu distrusts her. Zu calls Kwame back into the tent to start the interrogation in earnest.

Saran's violence continues to leave a lasting mark on the citizens of Orïsha, keeping them fearful. Like Zélie, Zu is haunted by the memory of her lost family. But, she also knows the bitter truth that she must sometimes use violence herself for protection and to fight for what she believes in.



CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

Inan calls after Zélie, looking for her. He feels hopeless—he realizes now that instead of being the one to fix Orïsha, he is seemingly inextricable from the problem. Flooded by visions of Zélie's memories of the Raid, he remembers the admiration he once had for his King Saran's strength.

Inan continues to question his father's ways, realizing that he has been complicit in the pain that his father caused. He believed that being loyal to his father was the same as putting Orïsha's best interests at heart, but once again, he feels confused about if this is actually the case.



Zélie returns and says, reluctantly, that she thinks they should work together. She reveals the sunstone. Inan says that he hates the way his magic makes him feel—he feels at war with himself, and it hurts him. Zélie says that he's causing that very pain by fighting who he is. Even the **pawn** that he carries as a reminder of his father, King Saran, is inflicting more than emotional harm. It's made of majacite, a special metal that burns maji.

Inan feels that his magic puts him at war with himself when in fact, his adherence to his father's hatred of magic is what's causing him pain. The pawn, or game piece, shows how Inan was unwittingly hurting himself by clinging to his father's hatred for diviners.



Inan remembers how he got the **pawn**. He and his father, King Saran, used to play sênet every week before the Raid, a special time when his father passed on his wisdom. After the Raid, Inan tried to get his father to play a game of sênet with him. The King threw the board to the ground, scattering pieces. Inan pocketed the pawn. Now, it fills him with shame.

As he gains more perspective on his father's cruelty, Inan is able to look back and see the sinister undertones in some of his memories. His father has the capacity to be cold and cruel, as he was on that day. He realizes he is ashamed of his father's harsh actions.



Zélie says that Inan is holding out loyalty to someone who will always hate him for who he is. Inan tosses the **pawn** aside, realizing Saran's lies. Though magic is dangerous, the way his father has tried to eradicate it has only brought more danger and violence. He tells Zélie that he won't stand in the way of their quest to bring back magic.

Inan finally breaks away from his father's teachings and decides to follow his own sense of what is right and wrong. He recognizes now that his father's actions were (and still are) motivated by a deeply held prejudice against diviners, which allowed him to dehumanize and demonize them. Inan also sees that Saran has trapped the kingdom in a cycle of fear and destruction. He hopes that by breaking away from his father's beliefs, he may be able to prevent more pain.



CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

As Zélie and Inan prepare to attack the encampment, Zélie remembers the self-hatred she experienced after the Raid. She blamed her mother and magic for the tragedy. In time, she came to see the beauty in magic, and decided to hold on to her mother's teachings. But it was difficult to hold onto the feeling that magic was beautiful in the face of Saran's hatred.

Inan walks towards the fortress and holds out the sunstone, calling to the guards that he wants to trade it. As more and more masked people emerge from the trees and the fort, Zélie dashes forward and Inan throws her the sunstone. It fills her with energy and visions of Oya. An army of animations swirl out of the ground.

The widespread, institutionalized prejudice against the diviners has pernicious effects, damaging diviners' senses of esteem and self-worth. Zélie has realized that the culture of the diviners can serve as a connection to her mother, one of the reasons it is so valuable.



Zélie is most powerful when she feels most closely connected to the gods. Even though her faith can feel distant in times of trouble, it can also be a source of strength and support.



CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

As Kwame throws questions at Amari, he punches and stabs Tzain. Amari cries, thinking of Binta and others who have suffered for her.

Suddenly, another girl rushes in to tell them the encampment is under attack. After Kwame runs out of the tent, Amari breaks her restraints, thinking she should have fought harder when she was in the palace.

The girl rushes back in, and Amari wrestles her to the ground. She is about to strike her with the bone dagger, but she thinks of all the pain Saran's violence has brought. She cannot be like him. Instead, she knocks the girl unconscious. Amari braces Tzain against her, and pulls him out of the tent.

Amari guiltily feels like her quest to bring peace has resulted in only more violence so far.



Amari regrets that she didn't rebel sooner, before more blood was shed. She has new perspective on the time she spent reluctantly acquiescing to her parents' demands.



Amari was angered and saddened by the violence that had been committed in her name, but when the moment came, she was almost overwhelmed by a desire to strike. Violence can be cyclical in that way, exciting both regret and a desire for revenge. However, Amari also felt the desire to differentiate herself from her bloodthirsty father—so, she chose to turn away from his teaching and hold back from hurting someone.



CHAPTER FIFTY

Inan and Zélie fight amidst the crowd of animations. Kwame runs out of the encampment's gate, his hands ablaze. He is a Burner, like the maji who incinerated Saran's first family. As Zélie drops the sunstone, the Burner catches it, and his entire body erupts in flame.

Kwame, like the diviners who killed Saran's first family, has an ability which is overtly dangerous. He provides a glimpse into how dangerous and frightening it would be if diviners decided to use their powers for evil. Whether that fear is founded or not, it is one of the justifications Saran has used for the oppression of diviners. This imbalance of power, in which some have the ability to use destructive magic, can drive violence.



Melting the ground around him, he stalks towards Zélie and prepares to strike her with a jet of fire. Inan rushes forward to counter with magic of his own, but at that moment, a girl yells for everyone to stop and says that Inan and Zélie are with them. The Burner freezes in his tracks, and lets his fire go out.

Inan was prepared to use violent magic of his own in retaliation, but cooler heads prevailed. Even though Kwame has the ability to hurt others, he is also loyal and logical, diminishing the concern that he would use his power for evil.



CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

As they enter the encampment, Zélie is surprised to see a thriving, hidden community of diviners. She is also confused that Inan tried to save her. She feels like she's seeing him in a new light. Zu heals the wounds that Zélie acquired in the battle outside.

Zélie has never seen a thriving divîner encampment before, and it is eye opening. She sees how the diviners support each other, serving almost like an extended family. Their shared struggles and beliefs and abilities bring them together. Zélie also sees that Inan is breaking away from his father's influence, demonstrated by the fact that he was prepared to fight for her, rather than against her.



Questions tumble out of Zélie, but then Amari stumbles in with Tzain holding onto her for support. As she heals him, Zu begins to explain that she and a few others barely escaped after Saran attacked. Inan and Amari exchange guilty looks.

Both Inan and Amari see yet another example of the pain their father has caused in the kingdom. Seeing these personal impacts makes both of them feel less loyal to their father and more guilty even to be associated with him, because they know his actions do not align with their own senses of right and wrong.



Crying, Zu apologizes for the hurt she inflicted on Tzain. She felt as if she had no choice. Zélie wants to be angry, but she knows that she's no better. She would have killed the masked boy if Inan hadn't stopped her. She knows they were just fighting to keep their people safe. Zu is still crying, and Zélie pulls her into an embrace. They forgive each other, and Zu and her friends volunteer to help in the quest.

Zélie sees that both sides are guilty of committing needless violence. In an effort to protect themselves and their friends, both Zu and Zélie hurt innocent people. Rather than continuing to be angry or continuing to fight, Zélie and Zu agree to focus on the common, larger enemy.



But first, says Zu, they should hold the Àyojo festival, a traditional celebration of the gods. She suggests they could have each divîner touch the scroll, unleashing their powers. The suggestion makes Zélie hesitate. Even though the restoration of magic has long been her goal, now she worries about the potential for violence and for the sunstone to fall into the wrong hands. Reluctantly, she agrees.

Zu's commitment to divîner traditions—even though they are outlawed—is one of the things that has made the encampment such a thriving, supportive community. Having seen firsthand how dangerous magic can be, Zélie now begins to question whether restoring magic is really the right thing. She worries that the reintroduction of that kind of power will only lead to more violence and killing. She is tempted to withhold power to try to prevent more death.



Tzain confronts Inan, saying that he will not trust him. When Zélie tries to convince him, Tzain says she's stupid for trusting the person who burned their village and tried to kill her. He says that Zélie is always making mistakes.

Tzain has a clear set of priorities, and his family and community are at the top. He feels responsibility to his people above all else. For this reason, he cannot accept Inan as an ally, and chastises Zélie for doing so.



CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO

Outside the tent, Inan gives Amari her headdress, which he's been carrying with him since Sokoto. They talk about his new status as a maji and the fact that Saran would kill Inan if he knew. Amari asks how she can trust Inan after all he's done in their father's name. He says he will earn her trust. Amari says she will try, but that her loyalties are with Zélie and her people now. She will fight him for them, if need be.

After seeing so much suffering in the kingdom and working closely with Zélie and Tzain, Amari no longer feels loyal to Saran. She has chosen her own path, and encourages her brother to do the same. After all, because of Saran's extreme prejudice against diviners, he will doubtless murder his own son if Inan's powers are revealed.



CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE

The next day, the camp is abuzz with preparations for the celebration. The sight of so many happy diviners fills Zélie with joy.

Zélie sees that the community of diviners are able to celebrate their traditions and support one another. It is one of the first times she has seen how the traditions and kinship of the diviners can bring joy rather than pain.



A stranger bumps into Zélie. He is clearly a foreigner, the first Zélie has ever met, and she is delighted and curious. Flirting, he tells her she's beautiful. His name is Roën. As Roën slips away, Inan stops him and tells him to return Zélie's compacted staff, which he pickpocketed when they bumped into each other. Zélie shudders to think of losing the staff, her only connection to home.

Zélie's staff is important to her because it reminds her of her commitment to protect her family. The thought of losing that connection is painful. Meanwhile, Roën's pickpocketing suggests that not all diviners in the camp have pure intentions.



Zélie offers to help Inan learn how to control his magic, which he is still suppressing. Sitting by the river, Zélie asks Inan about his magic. She tells him that the gods are always there, even in the darkest times, and it's fine to appeal to them for help and guidance. Suddenly, they are both in Inan's dreamscape—for the first time, not as enemies.

Zélie encourages Inan to allow himself to be himself and stop ignoring his magic because of his father. It is important for him to explore his identity, rather than suppressing it out of fear of his father. Zélie also explains the way that faith—both in gods and magic—can provide a sense of comfort and community, even when things seem hopeless. Zélie herself demonstrated that turning towards these beliefs will help Inan connect with others who can support him,



CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR

Zélie and Inan swim in the cool lake in the dreamscape. Zélie talks about living in the lakeside town of Ibadan before the Raid, and then in Ilorin, by the sea. He realizes he burned down her happiness. He says he'll rebuild the town when everything is over. She laughs bitterly, saying that Tzain believes Inan will kill her long before then.

Speaking with Zélie, Inan realizes the true impact of the violence he and the guards committed. Putting a personal face on the destruction drives home the actual human toll of Saran's policies. Another byproduct is that Zélie cannot bring herself to fully trust Inan, who she knows has been taught to hate her his entire life.



CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE

Zélie feels conflicted. She knows she shouldn't trust Inan, but she's also seen his kindness over the last couple of days. She realizes that he was able to see visions of her past. He says that seeing those memories made him realize how wrong his father, King Saran, is.

By seeing Zélie's own experiences and feeling the intensity of her pain, Inan has gained empathy for the diviners and learned to further question his father's ways.



Zélie begins to believe Inan really does want to change Orisha for the better, despite herself. Inan says he can't bear to see any more blood on his family's hands. Inan swims closer, and Zélie's heart pounds. He asks if she wants him to leave, and she says no. They begin to kiss.

Even though Tzain has warned her not to trust Inan, Zélie wants to follow her own heart, and maybe even be with him. Inan also wants to break away from his family, renouncing their past deeds. This shared desire brings them together.



Suddenly, Zélie and Inan are pulled violently out of the dream. Tzain throws Inan to the ground. Inan leaves for the camp, and Tzain yells at Zélie, asking how she can be so naive. He says Inan is the son of a killer—and a killer himself.

Tzain remains distrustful of Inan, linking him to Saran and the damage that Inan himself has already done. Tzain does not believe that Inan will choose a new path over loyalty to his father.



Tzain says that he's glad their mother didn't live to see Zélie sink to this level, and her magic erupts. Using her magic, she strikes his shoulder with an arrow-like shadow. Betrayed, Tzain storms away, ignoring her apologies and sobs.

To Tzain, Zélie has chosen her own desires and beliefs over loyalty to her family one too many times to be forgiven.



CHAPTER FIFTY-SIX

Zélie is devastated, but when she returns to the camp that evening, Amari brightly dresses her up for the celebration. With her sadness has returned a deep apprehension about sharing the scroll's magic. She pictures Tzain's fear when she struck him, and her own when Kwame was ignited.

Seeing the harm that magic can cause has made Zélie question whether reintroducing it will truly bring peace. She worries that bringing back magic might simply lead to more fighting, rather than its end.



Amari also gives Zélie a word of caution. She says she can see that Inan is infatuated with her, but she warns that his loyalty to their father is stronger. Despite her instincts, Zélie maintains that she trusts Inan now, and thinks that he has a good heart. Amari is overjoyed to think her brother is finally turning away from family, towards what is right.

Amari asks again why Zélie doesn't want to share the scroll. All Zélie can picture is destruction at the maji's hands. She says they need to establish control first, or people will get hurt.

Amari pulls Zélie outside, where the festival is in full swing. It takes Zélie's breath away. Seeing dances and hearing songs to celebrate the gods, Zélie feels like she's watching a community who can breathe again for the first time. It reminds her of her mother. Amari tells her that she is a part of this joy, and she shouldn't let anyone take this magic away.

CHAPTER FIFTY-SEVEN

Tzain seeks Amari out in the busy festival. They tease each other about spending a night together in a tent—of course, they were both tied up and being interrogated. Tzain pulls Amari into a circle of dancers, spinning her around. She feels happy and safe.

CHAPTER FIFTY-EIGHT

Inan watches Zélie dance with a child, thinking that she looks beautiful. He grabs her hand and pulls her away from the party, where Tzain won't see them. There is intense chemistry between them, but when he calls her "little Zél," she pulls away sharply. That was the name her mother called her.

Zélie is full of fear, thinking about the violence inflicted by the monarchy and the potential for violence that she now contains. Thinking of Kaea, Inan says that he, too, lost control of his magic and hurt someone he cared about. Zélie says that this kind of community of diviners is what she's always wanted, yet now she worries about what will happen if magic falls into the wrong hands. It's a similar fear to his own, but with her, he feels less afraid. He presses his lips to her neck and thinks that together, they don't need to be afraid of magic.

Much like Tzain, Amari worries that the loyalty Inan has for their father will overrule any newer pull he might feel towards acting against Saran. However, Zélie convinces her that Inan is actually turning towards what is right instead of blindly following his father.



Zélie worries that unchecked magic will cause yet another power imbalance, which will simply bring more violence and pain. She wonders if bringing back magic is truly the way to end the cycle of violence in the kingdom.



Diviners are united by more than just their abilities. They are also a strong community united by faith and traditions, like the festival. Zélie sees that the strength of that community outweighs the potential risk of violence. Through magic and tradition, diviners are connected to their gods, to one another, and to their ancestors, just as Zélie feels more connected to her mother.



Even though their families are enemies, Tzain and Amari have formed a strong—and potentially flirtatious—bond.



Zélie's desire for Inan conflicts with her loyalty to her family. She knows she is betraying Tzain by giving in to her desires. When Inan accidentally invokes her mother, it makes Zélie even more aware of the fact that she seems to be choosing her own desires over loyalty to her family.



Zélie feels trapped inside a self-perpetuating cycle of violence. She wants to stop the monarchy from being able to hurt so many people, but she worries that she is actually just introducing the potential for more pain. Both Zélie and Inan know from experience that magic can lead to more violence. At the same time, if magic was widespread, it would allow diviner communities to grow and thrive again, and it would possibly reverse Saran's oppressive regime.



CHAPTER FIFTY-NINE

Inan tells Zélie she should move to Lagos with him, and she bristles. He says that when she brings back magic, it will ignite a war—like the Raid happening over and over again. Magic, Zélie knows, will not bring peace—just a chance to fight back.

Inan thinks they can convince King Saran to give up his fear and violence toward the maji. He thinks they can unify Orïsha. Zélie is hopeful for a moment—but then she thinks, again, that magic is too dangerous. But Inan presents a compelling vision of peace, with maji working together to rebuild Orïsha. She wants to believe him, and they kiss.

Both Zélie and Inan no longer think that bringing magic will bring peace. They both know that it will continue the cycle of violence. However, while Inan thinks that there will just be endless, needless war, Zélie thinks that it will bring righteous violence, allowing the maji to fight back against the injustice of the monarchy and defend their people.



Inan knows that fear drives prejudice, and, in turn, violence. He believes that by removing this fear, he and Zélie can also remove the evils that result from it. He also believes magic can be used for good, rather than simply for violence, which is a sharp contrast from his earlier understanding of magic and the maji.



CHAPTER SIXTY

Tzain abruptly stops dancing with Amari, as he sees Inan kissing Zélie. When he sees Zélie kissing Inan back, Tzain storms away, gathering his belongings. He says he's tired of cleaning up Zélie's messes, and he's leaving.

Amari asks why Tzain can't forgive Zélie this time, and he explodes. Inan destroyed their home, killing innocent people, children. Now, Zélie is forgetting that and putting them all at risk, as well. Suddenly, horns sound. The King's men have arrived.

Tzain thinks again that Amari has selfishly chosen her own interests over the safety of herself and her family. He is tired of fighting to protect them both. He wants to strike out on his own rather than staying tethered to her and forced to grapple with her mistakes.



Not only does Inan believe that Zélie is selfishly ignoring the needs and safety of her family, but, he also points out, Inan has committed ruthless violence in the past and seems likely to do so again.



CHAPTER SIXTY-ONE

As Zélie and Inan kiss passionately, a horn blares. Soon, a horde of royal guards surrounds the camp, yelling for them to give up Zélie and the scroll, or die. Zu comes forward, saying that they have neither, and are simply gathered for a peaceful celebration. As she raises her hands in surrender, an arrow pierces her body. The guards begin their attack.

The guards cut down as many diviners as they can. Panicked, Zélie searches for Tzain. A guard slashes down the defenseless young boy Zélie danced with earlier. Kwame moves past Zélie and slashes open his own palm—preparing to use blood magic. His body explodes in flames, incinerating the camp and the guards in a wave of fiery death. The fire consumes Kwame as he uses his last moments to fight off the guards.

The guards will not be reasoned with, resorting immediately to violence. They make it clear that the only option is to fight back.



Because the guards began slaughtering children and innocent people, the diviners used their magic to fight back. Their use of magic to kill will doubtless be used as justification for calling magic dangerous, but its also clearly the only way they can defend themselves.



Because of Kwame's attack, many diviners escape. Zélie realizes that this violence, this use of magic, is the only way to truly fight back against the guards and show them they have strength. Amari and Tzain ride over on Nailah, calling to Zélie. But at that moment, someone else's hands grab Zélie away.

Even though Zélie is terrified by the violence she's witnessed, she realizes that justified and targeted violence is the only way to fight the oppression of the guards and, eventually, to bring peace.



CHAPTER SIXTY-TWO

Tzain and Amari search in vain for Zélie on the scorched, corpse-strewn field. Inan isn't there either, and Amari is forced to consider he may have betrayed them. Tzain breaks down, saying that he failed his parents. He broke his promise to protect Zélie.

Amari has chosen to renounce her parents and their ways, but she is forced to confront the possibility that her brother has not actually changed. Meanwhile, Tzain feels like he has let his own parents down by losing track of Zélie, emphasizing his belief that family loyalty should come above all else.



Watching Tzain mourn Zélie, Amari is wracked with shame. She wonders how many families her father, King Saran, has destroyed like this, and how much she is to blame. The thought galvanizes her. She tells Tzain the guards likely took Zélie to a nearby fortress. She has a plan to break in. She will be strong.

Even though she has rejected her father's views, Amari still feels responsible for the pain he has caused because of their shared blood. She decides that the only way to truly renounce her connection to him is by directly fighting him.



CHAPTER SIXTY-THREE

Zélie is chained up with majacite in a dark chamber. She thinks of all of those who died in vain, including Lekan and Zu. She thinks with horror about whether Inan could have betrayed her, after all they've been through. But then, Inan walks in, flanked by guards. Her heart sinks, thinking that he is responsible for her fate.

For Zélie, the many deaths and injuries that accumulated over the course of their quest were justified by the larger goal of bringing peace and restoring magic to Orisha. However, if those goals are not met, then their friends simply died in vain, which is a horrifying thought.



Inan orders the guards to leave. When they do, his face immediately changes. He says the guards discovered the encampment when some diviners went to a nearby town to buy supplies—so he didn't betray her, after all. He says he doesn't have much time, and Zélie has to tell him how he can destroy the scroll. Otherwise, Saran will kill her.

Inan's revelation that he didn't betray the diviner encampment seems to suggest that he has stayed steadfast in his decision to break away from Saran. But then, his request that Zélie tell him how to destroy the scroll suggests the opposite: it seems he is intent on destroying magic, just as his father is. Zélie cannot tell if Inan is more loyal to his father or to his own morals.



Zélie knows that destroying the scroll won't solve anything—Saran won't stop until he's wiped out the diviners entirely. Now, she says she will die before revealing anything. The soldiers killed all those children, and nothing else matters.

One thing Zélie does know is that the prejudice Saran holds against the diviners runs far deeper than any reasonable fear of magic. He is not intent on peace, but rather genocide. The fact that his soldiers wantonly killed young diviner children is evidence enough of that.



For Inan, the feeling of grief is overpowered by fear. He says that Kwame took out three platoons in an instant, confirming the monarchy's worst fears about magic. Inan says that Kwame took things too far. He says they can't give people that kind of power. Zélie says she can't believe what she's hearing.

Inan thinks that the monarchy's bias towards diviners is justified because their ability to do harm excites a reasonable fear—fear that Inan himself feels. He now thinks that magic brings inequality and fighting and should be suppressed.



King Saran enters, overwhelming Zélie with memories of the Raid. But her desire for vengeance outweighs her fear. She knows he is at the core of hate and oppression in Orisha.

Zélie feels a righteous anger towards Saran. He has fueled so much oppression and violence in the name of deeply held prejudices. She knows she must fight him in order to fight his evil ideologies.



Saran asks if she killed Kaea or knows who did. Zélie thinks about revealing Inan, but his terror stops her. Saran tells Inan that when Saran was young, he believed young diviners could be allowed to live. He thought the Raid would leave them afraid and obedient.

Saran demonstrates that although he was once apparently less ruthless towards diviners in the past, it was only because he believed he could keep them under his control using fear. Saran has demonstrated that by abusing and persecuting diviners in Orisha every day for more than a decade.



Zélie yells that Saran has murdered and exploited her people, thinking they would never fight back, but now they are. Saran says that his own father fought for the maji's rights, and they burned his family.

Saran's oppression of the maji is rooted in his fear of the power of magic. He turned that fear into a widespread system of exploitation and oppression.



CHAPTER SIXTY-FOUR

Saran calls in a physician who injects a serum into Zélie's neck while Inan watches, horrified. Saran says it is to keep her from passing out while they torture her. A soldier tears the back of Zélie's dress and begins to heat his dagger over the flames of a torch. The knife sears into Zélie's back, a pain so intense that Inan can also feel it. He runs forward and attempts to fight off the guards.

Unlike Zélie, who sees violence as a tool to fight oppression and protect her family, Saran uses violence to inflict cruelty and fear. He is adept at drawing out pain and exerting psychological as well as physical torture.



Saran scoffs at Inan, who feels the sting of his father's disappointment. The guards pull Inan out of the room just as he realizes the soldiers are carving the word "maggot" into Zélie's back.

Even though Inan has renounced his father's ways, he still feels a desire to make him proud, showing that he has not fully rejected his father. Saran's decision to carve a slur into Zélie's back shows the way that his use of torture is linked to the way he dehumanizes and exploits diviners. He feels no qualms about hurting Zélie because he views her as less than human.



Desperate, Inan snaps into the dreamscape. He needs to bring Zélie there, to save her from the pain. Zélie appears, but she seems not to know where or even who she is. Crying, she says she can't feel anything. Watching Zélie, Inan thinks of Saran's refrain: "duty before self." He thinks of Kwame bursting into flames. He realizes he must prevent destruction at all costs.

Seeing the pain that his father has caused, Inan again decides that his father's way is unacceptable. But he also thinks of the diviners fighting back as evidence that their way cannot be right, either. He believes that if anyone has outsized power—be it his father or the diviners—then violence will continue in Orisha.



CHAPTER SIXTY-FIVE

Tzain and Amari slip through the town of Gombe, where the guard fortress is located. Tzain knocks on a metal door where a gruff voice asks for a password. The password he knows is out-of-date. Tzain gives the name of a friend, who comes to the door and lets them in. He and Tzain are on rival sports teams; Tzain masks his fear about Zélie, and they step inside the bar. The bar is overflowing with diviners, and only a few kosidán, all of whom are there with romantic partners who are diviners. Tzain says many cities have secret places like this one, where diviners can meet in peace.

The widespread persecution of diviners and Orisha has necessitated the creation of enclaves like this one, where even the most innocuous activities must be carried out in secrecy and fear. The prohibition against relationships between diviners and kosidán is a cruel way of emphasizing diviners' status as dangerous Others.



Tzain warns that his friends here are loyal but guarded. They are happy to see him and there is an air of celebration. Amari interrupts the greetings to say that they need help. The group grows serious as Tzain explains. They say there is nothing to be done—the guards are ruthless. Amari shudders to think of the damage the guards have caused.

Hearing the experience of the diviners and their friends drives home for Amari the fact that guards are ruthless enforcers of prejudice, and not as peacekeepers. Prejudice against diviners is not only widespread but institutionalized in this way.



Amari pulls out the scroll and says that with magic, they can break in. Frightened by the sight of the scroll, two of the girls grab Amari and drag her sharply out of the bar. She sees that they are afraid more than angry, and she reveals her identity. She also says that she is the future queen of Orisha, deciding in that moment that she must circumvent the line of succession to gain the throne over Inan.

Magic has been stigmatized and demonized so much by the monarchy that just the mention of it makes diviners afraid. Saran has effectively forged a link between the practice of magic and ruthless acts of oppression, convincing diviners that any attempt on their part to regain power would result in certain death.



Amari holds up the scroll and says that seizing magic is the only way for the diviners to fight back against Saran and avoid being killed themselves. But first, they must save Zélie.

Amari advocates for using magic to seize power as the only way of overturning the oppression of the monarchy and, eventually, bringing peace. Amari knows that fighting back is justified and is the only way to bring justice.



CHAPTER SIXTY-SIX

Inan feels Zélie's pain like a lingering presence. He enters King Saran's office, and sees that his father is calm and collected: harming Zélie is all in a day's work for him. Because she is a maji, her death doesn't mean anything to him, just as the deaths of those in the encampment don't mean anything.

Saran says that Inan disgraced him, expecting Inan to cower. But for once, Inan talks back, saying that the interrogation was useless and cruel. Surprisingly, Saran takes it as a sign that Inan has grown during his travels.

Saran says that they must go to these lengths to keep the kingdom safe. Other kingdoms fell when they didn't keep magic in check. He says he needed to break the "maggot," Zélie, and then she told him everything he needed to know: the scroll can only be destroyed with magic. He has kept her alive for now so she can be the one to destroy it.

Saran says that Zélie deserves to be killed because she killed Kaea. He holds up a turquoise crystal—one of the ones that appeared in Kaea's hair after she died. He says that Amari must also be killed for her role in Kaea's death.

After they kill Zélie, says Saran, they will parade her body around Orisha to put down any thoughts of rebellion. He says there is no other way, because maji are dangerous.

Saran gives Inan an unexpected and unwanted hug, and Inan remembers when he hurt Amari as a child. His father told him being able to hurt her would make him a great king; words that had made Inan happy. Inan's success in hunting down the scroll now has proven to Saran that Inan will indeed be a good ruler. In some ways, it's all Inan's ever wanted, but all he can think about is Zélie.

Saran is able to rationalize any violence he commits against diviners because, in his mind they are not human. Saran's oppression of the diviners is closely linked with his ability to view them with detachment and disdain.



In the past, Inan always obeyed his father, out of a combination of fear and respect. But, as he has learned more about his father's harmful beliefs and policies, Inan has begun to question his father and feel less controlled by him.



Saran's fearmongering and dehumanizing tactics are on display here. To justify the oppression of the diviners, he points to other kingdoms where allowing them to have power has apparently led to ruin. Now, he hates all diviners, equating them with maggots.



Saran shows the way that violence can feed into itself. By seeking to avenge violence with more violence, Saran simply promotes death without justice. He also confirms that he is willing to kill his own children in order to support his own murderous, oppressive regime.



Saran hopes to keep diviners under his thumb by using fear. He will prevent that which he is afraid of—the diviners gaining power—by making them more afraid of him, instead.



Saran always promoted an equivalence between ability to fight and ability to lead, forcing Inan to hurt his sister even though he did not want to. Even now, Inan finds his father's approval compelling, and must fight to remind himself that this is no longer who he is.



CHAPTER SIXTY-SEVEN

Late at night, Inan sneaks into Zélie's cell. Zélie is bloodied and almost lifeless, in chains. Inan wonders how Saran can think the maji are animals when he behaves this way himself. Inan unlocks her restraints and carries her to the hall. Though they hear guards, Inan presses on, knowing he must save her. Suddenly, there is shouting and heat as an explosion bursts through the wall.

Saran's prejudice is built on a foundation of dehumanizing the diviners, painting them as less than human. But Inan believes now that acts of senseless violence are what make someone less than human, not their identity as a diviner. Inan's love for Zélie has helped him to see the many flaws in his father's beliefs, and question the blind loyalty he had for his father in the past.



CHAPTER SIXTY-EIGHT

The fortress is heavily patrolled by guards. Amari, Tzain, and Tzain's friends from the bar dash towards the walls. After touching the scroll, three of them gained abilities they can use to fight. One uses the ability to manipulate metal to create an opening in the fortress wall and then close it behind them before any guards see.

Amari has convinced the new maji that they must use their magic to fight back, which is ultimately the only way to fight the cycle of violence and oppression that Saran has inflicted upon the kingdom.



The group has breached the armory. When a guard enters, Amari presses a blade to his neck and gets him to say where Zélie's cell is. She feels surprised by the venom in her voice; it reminds her only of her father, Saran.

Amari has learned how and when to use the threat of violence when it is necessary, in order to help herself and her friends do what is right. Still, she feels some ambivalence, both because she dislikes violence and because it is a link to her father.



An explosion echoes from elsewhere in the fortress, drawing the guards. The other diviners from the bar, wanting to help the cause, created makeshift explosives to use as a distraction. Using their various powers in concert, the various maji in the group fight their way through the guards who remain in the hall. Amari surges forward, thinking of how close Zélie is.

The team of diviners working together provides a glimpse of what society might be like if diviners were allowed to flourish and practice their traditions. They could use their different skills to work together and help one another, and not just for violence as Saran contends. Of course, there are also times when the use of magic for violence is necessary.



Suddenly, Saran appears, flanked with guards. He is enraged when he sees Amari. But for the first time, she feels strength and bravery. She feels unafraid to use her sword if need be. She feels a righteous anger, thinking of Binta and all the other maji who have suffered and died because of this man. She prepares to strike, but Tzain's voice calls her back to attention. He reminds her that they need to go. Amari turns her attention back to finding Zélie.

Amari is ready to fight, but her intentions set her apart from her father. Unlike him, she fights for what is right, and she is not afraid to hurt even her own father if it means protecting her friends and their cause. Amari realizes that violence in the name of fighting an oppressor is justified, which is entirely different from her father's use of violence to demand fear and obedience.



CHAPTER SIXTY-NINE

Inan watches as soldiers fall to magic around him, terrified. He thinks it is a slaughter rather than a fair fight. He feels Saran was right—if magic is allowed to return, the kingdom will fall to slaughter and chaos.

Inan is now determined to stop magic, but he also must save Zélie. He realizes that the maji breaking in will head to Zélie's cell to try to find her, and so he heads there.

Inan is stopped short by the sight of Amari, wielding a sword with confidence. The Amari he knows would never fight. Inan hands Zélie to Tzain, who is devastated at the sight of the slur carved into his sister's back.

As they leave, Inan says he must stay to try to help them from inside the monarchy, since King Saran does not yet know that Inan's allegiance has shifted. Privately, he thinks that his mission to destroy magic is just beginning.

CHAPTER SEVENTY

Zélie feels nothing but pain and guilt. Seeing Tzain's face, she thinks that her injuries are hurting him like watching the Raid did. She can no longer feel magic, and without it, performing the ceremony will be impossible. A girl who touched the scroll uses her new power to knit together the wounds on Zélie's back, and she falls into a deep sleep.

Zélie finds herself once again in the dreamscape. Inan approaches gingerly, and all Zélie can think is that she can't reveal how much Saran has broken her. She sees pity in his eyes, and it makes her furious. Wanting to forget the scars on her back, she pulls him into a kiss. He is hesitant, but she is insistent. Yet when she closes her eyes, all she can think of is Saran's torture. But she wants to stop thinking about it, and pulls him closer.

Inan sees magic being used for fighting and thinks that it confirms his long-held fear: magic always leads to violence. Although he does not wish to slaughter and oppress diviners in the same way that his father does, his fear of magic nonetheless brings him in closer alignment with his father's beliefs.



Although Inan has decided not to follow his father, his father's belief in the danger of magic still has powerful influence over Inan. Like his father, Inan is afraid of those who have magic because he worries they will use it to violently seize power. What he fails to grasp is that even without magic, Saran has violently seized power for himself.



Inan is surprised to see that Amari, like Zélie, has come to terms with the fact that violence is sometimes a necessary tool. Meanwhile, Tzain sees that Zélie will now carry a painful, powerful reminder of the monarchy's dehumanizing tactics.



Inan's goals now align in some ways with those of his father, making it unclear whether he is still in Saran's thrall.



Even though she can be headstrong, Zélie takes her commitments to her family—both her biological family and her adopted one—very seriously. She worries that her own injuries are hurting them.



Saran's violence has inflicted deep psychological wounds on Zélie. She feels powerless to combat an enemy that resides in her own heart and mind. Saran is an expert at using violence as a tool to make others feel weak and alone.



CHAPTER SEVENTY-ONE

Zélie awakens, awash with confused memories of Inan, Saran, and the scars on her back. The girl who healed Zélie enters, smiling brightly. She says that though she healed Zélie's bleeding, she couldn't make the scars on her back disappear. Regardless of her scars, Zélie thinks that her emotional pain will be permanent, anyway.

Tzain enters, cowering and uncharacteristically quiet. The sight pains Zélie. He says that he broke his promise to protect her, and that what happened is his fault. She tries to convince him otherwise.

Also disturbing is the fact that Zélie can't seem to access magic, which means she won't be able to perform the ceremony. She wants desperately to conceal this. Amari enters too, and she and Tzain reveal that the solstice is the very next day. They are still very far from the sacred site, possibly too far reach it in time. The thought of losing magic overwhelms Zélie with memories of the Raid because she feels as if she is losing her mother all over again.

Tzain says they have to find Baba and escape Orïsha. Amari agrees, saying they will regroup and find another way to fight. But one of the boys from the bar bursts into the tent, angered by their words. He says people have sacrificed their lives for them. Now is not the time to give up.

If they go to the port city of Jimeta and take a boat to the island rather than traveling further overland, they may be able to make the deadline for the ceremony. But it is dangerous to go to Jimeta, a city of thieves and outlaws. Conflicted, Zélie attempts to appeal to the Sky Mother in prayer, but feels nothing. She feels abandoned by the gods and, because she knows she can't perform the ritual if she can't do magic, she feels like she's letting everyone down. However, she wants to keep fighting, even though her connections seems to be severed. Zélie now fully believes that the Sky Mother chose her for this mission, and she wants to follow through. She tells the others they're going—and they're going to win.

Zélie's thoughts show once again that violence leaves scars beyond the physical. It can be an intensely powerful psychological tool, whether used to bring justice, or, in this case, to further oppression.



Tzain takes his commitment to his family extremely seriously. While that makes him a strong and dedicated protector, it can also cause him to feel worthless when he worries that he has let his family down.



For Zélie, magic and divîner tradition are closely tied to her mother. She worries that losing her connection to magic also means permanently severing her connection to her mother. She also worries that without the ability to use the power they need to overthrow the monarchy, divîners will forever be trapped in Saran's cycle of violence and oppression.



Tzain's principle commitment is still to his immediate family members. However, the boy reminds Tzain and Zélie that they have new relationships and new responsibilities now, to a family defined by more than blood.



Zélie's feelings show an evolution in her faith. Previously, in times of deep difficulty, she would feel as if the gods had abandoned her, leaving her adrift and hopeless. Now, after meeting so many divîners who still believed in the gods and supported one another even when magic's return seemed impossible, she is able to both struggle through her doubt and keep faith in the gods.



CHAPTER SEVENTY-TWO

The group arrives at Jimeta, on the edge of a cliff over the ocean. There are no guards in Jimeta, but there are no laws there, either. Zélie fears mercenaries are hiding in every nook and cranny. This is the only place in Orïsha where it is possible to live outside of the long reach of the monarchy.

They arrive at a cave, where one of the boys knows a mercenary who can help them. He has a fast ship that may be able to get them to the island to perform the ceremony just in time. Only one person can enter the lair. Everyone agrees it should be Zélie, because of her magic. Wracked with guilt, she agrees without revealing the truth about her magic. She sends a prayer up to the gods.

Zélie walks down a long passage into the cave until she comes to a central area where men and women are gathered around a fire. They are all armed and masked, mercenaries. She approaches their leader and is shocked to see that it is Roën, the foreign pickpocket from the divîner settlement. Roën says she was unwise to enter the lair unguarded. When Zélie says she needs some men to help her sail to a mystical vanishing island to restore magic, they just laugh. One mercenary places a hand on Zélie's back to remove her, sending spasms of pain through her scars. She flips him onto the ground and rams her staff into him.

Roën is quietly amused. Zélie says she can't pay Roën, but he would be helping achieve the will of the gods. As for his men, Zélie says they will be employed by the future queen of Orïsha. Grinning, Roën agrees to the deal.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-THREE

Roën's ship cuts across the water. Zélie raises a prayer to the gods, but still can't feel them. Still, she thinks of all she's learned since she left home.

Prejudice in the kingdom has created an environment in which guards, ostensibly there to keep people safe, actually only bring fear and pain. The only way to escape the kingdom's injustices, then, is to live outside of its influence altogether.



Where Zélie once felt a crushing sense of responsibility to her father and brother, she now feels the same towards this adoptive family. While their bonds are strong, that sense of guilt can also be difficult to bear.



The cost of living outside the monarchy's reach is that everyone must be on their guard and ready to fight—a testament to just how dangerous it is to be a divîner in Orïsha. Even living as an outlaw is preferable. As has often been the case on their journey, Zélie finds that unfortunately, the violent acts of others drive her to fight.



By invoking the gods, Zélie is able to find some common ground with Roën despite his general distrust of others.



Zélie wants to be able to rely on the gods in difficult times, but it can be hard to feel their presence. She can draw on them in concert with other strengths and experiences she has gained since leaving home.



Suddenly, a fleet of warships appear on the horizon. Zélie squeezes Amari's hand in fear. Under Roën's advice, Zélie says they should try to take the nearest warship and keep heading for the island. Zélie prepares to fight, but Roën assures her that the mercenaries can handle it on their own. Looking to the large, armored ship, Zélie and Amari are skeptical. Roën asks what limit he and his men can go to—that is, if they can they kill the crew of the warship. Zélie holds them back. Too much blood has already been spilled.

Working quickly and quietly, Roën launches a rope line to the ship via crossbow and he and his men shimmy aboard. Within minutes, they've bound the crew of the ship. Roën jokes that he's simply carrying out the will of the gods. They speed on towards the island.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-FOUR

Inan can't stop thinking about Zélie, and he can't shake the feeling that he's lost her forever. Saran approaches and sees that Inan is wavering. Inan himself looks to the skies, wishing he could turn to the gods for guidance.

Saran surprises Inan by saying that he, too, wavered once. As a young prince, he watched as the monarchy considered a proposal to integrate leaders of the maji clans into the nobility of the court. Saran's father dreamed of such a government, one of unification and harmony. Saran's first wife, too, urged support of the referendum. Choosing love over duty, Saran says, he honored his wife's wishes and supported the movement. But then, he says, he realized the maji just wanted the power to conquer the nobles.

Hearing his words, Inan pictures the death and destruction he witnessed at the Gombe fortress. Saran says that Inan, too, must now choose duty and kingdom before himself. Saran presents Inan with his sword, telling him that sacrificing his heart will make him a noble king. Secretly, Inan thinks that he must choose Orisha over Zélie. He says he knows how they can get the scroll back.

Throughout their quest, Zélie and her friends have had to fight and, all too often, kill. Even though they fight in the service of bringing a more widespread and lasting peace, it still feels wrong that so many have died by their hands. Where previously Zélie might not have batted an eye at the thought of dispensing of some guards, now, she only wants to make sure that no more blood is shed than necessary. While violence may be necessary to a just revolution, that does not necessarily make it easier to stomach. And, not everyone who serves on the other side is necessarily a just target of violence.



Roën likes to be lighthearted about his belief in the gods. But, telling himself that he has been chosen by them, even with apparent humor, seems to be a source of confidence and strength, just as turning towards the gods is a source of comfort for Zélie and others.



Inan feels conflicted, drawn to abandon his mission in order to protect the person he loves. He wants to follow his heart, but he feels a sense of loyalty to his responsibilities as a prince, if not any longer to his father directly. He knows that turning towards the gods would give him a sense of connection and comfort, but again, he defers to his family's norms, which require that he reject religion.



Saran believes that granting civil rights to the maji was a mistake because they seized too much power. He has used that fear to motivate genocide and oppression. He has also turned it into an oppressive creed, believing that following one's heart always leads to destruction.



Saran's words strike a chord with Inan, who also fears that the reintroduction of magic into the kingdom will simply bring retaliatory violence against the kingdom. Inan is also following a version of Saran's creed, putting aside his own desires, and concerns, in favor of an abstract greater good.



CHAPTER SEVENTY-FIVE

In the captain's quarters of the stolen warship, Zélie tries to sleep, but memories of her torture are too terrifying and painful. She runs on deck to find Roën, who has beaten the crew of the ship. Sickened, Zélie turns toward the sea, not wanting to think about more violence. Roën shows her a series of scars on his arm, from when his men were killed in front of him and captors carved a new line in his skin for each one that died. The scars were inflicted on him in his homeland, a place called Sutōrī.

Roën says that he can tell Zélie's own scars, and the terror of her torture, are still fresh. He wants to know if she can really do the ceremony. Everything in Zélie screams that she can't. But out loud, she says that those responsible for her scars are in the other warships. However, she is no longer driven by revenge. She must stop Saran so that he doesn't destroy the rest of her people.

Roën jokes again about being chosen by the gods, but he is clearly at least a little serious, believing in the gods even as he jokes about them. He says it seems like too much of a coincidence that he and Zélie met twice and are now working together. He also tells her that talking to someone else is the best way to start healing her wounds. Zélie realizes he's right: she doesn't want to be alone. She enters Amari's room, and Amari greets her with a smile.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-SIX

Amari combs Zélie's tangled hair. They talk about their respective mothers, memories of having their hair brushed as young children. Amari says that Zélie can tell her anything.

Zélie admits that she used to think Amari was weak, because she was so obviously afraid of her father, King Saran. But now, Zélie says, beginning to cry, she, too, feels like Saran is an inescapable force in her head.

Once again, Zélie experiences the lasting trauma that accompanies violence. As a result, she is sickened even by the thought of violence committed against her enemies, by an ally. Roën, who has experienced great pain himself, also seems readily capable of committing harm to others.



From experience, Roën knows that acts of violence can be physically and emotionally debilitating. Zélie feels this too, as well as an echo of the desire for revenge that once motivated her. But her desire now is to combat injustice more broadly by restoring power to the oppressed, rather than specifically targeting those who have directly hurt her.



Like Zélie, Roën finds that faith in the gods also brings him closer to others, giving him a sense of connection with other believers and prompting him to look for more meaning in chance encounters. Meanwhile, despite the rift between their backgrounds, Amari and Zélie have become chosen family to one another—a bond that has more power and meaning than blood.



Though they were once enemies because they came from different backgrounds, Zélie and Amari have formed a new kind of family with one another that transcends those divisions. Zélie draws strength from memories of her family and her past, while Amari draws strength from knowing she has moved away from the unjust practices of her parents and forged her own path.



Zélie previously interpreted Amari's loyalty to her father and her desire to not commit violence as weaknesses. But now, Zélie empathizes with Amari's fear. She sees why it was difficult to break away from Saran's manipulation and how he shaped Amari's attitudes about both family and violence.



Zélie's tears make Amari choke up, too, just thinking about all the pain her family has caused. She apologizes that it took both her and Inan so long to realize just how wrong Saran was, and to begin to right his wrongs. She thinks of Binta, and, in her head, apologizes to her for not being able to do more.

Amari says she has seen a change in herself. Where before she cowered at the thought of King Saran and the damage he could inflict on her, when she saw him in the fortress at Gombe, she was ready to strike with her blade. Amari says that Zélie's harsh criticisms when they first met are part of what made her brave—it was the first time she thought she could be anything other than a scared and obedient princess. Zélie, too, will find a way to break free, Amari tells her.

Looking down, Zélie admits something else: she can no longer do magic. She worries that no one will be able to do the ritual now. Her words make Amari's stomach sink. Amari feels a wave of fear, and briefly thinks they should turn back, but then she thinks of all that has happened since she left home: she has overpowered fear and her father, and everyone has beaten the odds to be here. She tells Zélie that the gods don't make mistakes. No matter what, they have to try to do the ceremony.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-SEVEN

The ship approaches the island, which materializes in the morning light. By interrogating the guards, Roën gained useful information about where soldiers will be stationed. By sneaking onto the island in stolen uniforms, the group hopes to maintain an element of surprise.

Zélie addresses the assembled group. Her heart is in her throat knowing she may not be able to complete the ceremony at all. Still, she knows she must try to bolster her friends. She tells them their reasons for fighting far outweigh their fears. They have all been wronged by the guards and the monarchy, and now is the time to settle the score. Everyone cheers.

Amari reflects again on her decision to break away from her family and fight the injustices they have perpetrated—a decision that is continually reinforced as she observes firsthand the suffering that Saran has caused. She does not feel loyal to her father but instead to her own sense of what is right, and only wishes that she could have come to that conclusion sooner, before so many were hurt or killed.



This evolution has allowed Amari to place her concerns about injustice above her own fear and obedience to her father. That change has also shifted how she thinks about violence: although she abhors it, she also sees that it is justified in extreme cases. Amari now believes that violence may be the only way to stop Saran's cruel regime.



Amari knows that Zélie's belief in the gods gives her a sense of purpose, self-worth, and confidence, as well as connecting her to all of the other diviners who are relying on her. She invokes those things by telling Zélie that the gods are on their side.



Roën's target use of violence shows that it can be a useful tactic, and may be necessary in some cases.



Zélie feels committed to this newfound community and the cause they have taken up together, so she puts aside her own fears. She also puts a voice to the entire goal of the revolution: in order to overturn the injustice constantly perpetrated by the monarchy, the diviners and their allies must fight back and restore some semblance of a balance of power.



CHAPTER SEVENTY-EIGHT

As soon as they set foot on the island, Zélie feels the thrum of the gods' presence, though not her magic. The island is overrun with soldiers, but in their disguises, the group is able to push past them with relative ease. The soldiers are expecting a maji army. A fog clings to everything, helping to obscure the group's movements; Zélie thinks it is an indication that the gods are on their side, rooting for them. She also thinks about Amari seeking her out in the market in Lagos—another sign.

As they approach the temple in the center of the island, Roën sends a group of his men back to the shoreline to cause a distraction on the beach. As they leave, all Zélie can think is that she can't bear to have any more blood on her hands. As an explosion on the beach draws their attention, guards stream out of the temple to assess the threat.

Zélie and her friends and the mercenaries enter the temple, decorated with beautiful images of the gods. They enter the central dome, where images of the gods flank a central pillar, which has an indentation for the sunstone. Zélie prays to the gods to return her magic. Amari hands her the artifacts and she prepares to attempt the ceremony. At that moment, Saran and his men jump out from hiding places around the room. Inan is there, too, holding a majacite blade. Baba is with them.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-NINE

At the sight of her father, Zélie crumbles. They have to surrender. She admits that her magic is gone and hasn't returned. She is bitterly angry at the gods. She thinks of everyone who has died for her, in vain. But she can't let Baba die.

Inan steps forward to trade Baba for the artifacts. Zélie drops the sunstone and scroll, and an ordinary dagger, realizing Inan has never seen the real bone dagger. Her father asks why she gave up, and Zélie says she had to. They begin to walk away. Suddenly, an arrow pierces Baba's chest.

As at Chândomblé, Zélie's arrival at a sacred site where many diviners once gathered makes her feel closer to her faith, even if it doesn't make her feel more powerful in this instance. In addition, that sensation is bolstered by the thought that many things have gone well in the course of the mission. Belief in the gods helps give Zélie strength because it makes her feel a sense of kinship with those around her.



At this point in the journey, Zélie has seen many people—innocent or otherwise—fall. The quest for peace has long since begun to feel like a war in itself, which troubles Zélie. Although violence may be necessary to complete their mission, it still makes Zélie uncomfortable.



Zélie hopes that in this place, which carries so much tradition and history, she will be able to regain her abilities. The appearance of Zélie's father at that very moment is impactful because it brings her intense loyalty to her family to the surface.



In the moment when she sees her father, Zélie's resolve to stick to her personal goals and mission dissolves. She returns to the mindset she had before the quest began, placing the safety of her family first and rejecting the gods for putting her in such incredibly difficult situations.



In this climactic moment, Zélie realizes that her family still comes before her personal mission.



CHAPTER EIGHTY

Zélie remembers when her mother was killed in the Raid, when she swore never to let anything like this happen again—but now it has, as the life drains from her father. Zélie is filled with images of Baba’s life. It is the greatest blood magic—and it summons her powers back.

As the guards approach Zélie, she sends her magic arrowing at them. All she wants is blood and death, to avenge her fallen family, but she hears Baba’s voice telling her that revenge is not the path—she must fix things. She needs to restore magic, so that the maji can finally be treated with respect, so they can ward off violence with the threat of their own power.

Zélie feels once again that she has let down her responsibility to protect her family members, which is a deeply painful feeling. However, the depth of this pain also allows her to reconnect with her magic, showing the way that her faith is connected to sacrifice.



Zélie feels tempted to fight the death of her father with more death, but on some level she knows that such tactics are self-defeating—nor will they bring her peace. Instead, she needs to focus on her broader aim of restoring equality to the kingdom, and giving the maji the power to fight their oppressors.



CHAPTER EIGHTY-ONE

Zélie has turned her deadly focus on Inan. He aches with her heartbreak, but he focuses on his goal of ending magic. He can’t let Orísha burn. He seizes the scroll and tries to focus his magic on it to destroy it, but it doesn’t work. He thinks that Zélie’s magic could destroy the scroll.

Inan runs towards Zélie, yelling that this is all her fault. He says it’s her fault Baba died. Angered, Zélie sends a bolt of magic towards him. He holds the scroll in front of him and watches as the magic rips it apart. Zélie screams. Saran turns to his son with pride.

A mercenary approaches King Saran from behind. Without thinking, Inan kills the mercenary with his magic. His father is horrified, especially when he sees the mercenary is covered with the same blue crystals that Kaea was. Saran stabs his sword into Inan. Inan pleads with his father, thinking of all the pain he has caused in his father’s name. He can’t let it all be for nothing. But Saran says Inan is no son of his.

Inan has internalized his father’s message about duty and adapted it to his current situation—instead of bending to his own desire to help Zélie, he believes he is putting the kingdom first by fighting against her. He believes that if anyone has the power of magic, it will lead to more violence.



Inan continues to ignore his own instincts and morals, intentionally hurting the person he loves in service of his mission. Unsurprisingly, this tactic wins him the approval of his father, who advocates a similar code of conduct.



Seeing that his son is able to do magic, Saran does not hesitate to commit violence. For him, the classification of maji as dangerous and inferior is so powerful that it is not even swayed when the maji in question is his own son. Saran’s attack reminds Inan of what he has slowly been realizing—that his morals do not align with that of his father, and that he knows his father’s tactics have caused devastation throughout the kingdom. Meanwhile, Saran believes that duty to the kingdom and his own hungry quest for power outweighs any responsibility towards his family members.



CHAPTER EIGHTY-TWO

Amari slashes through guards alongside Tzain. The stain of bloodshed is difficult to bear, but necessary. She tries not to think about the fact that she's fighting and killing her own guards.

Once again, the heroes must use violence in service of their broader goal of bringing peace. Amari is uncomfortable with that paradox, but also feels that it is necessary.



Amari sees Inan crumble, pierced by Saran's sword. Amari runs towards her father. The king says that the gods have cursed him with children who are traitors. Amari says it is his own blood that is the curse, and she is ready to end it.

Amari sees that not even the bond of blood will keep Saran from hurting Inan. For her, too, the ties of blood family are no longer the most important thing. Instead, she recognizes that their father is evil, and that it's time to fight back.



CHAPTER EIGHTY-THREE

Amari thinks about all the fighting Saran forced her and Inan to do as children, pitting them against each other so that they would be stronger than his first children.

Saran's obsession with violence left his children terrified and damaged. For Amari, it has always been a source of conflict between her own desire for peace and her father's wishes.



Amari says that Saran raised her to fight monsters, but only now is she realizing that he is the biggest monster. She fights him with her sword, feeling strength and courage she didn't know she had. But then she thinks that if she kills him, she is no better than him. As she stumbles past him, Saran slashes his blade across her back.

Amari has begun to come to an important realization: it is possible for her to break free of her father and his many crimes, and to avenge those crimes by fighting back against him directly. She is torn, however, about using violence to that end. To Amari, killing Saran feels like she is simply perpetuating the cycle of anger and killing that he tried to force her into. Saran has no such hesitations.



Amari realizes Saran does not care about spilling his own children's blood. This is his choice. She plunges her sword into his chest. Although tears fill her eyes, she knows she has done the right thing. She tells her father this will make her a far stronger queen, echoing his old refrains.

Realizing that Saran will always place his own power above his family, and always resort to violence, Amari decides that in this case, violence is justified—to end more killing and oppression, she will kill.



CHAPTER EIGHTY-FOUR

Zélie tries to channel energy from the ashes of the scroll, but to no avail. She tries to remember the incantation inscribed on it, but barely can. Light begins to fill the chamber, a sign that the solstice is happening. She tries to reach out to the spirits of the temple priests for help, but all she feels is Baba and the magic in her own blood.

The sudden loss of Zélie's father is so devastating that it's difficult for Zélie to focus on what she needs to do. Without him, she feels both personally lost and disconnected from her faith and magic, just as she did when her mother died.



Zélie realizes there may be another way to reach the Sky Mother. She thinks about drawing a connection through all her ancestors, through their blood. The mercenaries are still fighting against all odds, and so should she, Zélie thinks.

Instead of focusing on her personal connection to the gods, Zélie thinks more broadly about the community of diviners who are connected to each other and the past through their faith. That connection is where the real strength of their belief lies.



Zélie picks up the sunstone and thinks not of magic but of the blood and bone connecting her to the past. She thinks of her mother. She slashes open her palms with the bone dagger and presses them to the sunstone, pleading to her ancestors as she does so. She feels the power of her ancestors, both maji and kosidán, flowing through her. She feels their energy pulsing through her. The sunstone shatters and light fills the room as she feels magic coursing through every being, connecting them all.

Instead of thinking of magic itself, Zélie thinks of the community of diviners who support each other through their magic and practices. This connection is actually extremely powerful. She also realizes that this community extends beyond the mere connections of blood. Non-maji who have helped and loved her are also part of the wider family of ancestors who have helped her get to this point.



CHAPTER EIGHTY-FIVE

Zélie thinks of her mother as she floats through blackness to her mother's voice. She sees a vision of Oya, who says she has always been by Zélie's side, and always will be. But then she realizes it's not Oya, but her own mother. Mama tells Zélie that Baba is there now, at peace.

The Goddess Oya is a source of comfort for Zélie not only because she is a connection to Zélie's magic, but because she is a connection to Zélie's mother. Once again, Zélie draws faith from her belief in the gods in part because they serve as a link to her family.



Zélie says they must bring Tzain there, so they can all be together. But Mama says it is not his time, nor is it Zélie's. Orisha still needs her. The blackness begins to fade as Zélie yells that she cannot leave her mother again.

Zélie's desire to keep her family together is the strongest pull she feels in this moment. But her mother reminds her that she has other responsibilities, which extend beyond her blood family to the broader community of diviners who rely on her. Ultimately she must keep living and fighting for them, as much as she just wants to be with her mother.



EPILOGUE

Zélie open her eyes and realizes that she's at sea with Amari, Tzain, and Roën. She asks if they were successful in bringing magic back. Everyone is silent, and she takes their silence to mean no. But Amari shakes her head and holds out a hand swirling with magic. Her hair now has a white streak through it.

If the ceremony converted non-diviners to diviners, it will have major implications for the society of Orisha. If everyone has magic, it may mean that there are fewer power imbalances, shepherding in an end to the cycles of violence. On the other hand, it also means that everyone will have the power to use their magic to commit violence, and will have to personally determine what to do with that power. It will also complicate the social stratification of Orisha, possibly creating a more level playing field in which diviners are not distinguishable from everyone else. But for the same reason, it may simply excite more conflict.





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