Reader Guide

Title: MISTWOOD
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This reader guide may be duplicated for classroom, book club discussion group, or related purposes.

Author biography: Leah Cypess has been writing since the fourth grade, but before becoming a full-time writer, she earned her law degree from Columbia Law School. She worked for two years at a large New York City law firm, then moved to Brookline, near Boston, where she now lives with her husband and two young children. More information is available at her website, www.leahcypess.com, and she can be reached at LCypess@gmail.com.

Summary

Mistwood is a high fantasy about identity, loyalty, and making choices. Isabel is supposed to be the Shifter, the immortal shapeshifter who has protected the kings of Samorna for centuries. It is because of her legend that Prince Rokan risked everything to ride into the Mistwood and summon her to his side. But instead of the Shifter, he found Isabel: a lonely human girl with only fragments of the Shifter's powers, beset by flashes of memory and emotion that do more to confuse than to help her.

If she is the Shifter, why can't she change her shape? Why doesn't she remember what made her flee the castle so many years ago? As she is drawn deeper into a web of magic and assassination, Isabel will have no choice but to look for answers. But her search will lead her to the one question the Shifter hasn't faced in a thousand years: where does she come from, and what does she really want?

Discussion Questions

[1] Isabel's struggle with identity centers on the discrepancy between her legend – how others see her – and a reality that seems to fall short. What is her main method of dealing with this divide? When does that method begin to break down?

[2] Early in the novel, Isabel contemplates telling Rokan the truth about her lack of power. What makes her change her mind? When she finally does tell someone, she chooses Ven instead. Why do you think she goes to him rather than Rokan?

[3] Why do you think Ven reacts the way he does when Isabel tells him the truth about her lack of powers? What about his reaction causes Isabel to leave the castle?

[4] Most of the people around Isabel spend much of the book deceiving her in one way or another. Given their understanding of her nature, do you feel their deceptions were justified?

[5] One of the main themes of the novel is choices, and Isabel's main choice was which prince to protect. Do you agree with the choice she made? Were there any points in the novel where you found yourself rooting for her to choose one of them over the other? What influenced your inclination?

[6] Who do you think would have made a better king – Kaer or Rokan? Why?

[7] Rokan tells Isabel that "Nice kings are weak kings, and weak kings are bad kings." Do you think that is true? Why or why not? Can you think of examples from history to support your opinion?

[8] One of the most important values in the world of MISTWOOD is that of loyalty. How does the Shifter exemplify this value, and how does she come to struggle with it? Is her final choice in consonance with this value or not?

[9] Is loyalty as important a value in our world as it is in Isabel's? Do you think a modern-day person would have reacted differently to Isabel's dilemma? If so, in what way?

[10] Rokan's father, though dead before the novel begins, is a major influence on both the course of events and on several of the main characters. What is your impression of his character? How accurate do you think such an impression can be, when it is based primarily on what other people say about him?

[11] What is your opinion of Clarisse? How did that opinion change as her motivations, abilities, and actions were revealed over the course of the novel? How do you feel about the position she is left in when the novel ends?

[12] After the first assassination attempt, Clarisse offers Isabel an alliance, which Isabel refuses. Based on what she knew at the time, do you think that was the right decision? How might events have transpired differently if Isabel had accepted Clarisse's offer?

[13] If you could choose between being the Shifter or being human, which would you choose? Why? Which do you think Isabel would have chosen, if the choice were up to her?

Essay Questions

[1] How does Isabel change over the course of the book? How are these changes related to the people around her?

[2] How does the society in which Mistwood takes place affect the choices and actions of the main characters?

[3] Do you think Clarisse is overall a good character or a bad character? Why?

[4] Do you agree with the choice Isabel made? Why or why not?

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