

The Mapmaker Chronicles, Race to the End of the World

By A.L. Tait

Discussion Questions – Themes

- Maps and Mapping
 - It is hard to believe now that people believed the world would simply end, and that one would fall off the edge if one traveled too far. When and how did this belief change?
 - Quinn's doubts about the expedition are based on the maps he has studied (p 9). What does he discover there?
 - Quinn and Ajax find a tapestry map (p 159) that seems to offer clues to their journey. When Ajax takes it with him when he's returned to Dolan's employ, it may have left the crew of the *Libertas* without a valuable tool to assist them in their race. How do you imagine the map might play a role in the sequels to this novel?
- Myths and Legends
 - In this society the people have been brought up on a range of myths, one of which was that, "Besides everyone knew that if you went too far in either direction you'd fall off the end of the earth. They also knew that below that drop lay Genesi, dragon of death, waiting." (p x) In earlier times people in our own world actually believed in myths like this too. Why?
 - Several superstitious beliefs appear in this novel, e.g. red hair was considered a good luck charm (p 35); "'Everyone knows that girls are bad luck on a boat.'" (p 48) What is the origin of these two beliefs?
 - Jericho sees the monster (p 58) and later a great white beast appears again to Quinn (p 126). Then his ship's crew see what they believe is a dragon (p 212). But Quinn says, "'It's good luck for us. I know it.'" (p 234) and names it Nammu, Goddess of the Sea (p 235). What did you think the creature was? Did you imagine it was a mythical creature or something else?
- Ethics & Honor
 - Zain is a man of principle. In which incidents in the novel does he demonstrate this?
 - How alike are Quinn and Zain in this regard? How are they different?
- Imperialism
 - "The possibilities – for expansion, for wealth – were unlimited." (p 25) How much of early exploration was really about scientific knowledge, or was it more about seeking economic benefit?
 - "And anything Gelyn could do, Verdania could do better." (p 26) Compare this rivalry to that between Britain and Spain in the time of the great explorers.
 - Many explorers were so focused on seeking gold or on the notion of mapping or exploration that they failed to consider that other people might be less than pleased with their arrival. Consider the following quotes in this regard: "... he

hadn't ever stopped to consider that there might be other people in them." (p 83) "'Just because we hadn't left home to find it didn't mean there was nothing there.'" (p 169) "'No, what we knew about our world ended at our borders. There's a difference.'" (p 170)

- Women's Rights and Powers
 - "'They didn't even consider trying girls out for the mapmakers' school.'" (p 46) When Aysha is discovered in disguise as a stowaway (p 43) Zain is initially angry but eventually accepts her as a healer (p 50). Does he also sense that she might have other uses or skills to contribute to the journey?
 - "'Ash hadn't been brought up to be 'protected.'" (p 183) Discuss.
- Slaves' Rights
 - "'Look at you. You've been a slave for most of your life. But you're not just going to accept that, are you? You're here.'" (p 46) "How must it feel for such a proud man, a warrior, to have been taken into slavery?" (p 68) Discuss the influence of slavery over Zain's character.
 - Discuss these quotes: "If a slave had them, then he should have them." (p 137) "'Slavery is no life at all.'" (p 213)
- Leadership
 - "Zain managed to make every man on his crew feel their role was vital." (p 68) What makes a good leader or captain?
- Historical Fiction
 - This is a fantasy but it is also a work of historical fiction since it has strong parallels with real events in history. The exploration of other continents, and the discovery of unknown tribes and lands which occurred between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries by European explorers are clearly paralleled in Zain and Quinn's journey. What other parallels with history did you discover in this novel?
- Survival Tactics
 - There are a number of instances where ingenuity is used to trick or to deter the enemy in this novel: Ajax teaches Quinn the trick with hinges (p 7); Quinn has learned the value of "sneaking" (p 84) from his brothers; "'A man cannot move quickly in bare feet,' Zain would say if he saw Quinn now." (p 66) Were there other instances like these?
 - Zain teaches his crew fighting skills that are quiet but deadly, and sound akin to martial arts. How do they assist his crew in making this journey safely?

Discussion Questions – Elements of the Novel

- Characters
 - Which character was most intriguing and why?
 - Which character do you feel might play a larger role in the remaining two books in the trilogy?
- Writing Style: Find other examples of the use of these devices in this text.

- Simile: "The trees around them were packed together like the scones his mam sometimes baked."(p 81)
- Metaphor: "this boiling cauldron" (p 124).
- Personification: "The storm had them in its teeth and was shaking them like a rabid dog." (p 124)
- Sarcasm: "'Get any closer and I'll be wearing you as a cloak,' the Deslonder said." (p 82)
- Suspense
 - The story is told from third person subjective or narrative point of view largely from Quinn's perspective, but also Ash's. How do these alternating perspectives heighten suspense?
 - How is suspense created by other aspects of the narrative?
- Genre
 - This story falls into several genres – the rite of passage, the survival or adventure story, historical fiction, fantasy. Choose any of these genres and discuss how the story fits into that genre.

Further Topics and Quotes for Discussion & Research

- "The only reason Quinn could read was because of his mother. She'd had schooling as a girl." (p viii) This is a mystery in the novel, which is explained further (p 38). How did the daughter of a Baron end up marrying Quinn's father, Bayard Freeman?
- "It hadn't taken him long to work out that knowledge meant power." (p x) Discuss.
- "But it was one thing to create beautiful maps and quite another thing to realize what those maps represented." (p 9) What does Quinn find that they represent?
- "'Words are always best, Quinn,' Zain said. 'Only fight when you have to.'" (p 89) How often does this philosophy work in the novel? Does it work in real life?
- "'People will always fear what they don't understand . . . The trick is to show them that what makes you different is nothing to fear.'" (p 123) Discuss with reference to any character in this novel.
- "'There is no reward without risk . . . Going home because we are scared would be no homecoming. My family would not be free.'" (p 213) Zain's slavery has taught him a lot about strength. Discuss the incidents which reveal that.
- "'Look for reasons to keep going, not for reasons to stop.'" (p 214) This is a maxim which applies in every life. Discuss.
- "'As a slave, Zain had to win in the most scrupulous way possible.' (p 217) Why does Zain feel such a need to be morally superior in his actions?
- "'An alliance is only as strong as the trust that binds us.'"(p 227) Can a partnership or agreement ever succeed if there is a lack of trust between parties?
- "'Keep your friends close and your enemies closer.'"(p 228) This is a quite cynical but often very pertinent statement regarding life. Discuss.
- What is an "Enemend"(p 229)?

- “‘You can only change how you react to those things.’” (p 232) This novel is about Quinn learning to react only to those things which are really important. Discuss.
- Ash’s (Aysha’s) interest in plants is inherited from her mother, Sarina, who was regarded as a healer but driven out of her village because of superstition. Ash is not only interested in propagating plants for food but also for medicine and other purposes, e.g. for coloring ink for Quinn’s mapmaking. Explorers found many new plants when they journeyed into the unknown, and this became part of the economic bounty of such journeys. Research and discuss further.
- Life on board a ship in earlier times was not always pleasant, e.g. “lice were, unfortunately, non-paying customers on every ship, no matter how clean.” (p 67) or “Starvation was every explorer’s nightmare, and a reality for every one of them.” (p 153) Research this life further.

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