

A Wizard of Earthsea



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF URSULA LE GUIN

Ursula K. Le Guin was born in Berkeley, California, to anthropologist parents. After studying at Radcliffe College (present-day Harvard University) and Columbia University, she worked as a secretary and a French teacher and eventually as a full-time writer of science fiction. Although she was known throughout her life as “America’s greatest living science fiction writer,” she balked at being put in a box as a sci-fi writer and preferred to be known simply as a novelist. Nevertheless, her enduring influence on the genre inspired writers like David Mitchell (*Cloud Atlas*), Neil Gaiman (*American Gods*, *The Sandman*), Kelly Link (*Magic for Beginners*), and Jeff VanderMeer (*Annihilation*). She was responsible for revolutionizing the genre by incorporating literary, lyrical prose, Taoist influences, and themes of feminism, anarchism, and environmentalism into her many works. Today, her name is synonymous with using the “safe, sterile laboratory” of the future and fictional world in order to examine the nature of reality, the issues at the heart of the human condition, and the possibilities and dangers that humanity faces as it expands, changes, and seeks to spread its own influence.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Though *A Wizard of Earthsea* is set in an alternate fantasy world composed of a sprawling archipelago amidst a vast, planet-covering sea, the societal challenges the world of Earthsea faces are often similar to those readers are familiar with. For instance, the individuals of Earthsea are easily corrupted by the pursuit of power and material goods. By investigating these fundamental human drives, Le Guin delivers a stark cultural commentary on the destructive nature of endless want, suggesting that instead of pursuing individual wealth or glory—like Jasper, Yevaud, Serret, and Bendersk do—a person should strive to serve their community, gain a deeper understanding of the self, and let go of materialism. Writing in the mid-1960s, which was a time of great social upheaval, Le Guin uses elements of Taoist philosophy—elements which informed a great deal of her work and indeed her life—to suggest that a more equitable, natural society is possible, but that in order to achieve it, all people must overcome the individualistic rhetoric that defines so much of contemporary life.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

At the time of its publication, *A Wizard of Earthsea* garnered

comparison to J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*, as well as his Lord of the Rings trilogy. *Earthsea* has, over the years, also been compared to the works of C. S. Lewis, specifically his Narnia series (which includes *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*). While Lewis’s work for children investigates themes and moral quandaries through a distinctly Christian lens, Le Guin’s young adult novels inhabit an irreligious yet deeply philosophical point of view inspired by the tenets of Taoism. Fundamental Taoist texts including the *Tao Te Ching*, the *Zhuangzi*, the *I Ching*, and the *Daozang* explore ideas of balance, humility, stillness, and the possibility of achieving oneness with nature and the natural order of the world. By blending the genres of fantasy, Bildungsroman (coming of age), and children’s literature, Ursula K. Le Guin created, with *Earthsea*, a new tradition that has influenced countless writers since. Philip Pullman’s *The Golden Compass*, the first part of a trilogy known as the His Dark Materials series, draws on *Earthsea*’s focus on a young protagonist who must learn painful lessons about autonomy, humility, and balance in order to survive. Le Guin’s other novels set in Earthsea include *The Tombs of Atuan*, *The Farthest Shore*, *Tehanu*, and *The Other Wind*. Le Guin’s landmark novels for adults, *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed*, explore themes similar to those excavated in *Earthsea*: ideas relating to race, class, the pursuit of power and control, and the need to maintain balance in the world appear abundantly in both books.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *A Wizard of Earthsea*
- **When Written:** Mid-1960s
- **Where Written:** Portland, Oregon
- **When Published:** 1968
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary Speculative Children’s Literature
- **Genre:** Children’s Literature; Fantasy; Bildungsroman
- **Setting:** The fictional archipelago of Earthsea.
- **Climax:** Ged travels to the ends of the earth to face down the horrible shadow that has been haunting him since his youth and calls it by its true name, Ged, in order to tame it and return it to the depths of his soul.
- **Antagonist:** The Shadow; Jasper; The Dragon of Pendor; Serret; Bendersk
- **Point of View:** Third-Person Omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Adaptable? *A Wizard of Earthsea*, beloved by a generation of readers, has been adapted for radio, film, and television several times—and yet Ursula K. Le Guin disapproved of the majority of

adaptations of her work. Of prestigious Japanese animation Studio Ghibli's adaptation, *Tales from Earthsea* (2006), Le Guin said, "It is not my book. It is your movie. It is a good movie." The film combined storytelling elements of the first four books of the sprawling *Earthsea* series rather than focusing on the first book alone. *Legend of Earthsea*, a 2005 Sci-Fi Channel adaptation of the first two novels in the *Earthsea* cycle, drew Le Guin's ire after casting a "petulant white kid" as Ged, as well as making the majority of the main cast white as well. In the *Earthsea* novels, the protagonists are largely non-white—the TV adaptation thus ignored Le Guin's central choice to focus on non-white stories.



PLOT SUMMARY

On Gont, an island in the fictional *Earthsea* archipelago, a young boy named Duny begins to discover his powers as a mage when he copies a spoken charm his aunt, a witch and herbalist, to control a local herd of goat. Duny's aunt notices his facility with spells and takes him under her wing as prentice. When pale-skinned invaders from the Kargad Empire threaten the island of Gont, Duny uses his skills with fogweaving to create a thick, impenetrable mist and shield his village from the marauding Karg forces. The act is the greatest work of magic Duny has ever done, and it leaves him exhausted and spent.

The incident, however, draws the attention of a local mage named Ogion who comes to Duny's village to ask permission to take on Duny as a prentice. Duny excitedly goes with the wise Ogion. After being given the **true name** Ged—and the public name Sparrowhawk—Duny travels across the island of Gont to the village of Re Albi with his new master. The young Ged, however, soon finds himself frustrated with Ogion's refusal to use magic to accomplish everyday tasks. Ged wants to learn as much as he can as fast as he can, and he sees Ogion's slow-paced coaching as a burden. When a local village girl entreats Ged to cast a spell beyond his knowledge, Ged turns to one of Ogion's ancient rune books—and nearly unleashes a dark, terrible force by reciting an old spell aloud. Ogion intervenes just in time, but the man senses his student's power and frustration in equal measure. Ogion urges Ged to travel to the prestigious School for wizards on the Isle of Roke—the school where Ogion himself studied—but to beware of the blind pursuit of power.

Ged arrives at the School on Roke and finds himself immersed in a world of riddles, tests, and illusions. He meets the Archmage Nemmerle, a very old wizard and head mage of the school. Ged meets his new classmates, including the pompous braggart Jasper and the kind, quiet Vetch. Jasper and Vetch eagerly show off their skills with illusions. Ged begins to fear he has made the wrong choice in coming to Roke, yet as his classes begin, he dedicates himself to his studies and begins to realize he is a skilled mage-in-training. As the nine Masters of Roke

instruct Ged and his classmates in the arts of illusion, herbalism, summoning, and runes, they warn the pupils to understand the delicate balance sustaining the universe—and the ways in which magic, when used for ill means, can disturb and corrupt that balance.

Ged adopts a pet, an otak—similar to a small fox—and deepens his friendship with Vetch, even as his rivalry with Jasper worsens. Eventually, things come to a head as Ged, fed up with Jasper's taunts, challenges the other boy to a duel. They retreat from school and head up to a grassy knoll, where Jasper dares Ged to summon a spirit from the land of the dead. Ged tries to do so—but instead calls forth a terrible black shadow which attacks him, leaving Ged covered in horrible wounds.

Nemmerle arrives and chases the shadow off with a swell of light. The other Masters help bring Ged back to the Master Herbalist's chambers to begin a long, arduous healing process—Nemmerle, meanwhile, exhausted by the effort of driving away the shadow, passes. A new Archmage, Gensher, is appointed. Ged spends months recuperating. When he returns to his classes, he is covered in white scars and his classmates hardly recognize him. Archmage Gensher encourages Ged to continue his studies—Ged will need to learn everything he can, Gensher says, to fight the shadow he has brought into the world, for it certainly awaits him somewhere. Ged studies hard and slowly returns to weaving spells and enchantments. Vetch, who has earned his wizard's staff and is returning home to the East Reach, tells Ged his true name: Estarriol. Ged searches for information about the shadow in old books of lore, but he cannot find anything useful. When it is time for Ged to leave the school on Roke, he passes one final test from the Master Doorkeeper and sets out for a humble but necessary post as a wizard on the isle of Low Toring—which is under threat from a cluster of dragons who live on the nearby island of Pendor.

On Low Torning, Ged attends to the everyday needs of his fellow villagers. It's not the glorious adventure he expected—but after failing to save his new friend Pechvarry's young son from a deadly fever, Ged begins feeling the presence of the shadow once more. Knowing he must save the residents of Low Torning from the dragons so that he can depart and outrun the shadow, he travels to Pendor and confronts the fearsome dragon Yevaud. By speaking Yevaud's true name aloud, Ged is able to bind the dragon to Pendor forever, ensuring that Low Torning will be safe. Ged returns to the isle with the good news, and he knows it is time to move on.

Ged tries to return to Roke, but an enchantment keeps him from reaching the island. While staying the night on a nearby isle, Ged encounters a stranger who seems to know him. The stranger urges Ged to go north to the land of Osskil and the Court of Terrenon—there, Ged will learn how to fight back against his shadow. Ged returns to the harbor and seeks passage to Osskil. He signs up as an oarsmen on a longboat, and, during the arduous journey north, meets an Osskilian

named Skiorh who frightens him. Nevertheless, when the ship arrives in Osskil, Ged accepts Skiorh's offer to lead him to the Court of Terrenon. On the way, however, Skiorh begins behaving oddly. When Ged forces Skiorh to turn and face him, Skiorh's hood is empty—yet it begins fighting him. Ged realizes that Skiorh has become a *gebbeth*, or puppet, of the shadow. Ged escapes the shadow's clutches by seeking refuge behind a glowing castle rampart, but he loses consciousness as the gates close between him and the *gebbeth*.

Ged awakes in the luxe Court of Terrenon. A woman, Serret, introduces herself as the Lady of the court—her husband, Benderesk, is a man several times her age. Serret, hungry for company, strikes up a friendship with Ged, though he does not recognize her as the village girl he once knew on Gont. Serret soon tries to lure him toward the founding-stone of the castle: the powerful stone of Terrenon. The stone is kept in a dark, remote room under three separate locks. As soon as Ged spots the stone, he senses a terrible power coming from it and refuses to touch it or speak to it. Serret, however, tries to get Ged to want the stone's power—she even offers to rule alongside him once he becomes true master of the stone. When Ged refuses a second time—in front of Benderesk—Benderesk transforms Serret into a horrible creature and unleashes his Servants of the Stone to pursue her and Ged from the castle. In the courtyard, Ged finds the frozen corpse of his *otak* companion. Serret changes herself into a bird and tries to fly away. Ged follows suit, turning himself into a hawk. He flies out to sea, where Osskilian magic has no power over him.

Soon, he arrives back on Gont, still in hawk-form. He flies straight to the arm of his former master, Ogion, and Ogion helps Ged find his way back to his human form. Ogion shelters Ged for several days as Ged returns to health. Ged tells Ogion about all the trouble he's had since resigning as Ogion's prentice—but Ogion points out how much good Ged has done, too. Ogion builds Ged a new staff and tells Ged that running from the shadow will do him no good: he needs to turn the hunter into the hunted. After his new staff is complete, Ged commandeers a small boat, hoping that if he meets the shadow over the sea, he will be stronger against it than he has been on land. When Ged calls out for the shadow, the shadow flies across the waves. When Ged sails at it, however, the shadow turns and flees. A wild chase commences, and the shadow tricks Ged into running aground on a remote sandbar. Ged finds two people living there: an elderly man and woman who do not speak his tongue, and whom he begins to believe are Kargish royalty living in exile. After repairing his boat, Ged takes to the seas again. He soon encounters the shadow again—this time, it appears in the back of his boat. Ged grabs at the shadow, yet he is unable to take hold of it. The shadow flees the encounter, yet Ged feels something has changed—now, he is the hunter.

Ged continues pursuing the shadow across the sea, stopping on small islands to replenish his supplies and rest. On one island,

he is turned away when the villagers report that a man who looked like Ged arrived several days ago. On the island of Iffish, Ged is walking the streets in solitude when he comes upon his old friend Vetch. Vetch and Ged embrace joyously, and Vetch invites Ged to come rest at his house. Vetch's younger sister, Yarrow, is just a few years younger than Ged, and the two get along well. Ged fills Vetch in on what he has been battling ever since leaving Roke and explains that he plans to track the shadow to the ends of the earth to face it. Vetch offers to come along—someone, he says, needs to bear witness to Ged's great, final encounter with the beast. As Vetch and Ged strategize about how Ged might best the shadow, Ged says he knows he must find out the creature's true name.

Vetch and Ged set out, traveling southward on a long journey past the last known island in the archipelago. Out on the open water, very far south of the last sight of land, the ship suddenly runs aground. Ged alone can see the sand and the reef—Vetch is unable to see anything but water all around. Ged spots the shadow in the distance—it assumes the shape of his father, then Jasper, then Pechvarry, and then a semblance of Ged himself before returning to its shadow form. Ged speaks the shadow's true name aloud: Ged. As Ged grabs hold of his shadow-self, there is an explosion of light and darkness. The land dissolves and Vetch pulls Ged from the waves. Ged is exhausted but exhilarated—he tells Vetch that he finally feels “whole.” Vetch and Ged sail home to the East Reach, where Yarrow greets them happily.

In a brief epilogue, the narrator reveals that in all of the great songs and deeds that will be sung about Ged's many adventures in the years to come—long after he ascends to Archmage of the entire Archipelago—not a one will mention his encounter with the shadow.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Ged / Duny / Sparrowhawk – Ged, whose childhood name is Duny and whose public name, or “use-name,” is Sparrowhawk, is the protagonist of *A Wizard of Earthsea*. Le Guin refers to Ged primarily by his **true name**—which, in the Earthsea universe, is often unknown to all except a few close friends and possesses spell-like qualities. She does this in order to establish an intimacy and camaraderie with the reader as she relays Ged's coming-of-age story, which follows him from the time he is a boy of 12 until he is a man of 18 and a wizard in his own right. At the start of the novel, Ged is known as Duny and lives in a poor village on the isle of Gont. He is powerful yet untrained when it comes to sorcery. His skills draw the attention of a local mage, Ogion, who takes the young Duny on as prentice and gives him his true name: Ged. Ged quickly grows frustrated with Ogion's sage, slow silence, and, in order to more quickly

amass power and knowledge travels at the age of 14 to the Isle of Roke, where he attends the School for wizards there. At the School, Ged's thirst for power is put to the test—and he fails himself, his classmates, and his instructors when, in an illegal duel with another prentice, he calls forth a terrible shadow being that nearly kills him. Ged's life, which was so full of purpose and potential, suddenly becomes a lengthy, drawn-out showdown against the shadow that hunts him. As Ged finishes his training, enters the world, and begins having adventures, he is constantly reminded of the careful equilibrium of the universe—and what happened when he dared to disturb it. He soon realizes that running from the shadow, which pursues him constantly, is not the answer—he begins to understand that he must face it and understand it if he wants to conquer it. As Ged grows from a boy into a man, he learns important lessons about duty, destiny, balance, pride, and how to live a full life as a whole, integrated self rather than scraping by while ignoring the dark, painful parts of oneself.

The Shadow – The shadow Ged lets loose into the world during a duel with Jasper on Roke Knoll is the primary antagonist of the novel and its greatest mystery. The shadow is, at first, a child-sized, featureless “clot” that Ged brings forth while trying to summon the spirit of a dead maiden of yore. The shadow seems to leap of the mysterious space Ged opens up between the world of the living and the world of the dead and instantly attacks Ged, rending his face and arms with horrible long gashes. Even though Archmage Nemmerle arrives and chases the shadow off, the shadow still remains in the world of the living and the light, and Ged knows deep down that he will have to face it once again. Over the years, the shadow continues to pursue him—first in dreams, and then in the flesh—while Ged frantically tries to figure out where the shadow has come from, what it wants from him, and what the rules of their careful yet violent dance truly are. The shadow comes to Ged in many forms: it uses a *gebbeth*, or puppet, to lead Ged into a trap in the far-north land of Osskil by possessing the body of a sailor named Skiorh. It appears on Iffish, days before Ged arrives there, in the form of Ged himself. When Ged chases the shadow to the end of the world for a final confrontation, it takes the form of several people from Ged's life: his father, Jasper, and his friend Pechvarry. At last, after encountering the shadow several times, Ged begins to understand that the shadow is actually the darkest part of himself. By speaking its **true name** to it—Ged—Ged is at last able to reintegrate the shadow into himself and know peace as a whole man beholden to no one but himself. The shadow never speaks or emotes, yet throughout his encounters with it, Ged senses a pointed malevolence coming from it. Ged knows all along that the shadow wants to destroy him, but what it takes him years to learn is that the shadow is in many ways a metaphor for the experience of coming of age and learning to identify and accept even the darkest parts of oneself.

Ogion – Ogion is the wise Gontish mage who takes on the young but promising Ged (then known as Duny) as a prentice. After giving Duny his **true name** of Ged in a ritual ceremony on Ged's 13th birthday, Ogion takes Ged across the island to the village of Re Albi, where he begins slowly instructing Ged in the building blocks of magery. Ogion is a largely silent, wise, and sage man who never sees a need for rush, pompousness, or glory. This frustrates the headstrong and hungry young Ged, who longs to quickly amass skills in powerful and increasingly dark magical arts. Perturbed by Ged's reckless pursuit of immense power and strange, ancient magic, Ogion encourages the bot to travel to Roke and attend the School for wizards there (which Ogion himself attended), but he also warns Ged not to blindly pursue power, glory, and fame. Many years later, after several painful, traumatic, and dangerous adventures, Ged returns in falcon form to his old master's doorstep to recuperate. Ged is ashamed of the foolhardy boy he once was, and he tells Ogion, his “true master,” that he should have better integrated the skills of patience, care, and a slow accumulation of knowledge that Ogion tried to teach him at a young age. Ogion is an endlessly forgiving, tender, and understanding man. As the wise mage he is, Ogion understands the passion and foolishness of youth. His initial sense of Ged's powerful potential never fades, and he continues to support his onetime prentice even years after Ged leaves his side. Ogion teaches Ged many important lessons about patience, kindness, duty, and the ineffable cosmic balance which governs all things.

Jasper – Jasper is a pretentious, braggadocious, and moneyed student at the School for wizards on the Isle of Roke. When Ged first meets Jasper, he is envious of the boy's devil-may-care attitude and fine possessions—yet the more Ged gets to know Jasper, the more he comes to see that Jasper is plagued by self-doubt and an unyielding thirst for rivalry. Jasper's pursuit of power—and his desire to constantly best his classmates, especially the talented Ged—represents the corruptive thirst for glory, pride, and fame against which Ged must struggle during his early years as a wizard. When Jasper challenges Ged to a duel on Roke Knoll, Ged decides that he will perform a dangerous summoning spell in order to impress and silence Jasper once and for all. Sick of enduring taunts about his humble beginnings on Gont, Ged believes that if he pulls off an impressive spell, he will establish himself as undeniably powerful and capable—but Ged's own pride gets the best of him when his summoning spell unleashes a terrible shadow creature into the world. Jasper does not attend to Ged or help him during his bloody initial struggle against the shadow, and after receiving his staff from the School, Jasper fades into obscurity. Ged's rivalry with Jasper teaches him that the pursuit of power and glory for their own sake is dangerous, corruptive, and violent. Without Jasper, Ged would not be able to grow into the humble, introspective mage he ends up becoming.

Vetch / Estarriol – Vetch, whose **true name** is Estarriol, is Ged’s closest friend and most steadfast companion at the School on Roke and in the years beyond their education. The dark-skinned Vetch comes from the East Reach of the Archipelago. A humble, patient young man who is a true friend to Ged, Vetch is a powerful sorcerer who nonetheless decides, after finishing his studies, to return to his hometown and serve as mage to the island from which he came. Whereas Jasper and Ged yearn (and fight) for power, glory, and renown, Vetch wants to use his skills to help others. While at school with Jasper and Ged, Vetch is constantly trying to de-escalate fights and skirmishes between the two pompous boys—even though his attempts are often unsuccessful. On the isle of Iffish in the East Reach, Vetch makes a name for himself as a powerful yet approachable wizard who is available to anyone who needs his help. He understands that a sense of duty is enough of a destiny for anyone—yet he maintains a sense of adventure and yearning that leads him to accompany Ged, years after they part ways on Roke, across the sea to the ends of the earth in order to confront the shadow that has been haunting Ged for years. Vetch knows that his friend has been burdened with a difficult lot, and he wants to do all he can to support Ged as Ged struggles against his own fate. Supportive, modest, and thoughtful, Vetch is a wizard of immense power, bravery, and heart.

Archmage Nemmerle – Archmage Nemmerle is the archmage, or head, of the School on Roke that Ged attends. The ancient man—rumored to be the oldest living person in Earthsea—is almost always accompanied by his prophetic pet raven, a bird from the northern land of Osskil. Nemmerle is an old and powerful man who has the ability to divine things about his students just from looking at them and speaking over them. Nemmerle is deeply wise and extraordinarily powerful, yet he is quiet, withdrawn, and humble. Nemmerle gives his life to help Ged fight off the shadow that Ged unleashes into the world during a duel with Jasper. Ged harbors guilt about having been in a way responsible for Nemmerle’s death—yet Nemmerle willingly uses the last of his ancient powers to help Ged recover from the mortal wounds that the shadow inflicted upon him. Nemmerle’s power comes from his wisdom and selflessness, not from flagrant displays of great magic.

Archmage Gensher – After Archmage Nemmerle dies saving Ged from the shadow, Archmage Gensher is elected by the nine Masters of Roke to replace him. Gensher is a wise, thoughtful man who is invested in Ged’s healing and in his future. Despite his great power, Gensher is unable to see what lies before Ged on his adventures—yet as he coaches Ged through his final years on Roke and prepares to help send him out into the world, he cautions Ged never to forget what his hardships have taught him and to always keep an eye out for the temptation of power and glory.

The Master Hand – The Master Hand is one of the nine

Masters of Roke. He teaches the arts of illusion, sleight of hand, and minor acts of Changing. The Master Hand, however, is careful to warn his students who would seek to transform their illusions into true changes that there is a careful balance to the universe—a balance that must be maintained even if the temptation to let one’s powers run wild is great.

The Master Namer – One of the nine Masters of Roke, the Master Namer resides in the Isolate Tower, far away from the School, where he instructs students in the grave and mostly silent art of understanding the **true names** of everything in the universe. When Ged is first sent to study with the Master Namer, he feels the work is boring drudgery—on his second trip to the Isolate Tower, however, Ged feels a deep reverence for the careful, specific work the Master Namer does.

The Master Summoner – The Master Summoner is a stern, aged man who teaches somber “true” magic: summoning energies, drawing powers from the universe, and controlling other earthly forces. The grave Master Summoner always imparts unto his students the dangers of changing matter and summoning forces unknown and the importance of maintaining the equilibrium of the universe. The Master Summoner refuses to share with the young Ged—or any of his pupils—information about the arts of summoning living people and raising the dead.

The Doormaster / The Master Doorkeeper – The Master Doorkeeper guards the door to the School for wizards on the Isle of Roke. When Ged first meets the doormaster at the School on Roke, he doesn’t realize that the man is one of the nine wise, revered Masters of Roke. It is only later in Ged’s training, when it is time for him to leave the School, that he comes to understand the sage yet playful man’s true power. The Master Doorkeeper tests Ged as he departs the school by asking Ged to speak the doormaster’s **true name**—Ged eventually realizes that the only way to learn it is to ask. The Master Doorkeeper willingly gives Ged his own name—a sign of trust, care, and deep respect in the world of Earthsea.

Pechvarry – Pechvarry is boatbuilder whom Ged meets while living on the isle of Low Torning and serving its people as their mage. Ged strikes up a friendship with the kindly, affable Pechvarry, but when Ged fails to save the life of Pechvarry’s son after the boy is struck with a terrible fever, Ged senses something shift between them. His own guilt creates a barrier between him and Pechvarry.

Yevaud, the Dragon of Pendor – Yevaud is the **true name** of the fearsome Dragon of Pendor who sacked, burned, and overtook the Isle of Pendor from its native inhabitants many years ago. Since then, Yevaud has ruled over a brood of young dragons who occasionally fly across the Archipelago in search of sheep, terrorizing the residents of the outlying islands. Ged travels to Pendor to confront all of the dragons—yet after dispatching with most of the small, young dragons, he realizes that it is Yevaud whom he must tame. Yevaud is slick, cunning,

and flattering, as all dragons are, but Ged resists the temptation to listen to Yevaud's compliments. Yevaud taunts Ged by offering him the opportunity to learn the shadow's true name—how Yevaud knows of Ged's travails, Ged is uncertain, yet again he refuses to accept any information from the duplicitous Yevaud. Instead, by speaking Yevaud's true name, Ged binds the wily dragon to the isle of Pendor forever, preventing him or his brood from ravaging the vulnerable nearby island communities.

Skiorh – Skiorh is an Osskilian man Ged meets on a longship bound for the north. Skiorh, a rough-spoken and imposing man, gives Ged a bad feeling after Ged senses a strange blurring of Skiorh's features during their sea journey. Nevertheless, when the ship makes port in Osskil, Ged reluctantly agrees to follow Skiorh to the Court of the Terrenon—only to realize halfway there that he has been duped. Skiorh has become a puppet, or *gebbeth*, of the shadow. Out on the wintry moors, Skiorh slowly disappears and reveals to Ged that he has all along been possessed by Ged's shadow. The two fight until Ged pulls himself into the Court's enchanted gate and escapes.

Village Girl / Serret – The Lady of the Court of the Terrenon, Serret, was once a young girl who grew up in the village of Re Albi on the Isle of Gont. When Ged is young, he meets a village girl, the daughter of the Lord of Re Albi, and the girl encourages him to try his hand at increasingly dark magic. Ged, longing to impress her, tries to find the spells she wants him to cast in his mentor Ogion's book of runes, but Ogion warns Ged that one must always be cautious of the powers a person serves. Later on in the novel, when Ged arrives at the Court of the Terrenon in Osskil, he meets the Lady Serret—she is surprised when he does not recognize her as the girl from Re Albi. Nonetheless, Serret extends great hospitality and friendship toward Ged, but ultimately it becomes clear that now Serret serves the power of the mysterious stone of Terrenon and wants for Ged to master the stone and rule the world with her. Whatever forces pull Serret, time and time again throughout her life, toward dark magic and perversion of the universe's careful equilibrium are unknown—yet her struggle against the dark mirrors Ged's own struggle to understand the complicated, delicate forces that hold the universe in balance.

Benderesk – The Lord of the Court of the Terrenon, Benderesk is an elderly Osskilian nobleman who has languished in years of servitude to the mysterious, powerful Stone of Terrenon. Ged has little association with Benderesk during his days at court—yet it is clear from Benderesk's cruel outrage toward his wife, Serret, when she refuses to convince Ged to approach the stone that Benderesk has given up all agency in order to serve the dark powers the stone possesses.

The Elderly Man and The Elderly Woman – The Elderly Man and the Elderly Woman live together on a seemingly uninhabited sandbar in the middle of the ocean. For many years, it seems, they have been living alone with only one

another's company. The two are pale Kargs who do not speak the Hardic tongue of the Archipelago. When Ged's shadow tricks him into running aground on their sandbar, Ged stays with the couple for several days before beginning to piece together their story. After the elderly woman shows him some finery inlaid with the emblems of the Kargish empire, Ged begins to believe the two are a royal or noble brother and sister living in exile.

Ged's Aunt – Ged's aunt is a witch from the isle of Gont. She mostly performs herbal cures and healings and simple spells meant to herd animals. However, when she recognizes potential in the young Ged (known in his childhood days as Duny), she begins instructing him in the art of binding spells and the use of **true names** to control other beings. Ged's aunt is a formative figure in his younger years—though he hungers for power and knowledge far greater than what she can give him.

Yarrow – Vetch's younger sister Yarrow is a girl of 14. Though she is young, she is brave, precocious, and whip-smart. She has faith in Ged and Vetch's ability to conquer anything together, and she wholeheartedly supports their journey together to the ends of the earth. Yarrow's **true name**, Vetch reveals to Ged, is Kest—the word, in the Old Speech, for “minnow.” Like a wily minnow, Yarrow is quick, darting, and capable.

MINOR CHARACTERS

The Master Herbal – One of the nine Masters of Roke, the Master Herbal instructs students at the School in the arts of herbal cures and healing. A patient and selfless man, the Master Herbal spends months nursing Ged back to health after Ged's first encounter with the shadow on Roke Knoll.

The Master Patterner – The most mysterious of the nine Masters of Roke, the Master Patterner teaches his arcane and ineffable arts in the privacy of the Immanent Grove, away from the eyes of young prentices and pupils.

Ged's Father – Ged's father is a bronze-smith from the isle of Gont.

Murre – Murre is Vetch and Yarrow's youngest brother.



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.



COMING OF AGE

Ursula K. Le Guin's *A Wizard of Earthsea* is a Bildungsroman, a novel focusing on the journey of its protagonist from youth toward maturity. As the young boy Duny becomes the wizard-in-training Ged—and as Ged begins to taste the power he will one day embody as the wizard Sparrowhawk—Le Guin charts Ged's growth. Coming of age for Ged is not easy: he wrestles with pride, self-doubt, and a thirst for power that threatens his life. Over the course of the novel, Le Guin argues that though coming of age is a laborious process, it is the only way for an individual to truly comprehend themselves, the world, and the larger purpose of their existence.

When Ged first begins his journey, he's full of ambition but also plagued with embarrassment and fear. Ged comes to the conclusion that he must pursue knowledge of his craft in order to grow and discover who he is and what he's capable of. Ged is embarrassed when a young girl in the village of Re Albi (where Ged has traveled with his mentor Ogion to study the magical arts) accuses him of being too afraid to cast a dangerous changing spell. Ged fears that in failing to cast the spell, he is weak or immature—he doesn't yet understand that there are certain dark breeds of magic that are not meant to be explored. His bullheaded thirst for knowledge leads him to make a reckless decision that will change the course of his life forever. After the encounter with the girl, Ged hurries home to the cabin he and Ogion share and opens one of Ogion's ancient tomes. A terrifying darkness fills the room—but Ogion enters just in time, dispersing the darkness with his staff. While speaking with Ogion about what has just happened, Ged realizes that while he loves Ogion, he craves more knowledge and power than he feels Ogion can give him. Ged makes the difficult decision to travel to the isle of Roke to attend a school for wizards and, hopefully, to amass more knowledge, power, and potential. This episode is important to Ged's coming-of-age journey because it represents a moment in which Ged knows what he wants. Even though he knows that to pursue what he believes is his destiny will be difficult, Ged is determined to uncover the purpose of his existence and the depths of his power.

Despite Ged's recognition of the value of learning and challenging himself, his coming-of-age journey is initially more trying than it is rewarding. Ged's coming-of-age process is kickstarted when he arrives at the school for wizards on the island of Roke. When Ged enters a rivalry with a fellow student named Jasper, he's still inexperienced, impetuous, and impatient. Ged rises to Jasper's bait, and in an attempt to best his fellow wizard, he unintentionally casts a much-too-powerful spell that unleashes a horrible, frightening, and violent shadow into the world. The shadow attacks Ged, leaving him near death. Ged recovers slowly over the course of a year, and he is forever changed by the terrifying encounter. This incident is an

important part of Ged's coming-of-age journey as it represents a painful experience that nonetheless allows Ged to understand himself better. He thought he wanted power, glory, and fame—yet having pursued those things recklessly, he now sees his own foolishness. As Ged is forced to interrogate all he thought he knew about himself in the aftermath of this incident, Le Guin suggests that becoming oneself is a difficult, laborious journey full of missteps and uncertainties. Ultimately, Ged understands that he must undergo the difficult process of confronting his own flaws and shortcomings in order to truly mature and to fully understand himself and the world around him.

Toward the end of the novel, Ged has a final showdown against the shadow. Ged has spent years running from it and trying to escape the darkness it has brought into his life. The shadow has pursued him across Earthsea—and with each encounter, Ged's realization that he cannot spend his life running from his fear and sense of failure has deepened. Ged realizes that even after all he's accomplished, he still hasn't confronted his main adversary: the shadow. As the novel nears its end, Ged knows that he cannot run from the shadow any longer. With the help of his old friend Vetch, Ged tracks the shadow to the ends of the earth, where he confronts it and accepts that the shadow has been a part of him all along. Finally, in calling the shadow by its **name**—his own name—Ged is able to reabsorb it into the place from which he loosed it: his soul. Ged's final encounter with the shadow is the final trial in his coming-of-age process. Ged's ability to conquer the shadow represents the fact that he has come to understand himself. He knows that there is darkness as well as light within him, and that the power he possesses has the potential to bring him a sense of humility and grace—or an all-consuming lust for greatness. In besting the shadow, Ged shows that he has come to accept not just himself, but the world in which he lives and the destiny it holds for him.

The trials Ged faces as he grows over the course of the novel test and even threaten him. Ultimately, however, Ged is left with a better understanding of his life's purpose and duties. Le Guin uses Ged's story to suggest that even in the reader's world, the lessons one learns as one comes of age are of tremendous importance to one's development as both an individual and a member of society. style.



KNOWLEDGE AND PATIENCE VS. POWER AND PRIDE

"Have you never thought how danger must surround power as shadow does light?" Ged's

mentor Ogion asks him as Ged contemplates leaving Ogion's tutelage and traveling to Roke to attend a prestigious school for wizards. With the careful, deliberate Ogion, Ged knows, he will learn intricate magic but must remain beholden to his master's careful disbursement of knowledge and information. On Roke, however, Ged knows that he will learn as fast as he is able,

speeding toward a vast accrual of power. As Ged pursues the power he believes he's destined for, however, he finds himself in for a rude awakening. In charting Ged's journey, Ursula K. Le Guin ultimately argues that the reckless, impatient pursuit of power—without knowledge, patience, and skill to ground that power—is not just useless but dangerous.

At the beginning of the novel, Ged yearns for power, glory, and fame despite Ogion's attempts to slowly and holistically teach Ged small bits of magic. Frustrated by Ogion's slow pace, Ged defies his master, first by reading forbidden, dangerous spell books, and secondly by deciding to abandon Ogion's tutelage and pursue fame and power on the isle of Roke at a prestigious school for wizards. "Any craft you undertake to learn you will learn, for your power is great. Greater even than your pride, I hope," Ogion tells Ged as Ged leaves, demonstrating the fact that while Ged is following the thread of power and pride, Ogion instead longs for Ged to focus on simply learning well and becoming the best wizard he can be. On the isle of Roke, Ged continues his pursuit of power and glory as he grapples with his fellow pupil Jasper, a gifted illusionist, for clout and renown. Ged's power struggle with Jasper perhaps best encapsulates Ged's central conflict between knowledge and patience versus power and pride. Ged is so anxious to prove his powers to Jasper—and to the rest of their cohort—that he foolishly performs an act of magic outside of his expertise and unleashes a terrible, horrific shadow being into the world. Ged is horribly maimed in the encounter and forced to spend months in bed recovering. Ged's breakneck pursuit of power without knowledge and pride without skill nearly kills him, demonstrating Le Guin's assertion that power for power's sake is a dangerous thing.

As the novel progresses, Le Guin continues to show how knowledge and patience are more important tools in life than power, pride, glory, or fame. In the wake of his first encounter with the shadow, Ged becomes a more patient person—a person invested in a holistic education based in knowledge, wit, and careful thought rather than rash action or grand displays of power. This change in Ged is evidenced by several important choices he makes relating to the pursuit of power and glory—a pursuit that was once central to his life, but that has since been replaced by a quest for knowledge and holistic understanding of the world. First, when it is time for Ged to leave school, he agrees to take an assignment to help protect the island of Low Tarning, a small and rural place where there is "no fame, no wealth, maybe no risk" according to the Archmage of the school on Roke. Ged nevertheless accepts the post: "his desire had turned as much against fame and display as once it had been set on them. Always now he doubted his strength and dreaded the trial of his power," Le Guin writes of Ged's mental and emotional state as he leaves school. This demonstrates that experiencing the consequences of power for power's sake has fundamentally changed Ged. Ged's thirst for power is tested

once again when he ventures to Pendor to protect the people of Low Tarning from Yevaud, a gigantic, fearsome dragon who lives there. When Ged encounters Yevaud and binds Yevaud to his will by speaking Yevaud's **true name**, Yevaud offers Ged the key to "master[ing]" and besting the shadow that Ged senses is pursuing him and threatening his life. Yevaud offers Ged the power to best his shadow, claiming to know the shadow's true name—yet Ged refuses Yevaud's help, knowing that to simply best the shadow without fully understanding it and taming it himself would be an empty and perhaps even dangerous act.

Ged's fundamental predicament is feeling torn between the pursuit of power, pride, and glory and the hard-to-swallow awareness that without dedication, time, and careful studying, he will never ascend to the heights he longs to reach. Ged's journey from fiery, impatient, headstrong boy into a more patient, open, and thoughtful young man is a difficult one, and yet his experiences along the way shape him into the person he was always meant to become.



IDENTITY AND THE SHADOW SELF

When Ged is still a young wizard-in-training, his prideful desire to best his schoolmate Jasper leads him to cast a spell beyond his prowess—a spell that unleashes a mysterious, horrific, and powerful shadow creature. As Ged comes to terms with what he has done, he finds himself realizing that he cannot spend his life running away from the creature he has loosed on the world—a creature that will hunt him until the end of his days unless he turns around and faces it. Through Ged's struggle with the shadow (which he ultimately comes to realize is a part of himself), Ursula K. Le Guin suggests that life's central battle is the fight to recognize, accept, and integrate all of the disparate, dark, shadowed parts of one's identity—even those parts one might find frightening, hateful, or untamable.

When Ged accidentally unleashes a terrible shadow being into the world during a schoolyard duel with Jasper, his rival at the school for wizards on Roke, Ged finds himself facing down a journey he never expected he'd have to take—a journey of intimate self-understanding rather than one of pursuing power, glory, and renown. Ged finds himself forced to confront a deeply personal and profoundly existential challenge at what should be the bright, boundless start of a new career—rather than chasing dreams of power and wizardry, he finds himself contending with an enemy that reflects his own folly and hubris back at him and forces him to reconsider major questions about his path. Ged imagined that his life's story would be one of glory and achievement—but his encounter with the shadow prepares him for the realization that the great challenge of his life may already have been ordained. After healing from the wounds the shadow inflicts upon him during their first encounter, Ged wonders if he will have to outrun the shadow that pursues him for the rest of his days. His internal struggle

to comprehend what has befallen him represents the ways in which people come to see the emotional, psychological, and intellectual challenge of coming of age and understanding oneself as drudgery rather than an adventure in and of itself. Before Ged recognizes what the shadow is—part of himself—he sees it as something external, uncontrollable, and fearsome rather than a part of himself he must learn to accept and reintegrate.

Though Ged is severely wounded and nearly killed during his first encounter with the shadow, future encounters force him to look inward and confront the shadow as a part of himself that he unleashed. As Ged meets the shadow again and again throughout his travels around Earthsea (and in his own dreams from time to time), the shadow does not attack him as violently and maliciously as it did during their first meeting. It tries to deceive him by disguising itself in the bodies of others, and it does attempt to hurt Ged, but it is never as strong as the moment in which it first emerged—a moment in which Ged longed for power and total control. The shadow grows weaker the more Ged learns about it, reflecting the fact that the more one understands about oneself, the less frightening and seemingly unconquerable the dark parts of one's inner self become. These relatively anticlimactic encounters with the shadow throughout Earthsea demonstrate that the struggle to understand, conquer, and integrate the darkest parts of oneself is not necessarily a single, epic standoff, but rather a laborious and inward-looking process—yet one that gets easier all the time. Ged is ultimately able to recognize his shadow as the darkest, most horrible part of himself, and, in **naming** it, he is able to integrate it into himself once more. After chasing the shadow to the end of the world and confronting it by calling out its true name—his own name—Ged reabsorbs the shadow, and his struggles against it are finished. By realizing that the shadow is and always was part of himself—and by calling it Ged, its true name—Ged is able to tame the shadow and allow it to return to the mysterious place from whence it came, which turns out to be from the depths of Ged's very soul. Le Guin thus reveals that Ged's struggle against the monster has always been a metaphorical struggle against the darkest part of himself. The shadow existed to hurt Ged, to taunt him, to distract him from his path, and to deceive him into a constant state of fear, suspicion, trepidation, and self-loathing. By realizing that the darkest part of himself is the part associated with fear, self-destructive behavior, and sabotage, Ged is able to understand it, name it, calm it, and return it to the depths of his soul. By integrating the shadow back into himself, Ged accepts that there is no darkness without light, and vice versa. The dark, shadowed part of himself will always exist—but by accepting it rather than seeing it as an enemy, he can at last begin life on his own terms.

In accepting that he will doom himself to a life of fear and misery should he try to exist separately from the darkest parts

of his inner self, Ged comes to understand one of life's most important lessons: that the self is a many-faceted—even fractured—thing. As Ged comes to appreciate that there is no shadow without light, he at last comprehends that he must not reject the parts of himself he fears or despises. Instead, he must learn to accept and live with them, willingly integrating the many disparate parts of his personality.



DUTY AND DESTINY

In the world of the Earthsea archipelago, wizards and mages are bound by duty to use their gifts to help others in their home communities and beyond.

After finishing his prenticeship (the word that denizens of Earthsea use in place of “apprenticeship”) at a school for wizards on the island of Roke, Ged finds himself torn between a sense of duty to fellowship, service, and good works carried out on small, unremarkable islands versus the larger pursuit of great deeds, heroism, and his own mortal struggle against the shadow creature that he unleashed upon the world while still in school. As the novel progresses and Ged comes to understand the true meaning of hard work and goodwill, Le Guin shows how while one may feel they are destined for greater things than rote duties, one can learn that living a life of responsibility to other people and service to one's community is a heroic destiny in and of itself.

As she delves into Ged's world, Le Guin shows how Ged must learn to see the beauty in his ability to offer his services as a wizard to his friends and neighbors rather than looking upon his destiny as a chore, a bore, or an imposition. While Ged is still a child known as Duny, he lives on a poor and isolated island where he learns charm work from his aunt, a local witch, and becomes versed in the uses of herbs, healing spells, and other minor helpful, protective enchantments. The root of Ged's education is based in helping others to heal, grow, and stay safe. He comes to magic knowing that magic is a humble thing—its true purpose is not to bring one glory or renown, but rather to allow one to aid one's community. In spite of Ged's humble roots, as his skills with magic bring him more and more attention in his small community, he is told—and begins to truly believe—that he is destined for greatness. He begins to conceive of magic as a way to escape his unremarkable home, to make his mark on the world, and to become one of the greatest wizards ever to live. Ged's hubris in his formative years ultimately leads him to pursue an education on the isle of Roke—but while there, Ged finds that the pursuit of power is not all it's made out to be. After a terrible accident, in which Ged accidentally unleashes an evil shadow into the world, he begins reconsidering what his destiny might be—out of necessity, out of shame, and out of a deeper sense of self-understanding.

After his adventures in school on the isle of Roke, Ged is injured, humble, and wary of pursuing his former notions of a

heroic destiny. Despite his former yearning for power and glory, Ged's harmful and frightening act of hubris leads him to accept a post on the poor, faraway island of Low Torning with grace and thankfulness. It does not even "enter his head that a wizard might be ashamed to perform such simple crafts." Just a few years ago, Ged shirked the humble but essential practice of healing crafts and protective spells in pursuit of flashier, illusion-based magic that would allow him to demonstrate his might and prove that he was destined for greatness. Now, however, Ged has begun to see that duty to his fellow people may, in fact, be a great enough destiny for him. On Low Torning, Ged truly learns the value of serving others. Now a humbler, quieter version of the boy he once was, he quickly finds that the people of the island hold him in high regard as a former inhabitant of Roke, or "the Isle of the Wise"—yet the praise he garners and the attention he attracts make him uneasy and embarrassed. When he sets off for the island of Pendor to confront the young dragons who live there—dragons who will eventually fly eastward to wreak havoc on the poor, vulnerable Low Torning—Ged does not undertake the journey as a means of asserting his power, prowess, or skill as a wizard. He genuinely wants to serve the people of Low Torning by protecting them from any harm that might come their way. Throughout his encounters with the young dragons and their progenitor, Yevaud, Ged remains focused not on outsmarting the dragons, approaching their horde of gold, or matching them in battle: he focuses only on containing them to their isle, ensuring that they leave Low Torning be. This episode is proof of Ged's realization that duty to others is a great destiny in and of itself. He does not need to use his encounter with the dragons to prove himself, to secure glory, or to begin spinning for himself another, grander destiny. Ged has accepted that his destiny as a wizard is to help others—and it is only after accepting that fact that he'll begin performing the works that will bring him the renown he always sought. Though Ged's power as a wizard brings him attention and the sense of pride he always longed for, he now knows that the only way to truly earn these things is to root his actions in a sense of service, duty, compassion, and humility.

Over the course of the novel, Ged transforms from an impatient, petulant boy who sees his gifts as a wizard worthy only for their abilities to bring him power, glory, and fame into a young man who appreciates the value of duty to one's community and who understands the gravity of his destiny. Ged comes to see that his destiny to serve others is not mutually exclusive from a destiny in which he achieves greatness—and that, in fact, achieving the latter is not possible without fulfilling the former.



COSMIC BALANCE

In the world of the Earthsea archipelago, magic, dragons, and dark spirits abound. Though the

fantastical setting of the novel suggests that Earthsea is a world in which anything might happen, Le Guin makes clear that there is a cosmic balance that must be maintained, and that to use spells to conjure great riches, to quickly and miraculously heal deep wounds, or to remove consequences from one's actions is forbidden. Drawing on the tenets of Taoism—an ancient Chinese philosophical tradition that advocates humility, simplicity, and harmony—Le Guin uses *A Wizard of Earthsea* to argue that there is a cosmic balance in all life that must be maintained. To upset this balance by pursuing materialism, ego, and power is not just to destabilize the universe, but to doom oneself to a life of fear, jealousy, and dissatisfaction.

There are several instances throughout the novel in which Le Guin indicts greed, materialism, ego, and all the negative, self-serving actions that accompany the pursuit of greatness and riches—and that throw off the delicate rightful balance of the universe. First, Le Guin argues that irresponsible pursuit of materialism corrupts the natural beauty and balance of the universe. When Ged first arrives on the isle of Roke to attend a school for wizards, he finds that he is easily able to keep up with his classmates in the arts of illusion and spell-building. Ged, however, wants more: he can easily turn a pebble into a diamond through illusion, but when he attempts to find a way to make the change permanent, the school's Master Hand points out that to change the rock into a jewel, Ged would have to change its essence—its **true name**. To do so, the Master Hand warns, "even to a small scrap of the world, is to change [and] shake the balance of the world." "A rock is a good thing, too, you know," the Master Hand goes on to say, suggesting that Ged learn to appreciate the careful balance of the objects in the universe for what they are rather than attempting to convert them into what they are not. This instance is significant because Le Guin suggests that to upset the balance of the universe in pursuit of material things is dangerous. Things are what they are, she implies, and to change a plain rock into a glittering jewel is a dishonest and unnatural act that upsets the careful harmony of the universe's beauty.

Next, Le Guin suggests that the desire to glorify one's ego—and the steps one might take in pursuit of that goal—threaten the careful balance of the universe. When Ged, attempting to best his schoolmate Jasper in a duel, summons forth a dark creature—a shadow—from realms unknown, the shadow attacks Ged and nearly kills him. Ged doesn't know the true power or significance of what he has loosed onto the world. Yet as Ged heals from his wounds and recovers from the trauma of the episode, he understands that his quest for power, glory, and fame—his attempt to inflate his own ego—has upset the balance of the universe in a profoundly dangerous way. The shadow, Ged will later learn, is and always was a dark part of himself. "To light a candle is to cast a shadow," the Master Hand once told Ged—and now, Ged sees that in the pursuit of his

own ego's glorification, he has brought a great shadow into the world and shaken loose the balance not just of the universe but of his own inner equilibrium. Ged's journey will become a quest to repair this balance—no matter the cost to his reputation, his health, or his legacy. Ged begins to understand the consequences of upsetting the world's cosmic balance through his own pain and suffering.

Lastly, Le Guin shows how the pursuit of limitless power and knowledge disrupts the balance of the cosmos. After an encounter with his shadow, Ged loses consciousness and wakes up deep in the kingdom of Osskil, a guest of the lady Serret at the Court of Terrenon. Ged slowly realizes during his stay at court that Serret, now grown, is the same girl who once tempted him to perform dangerous magic back on Re Albi. Serret is now married to the lord Benderesk, who has been charged with protecting the precious and powerful stone called Terrenon. Serret brings Ged to the stone, urging him to recognize that he is the only one who can harness its great power—yet Ged senses a terrible aura coming from the stone and refuses to seek its powers or its answers. Ged knows that to ignore his instinct and commune with the stone—and the terrible, powerful spirit he knows is trapped inside of it—would be to profoundly (and perhaps irreversibly) upset the balance of the world. While Serret and her husband long to harness the stone's limitless power for themselves, Ged knows that absolute power corrupts absolutely. "In our hands [the Old Powers] will work only ruin," Ged warns Serret. "Ill means, ill end." Ged has learned that he cannot upset the balance of the universe without bringing great harm and calamity not just to himself but to those around him. His rejection of the power the stone offers him shows that he has learned well his lesson about upsetting the careful balance of the world in which he lives.

Le Guin's suggestion that there is balance to all things—not just in the world of Earthsea, but by extension, in our own universe—reverberates throughout Ged's journey as he wrestles with the concepts of materialism, balance, power, and ego. Ultimately, through Ged's eventual acceptance of the need to maintain balance, Le Guin shows how humility and harmony are essential to maintaining the web of physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual interaction that defines the world.

back to several of the novel's major themes, including coming of age, identity and the shadow self, and cosmic balance. In the world of Earthsea, individuals are given names just as they are in the real world—but in Earthsea, every living thing, whether it is a human, a plant, an animal, or a mineral, also has a hidden true name that defines its essence. Knowing another's true name is a powerful thing: true names can be used to summon someone, to bind them to one's will, or to otherwise control them. It is thus very vulnerable for the characters in the novel to share their true names with one another, yet several characters do just that in order to demonstrate love, trust, and goodwill, such as when Vetch offers Ged his true name (Estarriol) upon departing Roke. Much of the magic Ged and his classmates at the School on Roke learn has to do with divining true names. A thing cannot be changed or transformed without knowledge of its true name. Wizards-in-training spend months at a time studying the true names of every living thing in isolation at a tower far away from the school itself in order to devote themselves to full understanding of how consequential possession of a thing's true name is.

Whenever someone invokes a thing or a person's true name, then, it symbolizes that that person or thing's essence is wholly known to them. Because Ged's journey is a journey of self-discovery, it is fitting that in order to best the shadow which has pursued him across Earthsea since his school days can only be defeated with its true name. When Ged realizes that the shadow's true name is Ged—his own name—it shows that he has at last come to understand himself wholly, and that he at last has power over his own destiny. To master a thing's name is to master the thing itself—and yet all residents of Earthsea are duty-bound to use the true names they learn throughout the course of their life carefully, making sure not to disturb the careful balance of the universe by changing, controlling, or corrupting even a single blade of grass without understanding the consequences. Through the symbol of true names, Le Guin argues that to be a part of the world is to take responsibility for all of it—and to learn a thing's true name is to learn exactly what one is assuming responsibility for.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Houghton Mifflin edition of *A Wizard of Earthsea* published in 1968.



SYMBOLS

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



TRUE NAMES

Throughout *A Wizard of Earthsea*, true names symbolize the intense power of being seen, known, and accepted as one truly is—a concept that relates profoundly

Chapter 1 Quotes

☞ Many a Gontishman has gone forth to serve the Lords of the Archipelago in their cities as wizard or mage, or, looking for adventure, to wander working magic from isle to isle of all Earthsea. Of these some say the greatest, and surely the greatest voyager, was the man called Sparrowhawk, who in his day became both dragonlord and Archmage. His life is told of in the *Deed of Ged* and in many songs, but this is a tale of the time before his fame, before the songs were made.

Related Characters: Ged / Duny / Sparrowhawk

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

In the opening lines of the novel, Ursula K. Le Guin establishes the fantastical world of the Earthsea archipelago and explains the magic and lore that govern this world. In this passage, as Le Guin introduces a story from “the time before [Ged’s] fame,” she tells her readers outright that the smaller, humbler, more personal tasks a person undertakes are often the defining milestones of their life. While the pursuit of fame, power, and glory is tempting, Le Guin suggests that being Ged becoming powerful dragonlord and a renowned Archmage are lesser achievements than those detailed in this particular, lesser-known story. This is significant because it suggests that coming-of-age stories—the tales of how one comes to truly understand oneself—are the most important stories there are. Ged’s lesser adventures might not be the subject of great songs and deeds, but they are worthy of just as much attention and reverence as his flashier endeavors. By establishing this early on, Le Guin allows readers to understand that Ged’s pursuit of glory and renown is a foolish one, lending an air of foreboding to Ged’s struggles with the pull of power and fame.

☞ He crossed to the far bank, shuddering with cold but walking slow and erect as he should through that icy, living water. As he came to the bank Ogion, waiting, reached out his hand and clasping the boy’s arm whispered to him his true name: Ged.

Related Characters: Ogion, Ged / Duny / Sparrowhawk

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Duny receives his “true name” from his master-to-be, the wise old wizard Ogion. This passage introduces the concept of true-names and use-names. In the world of Earthsea, every living thing has a true name—and throughout the novel, true names symbolize the ways in which the denizens of Earthsea seek to know, name, and understand the fundamental essence of all living things. Ogion gives Ged his true name, demonstrating early on in their relationship that he sees, knows, and accepts his new prentice (the word the novel uses for “apprentice”) for who he is, good or bad. True names are powerful, and they can be used for good or evil. One can summon a friend’s consciousness by invoking that individual’s true name—or one can use a true name in a binding spell, compelling an individual to their will. To truly know someone, Le Guin argues, is a great responsibility. Intimate knowledge of a person’s true nature must be handled with care. As Ogion welcomes Ged as his prentice, he announces his intent to handle Ged with care and generosity.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☞ "You want to work spells," Ogion said presently, striding along. [...] Wait. Manhood is patience. Mastery is nine times patience. What is that herb by the path?"

[...]

"I don't know."

"Fourfoil, they call it." Ogion had halted, the coppershod foot of his staff near the little weed, so Ged looked closely at the plant, and plucked a dry seedpod from it, and finally asked, since Ogion said nothing more, "What is its use, Master?"

"None I know of."

Related Characters: Ged / Duny / Sparrowhawk, Ogion (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

As Ged begins his apprenticeship with Ogion—who is known throughout Gont as “Ogion the Silent”—he finds himself frustrated with his master’s quiet, humble demeanor and refusal to use magic to complete everyday tasks. In this passage, Ogion demonstrates to Ged that he is

unwilling to change his nature for Ged's benefit. Ogion wants Ged—whose thirst for power the older man can easily sense—to slow down and approach his education without an outcome in mind. Ged wants to amass knowledge and power as quickly as he can. He knows he is talented, and he feels he is bound for greatness—but Ogion wants to impress upon Ged that without an appreciation for and understanding of the world around him, he will focus on the wrong things, and he will struggle and fail. Ogion, who pays careful attention to the herbs and plants around him—even those he sees no use for—is a student of the world. He wants Ged to adopt the same relaxed, holistic approach to his education, but as time goes on, Ged will only become hungrier and hungrier for knowledge of increasingly arcane, impressive, and even dangerous magic.

“Ged, listen to me now. Have you never thought how danger must surround power as shadow does light? This sorcery is not a game we play for pleasure or for praise. Think of this: that every word, every act of our Art is said and is done either for good, or for evil. Before you speak or do you must know the price that is to pay!”

Related Characters: Ogion (speaker), Ged / Duny / Sparrowhawk

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

After Ogion walks in on Ged toying with a dark, ancient summoning spell—a spell well beyond Ged's faculties, and possibly even beyond Ogion's—Ogion speaks sternly to his prentice as he explains the careful equilibrium that governs the practice of sorcery. This passage is significant because it represents Ogion's desperate attempt to impress upon his headstrong, power-hungry prentice the dangers of making a “game” of serious arts. Power, Ogion warns, is often surrounded by an aura of danger. Just as there cannot be light without shadow, there cannot be a concentration of power without the threat of that power's perversion. Throughout the novel, these themes of balance, equilibrium, and the need for patience over the pursuit of power will reoccur again and again as Ged struggles to find stability within himself. This is not the first time Ged has been tempted by power, and it will not be the last. Yet in the future, Ogion's words will echo through Ged's consciousness with a new profundity. Ged will soon see that there is indeed a price to pay for careless, reckless use of

sorcery for the pursuit of individual glory.

Chapter 3 Quotes

“To change this rock into a jewel, you must change its true name. And to do that, my son, even to so small a scrap of the world, is to change the world. [...] You must not change one thing, one pebble, one grain of sand, until you know what good and evil will follow on that act. The world is in balance, in Equilibrium. A wizard's power of Changing and of Summoning can shake the balance of the world. It is dangerous, that power. [...] It must follow knowledge, and serve need. To light a candle is to cast a shadow...”

Related Characters: The Master Hand (speaker), Ged / Duny / Sparrowhawk

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

While studying with the Master Hand—or the master of illusion—at the School for wizards on the Isle of Roke, Ged finds himself having deeply existential conversations with his instructor about the differences between creating an illusion and fundamentally changing an object into something else. As the Master Hand warns Ged about all sorcerers' great responsibility to maintain the world's careful Equilibrium, Le Guin engages with the theme of knowledge and patience versus power and pride, as well as themes of duty, destiny, and cosmic balance.

A Wizard of Earthsea is a novel profoundly concerned with the careful order of the universe—and the dangers that erupt when that balance is disrupted or corrupted. Ged's pursuit of power leads him to desire to perform great, impressive acts of magic, but all of his masters, instructors, and teachers warn him that to change a thing's essence will create a ripple effect throughout the universe. Even as the Master Hand advocates using careful knowledge to discern what the best use of any given power might be, Ged yearns for the glory and validation that come with grand displays and casts aside the idea that he has a responsibility to a larger set of powers: those of balance, Equilibrium, and harmony.

☞ If the student complained the Master might say nothing, but lengthen the list; or he might say, "He who would be Seamaster must know the true name of every drop of water in the sea."

Related Characters: The Master Namer (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

When Ged travels to the Isolate Tower north of the town of Thwil to study with the Master Namer, he and his fellow prentices find themselves bored by the laborious work of learning lengthy lists of objects' true names. The Master Namer insists that because spells fundamentally change the world, a person must know what they are changing. To know, see, and understand a thing's essence is of fundamental importance to sorcery—and even if it's boring to learn these names, to memorize them, and to consider them each time one casts a spell, it is paramount in maintaining the careful balance of the universe.

The Master Namer's words echo sentiments expressed to Ged already by the Master Hand and by Ogion, underscoring the fundamental importance of knowledge and patience over power and the pursuit of pride. This challenge also relates to Ged's journey toward self-understanding and a holistic integration of all of the good, bad, light, and dark parts of himself. Just as Ged scoffs at the idea that he must learn the true names of everything in the world, he does not devote the time or energy to understanding his competing feelings and instincts. His impatient, headstrong nature will cost him gravely in the years to come—but the disastrous events soon to transpire will ultimately inspire him to take his former masters' words to heart at last.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☞ Only for a moment did the spirit glimmer there. Then the sallow oval between Ged's arms grew bright. It widened and spread, a rent in the darkness of the earth and night, a ripping open of the fabric of the world. Through it blazed a terrible brightness. And through that bright misshapen breach clambered something like a clot of black shadow, quick and hideous, and it leaped straight out at Ged's face.

Related Characters: The Shadow, Jasper, Ged / Duny / Sparrowhawk

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Ged's longstanding rivalry with his fellow classmate Jasper boils over as the two engage in a duel. When Jasper challenges Ged to prove his worth as a wizard by summoning a spirit from the world of the dead, Ged successfully conjures the spirit of a long-dead noblewoman for just a moment before the space between the world of the living and the world of the dead seems to open and release a terrible "clot of black shadow." This passage is significant because it represents the apex of Ged's impatience, hubris, and foolishness. Since his youth, Ged has wanted to prove himself as a wizard and amass as much knowledge, skill, and power as he can, as fast as he can. Now, all too late, Ged realizes that he has gotten himself in over his head. The shadow Ged has unwittingly summoned attacks Ged, almost as if punishing him for his foolhardy, headstrong nature. By refusing to heed his teachers' words about upsetting the careful Equilibrium that governs the universe and dabbling in dark, complicated magic against their advice, Ged has put himself—and the entire Archipelago—in mortal danger from forces unknown.

Though Ged doesn't know it yet, the shadow is in actuality a part of himself—the darkest part of his soul, summoned forth from places unknown. Ged will spend the rest of the novel grappling with the horror he's unleashed from within himself and attempting to comprehend what he's done while repairing what he's broken within his own being.

☞ "Lord Gensher, I do not know what it was—the thing that came out of the spell and cleaved to me—"

"Nor do I know. It has no name. You have great power inborn in you, and you used that power wrongly, to work a spell over which you had no control, not knowing how that spell affects the balance of light and dark, life and death, good and evil. And you were moved to do this by pride and by hate. Is it any wonder the result was ruin?"

Related Characters: Archmage Gensher, Ged / Duny / Sparrowhawk (speaker), The Shadow

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

After Ged finishes a long, arduous recovery in the wake of his encounter with the shadow, Ged approaches the new Archmage of the School on Roke to beg forgiveness and to seek advice. The Archmage Gensher, however, has little advice for Ged—he is just as baffled by the nature of what Ged has unleashed into the world as Ged himself is. Gensher, however, reminds Ged that with great power comes great responsibility. Gensher's words in this passage tie in with many of the book's major themes, like the struggle to remain patient and humble in the face of a thirst for power; the sense of duty and responsibility one owes to oneself and one's community; the careful cosmic balance of the universe; and the pain of realizing that there is darkness within every soul, and that to be whole one must recognize, accept, and learn to live with that darkness. Ged's releasing of the shadow troubles him and those around him, yet few can even understand what has come to pass or how Ged might restore order to the world. Ged's journey, then, will become one of humility, patience, and a laborious, hard-earned understanding of himself, his desires, and the darkest parts of his soul. Ged must learn to overcome his pride and his belief in his own exceptionalism if he is to rescue himself from the creature whose fate now seems bound to his own.

☛ No one knows a man's true name but himself and his namer. [...] If plain men hide their true name from all but a few they love and trust utterly, so much more must wizardly men, being more dangerous, and more endangered. Who knows a man's name, holds that man's life in his keeping. Thus to Ged, who had lost faith in himself, Vetch had given that gift only a friend can give, the proof of unshaken, unshakable trust.

Related Characters: Vetch / Estarriol, Ged / Duny / Sparrowhawk

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Vetch has just revealed his true name, Estarriol, to Ged. It is Vetch's last night at the School on Roke, and as he parts from his friend, he wants to give Ged the "gift" of displaying his trust in him. As the narrator explains the profound significance of true names in the world of Earthsea, it becomes clear that Vetch's gesture is a display of utter vulnerability and goodwill. In Earthsea, a person's true name can be used for good or for evil. One can use a true name to bind a person's will using a spell or otherwise control them, yet as Vetch gives Ged his name, it is clear that he believes his friend will safeguard his name and use it responsibly. Ged, who is still reeling from the shame of his encounter with the shadow on Roke Knoll, feels unstable and irresponsible—so when Vetch offers up his true name, it shows Ged that there are still people around him who have faith in him and his ability to learn from his mistakes.

☛ "You thought, as a boy, that a mage is one who can do anything. So I thought, once. So did we all. And the truth is that as a man's real power grows and his knowledge widens, ever the way he can follow grows narrower: until at last he chooses nothing, but does only and wholly what he *must do*..."

Related Characters: The Master Summoner (speaker), Ged / Duny / Sparrowhawk

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 85

Explanation and Analysis

In a conversation with the powerful Master Summoner, Ged learns about the fickle nature of power and the limits of a wizard or mage's capabilities. Ged, who was born with great power in him already, was praised from a young age for his great facility with spells. He imagined that at Roke, his powers would become enormous, envied, and undeniable—instead, Ged has used his still-forming powers irresponsibly and created a conflict of serious, perhaps even mortal proportions.

Now, Ged must rethink the purpose and uses of power, sit back, and dedicate himself to his duty to maintain the careful balance of the world around him. Being a wizard, Ged thought, would mean glory, fame, and renown—now, Ged sees that the pursuit of those things is foolish, and that the true life of a mage is centered around duty, humility, and patience. This is a significant part of Ged's coming-of-age tale because it represents the boundary between boyhood and manhood. Just as the Master Summoner himself was

forced to realize that a wizard's path is dictated by duty and destiny, Ged, too, now must come to accept that the path to his fate may not be glorious.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☞ "There is no comfort in this place," the Archmage had said to Ged on the day he made him wizard, "no fame, no wealth, maybe no risk. Will you go?"

"I will go," Ged had replied; not from obedience only. Since the night on Roke Knoll his desire had turned as much against fame and display as once it had been set on them. Always now he doubted his strength and dreaded the trial of his power. Yet also the talk of dragons drew him with a great curiosity.

Related Characters: Ged / Duny / Sparrowhawk, Archmage Gensher (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 91

Explanation and Analysis

After finishing his education at the School on Roke, Ged accepts a humble position as a mage on the remote, poor isle of Low Torning—a place recently threatened by a knot of dragon who live on the nearby isle of Pendor. Ged's responsibility is to shield the denizens of Low Torning from the dragons, and yet Archmage Gensher warns Ged that there may be no glory in the position at all. Ged's desire for fame, power, and renown has diminished in the time since his horrible encounter with the shadow, but at the conclusion of this passage, Le Guin shows that there is still a spark of curiosity, excitement, and the itch for adventure within Ged. This shows that while Ged has grown up a lot in recent months and learned a good deal about humility, patience, and balance, he still feels power within him. Ged is not defeated or broken by what has happened to him; instead, he is ready to transform his experiences into a new way of viewing and existing within the world around him. Ged's journey has just begun—and though he sets out for Low Toring with a sense of humility and duty, he'll soon realize that there is much more ahead of him.

☞ Either he must go down the hill into the desert lands and lightless cities of the dead, or he must step across the wall back into life, where the formless evil thing waited for him.

Related Characters: The Shadow, Ged / Duny / Sparrowhawk

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 96

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Ged is attempting to save the child of his new friend on Low Torning, Pechvarry, after the child has been struck by a terrible fever. Ged reaches out with his consciousness to follow the child toward the barrier between the world of the living and the world of the dead, which, for Ged, is represented by a low wall at the top of a long, sloping hill that leads downward into the unknown. Ged soon realizes that the child is too far gone to be saved, but as Ged turns around to return to the land of the living, he spots the "formless" shadow waiting for him on the other side of the wall at the top of the hill.

This passage is significant because Ged at last realizes that to live in the world means to fight—perhaps forever—against the shadow. To surrender and die, however, is to give up any hope of besting his foe at all. Ged still has not begun to understand that the shadow is in fact a part of him—a part of him he must learn to accept if he is to survive. To die would be the easy thing, but as Ged is growing older and becoming a man, he is learning that duty is more important than comfort, and that his destiny looks very different than what he imagined it would as a child.

☞ "If you could name it you could master it, maybe, little wizard. Maybe I could tell you its name, when I see it close by. And it will come close, if you wait about my isle. It will come wherever you come. If you do not want it to come close you must run, and run, and keep running from it. And yet it will follow you. Would you like to know its name?"

Related Characters: Yevaud, the Dragon of Pendor (speaker), The Shadow, Ged / Duny / Sparrowhawk

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Ged confronts the gigantic and fearsome Dragon of Pendor, who attempts to flatter, trick, and beguile Ged. Here, the Dragon—whose true name is Yevaud—attempts to earn Ged's favor and place Ged in his debt by offering up the true name of Ged's shadow. Ged

knows that true names allow a person to obtain mastery over another being or object—yet he is loath to accept help from the dragon. Even so, Yevaud’s words are profound: he knows, somehow, that Ged will be tortured, pursued, and hounded by the shadow wherever he goes. Ged’s fate seems to be a bleak one, and yet Yevaud gives Ged a significant hint here. To tame the shadow, Ged must come to truly understand it for what it is rather than simply outrunning it as it pursues him across the Archipelago. Ged must use the skills of knowledge and patience he’s acquired at the School on Roke in order to understand his enemy. He cannot simply live in fear of what he does not know.

Chapter 6 Quotes

☞ "Leave me at Serd and sail where you like. It's not against your ship this wind blows, but against me."

"Against you, a wizard of Roke?"

"Have you never heard of the Roke-wind, master?"

"Aye, that keeps off evil powers from the Isle of the Wise, but what has that to do with you, a Dragontamer?"

"That is between me and my shadow," Ged answered shortly, as a wizard will; and he said no more as they went swiftly, with a steady wind and under clearing skies, back over the sea to Serd.

Related Characters: Ged / Duny / Sparrowhawk (speaker), The Shadow

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 114

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, as Ged leaves Low Torning in hopes of returning to Roke, he finds that the enchanted Roke-wind, which keeps evil far from the island, is blowing against him. He knows that this must mean his shadow is near; the island is trying to protect itself from the baggage Ged carries as someone bound to a force of evil. Even though Ged has done great deeds—and recently tamed a cluster of dragons, a remarkable feat—he knows now that feats of glory do not make him better or more worthy than anyone else. Ged humbly retreats from Roke, knowing that it is not worth fighting through the wind to get to the island and endanger the others there. While as a younger boy, Ged might have stubbornly insisted upon using his powers at all costs, he is now wise enough to know that he is not exceptional. In other words, he realizes that his struggles are not more important than the lives of those on the Isle of the Wise.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☞ "It will speak of things that were, and are, and will be. It told of your coming, long before you came to this land. Will you ask a question of it now?"

"No."

"It will answer you."

"There is no question I would ask it."

"It might tell you," Serret said in her soft voice, "how you will defeat your enemy."

Ged stood mute.

"Do you fear the stone?" she asked as if unbelieving; and he answered, "Yes."

Related Characters: Village Girl / Serret, Ged / Duny / Sparrowhawk (speaker), The Shadow

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 136

Explanation and Analysis

At the Court of the Terrenon in the far-north land of Osskil, Ged finds himself hosted by the Lady Serret and the Lord Benderesk. When Serret shows Ged the precious jewel of the castle—the stone of Terrenon itself, the founding-stone of the building—Ged senses a terrible power coming from the stone immediately. In this passage, it becomes clear to him that Serret is trying to manipulate Ged into touching the stone, speaking to it, or asking a question of it. Ged knows now for sure that Serret and her husband are somehow under the stone’s control, and he wants to avoid the same fate. Even though Serret tells Ged the stone has the power to help him figure out how to defeat the shadow, Ged has learned enough about the dangers of power, imbalance, and pride to know that the stone can offer him nothing good. This marks an important stage in Ged’s coming-of-age journey. He is no longer blinded by the promise of power or even the idea of relief from the problems that plague him. He knows that in order to restore balance to his life, he must search within himself—he cannot get the answers from false or dangerous forces.

☞ "But I know this: the Old Powers of earth are not for men to use. They were never given into our hands, and in our hands they work only ruin. Ill means, ill end. I was not drawn here, but driven here, and the force that drove me works to my undoing. I cannot help you."

Related Characters: Ged / Duny / Sparrowhawk (speaker), Village Girl / Serret

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 139

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Ged apologizes to Serret for his refusal to seek the help of the stone of Terrenon. He explains himself by trying to impress upon her the danger of using powers one doesn't fully understand. Ged, however, has not yet realized that Serret is the same young village girl from Gont who first lured him toward dark magic by asking him to prove himself and perform a dangerous summoning spell. Ged's first glimpse of the shadow took place while reading Ogion's rune-books in an attempt to find a spell that would impress the girl—now, years and years later and halfway across the world, she is still attempting to force Ged to surrender to ruinous forces that use “ill means” to achieve an “ill end.” Ged, this passage shows, has learned much about the balance of the universe and the value of patience, humility, and reservation of judgement in the face of the promise of power and glory. He cannot be easily swayed as he once was—he has matured past the need to impress others, to assert his own facility with power, or to master things not meant for his hands.

☞ "I have no strength against the thing," Ged answered.

Ogion shook his head... [...] "Strange," he said: "You had strength enough to outspell a sorcerer in his own domain, there in Osskil. You had strength enough to withstand the lures and fend off the attack of the servants of an Old Power of Earth. And at Pendor you had strength enough to stand up to a dragon."

"It was luck I had in Osskil, not strength," Ged replied, and he shivered again as he thought of the dreamlike deathly cold of the Court of the Terrenon. "As for the dragon, I knew his name. The evil thing, the shadow that hunts me, has no name."

"All things have a name," said Ogion.

Related Characters: Ogion, Ged / Duny / Sparrowhawk (speaker), Yevaud, the Dragon of Pendor, Benderesk, The Shadow

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 150

Explanation and Analysis

After fleeing the Court of the Terrenon in the midst of an assault by the shadowy Servants of the Stone, Ged flies in falcon form to the home of his old master Ogion the Silent. Ged is driven to Ogion's hut by instinct—having lost his otak, failed to protect Serret, and nearly losing himself in his bird form forever, Ged knows on a primal level that he must return to the place his journey began in order to figure out what to do next. In this passage, Ged laments to Ogion his feelings of being unable to match the shadow in strength or in cunning.

Rather than letting his former prentice sink into despair, Ogion assures Ged that everything has a name—meaning that everything unknown can be known, everything shadowed can be brought to light, and everything that hunts may yet be hunted. Ogion's words, unlike, Yevaud's don't emptily flatter Ged for his achievements—instead, Ogion attempts to show Ged what he has been able to accomplish through knowledge of the self, resistance to temptation, and the desire to truly know and understand the world around him. That same energy, Ogion suggests, is needed if Ged is to restore balance to his life—and to the world—and defeat the shadow.

☞ "You must turn around."

"Turn around?"

"If you go ahead, if you keep running, wherever you run you will meet danger and evil, for it drives you, it chooses the way you go. You must choose. You must seek what seeks you. You must hunt the hunter."

Related Characters: Ged / Duny / Sparrowhawk, Ogion (speaker), The Shadow

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 151

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Ogion explains that what Ged has been doing so far—outrunning the shadow whenever he meets it—is counterproductive and in fact dangerous. To continue pursuing the shadow makes Ged more vulnerable to it. Metaphorically speaking, this suggests that to be so afraid of the unknown that one refuses to try and understand it means that one is all the more vulnerable to unknown, unseen, or unspeakable forces. Rather than letting himself

(and his destiny) be controlled by the shadow's whims, Ogion suggests, Ged needs to take control of the situation and harness his own skill, power, and self-knowledge to confront the shadow at last. Ogion has never endorsed the use of force or power—but now, he suggests Ged summon the power of self-reflection, self-determination, and self-restraint in order to turn the shadow's methods around on it. Ogion has always urged Ged to think of the road less traveled: to use knowledge rather than power, patience rather than haste, and reflection rather than action. Now, he continues to suggest Ged harness these skills more thoughtfully than ever before in order to tame what threatens him.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☞ There was a great wish in him to stay here on Gont, and forgoing all wizardry and venture, forgetting all power and horror, to live in peace like any man on the known, dear ground of his home land. That was his wish; but his will was other.

Related Characters: Ged / Duny / Sparrowhawk

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 155

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, as Ged prepares to leave Ogion's hut on Gont and pursue the shadow on the open ocean, he is seized by the desire to stay on Gont and live a humble, peaceful life. This passage is significant because it shows how much Ged has already grown over the course of the novel's action. Whereas in the beginning of his journey Ged couldn't wait to leave Gont for greener pastures, he now finds himself taking pleasure, joy, and comfort from the simple things in life. He no longer wants fame, glory, or even a grand destiny. At the same time, Ged realizes that he is duty-bound to confront his shadow, fearful though the task may be. As Ged's journey has carried him onward, his priorities have shifted vastly. Ged no longer yearns for recognition and renown; now, he wants only to obtain the tools that will allow him to understand the shadow he has loosed upon the world and set things right once again.

☞ The shadow had tricked him out onto the moors in Osskil, and tricked him in the mist onto the rocks, and now would there be a third trick? Had he driven the thing here, or had it drawn him here, into a trap? He did not know. He knew only the torment of dread, and the certainty that he must go ahead and do what he had set out to do: hunt down the evil, follow his terror to its source.

Related Characters: The Shadow, Ged / Duny / Sparrowhawk

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 173

Explanation and Analysis

After being twice deceived by his shadow—and twice having his very life threatened by its tricks—Ged continues to sail onward in hopes of meeting it. Though Ged wants to confront the shadow, he is acutely aware of its wily nature and its desire to end him. Ged cannot give into his fear, though—he knows that being too vigilant or defensive would only make him more afraid, and that would lead to his failure to pursue the shadow at all. Ged knows that his need to confront the shadow is part of his destiny. His life cannot continue while the shadow stalks him—and if it must end in a confrontation with the creature, he is ready to “follow his terror” toward that possibility rather than live a life avoiding what he is bound to do. This demonstrates the ways in which Ged has grown over the course of the novel. He no longer wants fame, glory, or honor—he wants only to right the wrongs he has brought into the world, to achieve a deeper understanding of himself, and to restore balance to the universe by offering himself up.

☞ He knew now, and the knowledge was hard, that his task had never been to undo what he had done, but to finish what he had begun.

Related Characters: The Shadow, Ged / Duny / Sparrowhawk

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 175

Explanation and Analysis

As Ged continues pursuing his shadow across the open ocean, he thinks deeply about the meaning of his adversarial, threatening relationship with the creatures. Ged knows that he will only be able to defeat the shadow by

understanding its true nature and using that power against it—yet it has been difficult to figure out what the shadow is, what it wants, and why it is testing Ged. Now, in this passage, Ged arrives at the “hard” (and hard-won) revelation that defeating the shadow is not a matter of righting a wrong, overturning the past, or changing his fate. Instead, he is on a much larger journey, and in order to arrive at its end, he must face his destiny without fear. This passage ties in with ideas of duty, destiny, and cosmic balance, as well as the idea of identity and the shadow self. Ged must use every introspective, intellectual tool in his arsenal in order to best the shadow.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☞ "Pride was ever your mind's master," his friend said smiling, as if they talked of a matter of small concern to either. "Now think: it is your quest, assuredly, but if the quest fails, should there not be another there who might bear warning to the Archipelago? For the shadow would be a fearful power then. And if you defeat the thing, should there not be another there who will tell of it in the Archipelago, that the Deed may be known and sung? I know I can be of no use to you; yet I think I should go with you."

Related Characters: Vetch / Estarriol (speaker), The Shadow, Ged / Duny / Sparrowhawk

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 185-186

Explanation and Analysis

On the isle of Iffish, Ged unexpectedly runs into Vetch, his old friend from the School on Roke. As Ged fills Vetch in on the draining quest which has occupied him ever since leaving Roke, Vetch insists on accompanying Ged out into the open ocean to pursue the shadow. As Vetch offers his help, solidarity, and support to his prideful friend, Le Guin shows that there is no glory in solitude. Though Ged feels it is his duty to face the shadow alone, Vetch knows that such a task should be witnessed—for good or for bad—in order to tell the story of what has happened. Vetch knows that other people would do well to learn from Ged’s mistakes and triumphs alike. Ged’s journey of self-reflection and understanding may be of use to future generations, especially since the shadow he now pursues is seemingly unprecedented in the history of the Archipelago. The kind, patient, and thoughtful Vetch assures Ged that he will stand beside him at the most vulnerable and pivotal moment of his life, demonstrating as he did when he told Ged his true

name back on Roke that Vetch is a true ally and companion.

Chapter 10 Quotes

☞ On the course on which they were embarked, the saying of the least spell might change chance and move the balance of power and of doom: for they went now toward the very center of that balance, toward the place where light and darkness meet. Those who travel thus say no word carelessly.

Related Characters: Vetch / Estarriol, Ged / Duny / Sparrowhawk

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 196-197

Explanation and Analysis

As Ged and Vetch set off into the open sea to pursue the shadow to the ends of the earth, they refrain from using any kind of magic to change the winds, to fortify their boat, or to conjure illusory food or water. This passage once again suggests that the careful balance not just of the world of Earthsea, but of the reader’s own world as well, must be maintained. Ged and Vetch seek “the place where light and darkness meet”—the place where Ged will at last confront the darkness he has loosed into the world and seek to bring it back toward the light. There is a careful balance between light and dark, Ged knows, and to tip the scales through careless displays of magic meant only to make things simpler is reckless. Ged once imagined becoming a mage in order to master impressive spell and live a life of ease and prosperity helped along by magic—now, however, Ged sees that simplicity, patience, and balance are essential not just to survival but to harmony, happiness, and prosperity.

☞ Aloud and clearly, breaking that old silence, Ged spoke the shadow's name and in the same moment the shadow spoke without lips or tongue, saying the same word: "Ged." And the two voices were one voice.

Ged reached out his hands, dropping his staff and took hold of his shadow, of the black self that reached out to him. Light and darkness met, and joined, and were one.

Related Characters: Ged / Duny / Sparrowhawk (speaker), The Shadow

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 212

Explanation and Analysis

As Ged confronts the shadow on a mysterious, seemingly illusory sandbar in the middle of the ocean far beyond the last reaches of the Earthsea Archipelago, he at last realizes the shadow's true identity and is able to speak its true name. Though Ged never revealed the realization to Vetch or even fully considered the possibility in his own thoughts, Ged now knows for certain that the shadow is a part of himself. In naming it by speaking his own true name aloud, Ged is able both to bind the shadow to his will and to metaphorically demonstrate his willingness to accept the "light and darkness" that live commingled within him. In this moment, the shadow seems to be reabsorbed into Ged's very essence—the light and darkness become "one" as Ged accepts that the thing that has been haunting and hunting him for years is a manifestation of his own darkest instincts, impulses, and desires. By naming the shadow Ged demonstrates that he sees, knows, understands, and accepts not just the shadow, but himself as well. Ged's coming-of-age journey and his quest for an actualization of his whole self are now complete.

☞ "The wound is healed," [Ged] said, "I am whole, I am free."
[...]

And [Vetch] began to see the truth, that Ged had neither lost nor won but, naming the shadow of his death with his own name, had made himself whole: a man: who, knowing his whole true self, cannot be used or possessed by any power other than himself and whose life therefore is lived for life's sake and never in the service of ruin, or pain, or hatred, or the dark.

Related Characters: Ged / Duny / Sparrowhawk (speaker), Vetch / Estarriol, The Shadow

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 214

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, as Ged and Vetch sail back toward the Archipelago from the open ocean over which they confronted the shadow, Ged lies in the boat, spent and exhausted yet exhilarated. Ged remarks that he is "whole" and "free" now that he has accepted the shadow as a part of himself and healed the "wound" created when the shadow initially split from him. Vetch admires his friend's courage

and feels grateful for Ged's restoration, but there is also a deeper, more profound meaning behind Ged's healing. By accepting the shadow as a part of himself and mastering it by calling out its name—his own—Ged has fully accepted the truth of who he is. He knows and accepts himself as a whole man who contains light and darkness together rather than as a person rent from the darkness within him. This means that Ged is now firmly the master of his own destiny. While he will still nonetheless serve others and fight for the safety of the Archipelago, Ged will not be able to be swayed, controlled, or bound by anyone other than himself. Vetch feels emotional as he considers how hard his friend has worked to truly know himself and become the sole decider of his own fate.

☞ In the *Deed of Ged* nothing is told of that voyage nor of Ged's meeting with the shadow, before ever he sailed the Dragons' Run unscathed, or brought back the Ring of Erreth-Akbe from the Tombs of Atuan to Havnor, or came at last to Roke once more, as Archmage of all the islands of the world.

Related Characters: The Shadow, Ged / Duny / Sparrowhawk

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 217

Explanation and Analysis

In a brief epilogue, the narrator of the novel reveals that nothing of Ged's voyage to confront and best the shadow on the open ocean has ever been told in the great lore of Ged's life. Though his other adventures have been sung and studied for years, and though Ged, this passage reveals, will go on to achieve true greatness, this particular part of Ged's journey is missing from the story of his life. This passage ties in profoundly with some of the novel's major themes, including the idea of knowledge and patience versus power and pride. Ged's journey over the course of the novel has not been about the pursuit of glory, fame, renown, or power, as he perhaps thought his life might be as a young boy. Instead, Ged's intimate quest for self-understanding and a reintegration of his true identity—shadow and all—has been a deeply personal one. This journey of Ged's will receive no fanfare and it will not be used to glorify his name, but that does not make the trials and tribulations Ged has been through any less important, worthy, or necessary. Le Guin suggests that in fact the most major journeys one endures throughout life are those concerning self-actualization and coming of age.



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.

CHAPTER 1

The island of Gont in the Northeast Sea of the Earthsea Archipelago is a land famous for its wizards. The greatest, bravest, and most famous of all these wizards, according to many, was the wizard Sparrowhawk, who was also known as Ged. Before he was either Ged or Sparrowhawk, however, this young Gontish boy was known as Duny. The last of six children, Duny's mother died shortly after his birth. Duny had a "wild" childhood adventuring through Gont's forests and cliffs.

One day, when Duny is a boy of seven, he hears his mother's sister—a local witch and herbalist—command a herd of goats by crying out a rhyme to them. The next day, Duny repeats the charm to the herd. As the goats slowly, as if in a trance, march toward him, Duny finds himself both mesmerized and terrified by his ability to command the beasts.

As the goats come closer and closer, Duny tries to run away from the herd, but they follow him through the village. Hearing the commotion, Duny's aunt emerges from her hut and speaks a single word to the goats. They are released from the spell. Duny's aunt calls him into her dark hut, which is fragrant with the herbs the woman uses in her healing spells. Duny's aunt sees the "makings of power" in her nephew and offers to teach him more spells—provided he doesn't share them with the other children. Duny promises to keep the knowledge hidden. It is an easy promise for him to make, as he likes to "know and do what they [know] not and [can] not."

To make sure Duny follows her directive, Duny's aunt creates a spell that will bind his tongue until she permits him to speak, and that will even then keep him from sharing what she's taught him with another. Duny's aunt starts a ritual fire, feeding it with leaves and herbs as she chants songs in a language Duny does not recognize. When the witch tests her spell, Duny is still able to laugh. She realizes that young though he is, he must be extremely powerful to make any noise in the face of the strongest spell she knows how to weave. Duny's aunt douses the fire, allows Duny to speak, and begins teaching him the animals' **true names**—the names to which they must come when called. This is the first step of Duny's life as a mage, or wizard.

By providing context for the place Ged's story holds in the larger mythology of Earthsea, Le Guin sets up the novel as a coming-of-age tale which will center around the early adventures of a wizard destined for greatness.



This passage shows that even as a young boy, Duny is powerful beyond his years. The early days of Ged's training in magic will revolve around balancing this innate power with a tempered investment in patience and the pursuit of knowledge rather than glory and pride.



This passage again confirms that the young Duny wants to use magic to assert his power, excellence, and dominion over the creatures—and people—around him. Duny craves power and glory, and will need to learn to temper this impulse if he is to succeed as a young wizard.



This passage introduces the concept of true names—one of the novel's central symbols, true names relate to the fundamental essence of every living thing on the Earthsea archipelago. In order to bind, control, change or use something, one must first know its true name.



Soon, Duny can call birds out of the sky with ease. He is so hungry for the knowledge his aunt possesses that he does anything she asks of him. Duny has reverence for what his aunt teaches him, but being a simple country witch, she knows little of “the Balance [...] which the true wizard knows and serves.” Duny’s aunt teaches him small spells and charms for every circumstance. Duny takes pleasure in being able to control the animals around him, and, by the time he is 12, he knows a good deal about herbals, healing, mending, finding, and binding. He has studied the lore his aunt has taught him about the great deeds of great wizards, and he has even begun to dabble in the powers of illusion.

The narrator describes the strong and powerful Kargad Empire, rulers of four great lands in the Earthsea archipelago. The Kargs are “savage” people with white skin and yellow hair—as opposed to the people of Gont, who are dark-skinned—and they sail the Archipelago ransacking towns and conquering all they can. The people of Gont have heard that the Kargs recently raided lands just south of them, but as an insular community, they care little for the struggles of other isles. One night, though, the people of Gont can see the fires of a nearby island being raided—some hurry to flee into the forest while others prepare to make a stand against the Kargads. Duny helps his father, a bronze-smith, prepare through the night by building as many weapons as fast as he can.

In the foggy morning, as Duny prepares to fight alongside the other Gontish men, he is scared. He knows he has no physical strength. Though there is power in him, he does not have the knowledge to set that power free. He laments that he will soon die in battle before he can achieve any of his dreams of greatness. As the Kargs approach, Duny suddenly thinks of a spell that might help his people: a fogweaving charm that binds the mists together and allows one to shape the fog into illusory ghosts.

Thinking quickly, Duny changes the spell to suit his needs: he **names** aloud the boundaries of the village, then speaks the charm, adding to its words a spell of concealment. His father urges him to be quiet as the Kargs approach—but he explains to his father that he’s hidden their village from the Kargs, buying them all time to escape. Duny’s father heeds his son’s words.

Though Duny’s aunt does her best to instruct him in the art of healing and spells, she is ignorant of the sacred “Balance” that governs the world. To use too much magic too freely is to disrupt the careful equilibrium of the universe—in other words, for a wizard to seek too much power is a dangerous thing. This hard realization will form the crux of Duny’s early years as a mage-in-training.



As a threat of invasion and destruction comes to Gont, it seems there is little the island community can do to protect itself—yet Le Guin shows how the members of the humble isle come together, bound by the duty to defend one another.



This passage represents the first instance in which the young Duny uses his powers for a higher purpose and not simply for the sake of them. Duny is young but powerful, and he is able to perform with relative ease magic far beyond what his aunt has taught him.



Duny uses his powers—which are great in spite of his youth—to serve his community. This episode is important because it establishes the fundamental use of magic as a tool of support, solidarity, and generosity rather than a means to glory, power, or fame.



The villagers attack the Kargs through the fog, leaving the Kargs confused and wounded. Though the Kargs attempt to charge through the fog, they are distracted and frightened by the fleeting fog-ghosts Duny has conjured. They turn tail and run for their ships. Though the Gontish people suffer some losses, their village is by and large safe. Duny is hailed as a hero—yet something has come over him in the wake of the battle, and he seems unable to hear or speak. His aunt assesses him and tells the others that he has overspent his power—she can do nothing to help him. Duny spends several days recovering, and on the fifth day, a cloaked stranger wielding a staff comes to town. The man, a wizard, visits Duny and heals him with a simple touch.

The wizard, who is called Ogion the Silent, announces that the tales of Duny’s deed with the fog have reached his home of Re Albi, on the southern side of the island, where he is Mage. Duny’s father knows that Ogion wants to take Duny away and train him, but he begs the wizard to let Duny spend his 13th birthday—his “Passage” into adulthood—at home. Ogion vows to return for the boy after the winter has passed and keep him as prentice, or apprentice. Ogion says he anticipates with excitement the day Duny turns 13 and receives his **true name**.

On Duny’s 13th birthday, he takes a ritual dip in the cold river Ar just outside the village. On the near bank, his aunt takes his name from him. On the far bank, as the boy emerges from the river, he finds that Ogion is there to receive him. Ogion gives the boy his **true name**: Ged. That evening, as the feast of the Sunreturn carries on, Ogion bids Ged to follow him—it is time to leave the village and head for Re Albi, far away across the isle of Gont. Ged gathers his few possessions, says farewell to his people, and sets off with his new master.

CHAPTER 2

Ged thinks that as the prentice of a great mage like Ogion, he will quickly and easily amass power, knowledge, and mastery of his skills—he imagines transforming himself into a bird or deer and running wild and free. Instead, however, his early days with Ogion are boring and nondescript. After four days under Ogion’s tutelage, Ged has not learned a single spell, **name**, or rune. Sheepishly, Ged asks Ogion when his apprenticeship will begin; Ogion responds that it has already begun. Ged says he hasn’t learned anything yet, but Ogion retorts that Ged simply hasn’t figured out what Ogion is teaching him. “Manhood,” Ogion warns, “is patience.”

Duny finds that in the wake of his great act of magic, his faculties are nearly completely depleted. This passage underscores the great amount of energy it takes to produce spells of such a high caliber—and foreshadows the darkness and danger beneath grand displays of might and power.



Duny’s life is about to change forever. He is soon to become a man, and soon after that, he will enter into an apprenticeship with a powerful wizard who recognizes his gifts and wants to help him harness his power.



Duny’s ritualistic swim in the river Ar represents his crossing over from boyhood to manhood. On the far side of the river, as Ged receives his true name from his new master, Le Guin symbolizes the fact that Ogion sees, understands, and accepts Ged for who he is. Ogion agrees to take Ged on as a prentice with the full truth of who Ged is in mind—he is ready to accept the challenges of teaching Ged alongside the joys.



Ged seems to have believed that the moment he went off with Ogion, his education would begin: he would start learning spells, amassing knowledge, and expanding his powers. Ogion, however, is an unorthodox teacher who wants Ged to learn important lessons about patience before he ventures into the practice of magic. A simple man with no desire for glory, fame, or renown, Ogion attempts to show Ged that the simple life is the best life.



Ogion encourages Ged to learn about everything around him. He doesn't want Ged to simply learn about plants with magical or medicinal properties, for example—he wants Ged to learn about even ordinary plants, so that he may one day learn those plants' **true names** and true beings. Ged feels like a fool and begins to resent Ogion, but he nevertheless acts obedient in the hopes that Ogion will soon begin teaching him something that will help him become more powerful. When a rainstorm comes, Ged is shocked at how Ogion allows the rain to fall on them rather than saying a spell to send the weather away. Ged wonders what the use of power is if one will not use it.

After many days of travel, Ogion and Ged arrive in the village of Re Albi, where Ogion lives. Ogion gives Ged a small sleeping alcove in the west wall of his one-room home, and, as winter arrives, Ged gets to work learning to read and write a set of ancient runes, the Six Hundred Runes of Hardic—Hardic is the tongue spoken throughout the Archipelago of Earthsea. Ged knows that though the work is hard, it will help him become a better master of charms and spells in the long run: Hardic is tied to the Old Speech, the ancient language in which all living and inanimate things are named with their **true names**.

Spring arrives, and Ogion begins sending Ged out each day to gather herbs. Ged takes delight in exploring nature after being cooped up with the Runebook all winter. One day, while foraging in the woods, Ged comes across a village girl whom he knows to be the daughter of the Lord of Re Albi. The girl, recognizing Ged as Ogion's apprentice, asks him to tell her about sorcery. After Ged tells the girl about his trick that defeated the Kargish warriors, the girl asks Ged to call a falcon down from the sky. He does so, but the bird is skittish and doesn't stay long.

The girl asks Ged if he can summon the spirits of the dead. Ged, longing to impress her, says he could if he wanted to. She asks him to perform a changing spell and transform himself into an animal. Ged, however, becomes flustered by the girl's demands, and he makes an excuse to hurry home. Days later, Ged meets the girl in the meadow again and she continues to pressure him to perform a changing spell. When Ged hesitates, she tells him he's too young after all—and too afraid—to perform such magic. Ged resolves to prove himself to the girl. He tells her to meet him in the meadow the next day and then heads home to peruse some of Ogion's ancient Lore-Books.

Ogion clearly has a deep reverence for the natural world—his mission as a mage seems to be to fully understand the world around him without trying to change or manipulate it to his own advantage. Ged, however, doesn't understand how one could have such great power at their disposal and not use it. Ged's apprenticeship with Ogion will test both of their patience and the limits of their ability to see through the other's eyes.



Ged undertakes his learning solemnly and reluctantly only because he believes it will further his powers in the future. Ged doesn't have any particular reverence for the concept of true names: he doesn't understand the magnitude and responsibility of knowing, accepting, and understanding a thing's truest essence.



Ged's friendship with the village girl represents the first major instance in which he allows himself to become tempted by the desire for power and glory. Ged is so desperate to prove himself to the village girl that he begins to abandon the tenets of restraint and quiet Ogion has spent months trying to instill within him.



Ged is frustrated with his inability to impress the village girl, something that comes to a boiling point when she accuses him of being inept and too young. He wants to prove himself to be a powerful individual—and he's willing to defy logic and lore and even risk his own safety in order to do so.



Though Ged struggles to understand the language in the ancient books, he reads on and on. While puzzling his way through one spell in particular, a sharp horror comes over him—yet he cannot move his eyes from the page. When he looks up from the book at last, Ged finds that a darkness has spread through the house. Ged feels terror bind him to his chair. A cold air enters the room. Ged looks over his shoulder and sees a dark, “shapeless clot of shadow” crouching near the door. The shadow whispers to Ged, but Ged cannot understand what it is saying.

Ogion flings the door open and enters surrounded by a bright white light. He speaks a spell against the darkness and it quickly dissipates. Ogion approaches the terrified Ged and warns him that to work the spell he was reading would be to imperil not just his power, but his life. Ogion reminds Ged that the girl he has been meeting in the woods is the daughter of an enchantress—the girl herself is nearly a witch already. Ogion tells Ged that one can never know what powers another witch, mage, or sorcerer serves—it is clear that the girl, her mother, or both of them wish Ogion ill. “Danger,” Ogion warns, “must surround power as shadow does light.”

Ged says he was forced to turn to the books since Ogion teaches him nothing. Ogion tenderly says that if Ged wants to leave and seek knowledge somewhere else—like Roke Island, “where all high arts are taught,”—he may go at any time. Ogion says that he knows Ged will learn well whatever he attempts, as Ged’s power is great—greater, Ogion hopes, than Ged’s pride. Ged knows that though he loves Ogion and enjoys their long walks and silent time together, he cannot still his own craving for glory. Ged asks to go to Roke, and several days later, Ogion leads Ged down to the port. Ged is surprised as down at the port, common people kneel before their mage, the man who has saved their island from calamity time and time again with his skills.

Ogion seeks passage for Ged on a ship bound for Roke—a ship called the *Shadow* is sailing soon, and though Ogion does not like the name of the vessel, he nonetheless urges Ged to board and to use his skills in fogweaving as required by the crew. Addressing Ged affectionately as “Sparrowhawk”—the name Ged uses to disguise his **true name**—Ogion bids Ged farewell and hands him a note to deliver to the Warder of the School on Roke.

Ged opens up a dangerous Lore-Book and begins reading and speaking things he does not understand. Ged unleashes a terrible power into the room—yet even as he feels full of horror and fear, he cannot stop the powerful forces around him from tempting him further and further into darkness. Ged has disturbed the balance of the universe, though he doesn’t yet recognize the severity of his actions—and will not for many years.



Ogion rescues Ged from the darkness and tries not to reprimand him but simply to impress upon his prentice how dangerous power can be. Ged was thoughtless, careless, and self-serving in opening up the Lore-Book—Ogion wants to teach Ged to exercise restraint, thoughtfulness, and balance whenever he attempts magic.



Even though Ogion wants to instruct Ged in the way he believes the boy should be taught, he knows that to keep Ged from his desires is a dangerous thing. Ogion, then, supports Ged as Ged decides to pursue greatness, glory, and a faster path to knowledge and power at the School on Roke. As they arrive at the port, however, Ged begins second-guessing his decision when he sees the reverence with which the people of Gont treat Ogion.



The name of the ship Ged sails to Roke on is portentous. The Shadow harkens back to when Ged sensed a shadow beckoning him in the corner of the room in Re Albi—his journey to Roke, then, similarly foreshadows a lingering darkness that Ged must be wary of.



With that, Ged, who has never been off the isle of Gont—let alone anywhere on the island other than his own village and Re Albi—boards the *Shadow*, taking in the overwhelming sights and sounds of the port. When the master of the ship realizes Ged cannot summon the winds yet, he orders the boy to find a place out of the way and stay there. Ged makes himself as unobtrusive as possible, and soon, the oarsmen launch the boat from the dock. The ship is crewed by about 70 people—many of them are just a bit older than Ged, and over the course of the journey, they invite him to share their food and jokes (even though they tease him by calling him “Goatherd,” mocking his humble origins.)

The journey takes many days, and the water is very rough. Ged occasionally rows alongside the other oarsmen, especially when the weather requires the crew to split their duties between rowing and baling. The master of the ship again calls on Ged, asking if he can use his powers to point them toward Roke—when Ged says he cannot, the shipmaster admits that they have been blown off course and will likely arrive in the dangerous Hort Town. Ged will have to find his own passage to Roke. Nervous, Ged looks westward, in the direction of Roke, as the ship sails onward—as dusk approaches, Ged spots a light in the distance. He calls out to the shipmaster: they are near Roke after all. The shipmaster turns the boat toward land. As the ship arrives in the bay, the skies clear and the night stars begin to emerge in the sky.

CHAPTER 3

In the morning, Ged disembarks the *Shadow* and arrives in the town of Thwil on the isle of Roke. He tries to ask for directions to the School for wizards, but he has trouble getting the townspeople to steer him toward the place—they either outright refuse to answer him or respond in riddles. Ged eventually makes his way to a square where there is a great building. He enters and finds a small wooden door. Ged knocks on the door and says he is looking for the Warder of the School. An old man opens the door, introduces himself as the doormaster, and invites Ged to enter the School if he can. Ged steps forward—but though he feels he has crossed the threshold he soon realizes he hasn’t moved.

Ged casts an opening spell he learned from his aunt, yet the power that holds the doorway is stronger than the charm. Ged asks the doormaster for help. The doormaster tells Ged to say his own **true name** aloud. Though in the world of Earthsea doing such a thing is unheard of unless one’s life is directly in danger, Ged speaks his name out loud—this allows him to pass through the doorway. As Ged walks through, he has the sensation that a shadow has followed him inside.

On Ged’s journey to Roke, he finds himself fending off taunts from the other crew members. Such teasing will fuel Ged’s desire to prove himself on Roke—and when he encounters similar taunts from his classmates at the School, his need to show everyone around him that he’s more than a “goatherd” will prove dangerous and destructive.



The difficult journey toward Roke symbolizes the difficult transformation Ged is about to undergo as he leaves behind the home he once knew and prepares to start a new chapter of his life. The journey toward the future he wants won’t be easy—but there will be moments of peace, relief, and certainty on the way.



Ged finds himself a little bit out of his depth on the Isle of Roke. The place clearly takes pride in the role it plays as a home for wizards and mages, and Ged finds himself struggling to simply find the School. This demonstrates, again, that Ged needs to learn how to exercise his patience more readily.



This passage again underscores the powerful nature of true names in the world of Earthsea. True names can unlock doors—literally—but judging by the shadowy premonition Ged gets as he enters the School, they also open the gateway for outside forces.



Ged now sees that the wooden door was merely an illusion: the door is actually ivory, made from the tooth of a dragon. The doormaster welcomes Ged and leads him through the corridors to an open courtyard. Ged relishes being in the innermost sanctum of the House of the Wise. As Ged makes eye contact with an old wizard dressed all in white and accompanied by a raven on the far side of the courtyard, he feels a sense of deep understanding of the world wash over him. The moment passes. Ged recognizes the man as the Archmage and approaches him with the letter from Ogion.

The Warder of Roke is known as the Archmage Nemmerle. A very old man who once trained Ogion when Ogion was a young mage, Nemmerle asks Ged to tell him about the seas on the journey to Roke. Ged says that things on the *Shadow* were mostly calm—except for a terrible storm the day before. Nemmerle speaks some ancient words over Ged. Ged has the sensation of standing in a room full of shadows. Nemmerle finishes and urges Ged to run along.

As Ged sets out to explore the school, he runs into a tall, pompous young man who introduces himself as Jasper and offers to show Ged around. Ged can tell that Jasper is wealthy, and he is immediately put off by Jasper's upper-class haughtiness. Ged introduces himself to Jasper as Sparrowhawk. Jasper helps Ged select a cloak from the wardrobe room, shows him the library where books of lore and ancient rune-tomes are kept, and brings him by the humble dormitories upstairs. When Ged makes a remark about Jasper having to get used to living so simply, Jasper bristles defensively.

A gong rings, summoning the students of the school to the refectory for their midday meal. At the Long Table—rumored to be enchanted to accommodate an endless number of people—Ged and Jasper sit near Vetch, a heavy-set boy even darker-skinned than Ged himself. Ged immediately takes a liking to the sarcastic Vetch. Vetch and Jasper take Ged into town after lunch. Ged is amazed by how prevalent magic is throughout the town of Thwil—even children cast enchantments as pranks in the streets.

Ged is in awe of his new surroundings. He feels that this is the place he was always meant to be. Ged believes that here, in this house of great power and wisdom, he will finally be able to achieve his full potential, and he is anxious to begin his learning.



The Archmage Nemmerle is an old and wise man who seems to be able to learn the whole of Ged's history—and perhaps even divine his future—with a few simple words. Ged is awestruck but also mildly frightened by the man's immense power.



Jasper and Ged get off on the wrong foot right away. Ged dislikes Jasper's haughty personality while Jasper resents being teased. The two boys establish a rivalry within moments of meeting one another—a dynamic that will impact both their lives in profound, unpredictable ways.



Ged's early introduction to the Isle of Roke is full of competing emotions. He is grateful to be in such a special place—yet even the slightest complication, like his distaste for Jasper, makes him fear he's made the wrong choice in coming here to study. Ged is clearly in conflict with himself even as he begins what he believes to be the next chapter in his grand destiny.



Jasper and Vetch lead Ged up into the lush woods beyond town. At the base of Roke Knoll, a green hill, Jasper asks Ged to perform some famous Gontish magic for them. Vetch urges Jasper to let Ged be, but Ged insists he has skill and power enough to perform any spell. Jasper encourages Ged to perform an illusion. Jasper himself speaks a spell creating the illusion of a stream running down the side of the hill. Vetch picks up a piece of earth and speaks over it, creating the illusion that it is a bumble bee. Ged, heartbroken, says he doesn't know how to create illusions yet: "We Gontishmen," he tells the others, "do not play [sorcery] for pleasure or praise."

That night, Ged lies alone in bed feeling despondent. He regrets having come to Roke. When there is a knock at the door, however, and Vetch comes in to talk to Ged—asking questions about Ged's youth and telling stories about his own upbringing in the East Reach—Ged feels comforted. He sees that though Vetch is soon to be made sorcerer, there is a greater power Vetch holds: the power of kindness. The encounter with Vetch restores Ged's confidence. He reminds himself that though his schoolmates are more skilled in illusion than he, none of them have saved a village from destruction as he has.

In the weeks and months that follow, Ged devotes himself intensely to his studies with the nine Masters of Roke. Each day he studies the deeds of great heroes and the lore of Earthsea; he learns the art of manipulating the weather; he continues his studies in herbals and healing; he learns illusion and changing spells from the Master Hand. Ged finds that the art of illusion comes easily to him, and he begins deepening his relationship with the Master Hand as he seeks more knowledge. During one lesson, Ged asks how he might learn to change a pebble into a diamond and keep it that way. The Master Hand, however, warns Ged that the art of illusion is not about changing the thing itself. To change an object, one must change its **true name**: to do that would throw off the balance of the world.

One day, the Master Hand says, Ged will learn powerful changing spells—but he will have to be careful about what he changes, when he changes it, and how he goes about it: to throw off the equilibrium of the world is a dangerous game. "To light a candle," the Master Hand warns, "is to cast a shadow." Not all rocks, he says, can be diamonds. After leaving the Master Hand, Ged encounters Jasper in the hall. The two exchange barbs, and Ged finds himself offended even more deeply by Jasper's haughty, cruel nature. He becomes more determined than ever to outdo his rival and prove himself to Jasper. He wants to humiliate the other boy publicly. He cannot yet sense the darkness in their rivalry—the dark danger the Master Hand just warned him about.

Though Ged is hungry to expand his powers and show off what he's made of, here, he finds himself reluctant to show his hand so early. He doesn't want to be made fun of, nor does he want to reveal himself to be less adept than his fellow students. He tries to couch his shame in a prideful statement about the proper uses of magic—a statement that is truer than even he knows.



At the height of Ged's misery, Vetch steps in to show Ged that he is not alone. Ged's faith in his own decision to come to Roke is restored—he feels hopeful that he will learn and make friends here as he always dreamed he would. It is easy for Ged to get down on himself or to feel insufficient, but he tries to remind himself of the great things he's already accomplished, no matter how small they might seem to his classmates.



As Ged delves deeper and deeper into his studies, he enjoys learning everything he can about the many different facets of sorcery and magic. Still, however, Ged hungers for greater power. He doesn't yet understand the careful balance of the universe—and how the use of magic for purposeless reasons threatens that balance. Ged still has a lot to learn about the world around him, even as he plumbs the depths of the magical arts.



Ged purports to understand and internalize the Master Hand's words about accepting the world as it is, maintaining the balance of the universe, and being aware of the chain reactions that can occur when one ignores the world's Equilibrium. Yet when confronted with Jasper and the boy's cruel taunts, Ged is unable to remember the Master's wise words—he is consumed only by hatred and a desire to do whatever he needs to do to get revenge and prove himself.



That winter, Ged and seven other students are sent to the northernmost part of Roke Island to study at the Isolate Tower with the Master Namer. There, Ged and his fellow students learn the **true names** of every geographical feature of the cape. The work is draining and boring, but the Master urges his pupils to accept that if one wants to control the elements, one must first know the true names of that which they seek to change.

True magic, the Master Namer entreats his students to understand, comes from the Old Speech—many words of this language have been lost throughout the ages, and some are hidden or unknown only to creatures such as dragons. One must be careful when practicing magic to use **true names** in order to control, change, or influence only the specific thing named in the spell: this is why wizards and mages must be so attentive, so that they do not change the balance of the world and wreak havoc on the equilibrium of the universe.

Ged is released from the tower earlier than his fellow pupils: he has learned well and worked hard over the year at the tower, and he returns to Roke with a sense of accomplishment—and a hunger for even more knowledge. On the way back to the school, Ged stops for shelter beneath a tree one night. While he is sleeping, a small animal curls up in his cloak. Ged recognizes the creature as an otak—similar to a small cat or fox—but he knows its **true name** is Hoeg. Addressing the creature by its true name, he invites it to follow him home and travel with him. The creature stays in Ged’s cloak hood all the way home.

Ged receives a warm welcome. Vetch compliments Ged’s otak and states that those who keep wild beasts are those gifted in the Old Powers; Jasper, however, declares that Ged is just keeping a “rat” in his cloak. The Lord of O, once a pupil of Archmage Nemmerle, has come to the school for a feast with his bride in tow. Vetch, Ged, and Jasper admire the Lady of O and enjoy one of the master’s songs as he regales the feasters with old tales and deeds. Jasper performs an illusion for the Lady, conjuring a beautiful white tree and a white bird with a long tail. The Lady begs her husband to allow Jasper to come to court with them as their illusionist—but Jasper insists on staying at school. As the others praise Jasper’s illusion, Ged privately thinks to himself that he could have created a better one.

Ged yearns for a fast accumulation of knowledge, power, and skill—but instead, his teachers again and again try to impress upon him and his fellow prentices just how important it is to be careful, deliberate, and thoughtful about the spells one weaves.



The Master Namer doesn’t teach the most interesting art—but he teaches perhaps the most important. The Master Namer wants his prentices to comprehend that to recognize and understand a thing’s true nature is the most important part of sorcery. Without care, thought, and deliberation, the universe’s balance is profoundly threatened.



Ged is anxious to get back to the exciting world of the School—yet as he journeys home, his encounter with the otak and his ability to make it feel seen, understood, and wanted by using its true name proves how essential the Master Namer’s instruction truly is.



Ged is so happy to be back at school—and on the cusp of learning more new things—that he laughs off Jasper’s taunts and chooses to bask in the festive atmosphere rather than waste energy being upset or defensive. Still, the threat of Jasper’s cruelty—and Ged’s plans to retaliate against him—linger. Ged is still determined to prove himself to Jasper and to show everyone else that he is the most skilled wizard at the School.



CHAPTER 4

That spring, as Ged resumes his training at the school, he sees little of Vetch and Jasper—as new sorcerers, they now study with the Master Patterner in a secret grove off-limits to prentices. Ged resumes classes with the other Masters, deepening his knowledge of weatherworking, herbalism, and healing. At night, he studies runes on his own. Ged is such an adept pupil that rumors swirl about him throughout the school: some say he has special powers, evidenced by his friendship with the otak, while others say he has been ordained as the next Archmage. Ged ignores his classmates and spends much of his time alone.

Ged is now 15. He begins studying more advanced shaping spells with the Master Hand—the Master even gives Ged advanced books, though he warns Ged not to tell the Archmage of the private knowledge he's passing down to him. Ged begins working with the Master Summoner, who teaches summoning rather than illusion. The Master Summoner makes sure to warn Ged, as the Master Hand once did, that to summon earthly forces is to change the earth itself: such a burden should not be taken lightly. Ged is interested in learning spells to summon the spirits of the dead, but such practices are firmly off-limits. Sometimes Ged's summoning studies fill him with a dark portent or remind him of the shadows that filled the room back on Re Albi, but he pushes aside his fear.

As spring turns to summer, the school gathers for a large feast to celebrate the full moon. The students celebrate alongside their Masters, the townspeople of Thwil, and farmers and villagers from across the island. The first night of the festival is wild and fun, and on the morning of the second day, the whole town sleeps in. On the second night of the festival, Ged, Vetch, Jasper, and several of their fellow students have a picnic and practice illusions beneath the stars. As always, Ged and Jasper find themselves trading insults disguised as friendly jests. Jasper says he's sick of hanging around prentices—he wants to be in the company of equals. Ged asks Jasper what sorcerers have that prentices don't. "Power," Jasper says. Ged challenges Jasper to a duel, stating he'll match Jasper's power.

Ged is earning a reputation for himself as a powerful young mage, but he refuses to rest on his laurels or give into his classmates' flattery. Ged still wants more knowledge and more power, and he is determined to keep his head down and learn how to prove himself once and for all.



As Ged delves deeper into his studies than ever before and begins seeking out darker kinds of spells, he alarms his teachers and once again draws their warnings to pay attention to the careful balance of the universe. Ged, however, pushes through his own intuition as he tries to make himself powerful enough to create a grand display that will help him prove himself once and for all. Even though Ged knows that he's headed down a dark path, he cannot stop himself from the pursuit of power and glory.



Jasper and Ged can no longer contain their animosity for one another. Even in the midst of a joyful, happy time, their hatred boils over. Jasper wants to push Ged to the edge—and Ged allows himself to be pushed. Ged has been determined since arriving on Roke to find an outlet for his desire to prove himself: now he has found it, and he is ready to show Jasper what he's learned.



Vetch reminds the two that duels are forbidden. He urges them to come to their senses, yet Jasper and Ged remain resolved to prove themselves. Ged transforms himself into a falcon on the spot before reclaiming his human form. Jasper accuses him of casting an illusion, but Vetch insists Ged has mastered true change. Jasper, however, declares himself unimpressed. Vetch urges Ged not to rise to Jasper's bait, but Jasper asks Ged to follow him to Roke Knoll and show him what Gontish wizards can really do. Ged agrees to go. Jasper says meanly that he's looking forward to seeing Ged charm some goats. Ged vows that he will raise a spirit from the dead and leaves the courtyard.

Up on the grassy, empty knoll, Ged and Jasper stand several paces away from each other. Ged prepares to perform his summoning—but he no longer cares about impressing Jasper. He simply wants to prove to himself that he has the power to do the unthinkable. Ged announces his intent to call a beautiful maiden of lore. Ged stretches out his arm and begins the summoning spell—the one he read in Ogion's book years ago. The others watch as Ged falls to the ground and then rises back up with something between his hands. Ged calls out the name of the legendary maiden. The shapeless mass in his hand splits apart to reveal the form of a woman for just a moment—then, a horrible, shapeless shadow leaps out of the mass and attacks Ged violently.

Jasper hides his eyes, and Vetch alone watches in horror as the faceless, child-sized shadow tears at Ged's flesh. Vetch tries to pull the creature off of Ged, but something stops him from touching it. Suddenly, a bright light takes over the sky; when it dissipates, the shadow is gone. Ged is unbreathing and covered in bloody, gaping wounds—the Archmage Nemmerle is standing over him. Nemmerle touches Ged with his staff, and Ged gasps for air. Nemmerle kneels, weakened. Vetch looks around and realized that other wizards have arrived—the Masters have been drawn to the scene by the strength of Ged's spell.

While others from the school arrive to help carry Ged back to school, to the chambers of the Master Herbal, the Master Summoner stays on the hill all night keeping watch for the return of the shadow. The creature, however, does not return—it is hiding somewhere out in the world. The Master Herbal tends Ged's "evil wounds," which seep flows of black blood. Ged runs a fever, but no spell can cool him down. In another room of the school, the Archmage Nemmerle, his power spent after casting out the shadow, lays dying. The other Masters stand over him, mourning his loss but understanding that all lives must come to an end.

Ged allows himself to be so deeply affected by Jasper's cruel taunts that he puts himself at risk by attempting increasingly dangerous forms of magic. True changes, as Ged's Masters have warned him, disturb the balance of the universe and must be performed carefully—and on top of that spell, Ged wants to attempt something none of his Masters have even agreed to let him read about. Ged's pursuit of pride and glory takes him to dangerous places.



In this climactic scene, Ged decides that it's himself he wants to impress, not Jasper. Ged has believed since his childhood that he is special and destined for greatness—he believes that if he can pull this off, he'll never have any self-doubt again (and nor will his classmates doubt his absolute power). Ged, however, fails to perform the spell correctly, and he summons forth something he never imagined.



The shadow's violent attack on Ged seems to be the work of a dark creature from another world. As the novel unfolds, however, and it becomes clearer and clearer that Ged has released from within his very soul the darkest part of himself, this scene can be read as Ged's dark drive for power and domination taking vengeance against the part of him foolish enough to succumb to the pull of glory, pride, and renown.



Ged's actions on Roke Knoll reverberate throughout the School, forever changing the fabric of the place Ged calls home. The Masters spoke of the careful balance of the universe for years, but Ged never listens. Now, though, the practical gravity of disturbing the world's equilibrium is made painfully clear.



The next day, the nine Masters gather to choose the next Archmage—they settle on a wizard called Gensher of Way who lives far away and send a ship to collect him. Ged knows nothing of this, though—for four weeks, he swims in and out of consciousness, confined to the Master Herbal’s chambers as he slowly heals from his terrible wounds. Finally, one autumn day, Ged is well enough to sit up—but he cannot talk, only weep. It takes another season for Ged to recover, and it is not until early spring that Ged is well enough to leave the Master Herbal’s chambers, rejoin his classmates, and greet the new Archmage.

Ged’s classmates hardly recognize him—the left side of his face is covered in white scars, and he has grown terribly thin. Ged goes straight to Archmage Gensher to swear his loyalty toward him—but when he bends the knee, the Archmage, who knows what Ged did, rejects his offer. Ged asks if he must leave Roke, even if what he wants is to stay, learn, and undo the evil he’s unleashed onto the world. The Archmage insists that if Ged left now, he’d become a *gebbeth*—a puppet doing the will of the shadow. He insists Ged stay on Roke and learn until he gains the strength to fight the shadow, which is surely awaiting him somewhere in the world. Ged admits he has seen the shadow in dreams.

The Archmage Gensher chides Ged for using his power wrongly and spinning a spell without thinking of how it would affect the balance of all things. Worst of all, the Archmage says, Ged was moved to do so by pride and hatred. Now, the shadow wants to work its evil through Ged. Ged says he wishes he were dead. The Archmage again chides Ged, recalling how Nemmerle gave his life so that Ged could live. All Ged can do now, the new Archmage says, is study and work as hard as he can.

As Ged returns to daily life, he notices that Vetch and Jasper are seemingly gone from the School. He does not attempt to make any new friends and he struggles in his studies, afraid of casting too strong a spell again. In autumn he returns to the Isolate Tower, but this time, he is thrilled rather than full of dread at the prospect.

Ged’s wounds, which nearly took his life from him, take a long time to heal. This represents the profundity and violence of what Ged has unleashed upon the world. He is, after all, a talented wizard of great natural-born power—but he has used that power for evil, and as a result the costs of his schoolyard duel are astronomical and unimaginable.



Ged now sees that his actions have severe ramifications. The balance in the universe his masters always spoke of is not some abstract concept—it has real, practical effects. The Archmage isn’t angry with Ged, but at the same time, he wants Ged to understand the gravity of what he’s brought forth into the world. Ged will be safe at school, but beyond the walls of the building, there is no telling what awaits Ged. He will have to figure that out for himself.



This passage represents a new struggle within Ged—the struggle between craving the oblivion of death and having to deal with the now-arduous fact of being alive. As long as Ged lives, he knows, he will have to fear the shadow—but Gensher urges Ged not to let pride get the better of him twice. Gensher wants Ged to fight through his uncertainty and fear and find a way to make sure the sacrifices of those who’ve attended to Ged are not in vain.



Ged’s encounter with the shadow fundamentally changes him. He is no longer showy or confident, and he longs for simplicity, isolation, and modesty.



The night before Ged leaves for the tower, Vetch, who has been studying at the secretive Immanent Grove, arrives at Ged's room to wish him good luck—and to return the otak, whom he's kept watch over while Ged recovered. Vetch urges Ged to come to his homeland, the East Reach, once Ged completes his studies and becomes free, but Ged states he might never be free. Ged asks what is in store for Vetch, and Vetch speaks excitedly of a return to his hometown followed by the search for a job of magery in the "little isles." If Ged ever needs him, Vetch says, Ged should summon him by his **true name**: Estarriol. Ged, too, tells Vetch his true name. Ged knows what a meaningful thing it is to have shared his true name and to have heard Vetch's.

Though Vetch has proven himself to be a worth, powerful, and levelheaded sorcerer—and thus superior to both Ged and Jasper—he does not have a shred of pride within him. Vetch wants to improve the lives of the people in his hometown and in smaller, more vulnerable isles. He accepts that wizardry is a duty to one's community rather than the chance to pursue glory, fame, and renown. In entrusting his true name to Ged, Vetch proves that he is ever the loyal, thoughtful, true friend. To share one's true name is a vulnerable thing, and Ged does not take the gesture lightly. He is in awe of Vetch's goodness, kindness, and righteousness.



The next day—Ged's 17th birthday—he sets out for the tower. The journey takes him longer than it once did. He studies at the tower until the end of winter, at which point he returns to the Great House to be made sorcerer. Archmage Gensher accepts Ged's pledge of loyalty and allows him to study higher magic. Ged finds his old skills returning to him. Even while studying the dangerous arts of making and shaping, Ged feels himself learning with ease.

Receiving a kind of blessing from Vetch, studying at the Isolate Tower, and making amends with Gensher allows Ged to accept that in spite of the mistakes he's made in the past, there are still ways in which he can repair his relationships and begin thinking of a future. He begins to feel less alone and less hopeless.



Ged searches lore books and asks his Masters about creatures such as the shadow—but there is little record of such creatures in all of history, only a few stories of spirits from the realm of the dead devouring those who summon them. In a conversation with the Master Summoner, the Summoner tells Ged that a mage is not one who can do anything—a mage must follow the increasingly narrow path he can follow, even as he amasses power, until he realizes what the one thing he must do is.

Ged is learning more and more about what his future will look like, and it is very different from the one he imagined for himself. It is clear that Ged's coming-of-age journey is leading him down a specific path. He is beginning to accept that he may not achieve the glory, fame, and renown he once dreamed of; instead, he may need to undertake a much more personal, arduous journey, one in which there is little glory but much fulfillment.



When Ged turns 18, the Archmage Gensher sends him to study with the Master Patterner in the hidden Immanent Grove. Little is known of this secretive place where people make and learn complicated magic. At the end of spring, Ged returns to the Great House. At the door, he finds the doormaster he met many years ago when he arrived. He realizes that this man is the ninth master: the Master Doorkeeper. The Master tells Ged he can win his freedom if he discovers and says the Master's name. Though Ged has learned much during his time on Roke, a mage's name is nearly impossible to divine.

As Ged begins studying the advanced magic he longed to study, he finds that honing his skills is not about glory or excitement but rather about personal fulfillment and the furthering of one's knowledge. Ged has become a much more patient person. How he reacts to the Master Doorkeeper's test is evidence of how much he's changed and how seriously he's dedicated himself to setting aside his pride.



Ged sits down and thinks for a while about how to do what the Master Doorkeeper has demanded. He falls asleep, unable to think of an answer. At last, Ged returns to the Master and tells him that he cannot force or trick the man's name from him. He is content, he says, to stay and learn from him unless the man will consent to answer a question. The Master urges Ged to ask it. Ged asks the man's name, and the Master, smiling, says it. Ged repeats it, and the Master lets him in. Ged gathers his things—including his newly earned staff of yew—and leaves the Great House for the last time, heading down to the ship awaiting him in the harbor.

In this scene, Ged again demonstrates that he's become a much more patient, introspective, and levelheaded person. He is willing to accept that his Masters hold wisdom that he cannot imagine. This makes Ged's achievements feel more hard-won and fulfilling: when he sits back and listens rather than scheming as to how he can make himself look powerful, smart, or special, he finds his capacity for growth and success much improved.



CHAPTER 5

West of Roke are the Ninety Isles, a community of small islets. Some, uninhabited, are daily erased by the tides, while others are home to villages of seafaring people and fishermen who paddle their boats along the saltwater roads that connect the isles. The westernmost of these islands is Low Torning—and the place is in need of a wizard. Threatened constantly by the dragons of Pendor, a land even further west, the people of Low Torning welcome Ged with humility and reverence, apologizing for the humble quarters they've built for him—and yet Ged knows that his pride has no place here.

This part of Ged's journey continues to show how much he's learned, grown, and changed from the prideful, headstrong boy he once was. Ged accepts the post on Low Torning with grace and humility. He truly wants to serve the people of the small isle and renounce his former desires for glory and renown.



Though most graduates of the school on Roke pursue more prestigious positions, Ged knows that the people of Low Torning will need protection from the nine dragons rumored to swarm the isle of Pendor, a desolate place with no food. The dragons have already begun flying as far as Low Torning in search of sheep, and the people need someone to protect them. Ged has accepted the position with grace—since the encounter with the shadow, he no longer dreams of a life marked by fanfare and glory. Still, there is a part of him that thrills at the chance to encounter dragons. Before leaving Roke, the Archmage Gensher warned Ged that a powerful presence which wills his destruction was waiting in the North—Low Torning is a safe, out-of-the-way place where Ged can gather his strength for the struggles ahead.

There is still some excitement in the post at Low Torning—the chance to encounter and even master dragons thrills Ged even as he accepts that he must live a simple, humble life out of the spotlight. Ged knows that his destiny is now forever changed, and yet he wants to find a way to build a new future for himself rather than cower forever in fear of an unseen, unknown enemy.



Ged begins his duties on Low Torning with a sense of humble gratitude by working herbal remedies and other simple charms such as he worked in his youth on Gont. He makes friends with a boatmaker named Pechvarry and helps the man to charm his boats to make them more sound on the seas. At the end of Ged's first autumn on the island, Pechvarry's son grows sick. A witch comes to heal him, but her spells do not help the boy. Pechvarry begs Ged to save the child. Ged kneels on the child's pallet and senses that the child is already beyond help—yet Ged knows he cannot let his new friend down.

Ged's humble life on Low Torning is satisfying in small ways—and yet when a large challenge arrives, Ged cannot resist his old impulse to use his powers to save the day. Still so traumatized by the ways in which he failed himself, Nemmerle, and others by releasing the shadow, Ged feels he cannot fail a second major test of his character. He becomes determined to save Pechvarry's son no matter the cost.



Ged summons his power and reaches out with his spirit to chase the child's spirit to the border between life and death. He is able to see the child running ahead of him down a dark slope. He tries to follow the child, but he soon realizes he's gone too far toward the other realm. Ged begins walking back to the world of the living with taxing, laborious steps. When he comes back to the top of the hill, he sees the shadow waiting for him. Ged knows that if he returns to the world of the living, he will soon have to face the shadow—but if he returns to the world of the dead, he'll perish. Ged summons his strength and leaps forward back toward life.

Ged, still hovering over the child, collapses to the ground. Pechvarry carries Ged home, where his otak licks him awake. Ged is full of fear and grief: Pechvarry's son is dead, and as for Ged himself, the shadow has found him at last—now, surely, it will come for him with more strength than before. He begins dreaming of the shadow. Even when awake in the light of day, he feels a cold dread around him. He binds his house with spells to protect him from the shadow but is careful not to spend too much of his power—he still needs his strength to fight off the dragons of Pendor.

Ged, frustrated by the difficult situation he has gotten himself into, decides that there is only one way forward. He goes to the Head Isle-Man of Low Torning and asks permission to leave the island and go confront the dragons of Pendor—he does not want to put the people of the isle in danger by bringing the shadow here, nor does he want to abandon them to the dragons' hunger. The Isle-Man warns Ged of how dangerous facing down nine dragons at once is, but Ged insists that eight of them are rumored to still be young. Sensing Ged's determination, the Isle-Man gives him leave to go.

The great Dragon of Pendor arrived there years ago to take over the castle, drive the townspeople into the sea, and sit upon the once-great king's horde. No one has ever tried to avenge the loss of Pendor, and ships frequently steer far away from the isle all together. In spite of this, Ged hires a single small boat to sail directly there. He feels fierce and excited as he nears the island—knowing he may die, he feels totally free. As Ged arrives in the harbor, he shouts out, calling the "Usurper of Pendor" to come face him.

As Ged enters this strange space between the world of the living and the world of the dead, he finds himself facing an important choice. Ged's ultimate decision to rejoin the world of the living—and to face down the shadow, his failures, and his inner conflicts for the rest of his days—signals enormous emotional and spiritual growth. This is an important turning-point in Ged's coming-of-age journey as it shows that his determination to right his own wrongs and restore balance to his life (and the world) outweighs his fear.



Ged's shadow haunts him in dreams at the most profound moment of self-loathing, dread, and sadness he's known in a long time. This signals that the shadow has something to do with Ged's innermost self. Binding his house won't protect him from the shadow, Ged knows, yet he is so afraid of how the shadow makes him feel that he's desperate to try and keep it out.



Ged is in a precarious position. He knows that because the shadow is near, he is endangering the people of Low Torning, but he cannot abandon them to try to save them, because doing so would leave them vulnerable to the dragons. Ged decides to confront the dragons—placing himself in harm's way—in order to put the priorities of the people to whom he is duty-bound before his own.



In sailing on Pendor, Ged demonstrates remarkable bravery but also a glimmer of his old, reckless self. Ged has not forgotten or erased the person he used to be—and the person he still fundamentally is inside—and in moments like this, his hard-won traits of patience and humility give way to the part of him that still seeks adventure and challenge.



Several young dragons begin flying at Ged. He casts a binding spell on their wings as they fly close to him. They fall into the sea, one by one, and drown. When three more dragons fly at Ged at once, he casts a Changing spell to transform himself into a dragon momentarily. He attacks them and sends them dropping into the sea. Ged quickly returns to his human form and calls out for the largest dragon to show itself. Ged is startled when the castle appears to change shape—he realizes that the great Dragon of Pendor has been wrapped around one of its spires. Now it uncurls itself and stands in its full power.

The Dragon speaks to Ged and asks him not to kill his three remaining spawn to try to get to the horde of treasure. Ged insists it's not the horde he wants. The Dragon, using the Old Speech, flatters Ged by telling him how powerful he is for such a young wizard. Ged knows, however, not to trust the Dragon's words. The Dragon continues to taunt Ged by asking if he has come to Pendor to seek help against the thing that hunts him from the dark. The Dragon tells Ged to name what hunts him. Ged says he cannot. The Dragon warns Ged that in order to master what chases him, he'll need to name it. The Dragon says that the shadow will pursue Ged no matter where he goes.

The Dragon offers to tell Ged the shadow's name. Ged knows that the Dragon is manipulating him—he is certain that to trust the Dragon would be foolish. Ged tells the Dragon he wants to strike a bargain with him—then he promises that if the dragon never flies east of Pendor, it will come to no harm. The Dragon asks what leverage Ged possibly has. Ged says he knows the Dragon's **true name**, and he speaks it: it is Yevaud. The Dragon stands still. After a long while, it again offers to tell Ged the shadow's name. Ged, addressing Yevaud by name once again, repeats that he does not want any favors. He compels Yevaud to swear that he will never come to the Archipelago. Releasing a breath of flame, Yevaud swears. His oath binds him to the isle, even as Ged, in his tiny boat, sails back to the Archipelago.

CHAPTER 6

As Ged sails eastward back to the Archipelago, he feels a renewed fear of the shadow. He has no idea what to do or where to go in order to escape it, and so he decides to return to Low Torning and report on his encounter with Yevaud. As Ged returns to the island and tells the Isle-Men of what's transpired, the people of Low Torning rejoice. They turn Ged's deeds into a chant, the *Song of the Sparrowhawk*, and the whole island celebrates late into the night. The evening is joyful, but in the morning, Ged's old fear returns. He knows he must leave the island. As he says farewell to Pechvarry, he feels guilty over having been unable to save the man's son—even though he was able to conquer an island of dragons.

Ged demonstrates his immense skill and power in defeating several dragons with little effort. He is a master of spell-weaving and changing alike, and it brings him satisfaction and happiness to use his skills to protect the people to whom he is bound to serve.



Ged's encounter with the Dragon shows how far he's come yet again. Rather than succumb to the Dragon's carefully selected words of misleading flattery, Ged chooses to remain focused on his mission.



Ged doesn't even accept the Dragon's offer of help against the shadow, knowing that the personal journey he's on isn't one that can be so easily completed. Ged shows himself to be resistant to flattery, to corruption, and to taking the easy way out. As Ged uses the Dragon's true name against him, it becomes clearer than ever that Ged at last understands how to use his training for good. Ged protects the people of Low Torning—and indeed the rest of the archipelago—without letting his pride, his desire for knowledge and power, or his secret need for glory get in the way. Ged conquers the Dragons of Pendor without sacrificing any of himself in the process.



As the people of Low Torning toast and feast Ged and sing of his power and accomplishments, Ged refuses to let himself be sucked in. He doesn't feel proud or especially glorified about what he's done—saving the isle from the dragons was his duty, and he has completed it humbly. Ged knows that he cannot rest on his laurels—there is still danger, conflict, and a serious trial ahead of him.



Ged and several boatmen from Low Torning set out on the journey back to Roke. The trip takes several days, and though Ged is anxious, his sailing-mates are still proud and triumphant, rejoicing in the victory over the dragons. As the boat approaches Roke, a strong wind batters the vessel. Ged casts a spell to push the boat through the storm, but it is of no use. Ged realizes that the wind blows against him only. He urges his crew to turn back to the nearby isle of Serd and leave him there—he tells his men the conflict is between him and his shadow.

Ged passes an anxious night at an inn on Serd, considering where he might run next. He knows that though the shadow has no physical substance, once it catches up with him, it will pull strength and life from him. He can sense nothing but doom ahead of him and feels he cannot drop his guard even for a second lest the shadow try to trick him by inhabiting the body of another. At dawn, Ged resolves to turn to chance. He goes down to the harbor and boards a galley bound for the Great Port at Havnor. From there, he thinks, he might return to Gont and seek out Ogion.

While making port in the town of Orrimy, Ged finds himself being followed by a cloaked man as he makes his way through the streets. The stranger tells Ged he senses his fear—though the stranger doesn't know Ged, he says, he thinks their meeting must not be a chance thing. He has heard stories of a scarred man who must fight his way through darkness. He urges Ged to go to the Court of the Terrenon in Osskil—there, he will find a sword with which to fight the shadows. Ged is afraid to trust the man, yet after the stranger departs, Ged hurries to the harbor and begs passage on a thin longship bound for the north. He offers himself as an oarsman, since the ship already has a weatherworker on board.

The journey is long and taxing, yet Ged grows accustomed to the work within a few days. Osskil, the land he is bound for, is a faraway place whose wizardry is different than that practiced on Roke. Gold is prized there highly, and the people of Osskil are often divided in pursuit of it. The pale-skinned northerners shun Ged for his “red” skin, and even his status as a wizard wins him no goodwill or high regard. Ged keeps to himself for most of the journey, but one day, a man called Skiorh taunts Ged's pet otak. When another oarsman stands up for Ged, Skiorh scowls and turns toward the man—Ged sees Skiorh's features blur and shift for a moment, and he becomes suspicious of the man. For the rest of the journey he avoids Skiorh when he can.

Ged wanted to sail to Roke in order to secure safety for himself—but when he realizes that his presence on Roke would threaten the people of the island, he turns back without a second thought. The Roke-wind blows against threats to the isle, and Ged realizes that the enchantment must sense that the shadow, bound to him, is near.



Ged doesn't feel equipped to fight the shadow—he doesn't even know where to begin when it comes to figuring out how the creature operates. Rather than move ahead blindly and bullishly, Ged decides to consult those wiser than him. This demonstrates that he's grown in terms of humility, patience, and the desire for knowledge and informed decisions rather than thoughtless action.



Ged's encounter with this mysterious stranger is suspect, but Ged is so desperate for answers that he takes the unknown man at his word. This shows that Ged, in his fight against pride and the desire for power and action, has perhaps swung too far in the other direction. Ged is still coming of age and still learning how to do what's best.



Again, Ged finds himself feeling slightly perturbed and uncomfortable on the journey to Osskil—a part of him senses, on some level, that something nefarious is afoot. Ged, however, is so desperate to get to Osskil and find the answers he seeks that he pushes aside his intuition.



At last, the longboat arrives in the harbor of Osskil. Ged begins asking directions to the Court of the Terrenon—Skiorh, overhearing him, says he is on his way there and offers to lead Ged the rest of the way. Ged is not excited by the prospect of traveling with the shady Skiorh, but not knowing the language of this land, he feels he has no other choice. He draws up the hood of his cloak and begins following the man through the moors beyond the harbor.

After a day of walking, Ged is exhausted, yet Skiorh insists they are not far. The weakened Ged follows Skiorh through darkness and snow, asking him periodically how much longer they have to go. One time, when Skiorh turns around to tell Ged they are near, his voice sounds like the voice of a beast. Ged stops and calls Skiorh's name. When Skiorh turns around, Ged sees that there is no face beneath Skiorh's hood. Ged realizes Skiorh has been turned into a *gebbeth*—a puppet—by the shadow, but it is too late. Skiorh calls out Ged's **true name** and Ged is prevented from casting any transformation or summoning. Ged realizes that his shadow has come for him.

The *gebbeth* advances on Ged, and Ged strikes out with his staff. He hits the form of the cloak to the ground, but it rises once again and tries to get hold of him as it did on Roke Knoll the first night it came into the world. Ged seizes an opportunity to run from the shadow, but it follows him at a quick pace. The shadow calls Ged's name again and again, but Ged continues forward in spite of his fear and exhaustion.

As Ged reaches a slope, he struggles his way up and soon senses a light before him and a voice urging him to come toward it. The light grows and soon Ged sees a gateway. He stops running and the *gebbeth* catches him by his cloak. Ged struggles from the shadow's grasp and goes through the lighted door—yet he cannot shut the door on the *gebbeth*. As Ged struggles with the last of his strength, he feels himself fade out of consciousness.

CHAPTER 7

Ged wakes in a large bed upon a stack of mattresses. He is in a large room made of stone. From a nearby window, he can see the wintry moor outside. He is surprised to be alive. As Ged rises from the bed, he realizes that his *otak* is missing. He calls for it by its **true name**, but still, it does not come to him—he knows this means it is dead. He wonders what could have happened to it and finds that he cannot remember much about his struggle against the *gebbeth*. A door opens, and a young woman in fine clothing enters the room. She welcomes the wizard Sparrowhawk to her home.

Ged feels alone and trapped on Osskil rather than closer to answers and enlightenment. He's all but forced to follow Skiorh deep into the lands ahead, even though there is a part of him that deeply distrusts the man.



The horrific realization that Ged's shadow has lured him to Osskil and entrapped him all alone fills Ged with terror and fear. Ged suppressed his intuition and now must face off against his shadow alone, defenseless, and in a strange land. The shadow has been able to manipulate a stranger into carrying out its bidding, and in so doing has completely corrupted that individual. This demonstrates the delicate nature of the cosmic balance in the world of Earthsea and suggests that anyone can be transformed into a shred of their former self by the world's dark forces.



Ged knows he can't defeat the shadow in combat—his only choice is to run. Ged has been running from his shadow for a long time now, and though he knows this pattern must stop, he's left with no other options in this moment.



Darkness and light are opposing forces, and though others have hinted to Ged about the need for balance between the two, this scene shows the practical ways in which oppositional forces leveraged against one another can shift the balance of the universe.



*Ged has no memory of how the encounter with the shadow ended—but without his staff or his *otak*, he is alone, defenseless, and more lost than ever before. Ged has come to a strange land after taking the circumspect advice of a stranger, and now he is truly on his own.*



Ged asks the woman where he is. She tells him that he is at the Court of the Terrenon, ruled by the lord Benderesk, who is the keeper of the precious stone called Terrenon. The woman introduces herself as Serret. She promises Ged that he is safe in their castle—the mighty stone walls will protect him from the thing that drove him here. Here, she tells him, he may find a new and different kind of strength as he heals. Serret takes Ged on a tour of the castle and introduces him to her elderly husband Benderesk. Ged senses something strange about the place and wonders whether he is here by chance or by fate.

As the days pass in the cold, dreary palace, Ged finds himself full of sadness and shame. He feels he has disappointed all who have taught him so far: the Masters of Roke, the Archmages Gensher and Nemmerle, and Ogion, too. He is embarrassed about running away from his shadow yet again. He keeps mostly to himself, but occasionally takes walks through the halls with Serret. Soon a friendship grows between them and they talk more and more each day.

One afternoon, Ged asks Serret about the precious stone of Terrenon. Serret offers to show it to him. She leads him up to a high, empty tower and unlocks a large door with a special silver key. Ged stares in amazement as Serret unlocks two more doors in a long, winding hall, breaking through the final door with a whispered enchantment. As Ged peers into the small, dank room she has unlocked, he feels a sickness come over him. He spots the stone of Terrenon: it is rough and unshapen yet it possesses a great, dark power—the power of an “old and terrible spirit” imprisoned within it.

Serret tells Ged that the stone was made at the beginning of time itself—its infinite power allow it to answer any question asked of it. She invites Ged to ask it anything he wants, but he refuses to do so. Serret asks Ged if he is afraid of the stone, and he admits that he is. The stone, he explains, has the power to work terrible evil. Serret insists she’s touched the stone and spoken to it before, yet she has come to no harm. Serret abruptly leaves the room, and Ged follows her.

Ged trusted the stranger on Orrimy and he trusted Skiorh upon arriving in Osskil—now, having seen the ill effects of placing his trust in unknown individuals, he takes nothing for granted and adopts an air of suspicion. Ged doesn't know what has truly brought him here or what this place holds, but he is not willing to be trapped a third time.



Ged feels lost, vulnerable, and ashamed—and it is in this state that Serret seizes upon him and begins to grow closer to him. Ged felt skeptical about the Court of the Terrenon from the moment of his arrival, but now, in the depths of his self-loathing, he allows himself to be charmed by Serret.



As Serret reveals the stone of Terrenon, Ged knows that he has made a mistake both in coming here and in trusting that he'd be safe within the castle walls. True, the shadow cannot pursue him here—but there is a greater, darker power living here.



Ged proves yet again that he has learned from his past mistakes, as he does not dare go near the stone. He knows that power corrupts: his own search for power, dominion, glory, and greatness and his youth has led him only to ruin. He is not going to make the same mistake twice—but he cannot bring Serret back from the dark territory into which she's already tread.



Ged does not sleep well that night. The next morning, he apologizes to Serret for offending her. Serret explains that there is nothing to be afraid of—she believes that he is the lone individual who can control the stone. The stone itself, she says, prophesied Ged’s arrival. Serret encourages Ged to use what is his for the taking: the power of the stone. Ged insists that the Old Powers are not for the use of men—he believes he is here by chance, not by fate. Serret, however, explains that the man who spoke to him in the streets when he arrived in the north was once a wizard, now a servant of the Terrenon, who brought Ged to the castle. Only darkness, Serret says, can defeat the shadow.

Ged says the only way he can defeat the shadow is to learn its **true name**. Serret says the stone can reveal that name. Though Serret quietly encourages Ged to give in and approach the stone so that they can rule the land together, Ged stands up and replies that it is light that defeats the dark—not more darkness. He realizes that he has fallen into a trap and is in danger of being bound to the Stone forever.

As Benderesk enters the hall, he reprimands Serret for being unable to bend Ged to their will—and the will of the stone. He calls his wife—addressing her as “woman of Gont”—a fool. Benderesk casts a Changing spell on Serret, transforming her into a hideous, sniveling beast. Ged reverses the spell. Serret grabs his hand and pulls him through the halls outside to a courtyard to make their escape before Benderesk unleashes the mysterious Servants of the Stone.

Outside, Ged leads Serret through the charmed gate, which is invisible to her, and out onto the moors. Ged at last recognizes Serret as the Gontish village girl, the daughter of the Lord of Re Albi—the girl who initially encouraged him to speak that horrible spell that loosed the shadow. Ged looks around nervously as they emerge onto the moor for any sign of the gebbeth or the shadow itself—instead, he spots the dead body of his otak preserved in the snow.

Serret urges Ged to change himself quickly—the Servants of the Stone are creeping forward from the castle. Serret transforms into a grey gull and flies away. Instead of changing himself, Ged transforms a blade of grass into a wizard’s staff and uses it to cast a spell that will drive the dark creatures away. Still, the winged creatures continue attacking Ged, while others fly after Serret. Ged transforms himself into a hawk and flies after them. When he catches up with them, he realizes they have already killed Serret. Ged flies out to sea, where the Old Powers, bound to the isle of Osskil, cannot follow him.

Serret, having failed to lure Ged into using the power of the stone once, now tries a different tactic: she presents the stone as the only thing that can defeat Ged’s shadow. Ged, however, is staunchly opposed to using Old Powers not meant for him. He has seen what destruction dark powers in the hands of the wrong master can do, and he will not fall into his old ways again.



Ged stands firm against Serret’s tricks, just as he did against the Dragon on the isle of Pendor. Ged is proving himself to be someone deeply attuned to the balance of the universe and the dangers of unchecked power—a far cry from the impetuous, headstrong boy he once was.



Benderesk, it turns out, has been even more profoundly corrupted by the stone than Serret. Ged attempts to save them both from the horrors that await those who refuse the stone’s power. Ged believes there’s still a way they can both escape the darkness surrounding the keep.



Ged failed to recognize Serret for who she was during his stay at the keep, though she seemed familiar to him. Ged now realizes that Serret has perhaps always served dark powers—she was able to tempt him once but not twice. Ged’s different reactions to Serret’s two attempts to force him into the use of dark magic show his growth over the course of his harrowing journey.



Ged cannot save Serret in the end, yet he is able to escape the Court of the Terrenon without succumbing to the fearsome stone or its dark, shadowy servants. By transforming himself into an animal, however, Ged is still dabbling in dark and unrestrained power—yet doing so is by far the lesser of two evils.



Ogion, who has been wandering the forests of Gont for a whole season, returns to his hut in Re Albi. The morning after his return, as he fetches water from a spring, he hears the scream of a hawk—moments later, the hawk alights on his wrist. The hawk looks directly at him. Ogion recognizes the hawk as something he once **named**. He brings the hawk home and offers it water, but it is too frightened to drink. After speaking a spell and saying Ged’s name aloud, the hawk transforms into a trembling, scarred young man dressed in fine silks. Ogion leads him to a pallet in the corner and helps him to lay down and rest.

Ogion knows that great dangers accompany the art of changing—the longer a person stays in their changed form, the greater risk they run of being unable to find their way back to themselves and forgetting their human identities entirely. While in hawk form, Ged’s instincts merged with the instincts of a hawk, and by the time he reached Ogion, he had lost the ability to return himself to his true form. Ogion knows he has saved Ged at the last possible moment.

In the morning, Ged wakes and apologizes to Ogion. He feels he has returned to him just as he left: as a fool. As snow begins to fall, Ged tells Ogion about the years that have passed since he left Gont, informing him about the battle he wages against his shadow. Ged tells Ogion he fears he has no power against it. Ogion points out the feats Ged has accomplished—but Ged attributes his survival to luck alone.

Ged tells Ogion that he needs the shadow’s **true name** to defeat it—but he believes it has none. All things, Ogion tells him, have a name, and Ged senses the certainty in Ogion’s voice. Ogion remarks how strange it is that the shadow knew Ged’s true name. Ogion gets lost in thought, but Ged assures his former master he will not stay long enough to bring the shadow to Re Albi—he will soon move on. Ogion warns Ged that there is no safe place in the world, and that he will only make himself more vulnerable by changing shape to try escaping it. Ogion tells Ged the only thing he can do is turn around and seek that which seeks him. He must become the hunter rather than the hunted.

Ged, Ogion points out, has already returned to Gont, the place where his journey began—now, he must seek the source of the shadow. Maybe at their third meeting, Ogion suggests, Ged will have the opportunity to defeat it. Ged thanks Ogion for being his “true master.” Ogion gets to work whittling Ged a new staff of yew-wood. Ged, still weary from his ordeal, sits quietly and watches and listens as Ogion forms the staff. At last, the staff is finished. Ged accepts it with gratitude. In the morning, when Ogion wakes, he finds that Ged is already gone. Ged has left Ogion a note which reads only, “Master, I go hunting.”

Ged flew directly to Ogion’s house, knowing that his old master—whom he sought out before being lured to the Court of the Terrenon—is the only one who can help him. Ogion’s ability to recognize Ged even in hawk form shows that Ogion truly knows, understands, and accepts Ged, and that acceptance is what Ged needs in order to heal and return to himself after so long in a different form.



Le Guin again demonstrates how upsetting the careful balance of the universe—even in dire circumstances—can profoundly threaten one’s well-being. To throw off the world’s equilibrium is to invite in dark forces; to change one’s nature is to risk being lost forever. Le Guin shows how important it is not to lose sight of oneself even in one’s darkest moments.



Ged is feeling low, lost, and full of self-loathing. Ogion, however, sees how much his prentice has grown. Ogion doesn’t want Ged to ignore the accomplishments he’s achieved or lose sight of the fact that he still stands a fighting chance against the forces that haunt him.



Ged is feeling defeated, hopeless, and useless. He fears he’ll never be able to best the shadow and will spend his life fleeing from it. Ogion, however, has faith in Ged’s ability to best the shadow. More than that, Ogion knows that all Ged needs to do is reframe how he thinks of the shadow—by seeing the shadow as something he pursues rather than the thing which pursues him, Ged will be able to find the confidence and strength to outwit it. Things are far from over, Ogion knows, and all is definitely not lost yet.



Ged long rejected Ogion’s sage advice, believing he knew better than the slow, steady old man. Now, however, Ged is immensely grateful for Ogion’s help, wisdom, and generosity. Ged defied Ogion’s advice once before, and he is determined not to make the same mistake twice. As Ged departs Ogion’s hut, he’s full of renewed resolve and the determination to make his master proud.



CHAPTER 8

Ged arrives at the Port of Gont with nothing but the staff Ogion has carved for him. He asks for passage on a ship bound north or west, but it is close to the Sunreturn festival, and no ships are departing. Ged spends the night having dinner with some seamen. Ged enjoys their company and wishes he could stay on Gont and renounce his power in order to live like an ordinary man, but he knows he must move on. He takes his leave of his new friends and heads to a nearby village, where he finds a fisherman willing to sell him a ramshackle longboat. Ged exhausts himself securing the boat with charms and spells. After a good night's sleep, he sets off the next morning, raising up the wind with yet more enchantments.

Ged's plan is to retrace his course. He hopes to draw the shadow out and meet it on the sea. Evil, Ged believes, is tied to earth—but on the sea, he may be able to meet the shadow on neutral terms. If he must, Ged is prepared to drown himself along with the shadow in order to save the Archipelago from its threat.

Ged uses little magic as he sails over the choppy seas. After days of sailing, he grows frustrated with the shadow's failure to appear. He calls for it in a fit of rage—and within moments, he can see the dark shape flying across the water. It has abandoned its gebbeth form and now looks more like the shadow of a man—Ged fears it is growing stronger. As the shadow flies closer, Ged is overcome with fear, yet he manages to summon his strength, call up a wind, and sail directly at the shadow. The shadow turns and flees northward. Ged follows the shadow until it turns once again, leading him southward once more. As the shadow loops around, Ged notices its shape looks less defined. Ged continues to follow the shadow into a rainstorm.

Ged continues to pursue the shadow southward, even past the isle of Gont. The rain gives way to mist, and Ged catches sight of the shadow up ahead. Ged uses a clearing charm to see through the mist so that he can follow the shadow as it ducks, dips, and veers off course, become more and more divorced from its form each time he lays eyes on it. Finally, however, a large wave pulls Ged's boat out of the sea and brings it down on some rocks; it smashes to bits, and only Ged's staff remains intact. He tries to make his way to the beach, but he is caught in the waves and begins to drown. At last, a current brings him to land, where he lies spent on a cold beach.

Ged once dreamed of achieving power, glory, and renown as a wizard. Now, having faced such horrors as he never could have imagined, Ged instead finds himself dreaming of an ordinary life as an ordinary man. This is just a fleeting fantasy, however: Ged knows he is duty-bound to restore balance to the world and to encounter and defeat the malevolent presence he alone is responsible for releasing.



Ged knows that in unleashing the shadow into the world, he has put many people at risk. Ged wants to right his own wrongs, and he's prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice to restore balance to the Archipelago and keep his people safe.



Even though Ged believes his shadow is growing stronger—and thus represents an even greater threat to him—Ged knows that he cannot run from it any longer. He must hunt it and face it, no matter how much fear the idea of doing such a thing instills in him. It is Ged's duty to return the shadow to the place from whence it came, and he cannot hide from his fate.



Ged is determined to catch up with the shadow, but either the shadow or cosmic forces beyond either of their control result in Ged becoming marooned in a strange land. This passage metaphorizes the difficulty of confronting the truth about oneself: it is often difficult, arduous work that must be done in stages. Ged doesn't yet have all the tools he needs to defeat the shadow, and so he winds up on a strange island.



It is night by the time Ged is able to move again. Exhausted, he walks toward the dunes, hoping to find shelter. Atop the dunes, however, he sees only another beach on the other side—he is on a small sandbar, not a true island. Ged turns to his left and begins walking. Soon, he sees a ramshackle hut. He enters to find an elderly man sitting by the fire and an elderly woman huddled on a pile of rags in the corner. Ged tells the pale, wan couple he is seeking shelter and will not hurt him, but they stare at him with terror in his eyes. He sets down his staff and asks for warm clothes. The old man wordlessly helps Ged, but Ged can tell he doesn't understand him. Ged asks the old man if he speaks Kargish, and the old man nods.

Ged is too exhausted to figure out who the old Kargs are, why they are living on an abandoned sandbar, or what their relationship to one another is. He helps himself to some water and food and quickly falls asleep. For a full day after his arrival, he is overcome with fever and exhaustion and spends most of his time sleeping. On the second day, Ged rises and explores the sandbar where the shadow has tricked him into becoming marooned.

The old couple remain wary of Ged as he gets to work repairing the hull of his old boat, which has washed ashore. Slowly, they become more accustomed to him, and the old woman even offers him fresh-caught mussels. That evening, the elderly woman shows him a beautiful child's brocade dress covered in pearls shaped in the emblem of the Kargad Empire, as well as a broken ring. Ged begins to believe the couple are not married but are rather a once-royal brother and sister pair who have long lived in exile.

As Ged prepares to leave, he tries to offer the elderly man and the old woman passage on his boat to a more populated place, but they refuse his offer. Ged readies some supplies and sets an enchantment on their one freshwater spring so that it never runs dry. He returns to the sea and sets off, just as baffled by his mission as he was before landing on the sandbar. The only thing Ged now knows for sure is that he is no longer being hunted: he is now the hunter. His shadow is just as afraid of him as he is of it.

This new wrinkle in Ged's journey represents a moment in which he feels trapped, exhausted, and defeated. However, Ged will soon realize that he has an important opportunity on this deserted stretch of land to do some introspection, some healing, and to get some rest before facing the inevitable challenges ahead.



Ged knows that the shadow has led him here to entrap him, but he is determined to find a way out of this trap and back to his mission of besting the shadow once and for all. Ged doesn't let himself become sidetracked by self-loathing, remorse, or sadness.



Ged begins to understand more about his unlikely companions on this far-flung stretch of land. He comes to have empathy for them even as he recognizes that they are part of an empire who once attacked his people. Light and darkness, Ged understands, are inside everyone.



Ged has come to feel a kind of fondness or protectiveness toward the elderly man and woman. He feels a sense of duty to them, even though they are members of the Kargad Empire—a group that once threatened Ged's own life. Ged now sees that he has a larger enemy and a larger purpose: to confront the shadow. This allows him to focus on doing acts of goodwill toward others, even those he might have considered his enemies in the past.



Ged follows a southeasterly course across the sea, nervous but hopeful that his rig, held together by enchantments, will take him to land. Ged barely sleeps, so arduous is the work of continually keeping up the spells holding the boat together. As a new day breaks, Ged feels a strange sense of fear come over him: he takes this to mean that the shadow is near, and that he is headed in the right direction. Soon, Ged spies a rocky cliff face of land—he is uncertain of exactly where he is, but he believes he has landed somewhere in the East Reach. He wonders whether the shadow has drawn him into a trap, but he knows that regardless, he must follow his instincts.

Ged steers his boat into a small inlet, but as he goes further and further into the cliffs, he spies no sign of life. He feels a coldness come over him. He turns around and finds that the shadow is standing behind him in the boat. Ged is not afraid, but ready instead—he knows that no magic, enchantment, or wizardry will help him. He lunges for the shadow, and though pain and coldness fill him, he realizes that when he grabs the shadow, he is only grabbing at the air. The shadow immediately shudders and shrinks away, and then it turns into smoke and flees back out to sea.

Ged falls to his knees, exhausted and weakened. He cannot tell if the shadow has filled him with cold and weariness or whether he's simply tired from his arduous journey. As he stands and steers his boat back out to the sea, he knows he is neither hunted nor hunter. His third meeting with his shadow has instead formed a bond between them—now, neither can escape the other. He knows they will meet again—and that their next meeting, however it turns out, will be their final encounter. His mission, he now realizes, is not to undo what he did in unleashing the shadow into the world but rather to finish what he started.

Out on the bright sea, Ged summons to mind the maps of the East Reach, thinking of a place to which he might sail. With a direction set in his mind he sails on, and soon comes to the coast of an island. From the ocean, he can spot a small village. When he docks and disembarks, the townspeople marvel at his staff and show him great hospitality. Ged eats, bathes, and at last falls into a hard-won sleep at a small, cozy inn.

In this passage, Ged experiences an acute sense of fear, but he leans into that sensation and follows it, refusing to back away from his own discomfort. Ged has learned that the shadow will pursue him no matter what—and so even though he fears it, he must meet it or spend his life running from it. Ged shows more bravery than he ever has by pursuing what frightens him. True glory and power is not about grand shows of force but rather about confronting what one dreads.



This is the first time Ged and the shadow have connected like this since the shadow was first let loose. The shadow is not able to wound Ged as it did that night on Roke Knoll—this demonstrates that as Ged becomes stronger, the shadow grows weaker. There is a strange balance between the two, and Ged must learn how to work it to his advantage in order to defeat the shadow once and for all.



At first, the shadow hunted Ged relentlessly. Then, Ged hunted his shadow with fear but without pause. Now, Ged realizes, neither of them are assigned to the roles of hunted or hunter: they are bound to one another in a more complicated way. Ged's relationship with the shadow ties in with the concept of the universe's careful equilibrium—the two have been engaged in a kind of dance as they've crossed the seas and are now at a point of standoff. Equally matched, Ged knows he must come up with a way to retake his advantage and complete his mission.



Ged's chase with the shadow has left him profoundly drained. He knows that in order to best the shadow the next time he meets it, he will need to gather all his strength and honor the work he's done so far.



CHAPTER 9

Ged spends three days in the village recovering and building a new boat that is not held together by spells but rather by sound materials. Ged obtains the boat from an old man, whose terrible cataracts he heals in exchange for the vessel. The old man thanks Ged for helping him once again to see all the light in the world. He suggests Ged name the boat *Lookfar*. Ged does many other good works for the villagers, healing the sick and tending to the flocks with enchantments. After several days, Ged heads southward—once again, he is in pursuit of the shadow.

Ged soon arrives on a small island and docks at the port—yet as soon as he disembarks, the village sorcerer comes hurrying toward him and explains that while the villagers mean him no disrespect, they are wary of him. Just a day ago, the sorcerer says, a man who looks just like Ged—but who cast no shadow—was seen arriving on the island without a boat. Ged thanks the sorcerer, turns back to his boat, and sets sail once again, puzzled but still determined.

Ged arrives at a larger island with a full port. He stays at an inn, where he eats and talks with some traders and townspeople. Recognizing Ged as a wizard, one man boasts that this village, Ismay, shares with other surrounding towns the services of a wizard trained at the School on Roke. Ged knows that he is not needed here. He declares his intent to stay only a night or two, feeling a cold dread wash over him as he realizes his destiny is to follow the shadow wherever it is bound. The next morning, Ged wakes to snowfall. He watches children play in the street and again grows forlorn over his lonely fate.

That night, reluctant to leave, Ged wanders the streets. He hears a man and a young woman talking as they pass him, and he is shocked when he recognizes the man's voice. Ged follows the pair until the man turns around and holds his staff aloft in defense. Ged, taken aback and frightened, addresses the man, telling his old friend Vetch that he's hurt Vetch no longer recognizes him. Vetch, however, immediately drops his staff and cries out in joy. He embraces Ged and apologizes for startling at his presence. He says he has been waiting for Ged to come to the isle of Iffish for a long time. He tells Ged that several days ago, in a village in the hills, he saw an "imitation" of Ged—Vetch followed the "presentment," calling Ged's name, but got no answer.

Even in the midst of a laborious, difficult, and intensely personal journey, Ged still makes time to help others and do the duties he knows he must as a mage. This shows how far Ged has come over the course of his journey: he no longer sees his path as a means to a glorious end, but rather he understands that his gifts as a wizard make him beholden to a larger duty to his fellow people.



Ged believes that he has found shelter on a small island, but as soon as he arrives, he realizes that his shadow has beat him here. In assuming his shape—but remaining itself and distinctly other than human—the shadow is taunting Ged by souring his opportunities.



Ged feels that the experiences he should be having—serving as mage to an isle of people, enjoying a simple snowfall or a walk through the streets, and enjoying time with kind strangers—are off-limits to him given the heavy burden he carries in the form of the shadow. As long as the thing pursues him, Ged knows, he will never be free to live the life he wants.



As Ged reunites with Vetch, the meeting is full of happiness, joy, and a sense of destiny. Vetch's report, however, about the strange imitation of Ged which has been spotted on the isle further disturbs Ged. Ged knows that no matter how much happiness he encounters, as long as the shadow lives, it will always threaten him. This sharpens his resolve and helps him to see that he truly needs to vanquish the shadow if he is ever to know unimpeded joy again.



Vetch introduces Ged to the young woman beside him: she is his sister, Yarrow, a girl of 14 who wears a miniature but live dragon as a bracelet. Together Vetch and Yarrow invite Ged to come to their home for some rest and nourishment. Ged admires Yarrow's bravery in wearing a small dragon on her arm. Yarrow asks about Ged's famous otak—but Ged replies the creature is no longer with him. At Vetch and Yarrow's spacious home, Ged admires the prosperity his friend has earned.

Vetch asks what has brought Ged to Iffish, and Ged explains the entirety of his travels. Vetch says he wants to go with Ged to meet the shadow, but Ged insists he must go alone. Vetch reprimands Ged for being prideful: someone must accompany him. If Ged fails, the citizens of the Archipelago must be warned of the shadow's power; if Ged bests the shadow, someone must witness the event in order to sing the great songs of the encounter. Vetch insists that because he was with Ged at the beginning of his journey with the shadow, it is fitting he should be with him at its end.

Ged admits that he is afraid to encounter the shadow again: the last time they met, Ged could not even seize it and realized he had no power over it. Vetch, however, optimistically insists that Ged will find a way to **name** it and conquer it. Vetch asks what it could mean that the shadow has taken Ged's shape in the Reach while it never did in the Archipelago. Ged and Vetch discuss the different enchantments that govern the different lands of Earthsea. The men continue discussing what could be calibrating the shadow's form and what Ged's delicate power balance against the shadow will mean for their future encounters. All Ged knows for sure is that he must learn the shadow's name.

The next day, Vetch goes out to attend to some errands before he leaves with Ged. Ged stays with Yarrow and Vetch's younger brother, Murre, and delights in their company. Yarrow prepares food for Vetch and Ged's journey, insisting they will need real food—not illusion—to keep them strong on their quest. Ged says he would not summon the illusion of food anyway, lest he disturb the equilibrium of the world. The two continue talking about the great powers of the world, and Ged declares that the greatest power is the power held in a thing's **true name**. Ged enjoys talking with the sharp, smart Yarrow, and the two joke and tease each other as they banter.

When Vetch first left the School on Roke, there was a sense of melancholy within Ged as he watched his friend accept what he saw as a humble position. Now, however, Ged sees how greatly Vetch has been rewarded for his humility, his sense of duty, and the goodwill he's earned with the people he serves.



Though Ged has grown a lot and excised much of his prideful nature, there is still a part of him that insists on going things alone and shouldering the brunt of every burden. Now, as Ged reunited with Vetch, he feels less alone for the first time in a long time. Vetch doesn't want Ged to feel he has to make a great show of doing things all by himself—he can ask for help and still be strong.



Ged knows exactly what it is he must do in order to best the shadow once and for all, but how he goes about doing it still remains a mystery. Luckily, he has the help of a true friend, Vetch, as he attempts to solve the mysteries not just of his own journey but of the larger world of which they're a part. There is a lot of uncertainty surrounding the shadow, but Ged, strengthened by Vetch's friendship and goodwill, feels strong enough to face whatever lies in store.



As Ged and Yarrow talk, Ged finds himself bolstered by Yarrow's lightheartedness. Even though they're talking of serious matters and existential things, Ged never feels fear or uncertainty in the midst of their conversation. Ged is about to set off on a terrifying journey, but this conversation shows that he is better-equipped to face the shadow than he ever has been.



The next day, Vetch takes his leave of Ismay, informing the village elders that he is off to help an old friend on a quest. The elders berate Vetch for leaving them. Vetch declares that though he is, as a wizard, a servant, he is not *their* servant. Vetch, Ged, and Yarrow head down to the port. Yarrow stands watching from the docks as Ged and Vetch, in the *Lookfar*, set out to sea.

Vetch understands that as a wizard, his duty is not to any one person or place—his duty is to justice more largely. Vetch wants to support Ged on this important journey, so he makes clear to his neighbors that he is not abandoning them—he simply has duties to attend to elsewhere.



CHAPTER 10

As Vetch and Ged make their way across hundreds of miles of stormy seas, stopping on small islands occasionally for supplies and water, Ged refuses to use any spells or enchantments to ease their journey. Both men are full of a cold, heavy foreboding, and neither wants to use magic and upset the careful balance that allows them to sail forth at all. Ged steers their course toward the outermost fringes of the Reach. Vetch warns him that beyond this point, there are no lands at all—only the open sea. In this part of the world, Vetch says, there are things that haven't been named.

Though Ged has, in the past, ignored both the careful balance of the universe and the need to internalize reverence for the natural world, now, he is mindful of both these things. He wants for this journey to go well, and he fears acting in the thoughtless, headstrong, power-hungry way he did earlier in his journey.



Ged laments that he is going forth to meet his fate without having seen so much of the Archipelago. He talks longingly of all the places he still wants to go. He berates his foolish younger self for trading the light of the world “for a shadow.” The only thing that brings Ged comfort is his thoughts of Yarrow. He tells Vetch how much he admires his whip-smart sister, who is like an uncatchable minnow. Vetch smiles and says that Yarrow's **true name** is Kest—“minnow” in the Old Speech.

Ged is still a young man—but he recognizes already just how foolhardy he was as a youth, and how much energy he wasted trying to become powerful. Ged is angry with himself for having sealed his fate at such a young age, but he remains hopeful that he will be able to return to the light soon.



The pair sail through treacherous weather and dark nights—Ged realizes that it is shortly after Sunreturn, an unlucky time for travelers. Nevertheless, he holds their course steady. After refilling their stores of water on a strange, remote island, the two continue on. Vetch questions whether Ged has them on the right path, but Ged says only that he is drawn to the shadow like iron to a magnet. The two of them occasionally discuss how they might figure out the shadow's **true name**, but even after trading stories of great wizards' remarkable deeds, Ged settles on the idea that “to hear, one must be silent.”

Ged knows that he will need an impossibly strong kind of magic to defeat the shadow—and while he accepts that the answer to besting it lies in learning its true name, he wants to take a gentler, more sage approach to discovering that name. Ged has too often rushed headfirst into a dangerous situation or created more trouble for himself by overestimating his abilities; now, he wants to respect the magnitude of what he's dealing with and let the answers come to him naturally.



Soon, Ged and Vetch come to the last island in the Archipelago for food and a night's rest. Beyond here, Vetch warns, there is only ocean. Ged, however, believes there are perhaps lands undiscovered. Ged is suddenly seized in the middle of the night by a premonition that they are moving too slowly—the shadow is threatening to escape from them. They must leave now, he says, and head east—if Ged loses the shadow, he, too, is lost.

Ged knows that his fate is bound to the shadow, and he is not willing to risk it all because of a desire for comfort or even a fear of the unknown. Ged knows what he must do and he is determined to see this mission through.



Ged and Vetch sail onward, and, at last, Ged summons a wind to carry their ship eastward. Ged speaks little except to ask Vetch, after their noon meal, whether he believes that there are undiscovered lands. Vetch says he's afraid that if the two of them sail too far, they will fall off the edge of the world. Ged does not respond to Vetch's jest. They sail through the night, and, the next day, they encounter heavy rain. Ged continues summoning the winds—yet he worries that if they stray too far from the Archipelago, his powers will weaken.

The next day, Vetch questions whether Ged is perhaps being led into a trap—the shadow, Vetch points out, does not hunger or weaken, while they themselves do. Ged insists that they are nearly caught up with the creature. They continue sailing onward, sped by Ged's winds, and Ged begins seeing a “dark vision” along the horizon. Suddenly, one afternoon, Ged stops the wind and orders Vetch to put down the sails. Ged clearly sees something—yet Vetch cannot see it. Still, he follows his companion's orders. It soon becomes clear that Ged believes they have arrived in a bay, but Vetch cannot see the sand their boat seems to arrive upon.

Once the ship is aground—even though Vetch cannot see what land they may or may not have come to—Vetch and Ged both become aware of a strange stillness on the sea and in the air. Vetch steps out of the boat seemingly into the sea. As Ged walks forward, though, Vetch can see that it is indeed sand his friend walks upon. Ged's staff begins to glow faintly as he walks on. Soon, Ged becomes aware of the shadow coming toward him across the sand.

As the shadow approaches, Ged finds that the shadow has taken the form of his father. Stunned, he blinks, and finds that it takes the form of Jasper. As Ged raises his staff to better see the shadow, it takes the form of Pechvarry. Ged continues forward toward the shadow as it continues shifting shape. Ged lifts his staff and it brightens intensely. The shadow casts off its false forms and once again becomes a strange, dark creature. As Ged and the shadow come face to face, Ged speaks the shadow's **true name** to it: Ged. The shadow says the same thing back. Ged takes hold of his other self. Light and darkness meet.

Ged and Vetch's journey is a long and difficult one. It is made all the more fraught and arduous by the fact that they are sailing into unknown territory—so far from the Archipelago, Ged has no idea what rules or enchantments might exist. Still, however, Ged stays the course, determined to see his conflict with the shadow through to the end.



Ged has chased his shadow across the sea for days and days, refusing to heed Vetch's warnings about walking into a trap or being deliberately jerked around. Now, as Ged senses the shadow's presence, he realizes that he was right all along—the shadow has been drawing him somewhere specific in order to confront him.



The shadow has led Ged to the ends of the earth, but now there is nowhere left to run. The strange enchantment Ged and Vetch come upon may be the work of the shadow, but Le Guin leaves much of Ged's final struggle with the shadow ambiguous. The specifics and optics of their showdown are not important—what is essential is that Ged at last recognizes exactly what he must do to defeat the shadow and reclaim ownership of his life.



In Ged's climactic final encounter with the shadow, he at last realizes that the shadow's true name is his own. In other words, the shadow is and always has been the darkest part of himself. By accepting this facet of his own personality, Ged is able to absorb it. There is no light without darkness, and as the shadow and Ged at last rejoin as one, Le Guin invokes the power of the universe's perfect—yet often incomprehensible—sense of equilibrium. Ged's coming-of-age tale is at last complete: he has understood the truth of who he is.



Vetch hurries to help Ged, fearing his friend is overpowered, yet he finds himself unable to move through the sand Ged walks upon with ease. Vetch hurries back to the boat. As he gets in, he realizes he has lost sight of Ged. He looks around and at last sees his friend flailing in the waves—the sand is gone. Vetch rows over to Ged and hauls him back onto the boat. Ged is frightened and exhausted. He clutches his staff and doesn't speak for a long time. Vetch begins sailing back from whence they came.

That night, as Ged spies the new moon in the sky, he declares at last: “It is done. It is over.” Ged begins to laugh. He declares that he is whole, free, and healed. As Vetch looks carefully upon his friend, he sees that it is true: Ged has not lost or won; he has simply made himself complete by **naming** the shadow and understanding his “whole true self.” Ged, Vetch knows, cannot be used or possessed any longer by any entity but himself. Vetch sings an old, happy song aloud as he sails westward.

After over a fortnight of sailing and using enchantments to sweeten the seawater and catch fish to eat, Vetch and Ged find land again. The weather is calm and steady, and both men delight in the songs of seabirds and the sights of the great cliffs that surround them as they return to the Archipelago. Soon, they are back on Iffish. After docking their boat, they wind through the streets of town toward Vetch's house, where Yarrow, joyful, is waiting to meet them.

No song remains of Ged's encounter with the shadow—the very song Vetch promised to write and sing. However, there is an enduring tale of a boat that ran aground on the open sea. The song varies from isle to isle: some say it was Vetch who steered the boat, while others say it was two humble fishermen. In the *Deed of Ged*, the lore dedicated to Ged's legacy, no line even mentions his encounter with the shadow—even though many of his great accomplishments, including his return to Roke, his encounter with more dragons, and his ascendancy to Archmage of the Archipelago all have a place in the song.

Vetch came along on this journey to help his friend, and here, he proves that he is willing to risk everything for Ged's safety. Vetch is a selfless, devoted person who sees duty to others as a fundamental cornerstone of his life.



The shadow was always the darkest part of Ged—and this passage makes clear that now that Ged has accepted this fact, he is able to be “whole” once again. Ged's coming-of-age journey is thus complete. As a young man, he was easily swayed by the pursuit of power and the desire to prove himself to others. Now, however, having accepted the truth of who he is, he is beholden to no one but himself. Ged fully understands his complex nature now, and he is no longer in conflict with himself as he once was.



As Ged's journey comes to an end, he is not alone as he long feared he would be. Instead, he is surrounded by friends who love, see, and celebrate him. Ged is able to begin enjoying his life again now that the threat of the shadow has been removed—he understands who he truly is, and this allows him to show his true self to the others in his life, too.



The final passage of the novel proves that Ged's journey throughout the story was never about pride, glory, or fame. This journey has been an intensely personal one, necessary even though in the scope of things it brings no additional pride or glory upon Ged's name. This final passage hints that though Ged will ultimately achieve the greatness he once imagined for himself in his youth, this early, private adventure is perhaps the most important part of his entire story. The thankless, personal, quiet parts of a person's life, Le Guin suggests, are the most important.





HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Tanner, Alexandra. "A Wizard of Earthsea." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 26 Jun 2020. Web. 26 Jun 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Tanner, Alexandra. "A Wizard of Earthsea." LitCharts LLC, June 26, 2020. Retrieved June 26, 2020. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/a-wizard-of-earthsea>.

To cite any of the quotes from *A Wizard of Earthsea* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Le Guin, Ursula. *A Wizard of Earthsea*. Houghton Mifflin. 1968.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Le Guin, Ursula. *A Wizard of Earthsea*. New York: Houghton Mifflin. 1968.