

SYNTHESIS: THE TRILOGY

1. The first book of the series is told from Gen's perspective; the next two books are written in the third person. What are the advantages and limitations of each perspective? Do you think one works better than the other in this series?

2. At the beginning of the series, Eugenides, imprisoned in Sounis, swore to himself and his gods that if he ever got out, he "would never never take any risks that were so abysmally stupid again" (*The Thief*, p. 1). Does he abide by this promise throughout the series? What sort of risks does Gen take, and do they pay off? Does he risk just himself, or others as well? In your opinion, are some risks more worthwhile than others? At what point does a risk become "stupid"?

3. Divine intervention saves Eugenides several times. Do you think Gen could have become king of Attolia without the support of his gods? How much do the gods interfere in his life, and how much can his accomplishments be attributed to Gen alone? In *The Queen of Attolia*, Eddis tells Eugenides, "If I am the pawn of the gods, it is because they know me so well, not because they make up my mind for me" (pp. 191–192). What does she mean by this? To what extent are the fates of Eddis, Eugenides, and the other characters determined by the gods? Consider the other stories you've read (Greek or Roman myths, perhaps) in which gods interact

with mortals. How do Eugenides's gods' actions compare?

4. Eugenides has a reputation as a liar. Does he deserve this reputation? When does Eugenides lie? When does he tell the truth? How does he use the truth to mislead? Eddis says she "sometimes believes his lies are the truth, but [she has] never mistaken his truth for a lie" (*The Queen of Attolia*, p. 383). How can she tell the difference? How does Attolia initially respond to Eugenides's words? Does her response change after they are married?

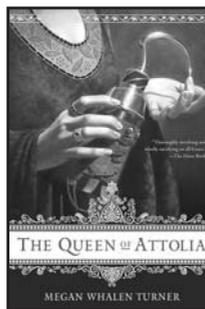
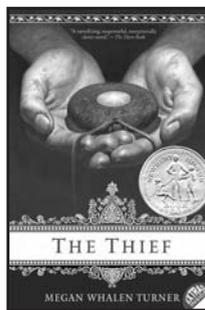
5. One of the ways Eugenides deceives people is by cultivating a particular appearance. In *The Thief*, for example, the other characters see him as a lowborn, uneducated braggart. In *The King of Attolia*, he seems to be an inept, weak ruler. Why does he craft and maintain this façade, and why do people believe him? How does he use people's beliefs and expectations against them? Are there times when his personality shines through?

6. What other characters share Gen's aptitude for misleading appearances? How does this deception serve their respective purposes? Do you, personally, know people who construct an appearance that is different from their true selves? Why do you think they do this? How much of your "true self" do you reveal to your friends, family, or teachers? To what extent do you adapt your personality to the occasion?

7. Familial relationships can be quite complex. Consider Sophos and his father, Eugenides and his father, Eugenides and his cousins, and Dite and Sejanus. What are some sources of friction between these relatives? How do their relationships change with time? How do these relatives really feel about one another? What evidence supports this?

8. How would you describe a typical "hero"? How would you describe Eugenides? Would you use the same adjectives to describe him in *The Thief* as you would to describe him in the next two novels? What are his strengths and weaknesses? What sets him apart from most heroes? Were you ever frustrated with him? Why do you think the author elected to create such an atypical hero?

9. Stories and storytelling serve many functions in society. What are some of the roles storytelling plays in a culture? What roles do storytelling and stories play in these narratives? Do you notice any parallels between the myths in these books and other myths you have read? The magus says, "I didn't realize that so much of the teller could be invested in the stories" (*The Queen of Attolia*, p. 164). What does he mean? How does a teller make a story his or her own? How can a story be adapted to fit an audience or advance a certain perspective?



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A GUIDE TO TEACHING MEGAN WHALEN TURNER'S THE THIEF, THE QUEEN OF ATTOLIA, AND THE KING OF ATTOLIA



These three entrancing novels by Megan Whalen Turner bring to life the stuff of epics! A wonderfully unique hero, Eugenides the thief, is the heart of this series in which battles are lost and won; political machinations and intrigue decide the fate of nations; and if one calls on the gods, they just might answer. Eugenides's destiny is entwined with the destiny of three nations, and his personal journey anchors and echoes epic themes that resonate throughout the books. The series is ideal for encouraging critical thinking about familial relationships, responsibility, deceptive appearances, and shifting power dynamics—in both politics and in personal relationships.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Megan Whalen Turner writes fiction for young adults. She received her BA with honors in English language and literature from the University of Chicago in 1987. From her books are *The Thief* (a Newbery Honor winner) and *Instead of Three Wishes*. She lives with her family in Ohio.

Photo credit: Dudley Carlson



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THE THIEF

ABOUT THE BOOK

Gen is a thief who can steal anything—at least, this is what he has boasted in wineshops across Sounis. Now his boasting has landed him in prison, surrounded by chains, stench, and darkness. When the king's magus asks Gen to accompany him on a quest to steal a legendary religious object, Gen is hardly in a position to refuse.

With little fanfare, Gen, the magus, the magus's two apprentices (whom Gen quickly nicknames "Useless the Elder" and "Useless the Younger"), and a soldier embark on a journey that takes them out of Sounis, across the mountainous kingdom of Eddis, and into the potentially dangerous territory of Attolia. The three nations are currently in a tenuous peace, but if the quest succeeds, the balance of power will shift. Of course, there's no guarantee the legendary object even exists. And if it *does* exist, it is uncertain Gen will be able to wrest it from the watchful gods who guard it.

With humor and skill, Gen, the incorrigible young thief, narrates an unforgettable adventure full of danger, difficulty . . . and a realization that things are not always what they seem.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Sophos's father believes that the people of Sounis should forget the old gods. Sophos explains, "[My father] says that a country with two sets of gods is like a country with two kings. No one knows which to be loyal to" (p. 60). Do you agree with Sophos's father? What are the advantages of having two different systems of belief? What are the disadvantages? What conflicts might arise as a result? When might new gods be introduced to a society, and how much of an obligation

does that society have to the old religion? Do you think Sophos's father's comparison of religion and monarchs is apt?

2. After Gen tells the story of earth's creation and the birth of the gods, the magus informs him he "shouldn't think that [his] mother's stories are true to the original ones. . . . Many of these myths were created by great storytellers centuries ago, and it is inevitable that in the hands of the common people they get debased" (p. 67). Do you agree that, in the hands of the common people, stories become "debased"? What makes a tale the "most accurate" version? Is there such a thing? Thinking about the fairy tales, folktales, and legends you know, which stories have several familiar variations? How has the story changed over time? Which version is the "right" version?

3. The magus brings Gen along "as a useful sort of tool and not a human being at all" (p. 44). Is Gen a tool? If so, whose? Are any of the characters tools? What are the advantages and disadvantages of being a tool? Can a tool be used for a purpose other than its intended function? Which characters, items, or places are adapted to new uses?

4. The magus reveals that he was the sole member of his family to survive the plague years. Gen, thinking of his relatives, "most of whom [he] had always considered a grievous burden," ponders, "I have an overabundance of relations, and I wonder if I am better off than you" (p. 107). Why does Gen think he is better off than the magus? Do you think it's better to have many relatives you dislike, or to be alone?

5. Several times, Sophos is startled by Gen's comments about his family and background. What surprises him? Why is he surprised? How does Gen reshape or

defy other characters' perceptions of class and hierarchy?

6. The magus says with regret, "[Ambiades] would have made a fine magus if he could have stopped being the grandson of a duke" (p. 210). What does he mean by this? How does Ambiades's awareness of his position impact his actions and decisions? To what extent are Sophos's actions similarly dictated by his position? If Sophos were in Ambiades's place, do you think he would make the same decisions Ambiades does?

7. How does the magus's attitude toward Gen change? What evidence do you see of this? How does Gen's attitude toward his companions change? How does this influence his plans?

8. Were you surprised by the ending? Why or why not? How does Gen, as a first-person narrator, skirt around the truth? What hints does he drop about himself, and what information does he withhold? What other techniques does the author use to hide or hint at Gen's true purpose? Skim through the book again. In retrospect, do any lines strike you as being ironic, foreshadowing the ending, or having a second meaning?

9. Do you agree with Eddis's decision to destroy Hamiathes's Gift? What does she lose by destroying it? What does she gain? Eugenides says he would rather die than be burdened with immortality. He explains, "There is something horrible and frightening and, I'd discovered, very, very painful about being trapped in this life when it is time to move on" (p. 213). What are the advantages and drawbacks to being impervious to death? Is this a suitable gift for a god to give a king? If you were offered a chance at immortality, would you take it?



THE QUEEN OF ATTOLIA

ABOUT THE BOOK

The talented thief Eugenides has visited the palace of Attolia one time too many. Normally, he leaves a small token for the queen, indicating his presence, and then he safely vanishes, unseen by Attolian guards. This excursion, however, does not go as smoothly as planned. The queen is ready for him, and Eugenides finds himself imprisoned in her dungeon. Attolia has learned from her past mistakes, and she is determined the thief will not escape again. She punishes him as thieves have been punished for generations—and in a way that guarantees he won't steal from her again.

Attolia breaks Eugenides's body, but she can't break his spirit. Returned to his native land, Eugenides slowly nurses his wounds. First, he must overcome the physical trauma of torture; later, after the most immediate threat passes, he confronts greater problems: despair, bitterness, and terror.

Irrevocably altered by his experience in Attolia's prison, Eugenides emerges from his self-imposed isolation to discover Eddis at war with Attolia and Sounis. The Mede empire lurks on the borders with anticipation, watching for an opportune moment to conquer the three smaller nations. Using his considerable skill and

intelligence, Eugenides endeavors to end the war and stave off the outside threat. To do this, he must use all his resources. If he plays his cards right, he might be able to give Eddis what she desires—peace—and find his heart's desire, as well.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When she visits Eugenides in the prison, Attolia is reminded of a broken amphora from her childhood (pp. 38–40). Why does the one-handed thief make her think of this? At what point do you think she regrets her decision to maim him? Does she recognize this regret?

2. Looking into Eugenides's eyes after she cuts off his hand, Attolia sees "only fever and pain and an emotion she couldn't put a name to" (p. 38). What are some possible emotions this could be? Why can't she name it?

3. Is Attolia within her rights to cut off Eugenides's hand? Politically, is this a wise decision? Why or why not? What other options does she have? What would you have done in her place?

4. After Eugenides heals, a doctor from the War Hospital takes him to visit amputees (pp. 189–190). What do you suppose the doctor's intentions and goals

are? Why does the visit make Eugenides feel sick and irate? Would you side with one over the other? To what extent is Eugenides, a public figure, part of the royal family and a fellow amputee, obligated to share his experiences with others?

5. When Eugenides's nightmares return, he asks Eddis's permission to "run away and hide," explaining that he feels something worse than despair: terror (p. 206). Do you agree that terror is worse than despair? Why or why not? Do you think his terror makes him less the "hero of Eddis"?

6. Eugenides suggests a way to "eliminate the instability of the Attolian queen": he could get into Ephrata and "remove" her (pp. 214–215). Eddis protests, "[It] would be worse than losing you to have you do this and become like her" (p. 219). Do you agree that it would be better for Gen to die than to compromise his beliefs this way? Why does Gen insist on leading the excursion?

7. Eddis and Attolia have radically different ruling styles. How would you characterize each? Is one more effective than the other in the long run? In the short run? What factors have led the two rulers to adopt such distinct policies? Which country would you prefer to rule—and what method would you use?



THE KING OF ATTOLIA

ABOUT THE BOOK

As the new King of Attolia, Eugenides has all the accoutrements of a monarch: the throne, the title, the crown, the raiment. What he lacks is the respect normally due a monarch. The people of his new country either resent him for kidnapping their queen and forcing her into marriage, or else they see him as her puppet, completely useless in his own right. Eugenides does little to discourage this perception. He seems apathetic, weak, and crippled, prey to the practical jokes of his soldiers and blind to the poorly concealed insults of his attendants. But for those who will see it, there is a strong, tender bond between Eugenides and his wife, and the few who look beyond Eugenides's appearance might note a will stronger than tempered steel and a mind twice as sharp.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When Eugenides asks Costis why he attacked him, Costis explains, "You have no idea even how to look like a king, much less be one. You don't walk like a king, you don't stand like a king, you sit on the throne like . . . like a printer's apprentice in a wineshop" (p. 13). What sort of behavior might qualify as "kinglike"? Do you think a monarch has an obligation to appear regal? What are the advantages of presenting a regal appearance? Are there advantages to seeming less kinglike? How do Eddis and Attolia behave as monarchs?

2. The Eddisian ambassador, Ornon, "expected a great deal of pleasure in watching Eugenides" at the Attolian court. Instead, Ornon feels he's "floating downstream with no one at the tiller in

a boat headed for a waterfall" (p. 92). Why does he feel this sense of impending disaster? At this point, do you think Eugenides's actions are as controlled and calculated as usual, or is he really on the edge of a precipice, as Ornon believes?

3. When one of Dite's companions offends Eugenides at dinner, Eugenides responds with a threat veiled in a pleasant expression (p. 94). Why does the queen choose this moment to offer Eugenides her wine glass? Do you think she should have intervened sooner to prevent the abuse of her husband? What is her ultimate goal? Is her passivity an effective method of achieving this goal?

4. Sejanus and Eugenides both maneuver others into doing what they want them to do. How does Eugenides's style of manipulation differ from Sejanus's? Do you know anyone who manipulates people as Sejanus does? How about people who manipulate as Eugenides does? Which is more dangerous, in your opinion?

5. Costis decides to confess to the king that he told the queen and Susa about Eugenides's staring out the window. Why does he feel compelled to admit this? Why does he delay his admission? When he finally tells the king, why does the king apologize? In what "impossible situation" has Eugenides put Costis (p. 143)?

6. As Costis's attitude toward Eugenides changes, do you think he should be obligated to defend Eugenides when soldiers or courtiers mock him? Why or why not?

7. In order to encourage the queen to pardon Teelus, Eugenides instructs Teelus to invoke Hephestia (pp. 189–193). Why is the queen angered by this invocation? Is Eugenides right to remind Attolia of this

memory? Is this method more acceptable than directly countermanning the queen's justice? A little later, Relius asks for mercy in Eugenides's own words: "Please don't hurt me anymore" (p. 246). Why does he remind Eugenides of the past? How is Eugenides's relationship with Relius and Teelus colored by their shared history? How do you think Eugenides feels about these two?

8. Speaking with the traitor Relius, Eugenides says, "You must hate [Attolia] now," Relius replies, "If I were [imprisoned] for fifty years . . . and she released me, I would crawl, if that was all I could do, to her feet to serve her" (p. 247). What has Attolia done to command and retain this kind of loyalty?

9. Relius tells the queen, "No man can choose to serve only himself when he has something to offer to his state. No one can put his own wishes above the needs of so many" (p. 327). Do you agree with his assessment? If someone has something to offer the state, should he proffer his services? Should the needs of a country take precedence over the needs of an individual?

10. *The King of Attolia* arguably shifts the focus even farther from Eugenides, often emphasizing the response of Costis, Ornon, or other characters. How does this alter the way the author can reveal or hide information?

