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### Magnolia League Mini Analysis

*The Magnolia League* is an interesting book - we see on the surface the fish out of water story with a slightly watered down supernatural twist. As we follow Alex's journey back into the family her mother departed, she is taken through a maturing process, she makes foolish mistakes and is obsessed with things that a normal 16 year old would be. Her seeming maturity at the beginning of the book does not hold up - we see many sides of her as she becomes corrupted by the supernatural temptations that are offered to her. The book begins by presenting Alex as a clear foil and antithesis of both her grandmother and all of the other Magnolias, but by the end, she has (apparently) succumbed to the temptations offered, with one notable exception.

In the book, we see Alex portrayed very honestly - I can easily see a 16 year old girl making the choices that she makes, seeing things the way she does, and I feel that Crouch has written the character in a very authentic manner - which acts as an interesting opposite to the supernatural position that Alex finds herself in. We see Alex confronted by many of the same types of challenges that an 'average' teen might find themselves up against, in a similar situation. Having to move across the country, start a new school with established social groups, and having to find a new set of friends all drew me to the many similarities in the 1984 movie *The Karate Kid*. The first thematic similarity is the sweeping and somewhat contrived "fish out of water" arc that moves the story into position. In *The Karate Kid*, Daniel's mother has a new job that

requires them to move from urban New Jersey to sunny ocean-side California. With regards to physical characteristics, we see that Daniel is portrayed as Italian, dark haired, and has a pronounced accent. The people in California (as primarily portrayed by Elisabeth Shue and the boys from the Cobra Kai dojo) are represented by mostly blond haired, blue eyed Californian stereotypes. In a similar fashion - although Alex was from Savannah originally, great pains are gone to in order to point out the vast physical differences between her and the rest of the Magnolia teens. Crouch spends a lot of time detailing Alex's physical appearance, from her dreadlocks, to her not-skinny body, and her choice of radical clothing. The contrast in this case is to the Georgian socialites from the League, who all are perfectly sized, have flawless hair and complexions, and who all dress in the latest upscale fashions.

The second similarity is the introduction of a new talent, and somewhat mysterious "mentor". In *Magnolia League*, the mentor character of Sam Buzzard does not play the traditional mentoring role, but instead is a sporadic character who dispenses mysterious advice, not always helpfully. In addition, there are a few other characters such as Josie the maid who play this role in a reduced capacity. Mr Miyagi in *The Karate Kid*, however is a paragon of the role. He takes Daniel under his care, teaches him about life, and genuinely works to make Daniel's life better, both physically (with regards to the bullying), and emotionally. The acquisition of a new talent is a similar arc - in *Magnolia League*, the other girls all are utilizing the hoodoo magic, and Alex begins to do so as well, in order to both fit in with the Magnolias and at school, and to get what she wants - such as Thaddeus' love. Daniel seeks out Mr Miyagi's karate teachings for similar purposes - to become accepted and get approval (and, of course, to beat the 'bad guys').

The final climax and outcome of the two stories diverge, however - where Daniel comes out of the final confrontation victorious, with the girl and the trophy, Alex's outcome is far murkier. She does not end up with Thaddeus, and appears to compromise her primary beliefs for Sina, someone that is clearly working for her own motives. She ends up conforming to what the League and her grandmother want of her, with the opening of an implied and much more insidious thread. The twist of Alex's love for her obviously dead mother is interesting, but feels contrived in order to further the story and series.

*The Magnolia League* is a fairly entertaining supernatural fiction novel. While the main character is well written, deep and believable, many of the other characters feel like very shallow stereotypes. From a literary standpoint, there are some interesting threads to follow with regards to Alex's character and the maturation process. Combined with her gradual awakening and disillusionment of her upbringing, the life on Big Jon's farm and experiences with her first boyfriend, her character is easily relatable and warm. As a reader, the story is crafted in such a way that we want her to be successful, which makes each of her increasing submissions to the League more painful. Adults will easily relate to the view of children growing and maturing, and teens will be able to relate well to the situations Alex finds herself in with regards to acceptance, finding friends and the losses that she endures. Regardless of the age or desire of the reader, they will find something worthwhile here.

## WORKS CITED:

Crouch, Katie. *The Magnolia League*. Little, Brown and Co, 2014. Apple eBook.

Avildsen, John G. *The Karate Kid*. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2005. DVD.