

Book 1

Summary and Prediction

The first book starts by introducing the protagonist of the book: Gilgamesh. He is the king of a place called Uruk, which is set between two rivers. The introduction also briefly talks about Enkidu, who would become a major character later in the chapter. Gilgamesh rules Uruk with tyranny. He demands to sleep with brides before their husbands are allowed, and forces his people to work until the point of unbearable exhaustion. His people are sick of his neglect for them and want him to change his ways of ruling.

Next, the book talks about the contrasting life of Enkidu, and how his life is changed. Enkidu lives with the animals in a very primitive lifestyle. He drinks from springs, runs with his animal friends, and he frees the animals from hunters' traps. Enkidu knows no fear or wisdom. One day, a hunter's son witnesses Enkidu freeing an animal from a trap and tells his father. His father tells his son to travel to Uruk to ask Gilgamesh to send a prostitute to Enkidu, so that the animals would think of him as a stranger. When his son tells Gilgamesh, the king sends the prostitute but he honestly doesn't care. Enkidu receives the prostitute, confused at first. The woman sleeps with him and when he wakes up, all the animals had left him.

The final event starts with Gilgamesh waking up from a dream. He goes to his mother, Ninsun and tells her what happened in his dream. In his dream, Gilgamesh saw a star fall to Earth. His people stood around it, admiring it. Gilgamesh, in jealousy, tried to get rid of it, but it was too heavy. Ninsun tells him that the star is his companion and that Gilgamesh is not strong enough to drive it away. Gilgamesh then has a second, similar dream, where his people stood around an axe. Gilgamesh, again, tried to lift up the object, but failed. Ninsun says that the axe was once again his companion who will lift Gilgamesh out of his tiredness. Gilgamesh then reveals to his mother that he is very lonely and longs for companionship. Meanwhile, Enkidu

had gotten used to the prostitute. One morning, she asks him why he still runs with his animals, when he is unlike them; he is a human. She leads him to a shepherd's house, where he is taught to be "civilized". When Enkidu enters Uruk, many people admire him, saying that his appearance resembles that of Gilgamesh's. At night, when Gilgamesh walks to the Family House, Enkidu stands in his way. Gilgamesh hears the praise his people are giving Enkidu and becomes envious. He attacks Enkidu and they start fighting. Suddenly, they both stop. Gilgamesh and Enkidu look at each other in the eye and suddenly they begin to laugh, as if they had become friends.

The chapter basically introduces the contrasting lives of the main characters to the reader. Gilgamesh was a tyrant ruler, and Enkidu was a man living in the wild. Gilgamesh felt like something was missing in his life, and found a part of himself in Enkidu. They became friends, despite their different lifestyles.

There isn't much to predict here, but based on the text, I believe that Enkidu will shape Gilgamesh to become less of a tyrant and more of a dignified human, and that he will lift him out of his tiredness in the same way Ninsun said the axe would.

Important Quotation

"Gilgamesh was called a god and a man; Enkidu was an animal and man. It is the story of their becoming of human together." - page 15

I chose this passage because it shows how two different people, a king and a wild man can still put aside their differences, and become companions. At the end of book 1, Gilgamesh and Enkidu became friends because when their human aspects were put together, they were able to ignore their other traits; Gilgamesh became more of a human than a god, and Enkidu became more of a human than an animal.

Questions

What period in time does this story take place in?

Who is Gilgamesh's father?

The book mentions that Gilgamesh's callous ways of ruling left his people longing for the past, implying that things were better back then. Does this mean that Gilgamesh had a nicer predecessor to his throne, or did he used to be more kind?

Why was Enkidu specifically chosen to be Gilgamesh's equal?

Personal Response

_____ When the book introduced Gilgamesh as a merciless ruler, I really antagonized him. Hearing his neglect for his people infuriated me, and I kind of wanted something bad to happen to him. However, towards the end of the book, when he befriended Enkidu, I felt like there was still some heart inside him.

Connections & Conventions

One connection can be made to real life. Gilgamesh, despite having all the power over his people, is still left feeling lonely. In the same way, some famous celebrities with a gigantic following from fans can still feel lonely at times, especially if they do not have true friends or a supporting family.

An obvious connection can be made to the Epic Conventions. One states that the presence of deities influence the hero's actions. In the book, Gilgamesh often speaks to the goddess Ninsun, his mother, for advice.

Book 2

Summary and Prediction

The second book starts with Gilgamesh stating that he wants to kill Humbaba, the Evil One. Enkidu is skeptical to this idea, since the idea of Humbaba's forest strikes fear in him, but Gilgamesh urged him to go anyway. Gilgamesh says that Humbaba is the reason for Enkidu's weakness and fear. Enkidu protests, but Gilgamesh doesn't listen. He instead, focuses on ways to climb above the sacred cedar trees. Enkidu tells him that Humbaba is the face of death, and Gilgamesh says that he is not afraid, and that there is dignity in dying whilst fighting Humbaba. They go to the marketplace to tell the Elders. The Elders know that this journey would be dangerous, but still give the king some support, saying that Enkidu is cowardly. The armourers bring the friends their weapons, and they embark on their adventure. The Elders tell Enkidu to lead the way, since he knows the forest better than Gilgamesh. The friends go to Ninsun for advice. Ninsun tells Shamash the sun god, to grant protection to her son. She then turns to Enkidu, and adopts him, saying that she was the one who sent him to Gilgamesh.

Three days later, the friends reach the edge of the forest. Gilgamesh becomes afraid, but Enkidu reassures him. Enkidu touches the forest gate, and his hand becomes paralyzed. Gilgamesh tells him to ignore it, and that it should not stop their adventure. Gilgamesh continues in front of his friend, promising to protect him. They soon reach the high cedars, and find a place to sleep. During their rest, Gilgamesh frequently wakes up due to his dreams, and Enkidu's pain hinders his sleep. Gilgamesh tells his friend about a dream where both of them were caught in a rockslide, and a graceful man appeared. However, only Gilgamesh was saved. Enkidu tells him that this dream meant that they would be victorious tomorrow. Gilgamesh has another dream where death rained down onto the companions from the heavens. Again, Enkidu says that it represented victory, and falls asleep after. During the morning, Gilgamesh cuts down the cedars,

and the sound attracts Humbaba. They get into a large brawl, and Humbaba beats Enkidu to the ground. Humbaba then gives empty promises to Gilgamesh, which Enkidu warns him not to trust. Gilgamesh decapitates Humbaba, and hangs the head from a tree.

The next morning, before the friends went back to Uruk, Ishtar, the goddess of love and war came. She says that the gods blame him for Humbaba's death, and that her father, Anu would forgive him if he married her. He rejects her and turns to Enkidu. Ishtar goes to her father, and they send the Bull of Heaven to kill Gilgamesh. When the bull descends, it kills three-hundred men, and attacks Gilgamesh. However, Enkidu was able to kill the bull before it was able to attack his friend. Ishtar curses Enkidu, and he throws a piece of the bull's flesh at her, in mockery. The friends go to sleep and Enkidu has a dream where the gods argued about which of the two friends should be punished due to their killing of Humbaba and the Bull of Heaven. Shamash tells the other gods that the friends were innocent. Enkidu reasons that this dream meant that the gods had chosen him to die, due to his fever. Gilgamesh could not understand why the gods had chosen Enkidu to die instead of him. Eventually, Enkidu's fever gets worse, and lies in bed for twelve days. Enkidu passes away on the final day, and Gilgamesh mourns his loss.

This chapter basically introduced the challenges and tasks Gilgamesh had to go through. He had a hard fought battle with Humbaba, narrowly escaped death from the Bull of Heaven, defied the gods, and eventually had to go through the death of his only friend.

If someone read only these two books, they would probably think this is the end of the story. Therefore, it isn't easy to predict what will happen next. My prediction is that Gilgamesh may embark on another journey to avenge his fallen friend.

Important Quotations

“The old men leaned a little forward, remembering old wars. A flush burned on their cheeks. It seemed a little dangerous, and yet they saw their king was seized with passion for this fight.” -

page 30

This quote really stood out to me, because after the quote, the men still encouraged Gilgamesh to go on the adventure, despite their initial thoughts about the journey being dangerous. This may indicate that the elders feared Gilgamesh, and did not dare to discourage his passion for killing Humbaba.

“Gilgamesh sat hushed as his friend’s eyes stilled. In his silence he reached out to touch the friend whom he had lost.” - page 50

I put this quote here because of how powerful it is. Gilgamesh was always alone, and his equal, Enkidu, was given to him. The two became really good friends, and seeing Enkidu die in front of Gilgamesh really strikes the reader.

Questions

What happens next in the story? What will Gilgamesh do now that his only friend is dead?

Why was Gilgamesh so bent on the thought of having superiority above Humbaba?

Why was Enkidu punished for killing the Bull of Heaven when he only did it to protect his friend?

Personal Response

I’m not going to lie, this book was less comprehensive than the other, but it was also much more exciting, since it was where the action started. Like I mentioned before in my personal response for the other book, I felt like Gilgamesh had actual feelings for others, and

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when further reading this book, it really cemented my “good-guy Gilgamesh” image of him. Throughout this book, Gilgamesh constantly encouraged Enkidu to keep going on their adventure, and at the end, when Enkidu was gone, he truly felt like a part of him was missing. This really changed my negative perspective of Gilgamesh from the beginning of book 1.

Connections & Conventions

This text can be linked to the Epic Convention of travelling over a vast setting, when the two travel out of Uruk and into the dangerous forest of Humbaba.

This text can also link to the recurring theme of sacrifice. Enkidu made a few sacrifices to save Gilgamesh. Firstly, he killed the Bull of Heaven before it could harm his friend. Secondly, he indirectly took the burden of the guilt, and the gods chose to kill him instead of Gilgamesh. Had he not been there to kill as well, Gilgamesh would probably have died. It is a counter-intuitive and unintentional sacrifice, but it is one that would leave Gilgamesh with a feeling of guilt.

Book 3

Summary and Prediction

The first part of the book brings us back to Gilgamesh. Now that Gilgamesh has lost his friend, he only knows grief. He decides to find a way to bring Enkidu back to life. He searches for Utnapishtim, who knows the secret to eternal life. He arrives at the mountains of Mashu, and sees Scorpion men guarding the gate. They tell him to turn back, however, Gilgamesh says that he has lost everything anyway. They reluctantly let him through the gates. He walks through the Road of the Sun, where everything was dark. He travels for days in the darkness, and comes across a valley with precious stones and vines. After going past the valley, he reaches the sea and comes upon a cottage. He knocks on the door, and the owner, a barmaid named Siduri

answers the door. She takes care of him and dresses him in nice robes, but he takes it off and puts on his dark pelts, as if he were so struck with grief. He rejects her suggestion to stay at her house and begin a new life, and demands her to tell him the way. She angrily tells him to find the boatman Urshanabi and his stone images, and Gilgamesh leaves immediately to go to the shore. He finds some stones in his way and smashes them. Urshanabi appears, and mocks him for destroying the stones. Gilgamesh tells him that he wants to find Utnapishtim, and Urshanabi tells him that there is no way to do so, since he has destroyed the stones that would have taken him across. However, he says that Gilgamesh can make a boat out of trees from the forest. Gilgamesh does so, and drifts into the sea of death.

The second event begins when Gilgamesh finds Utnapishtim on an island. He tells Utnapishtim what he seeks, and the old man tells him that it is useless to find a solution to the inevitable death. Gilgamesh asks him how he got his immortality, and Utnapishtim tells him his story. Utnapishtim used to live in a city called Shurru-pak. The gods were planning on sending a flood down, and the god Ea told Utnapishtim to build a ship, and save himself and to "Bring the seed of all the living creatures". Utnapishtim built the boat and in it were food, minerals, his family, animals, craftsmen and a navigator. A storm came, and lasted for six days. Utnapishtim saw this destruction and wept. Enlil, another god, came and granted Utnapishtim and his wife with immortality. After Utnapishtim tells his story, the two men go to Utnapishtim's house.

The final part of the book starts with Utnapishtim challenging Gilgamesh to stay awake for six days and seven nights, reasoning that if he were to overcome death, he must first overcome the need to sleep. Gilgamesh fails the challenge and Urshanabi is commanded to burn Gilgamesh's pelts and clothes him in new robes. Utnapishtim is reminded by his wife that he once went through grief in the same way Gilgamesh did, and out of pity, Utnapishtim tells Gilgamesh that there is a special rose at the bottom of the river that would make him young

again. Gilgamesh descends into the river with stones to weigh him down, and finds the rose. He takes it and ascends to the surface, full of joy. Urshanabi and Gilgamesh continue their departure, but first, Gilgamesh decides to rest at a pool. While Gilgamesh leaves the rose unattended, a snake consumes it. When Gilgamesh finds that it is gone, he gives up on his journey.

This final book is about Gilgamesh and his great journey for immortality, after being struck with grief. After he finds Utnapishtim, the old man explains to him why humans should not search for immortality, as it takes away the joy from their life. Gilgamesh is able to obtain a rose that restores youth, but a snake eats it, and he returns to Uruk empty handed.

There is not much to predict since this is almost the end of the book, but I feel like Gilgamesh will change his ways of ruling, and be a bit less callous to his people when he returns to Uruk.

Important Quotations

“He was no more a king but just a man who now had lost his way, yet had a greater passion to withdraw into a deeper isolation. Mad, Perhaps insane, he tried To bring Enkidu back to life.” - page 54-55

I chose this quote for two reasons. Firstly, it demonstrates how even as a powerful king, Gilgamesh was still nothing without his equal. Secondly, it shows what great lengths Gilgamesh traverses to cure his grief, when he was normally a lazy and bored king.

Questions

Why did Gilgamesh destroy the stones?

Will Gilgamesh change his ways of ruling now that he has had his life changed?

Why did Gilgamesh neglect to guard the rose, even when it was really important to him?

Personal Response

As I read this, I really expected something great to happen. I expected Gilgamesh to bring something back from this adventure. Nonetheless, after a long and tiresome journey, he came back home empty handed. This made me feel a bit of pity for him, but more importantly, it brought up the question: did Gilgamesh really accomplish anything significant in his journey? Sure, maybe he gained some knowledge about the responsibility of immortality, if his self-loving mind didn't reject that. However, this book seemed so unsatisfying to read in the sense that he had gone on this journey for nothing. I'm not saying it was a bad book, but it just felt odd to read a book where the so-called "hero" doesn't gain anything.

Connections & Conventions

This can be connected to the Hero's Journey stage of "the ordeal" as Gilgamesh, fueled by grief, crosses into the unknown world to find Utnapishtim. What is different in this story is that he never gets to bring any reward back to Uruk.