

Book 1

Summary

The plot of book 1 can be told with three major events. Firstly, the introduction of polar opposites, Gilgamesh and Enkidu. Gilgamesh is a secluded, tyrannical demigod ruler of Uruk, who abuses his power to suit his whims and desires, no matter how baseless. The people of Uruk find his ways old and vulgar, but lack the power to change their reality. Enkidu, on the other hand, lives among the creatures of the Steppe, and leads a very primitive life. He is covered in hair, drinks from springs, frees animals from hunters' traps, and mutually sees the animals as his kin.

Next, Gilgamesh and Enkidu's lives are thrown into disarray with their call to adventure. Gilgamesh's call comes to him in the form of his two dreams. In both dreams, Gilgamesh faces a loss of ability, in one he loses absolute control, and loses absolute power in the other. He discusses his dreams with his mother and goddess of wisdom, Ninsun, and how he longs for companionship. His mother tells him that his dreams show an opportunity to meet his equal, whom he can rely on as a close friend. Enkidu's call to adventure comes in the form of a prostitute, sent by Gilgamesh and requested by hunters. The prostitute seduces Enkidu and, in doing so, severs the connection Enkidu has with the creatures of the Steppe. The prostitute then brings Enkidu to a shepherd's home where he is taught to be civilized and human.

Finally, a man informs Enkidu that he will be choosing a virgin bride whom Gilgamesh would sleep with before him, as is Gilgamesh's birthright. Enkidu sees the unfairness and decides to confront Gilgamesh. Later on, Gilgamesh heads to the Family House, where the virgin bride will be chosen, but finds Enkidu blocking his path. The people around Enkidu praise him for his superior strength and similarity to Gilgamesh, making Gilgamesh envious of Enkidu. Gilgamesh and Enkidu attack each other in a fierce brawl until both are exhausted and cannot continue. Gilgamesh and Enkidu then look into each other's eyes and see themselves in one another. They then laugh, and acknowledge each other as equals.

Main Idea

This chapter was mainly about the complexities of friendship, how they can be both broken and formed. In the beginning of the story, Gilgamesh lives a very secluded life and longs for companionship, while Enkidu lives among the animals who accept him as one of their own.

Gilgamesh seeks companionship and leaves his state of solitude after having dreams. Enkidu is coerced into leaving the Steppe and the friendships he had with the animals. The two find new friendship in one another after brawling each other.

Prediction

I predict that Enkidu will inspire Gilgamesh to be a more just ruler, since Gilgamesh shares a strong connection with Enkidu and Enkidu opposes tyrannical rule. I predict that Gilgamesh will be exuberant about having a friend and will want to do activities together, but Enkidu will be reluctant in joining Enkidu. This is mainly because Enkidu has had many friends in the past, while Gilgamesh has only had himself and his mother. This prediction is supported by the text; *"He [Enkidu] ran beside the freed gazelle Like a brother And they drank together at a pool Like two friends"* [page 16, verse 3, lines 5-8], and *"I [Gilgamesh] am alone and I have longed For some companionship"* [page 20, verse 2, lines 4-5]. Furthermore, I believe Gilgamesh and Enkidu will go on a dangerous adventure in which Enkidu will lose his life, and Gilgamesh will either tighten his grip on Uruk or spiral into depression after trying and failing to revive Enkidu. This predictions are supported by the very first verse of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*; *"...About a man who loved And lost a friend to death And learned he lacked the power To bring him back to life. It is the story of Gilgamesh And his friend Enkidu"* [page 11, verse 1, lines 3-8].

Questions

While reading *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, I had many questions about the motivations and actions of many of the characters. I've decided to include 3 questions I had when reading.

- Who set up the old birthright that Gilgamesh uses to sleep with brides before their husbands are permitted?
- Did Gilgamesh just decide he wanted to sleep with brides before their husbands are permitted and say it was from an old birthright?
- Why did the hunter and his son ask for a prostitute to get rid of Enkidu instead of killing him themselves?
- Wouldn't it be quicker to kill Enkidu then go through the process of sending a prostitute and waiting until Enkidu leaves? Did this occur just to drive the plot forward?
- How did Enkidu end up on the Steppe?
- Was he created by the gods to serve as an opposite to Gilgamesh? Did he just neglectful parents? Why didn't the animals eat him up?

Important Quotation

"His [Enkidu's] friends Had left him to a vast aloneness He had never felt before. The lions returned To the mountains, the water buffalo To the rivers, the birds to the sky." [page 18, verse 2, lines 11-14]

- This passage marks the point of no return for Enkidu, he has lost all the friendships he had with the creatures of the Steppe, and now must look to the future of meeting the king of Uruk, Gilgamesh. This supports the main idea of friendship, in how Enkidu's friendships are broken and demonstrates the change Enkidu must go through and sets him in search of a new friend like Gilgamesh.

Personal Response

When I read the book, I felt a strong connection with the text. I found it interesting how the characters change in such a small period of time; Gilgamesh goes from living in almost complete solitude to having a friend, and Enkidu goes from living amongst the animals to being civilized and a member of society. This sudden and abrupt change in character reminds me of the effect our surroundings can have on the way we think, feel, and act. For example, we often welcome a familiar setting or trusted friend but hardly do the same when presented with an unfamiliar setting or a stranger. I also want to know why the hunter wanted Enkidu to be shamed rather than dead, which would achieve the same result of leaving his traps alone. The hunter's actions suggest that bringing shame or dishonour to someone is worse than death, which may have very well been true at the time *The Epic of Gilgamesh* was written. Book 1 of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* was an amazing read, and makes the rest of the tale more enjoyable.

Connections & Conventions

- The Hero's Journey
 - Enkidu and Gilgamesh experienced the first stage of the hero's journey, which is the call to adventure. Enkidu's call to adventure was the prostitute bringing him into civilization, while Gilgamesh's call to adventure were the two dreams he had.
- Epic Conventions
 - There are a few epic conventions seen in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Firstly, Gilgamesh is the king of Uruk, an above average position, and Enkidu is praised as Gilgamesh's equal

because of his appearance and strength. Moreover, both Enkidu and Gilgamesh prove themselves in combat when they fiercely brawl each other.

- Text-to-World
- There are two text-to-world connections that can be made. The first is fear of the unknown, which is demonstrated twice: The animals back away from the prostitute and Enkidu feels afraid, the animals are ashamed of Enkidu after he laid with an outsider to the Steppe, and the hunter requests for a prostitute out of fear of Enkidu. Fear of the unknown has always existed in the real world, and manifests itself into simple and grand fears: Fear of darkness and fear of people from other countries.
- Another connection to the real world is the people's resentment of Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh is a monarch who routinely abuses his power to suit his desires, almost creating a dictatorship. Moreover, the people lack the power or ability to change their reality. This reflects a dictatorship, and, just like in the real world, dictators are often hated by their people, who lack the resources and/or ability to change the country's leadership.

Book 2

Summary

Firstly, Gilgamesh wants to prove his strength and go on an expedition to kill Humbaba, the guardian of the cedar forest, nature divinity, and the proclaimed Evil One. Enkidu is reluctant to join Gilgamesh because he knows of the dangers of Humbaba's cedar forest. Gilgamesh doesn't heed Enkidu's warning and talks about climbing the cedar trees and reassures Enkidu by saying that the actions of humans are negligible in the grand scheme of things. Gilgamesh tells Enkidu that he will go with or without Enkidu, which convinces Enkidu to join Gilgamesh on his adventure. After being blessed from Ninsun, and armed by the armorers, Enkidu and Gilgamesh begin their adventure.

Next, the two set out into the forest and set up camp near the edge of the forest. Throughout the night, Enkidu's hallucinations of monstrous creatures brought on by fear of Humbaba and the cedar forest ravage him, while Gilgamesh has two dreams. In one, he is with Enkidu and is saved from death, and in the other the world is in chaos, but suddenly the world is put back in order. Gilgamesh tells Enkidu about his two dreams and Enkidu realizes that he will perish in the near future, and that Gilgamesh will be victorious in their battle against Humbaba.

The two then battle Humbaba, and Enkidu is gravely struck in battle. Despite his injuries, Enkidu knocks Humbaba down and Gilgamesh decapitates Humbaba. Enkidu and Gilgamesh then meet and anger Ishtar, who convinces Anu to create a Bull of Heaven to kill Enkidu and Gilgamesh. Much to Ishtar's surprise, Enkidu and Gilgamesh kill her bull.

Finally, Enkidu's injuries from battle with Humbaba develop into a raging fever that gets worse as the days go on. Eventually, Enkidu's fever reaches its height and his death is inevitable. Gilgamesh remains at his side, helpless and angry at the gods for choosing Enkidu to die for their actions. Enkidu then dies after recounting the change he has been through since he met the prostitute. Gilgamesh is devastated at the loss of his only and closest friend. Book 2 of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* was mainly about the wrath of the gods; the gods directly influenced the plot, and was the deciding factor in whether Enkidu or Gilgamesh would die. This is evident from the moment Enkidu and Gilgamesh set out on their adventure: Entering the cedar forest is dangerous because Humbaba, the god who protects the forest by physical force, will do everything in his power to rid the forest of those who enter; Ishtar sends a bull to kill Enkidu and Gilgamesh because they angered her, and Enkidu dies because they angered the gods.

Main Idea

This chapter was mainly about the power the gods have and the way they choose to exercise that power.

Prediction

I predict that one of two events will happen; Enkidu's death will haunt Gilgamesh and Gilgamesh will become a shadow of his former self because Gilgamesh will blame himself for Enkidu's death; Gilgamesh convinced Enkidu to join him on his expedition even though Enkidu warned about the dangers of the forest. The other event is that Gilgamesh decides to become a just and fair ruler of Uruk to honour the memory of his one and closest friend, Enkidu. This might occur because Enkidu opposed a tyrannical rule and showed Gilgamesh the wonders of friendship. However, Gilgamesh spiralling into a sort of depression and searching for a way to revive Enkidu is much more probable, as the very first verse of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* states as much. "*And learned he [Gilgamesh] lacked the power To bring him [Enkidu] back to life.*" [page 11, verse 1, lines 5-6].

Questions

- Why did the elders agree to let Gilgamesh and Enkidu face Humbaba?

- The elders must have some knowledge of the dangers of angering the gods, and a passion to fight can't possibly justify angering the gods, so were the elders planning some type of mutiny?
- Why did Gilgamesh want to kill Humbaba?
- There's no mention of any injustices Humbaba has committed; was Gilgamesh just trying to prove his superiority over a god?
- Why did Gilgamesh call Humbaba the Evil One when Humbaba only protects the forest? In fact, Humbaba only attacks Enkidu and Gilgamesh because Gilgamesh is cutting down trees.
- Does paralysis refer to the paralyzing fear Enkidu would be facing?
- Verse 1 and 2 of page 34 are about Enkidu's hand being paralyzed after touching the gate? Was his hand literally paralyzed or was he paralyzed with fear?

Important Quotation

"We outgrow our naiveté In thinking goddesses Return our love. I am tired of your promises, Tired as Ishullanu, Who brought you dates, Innocent until you pressed His hand against your breasts And turned him to a mole." [pages 43-44, verse 4 and 1, lines 14-20 & 1-2]

- This quote demonstrates the extent of the wrath of the gods and goddesses. Gilgamesh remarks that Ishullanu did nothing but give Ishtar fruit that would warrant being turned into a mole. This quote makes it seem as if the gods and goddesses behave irrationally and are not the figures that humans make them out to be. This supports the main idea of the wrath of the gods, as Ishtar, the goddess of love exacted her wrath on another god just for bringing her some fruits.

Personal Response

When I read book 2 of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, I felt a strong connection with the text; I found it interesting, and sometimes hilarious, the way the gods acted and justified their actions. It was particularly interesting to read that Enlil wants Enkidu to die because Gilgamesh is two-thirds god and therefore should not be killed, but Ishtar turned a god into a mole for something as trivial as bringing her fruit. This makes it seem as if the gods and goddesses view an eternal life of suffering to be better than death. However, I understand that the gods are made out to have distinct personalities, so I shouldn't judge the behaviour of all the gods and goddesses based on one goddess. This book, coupled with book 1 of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, has made me further invested in the plot and excited to know what happens next.

Connections and Conventions

- The Hero's Journey

- Enkidu refuses the call to adventure when Gilgamesh presents the idea of going to the cedar forest and slaying Humbaba. Enkidu agrees to go on the adventure with the guidance of Ninsun, who acted like their mentor, giving them good blessings. The two cross the threshold of the forest, leaving the known limits of their world, and entering one with many scary and dangerous creatures. When they set up camp, Enkidu and Gilgamesh face tests and enemies in the form of Enkidu's visions and Gilgamesh's dreams. The two overcome the dreams and hallucinations to approach Humbaba, by cutting down cedar trees. The two face the ordeal and are victorious in getting the reward of a stronger friendship and the head of Humbaba. On the road back, Enkidu worsens because of his injuries in battle. As they make their way back to Uruk, Enkidu and Gilgamesh are severely tested as they face off against and slay Ishtar's heavenly bull. Enkidu dies from the battle against Humbaba, and Gilgamesh is once again in solitude, but with the memory of friendship.
- Epic Conventions
- Enkidu and Gilgamesh prove themselves to be great warriors in their battles against their supernatural foes, Humbaba and the Heavenly Bull. They also travel over a vast setting, taking three days to reach the edge of Humbaba's cedar forest.
- Text-to-World
- In real life, sacrifice plays an integral role in how events play out; Enkidu puts his life on the line to protect his friend against the heavenly bull, and is burdened with death because of the death of Humbaba. This directly influences Gilgamesh's life as he is saved from death in both occasions. There are real world cases of sacrifice which can cause great change, such as the sacrifice of Mohammed Bouazizi, who sparked the Tunisian revolution.