



DARK RISE

C. S. PACAT

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Recommended for 13 to 18 years old

Summary

THE DARK WILL RISE. WHO WILL FALL? WHO WILL STAND?

The ancient world of magic is no more. Its heroes are dead, its halls are ruins, and its great battles between Light and Dark are forgotten. Only the Stewards remember. For centuries they have kept vigil, sworn to protect humanity if the Dark King ever returns.

Sixteen-year-old dock boy Will is on the run in London, pursued by the men who killed his mother. When an old servant urges him to seek out the Stewards, Will is ushered into a secret world, where he must train to fight for the Light in the oncoming war.

As the Dark King's return looms, reborn warriors begin to draw battle lines. But when the young descendants of Light and Dark step into their destined roles, old allegiances, old enmities and old flames are awakened. Will must stand with the last heroes of the Light to prevent the calamity that destroyed their world from returning to destroy his own.

Dark Rise is the first book in a thrilling new YA fantasy series from bestselling Australian author CS Pacat.

Themes

Fantasy, romance, magic, adventure and secrets.

About the author

CS Pacat is the internationally acclaimed author of the young adult comic book series Fence, and the bestselling adult trilogy Captive Prince. Born in Australia and educated at the University of Melbourne, CS Pacat has since lived in a number of cities, including Tokyo and Perugia, and currently resides and writes in Melbourne.

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Suggestions for Classroom Discussion and Application

Prologue

- If the main purpose of a **prologue** is to set the scene, provide background information and engage the reader, do you think the prologue of *Dark Rise* is effective?
- Analyse your response to the prologue by asking questions such as:
 - Did some aspects of the world in which the story is set seem familiar?
 - Did some characters, descriptions or dialogue seem ‘out of place’ in your understanding of that world?
 - Did the discord between the familiar and unfamiliar intrigue you?
- Now discuss specific elements in the prologue – such as dramatic action, conflict and mystery – that made you want to keep reading?

Building Suspense

According to the Oxford dictionary, *suspense* is the ‘feeling of worry or excitement that you have when you feel that something is going to happen, somebody is going to tell you some news, etc.’ CS Pacat is an expert builder of suspense.

- Find examples of the following: *atmosphere*, *mystery*, *foreshadowing*, *fast pacing* and *conflict* in Chapters One and Two and explain how each created a sense of your own ‘worry or excitement’ about what would unfold in the story.

Word Choice and Language

It looked plain except for its black hilt, and its long, carved black sheath...

...As soon as he had it, he drove it back into its sheath. pp 39-41.

- Word choice and language are intrinsic to writing that heightens the reader’s experience of a scene. In the book, find and read the full passage that the excerpt above has been taken from, and find a synonym for the word *quiescent*.
- Rewrite the sentence using the synonym and explain if the new sentence is strengthened or weakened by the change, and why.
- Choose three other words in the excerpt and repeat this exercise, explaining why you think CS Pacat chose that exact word to heighten the drama of the scene.
- Consider the phrase: *Only Tom and Justice were still fighting, **locked in battle like two titans***. Why do you think CS Pacat chose this simile here? Find other similes in the excerpt and explain the effect each had on your reading experience.

Theme

I think what people were is less important than what they are. And what people are is less important than what they could be. p 271

- Compare and contrast Will and Violet’s actions in terms of the battle between fate and free will. Are they both destined to become the person that others – namely the Stewards – expect them to be?

Genre

- According to Wikipedia, fantasy novels share five key tropes (commonly recurring literary devices, motifs or clichés). These tropes are good vs evil, quest, magic, medievalism and races or species.

Find examples of each trope in *Dark Rise*.

- CS Pacat says that fantasy novels are the place that modern myth-making happens and that, ‘We have exchanged Hercules for Harry Potter’.

In a whole-class discussion consider this statement and talk about how Pacat’s version of good versus evil in *Dark Rise* subverts its trope and creates a new way of thinking about who gets to be labelled ‘hero’ or ‘villain’. Make sure secondary characters such as Tom Ballard and Devon are also discussed.

Extension Question: Portals are a common feature of fantasy writing – think CS Lewis’s wardrobe, JK Rowling’s Platform 9¾. What is their purpose in the genre? Compare and contrast Pacat’s ‘broken arch, standing alone on the ruined moor’, with one other in fantasy literature.

LGBTQ Characters

‘I grew up reading fantasy novels in which there were few or no queer characters,’ says CS Pacat in an interview with the *Guardian* in 2020. ‘Those that we had were often hidden, coded and subtextual. If they were explicit they always had the same quote-unquote gay storyline, which was, “I come out, I face an enormous amount of oppressive backlash, I’m forced to live my life on the fringes of social acceptability, until at the end I die tragically.” It’s as though discrimination is just a fact of queerness that can’t be separated from it.’

- Research online the history of the Motion Picture Production Code, better known as the Hays Code, and its effect on the way Hollywood portrayed homosexual characters between 1930 and 1968.
- In a whole-class discussion talk about the power that films have in influencing societal opinions and actions, and the impact that the code could be expected to have had on LGBTQ people.

‘We’re getting to the point I yearn for where if you have a queer character they could have a romance narrative where [their queerness] is not the romantic obstacle. They could have a more exciting obstacle, like, “You killed my brother but I’m falling in love with you”,’ Pacat laughs, describing *Captive Prince*. ‘Or a mystery detective narrative. Or a hero’s journey,’ says CS Pacat later in the same *Guardian* article.

- How do the relationships between Will and James, and Tom and Devon reflect CS Pacat’s statement? And what, if any, long-term shifts do you think this novel, and others like it, will have on societal attitudes and actions?

Further Reading:

The following are authors and books that CS Pacat mentions as being influential during an ABC Radio National *TheBookshelf* interview in 2020.

JRR Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Hobbit*
 CS Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia*
 JK Rowling, *The Harry Potter series*
 Susan Cooper, *The Dark is Rising*

NB: In the same interview Pacat says that these books created an ‘imaginative colonialism’ because they created an association between English landscapes and fantasy novels. ‘*Dark Rise* gave me an opportunity to revisit, push back against and take this on.’

In the author’s own words

‘I’ve always loved fantasy, and grew up reading *Lord of the Rings*, but one way that *Lord of the Rings* felt old fashioned to me is that the enemy is always a distant external force. I was more interested in the idea of the enemy within. I wanted to write an epic fantasy with rich worldbuilding and intense characters, where an ancient battle of good and evil had to also contend with shades of grey.

‘I also grew up as a queer kid watching a lot of queer-coded villains in 1990s media. Because the only place I ever saw myself was as the “enemy” to the hero, it made me interested in alternative perspectives on the hero narrative. As a friend put it, “It didn’t make me hate queer people, it just made me love villains.” I like the idea that heroism can arise in unexpected places, and that villains aren’t necessarily who you think they are either.

‘The last piece of the puzzle I think is that my training is as a geologist, and I’m fascinated by archeology and glimpses of lost worlds. There is something equally fascinating and disturbing to me about museums. I had the earliest idea for the book when I visited the Louvre for the first time, and found the experience utterly unnerving. They say you die twice, once when you die, and then again when someone says your name for the last time. That so many great people lived and died and all that remains of a “civilisation” is a broken sliver of pottery? Lost “civilisations” led me to the idea of a long-dead magical civilisation that was forgotten by our world, except for remnants, artefacts known only to a few. And then of course I started to wonder what would happen if parts of that world were trying to return...’



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– CS Pacat