

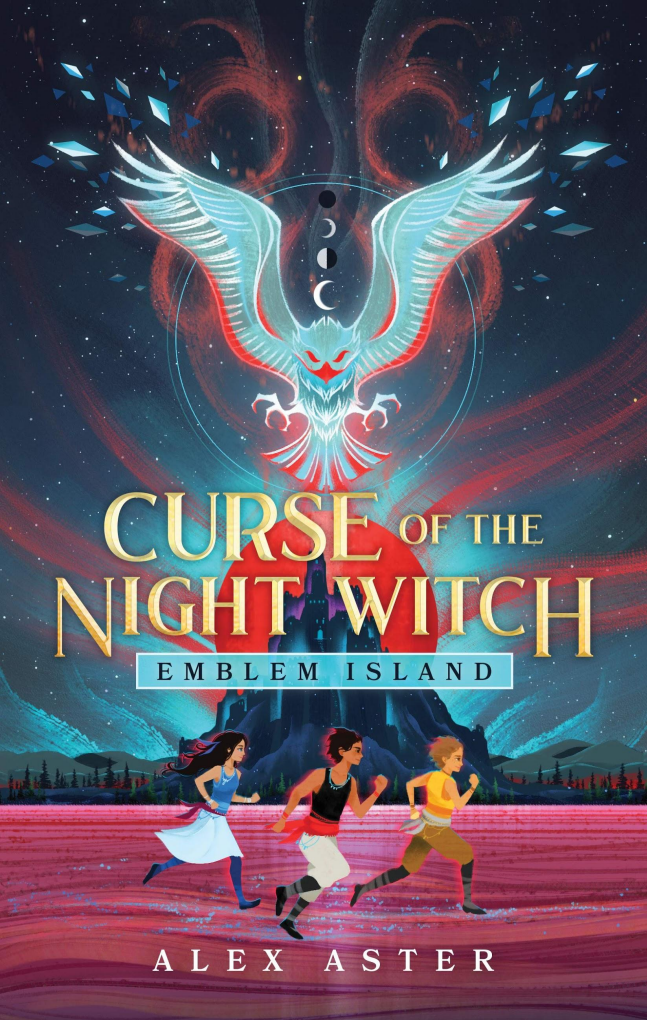


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Curse of the Night

Witch

Book Talk

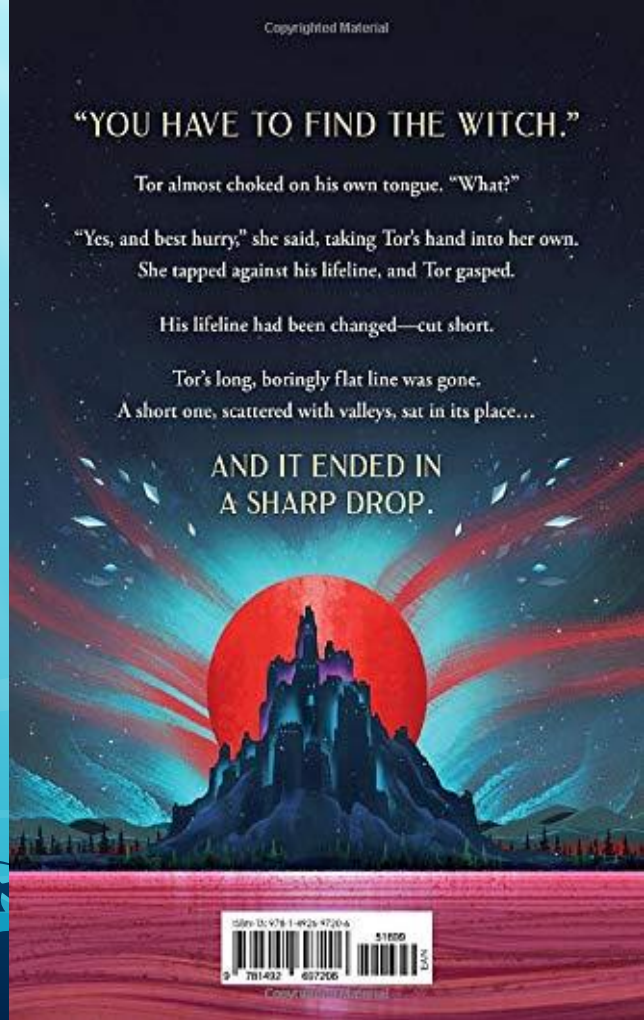
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“YOU HAVE TO FIND THE WITCH.”

Tor almost choked on his own tongue. “What?”

“Yes, and best hurry,” she said, taking Tor’s hand into her own. She tapped against his lifeline, and Tor gasped.

His lifeline had been changed—cut short.

Tor’s long, boringly flat line was gone. A short one, scattered with valleys, sat in its place...

**AND IT ENDED IN
A SHARP DROP.**



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Author Biography

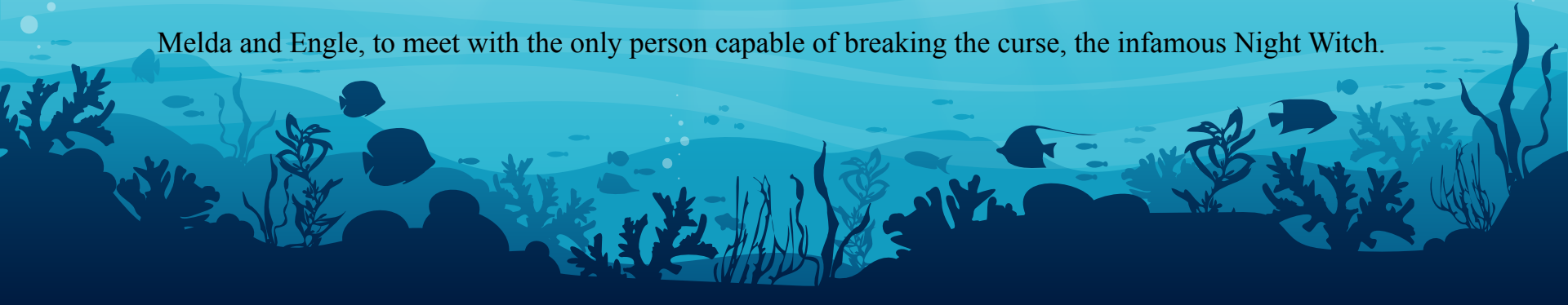
Alex Aster is a twenty-five-year-old award-winning author of her debut novel, *Curse of the Night Witch*. She graduated from The University of Pennsylvania, where she majored in English with a Concentration in Creative Writing and coincidentally signed with an agent the day of her graduation. Aster is also quite popular on the social media platform, TikTok, as well as a singer. Although *Curse of the Night Witch* is the first book of Aster's that was published, it is actually the sixth book that she has written. Her inspiration for this book comes from her Latin American heritage and the Latinx stories or *cuentos* her Colombian grandmother told her growing up. While writing this book, Aster realized just how much her Colombian culture and heritage have influenced her love for storytelling and writing.



Image taken from <https://www.asterverse.com/about>

Book Summary

Alex Aster's novel, *Curse of the Night Witch*, takes place on Emblem Island, where people are born with an emblem on their body that will determine their fate and their lifespan. The main character is a twelve-year old-boy named Tor Luna, who is born with a leadership emblem and is displeased with his fate, so during the New Year's Eve celebrations, where people throw their wishes (written on a piece of paper) into a bonfire in hopes that they will come true; Tor wishes for a new emblem. He wakes up the next morning with a cursed emblem that only gives him a week to live, so he decides to go on a journey with his friends, Melda and Engle, to meet with the only person capable of breaking the curse, the infamous Night Witch.



Quote One

“Her finger jabbed a page that had a drawing of the exact mark Tor had sprouted on his wrist, an eye with veiny spiderwebs for lashes. ‘It’s a witch’s curse. Knew it the second I saw it,’ Mrs. Libra said” (46).

Melda takes Tor and Engle to visit Mrs. Libra, who is kind of like a historian (described as a hoarder/collector) who has information on everything, in hopes that she may be able to shed some light on Tor’s cursed emblem, which she is. With her help, Tor and his friends are able to find out what kind of curse his cursed emblem is (witch’s curse) as well as where the curse originated from; The Night Witch. This is also where he finds out that The Night Witch is an actual person rather than just a character from a story in The Book of Cuentos.

Quote Two

“What happens to people who touch the marking?” she asked, her voice in a ridiculous high pitch. Mrs. Libra smirked, and Tor pressed his teeth together to keep a sudden flash of annoyance at bay. That was the thing with know-alls. From what he had heard, their knowallness toward people who did not know everything made them unlikable. Tor wondered if Mrs. Libra was a hermit by choice or simply didn’t have any friends. ‘The curse latches on to their body too, of course. Practically *everyone* knows that” (50).

Prior to reading the book, I wondered why Tor’s friends joined him on his journey to see The Night Witch despite all the dangers that lied ahead. I thought that they either really cared for Tor and were very loyal to him or Tor somehow managed to blackmail or threaten them to come along. It turns out that the reason why Tor’s friends accompanied him on his journey to see The Night Witch is because whoever touches a cursed emblem becomes cursed as well. While both of his friends’ lifespans also shortened to one week they, unlike Tor, where able to keep their original emblems since they didn’t wish for theirs to change like Tor did.

Quote Three

“I’m willing to take that risk,’ he said, sounding more confident than he felt. What other choice did he have? His lifeline had been reduced to a tiny stub. It was too late to turn back, even if he wanted to. He could only go forward. The old man nodded, solemn. He had a gleam of something in his eye-maybe respect, perhaps hope. Before Tor could figure it out, that glimmer vanished. ‘Walk east until the dirt turns black. Then, travel north until the sky turns gray. Finally, cross the lake. That is where you’ll find her” (283).

This quote is significant because this is when Tor not only finds out the exact location of where The Night Witch lives, but also when he finally does the thing he has loathed and spent his whole life running away from; becoming and behaving a leader. Despite the dangers that lie ahead and him not having much longer to live, Tor decides to risk his life to meet The Night Witch. so that at least his friends would be able to survive (sacrificing himself for the greater good) since they were innocent and weren’t the ones who wished for a new emblem.



Text Complexity

- **Lexile Text Complexity Score: 770L, Age Range: 9-13**

-This score means that the book is geared towards a younger audience since the 700-775 range means that the text is readable by 4th graders. I believe that this score is accurate because the text is comprehensible and appropriate for the ages provided.

- **Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease Score: 75 (text scale), fairly easy to read**

-This score means that the book is easily understandable for 7th grade readers. I believe this score is less accurate because the text itself uses simple grammar and vocabulary that is easy to understand. I would personally scale this book in the 80-90 or 90-100, meaning the book is easy to read since the content presented in the book is geared towards a younger audience.

- **Issues**

-While both scores give the age and grade levels that this book would be appropriate for, they don't really give any information about the reader's maturity and reading level, which can certainly influence how they will interpret the book. Also, there isn't really much information on the websites for how they decide on the final score for the book and what factors are included (ex: themes, topics, actual text, etc.).

Teaching Suggestions

If this book were to be taught in a classroom (preferably 7th to 9th grade), it can be used during a mythology or legends/fables unit. One classroom activity students can do is to write their own short story, or *cuentos*, like the ones that were mentioned in the book. This would be an excellent creative writing exercise and students will be able to develop and enhance their writing skills by creating their own stories.

Another possible activity could be to have an open discussion (and possibly write a paper) on identity and labels. Although Tor's leadership emblem is considered to be desirable since he will become the next Chief after his mother passes the role down to him, he hates his emblem and wishes for a different one. This could also lead to a conversation about societal and parental pressures and how society expects you to behave and act in a certain way depending on the label(s) you are categorized under.

Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story

Chapter Four: Books on Real-Life Experiences

- Not feeling like you fit in or belong is a struggle that many of us have experienced. Although Tor was born with the leadership emblem, something his parents (especially his mother, who also has the same emblem) were happy about, he hated his mark and the thought of becoming a leader. He would try to distance himself from his leadership classes (and anything regarding his emblem) by going swimming, which something that will get him into trouble if he is caught since it has nothing to do with his emblem because of how much peace and happiness it brought him.

Chapter Six: Books on Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions

- Along with his identity, Tor struggled with making decisions throughout this book, particularly the one at the end. His choice to make a wish for a different emblem set off a series of events and a race against time to meet the only person capable of saving the lives of Tor and his friends, who also became cursed from touching Tor's cursed emblem.

Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story

Chapter Seven: Books on Courage and Survival

- This book is literally one of courage and survival because Tor and his friends have only one week to journey to and find The Night Witch before they all end up succumbing to the curse. Also, the actual journey to The Night Witch is very dangerous and the main characters are risking their lives every step of the way.

Chapter Eight: Books on Allegory, Fantasy, Myth, and Parable

- Along with taking place on a fictional island, this fantasy book also includes many myths and short stories that have been written in The Book of Cuentos. One of the major themes of this book are the *cuentos* that the inhabitants of the island have grown up with and serve as a source of information for the main characters to find out where The Night Witch is located.

Why Should Teens Read This Book?

Teens should read *Curse of the Night Witch* because it is a fantastic fantasy and adventure book that uses language that isn't too difficult to comprehend and the plot is easy to follow. This book also does a great job at navigating the struggles that preteens and teens go through, like identity, friendships, fitting in, living up to societal and parental expectations, school, and what is in store in the future. There are also some really great lessons discussed in this book, like thinking about others and their needs before our own, priorities, and how every action (good or bad) has a consequence. Also, this book deviates from the traditional concept of including the Three Fates from Greek Mythology when discussing themes like fate and destiny. Although the plot is easy to follow, it has many twists and turns that are unpredictable, especially the ending. Since this is the first book in a series, not everything will be tied up neatly at the end, but a majority of the conflicts and issues that Tor Luna faced were resolved. For people who enjoy books where a group of friends go on a mythological or magical adventure, like the *Harry Potter* series or the *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* series, then they will certainly enjoy this book. Also, one of the things I really liked about this book goes against the norm of the main character getting the love interest and instead the friend of the main character gets the girl, similar to Ron and Hermione from *Harry Potter*.

Bibliography

<https://www.asterverse.com/about>

<https://belatina.com/alex-aster-the-24-year-old-author-writing-about-latinx-legends/>

