



SUPERSUMMARY™

IN-DEPTH  
STUDY  
GUIDE

# CITY OF THE BEASTS

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## PLOT OVERVIEW

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Isabel Allende's novel *City of the Beasts* tells the story of Alex Cold, a 15-year-old boy from California who accompanies his journalist grandmother on a life-altering journey through the Amazon.

The narrative opens with Alex at home in California, angry and frightened over the illness of his mother, who is undergoing cancer treatment. When his mother gets a chance at receiving a promising new treatment in Texas, Alex's parents send him to stay with his paternal grandmother, the adventurer and travel writer Kate Cold. Kate is about to embark on a trip to the Amazon, on an assignment for *International Geographic* magazine, with the goal of finding and documenting a mysterious, menacing rainforest presence known only as The Beast. The Beast has rarely been sighted but is known to attack humans, and it leaves a terrible smell wherever it goes. Alex reluctantly joins Kate on her expedition, feeling both excited and apprehensive about the enormous change from the life he knows.

Alex and Kate travel to the Brazilian city of Manaus, where they embark on a journey by boat up the Rio Negro. Joining them are a number of colorful characters with their own motivations for joining the expedition: Ludovic Leblanc is an arrogant anthropologist, Timothy Bruce is a steadfast photographer, and Omayra Torres is a beautiful young doctor hoping to vaccinate native peoples against outside diseases. The group travels up the Rio Negro, experiencing a stunning array of flora and fauna, to arrive in a village called Santa Maria de la Lluvia. There, Alex meets Nadia Santos, a beautiful and intuitive girl with a near-mystical connection to the natural world. Nadia lives with her father, César Santos, who serves as the expedition's guide, and she introduces Alex to the complicated forces at play in the village and the surrounding region. These include the menacing figures of Mauro Carías, a greedy entrepreneur, and Captain Ariosto, the commander of the village military, who Alex and Nadia overhear plotting to destroy the native peoples for their own gain. Through Nadia, Alex also meets an ancient shaman named Walimai, who warns Alex and Nadia of coming danger in the form of a dark spirit called the Rahakanariwa. Nadia also informs them of the roles they are destined to play in stopping it. Alex is skeptical of Nadia and Walimai's mysticism, but he begins to change his mind when he meets a caged black jaguar and has a vision of communing with it. Nadia informs Alex that the jaguar is his animal totem and represents his true nature.

Guided by César Santos and joined by Nadia, the group sets off up the river, to find the Beast, and falls prey to a host of misfortunes, ultimately resulting in their becoming stranded in the jungle. While they wait for help to arrive, the Beast visits their camp and kills one of the soldiers guarding them, terrifying the group and making the immediacy of their danger clear. Shortly thereafter, Alex and Nadia are kidnapped by an elusive tribe of Indians called the People of the Mist, who take them through the jungle and up the face of a waterfall to their hidden home, known as the Eye of the World. The tribe's chief is injured during the journey and dies soon after their arrival in the village, but before he dies he informs Nadia and Alex that they are destined to help stop the Rahakanariwa from destroying the tribe, echoing Walimai's earlier prophecy. Alex and Nadia are welcomed by the other members of the tribe and become symbolic members, learning of their true identities as Jaguar and Eagle and beginning to embrace their inner strength. The new chief, Iyomi, names Alex and Nadia chiefs as well; Alex is tasked with negotiating with the outsiders and Nadia is tasked with soothing the vicious Rahakanariwa.

Accompanied by Walimai, Alex and Nadia set out to fulfill their destinies by visiting the home of the gods, which turns out to be a beautiful, isolated valley inhabited by the Beasts themselves. Alex and Nadia learn that the Beasts are in fact ancient sloth-like creatures who have lived there undisturbed for thousands of years, acting as gods to the People of the Mist by recording the tribe's history in their prodigiously long memories. Once Alex and Nadia understand that the Beasts have been leaving their valley to attack human outsiders and protect the tribe, they convince the Beasts to stop doing so and state that they themselves will protect the tribe. The Beasts and the visitors share a communal dream in which the dreaded Rahakanariwa breaks free and attacks the tribe, underscoring the importance of Alex and Nadia's task. Before leaving the valley, Alex and Nadia negotiate with the Beasts for the chance to seek two treasures from the valley: the water of life, which might heal Alex's mother, and the crystal eggs that Nadia previously saw in a vision. Each of them undertakes a perilous quest and both succeed, taking their prizes with them from the valley.

When they return to the village, Alex and Nadia discover that the rest of the expedition has arrived via helicopter, along with Carías and Ariosto. Nadia negotiates with Chief Iyomi to convince the tribe to accept vaccinations from Dr. Torres, hoping that doing so will protect the tribe from outside harm. After much debate, Iyomi agrees to Nadia's request, but after Nadia catches Dr. Torres and

Carías professing their love for each other, she and Alex remember their dream in the city of the Beasts and realize that the alleged vaccinations are actually viruses that Carías, Torres, and Ariosto have been using to decimate native populations. Nadia interrupts before the natives receive the vaccines, but her revelation sets off a chain reaction of violence that leaves several Indians and members of the expedition dead, and Carías gravely injured. Although it seems that Ariosto might kill the remaining members of the expedition in order to hide his secret, Nadia and Alex succeed in calling Walimai and the People of the Mist to their aid. The tribe ultimately summons the Beasts to kill Ariosto and stun his soldiers so that the tribe can move the rest of the expedition to safety. The tribe decides to move to a new village within the Eye of the World, in order to forget the conflict in their previous village, and the outsiders depart with promises to protect the tribe from future interference. Alex convinces his grandmother Kate to use her journalism to protect the People of the Mist and make the outside world think that the Beasts are only a myth.

Back in Santa Maria de la Lluvia, Kate and the anthropologist Leblanc recover sufficient evidence of the crimes of Carías and Torres to bring them to justice. They also plan to start a foundation together to protect the People of the Mist. Nadia reveals to Alex that the crystal eggs are actually diamonds and gives them to him to help fund the foundation. Alex and Nadia reflect on the growth they've undergone since meeting and promise to remain best friends.

## CHAPTER SUMMARIES AND ANALYSES

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### Chapters 1-3

#### Chapter 1 Summary: “The Nightmare”

The novel opens with 15-year-old Alexander Cold awakening from a nightmare in which an enormous black bird carries his mother away. Alex lives on the California coast with his doctor father, John, his younger sisters, Andrea and Nicole, and his artist mother, Lisa. Lisa is very sick with cancer and spends much of her time in treatment, leaving John—who can’t cook anything besides pancakes that “always turned out like rubber-tire tortillas” (3)—to care for the house and children. As revealed through close 3rd-person narration, Alex believes that his family is falling apart and that even their house looks sad.

After a difficult morning with his unhappy family, Alex gets to school and realizes that he left his flute, which he needs to play a solo at orchestra practice, back at his house. He returns home at lunchtime to retrieve the flute and discovers his father shaving his mother’s head in their bedroom, while his mother weeps at the loss of her hair. After initially attacking his father upon seeing the razor, Alex barricades himself in his room and, overcome with a “hurricane of feelings” (9), he destroys all of his possessions, cutting his hand in the process.

When Alex’s parents discover his ruined room, he apologizes to them and confesses how upset he is to his father. While tending to Alex’s injured hand, John tells him that he’s frightened too and doesn’t know whether Lisa will live. John informs Alex that Lisa has to go to a hospital in Texas for a new treatment, and that Alex and his sisters won’t be able to stay at home in California while their parents are away. While Alex’s sisters will be going to stay with their maternal grandmother, Alex will be going to stay with his paternal grandmother, Kate. Although Alex begs to go with his sisters instead, John tells Alex that Alex has no choice but to meet Kate in New York City and then accompany her on a trip to the Amazon, where she’s going in the course of her career as a journalist. The chapter closes with Alex boarding a plane to New York, wishing for his mother to get well and fearing what might happen to him in the company of his intimidating grandmother.

## **Chapter 2 Summary: "The Eccentric Grandmother"**

When Alex arrives at the New York City airport, he finds that his grandmother Kate is not waiting for him as he had expected. While waiting for Kate, Alex remembers the frightening and exciting encounters he has had with her in the past, from the pranks she played on him and his sisters, to her terrifying stories of her adventures around the world, to her teaching him how to swim by pushing him into a pool. After waiting for several hours, Alex becomes angry and decides to "act like a man" (20); he resolves to get to Kate's apartment without her help.

While waiting for a bus at the airport, Alex meets a pretty, somewhat bedraggled girl a bit older than himself, who introduces herself as Morgana and offers to help him find Kate's apartment. Alex accepts her help but it quickly becomes clear that Morgana can't pay for her bus fare, so Alex pays it for her. During the bus ride, she offers him drugs, which he declines, thinking about his past experiences mountain climbing and how he prefers the controlled power of conquering huge obstacles to the loss of control that comes from using substances. Alex also remembers how, when Kate caught him smoking years earlier, she made him smoke four cigars until he "vomited his guts out" (29) and resolved never to smoke again.

When he and Morgana arrive in New York City, Alex observes the cold, chaotic streets and feels that he is "trapped in a sci-fi nightmare" (32). Morgana insists on stopping for food and, while Alex is using the restroom, she steals his backpack and vanishes into the night with all of his possessions and money, including his beloved flute. Struggling not to panic, Alex is left with only his passport.

## **Chapter 3 Summary: "The Abominable Jungleman"**

After calming down somewhat, Alex asks for directions and begins walking toward his grandmother's address. He finds that he is many blocks away, but thinks back to his previous successes and reflects that "if he could rock climb for six hours, like a fly, he could certainly walk a few blocks on level ground" (37). Alex arrives at Kate's apartment after midnight and she greets him gruffly, saying that he shouldn't expect to be pampered. Nonetheless, Kate serves Alex his favorite food and draws him a warm bath, showing that she hides some measure of tenderness beneath her fierce exterior.



Kate is sixty-four years old and very strong and self-sufficient, with an apartment full of fascinating artifacts from around the world. Alex recalls how he and his sisters have always been somewhat proud of Kate and her adventures, even when they were “embarrassed to introduce her to their friends” (40) due to her wild appearance and eccentric habits. When Kate learns that Alex lost his flute on the way to the apartment, she presents him with the flute that belonged to his grandfather, the renowned flutist Joseph Cold. Alex is delighted by the gift and finds that it sounds even more beautiful than the flute he lost.

Before Alex goes to bed, Kate explains to him that the next day they’ll be leaving for a region of the Amazon at the border of Brazil and Venezuela, where she’ll be traveling on assignment for *International Geographic* magazine. The assignment, she tells him, is to research a mysterious creature known as the Beast, which witnesses say walks on two feet, is extremely tall, and leaves a horrible scent wherever it goes. The Beast is rumored to have killed several people in the region. Kate informs Alex that an anthropologist named Ludovic Leblanc and a Brazilian guide named César Santos will be joining them on the expedition. Kate orders Alex to go to sleep so that he’s ready to begin working for her the next day.

## Chapters 1-3 Analysis

The opening chapters of *City of the Beasts* establish the characters and motivations of the primary protagonist, Alex Cold, and his vibrant grandmother, Kate Cold. The question of Alex’s maturity and readiness for the challenges ahead looms particularly large, with his father noting that he sometimes acts like a child in the face of his mother’s frightening illness and Alex himself wondering, after Morgana steals his backpack, how he could be so naive. While Alex has experienced great self-control and focus during his pursuit of rock climbing, it’s clear from his temperamental behavior throughout these opening chapters that some aspects of his character remain markedly childish and that he has not yet learned to manage his emotions—particularly anger—in difficult situations.

Through Alex’s relationships with other people, these chapters also introduce a key tension between outward presentation and inner reality. Of his father, Alex reflects that “John wasn’t a person for flattery” (27), but despite that emotional distance, John treats his son with caring, forgiving Alex after he destroys his room and tending to Alex’s injury. Similarly, Kate appears gruff but also takes good care

of Alex in her own way, providing his favorite food and trusting him with the responsibility of joining her on her trip. Conversely, Alex is fooled by Morgana's appealing exterior, believing that because she looks vulnerable, she won't harm him. In that case, her soft exterior masks the ruthlessness that drives her to rob Alex. This recurring mismatch between appearance and substance sets the stage for the even more complicated relationships that Alex will encounter in the Amazon.

Finally, this opening phase of the novel establishes the importance of music and the central symbol of Alex's flute. As Alex's life is uprooted, one of the few things he's able to hold onto is his flute and his ability to play it well, which he believes to be one of his defining characteristics. Alex's lowest point comes when Morgana steals his flute. Then, when Kate gives him his grandfather's flute, it serves as a sign of both his connection to his family and his unique individual worth, and his appreciation of it is a key moment in his and Kate's preparation for their expedition.

## Chapters 4-6

### Chapter 4 Summary: "The Amazon River"

Alex and Kate begin their journey in the Brazilian city of Manaus, which Alex is surprised to find is a bustling modern city. There, they meet three of their compatriots for the journey to come: the anthropologist Ludovic Leblanc, the English photographer Timothy Bruce, and his assistant, Joel Gonzalez. Having rarely traveled outside the United States, Alex is struck by the economic inequality among the residents of Manaus, noting "the wealth of some and the extreme poverty of others, all mixed together" (52). Alex is also interested to read in his guidebook that some tribes of native people in the area, whom he and the others refer to as Indians, lack almost all modern technology and written language.

From Manaus, the *International Geographic* team sets out by boat on the Rio Negro river toward a village called Santa Maria de la Lluvia, where they will meet their Brazilian guide, César Santos. Among other passengers on the boat, they are joined by a young Venezuelan doctor named Omayra Torres, who is traveling into the jungle in order to vaccinate the Indians against diseases brought by outsiders. Along the way, the arrogant Ludovic Leblanc explains to Kate, Alex, and the rest of the group that in his experience, the Indians are cruel and brutal, ready to behave violently at any provocation. Dr. Omayra Torres counters, saying that the

Indians are actually largely peaceful and more interested in ceremony than actual violence, but Leblanc disagrees.

As the boat continues upriver, Kate largely ignores Alex, leaving him to entertain himself while she writes. Alex witnesses an incredible array of flora and fauna, including caimans, beautiful birds, and even dolphins who play with him as he swims. Although he is a picky eater and can't bring himself to eat most of the available food, Alex nevertheless enjoys the journey and looks forward to showing his friends at home pictures of his amazing new experiences.

After a few days on the boat, the group reaches the village of Santa Maria de la Lluvia, "the last outpost of civilization" (63), where they meet César Santos and his daughter, Nadia, a beautiful girl who is two or three years younger than Alex. In the small village of settlers and explorers, Alex sees a number of soldiers, who he learns are there to protect the native people from outside intrusion but often fail to do so. A few assimilated Indians also live in the village, and Alex is surprised to find them peaceful and unintimidating, in contrast to Leblanc's stories of brutality.

### **Chapter 5 Summary: "The Shaman"**

In the hotel in Santa Maria de la Lluvia, the group gathers to plan their expedition. Leblanc insists that they leave the next morning to accommodate his work schedule and behaves condescendingly toward Dr. Torres when he finds out that she will be joining them as an employee of the National Health Service. The group also meets Captain Ariosto, who is in charge of the local military, and Mauro Carías, a wealthy entrepreneur who originally encouraged *International Geographic* to send a team to research the Beast. Kate suspects that Carías wishes only to stop the Beast from interfering in his business dealings, but Carías maintains that "the Beast is a problem for everyone" (79). Leblanc doubts that the Beast is real, but Santos defends the story of a local priest named Padre Valdomero, who claims to have seen the Beast himself. Santos also describes the spirituality of the native people, explaining that because they believe that "everything has a soul" (80) and do not understand Christian notions of sin, Padre Valdomero had found it unnecessary and even impossible to convert them to Christianity.

That evening, Alex takes a walk to the river with Nadia and her tame monkey companion, Borobá. When Nadia notices a nearby presence and calls to it by

mimicking an owl, Alex follows her into the jungle, even though he is frightened of leaving the village and has been warned not to. After hearing an answering owl call, Alex and Nadia encounter an ethereal, ghost-like man who “looked as if he had lived for centuries” (84) and who seems to appear out of nowhere. Alex watches as Nadia greets the man as a friend, and proceeds to have a long, animated conversation with him that Alex cannot follow. At the end of the conversation, the old man displays an amulet that, when he blows into it, sounds just like the owl call. He places the amulet around Nadia’s neck and vanishes.

Nadia explains to Alex that the old man is a shaman named Walimai, and that he can travel in realms of spirits in the company of his wife, who is herself a spirit. Nadia tells Alex what Walimai said during their conversation: although it is dangerous for foreigners to look for the Beast, Alex and Nadia have been called to do so “because [their] souls are pure” [87]. Additionally, Walimai warned Nadia that a frightening “cannibal spirit-bird” [87] called the Rahakanariwa is causing danger and that Nadia can call Walimai using the owl amulet when she needs help during their journey. Alex is skeptical, but Nadia believes Walimai’s words.

### **Chapter 6 Summary: “The Plot”**

Alex sleeps badly after meeting Walimai, remembering his warning that members of their expedition could die. He also misses his home and family, and wishes that Kate behaved more attentively toward him. Hearing voices outside, Alex leaves his hammock at the hotel and wakes Nadia to investigate with him. The two discover Captain Ariosto and Mauro Carías discussing a plan to get rich off of the lands currently occupied by native tribes. They hear Carías refer to the *International Geographic* group as “witnesses” and say that they will “[tell] the exact story we want them to tell” (92). Carías also mentions that someone he trusts will be on the expedition, but he does not tell Ariosto who, and implies that the goal of their plan is to rid the surrounding region of Indians.

While he is listening, a snake wraps itself around Alex’s leg, scaring him, but he stays quiet and the men do not discover him and Nadia. Nadia removes the snake from Alex’s leg. The two friends agree that they won’t tell anyone what they heard and will instead wait to see what happens.

### **Chapters 4-6 Analysis**

These chapters mark a transition into the first phase of Alex's true journey. Even before reaching Santa Maria de la Lluvia, Alex is bombarded by sights and sounds that are completely unfamiliar to him. The novelty of his journey on the river places pressure on Alex to grow beyond his previously sheltered existence. In some instances, as when he swims joyfully with dolphins, Alex rises to the challenge. In other instances, as when he refuses to try new foods even as he gets hungrier and hungrier, Alex clings to the comforts of the reality he knows and struggles to adapt to his new knowledge of the world. This inconsistent, somewhat fearful reaction to his changing circumstances indicates that, in these chapters, Alex is caught between different phases of maturity.

The introduction of Nadia in these chapters also highlights the limitations of Alex's worldview. Where he is skeptical and rational, she is intuitive and imaginative, with a deep knowledge of the natural world and an openness to the spiritual mysteries that surround her. Although Alex enjoys Nadia's company, he also calls her "a very weird girl" (87) and is unsure what to make of her trust in Walimai the shaman. Nadia brings a new worldview into the story that both complements and conflicts with Alex's perspective.

In contrast to Nadia's strong connection to the natural wonders of the jungle, the adults introduced in these chapters reveal very different kinds of connection to the Amazon. Each has his or her own particular motives for being there: Ludovic Leblanc seeks to advance his own fame; Dr. Omayra Torres wishes to intervene to protect the native people; Mauro Carías wants to profit from the land's natural resources. As Alex and Nadia watch the adults debate who should participate in the expedition and for what reasons, it quickly becomes clear that interpretations of the region, its people, and their value vary widely. The one constant is that the land itself and its indigenous inhabitants are voiceless in this debate; they are caught in the middle of countless conflicting interests with little power to defend themselves. As César Santos indicates when explaining the Indians' religion, their conceptual frameworks are so different from those of outsiders that such debates wouldn't even make sense to them. Through the conflicting motives of the expedition's members, the vulnerable place that the jungle and its people occupy begins to become clear in these chapters.

## Chapters 7-9

### Chapter 7 Summary: "The Black Jaguar"

Before setting out from the village, the members of the expedition visit the compound of Mauro Carías, who is rumored to be ruthless in pursuing wealth, even though “it was never proved that he had blood on his hands” (100). Carías treats his guests to an extravagant lunch and Alex especially appreciates the familiar imported food. While discussing Nadia’s education, she claims that she can speak with animals, which most of the guests do not believe. Carías suggests that she might be able to talk to one of his pets and takes the group out to his patio to view a restless black jaguar in a cage.

Alex is immediately entranced by the jaguar. When he gets close to its cage, he has a vision of being alone with the animal on “a vast amber plane surrounded by lofty black towers” (104), with six moons in the sky. He hears the jaguar speak his own name and answers it with the word Jaguar. While Alex is lost in his vision, Carías has a monkey thrown into the cage as prey for the jaguar. Alex attempts to free the jaguar and save the monkey, but before Alex can open its cage, César Santos shoots and kills the jaguar. Carías is furious, but Santos says that he killed the jaguar to set it free.

After leaving the compound, Alex tells Nadia about his vision and she explains that the jaguar is Alex’s totem animal, saying: “We all have an animal spirit that accompanies us. It is like a soul” (108). According to Nadia, Jaguar is Alex’s true name and he must strive to be like a jaguar. She explains that “animals aren’t cruel the way people are” (108). Alex begins to believe Nadia, who says that she gets her spiritual knowledge from Walimai.

The members of the expedition pack up their supplies and prepare to travel up the river to find the Beast. Leblanc hires an Indian named Karakawe to serve as his personal assistant on the trip, to fan Leblanc with banana leaves and carry his supplies. Additionally, five of Captain Ariosto’s soldiers join the group, along with another Indian guide named Matuwe. Although Leblanc protests, Nadia also joins the group, in order to stay with her father and avoid the unwanted attention of Mauro Carías.

## **Chapter 8 Summary: “The Expedition”**

The group sets out on the river once again, this time traveling up the Orinoco. Alex tells Kate about the conversation he and Nadia overheard. Though Kate states that she dislikes Carías and worries about his plan to exterminate the Indians, she agrees with Nadia that it’s best to simply wait and see what happens.



As the journey progresses, Alex senses that the adults are all tense and worried, and he feels as if he is being watched.

From the locally-born soldiers and the Indian guides Karakawe and Matuwe, Alex learns more about the culture of the native people. He discovers that Indians tribes own almost all possessions communally, share labor and child-rearing equally, and live together in group homes called *shabonos*. However, it is said that contact with outsiders can have a profoundly corrupting influence on the Indians, especially when they learn about metal weapons like machetes or guns. Karakawe, who has lived among outsiders for a long time, seems not to be like other Indians and rarely speaks to or spends time with the other members of the expedition. Nadia and Alex catch Karakawe going through Dr. Torres's possessions and decide "to keep an eye on him" (118).

As the boats progress into Venezuelan territory, Alex encounters many strange and beautiful new fruits and animals. Kate notes that this is also the region where the mythic city of gold, El Dorado, is said to be located. To pass the time, Alex plays his flute and discovers that in addition to comforting his companions, the music attracts birds and monkeys from the jungle. The peace on the boat is interrupted when a poison dart from the jungle strikes and kills one of the soldiers. Leblanc is particularly upset by this development and wishes to return to the village.

The journey becomes increasingly uncomfortable, and the party stops to rest at a small lake. Watching the women in the group swim, Alex reflects that the journey has been a welcome respite from "hormones churning around, not letting him think in peace" (132) and notes that he can now see the women's bodies as "equally beautiful, each in her own way" (133). While swimming, the photographer Joel Gonzalez is attacked by an anaconda. Though the rest of the group kills the snake, Joel is seriously injured and Dr. Torres states that he needs to return to Santa Maria de la Lluvia. The party roasts the anaconda and Alex, interested for the first time in trying a new food, eats some of it. Reminded of his father's pancakes, Alex has a sudden, brief vision of his mother. Nadia tells him that with practice, he can improve that ability to see her "from afar, with the heart" (140).

## **Chapter 9 Summary: "People of the Mist"**

The group makes camp in the jungle and sets up shifts to keep watch. During his shift, Alexander realizes that he has gained the ability to “sit quietly for a long time, in silence, concentrating on his thoughts” (143) and likens this new experience to the calm focus he feels while mountain climbing. Toward the end of the night, Alex is awakened by shouts around him and a terrible smell that permeates the campsite. Karakawe reports that one of the soldiers on his shift has vanished and the group discovers the missing man’s mutilated body in the jungle. Near the body is a huge pile of excrement, which Leblanc falls into, and the members of the expedition agree that an enormous animal must have left the dung. They also find broken branches and dark hairs nearby, all signs of the Beast.

After this second death, the group decides that Matuwe, along with some soldiers, should take the injured Joel Gonzales back to the village in one of the boats. The rest of the group resolves to continue, though Leblanc initially tries to leave and only commits to staying when Kate threatens to publicly expose him as a coward. Alex and the others proceed to set a trap for the Beast, though Nadia says that she hopes the trap fails, wishing that they could instead “talk with it and ask what it wants” (155). They also set out gifts to attract any nearby Indians, so that Dr. Torres can vaccinate them. Additionally, the members of the expedition discover that their radio is broken, and Nadia suspects Karakawe of tampering with it.

Alex plays the flute for the group again after dark, and Nadia’s monkey Borobá draws Nadia and Alex’s attention to a presence just outside the campsite. The friends sneak out in to the jungle and discover that they’re surrounded by silent, nearly invisible people with painted bodies. Alex is filled with wonder, and the mysterious beings vanish without speaking. Nadia tells Alex that the beings must be the legendary People of the Mist, a remote native tribe said to possess the power of invisibility. They agree not to tell anyone of their meeting.

## **Chapters 7-9 Analysis**

Beginning with Alex’s sudden vision in “The Black Jaguar,” the novel’s metaphysical themes develop significantly in these chapters. Where Alex was previously skeptical of Nadia’s belief in visions and spirits, he begins here to become more credulous of happenings that fall outside his strictly rational worldview. The incident with the jaguar is particularly important in propelling him toward greater maturity and open-mindedness. After briefly communing with the jaguar, Alex finds himself connected to a greater sense of calm and is even willing



to risk trying a new food, an idea which previously repulsed him. His reward for taking that risk is a vision of his beloved mother, indicating that Nadia's notion of "seeing with the heart" is directly related to a willingness to accept experiences without fear and judgment.

Just as Alex's resistance to spiritual growth begins to erode, so to do the barriers between reality and myth begin to fall away as the expedition moves deeper into the jungle. Though the Beast was rumored to be only legendary, it leaves behind very tangible proof of its existence. This proof takes both terrifying forms—the soldier's mangled body—and comedic ones—Leblanc covered in excrement—and Nadia continues to maintain that the Beast is a misunderstood animal rather than a dangerous monster. These conflicting perspectives on the Beast leave the members of the expedition unsure of how best to continue, caught as they are between fear and curiosity.

This sense of mystery and uncertainty reaches its peak in Nadia and Alex's encounter with the People of the Mist. They appear both solid and vaporous at the same time, seeming to be neither human nor spirit. Alex senses danger but finds himself unafraid, a seemingly illogical tension that he embraces nonetheless, symbolically resolving the problem of conflicting perspectives that has plagued the expedition since its departure from Manaus. Also significant is the role that music plays in bridging these divides: when Alex plays his flute, conflicts within the group diminish, animals are unafraid of humans, and even the elusive People of the Mist show themselves. Music serves as a constant between divergent ways of thinking and being, and Alex's command of it symbolizes his potential to reconcile seemingly opposed interpretations of reality.

## Chapters 10-12

### Chapter 10 Summary: "Kidnapped"

The next day, the group discovers that the two remaining soldiers have stolen the second boat, leaving the expedition stranded. After some argument, they decide to stay where they are, keeping their fire burning and hoping that Matuwe will arrive soon in Santa Maria de la Lluvia and send Captain Ariosto to rescue them in his helicopters. Alex is bitten by a fire ant, leaving him unable to walk and his leg in terrible pain. Meanwhile, Nadia catches Karakawe looking through Dr. Torres's cases of vaccines, and though he threatens her, she tells Alex and Dr. Torres

nonetheless. Dr. Torres agrees that Karakawe is behaving suspiciously and asks Alex and Nadia to watch him carefully.

The day passes without incident, and Alex observes that all of the men in the expedition seem to be competing for the affection of Dr. Torres. That evening, Alex plays the flute again and Nadia informs him that the People of the Mist have returned. The two go into the jungle and again meet the elusive beings, but this time, the beings capture them and carry them away into the jungle, hitting Alex in the head to subdue him. Alex and Nadia are carried for a long way, unable to see where they are going, and Nadia advises Alex to be quiet, saying that the Indians hit him out of fear that he would make noise and expose them. Using her knowledge of native languages, Nadia talks with the People of the Mist and impresses them with the amulet given to her by Walimai. The Indians give them food and also invite Alex to consume *masato*, an intoxicating drink. Alex and the People of the Mist fall unconscious, leaving only Nadia and Borobá sober to see the Beast pass through in the night. Alex is disgusted by the smell, but the Indians seem not to notice it.

In the morning, the People of the Mist set off with Alex and Nadia, led by their chief, an ancient man called Mocarita, and Tahama, an honored hunter. After several hours, they arrive at the bottom of an enormous mountain with a huge waterfall, which Tahama calls “the river that falls from the sky” (184).

## **Chapter 11 Summary: “The Invisible Village”**

Chief Mocarita informs the group that they will have to climb the face of the waterfall. Nadia, who is afraid of heights, despairingly claims that she cannot climb it. Mocarita and the other Indians become angry with Nadia, and but Alex calms them with his flute music and convinces Nadia that he can assist her with the climb. He notes that his father is “one of the most experienced and daring climbers in the United States” (186) and that he, Alex, has accompanied him on many difficult climbs. Although Nadia is terrified, Alex works with the Indians to make a length of rope and, once he and Nadia are secured together, they begin the climb up the waterfall.

Alex and Nadia successfully follow the People of the Mist to the top of the waterfall, using hidden footholds to make their way. When they reach the top, it becomes clear that one member of the party fell, and Alex goes back down the face of the falls to find the missing person. He brings the person back to the top

of the falls and discovers that it is the chief, Mokarita, now gravely injured. The Indians lead Alex and Nadia the rest of the way to their home, which they call the Eye of the World. It is a beautiful paradise, a valley of rain forest surrounded by tall black mountains called *tepui*s. Alex realizes that these are the mountains he saw in his vision with the jaguar.

After walking a bit farther, they arrive in Tapirawa-Teri, the hidden village where the People of the Mist live. Once Alex and Nadia remove their clothes, which frighten the residents of the village, they are welcomed warmly and learn the customs of the People of the Mist. Alex discovers that he can “listen with his heart” (202) and understand much of their language, and so he learns of the beauty of their communal way of life, in which connection to the community and living simply and respectfully are the most important things. The People of the Mist “had lived the same way for thousands of years and did not want to change” (205). Alex is amazed at the hidden society and the enormous variety of life on earth, thinking back on how he had recently “thought he was the center of the universe” (206). Alex and Nadia join with excitement in the village’s preparation for festivities to welcome the warriors home and celebrate the arrival of “the two ‘white souls’” (208).

## Chapter 12 Summary: “Rites of Passage”

Alex and Nadia take place in a joyous celebration including food, drink, and dancing. Mokarita is at the center of the festivities but continues to weaken. Mokarita summons Alex and Nadia and explains that they’re “the only foreigners to enter Tapirawa-Teri since the village had been founded” (213). He also says that because of Walimai’s prophecy that Nadia must help protect the People of the Mist from the bloodthirsty Rahakanariwa, Nadia and Alex have been invited into the life of the village.

When Mokarita dies, the village falls into chaos, unsure of how to choose a successor, so Nadia uses her amulet to call Walimai. Alex finds that he is now able to see Walimai’s beautiful spirit-wife, who was previously invisible to him. The tribe grows calm in Walimai’s presence, and Walimai tells them that Alex has come to help them. He also relates what he has seen of the foreigners, or *nahab*, saying that they are crazy and appear “like the dead; their souls have escaped their breasts” (221). Tahama vows that the *nahab* will never enter the Eye of the World, but Alex warns them that there may be no way to keep the helicopters

away. He and Nadia attempt to convince the Indians to accept Dr. Omayra Torres's vaccinations when she comes.

Alex and Nadia participate in the tribe's funeral rites for Mokarita. Under the influence of *ayahuasca*, each takes on the form of a totemic animal for a spiritual journey: Alex becomes a jaguar and Nadia becomes an eagle. During her vision, Nadia sees three crystal eggs in a high nest that she senses are very important. The two become members of the tribe by partaking of a drink made from Mokarita's bones. After much negotiation, Iyomi, Mokarita's ancient widow, is chosen as the new chief. Iyomi also names additional chiefs, saying that Nadia (known as Eagle) will be "chief for soothing the Rahakanariwa" (229-230) and Alex (known as Jaguar) will be "chief for negotiating with the *nahab* and their birds of noise and wind" (230). To mark his transition to manhood, Alex is taken by the men of the tribe and subjected to a series of trials, including having his arm covered with fire ants. During the experience he finds the strength to "open himself to suffering without resisting" (235) and knows afterward that he has "left his childhood behind" (236).

## Chapters 10-12 Analysis

These chapters mark profound transformation for both Alex and Nadia, as well as unprecedented change for the People of the Mist. After centuries of living in the same way, the People of the Mist welcome strangers for the first time, and shortly thereafter they select their first female chief, Iyomi. These enormous departures from tradition emphasize the weight of the threat presented by greedy outsiders like Mauro Carías; even a society that has held up for countless generations cannot remain unchanged in the face of the harsh realities of guns, helicopters, and disease. Yet even as outsiders present the greatest threat to the People of the Mist, they also present the best hope of salvation, in the form of Alex and Nadia. These chapters indicate that even for the People of the Mist, complete isolation is not the answer; they must trust in the good aspects of the things they find most menacing.

Similarly, Alex and Nadia are forced to discover the hidden gifts of outwardly terrifying things. For Nadia, facing her fear of heights by climbing the waterfall leads to her awakening as Eagle, an animal that draws its strength from heights and shows Nadia her own reserves of power. For Alex, his transition to manhood is marked by frightening rituals and "horrific pain" (235), but once he decides to accept the agony of the fire ant bites, he is left feeling "strong and invincible"

(236). Just as the People of the Mist find themselves relying on strange foreigners to guide them in trying times, Alex and Nadia discover that unsuspected strength lies on the other side of experiences that they initially wanted to avoid.

The communal lifestyle of the People of the Mist underscores these chapters' emphasis on trust and collaboration. For the People of the Mist, joining together is so important that the greatest honor in the funeral of their leader, Mokarita, is to literally consume his body by drinking the bone broth. In consuming the broth, Alex at last gives up his picky eating completely, a symbolic act of connection that gains him inclusion in the tribe. Just as the previous chapters highlighted the mistrust and conflicting motives of the *International Geographic* expedition, these chapters posit an alternate view of group dynamics, in which the juxtaposition of very different individuals brings strength rather than discord.

## Chapters 13-16

### Chapter 13 Summary: "The Sacred Mountain"

Alex visits his hospitalized mother in a vision and comforts her with his presence. Walimai tells Alex that he might be able to find the mystical "water of health" (240) to heal his mother and Alex vows to do so. Walimai, Alex, Nadia, and Borobá prepare to trek to "the sacred mountain where the gods live" (241), although Alex is confused about the purpose of their trip and believes it would be better to rejoin the expedition to help Dr. Torres with her vaccines and Kate with her article.

The group walks for over a day until they reach the bottom of the tallest *tepuí*. Walimai informs Alex and Nadia that only those invited by the gods can visit the peak and that each generation, the gods choose a messenger. Walimai is the current messenger and worries that he has not yet trained another to follow him. Alex and Nadia will be the first additional visitors "since the beginning of time" (248).

Led by Walimai, the group navigates a labyrinthine passageway that climbs through the *tepui*. Along the way, they witness incredible wonders, including caverns full of crystals, exotic flora, flying fish, and even what appears to be a small dragon. Alex reasons that the isolated *tepui* must be “a kind of Galapagos Island, where the most ancient of species had escaped genetic mutation or extinction” (258). Finally, they make their way out of the passage and discover a view of a spectacular valley in the crater at the top of the mountain, full of lush vegetation, strange birds, and “the unbelievable splendor of the city of gold, the dwelling of the gods” (261). As they descend into the valley, Alex realizes that what he thought was the golden city of El Dorado is actually a series of mineral formations, likely made of mica and pyrite rather than true gold.

### Chapter 14 Summary: “The Beasts”

Near the city, they encounter the Beast up close and discover that it looks like a giant sloth, down to its very slow movements. They also speculate that it might use its scent glands like a skunk to stun enemies. Walimai speaks with the Beast, and Alex and Nadia are surprised to learn that it speaks roughly the same language as the People of the Mist. Walimai translates that the Beast is one of many gods residing in the city and tells Alex and Nadia that these gods will hold a council. They discover that several more Beasts live in the false city of gold and that their society is very primitive, not even using fire.

The next day, Alex and Nadia witness the Beasts’ council. Walimai brings them news of the village and conducts a long conversation during which Alex and Nadia learn that the Beasts and the People of the Mist live in a kind of symbiosis; the People of the Mist “[protect] the gods from the outside world, while in turn those extraordinary beings had served as the storehouse of every word of the tribe’s history” (271). Because of their extremely long lifespans, the Beasts remember the complete history of the tribe and seem to the People of the Mist to be gods. When, they learn, the *nahab* began to threaten the People of the Mist, some of the Beasts left the *tepui* to try and kill the *nahab*, not understanding that there are an infinite number of them. These Beasts outside the *tepui* are the ones that attacked humans and prompted the *International Geographic* expedition.

Alex, acting as directed by Iyomi as the chief for negotiating with the *nahab*, attempts to explain that the Beasts’ recent actions have put both them and the People of the Mist in danger. He tries to convince them that some *nahab* can be helpful and that they need to work together to start conservation efforts to



protect the Eye of World. That night, everyone—including the Beasts—drinks a magical brew that causes them to share the same dream. The images in the dream show them that Jaguar and Eagle are destined to do battle with the Rahakanariwa—which is shown as a bird breaking out of its cage—to protect the tribe and the Beasts. In exchange for completing this task, Nadia asks for the crystal eggs she saw in her vision and Alex asks for the water of health. At first the Beasts are offended by their requests, but then Alex plays his flute to calm them and Nadia joins him by dancing. Impressed by their gifts of song and dance, the Beasts agree that Nadia and Alex can take the eggs and the water.

### **Chapter 15 Summary: “The Crystal Eggs”**

Walimai informs Alex and Nadia that they must undertake perilous journeys to retrieve their respective prizes. Alex must travel deep into the earth and Nadia must climb to the top of the *tepui*, and if either fails to complete the quest in a single day, they will be trapped in the valley forever.

The next day, Nadia begins her journey. This chapter is one of few sections of the book in which the narration strays from Alex’s perspective. Though Nadia is still afraid of heights, she tells herself that she will “think about solutions, not problems. She would confront the obstacles one by one” (289). Remembering her eagle totem and proceeding slowly, Nadia makes her way up the wall of the crater to reach the highest point of the *tepui*. Exhilarated by her experience, Nadia feels herself move out of her body into the spirit realm and finally “the void, empty of desire, of memory” (294).

At last Nadia returns to her body and finds the nest that holds the three crystal eggs. At first, she is unable to move the eggs and grows frustrated, but then she remembers Walimai’s lesson: “For everything you take, you have to give something in return” (297). She realizes that all she has to give is Walimai’s amulet around her neck and though she hesitates, she remembers that the eggs are necessary to save the People of the Mist and trades the amulet for them. The eggs immediately become light and Nadia sets out to carry them back down to the valley.

### **Chapter 16 Summary: “The Water of Health”**

While Nadia makes the climb detailed in the previous chapter, Alex crawls through a narrow tunnel that leads deep into the earth. Early in his journey, he becomes

panicked and exhausted, fearing that he will suffocate. After a period of despair, Alex reminds himself of his father's mountain climbing advice and calms himself using a breathing exercise.

After continuing through the passage for some time, Alex discovers a lake and river of "white water that reminded him of skim milk" (304). Alex wonders if he has found the water of health and sees a vision across the lake of a girl who looks just like Cecilia Burns, a girl back in California who he has a crush on. He is tempted to swim over to her but decides to follow a path away from the lake instead. In the next cavern he discovers walls covered in precious gems and considers filling his empty gourd with jewels to take home, dreaming of becoming rich enough to solve all his family's problems and protect the People of the Mist. But then he remembers Walimai's promise that the water of health can work magic and instead continues on to find it. The path leads to a dead end at a giant pile of rocks, which Alex moves gradually to enter a final chamber. Within the chamber is a giant white bat with long fangs, guarding "the fountain of eternal youth" (313). Alex plays his flute and the music frightens the blind bat, who retreats and lets Alex access the water, but the water dries up as he reaches it. In order to make it flow again, Alex is forced to leave behind his flute, but reflects that the gaining the water is worth losing even "his most valuable possession" (315).

When Alex returns to the valley he finds Nadia there with the crystal eggs. The two learn that while they were gone, the Beasts decided to accept their advice to stay safe inside their mountain rather than attempting to kill the *nahab*. Walimai indicates that it is time to leave the valley and so Alex and Nadia say goodbye to the Beasts. They proceed, with Walimai and Borobá, back through the labyrinth that leads out of the *tepui*. Before they exit, Walimai makes them smoke a mysterious leaf that causes them to forget the way through the labyrinth so that they can never return.

## Chapters 13-16 Analysis

With Alex and Nadia having been initiated into the tribe of the People of the Mist at conclusion of Chapter 12, these chapters bring the two friends into immediate, harrowing tests of their newfound maturity. Where the previous chapters found them newly acquainted with their strength and potential, these chapters force them to prove that fortitude. But in each of their cases, they discover that even immense personal strength is not enough to achieve their goals; as Nadia gives



up her amulet and Alex gives up his flute, they learn that sacrifice for the sake of others is the necessary complement to their own bravery. With the purposeful abandonment of those central symbols, Alex and Nadia demonstrate that they have become capable of truly selfless connection to others and no longer require the mediating influence of the flute and the amulet. Comforting each other, Nadia assures Alex that he himself makes the music, and he tells her, “the powers of the talisman are within you” (317). What once seemed external is now entirely incorporated into the newly mature friends.

Even as they become more deeply acquainted with their own somewhat mystical natures, Alex and Nadia also come to understand that some of what they had considered magical can actually be explained logically. The Beasts are not truly gods, but rather quirks of evolution; their home is not truly El Dorado, but only a series of minerals that give the illusion of a golden city. This swap further develops the theme of surface appearances versus true nature that began in the book’s earliest chapters: the fantastic is revealed as rational and vice versa. In the face of such conflicting evidence, Alex and Nadia both learn to rely on their inner calm and their essential connection to other living beings, rather than despairing at the confusion they face.

The symbiosis between the Beasts and the tribe also serves as an emblem of the power of perspective in defining things as rational or magical. From the point of view of the tribe, the Beasts, with their long memories and incredible lifespans, are as powerful as gods. Similarly, from the point of view of the Beasts, the members of the tribe are equally powerful, with their speed and skill at hunting and making fire. Each has a profound appreciation for the abilities of the other, and they view their differences as blessings rather than threats. As Alex prepares to mediate between the tribe and the *nahab*, the tribe’s relationship with the Beasts provides a telling microcosm of what an ideal relationship between the tribe and the outside world might look like.

## Chapters 17-20

### Chapter 17 Summary: “The Cannibal-Bird”

Walimai, Nadia, Borobá, and Alex arrive back in Tapirawa-Teri to find that the *International Geographic* expedition has arrived in the village by helicopter. Walimai decides to depart and Alex gives him his Swiss army knife in exchange for all his help. In addition to Kate, Dr. Omayra Torres, Karakawe, Ludovic

Leblanc, César Santos, Timothy Bruce, Captain Ariosto and Mauro Carías are also present, along with several soldiers. The village is completely abandoned and there are no signs of the tribe.

Dr. Torres emphasizes that it is extremely important to vaccinate the tribe soon and asks Nadia to try and communicate with them. Nadia agrees to do so to the best of her ability. That evening, Kate explains to Alex and Nadia that after their kidnapping, the expedition was rescued by Ariosto in his helicopters and that the group found its way to the village in search of Alex and Nadia. While everyone else is asleep, Nadia goes to the jungle and tells the People of the Mist that Kate has “a lot of magic in the world of the *nahab*” (336), hoping to convince them to trust the expedition.

The next day, Iyomi and the rest of the tribe emerge to speak with the members of the expedition. Nadia again attempts to convince them to accept the vaccinations, and when they hesitate, she suggests that Mauro Carías serve as an example to show that it’s safe. He refuses fearfully, and the tribe vanishes again. That night, Nadia sneaks through the camp, practicing her ability to seem invisible like the tribe. She overhears Mauro Carías and Dr. Omayra Torres alone together, professing their love for each other. In the morning, the tribe returns and at last agrees to accept the vaccinations, after Nadia reminds them that she has been charged with protecting them from the Rahakanariwa. While Dr. Torres is getting ready, Nadia tells Alex about seeing Torres and Carías together and Alex remembers the shared dream from their night in the *tepui*, in which the Rahakanariwa broke free and attacked. The two friends realize that “the Rahakanariwa [is] in the syringe” (351) and interrupt just in time to push Tahama away from the vaccination needle.

## **Chapter 18 Summary: “Bloodstains”**

Chaos follows Alex and Nadia’s interruption, with Dr. Torres attempting to continue the vaccinations. Karakawe announces unexpectedly that he works for the Department for the Protection of Indigenous Peoples and that he has been assigned to find out why so many native tribes have been dying off. He states that he has long suspected Mauro Carías and demands that the vials of vaccine be held as evidence, at which point Captain Ariosto shoots and kills Karakawe. In the ensuing mayhem, Ariosto destroys the vials and Tahama attacks Carías with his club while Timothy Bruce and Kate use their cameras to record the events. Three soldiers and several Indians are killed, including a woman whose infant Ludovic

Leblanc rescues. Holding the baby, Leblanc realizes with horror that “they themselves were the savages, not the Indians” (355).

As Captain Ariosto takes command of the remaining members of the expedition, Alex comes to understand that Dr. Torres has been helping Carías decimate native tribes for years. Her alleged vaccine vials actually contained viruses, and she and her lover Carías had killed hundreds of natives using them. Carías, it turns out, had planned for the *International Geographic* team to document the vaccinations in order to prove publicly that “the necessary precautions had been taken to protect the village” (358). Ariosto had been Carías’s accomplice throughout and, Alex realizes, is now eager to keep the true story from being revealed and might even kill the members of the expedition in order to keep his secret.

At Ariosto’s command, one helicopter leaves to take Carías, Torres, and some injured soldiers back to Santa Maria de la Lluvia. Leblanc comes up with the idea to distract Ariosto and so save their lives, telling the others: “We must pretend we do not suspect him, and conquer him with cunning” (362). Leblanc succeeds in putting Ariosto at ease by appearing to take his side, and Ariosto confiscates Bruce’s film to hide evidence of the day’s events. As the camp settles down for the night, Ariosto insists on tying Alex up away from the others as a punishment. Kate fears that Ariosto will kill Alex in the night, and Nadia sends Borobá into the jungle to find help.

### **Chapter 19 Summary: “Protection”**

Using her mental powers of invisibility, Nadia enters the jungle at night. Meanwhile, Walimai appears to Alex and cuts him out of his binds, using the Swiss Army knife Alex gave him. Nadia joins them and together the three hide in the forest, with Walimai encouraging Alex to negotiate with Ariosto even though he feels doomed to fail. While hiding, Alex and Nadia smell the terrible odor of the Beasts and know that one has attacked the expedition’s camp. In the morning, they find the camp completely empty, without even the dead bodies of the Indians remaining.

The chapter also includes a section of narrative from Iyomi’s perspective, describing her hesitations regarding the strangers and the vaccines and her ultimate trust in Nadia and Alex. It becomes clear that while Nadia and Alex hide in the jungle, Iyomi summons the Beasts at Walimai’s prompting to spray the

ruined village, since it could no longer be a home to the tribe. After the Beasts' odor stuns everyone in the camp, the tribe comes to move the expedition members out of danger and collect their dead. They also discover the mangled body of Ariosto, who was killed by a Beast in the night.

The members of the expedition regain consciousness in the forest and soon reunite with Alex and Nadia. Iyomi and the rest of the tribe appear to talk with them, saying that they wish to rebuild their village in another part of the Eye of the World. Nadia assures Iyomi that the remaining outsiders will work to help the People of the Mist, and "after endless negotiations about who were friends and who were enemies" (388), Iyomi helps the expedition return to their helicopter. After one shared evening with the tribe, the expedition party packs its things and exchanges gifts with the tribe in preparation for departure. Before they leave, Alex tells Kate of his experiences in the Beasts' city and she wishes to document it for her assignment, but Alex convinces her to instead write an article about the tribe and how best to protect it, as well as the evils of people like Carías, Ariosto, and Torres. Kate agrees to Alex's request, and plans to claim that the Beasts are a myth in order to protect them.

## **Chapter 20 Summary: "Separate Ways"**

Although he has never piloted a helicopter before, César Santos successfully flies the group back to Santa Maria de la Lluvia. There they discover that Carías—accompanied by Torres—has been transported to a hospital in Venezuela with permanent brain damage. Joel Gonzalez and the soldiers who were wounded earlier in the journey have recovered. Padre Valdomero reports to Kate and Leblanc that his interactions with grief-stricken Dr. Torres had further implicated her in the conspiracy to decimate the natives, and he notes that he had long been suspicious of Carías and Ariosto.

Kate laments that they don't have hard evidence to prove the conspiracy, at which point César Santos reveals that he recovered a vial of the alleged vaccine from Torres's supplies. He tells the group that he knew about Karakawe's true identity and convinced Leblanc to hire Karakawe so that he could join the expedition. Additionally, Timothy Bruce shows Kate that he still has the film on which he recorded Ariosto's killing of Karakawe, having swapped out the footage before giving film to Ariosto. Kate is overjoyed to discover the evidence and, at Padre Valdomero's suggestion, she and Leblanc plan to form a foundation to protect the People of the Mist.

Before parting ways, Alex and Nadia sit together on the dock in the village, considering how they feel “as if they had lived a lot of life since they met” (402). Nadia gives Alex her basket of three crystal eggs, telling him that the stones are actually diamonds and that with Kate’s help, he will be able to use them to fund protection for the People of the Mist. Alex tells Nadia that Kate has been assigned to write another article, this time about a remote area of the Himalayas, and he hopes to go with her, though he suspects that he will need to stay at home with his family. Though they are sad to part, Alex and Nadia agree to write to each other and remain best friends by “seeing each other with their hearts” (406).

### Chapters 17-20 Analysis

The concluding chapters of *City of the Beasts* bring both devastation and a measure of solace to the novel’s characters. During the violence that begins with Karakawe’s revelation, nearly everyone involved experiences a profound trauma: the members of the expedition witness death and fear for their own lives; the tribe suffers the loss of some of its members and is forced to abandon its home; even the nefarious Dr. Torres loses her beloved Carías. The positive outcomes at the novel’s end rely on the deep pain that precedes them, underscoring the novel’s consistent portrayal of good and evil as closely linked.

Given the destruction that occurs in Tapirawa-Teri, it seems at first that Alex and Nadia have failed in the chief roles assigned to them by Iyomi. However, having learned from their trials in the Beasts’ city not to despair in dire circumstances, they both rally their strength to attempt their tasks one last time. Crucially, they both succeed in deriving hope from a seemingly hopeless situation: Nadia uses her connection to Walimai and the Beasts to undermine Ariosto and free her compatriots, and Alex uses his newfound maturity and perspective to convince Kate to use her public platform for good. Each of them fulfills Iyomi’s expectations, even though the form that success takes looks very different than they might have expected. Again, the novel demonstrates how surface appearances can often contrast sharply with underlying meaning.

Finally, the closing scene of Alex and Nadia’s vow of friendship returns once again to the narrative’s theme of the primacy of interpersonal connection and shared responsibility. Despite the wonders and grand adventures he has experienced, Alex finds that he values his friendship with Nadia more than any of the more glamorous aspects of his journey. Moving forward, Alex understands at last that

his happiness derives not from his actions or possessions, but from his unity with others.

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

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### Alex Cold

Alex Cold is the novel's protagonist and the character whose perspective most colors the narrative. Alex starts out as an average 15-year-old from the California coast who "had never felt any great curiosity to explore beyond the safe boundaries of his own existence" (15). He lives with his two sisters, Andrea and Nicole, and his parents, John and Lisa. Alex is a skilled mountain climber and flutist and, until his mother gets sick, he leads a happy and uneventful life. When he learns that he'll have to join his grandmother Kate on her trip to the Amazon, Alex is initially frightened and angry, but once the trip begins, he quickly becomes engaged in his exciting new surroundings and the complex issues surrounding the peoples and environment of the Amazon. Though narrow-minded and skeptical at first, Alex grows significantly more mature and capable over the course of the novel. Aided in large part by his new friend Nadia Santos, Alex learns to appreciate the metaphysical mysteries of the native people and loses his attachment to the strictly rational mindset he once relied on.

Alex is somewhat passive at the start of his journey, merely observing and learning from those around him, until he glimpses his true nature through his encounter with the black jaguar at Mauro Carías's compound. This burgeoning understanding of his own strength and power increases after he and Nadia are kidnapped by the People of the Mist. Along with Nadia, Alex successfully proves himself to the People of the Mist and is invited into the tribe. Iyomi names him chief for negotiating with the *nahab*, a title which places unprecedented pressure on Alex. Simultaneously, Alex feels responsible for curing his mother's illness and, in the course of fulfilling these dual missions, Alex overcomes anxiety, greed, and temptation during his quest for the water of health in the city of the Beasts. During the novel's final sequence, Alex uses the insights and skills gained during his journey to thwart the plan to destroy the People of the Mist, managing to continue fighting even when the situation seems hopeless. Ultimately, he even convinces his grandmother Kate to use her journalistic reputation to protect the Beasts and the tribe, impressing her with his newfound maturity. By the end of the narrative, Alex has adopted the name Jaguar to reflect his inner fortitude and looks forward to future adventures with excitement rather than apprehension.



## Nadia Santos

Nadia Santos is described as a honey-colored girl of about 12 or 13. She travels with her father, César, and though she does not attend school, she knows a great deal about the natural world and speaks several languages, including some of the native people. Nadia's mother, who was not able to stand life in the village, is mentally ill and lives in her home country of Canada. Nadia is accompanied everywhere by Borobá, a small tame monkey who behaves like an extension of Nadia herself.

Wise and calm for her age, Nadia serves as Alex's guide to the world of the Amazon and impresses him with her intuitive abilities and deep connection to animals. Where Alex is skeptical and rational, Nadia is trusting and imaginative, and her ability to communicate easily with all kinds of beings—from outsiders like Alex, to natives like the People of the Mist, to mystical figures like Walimai—is key to the duo's success in their quests. After she and Alex are kidnapped, Nadia's abilities are further tested, as she is tasked by the People of the Mist with serving as the chief for soothing the volatile Rahakanariwa. She is also forced to confront her immense fear of heights, and once she does, she discovers that her true nature is that of the eagle, "the queen of the sky" (292). By communicating with Walimai and relying on Borobá for help, Nadia is the one who opens the passage to the city of the Beasts and who sets the stage for the salvation of the People of the Mist by collecting the valuable crystal eggs. Nadia's quick thinking saves the People of the Mist from Dr. Torres's viruses and though she is traumatized by the violence that follows her actions, she nonetheless musters the strength to moderate a final agreement between the expedition and the tribe. At the conclusion of the novel, Nadia gives the crystal eggs to Alex to use in funding protection for the People of the Mist and she promises him that they will remain connected by their deep friendship, demonstrating once again her role as a powerful mediator between different worlds.

## Kate Cold

Kate Cold, Alex's paternal grandmother, is a famous adventurer and journalist. She is 64 years old and very strong for her age, with wild hair and eccentric clothing. Kate's apartment is filled with relics of her world travels and Alex describes her as a frightening but thrilling figure in his childhood, who played tricks on him and his sisters and sometimes put them in dangerous situations, but who also impressed them with her daring stories and fearless personality. Kate



takes a tough-love approach with her grandson Alex, refusing to coddle him but occasionally showing subtle signs of affection and making it known that she feels her actions are the best way to help him grow and mature.

During most of their journey together, Kate ignores Alex, focusing instead on her own work and leaving him to entertain and fend for himself. Though her behavior sometimes seems uncaring and Alex wonders whether she loves him, he eventually comes to appreciate that her insistence on his self-sufficiency has been crucial to his growth as a person. Kate also holds her own as a professional woman, eagerly facing off against condescending men like Ludovic Leblanc. After Alex and Nadia are kidnapped, Kate's insistence on finding them leads to the expedition's encounter with the People of the Mist, and Kate's journalistic skills and professional standing are ultimately key to the group's plan to protect the tribe. Kate plans to start a foundation to fund the protection of the People of the Mist, and she also plans to use her platform at *International Geographic* magazine to convince the outside world that the Beast is a myth, so protecting the ancient creatures from outside interference. Alex mentions at the end of the novel that Kate has been assigned another story by the magazine and will next be traveling to the Himalayas.

### **Ludovic Leblanc**

Ludovic Leblanc is a renowned anthropologist who claims to be an expert in native Amazon peoples. He is short, thin, and about 50 years old, dressed like a stereotypical jungle adventurer and fond of referring to himself in the third person. Despite his grandiose claims, Leblanc is quickly revealed to be cowardly and lazy; he avoids any work on the expedition and panics in dangerous situations. Leblanc is also impatient with the pace of the trip and convinced that the native people, who he considers savages, are behind the gruesome acts attributed to the Beast. Leblanc's contributions to the expedition are essentially nonexistent until the final encounter with the People of the Mist, during which he suddenly realizes, upon seeing a native infant orphaned by the fight, that he and his people are far more savage than the Indians themselves. At that point, he commits himself to protecting the tribe and comes up with the idea to flatter and distract Captain Ariosto, which allows Nadia to execute her plan with Walimai and the tribe to overcome Ariosto. At the end of the book, Leblanc joins forces with Kate to start a foundation and use his professional influence to protect the People of the Mist.

## Dr. Omayra Torres

Dr. Omayra Torres is a Venezuelan woman described as “a beautiful mulatto, about thirty-five years old” (53). She joins the *International Geographic* expedition in order to find and vaccinate the native Amazon peoples, who are in danger of contracting fatal diseases from their contact with outsiders. All the men on the expedition admire Dr. Torres’s beauty and vie for her attention, and she struggles to be taken seriously as a professional, especially by Leblanc, who frequently belittles her expertise. Alex and Nadia feel that Dr. Torres is one of the only trustworthy adults on the expedition and Nadia even hopes that Dr. Torres might become her stepmother. Dr. Torres continues to seem like a sympathetic and noble character until the night in Tapirawa-Teri when Nadia witnesses her kissing Mauro Carías. It turns out that Dr. Torres has actually been helping Captain Ariosto and her lover Carías decimate the native populations by injecting them with viruses rather than vaccines, in order to clear the way for Carías and Ariosto to take advantage of the land’s natural resources. After the bloodshed in the village, Dr. Torres leaves with the injured Carías for Venezuela. Kate vows to bring her to justice for her crimes, using the evidence secured by Timothy Bruce and César Santos.

## César Santos

César Santos is the hired guide to the *International Geographic* expedition. He is a middle-aged Brazilian man with dark hair and “the sharp profile of a bird” (65). Like his daughter, Nadia, César Santos has a strong connection to the natural world and serves as a mediator between traditional native culture and outsiders. He remains a calm and knowledgeable presence throughout the journey, helping the expedition face dangers like the anaconda and advocating for the interests of the natural world, as when he kills Mauro Carías’s jaguar in order to set it free. Santos is the only one on the expedition who knows Karakawe’s true identity, and he convinces Leblanc to hire Karakawe. Santos’s skills as a pilot are also crucial to saving the group when he flies them by helicopter out of Tapirawa-Teri, and he provides a key piece of evidence against Torres and Carías by recovering one of Torres’s vials before they are destroyed.

## Walimai

Walimai is an ancient shaman, described as a very small man dressed in necklaces and tokens of various materials. His age is not specified, but he appears to have lived for much longer than a normal human lifespan. He is accompanied everywhere by his angel-wife, a benevolent spirit who is usually invisible but sometimes appears in the form of a beautiful young girl. Walimai befriends Nadia in the jungle near Santa Maria de la Lluvia and, after Alex arrives, warns her of the return of the Rahakanariwa. He gives Nadia an amulet to protect her in the dangerous times to come and tells her that she and Alex have been called to participate in the expedition. Using the amulet, Nadia calls to Walimai to help resolve the conflict in Tepariwa-Teri that ensues after Mokarita dies. Walimai helps Nadia communicate with the People of the Mist and conveys important information about the role that the expedition will play when it arrives. Most importantly, Walimai serves as Alex and Nadia's guide to the city of the Beasts, guiding them through the labyrinth on the way to the city and mediating the discussion in which the Beasts agree not to attack humans anymore. Walimai also helps Alex and Nadia learn to harness the power of their animal totems and aids in their success in their trials inside the city. Finally, Walimai comes to Nadia's aid in the chaos surrounding the vaccines and helps her reestablish trust with the People of the Mist.

### **Mauro Carías**

Mauro Carías is a powerful entrepreneur who lives in Santa Maria de la Lluvia. He is known to have international business dealings and homes in several countries, and he is also said to be seductive, and attractive to women. Nadia tells Alex that Carías "didn't have a heart in his chest but carried it in a tote bag" (76). Carías initiated the organization of the *International Geographic* expedition and hosts its members lavishly at his compound, where Alex encounters the jaguar that leads to his first glimpse of his true nature. As Alex and Nadia overhear him in conversation with Ariosto, they learn that his true motive is to exterminate the natives and gain natural resources, but they don't know how he plans to accomplish this. Later, it becomes clear that he and Ariosto convinced Dr. Torres to work with them and that together, Carías and his accomplices have been responsible for countless deaths among the natives. Carías had hoped that having the journalistic team present would provide evidence that vaccinations were provided, but his plan backfires when Karakawe reveals his identity and the team captures footage of the ensuing conflict. Alarmed by the appearance of the Rahakanariwa, Tahama clubs Carías on the head, causing permanent brain damage. At the conclusion of the novel Carías is in a hospital in Venezuela,

accompanied by his lover Dr. Torres and doomed to prosecution upon the discovery of the evidence of his crimes.

## **Captain Ariosto**

Captain Ariosto is the commander of the military forces in Santa Maria de la Lluvia and charged with protecting the nearby tribes. He becomes a menacing figure when Alex and Nadia overhear him plotting with Mauro Carías to exterminate the natives, but his full motivations do not become clear until the conflict in Tapirawa-Teri. When Karakawe reveals his identity and states his intention to prosecute Carías, Ariosto fatally shoots him and leads the soldiers in killing several members of the tribe. It becomes clear that Ariosto was working with Carías to get rid of the natives and exploit the natural resources of their land, in order to increase his own wealth and power. Ariosto attempts to take command of the situation after Karakawe's death, but he is lulled into a false sense of security by Leblanc's flattery and is ultimately killed by a Beast summoned to help the tribe.

## **Mokarita**

Mokarita is the name that Nadia gives to the chief of the People of the Mist, who leads their kidnapping and demands that they climb to the top of the waterfall with the tribe. His true name is not revealed. Mokarita is very old, has a kindly demeanor, and wears a crown of yellow feathers. During the climb to the top of the waterfall, Mokarita slips and falls down the rock face, coming to rest on a tree branch. Alex rescues him and brings him to rejoin the tribe, but Mokarita is severely injured and dies shortly after the tribe's arrival in their village. Before his death, he informs Nadia that she and Alex are the first foreigners ever to enter the village and that they are destined to play a role in helping the People of the Mist. It is during Mokarita's funeral that Alex and Nadia fully discover their animal totems and, by drinking broth made with Mokarita's bones, become members of the tribe.

## **Iyomi**

Iyomi is a very old member of the People of the Mist who is married to Mokarita. She comforts him before his death and, after he dies, she becomes the new chief of the tribe. Iyomi is the first female chief in the tribe's history. Shortly after being named chief, Iyomi names Tahama, Nadia, Alex, and Walimai as additional chiefs.

She also instructs Alex to undergo the rites of passage that lead him into manhood. Later, when the expedition reaches her village, Iyomi is the central negotiator on behalf of the tribe and helps save them from ruin after the conflict with the outsiders. A portion of the narrative in the chapter “Protection” is told from Iyomi’s perspective and provides the narrative’s most immediate glimpse into the People of the Mist’s experience of the novel’s events.

## **Karakawe**

Karakawe is an Indian man who the expedition meets in Santa Maria de le Lluvia. Having spent a lot of time in the company of outsiders, he has been partially assimilated into their culture. At César Santos’s suggestion, Leblanc hires Karakawe as his personal assistant for the journey. Karakawe is brusque and sometimes rude, and Nadia and Alex are suspicious of him because they see him looking through Dr. Torres’s cases of vaccines on multiple occasions. Later, when Nadia reveals the vaccines themselves to be the dreaded Rahakanariwa, Karakawe announces that he is actually an officer of the Department for the Protection of Indigenous Peoples and has been investigating the causes of the mysterious deaths plaguing native tribes. Karakawe states that he suspects Carías of wrongdoing, at which point Captain Ariosto shoots and kills Karakawe.

## **Timothy Bruce**

Timothy Bruce is a laconic English photographer who has worked with Kate on many previous assignments for *International Geographic*. He joins the Amazon expedition to document the Beast and is soon traumatized when his assistant, Joel Gonzalez, is badly injured by an anaconda. Bruce does not speak much throughout the narrative but is on hand to document its key moments and support Kate in her investigations. At the end of the story, it is Bruce who provides one of the key pieces of evidence against Carías in the form of film documenting Karakawe’s death and Ariosto’s actions.

## **Padre Valdomero**

Padre Valdomero is an eccentric priest who lives in Santa Maria de la Lluvia. Although he came to the Amazon as a missionary, he wound up getting lost and living with the natives for several years. He has respect and even reverence for native culture, saying that those who exploit the natives are far more dangerous than the natives themselves. Padre Valdomero is one of the novel’s strongest

proponents for the worth and rights of the region's native peoples, and he is the one who gives Kate and Leblanc the idea of starting a foundation to protect the People of the Mist.

## THEMES

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### Surface Appearances Versus Inner Truth

From its first chapter, *City of the Beasts* explores the frequent and surprising dissonances between outward appearances and internal realities. Throughout the novel, hardly anything is what it seems: the frail Morgana turns out to be a thief; the ferocious Kate becomes a nurturing figure in Alex's personal development; even the golden city of El Dorado is revealed as a kind of mirage.

The starkest example of this persistent duality comes from the Amazon itself, as well as the native people who live there. Alex quickly learns that the jungle is both stunningly beautiful and terrifyingly harsh, as when Joel Gonzalez is attacked by the anaconda shortly after Alex enjoys swimming with dolphins in that same river. Similarly, Leblanc describes the natives as "brutal warriors, cruel and treacherous" (54), but once Alex and Nadia actually meet the People of the Mist, they discover the tribe to be largely peaceful and welcoming. The most menacing and mysterious figure in the book, the Beast, also proves to be very different in reality than in reputation. It is neither inherently violent nor magical in nature; rather, its existence, though wondrous, is completely within the bounds of science and rationality.

Allende points even more explicitly at the essential differences between surface and inner truth in her exploration of Alex and Nadia's respective totem animals. Just as the Beast is not the monster that the humans feared it to be, the humans themselves are closer to being beasts than they had ever suspected. Though Alex has never heard of a totem animal before his journey begins, his recognition upon meeting the jaguar is instantaneous, and when the jaguar is shot Alex feels "as if the bullet had struck *him* between the eyes" (106). Alex discovers an animal side of himself that is in many ways truer than his human self, enough so that he adopts the jaguar's name as his own. Nadia does the same with the eagle, embracing a hidden facet of her identity even when her outward human self is frightened of the heights the eagle represents. By the end of the novel, the



outward expression of nearly every character has been subverted by a deeper truth that rises to guide the character's actions.

## **The Place of the Native Peoples and Natural Resources of the Amazon**

Though fictional, the narrative makes explicit reference to real-world conflicts occurring both in the Amazon and around the world. The destruction of native peoples and natural resources for the gain of personal wealth, governmental power, and military objectives is commonplace in countless global settings. Here, Allende addresses this ongoing conflict by delving into different interpretations of the role that the Amazon's native peoples and natural resources play in an ever-progressing world.

It's clear from the start that the members of the *International Geographic* expedition come from a culture that is ostensibly more advanced than those of the native Amazon peoples, with Alex noting that many are "still in the Stone Age" (49). With their fire, technology, and weaponry, the expedition and the other explorers who have come before them seem to have a significant advantage over the Indians. However, Dr. Torres notes that the introduction of these advantages to the natives has not been a gift but rather a curse that corrodes their society: "with a knife, any warrior felt he was a god" (118). Conversely, the natives possess an advanced connection to nature, animals, and each other that seems foreign and surprising to Alex, who has never observed such an asset in his own culture. This tension between what is truly "primitive" or "advanced" comes to a head when Leblanc sees the carnage his expedition has caused in the peaceful village and realizes: "[h]is worst nightmares had been reversed: [t]hey themselves were the savages, not the Indians" (355). Throughout, Allende questions the narratives of progress that underlie real-world attempts to do away with the traditional ways of life of native peoples.

The value of the pristine Amazonian land is similarly fraught. Mauro Carías acts as a stand-in for the idea of progress at all costs; to him, undeveloped Amazonian land is pure waste, in that leaving it intact means leaving resources like ore and wood unused. However, it becomes clear that developing the land is also wasteful, as it destroys existing resources like the plants necessary for traditional medical remedies and, perhaps most importantly, the calm stasis that the native

people have established with the land over the course of countless generations. By the time Alex and Nadia meet the Beasts and learn the truth of their symbiosis with the People of the Mist, it is clear to them that the entire rainforest is a macrocosm of exactly that kind of interconnection; no aspect of the land can live for long without the support of all the other aspects. By underscoring the immense value of this delicate balance, Allende argues against the removal of natural resources for raw material gain.

### **Mindfulness**

The importance of mindful engagement with lived experience is a recurring theme throughout *City of the Beasts*, materializing largely through Alex's personal development. At the start of the story, Alex is quick to anger and struggles to control his emotions, letting himself get so carried away that he destroys all of his possessions. However, he evolves over the course of story to gain presence and calm even in increasingly difficult circumstances, guided by the new environment and spiritual perspectives he encounters on his trip.

By the time that the expedition makes camp after leaving Santa Maria de la Lluvia, Alex already finds that he can "transport himself to that private place of stillness and silence that he had to reach when he climbed mountains" (143) and does not get bored easily like he did at home. Even just a few days into the trip, Alex's experiences have given him the foundation of calm necessary for more active mindfulness. Soon thereafter, Alex finds himself compelled to put that ability to good use, when he is responsible for both his safety and Nadia's during their climb up the waterfall. Alex tells Nadia to "concentrate on the next move...without hurrying" (192), indicating his appreciation of the power of a calm, focused approach to an overwhelming task. This tactic recurs when Alex begins to panic in the tunnel that leads to the water of life; even in this moment of greatest despair, he remembers his father's advice to "seek your center" (302) and uses methodical attention to his body and breath to find the strength to continue. What began as a simple sensation of increased peace becomes a method for literal survival, as both Alex's life and that of his mother ultimately rest on his ability to remain psychically grounded. By gradually increasing the stakes that rest on Alex's mindfulness, Allende illustrates its utility in resolving and balancing the fraught dualities that create tension throughout the story.



## SYMBOLS AND MOTIFS

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### **The Beasts**

The Beasts themselves are the most prominent motif in the narrative, appearing again and again before their true nature becomes clear. Because so little is known about them, they become something of a blank canvas on which the members of the expedition project their fears and hopes about the journey. The open question of their identity and intentions—whether they are human or animal, good or evil, mystical or mundane—symbolizes the broader sense of uncertainty and blurred boundaries that pervades every phase of the expedition.

When Alex and Nadia do discover the city of the Beasts and learn the details of their symbiotic relationship with the People of the Mist, the Beasts shift from being an emblem of uncertainty to one of stability. With their long lifespans and prodigious memories, the Beasts possess a true sense of eternity that is beyond the grasp of any of the human characters. Their connection to the tribe is similarly immovable, as the two groups of beings have sustained each other consistently for innumerable years. This shift in the symbolic meaning of the Beasts mirrors the personal and spiritual changes that Alex and Nadia undergo, as they move from childish uncertainty toward embracing their stable, eternal natures as Jaguar and Eagle.

### **Alex's Flute**

Alex's flute and the music he creates with it symbolize peace and interpersonal connection throughout the novel. Even at the start of the story, when Alex is relatively immature, his flute is his greatest source of strength and the thing that keeps him calm even as his home life gets difficult. One of Alex's lowest points comes when Morgana steals his flute, showing that despite its importance to him, he has not yet developed the maturity to protect it and use it effectively. Shortly thereafter, Kate gives Alex the flute that belonged to his grandfather, signifying that the upcoming journey will provide Alex with the skills to use this new, more valuable possession effectively.

Throughout Alex's trip through the Amazon, the flute provides a valuable means of connection between Alex and everyone he meets, including animals. Even in moments of conflict amongst the members of the expedition, the flute music creates calm and diffuses tension, symbolizing the presence of a guiding unity above the conflict, as well as Alex's potential to access that unity. Just as Alex's ability to cultivate mindfulness becomes a life-saving skill, so too does his flute take on increased importance as the dangers become more immediate. Alex uses the flute to calm the People of the Mist, subdue the white bat on his quest for the water of health, and, most importantly, establish a meaningful connection with the Beasts. The Beasts "had never received such a grand offering" (284) as Alex's music and the dance that Nadia creates to match it, and that gift allows Alex and Nadia to seek out the crucially important crystal eggs and water of health. The flute takes on its greatest symbolic power when, in order to collect the water of health, Alex is forced to leave the flute behind. Though he is initially devastated, he finds himself just as powerful without it, noting Nadia's words that he, not the flute, is truly the creator of the music. The flute ultimately represents not just the idea of seamless interpersonal connection but also Alex's ability to achieve that connection on his own.

## Food

Food and images of its preparation are another important marker of Alex's changing maturity over the course of his journey. Food begins as a marker of Alex's unhappiness at home, where his father cooks in place of his sick mother and produces nothing but rubbery pancakes. When he arrives at Kate's apartment, she shows her affection for him by serving his favorite food, but even that enjoyment is undermined when Kate tells him that "you never know what people put in meatballs" (43).

Once their trip is underway, Alex is such a picky eater that he goes hungry for the first several days of the trip, refusing to try new foods and so eating almost nothing. This extreme unwillingness to step outside his comfort zone represents Alex's rigid adherence to the beliefs and realities of his childhood. Eventually, he decides to try a bite of cooked anaconda, but this first step into the unknown is motivated not by a sense of adventure but by a still-childish desire to impress his peers, thinking about "how his prestige with Cecilia Burns and his friends in California would balloon" (139). However, that experience reminds him of his

family and he is rewarded with his first experience of, as Nadia calls it, “seeing with the heart” (140).

As the journey progresses, Alex becomes more and more willing to try new foods, even when they are strange or unappetizing. His new sense of adventure and the rewards it brings reach a peak when Alex unhesitatingly consumes the broth containing Mocarita’s bones and so becomes a member of the tribe. When he finally eats fish, which previously disgusted him, Alex wonders at how long he went without eating something so delicious, demonstrating that just as it symbolized his limited worldview at the start of the story, food also represents the personal growth he has achieved by the end.

### **Nadia’s Amulet**

The magical amulet that Walimai gives Nadia to protect her from danger is a recurring reminder of Nadia’s strengths and assets. That Nadia even communicates with Walimai is exceptional among her people, and so his gift of the amulet further marks her as a unique intermediary between very different worlds.

The amulet provides her with both an increased sense of inner strength and the outward ability to summon Walimai to her side, a duality that illustrates an essential balance between individual fortitude and shared responsibility. Although Nadia believes the amulet to be so powerfully magical that she cannot get by without it, her mission in search of the crystal eggs reveals to her that the amulet itself is not actually as powerful as her own skills and abilities. Just as Alex is still a musician after leaving his flute behind, Nadia finds that she is still able to communicate with Walimai and the spirit world without the amulet, which she leaves behind when she takes the crystal eggs.

### **Vials**

The vials in which Dr. Torres carries her vaccines serve as representations of the two sides of the expedition’s potential influence on the native tribes. Initially, their potential to protect the tribes from disease demonstrates the way that the members of the expedition can aid the tribes and compensate for the wrongs of other outsiders. They are a precious commodity for much of the journey, protected by Dr. Torres and worried over by Alex and Nadia when they see Karakawe near the vials.

Eventually, however, the vials come to symbolize the exact opposite of safety and protection: they become the concrete manifestation of the dreaded Rahakanariwa, as Alex and Nadia learn that the vials are filled not with vaccines but with the measles virus. It remains true that the outsiders have the power to help the People of the Mist, but the vials make it obvious that they also have the power to do great harm. At the end of the story, the meaning of the vials flips once again, when the group plans to use the one remaining vial as evidence to bring Carías and Torres to justice. Though that vial is still filled with the virus, its use turns from destruction to redemption when placed in the right hands. Throughout, the vials indicate the truth of what Alex and Nadia struggle to tell the People of the Mist: the *nahab* can be both enemies and friends.

## IMPORTANT QUOTES

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1. "For a long time, he leaned against the wall with his eyes closed, trying to control the hurricane of feelings that shook him to his marrow. Then, systematically, he set about destroying everything in his room." (Chapter 1, Page 9)

*At the start of the novel, Alex has little ability to control his emotions and gets angry easily. His enraged reaction to his mother's illness in this scene stands in stark contrast to the calm and self-control he discovers later in the novel.*

2. "He felt as if he were trapped in a sci-fi nightmare, in a terrifying megalopolis of cement, steel, glass, pollution, and loneliness." (Chapter 2, Page 32)

*Alex's experience of New York City as frightening and impersonal sets the stage for his coming travel to the even more foreign setting of the Amazon. While New York is cold and manufactured, the Amazon is hot and bursting with nature, but each holds hidden dangers.*

3. "What the book didn't say was that this vast area, the last paradise on the planet, was being systematically destroyed by the greed of entrepreneurs and adventurers." (Chapter 4, Page 48)

*From the outset, Alex is aware that outsiders come to the Amazon with an array of motives, some less pure than others. This knowledge provides*

*important context for the behavior of the characters he meets on the expedition.*

4. "Compassion is a modern invention. Our society protects the weak, the poor, the sick. From the point of view of genetics, that is a terrible error." (Chapter 4, Page 55)

*Ludovic Leblanc argues that because the natives fight brutally for dominance and do not have pity for those that don't survive, their society is wiser than modern society. Indirectly, his statement also supports the troubling notion that because adventurers and entrepreneurs are able to dominate the natives using superior technology, they are within their rights to do so.*

5. "The jungle seemed to come alive and respond to the sound of the instrument; even the noisy crew and the passengers would fall silent and listen." (Chapter 4, Page 58)

*This passage highlights the importance of Alex's flute, one of the book's most prominent symbols. Notably, it is not just humans who the flute calms and attracts, but also the jungle itself, underscoring music's power to bind different spheres of being.*

6. "He explained that the indigenous peoples were very spiritual. They believed that everything had a soul—trees, animals, rivers, clouds. For them, spirit and matter were one and the same." (Chapter 5, Pages 80-81)

*This emphasis on the spiritual unity of the native peoples foreshadows the transformation that Alex and Nadia undergo when they join the People of the Mist later in the book. They will come to learn the ability to bring their own true spirits into alignment with their material selves, even though Alex does not yet believe in the mysticism that César Santos describes here.*

7. "As a grandmother, she left a lot to be desired; she didn't even make an effort to answer his questions, because it was her opinion that the only way you learned was to find out for yourself. She maintained that experience was what you learned just after you needed it." (Chapter 6, Page 90)

*Although Kate cares about Alex, she expresses her affection almost exclusively through the tough-love approach exemplified here. Eventually, Alex will reflect that in fact this approach to forcing him into new experiences made it possible for him to grow as a person.*

8. "Finding your animal is less important for a woman, because we get our strength from the earth. We *are* nature." (Chapter 7, Pages 108-09)

*Nadia highlights an essential difference between men and women, which Alex will see more starkly when he meets the People of the Mist later on. Building his own identity as a man and examining his own preconceived notions of women are key components of Alex's maturation.*

9. "'Doesn't it scare you?' 'There are various ways to overcome fear, Alexander. None works,' she replied." (Chapter 8, Page 123)

*This exchange between Alex and Kate hints at the novel's core theme that acceptance of the present moment is the only effective way to overcome difficult emotions or experiences. Fear, like other strong emotions, is acknowledged but essentially rendered meaningless.*

10. "Senses are subjective, Alexander. Something that you find revolting may be attractive to someone else. Maybe the Beast emits that smell as a love song to call his mate." (Chapter 9, Page 142)

*The Beast, one of the book's key symbols, is invoked here as an example of the unknowable, something that can exist in either a positive or a negative light, depending on one's perspective. The Beast plays this role many times throughout the narrative and is one of the most persistent examples of outward appearance failing to match internal reality.*

11. "He thought how useful the trick of invisibility could be in his life, and determined to learn it. During the next few days he would realize that it was not a question of magic but a talent achieved with great practice and concentration, like playing the flute." (Chapter 10, Page 184)

*This passage marks the beginning of a narrative turn in which Alex's skill in mindfulness turns into a concrete necessity for survival. His ability to*



*concentrate, he will learn, has many practical applications beyond the calming and entertainment purposes he has used it for previously.*

12. "To his amazement, Alex realized that he could pretty much understand as long as he didn't try, but rather 'listened with his heart.' According to Nadia, who had an astounding gift for languages, words are not that important when you recognize intentions." (Chapter 11, Page 202)

*As he spends more time with the People of the Mist, Alex's devotion to rational thinking begins to fall away. Starting with his perception of language, he begins to rely more on his intuition and to trust his innate understanding of new information and experiences.*

13. "Parents usually promised their girls in marriage at birth, but none was forced to marry or stay with a man against her will. Abuse of women and children was taboo, and anyone who violated that rule lost his family and was condemned to sleep alone." (Chapter 11, Page 204)

*Gender and family dynamics as described here are just one way in which the social organization of the People of the Mist seems idyllic and could even be described as more "civilized" than the culture from which Alex and the rest of the expedition come.*

14. "In a movie or a novel, this would be the moment that the helicopters arrived to rescue him and he looked toward the sky, but without hope; in real life, helicopters never came in time." (Chapter 12, Page 218)

*Alex's childish expectations of salvation and justice are increasingly challenged as his journey continues. Here, he comes to terms with his and Nadia's newfound need to rely on themselves and their own skills rather than the interventions of others.*

15. "The *nahab* are so crazed that they try to take with them the stones of the earth, the sand of the rivers, and the trees of the forest. Some want the earth itself." (Chapter 12, Page 222)

*Walimai's account of the madness of the nahab underscores that just as some might interpret the natives' behavior as primitive, so too might those same individuals' behavior seem nonsensical to the natives. These*

*conflicting perspectives again illuminate the impossibility of passing judgment based on superficial appearance.*

16. “And then the searing pain went through him like a sword, emerged from his back, and, miraculously, he was able to bear it. Alex would never be able to explain the sense of power he felt during that torture.” (Chapter 12, Page 236)

*The initiation with the fire ants provides an advanced test of Alex’s new abilities to calm his mind and care for himself. Only by accepting pain is he able to conquer it, just as Kate indicated previously when she brought him into new adventures without preparation.*

17. “He asks the fish’s permission and explains that he has to kill it out of necessity. Afterward he thanks it for offering its life so we can live,’ she clarified.” (Chapter 13, Page 245)

*Here, Nadia tells Alex why Walimai is able to catch fish quickly where Alex wasn’t. Her explanation puts forth an alternate vision of problem-solving that contrasts with the forceful methods of those like Mauro Carías. Accordingly, to Nadia and Walimai, clear communication can be as powerful as a strong weapon.*

18. “Destiny was a fact, and there were times you had to jump into an adventure and get out whatever way you could, the way he had when he was four and his grandmother had pushed him into the pool and he had had to swim or else.” (Chapter 13, Page 250)

*Despite his doubts throughout the journey, Alex is finally compelled to leave his reliance on rationality behind. Where he once resented Kate and the entire expedition for interrupting his life, he is now able to see these events as a meaningful continuation of the life he is meant to live. Alex now views lack of preparation as an asset rather than a liability, which will serve him well in the unpredictable events to come.*

19. “But the giant sloths had not as yet reached the stage of evolution in which they contemplated death, and so had no need of gods. Their infinitely long lives were lived on a purely material plane.” (Chapter 14, Page 272)

*When Alex and Nadia finally learn the true nature of the Beasts, the mysterious creatures turn out to have the longest memories, and so the broadest perspectives, of any creature known to man. With so much memory to inform them, the Beasts are able to perceive the tribe as magical without feeling the need to worship them. Here, Allende implies that with enough perspective, all gods may become irrelevant.*

20. "This was the absolute space of the divine and of death, the space where even spirit is dissolved. She was the void, empty of desire, of memory. There was nothing to fear. She was outside time." (Chapter 15, Page 294)

*Nadia's experience of complete dissolution during her quest for the crystal eggs is one of the novel's only mentions of a state of being in which spirit and matter not only combine but cease to exist altogether. Nadia's feelings here hint that as much as she and Alex learn about the spiritual realm during their journey, there is yet a whole additional realm to be explored still. The fact that Nadia has this experience while Alex does not also suggests that her childhood among nature, possibly combined with her female identity, has given her unique mystical powers.*

21. "This was such an extraordinary experience that he could not trust in reason or logic alone; the moment had come to call on the same resources that had helped him when climbing and playing music, intuition. He tried to imagine how the animal was feeling and concluded that it must be as terrified as he was." (Chapter 16, Page 313)

*During his encounter with the giant white bat in the cave of the water of health, Alex goes a step beyond his previous commitment to intuition. He not only attempts to find his own center as he has by this point done several times before, but he also uses that knowledge to reach out and empathize with another creature. In doing so, he not only escapes a dangerous situation but also shows how self-knowledge is a crucial component of genuine compassion.*

22. "In a flash of insight, they realized the terrible trap they had all fallen into: the Rahakanariwa was the epidemic! The death that threatened the tribe was not a mythological bird but something much more concrete and immediate." (Chapter 17, Page 350)

*The Rahakanariwa serves as the ultimate example of the tension between myth and reality that permeates the novel. The Rahakanariwa is a symbol of danger, but when Alex and Nadia locate it within Dr. Torres's vials of vaccinations, they transform the immaterial symbol into a genuine and very present danger. The viruses themselves are dangerous, but the reactions of the tribe and expedition member to the knowledge of the viruses is even more dangerous, resulting in the deaths of Carías and Karakawe, among others.*

23. "What had Carías promised her that would cause her to commit a crime of such magnitude? Was it simply out of love for him, and not for money? Whatever her reason, whether love or greed, the result was the same: hundreds of men, women, and children were murdered." (Chapter 18, Page 357)

*The passage highlights the ultimate importance of outcomes over motivations. Just as Alex often wondered why he had to participate in certain aspects of his journey through the Amazon before eventually understanding the path laid out for him, now he and the rest of the expedition are left to wonder why an outwardly lovely person like Dr. Torres would carry out such heinous acts. They don't have an answer, but they also know that the answer is of little importance compared to the consequences of those motivations. The severity of Dr. Torres's crime—especially in contrast to her kind demeanor—also sheds light on the immense consequences of the outsiders' actions in the Amazon, a theme that builds throughout the novel.*

24. "The *nahab* welcomed her; no doubt they were impressed with her regal bearing and her many wrinkles, proof of how long she lived and of the knowledge she had acquired." (Chapter 19, Page 381)

*This passage comes from a short section that reveals the thoughts of Iyomi, the People of the Mist's chief, during her interactions with the expedition. Her perception of herself as intimidating contrasts sharply with information in previous chapters, in which it is revealed that Carías and Ariosto find her laughable rather than respectable. This contrast illustrates the differing values that the two cultures place on age and experience, particularly as they relate to the female body and women's authority.*

25. "He wasn't certain about the propriety of Christianizing the Indians, who had their own form of spirituality. They had lived in harmony with nature for thousands of years, like Adam and Eve in Paradise. Why, Padre Valdomero wondered, was it necessary to teach them the concept of sin?" (Chapter 20, Page 398)

*As the novel concludes, Padre Valdomero brings the customs of the native peoples into alignment with his own Catholic morality. He neither rejects the natives as savages nor worships them as savants; he is able instead to find evidence of his own spirituality in their practices, and vice versa. This ability to accept seemingly opposing things as simultaneously true epitomizes the emphasis on duality that runs throughout the narrative.*

## ESSAY TOPICS

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1. Alex's opinion on Kate's way of showing affection changes throughout the narrative; sometimes he resents her distant presence and sometimes he is grateful for it. What are some other ways in which different expressions of caring show up throughout the novel? How do they vary between characters and cultures, and how do those differences illuminate the novel's themes?
2. Many of the changes that Alex and Nadia undergo are tied to the different settings they encounter during their journey. Choose one of the settings that shapes their story and explore the ways in which that particular place influences their growth.

3. When Alex reads in his guidebook that the natives have no formal art in their society, Kate responds: “[t]hey don’t care about posterity, or showing off. Most of our so-called *artists* would do well to follow their example” (49). What does the lack of formal art reveal about the culture of the People of the Mist? In what other ways do they express their creativity, and how does that expression shape their society for better or worse?
4. Padre Valdomero appears in only a few scenes, but his perspective on the Indians is uniquely nuanced. How do his opinions differ from those of the other major characters, and how might the rest of the expedition have been different if he had been present?
5. With few exceptions, Allende chooses to tell this story in close third-person narration, sticking closely to Alex’s perspective. What is the impact of this narrative choice on the story, both positive and negative? How might a different choice—such as first-person narration or a broader third-person narration—have changed the meaning of the plot?
6. Alex suspects that because the Beasts do not contemplate death, they do not need gods. If facing death means requiring a connection to a god, how does the increasing danger that Alex faces during his journey change his relationship to spirituality and potential religious meaning?
7. Kate decides not to publish an article about the Beasts, although they are fascinatingly unique creatures. Knowing all the details about their society, how would you define them if you were writing an article about them? Are they animals or people? Magical or mundane? Good or evil?
8. Gender roles, particularly as they relate to women, loom large in this story. Choose three of the female characters from this novel and contrast the ways in which their female identity shapes their characters and actions, particularly in relation to their cultural contexts.
9. Allende advocates for protection of the Amazon’s native tribes and land, indicating that even well-meaning characters like Kate have the potential to cause the destruction of delicately balanced ecosystems and cultures. Drawing on the impacts—positive and negative—that the expedition has on the People of the Mist and the Beasts, make an argument for why outside intervention in pristine climates like the Amazon is or isn’t a good idea.

10. The ability to comprehend simultaneous conflicting truths becomes a necessity for Alex and Nadia as they continue their journey. In every phase of the narrative, Allende explores dualities such as logic and intuition, good and evil, and primitive and advanced, always seeming to conclude that, paradoxically, both sides of the duality are true. How does the overarching presence of these dualities complicate or inform the novel's other central themes?