

Knights of the Hawk

JAMES AITCHESON

Reading Guide

1. 'A man always remembers his first kill.' *Knights of the Hawk* is the only novel in the series so far to include a prologue. How does it help set the tone and provide context for the rest of the novel?
2. Lordship, oaths and obligations are key themes; Tancred aspires to be the kind of lord that Robert de Commines was to him. Does he succeed? To what extent do you see Tancred's younger self reflected in his protégé, Godric?
3. From the very beginning, the tone of the narrative is more sombre than in previous instalments. How does this reflect Tancred's development as a character and his experiences over the course of the series so far?
4. Fenland and sea form the backdrop for the majority of the novel. How are these wild and untamed settings used to create atmosphere? How do they reflect Tancred's mood?
5. In the second half, Tancred's personal quest for vengeance takes him out of recorded history and into the mistier realms of fiction. Is it important that historical novels engage with real-life events and characters? What do you think are the potential risks and rewards of venturing 'off-piste'?

6. In *Knights of the Hawk*, we catch glimpses of Tancred at a later point in his life, when he is an old man setting down the tales of his exploits in writing. What effect does this layering of the narrative generate?
7. Tancred's maverick nature and his desire to be master of his own destiny are the driving forces behind his journey in this novel, but they also have negative repercussions.
 - a. To what extent is he his own worst enemy, sabotaging himself in his struggle for honour and respect?
 - b. Is his headstrong attitude something to be admired, or pitied, or both?
 - c. Are all his troubles of his own making, or can some of the blame be laid at the doors of others?
8. *Knights of the Hawk* concludes in bittersweet fashion. Why do you think Aitcheson chose to add the final twist following the battle at Jarnborg, rather than allow Tancred a more traditional happy ending?
9. In the end, Tancred is able to achieve his aim of self-determination. Has it been worth the cost, in your view? What has he had to sacrifice along the way?

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