

The Splintered Kingdom

JAMES AITCHESON

Reading Guide

1. From the very beginning, Tancred comes across as a more ruthless character than when we last saw him in *Sworn Sword*.
 - a. Were you surprised by his decision to kill the Welsh prisoners in Chapter One? If so, why?
 - b. In what ways have the burdens of lordship shaped him? Is this new ruthlessness tempered by other, more positive changes in his character?

2. Previously a potential love interest, how does Beatrice's role change in *The Splintered Kingdom*? How would you assess her feelings towards Tancred, and his feelings towards her?

3. Most of the novel takes place in the treacherous borderlands known as the Welsh March. Why do you think Aitcheson chose this region, on the very fringes of England, as the principal setting for the second instalment in the trilogy?

4. Tancred gains English friends and allies in this novel, and begins to learn the native tongue. To what extent does this lead to a greater appreciation of the effects of the Norman Conquest on England and its inhabitants as a result?

5. The question of what drives someone like Tancred to devote his life to the sword-path runs throughout the book. What, in your view, is his main reason for choosing the warrior's way of life?
6. In what ways does the depiction of warfare and violence in *The Splintered Kingdom* differ from that in *Sworn Sword*?
7. Several characters act as mentors and confidantes to Tancred, offering him the benefit of their wisdom. How readily does he accept their advice? Who, if anyone, has the greatest influence on him?
8. Tancred's risk-taking leads to disaster on his campaign in Wales, but leads to success in his raid on Beverley (Beferlic). Do you think he is capable of learning from his mistakes, or will his hot-headedness eventually end in tragedy?
9. The novel concludes just as an infamous episode of the Conquest known as the Harrying of the North, during which William I laid waste Yorkshire, is getting underway. Why do you think the narrative stops at this point, without exploring this episode further?

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