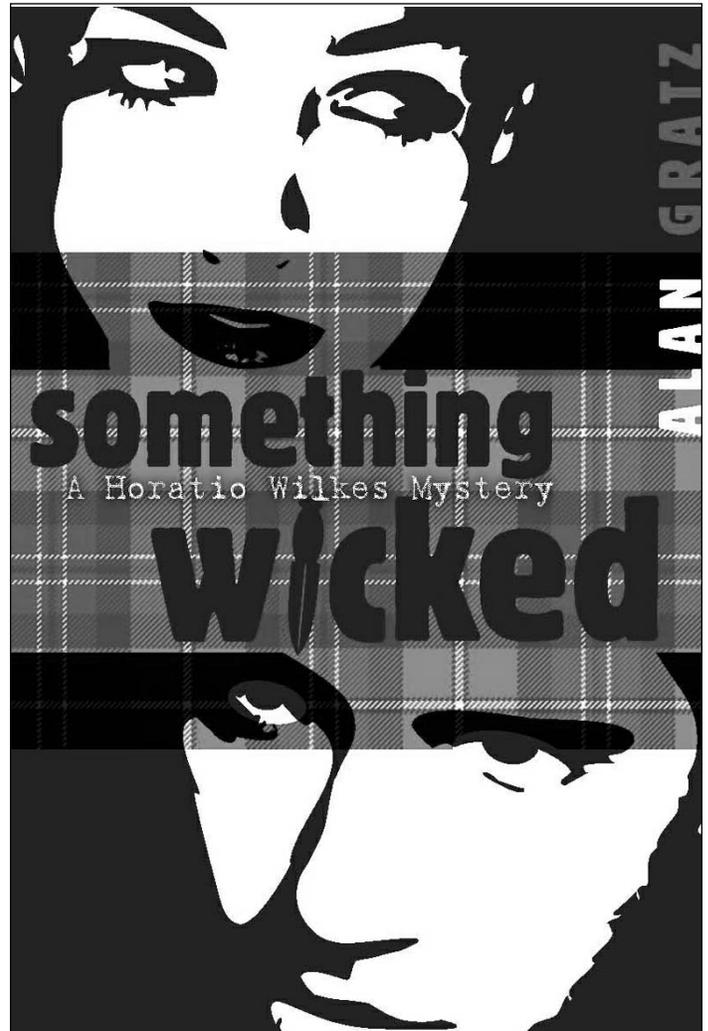


Something Wicked

DISCUSSION GUIDE

“If I’d been paying attention then, really listening with my head and not my heart, I might have heard it. It was the sound of something coming. Something wicked.”

- *Horatio Wilkes*



About the Book

Something wicked this way comes, and only Horatio Wilkes can stop it.

A Scottish Highland Fair turns foul when Horatio discovers the games' founder, Duncan MacRae, dead in his tent. All signs point to Duncan's son as the murderer, but Horatio's not so sure--especially when his friend Mac and Mac's girlfriend Beth start acting like they own the place. And that's just one of many mysteries: Like why are Mac's and Beth's fathers

acting so suspiciously? What's the deal with the goth-punk bagpiper corps threatening Horatio's friend Banks? Who is the hot girl spying on everyone? And why, exactly, are there men in kilts tossing telephone poles around?

Horatio will need all his snark and smarts--and maybe a little amazing grace--to thwart the fate a road-side psychic laid out for him and his friends. Not that he believes in that kind of thing anyway ...

Pre-reading Activity

Highland Games

The fictional Birnam Mountain Highland Games are the backdrop of *Something Wicked*, but each year, Scottish and Celtic culture and heritage are celebrated in real highland festivals across the U.S. and around the world. Before reading *Wicked*, explore similar gatherings in your region.

- ◆ What are the historical origins of Scottish festivals?
- ◆ What athletic events are unique to highland games?
- ◆ What kind of music is associated with such festivals?
- ◆ How is Highland Dancing performed and judged?
- ◆ Why do highland festivals continue to be so popular?



The Macbeth clan tent at the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games.

Questions for Discussion

Comprehension

- ◆ Who murdered Duncan MacRae and Megan Sternwood? How were they killed, and why?
- ◆ What evidence implicates Malcolm in his father's murder?
- ◆ How does Horatio plan to catch the killer? How does his plan work, and in what ways does it backfire?
- ◆ Celtic music plays an important role in highland festivals. What important roles does music play in *Something Wicked*?
- ◆ Who will Malcolm eventually sell the mountain to, and how is he able to afford it?

Fate vs. Self-determination

- ◆ Responsibility for one's actions is a major theme of *Something Wicked*. How does Mac come to think his actions are not his fault?
- ◆ At the end of the novel, Horatio repeats a line he heard earlier: "The mountain makes its own weather." What does the line mean, and how does Horatio twist its meaning when dwelling on his role in Megan Sternwood's death?
- ◆ Do you believe in astrology? Do you believe your life is scripted, or that you are the master of your own fate?

- ◆ How do each of Madam Hecate's prophecies come true?

Motivation

- ◆ Why don't Guy and Megan Sternwood want Mac and his father to own the mountain?
- ◆ What drives Mac to win the games and own the mountain? Is it merely "vaulting ambition?"
- ◆ Beyond Mac's good looks, what reasons does Beth have to date him?
- ◆ General Sternwood compares Horatio to his trained border collies, telling him, "You were born to work." Is he right? Why?

Questions for Discussion

Friendship and Betrayal

- ♦ Why does it take Horatio so long to see Mac's involvement in Duncan MacRae's death?
- ♦ What does Horatio say is the worst thing Mac did to him? Of all Mac's crimes, how is it the worst?
- ♦ How does Mac betray everyone he loves to get what he wants?
- ♦ Why does Megan Sternwood hate Beth Weigel?
- ♦ What friends and allies does Horatio make in *Something Wicked*? How does he earn their trust, and how does he repay it?

Macbeth and Something Wicked

- ♦ Horatio is a character from *Hamlet*, yet he plays a major role in *Something Wicked*, a *Macbeth* adaptation. What role does he take on from *Macbeth*, and why?
- ♦ Discuss dramatic irony. What assumptions can we make about the story of *Something Wicked* based on our knowledge of what happens in *Macbeth*? In what ways does the novel subvert dramatic irony?
- ♦ What scenes seem inspired more by detective stories than by Shakespeare?
- ♦ Besides the story and the characters, what other allusions to *Macbeth* can you find in *Something Wicked*?
- ♦ What famous scenes from *Macbeth* are not paralleled in *Something Wicked*? Why do you think those were left out?
- ♦ What character or characters from the play do Madam Hecate, Mac, Beth, Duncan, Banks, Malcolm, and Megan correspond to? Which characters in the book have no parallels in the play?
- ♦ How do the prophecies of Madam Hecate parallel the prophecies of the three witches in *Macbeth*? How are they different?
- ♦ In the play, Banquo is murdered by agents of Macbeth. What scene parallels that murder in *Something Wicked*? In what way does Banks become "a ghost?"
- ♦ Shakespeare famously borrowed many of his stories from previous works by other authors. What are some of the earlier sources for *Macbeth*, and how does *Something Wicked* fit into this tradition of retelling classic stories?

Dramatis Personae

- ♦ Horatio Wilkes: Amateur detective, and Mac's friend from school (Macduff)
- ♦ Joe Mackenzie (Mac): Handsome, ambitious grandson of Duncan MacRae (Macbeth)
- ♦ Beth Weigel: Mac's attractive, college-freshman girlfriend (Lady Macbeth)
- ♦ Wallace Banks: Mac's dorky, bagpipe-playing cousin (Banquo)
- ♦ Megan Sternwood: Enemy of Mac and Beth, and love interest for Horatio (Lady Macduff)
- ♦ Duncan MacRae: Long-time owner of Mount Birnam (Duncan)
- ♦ Malcolm MacRae: Duncan's son; Mac's uncle (Malcolm)
- ♦ General Guy Sternwood: Megan's uncle; border collie trainer
- ♦ Birnam Wood: Inverness County Sheriff
- ♦ Bill Mackenzie: Mac's father
- ♦ Chad Weigel: Beth's father
- ♦ Desdemona Wilkes: Horatio's sister; local reporter
- ♦ Terrance & Hell's Pipers: Thugs for hire (Murderers)
- ♦ Spot: Mac's border collie

Further Reading

YA Fiction Based on Shakespeare

- ♦ **Enter Three Witches** by Caroline Cooney (*Macbeth*)
- ♦ **Romiette and Julio** by Sharon Draper (*Romeo and Juliet*)
- ♦ **Romeo's Ex: Rosalind's Story** by Lisa Fiedler (*Romeo and Juliet*)
- ♦ **Ophelia** by Lisa Klein (*Hamlet*)
- ♦ **Son of the Mob** by Gordon Korman (*Romeo and Juliet*)
- ♦ **Othello** by Julius Lester
- ♦ **Pretty Things** by Sarra Manning (*The Taming of the Shrew*)
- ♦ **A Mid-Semester Night's Dream** by Margaret Meachem (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*)
- ♦ **This Must Be Love** by Tui Sutherland (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*)
- ♦ **Ariel** by Grace Tiffany (*The Tempest*)

Noir Detective Fiction

- ♦ **Double Indemnity** by James M. Cain
- ♦ **The Maltese Falcon** by Dashiell Hammett
- ♦ **Strangers on a Train** by Patricia Highsmith
- ♦ **The Big Sleep** by Raymond Chandler
- ♦ **Farewell, My Lovely** by Raymond Chandler
- ♦ **The Long Goodbye** by Raymond Chandler

Internet Resources

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hardboiled>
Learn more about hardboiled/noir fiction

<http://home.comcast.net/~mossrobert/>
The Raymond Chandler web site

http://www.scotclans.com/whats_my_clan/
What clan are you?

<http://www.gmhg.org/>
The Grandfather Mountain Highland Games

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XgGtjNqrdHA>
Star Wars Bagpipes

About the Author

Born and raised in Knoxville, Tennessee, Alan went from private school to the University of Tennessee. There he was accepted into the UT College Scholars program, where he tailored a program specific to his independent study of creative writing.



Alan wrote the obligatory “awful college novel,” sold a couple of short stories to literary magazines, and graduated in three years. Then began a succession of writing-related jobs: publicist at an art museum, instructor at a Czech university, bookseller, radio commercial writer, graphic designer, librarian. After earning a Master's degree he taught eighth grade English for a time, but his dream continued to be writing fiction for young readers.

In the fall of 2002, Alan finally took the plunge, quitting his day job to become a part-time writer and a part-time stay-at-home dad. While writing what would become his first published novel, *Samurai Shortstop*, he also wrote freelance episodes of A&E's *City Confidential*.

Alan now lives with his wife and daughter in the mountains of Western North Carolina.

Bibliography

Samurai Shortstop (Dial 2006)
Something Rotten (Dial 2007)
Something Wicked (Dial 2008)
The Brooklyn Nine (Dial 2009)
Nemo (Knopf TBA)

Learn more about *Something Wicked* and Alan's other books at www.alangratz.com