Samantha Shannon

The Bone Season (The Bone Season, 1)

United Kingdom (2013)

TAGS: Adonis Aphrodite Arcturus Ares Zeus





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General information	
Title of the work	The Bone Season (The Bone Season, 1)
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2013
First Edition Details	Samantha Shannon, *The Bone Season: A Novel*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013, 480 pp.
ISBN	9781408836422
Official Website	boneseasonbooks.com (accessed: September 17, 2020)
Genre	Dystopian fiction, Fantasy fiction
Target Audience	Young adults (also crossover)
Author of the Entry	Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com
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Creators



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Samantha Shannon , b. 1991
(Author)

Samantha Shannon was born in 1991 in West London. She wrote her first, still unpublished novel, *Aurora* when she was 15. From 2010 to 2013, she studied English Language and Literature at St. Anne's College at Oxford. She was shortlisted for the *Young Star Women of the Future Award** as a student author in 2012, even before the publication of her first novel. *The Bone Season*, the first volume in a planned seven-book series was published in 2013 to critical acclaim and translated into more than 25 languages. Andy Serkis and studio Imaginarium bought the film rights to the series in 2013. Shannon currently lives in London and is on the *Sunday Times* and *New York Times* bestselling authors list, having published *The Mime Order* in 2015, *On the Merits of Unnaturalness* and *The Pale Dreamer* in 2016, *The Song Rising* in 2017, and a standalone novel, *The Priory of the Orange Tree* in 2019. *The Mask Falling*, book four of the *Bone Season* series, is expected in 2021.

Sources:

bloomsbury.com (accessed: September 17, 2020);

BBC Meet the Author: Nick Higham conducts an interview with Samantha Shannon, February 3, 2015 (accessed: September 17, 2020);

The Author's Twitter and blog.

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* Created in 2006, *The Women of the Future Awards* celebrate female talent in the UK, in art, science, business, media, professions, technology, and sport. “The Young Star award acknowledges high achievers aged 16–21 who show exceptional promise within their industry, university or school.” (accessed: September 8, 2020 at: i-m-magazine.com).

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Additional information

Translation	The novel was translated into 26 languages.
Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs	Prequel: *On the Merits of Unnaturalness*, *The Pale Dreamer* , 2016. Sequels: *The Mime Order*, 2015, *The Song Rising*, 2017, *The Dawn Chorus* (a novella), 2020, and *The Mask Falling*, 2021.
Summary	In an alternate, dystopian reality, England in 2059 is under the semi-military control of an organization called Scion whose task and mission is to identify and eliminate "unnaturals", people with psychic powers. There are various categories of "unnatural" skills: communicating with ghosts, predicting future, mind-reading, etc. Paige Mahoney, a nineteen-year old girl, is the main character of the novel, and an exceptionally gifted clairvoyant, a "dreamwalker" who can penetrate and move around inside other people's minds. Criminal gangs are the only organizations powerful enough to protect "unnaturals" against Scion; they do it in return for the use of their powers for criminal purposes. Paige works for a "mime" lord, Jaxon Hall, head of the Covent Garden's Seven Seals gang. Unfortunately, after her powerful gift unintentionally causes the death of a scion agent, she is captured and sent to a penal colony, Sheol I, situated in a strangely changed, half-destroyed Oxford ruled by the Rephaim, a race of aliens from another world. There, Paige is selected by the Warden, Arcturus, to be his personal slave. He is an important Rephaim, the future husband of the evil blood sovereign, Nashira. The Rephaim feed on the aura (life force?) of the jailed clairvoyants, Nashira herself also steals their special psychic powers which allows

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her to rule over her own kind. The prisoners serve not only as a source of nourishment but also those most athletic and physically fit are trained to serve in a fighting force policing the colony and keeping at bay the Emim, bloodthirsty monsters from another world who are a constant threat. Those who are declared unfit to fight are tolerated if they can provide some artistic entertainment to the Rephaim, but live in atrocious conditions and under constant threat of death.

The Warden tells Paige the myth of Adonis and Aphrodite, she has never heard of it because classics are not taught in Scion schools:

> "As she cradled the body of her beloved, Aphrodite sprinkled nectar over his blood. And from the blood of Adonis sprang the anemone: a short-lived, perennial flower, stained as red as the blood itself – and the spirit of Adonis was sent, like all spirits, to languish in the underworld. Zeus heard Aphrodite crying for her love, and out of pity for the goddess, he agreed to let Adonis spend half the year in life, and half in death."
>
> (Kindle Edition, p. 375).

Paige befriends some of the entertainers who live in squalor and abject poverty, among them Liss, who dies but is resurrected with the magical force of the Warden's blood – the Rephaim's blood is a powerful substance called ectoplasm. "“And from the blood of Adonis,” he said, “came life.” Liss opened her eyes." (Kindle Edition, p. 387).

A strange, romantic attraction develops between Paige and the Warden, Arcturus. He seems to plot against Nashira, protect Paige, and teach her how to escape from the colony. When Paige finally escapes, she takes as many of the prisoners as she is able with her on the train to London. Arcturus, whom she finally fully trusts, is left behind because, for the safety of all humans, he must first eliminate Nashira.

Analysis

The Bone Season is a dystopian, alternate world, science-fiction fantasy with a young, extraordinary heroine who is clearly destined to save the world from horrifying alien enemies. Part of the action takes place in a strangely changed Oxford, which brings to mind Lyra's Oxford in Pullman's *Dark Materials*. The author, roughly the same age as her heroine, studied and wrote in Oxford like Pullman, and was

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impressed enough to adopt Oxford as the setting for her novel. While Lyra's Oxford is in an alternate world to our own, in which it is possible to pass between the two and between other alternate worlds, Paige's Oxford is situated in a world quite different from our own with an alternate past and present; for the inhabitants, it is the only real world. It is also linked to another fantasy world from where emerge powerful and ruthless quasi-gods, the Rephaim, as well as the Emim, the evil monsters threatening all beings alike. The godlike race is not immune from the beasts although they come from the same place. The heroic figure of the young, potential saviour belongs clearly to the epic tradition and is part of the almost always effective recipe for success in teen and YA literature. Still, the most obvious classical inspiration is the use of the myth of Adonis to explain metaphorically the strange Rephaim blood and its properties, as well as the fact that the only way to vanquish these creatures is through the use of the anemone flower. Shannon's version of the myth is not based on Ovid's story in book 10 of *Metamorphoses*. The blood-red anemone (born of Adonis blood sprinkled with nectar by Aphrodite), mentioned again in book 2 of *The Bone Season*, is a possible weapon against the Rephaim.

> "I knelt beside a dying poppy and scooped its seeds into my palm. At the touch of my hand, each one grew a tiny stalk and flowered – but they weren't quite poppies now. A deeper red. A smaller bloom. The smell of fire. Blood of Adonis. The only thing that could do harm to the Rephaim. They broke across my dreamscape like a red wave. A hundred thousand poppy anemones."
>
> (The Mime Order. Bloomsbury Publishing. Kindle Edition, 2015, 39).

The flower could be considered a symbol of the unexpected romance between Arcturus and Paige, flowering against all ods and potentially fatal to both of them but nevertheless a source of hope. In the novel, the totalitarian Scion regime forbids reading mythology and classical authors as they provide a dangerous wealth of ideas and sentiments, difficult to control – an interesting argument to retain in the contemporary debate about the worth of classical education. As Scion serves the Rephaim, it is possible that they banned mythology on the order of the Rephaim: who did not like the myth of Adonis as a potential threat to their survival.

The author makes intriguing and meaningful choices of names. Arcturus, the constellation of the Bear Warden, makes an apt name for

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Paige's alien protector. The names connected to the mysterious Rephaim come from Hebrew and the Bible (*rephaim* means ghosts, *emim* – according to the mediaeval Tanakh commentator Rashi, comes from *eima* meaning horror or terror – the dreaded ones, and both appear in *Genesis* 14; *sheol*, the name of the penal colony, is the Hebrew term for the underworld, or the world of the dead).* These names give to Shanon's dark universe a seal of ancient authority.

* My thanks to Prof. Lisa Maurice for pointing out Hebrew and Biblical references.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Adonis Aphrodite Arcturus Ares Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Family Journeys Relationships

Further Reading

Brown, Alex, "Bad Dreams: The Bone Season by Samantha Shannon", avaiable at www.tor.com (accessed: June 23, 2020).

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