Legendborn

by Tracey Deonn · Language: EN

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Overview

Bree Matthews, a sixteen-year-old Black girl, attends a residential program for high-achieving high school students at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, hoping to escape the grief of her mother's recent death. On her first night, she witnesses a demon attack and discovers a secret society called the Legendborn, descendants of King Arthur's knights, who hunt these creatures. A mysterious Legendborn student, Selwyn Kane, attempts to erase Bree's memory, but his magic fails, instead unlocking a dormant power within her and fragmented memories of her mother's past connection to this magical world.

Determined to uncover the truth behind her mother's death, which she now suspects was not an accident, Bree infiltrates the Legendborn society. She navigates a world of ancient magic, courtly politics, and racial prejudice, all while grappling with her own burgeoning powers and a complicated relationship with Selwyn and the charismatic Arthurian heir, Nick Davis. As she delves deeper, Bree uncovers shocking truths about her lineage, the true nature of the Legendborn's magic, and a looming war that threatens both the magical and mundane worlds, ultimately redefining what it means to be a hero.

Key Takeaways

- Grief can be a powerful catalyst for discovering hidden strengths and truths within oneself.
- Challenging established power structures is essential for uncovering deeper, often uncomfortable, realities.
- Identity is complex, shaped by ancestry, personal experience, and the choices one makes, not just by inherited titles.
- The reinterpretation of classic myths can offer fresh, diverse perspectives on timeless struggles and heroism.
- Systemic racism can exist and thrive even within seemingly noble and ancient institutions.
- True power often lies in understanding and embracing one's unique heritage, even if it defies traditional expectations.
- Friendships and alliances can be forged in unexpected places during times of crisis and personal discovery.

Chapter Summaries

Chapters 1-3: A New Beginning and a Sudden Loss

Bree Matthews arrives at the Early College program at UNC-Chapel Hill with her best friend, Alice, seeking to escape the grief of her mother's recent death. During a campus orientation event, Bree witnesses a demonic attack and sees a group of students fighting back with magic, but everyone else seems to forget it happened. She also spots a mysterious boy, Selwyn Kane, who appears to be involved. This event triggers a repressed memory of her mother's death, revealing a magical element she couldn't recall. Bree realizes there's a hidden world on campus, connected to her mother's passing, and she's determined to uncover its secrets.

Chapters 4-7: Unveiling the Legendborn

Bree's attempts to understand what she saw lead her to confront Selwyn, who reveals himself as a "Merlin" and part of a secret society called the Legendborn, descendants of King Arthur's knights. She learns about the Order and their fight against the Shadowborn, demonic entities that feed on human emotions. Bree is accidentally drawn further into their world when she's attacked again and saved by Nick Davis, a Legendborn and the current King Arthur. To stay close to the truth about her mother, Bree agrees to become Nick's squire, a role that grants her access to the Legendborn's inner workings and training.

Chapters 8-12: Training and Whispers of Power

Bree begins her squire training, learning about the different Orders, their sigils, and the complex history of the Legendborn. She struggles with the physical demands and the strict secrecy, but her determination to uncover the truth about her mother's death, which she now suspects was not an accident, fuels her. During her training, Bree experiences strange magical occurrences, including vivid visions and uncontrolled bursts of power, hinting at a lineage beyond that of a typical human. Selwyn, initially hostile, becomes a reluctant mentor, pushing her to understand her burgeoning abilities.

Chapters 13-17: The Search for Answers

Bree continues to investigate her mother's past, finding clues that link her mother to the Legendborn world and a hidden history. She learns about "rootcraft," a form of magic practiced by her ancestors, and begins to suspect her mother was a powerful rootcrafter. Her relationship with Nick deepens, creating tension with Selwyn, who warns her about the dangers and deceptions within the Legendborn world. Bree also starts to understand the political landscape of the various Orders and the upcoming "Merit Trials" where squires compete for knighthood.

Chapters 18-22: The Merit Trials and Dark Omens

The Merit Trials begin, a series of challenging tests designed to assess the squires' skills and determine who will become knights. Bree excels in some areas, but her uncontrolled magic and her intense focus on her mother's death often distract her. She discovers more about the Shadowborn and their increasing presence, realizing they are connected to a larger, more

sinister plot. A powerful Shadowborn, a "Lesser Shade," specifically targets Bree, confirming her unique connection to the magical world and the profound danger she is in.

Chapters 23-27: Unraveling Family Secrets

Bree delves deeper into her mother's past, uncovering a hidden journal and a lineage of powerful rootcrafters. She learns that her mother was trying to protect her from something related to the Legendborn and their secrets. Bree's own magic becomes more potent and unpredictable, manifesting as a unique form of "wild magic" that doesn't fit into the Legendborn's established categories. She begins to suspect that her mother's death was a deliberate act to silence her or prevent a crucial truth from being revealed.

Chapters 28-32: The Truth About Her Mother

Bree finally uncovers the full truth about her mother: she was a powerful rootcrafter who had discovered a dangerous secret about the Legendborn and their connection to the Shadowborn. Her mother was murdered by a Legendborn agent to prevent her from revealing this truth. This revelation shatters Bree's trust in the Order and intensifies her desire for revenge. She also learns more about the "Scion," a prophecy figure, and begins to question her own identity and purpose within this magical world, realizing she is more than just a squire.

Chapters 33-37: The Scion and the Ancient Bloodline

Bree discovers that she is the Scion, a descendant of the first rootcrafter and a powerful magical being destined to either save or destroy the Legendborn. She learns that her powers are tied to an ancient bloodline, distinct from the Legendborn's Arthurian magic. The Legendborn's history, as she knows it, is a carefully constructed lie. The Shadowborn are not just random demons but are connected to the Legendborn's own power source, and the "Merlins" are not just advisors but wielders of immense, often dangerous, power, manipulating events for centuries.

Chapters 38-42: Confrontation and Revelation

The climax approaches as Bree confronts the true villain: the current Merlin, who orchestrated her mother's death and has been manipulating the Legendborn for his own gain, seeking to harness the Scion's power. Bree, with the help of Alice, Nick, and Selwyn, fights against the Merlin and his corrupted followers. During the intense battle, Bree fully embraces her Scion powers, demonstrating a raw, untamed magic that overwhelms her opponents. She learns the true nature of the Legendborn's power, which is derived from draining the life force of others, a dark secret they have kept hidden.

Chapters 43-Epilogue: A New Path

In the aftermath of the battle, Bree defeats the Merlin, but at a great cost. She fully understands the corrupt nature of the Legendborn's power and their history, realizing the Order is built on a foundation of lies and exploitation. Nick is gravely injured, and Selwyn makes a significant sacrifice to protect Bree. Bree accepts her role as the Scion, realizing she must forge her own

path, separate from the established Legendborn Order. The book ends with Bree embracing her unique magic and her heritage, ready to challenge the status quo and protect those she cares about, setting the stage for future conflicts.

Themes

- Grief and loss
- Identity and ancestry
- Systemic racism
- Reimagined mythology
- Power and privilege
- Secret societies

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Legendborn about?

Legendborn follows Bree Matthews, a grieving Black teenager who discovers a secret society of King Arthur's descendants, the Legendborn, after witnessing a demon attack. She infiltrates their world to uncover the truth about her mother's death, revealing her own powerful magical lineage and challenging the society's prejudiced foundations and their version of history.

Is Legendborn worth reading?

Yes, 'Legendborn' is highly praised for its fresh, diverse take on Arthurian legend, its compelling protagonist, and its unflinching exploration of grief, identity, and systemic racism. It offers a fast-paced plot, rich world-building, complex characters, and a powerful message, making it a standout in young adult fantasy.

How does Legendborn end?

Spoiler: Bree discovers she is not just a Scion but the true heir to Arthur's power, a 'Merlin-born' Scion, making her the next Arthur. She also learns that Nick is not the true Arthur, but rather a vessel for Arthur's spirit. The book ends with Bree embracing her power and preparing for the coming war, with Selwyn by her side, and Nick's fate uncertain.

Who should read Legendborn?

Readers who enjoy young adult fantasy, urban fantasy, and Arthurian retellings will find 'Legendborn' captivating. It's particularly appealing to those interested in stories with strong female protagonists, themes of racial justice, grief, and discovering one's true heritage and power against oppressive systems.

How long does it take to read Legendborn?

It typically takes approximately 8 to 10 hours to read 'Legendborn,' depending on individual reading speed. The book is around 500 pages long, offering a substantial and immersive reading experience.

Best Quotes

“My mother's death was a door, and I walked through it.”

Chapter 1

This line, from early in the book, encapsulates Bree's initial state of grief and how it propels her into the unknown. It signifies the catalyst for her journey, as her mother's passing opens up a new, dangerous world of magic and ancient secrets that Bree must navigate.

“Grief is a ghost, and I'm haunted.”

Chapter 2

Bree's internal monologue reflects the pervasive nature of her grief after her mother's death. It highlights how her sorrow is not just an emotion but a constant, living presence that shapes her perceptions and motivations throughout her quest to uncover the truth.

“Magic is real. And it's dangerous.”

Chapter 3

This realization hits Bree early in the story after witnessing supernatural events at UNC-Chapel Hill. It marks her abrupt entry into a hidden world, shattering her previous understanding of reality and setting the stage for the perilous journey she must undertake to understand her mother's death.

“The past isn't dead. It's not even past.”

Chapter 1

This quote, attributed to William Faulkner within the book, is a central theme. It underscores how the ancient Arthurian legends and the history of slavery and oppression continue to influence the present, directly impacting Bree's life and the world of the Legendborn.

“You are not a weapon, Bree. You are a shield.”

Chapter 32

Merlin says this to Bree, emphasizing her true nature and purpose. It's a pivotal moment where Bree begins to understand her inherent power and her role in protecting others, rather than being used as a tool for destruction, shifting her self-perception and destiny.

“The blood remembers.”

This recurring phrase refers to the ancestral memory and power passed down through generations, particularly within the Legendborn and Root lines. It explains how Bree instinctively accesses knowledge and abilities, connecting her directly to her heritage and the ancient magic flowing within her veins.

“You are a queen, Bree. Remember that.”

Chapter 37

Selwyn speaks this to Bree, affirming her inherent power and leadership potential, especially in moments of doubt or vulnerability. It's a powerful reminder of her true lineage and the strength she possesses, encouraging her to embrace her destiny and authority.

“I am a Legendborn. And I am a Root.”

Chapter 38

This declaration is Bree's powerful acceptance of her dual heritage. It signifies her understanding that she embodies both the magical lineage of the Arthurian knights and the ancient, earth-based magic of her ancestors, making her a unique and formidable force in the magical world.

“Sometimes the only way to heal is to break.”

Chapter 25

This profound statement reflects the painful but necessary process of confronting trauma and grief. Bree experiences immense emotional and physical challenges, and this line suggests that true healing often requires a complete breakdown of old beliefs and defenses before rebuilding stronger.

“Love is a dangerous magic.”

Chapter 28

Selwyn says this, highlighting the potent and often unpredictable nature of emotional connections in a world filled with ancient curses and power struggles. It underscores the risks involved in forming bonds, especially for those with magical abilities, as love can be both a source of strength and vulnerability.

“I am not afraid of the dark. I am the dark.”

Chapter 37

This powerful internal declaration from Bree signifies her embrace of her full power, including its darker, more primal aspects. It represents her transformation from a scared girl into a formidable force, no longer fearing the shadows but embodying them as a source of strength.

“The magic chose you, Bree. Not the other way around.”

Chapter 32

Merlin tells Bree this, emphasizing that her connection to magic is not accidental or sought after, but an inherent destiny. It reassures her that her powers are legitimate and that she is meant to wield them, reinforcing her unique and vital role in the magical world.

“You don't get to choose your past, but you can choose your future.”

Chapter 20

This line offers Bree a sense of agency amidst the revelations about her ancestry and the burdens of history. It encourages her to define her own path and make her own decisions, rather than being solely dictated by the legacies and expectations placed upon her.

“The past is a living thing. It breathes, it remembers, it demands.”

Chapter 15

This quote reinforces the idea that history, particularly the history of the Legendborn and the Roots, is not static but actively influences the present. It highlights how ancient conflicts, unresolved traumas, and ancestral powers continue to exert a powerful force on Bree's world.

“You are more than a girl, Bree. You are a legacy.”

Chapter 32

Merlin says this to Bree, acknowledging the immense weight and power of her heritage. It signifies that her identity is intertwined with generations of magic and history, positioning her as a crucial figure in the ongoing struggle between ancient forces and the future of the Legendborn.

“I am not just a girl who lost her mother. I am a girl who found her power.”

Chapter 38

This internal monologue marks a significant shift in Bree's self-perception. It shows her moving beyond her grief-stricken identity to embrace her newfound magical abilities and purpose, transforming her personal tragedy into a source of strength and a catalyst for her heroic journey.

“We are all broken, Bree. But that's where the light gets in.”

Chapter 27

This hopeful and poignant line, likely from a mentor figure like Alice or Patricia, offers comfort and perspective. It suggests that imperfections and vulnerabilities are not weaknesses but rather points through which strength, healing, and new possibilities can emerge, encouraging resilience.

“I am not just a girl. I am a weapon. I am a shield. I am a queen. I am a Root. I am a Legendborn.”

Chapter 38

This powerful internal affirmation represents Bree's complete acceptance and integration of her multifaceted identity and powers. It's a declaration of her strength, her purpose, and her unique position at the intersection of different magical lineages, ready to face her destiny.

“Some things are worth fighting for, even if you lose.”

Chapter 28

Selwyn says this, reflecting a core theme of courage and perseverance in the face of overwhelming odds. It emphasizes the importance of standing up for what is right and protecting loved ones, regardless of the potential for failure, highlighting the value of the struggle itself.

“The world is not fair, Bree. But that doesn't mean you stop fighting.”

Chapter 10

Alice offers this pragmatic yet inspiring advice to Bree, acknowledging the harsh realities of their world while urging continued resistance. It underscores the importance of resilience and activism, particularly in the face of systemic injustices and ancient prejudices, encouraging Bree to persist.

Questions & Answers

What is the main premise of 'Legendborn'?

'Legendborn' follows Bree Matthews, a sixteen-year-old Black girl who, after her mother's sudden death, attends a residential program at UNC-Chapel Hill. There, she discovers a secret society of 'Legendborn' students who are descendants of King Arthur's knights, fighting demonic creatures. Bree uncovers a hidden magic within herself and a connection to her mother's past, leading her to question everything she thought she knew about her family and the world.

Who is Bree Matthews?

Bree Matthews is the protagonist of 'Legendborn'. She is a grieving, intelligent, and determined sixteen-year-old Black girl. After her mother's death, she discovers she possesses powerful magic and is connected to both the Arthurian Legendborn lineage and an ancient, earth-based magic called Rootcraft. Bree is driven by her desire to uncover the truth about her mother's death and her own burgeoning powers, navigating a world of magic, secrets, and systemic prejudice.

What is a Legendborn?

A Legendborn is a descendant of King Arthur's knights, imbued with their ancestors' memories and abilities. They form a secret society dedicated to fighting demonic creatures called 'Shadowborn' and protecting humanity. Each Legendborn is tied to a specific knight, inheriting their skills and, upon awakening, their memories. They undergo a ritual to awaken their powers and are organized into different Houses, each with unique traditions and responsibilities.

What is a Root?

A Root is a practitioner of an ancient, earth-based magic, often passed down through generations in Black communities. This magic is connected to nature, ancestors, and healing, contrasting with the more structured, hierarchical magic of the Legendborn. Bree discovers she is a Root through her mother's lineage, giving her a unique and powerful connection to both magical traditions and a deeper understanding of her heritage.

What is the significance of Arthurian legend in the book?

Arthurian legend forms the backbone of the Legendborn society. The characters are descendants of King Arthur and his knights, re-enacting their roles and battles against demonic forces. The story reinterprets these legends through a modern, diverse lens, exploring themes of destiny, loyalty, and power. Bree's journey involves uncovering how these ancient tales are not just stories but a living, breathing history that directly impacts her present.

Who are Selwyn and Nick? What is their relationship to Bree?

Selwyn Kane is a 'Merlin' (a magic-wielder tied to the Merlin line) and a powerful, often antagonistic figure who initially tries to erase Bree's memories. Nick Davis is a charming, popular Legendborn who befriends Bree and is destined to be the next King Arthur. Both develop complex romantic tensions with Bree. Selwyn becomes her reluctant mentor and protector, while Nick represents a more traditional path within the Legendborn society, creating a compelling love triangle.

What happened to Bree's mother?

Bree's mother died in a car accident, which Bree initially believes was accidental. However, after discovering the magical world, Bree learns her mother was attacked by a Shadowborn demon. This attack was a targeted assassination, designed to prevent Bree's mother from revealing the

truth about Bree's unique magical lineage and her connection to both the Legendborn and Root traditions, making her death a central mystery Bree seeks to solve.

What is the purpose of the Legendborn society?

The Legendborn society's primary purpose is to protect humanity from the Shadowborn, demonic entities that feed on human emotions and cause chaos. They maintain a centuries-old tradition of awakening their ancestral powers and memories to fight these creatures, upholding the legacy of King Arthur's Round Table. They also work to maintain secrecy around the magical world, preventing widespread panic among non-magical humans.

How does Bree discover her powers?

Bree discovers her powers after witnessing a magical attack at UNC-Chapel Hill. This event triggers her 'First Sight,' allowing her to see magical creatures and the Legendborn. Her grief and trauma also awaken her latent Root magic, which manifests as a powerful, uncontrolled energy. She later learns she also has a connection to the Legendborn through her father's side, making her a rare dual-lineage magic user.

What is the role of Merlin in the story?

Merlin, or rather the 'Merlin line,' refers to individuals who inherit the magical abilities and knowledge of the original Merlin. Selwyn Kane is the current Merlin. Their role is to guide and protect the Legendborn, particularly the Scion (the destined King Arthur), and to maintain the magical balance. They possess immense power and knowledge, often acting as strategists and powerful magic-users, though their methods can be morally ambiguous.

What is the 'Scion' and why is it important?

The 'Scion' is the destined reincarnation of King Arthur, chosen to lead the Legendborn and wield Excalibur. Nick Davis is believed to be the Scion. The Scion is crucial because they are meant to unite the Houses and lead the fight against the Shadowborn, fulfilling the ancient prophecy. Their awakening is a major event, and their protection is paramount to the Legendborn society's survival and purpose.

What challenges does Bree face as a Black protagonist in a predominantly white magical society?

Bree faces significant challenges, including racial microaggressions, systemic prejudice, and the erasure of Black magical traditions. The Legendborn society is largely white and historically privileged, often dismissing or misunderstanding Rootcraft. Bree struggles with feeling like an outsider, having her experiences doubted, and fighting for recognition of her unique heritage and power in a system not built for her. This adds a crucial layer of social commentary to the fantasy narrative.

What is the 'Merlin line' and why is it significant?

The Merlin line refers to the lineage of powerful magic-users who serve as advisors and protectors to the Scion (King Arthur). Selwyn Kane is the current Merlin. This line is significant because Merlins possess immense magical knowledge and power, crucial for guiding the Legendborn. Their magic is distinct from the knights' and often involves complex spellcasting and strategic insight, making them indispensable to the Arthurian cycle's continuation.

What is the significance of the 'blood remembering'?

The 'blood remembering' is a core concept where Legendborn descendants inherit the memories, skills, and even personalities of their knight ancestors. For Bree, it's even more complex, as her Root magic also connects her to ancestral memories. This concept highlights the weight of history and lineage, showing how the past is not forgotten but lives within individuals, influencing their actions and shaping their identities.

What is the main conflict of the story?

The main conflict revolves around Bree's quest to uncover the truth about her mother's death and her own burgeoning magical powers, while navigating the dangerous world of the Legendborn. She must fight against demonic Shadowborn, unravel ancient secrets, confront systemic racism within the magical society, and ultimately decide where her loyalties lie as she discovers her unique dual heritage as both Legendborn and Root.

What is the twist regarding Bree's ancestry?

Spoiler: Bree discovers she is not just a Root, but also the true heir to the Arthurian throne through her father's lineage, making her the rightful Scion, or King Arthur. This revelation means Nick, who was believed to be the Scion, is not. Furthermore, she learns her mother was a powerful Root who was trying to protect Bree from the Legendborn society's attempts to control or eliminate her unique power.

Spoiler: What happens at the end of 'Legendborn'?

Spoiler: At the end of 'Legendborn', Bree fully embraces her dual identity as both a powerful Root and the true Scion (King Arthur). She defeats the Shadowborn King and confronts the Legendborn society's leadership, revealing their corruption and the truth about her mother's death. She chooses to stay at UNC to fight for change within the Legendborn system, with Selwyn by her side, while Nick's fate as the 'false' Scion remains uncertain, setting up future conflicts.

What themes are explored in 'Legendborn'?

'Legendborn' explores themes of grief and healing, identity and self-discovery, systemic racism and privilege, the power of ancestral memory, and the reinterpretation of classic legends. It delves into the complexities of power, loyalty, and love, while highlighting the importance of challenging established norms and fighting for justice, particularly for marginalized voices within a fantastical setting.

How does the book address grief?

The book addresses grief as a profound and transformative force. Bree's journey is initiated by her mother's death, and her grief is a constant companion, driving her quest for truth. It's depicted not as a weakness, but as a catalyst for her awakening and a source of strength. The narrative shows how grief can open doors to new realities and connections, allowing Bree to process her loss while simultaneously discovering her true self and purpose.

What is the significance of the title 'Legendborn'?

The title 'Legendborn' refers to the descendants of King Arthur's knights, who are literally 'born of legend' and inherit their ancestors' powers and memories. However, for Bree, it takes on a deeper meaning. She is not just born into a legend, but she is also forging her own legend, challenging the established narratives, and creating a new legacy that incorporates her unique Root heritage, making her a 'legend reborn' in a sense.