

the shaman and the droll

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by Jack Lasenby

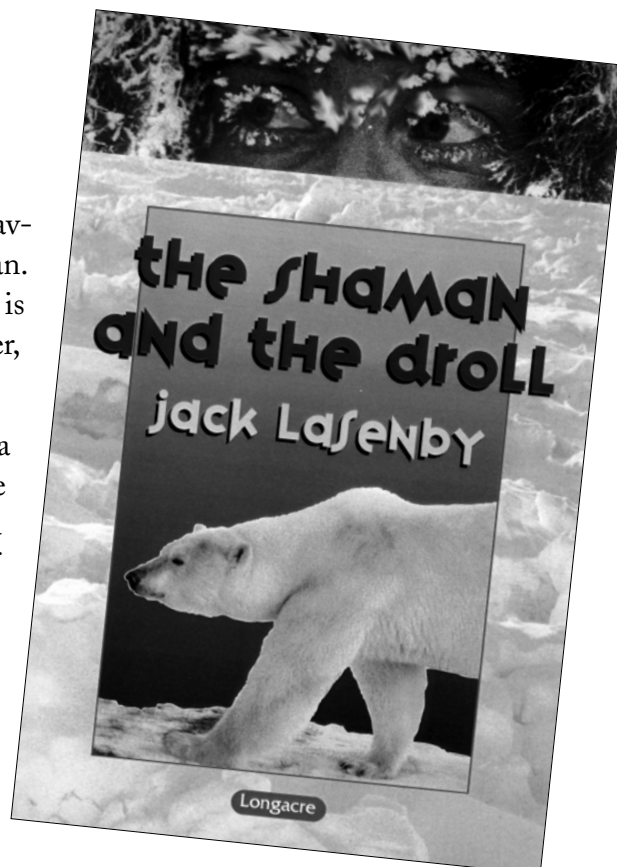
We must trust everyone and no one.

In the harsh land of the Great White Bear, Ish the Traveller finds a rescuer and companion – the Bear Man. Through their friendship Ish discovers the Bear Man is a servant of the village people; their wise one, their healer, their Shaman.

In this timeless, universal story Ish gains wisdom and a place. He learns the profound power of knowledge, the terrifying force of superstition, and witnesses first hand the mysteries of the human spirit. But in this land of blinding light there lurks a dark, menacing presence threatening all who may offend her.

'Lasenby writes impeccably, recreating from minute details a world that depicts both innocence and experience with equal vigour. He dispenses with unnecessary language and presents readers with an uncommon preciseness, a poetic flow. What he leaves unsaid often burdens the reader more than what is said.'

Viewpoint Magazine, Autumn 1999.



resource kit for use in schools

Includes:

- Information about the author
- Chapter by chapter study of the novel
- Comprehension exercises
- Essay topics
- Extension projects and activities

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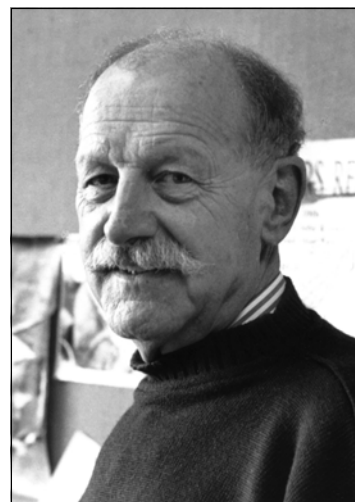
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information about the author

JACK LASENBY was born in Waharoa, Waikato, in 1931. After a variety of jobs, including deer-culler and possum-trapper in the Urewera mountains, Jack became a primary school teacher, then editor of the *New Zealand School Journal* and later, a lecturer at the Wellington Teachers' College.

His books include the popular Seddon Street Gang trilogy, *The Lake*, *The Mangrove Summer*, the Uncle Trev books, *Harry Wakatipu*, *The Conjuror*, and recently the Travellers series, beginning with *Because We Were the Travellers*, followed by *Taur*. *The Shaman and the Droll* is the third in the series. Jack is currently working on the fourth book.



chapter by chapter study

Chapters 1-7

- Does Ish show any signs of missing his previous companion Taur, early in the novel? Why/why not?
- Why is he so quick to trust the people on the island when they welcome him towards them?
- What are Lutha's reasons for rescuing Ish?
- What is the significance of the statue on the island? What does it suggest about the villagers that they choose to be ruled by a statue rather than a person?
- Do you think the people of the Floating Village will survive in the long-term? Why/why not?
- How does Ish define Salt Men?
- How does Ish justify the fact that he too has killed other people?
- Why does Lutha cry when she describes the murder of the Salt Man who was used to father children?
- What is the most likely truth behind Lutha's 'old story' of the origin of bears in the South Land? That: 'the Shaker broke down their cages in a garden. The bears escaped and crossed the mountains.'
- Why does Ish want to cross Grave Mountain?

Chapters 8-15

- What is significant about the way the Bear Man investigates the scene when Nip and Jak are trapped in the bear's carcass?
- What is the first difference in behaviour which Ish notices between the Bear Man and Taur?
- Why is the Bear Man so interested in dogs?
- Which part of a bear is poisonous to eat?
- What is the Bear Man's secret? How does Ish discover it?
- What does the Bear Man mean when he says that 'the cave is a world within a world'?
- Why does the Bear Man tell Ish the story of Queen Amity and her garden?

Chapters 16-22

- What is the 'Shaman's Promise' to his people?
- How does the Shaman use his senses to diagnose people? List three ways.
- What does the Shaman mean when he tells Kala to make Heta (the depressed woman) a 'house of her own'?

- Why do the Seal People need to eat so much fat as well as meat?
- What are the 'Dark Seeds'?
- What is the 'box' mounted on discs which Ish finds in the coal-tunnel?
- What do each of the three tunnels lead to?
- Why does Arku laugh at pain or difficulty?
- Explain the process of catching a seal, which Ish and Arku demonstrate when they hunt on the sea ice near the village of the Cliff People.
- Why won't the Cliff People eat the green plant which grows beneath the cliff?
- Why, even after nearly starving to death, do the Cliff People continue to eat all their food straight away, instead of saving it for future emergencies?

Chapters 23-27

- Who or what is the Carny? What is his job or position among the people in the Land of the White Bear That Ate the Sun?
- What is the Droll?
- How is the Carny related to the Droll?
- Do you think the Carny really believes in the Droll?
- Is it possible that the Carny sabotaged Cheena's wedding on purpose? If so, why?
- Why doesn't the Shaman intervene to get rid of the Carny?
- What do the words 'anathema' and 'maranatha' mean? Are they appropriate to the situation when the Shaman uses them?
- What attacks the Shaman outside in the snow?
- Was Arku right to knock Ish unconscious so he wouldn't try to save Cheena? Explain why you think so.
- What is the disease which kills the little girl in the Coal People's village?
- Before starting work in the forge each day, the blacksmiths pay their respects to a statue of a man with a hammer, which they call 'Thug'. Is there an equivalent mythical figure in contemporary western legends? What are some different names for him?

- Consider the Shaman's story about the Great Shaman making the first sledge, knife, lamp, man and woman. What does this story remind you of? What does it suggest about the nature of shamans?
- When the Shaman judges the dispute in the Cliff People's village, he effectively hands over the decision – whether to spare Filar's life – to his executioner, Chatu. Why does the Shaman choose to take such a risk, rather than simply passing on his own judgement?

Chapters 28-34

- What does the Shaman mean when he tells Ish that: 'It is not you who reads the book; the book reads you.'?
- Name some similarities between Arku and Taur.
- Why is Ish reluctant to become friends with Arku?
- Do you think, in the end, Arku was as good a friend to Ish as Taur was? Why/why not?
- What is the word 'Carny' short for?
- Why does Ish think the Carny is like the white bear who attacked the village?
- How do Ish and Arku help protect the Coal People's village against bears?
- Each of the different villages of people living in the Land of the White Bear have particular abilities and weaknesses. Name an example of a folly and a strength for each of the following three groups: the Seal People, the Cliff People, and the Coal People?
- What similarities are there between Lutha and the Shaman? Think of their sayings as well as their likes and dislikes.
- Why does Arku tell Ish about the peoples' plans to blind him?
- Do you think that Ish was right to leave the Land of the White Bear?
- Are you glad that Lutha got to meet her father before he died? Why/why not?
- What do you think would have happened to Arku after Ish and the Shaman had escaped?

comprehension exercises

things to think about after reading the novel...

DISCUSSION

- Participate in a classroom discussion about the differences between the Shaman and the Carny. If you were one of the village people, do you think you could do without either the Carny or the Shaman? Try to understand their antipathy for each other, by imagining both points of view. It could help to divide the class into supporters of the Carny and supporters of the Shaman, then debate which leader is more important to the people of the Land of the White Bear.
- What is the importance of storytelling, especially in a culture which doesn't know (or has forgotten) how to read? Discuss the importance of storytelling in our culture. Think of some of the Shaman's stories, such as the Wolf-Wife, or the tale about the two married couples who set out in different directions across the land to see how big the world is. Are there lessons to be read here? What important facts (about survival, history or science) can the Shaman's people (or we) learn from his stories?
- The Shaman is pleased when Ish discovers the story books in the library, because he believes that in order to 'know people, the Judge must know many stories. Must have a sense of the past in order to understand the present.' He also says that: 'People used to try to see into the future, but few foresaw what was going to happen to the world. Only the wise understood our future is in our past.' Discuss what the Shaman means, and relate the ideas to Ish's story. Also consider what wider implications the philosophy has in our world today. Do you agree with the Shaman's claims that the future is in the past? Why/why not?

MULTI-CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. **Where did the Shaman come from?**
 - (a) He was born and raised in the Land of the Great White Bear.
 - (b) He had once lived among the people of Lutha's village, but was accidentally swept under Grave Mountain, and couldn't return.
 - (c) He travelled there from the North Land by boat.
 - (d) He had once lived among the people of Lutha's village, but left them in search of adventure.
2. **Ish's new dog was called:**
 - (a) Nip
 - (b) Tip
 - (c) Trick
 - (d) Pat
3. **The Cliff People's main source of food was:**
 - (a) Bears
 - (b) Whales
 - (c) Birds
 - (d) Seals
4. **Ish cannot climb over Grave Mountain to escape from the Land of the Great White Bear because...**
 - (a) The weather is too bad.
 - (b) The mountain is too steep to climb.
 - (c) The risk of attack by white bears is too great.
 - (d) The risk of avalanche is too great.
5. **Amity was...**
 - (a) An evil queen who wanted to live forever.
 - (b) A goddess who was obsessed with her own beauty.
 - (c) The ruler of the white bears.
 - (d) The creator of the Droll.
6. **What is the first word the Shaman teaches Ish to spell?**
 - (a) S.N.O.W.
 - (b) I.S.H.
 - (c) L.U.T.H.A.
 - (d) J.A.K.
7. **What are the Shaman's two roles among his people?**
 - (a) Counsellor and Priest
 - (b) Priest and Doctor
 - (c) Healer and Judge
 - (d) Healer and Ruler

Answers on last page.

essay topics

- Consider the Shaman's statement: 'People like to scare themselves. If they do not understand, they invent. And what they invent is often worse than the truth. Superstition!' Explain why he dislikes superstition so much. Give examples from the novel, as well as real-life examples. Conclude whether you agree with the Shaman's attitude.
- Write about the Shaman's blindness. Why and how was it done to him? Do you think the people had good intentions in doing it? How has the Shaman adapted? Think about when Ish wonders 'if his blindness gave him a power the sighted do not possess.' Is there any truth to this statement?
- Make a list of some of the types of food which Ish catches and eats during this novel. Which, if any, have you tried? Which would you like to try? Which wouldn't you touch even if someone paid you? Write about a time you hunted for and ate your own food. Did you enjoy the experience? Why/why not?
- Consider the mystery behind the fact that the statue in the Floating Village has the same round face as the Guardians on the mountain-side (where Taur killed Squint-Face), which also strongly resemble the features of the people from the Land of the White Bear. Write a legend of your own creation explaining how the mystery came about.

extension projects and activities

CARTOON / FRESCO

Since the beginning of human evolution, people have been painting their stories, first on cave walls, then on pottery, parchment, church ceilings, and nowadays in books, on television and in the newspaper. So you can claim that cartoons had their origin in cave-paintings made tens of thousands of years ago!

In this novel Ish is motivated by a desire to chronicle his life by drawing on walls. Create your own cartoon or fresco, showing a series of illustrated events in order. Don't worry about drawing immaculate pictures – use stick figures if you like – but make sure your fresco has a strong sense of movement, and that it tells a good story. Examples could include:

- an event from your life, like scenes from your last holiday.
- one of Ish's adventures, like his encounter with the Floating Village, his journey under Grave Mountain, or his escape through the Droll's Tunnel.
- a mythical story from the novel, like the demise of the old civilization, how people spread like a 'plague upon the world' so the sun went mad and destroyed us' and turned much of the earth 'into deserts of ice and sand'.

POSTER

- Create a pictorial representation of the Droll. What would your 'Droll' look like? What would it hold in its hands? Would it be smiling or angry? Include pictures of other 'Droll'-like creatures/entities, from fictional books, television programmes, or even the news.
- Use pictures from magazines, quotes from the novel, your own poetry or art to illustrate the three tunnels behind the Shaman's cave. Show what each tunnel leads to, both literally and symbolically. Surround them with related words or sayings, or give them captions, explaining what they represent.
- Illustrate the concept of Justice, blind, holding scales in one hand and a sword in the other. Perhaps draw the Shaman next to her, highlighting their similarities and differences.
- Create a visual interpretation of the phrase: 'The White Bear That Ate the Sun'.
- Show how Ish's mind might picture Lutha's story of the White Bears escaping from cages in the 'garden' centuries earlier. Contrast this view with your reading of the event.

extension projects and Activities

CREATIVE WRITING EXERCISE

- Describe from the Shaman’s point of view, the day he was blinded.
- Describe Lutha’s point of view seeing Ish in the river, and deciding to rescue him.
- Write about what happened to Arku afterwards. Try to make it a happy ending.

MUSIC

Compose a song expressing the point of view of a character, such as:

- the Carny’s desire to control people using superstition and fear.
- Ish’s search for a home and family.
- the Shaman’s pleasure in his work.
- Lutha’s attitude to the women in her village.

DRAMA EXERCISE

Divide into groups of three or four, and act out a scene or myth from the novel without using words. While this tale is presented, the rest of the class could beat on drums (or clap their hands), as well as providing other sound effects (environmental or relating to the story). Stories could include:

- Ish’s first battle with a bear, in which the roles of Ish, the dogs and the bear should be acted out by individual people (Chapter 8).
- The story of the woman who was chased by cannibals, ran away so fast she turned into a star, then became a man and married a wolf (Chapter 18).
- The murder of Lekka by Tuka, and subsequent theft of his wife and belongings.

STORY-TELLING

Tell a story to the class, making sure that you dramatize it the way a good shaman would, changing voices between characters, and acting the movements. Choose any story which could be performed in an exciting way, either from the book, personal experience, or from your own mythology, such as:

- The hunter chasing the bear as big as a mountain
- Ish’s journey under Grave Mountain
- Your own hunting story
- Adam and Eve being evicted from the Garden of Eden
- How World War Two began and ended
- The discovery of gravity and its implications
- The life and death of Princess Diana
- When the Americans landed on the moon

Answers to Multi-Choice Questions:

1.(b) 2.(a) 3.(d) 4.(c) 5.(a) 6.(d) 7.(c)