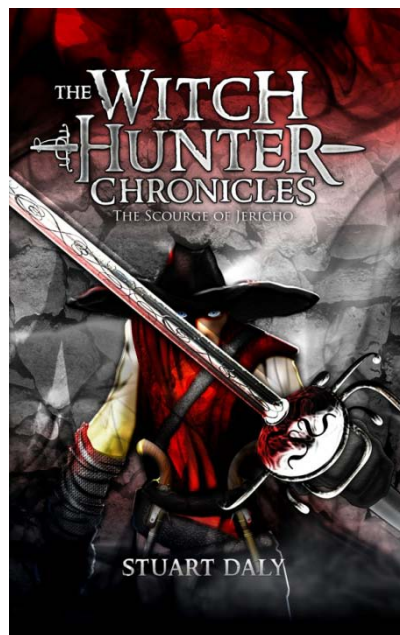


The Witch Hunter Chronicles

The Scourge of Jericho

Stuart Daly



TEACHING SUPPORT KIT

Prepared by Stuart Daly

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Teaching Support Kit

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Scourge of Jericho is the first novel in The Witch Hunter Chronicles, an action-packed adventure series targeted at readers aged twelve to sixteen years. Set in the seventeenth century, the novel is a mix of historical fact and elements of the author's imagination.

Author Stuart Daly had long considered writing a fast-paced, fun historical adventure series for teenage readers. Over the years he put pen to paper and drafted a few ideas, but nothing ever progressed further than a few scribbled pages that were subsequently misplaced. The idea of The Witch Hunter Chronicles, in fact, did not come to Stuart until during his third trip to Germany, back in 2001.

A self-confessed Germanophile, Stuart developed a strong interest in the history of the country, in particular the Thirty Years' War, and was inspired by the medieval towns and castles he visited. It was not until he was wandering the cobbled streets and parapets of Rothenburg ob der Tauber, a medieval town in Bavaria, that the Hexenjäger were born. Stuart's imagination ran wild, envisaging witch hunters stalking through the town's dark alleys, swathed in crimson cloaks, rapiers jostling by their sides, their grim faces hidden beneath wide-brimmed hats.

2. PLOT

Sixteen-year-old Jakob von Drachenfels has long dreamt of following in the footsteps of his cavalry commander father who he never knew. Forging a letter of introduction, he joins an elite order of witch hunters, the Hexenjäger. Jakob gets the shock of his life, when, in his first week, he is selected as part of a team to recover a biblical relic – the Scourge of Jericho – from Schloss Kriegsberg, a castle located in the heart of witch country.

Battling a coven of witches, a possessed witch hunter, a demon, and the immortal Blood Countess is only the beginning of Jakob's problems. For his biggest test lies in earning the respect of his fellow witch hunters. What is already a dangerous mission turns into a desperate struggle for survival when rival military orders – the Brotherhood of the Cross and the King's Secret – converge in Schloss Kriegsberg for a deadly showdown.

3. SETTING

The Scourge of Jericho is set in the German states during the seventeenth century. This was an age of constant warfare, as the great rival European empires sought to expand their borders. In 1666, England was at war with the Dutch Republic, and Ottoman forces were encroaching on the eastern borders of the Holy Roman Empire. As explained in the book's Historical Notes, 'Seventeenth-century Germany was very different to the country we know today. The country ... comprised several hundred independent states, principalities and territories, the borders of which were constantly changing. Known as the "German states" or the "German-speaking lands", these territories were part of the larger Holy Roman Empire. With its capital set in Vienna, and ruled by the Habsburg Holy Roman Emperor, this was a vast and cosmopolitan empire, stretching from Hungary in the east, to the Netherlands in the west, and from the North Sea down to present-day Italy' (p. 261).

This was a period in which people had firm beliefs in witchcraft and the Devil. Witch hunts occurred throughout all parts of Europe during the seventeenth century, but they were most severe in the German states. Real-life witch hunters such as Johann Georg Fuchs von Dornheim, the Witch Bishop of Bamberg, sent thousands of accused witches to their deaths. In *The Witch Hunter Chronicles*, witches are *real*. They are not manifestations of mass hysteria, but have signed a pact with the Devil to gain diabolical powers.

These events and characters provided the perfect backdrop for a heart-pounding adventure series.

4. STRUCTURE AND STYLE

The Scourge of Jericho is written in present tense and in first-person narrative, told from the perspective of sixteen-year-old Jakob von Drachenfels. The author chose this narrative style to create a sense of immediacy, essential in creating the cracking pace of the novel. *The Scourge of Jericho* is, at its heart, an action-packed adventure story, intended to be read quickly; the events of the novel taking place over the course of only two days.

A technique commonly used throughout *The Scourge of Jericho* to heighten suspense and to build the momentum of the narrative is to end chapters with a sudden revelation or a dramatic, unsuspected event. Chapters are kept brief, compelling the reader to carry on into the next chapter. Speed is also created through the use of short, truncated sentences.

Stuart Daly chose a sixteen-year-old narrator to allow teen readers to relate to the protagonist. The desire to be accepted by one's peers and to learn the truth of one's past are issues explored in the daily lives of many teenagers.

Jakob's internal monologues serve the important function of allowing the reader to develop an intimate relationship with the protagonist. The narrator is accessible and familiar to his teenage audience – we are fully aware of his aspirations, limitations and fears. Although archaic language would have certainly added to the novel's authentic feel, the author avoided this so that the language would be familiar to its teenage audience.

The tone is conversational, and the language is rich in figures of speech. Jakob often uses metaphors and similes to describe other characters, creating original and humorous character portraits. These descriptions offer insight into Jakob's creative mind, but also provide a comical perspective that lightens the story's overall suspenseful tone.

5. CHARACTERISATION

Our perspective of characters is provided through the eyes of the narrator. In this sense, the novel presents subjective character portraits. Whilst Jakob narrates events as they occur in present tense, his monologues and observations also encourage the reader to develop specific opinions of the characters.

With the sole exception of the French duellist Armand Breteuil, Jakob has to work hard to earn the trust and respect of the Hexenjäger. Many of the witch hunters have a

personal dislike of Jakob, and only as the narrative unfolds, when we learn more of these characters' pasts, does Jakob come to understand their differing motivations.

Bethlen is the only member of the Hexenjäger who maintains a great dislike of Jakob throughout the entire novel. From the first page, Bethlen is introduced as taking great pleasure in taunting Jakob. Bethlen is unaware of the truth concerning Jakob's past and believes he represents 'all that is wrong with this world, with its lucky few born into prestige and wealth, whilst the rest of us have to fight for the scraps from your table' (p.78). He is without morals, and informs Jakob that he has survived the hardships of life by being cunning and brawn. In a cowardly demonstration of his merciless nature, he drives his blade into Klaus's back. Jakob wonders how many others have died by having Bethlen sneak up behind them and murder them in cold blood.

The only female characters to appear in *The Scourge of Jericho* are the witches, the Blood Countess, and Sabina, the kitchen hand who develops a strong friendship with Jakob. The primary reason for this subdued female presence in the book is because the vast majority of people who were accused of witchcraft during that period were women. Midwives were also blamed for high infant mortality rates, and women were generally seen in the eyes of the seventeenth-century Church as associated with Eve's temptation of Adam, leading humanity into perpetual sin. Women were also banned from joining military organisations.

Readers may be intrigued to know that in the original draft of the novel, the character of Jakob was initially a girl, dressed as a boy, determined to break free from the shackles of contemporary gender stereotyping. The narrative voice, however, was too strong, defiant and derisive for this to be convincing, and so, the idea was abandoned.

Readers might also be intrigued to know, however, that a female main character will be introduced in book two of the series!

6. THEMES

The primary themes of *The Scourge of Jericho* are the **quest for identity, friendship, the dangers of ambition, courage, and deception and betrayal**. Below are notes on the quest for identity and friendship.

The quest for identity

The novel is a journey of self-discovery. Jakob's motive for joining the Hexenjäger is to follow in his father's footsteps. Driven by the blood coursing through his veins, Jakob has long dreamt of joining a military unit and carving a name for himself in combat. He was even prepared to forsake a promising career as an apprentice Warden in Dresden's Brotherhood of Farriers, and fabricated a letter of introduction in order to follow his dream.

Jakob's quest to prove himself in combat sees him selected as part of a team sent on a perilous mission to recover the Scourge of Jericho from a witch-infested castle. On the day before heading up to the castle, Jakob starts to question why he was selected to battle alongside veteran witch hunters. His lack of experience is placed in direct contrast to his battle-ready companions: 'their collective scars a timeline of every major engagement fought in the German states over to the turbulent course of the past decade' (p.286). Jakob's anxiety is heightened by Bethlen's and von Frankenthal's relentless taunting that he will not survive the mission. He believes that he has placed himself in great peril, but it is too late to turn back. He has no choice but to face the consequences of his actions.

At one point, Jakob's personal journey almost comes to an end when, after his first encounter with bloodthirsty witches, he almost confesses to Armand that he lied about his impressive military background. This is a crucial moment in Jakob's journey. He stands at a crossroads, fearing for his life, wanting desperately to return to the security of his former life. It is only Armand's comment – that Jakob's father would be proud of him – that stirs something deep within Jakob. He demonstrates great courage in deciding to venture deeper into the castle.

Having overcome his fear and defeated the witches, Jakob is rewarded for his bravery. He earns the respect of his fellow witch hunters, and learns that the spirit of his father does indeed lie within him. For the first time in his life, Jakob feels as one with his father, who is no longer an elusive ghost. Jakob can even picture his father as an older version 'of myself, grizzled and scarred by years of war, guiding his mount along a dusty trail, somewhere in the war-ravaged Low Countries over a decade ago' (p.244).

The novel concludes with major revelations concerning the mysterious past of Jakob's father, and of the possibility that he is still alive, albeit having spent the last decade chained to a prison wall in Rotterdam. Jakob's journey of self-discovery is far from over, and he makes a vow that he will undertake a quest to rescue his father.

Friendship

In the beginning of the novel, only two people at Burg Grimmheim befriend Jakob: Sabina and Armand Breteuil.

Jakob is quick to form a bond with Sabina, the kitchen hand. He feels comfortable and relaxed when in her company, and spent much of his time in his first week as an initiate in the kitchens, where their friendship developed. Sabina is the first person to have faith in Jakob, believing that he will one day become a skilled witch hunter. In the novel, Jacob also admits that conversations with Sabina are never forced, and he is quick to defend her against Bethlen.

Armand is the only member of the Hexenjäger to offer an initial hand of friendship to Jakob. Armand confides in Jakob that he has a shady past, but Jakob does not hold this against the French duellist. Jakob accepts that Armand is flamboyant and cavalier, but he also believes he is honest and sincere. Although von Frankenthal has been assigned to protect Jakob, it is Armand who takes on this role. Indeed, Armand becomes Jakob's mentor, giving him practical advice in slaying witches, and providing him with the much needed moral support he needs to survive the mission.

7. ACTIVITIES

INTRODUCTION

- Before reading the novel, consider the cover illustration. In small groups, discuss with your classmates what you think the story will be about.
- Research the witch hunts of the seventeenth century. How are these reflected in the context of *The Witch Hunter Chronicles*?

PLOT

- Do you find the ending of the novel satisfying? Justify your reason.
- Having finished the novel, write a one-page summary of what you think will happen in the sequel, given the events to take place in *The Army of the Dead*. (See the advertisement at the back of the book.)
- Chronology: see BLM 1 for a numbering activity.

SETTING

- Refer to page 7 of the book, and read the above notes on the novel's setting. Why do you think the author chose to set the novel in the year 1666?
- Sketch a floor-plan of Schloss Kriegsberg. Refer to pages 52, 62, 88 and 191–92 for information on the layout of the castle.
- The night before heading into Schloss Kriegsberg, the Hexenjäger sit around a camp fire and tell tales of witches (page 47). How is an atmosphere of suspense created?
- Imagine you were sitting around the camp fire with the Hexenjäger. Create your own blood-chilling tale, set in the same historical period as the novel.
- Two real-life witch hunters are mentioned in the novel: Witch Bishop of Bamberg Johann Georg Fuchs von Dornheim and Witch Finder General Matthew Hopkins. Research the career of one of these witch hunters, using Powerpoint to present your findings to the class.
- Research the historical personality Countess Elizabeth Báthory. Present a two-minute speech to the class on how she provided inspiration for the novel.
- Read Jakob's description of Paris on page 29. Write a report from the perspective of a Parisian journalist of that time on how duelling has impacted their city. Include an account of one of Armand's daring exploits in this report.
- Imagine you are adapting the story into a film. Choose a specific chapter and create a storyboard. A storyboard, like a comic strip, displays a series of images placed in sequence, and as seen through the camera lens. Present your storyboard to the class and explain your choice of film techniques. Ensure your storyboard considers the following:
 1. The type of camera angles and shots you would use.
 2. The type of atmosphere you'd like to create through lighting, background music and sound effects.
 3. The background used in each shot.

STRUCTURE AND STYLE

- The novel is told in first-person narrative. How is this effective in creating a close bond between Jakob and the reader?
- Read the descriptions of the Hexenjäger in chapter one and on page 37. Imagine that two new soldiers join the order. Describe them in the rich, figurative language Jakob uses.
- Read chapter five. Write down all of the similes and metaphors you can find.

Choose five of these and explain why they are effective.

- Read the final page of chapters two, six, ten and fourteen. How is suspense created?

CHARACTERISATION

- Read page 11. Write the letter that Jakob left on his uncle's and aunt's bedside table, explaining his reason for joining the Hexenjäger.
- The members of the Brotherhood of the Cross are introduced on pages 84–85. Whilst we are provided with descriptions of Leopold and Kurt von Wolfenbuttel, little information is provided about the Holy Spirit. Why do you think the author chose to provide such little information about this character? Write a character portrait of the Holy Spirit and speculate on his reasons for joining the Brotherhood of the Cross.
- Refer to pages 84–85. Create a Wanted poster for one of the Brotherhood of the Cross.
- In small groups, discuss the role played by Sabina. Designate a spokesperson for your group and have him/her report back to the class.
- Why does Bethlen treat Jakob with such disrespect? Do you feel sympathy for Bethlen? If so, why/why not?
- Read page 77–79. How are Jakob and Bethlen similar?
- Who is your favourite character in the novel? Justify your choice.

THEMES

- What has Jakob learned about his father by the novel's conclusion? What effect does this have on Jakob?
- In pairs, discuss the character of Christian von Frankenthal. How does he initially treat Jakob? Why does he treat him like this? How and why does their relationship change throughout the course of the novel?
- Jakob and Armand become good friends. Create a timeline that charts the development of their friendship.
- **Deception and betrayal** are principal themes of the novel. Create a mind map of all the examples of deception and betrayal that you think exist. Include a quote for each example you find in the story.
- In small groups, discuss how **courage** and **the dangers of ambition** are explored in *The Scourge of Jericho*.
- **Redemption** is another theme evident in the novel. Explain how it is explored through Armand's character.

CHRONOLOGY

Number the following events according to their chronological order
in *The Scourge of Jericho*.

- [] Armand instructs Jakob in swordplay.
- [] Klaus informs Jakob of what happens in the Harz Mountains during Walpurgis Night.
- [] Armand discovers a silver bullet in one of the witches.
- [] Von Frankenthal berates Jakob for not paying attention whilst riding to Schloss Kriegsblatt.
- [] Jakob shoots the Blood Countess.
- [] Armand tells Jakob about Gerhard, the last initiate placed under von Frankenthal's care.
- [] Jakob is introduced to Dieter and learns that his father may still be alive.
- [] Jakob realises that Klaus is the Holy Spirit.
- [] Captain Faust is killed.
- [] Jakob learns the truth as to why Bethlen dislikes him.
- [] Jakob displays great courage in drawing the demon away from von Frankenthal.
- [] Jakob leaps off the roof of the keep.
- [] Captain Faust informs the witch hunters that the Scourge of Jericho is guarded by a witch known as the Blood Countess.
- [] Von Frankenthal hands Claus's sword to Jakob.
- [] Blodklutt tells Jakob that his success and survival on the mission was largely due to luck.
- [] Jakob earns the respect of von Frankenthal.
- [] Jakob reveals that he left a letter on his uncle's and aunt's bedside table.
- [] Jakob feels sick after having fought his first witch.
- [] Jakob wakes in the keep to find that Blodklutt has his pistol aimed at the remaining members of the team.
- [] Von Frankenthal is bewitched, turning into the Blood Countess's pawn of evil.
- [] Armand tells Jakob that his father would be proud of him.
- [] The Hexenjäger discover the dead witches inside the keep.
- [] Bethlen drives his sword into Klaus's back.
- [] Armand informs Jakob that the *Malleus Maleficarum* enacts a heavy toll from those who use it.
- [] Jakob confesses that he fabricated a letter of introduction in order to join the Hexenjäger, unbeknownst to the order

- [] Jakob calls von Frankenthal '*Revelation 6.8*'.
- [] Jakob discovers the mangonel located atop the keep.
- [] Bethlen throws a lump of horse dung at Jakob.
- [] Jakob learns that Heinrich von Dornheim is in league with the Blood Countess.
- [] Jakob is surprised by Claus's cynical remark that the Catholic Church has done little to hunt the witches in the Harz Mountains.
- [] Heinrich von Dornheim enters the keep, the witches retreating from him in fear.
- [] Robert Monro announces that the King's Secret is heading towards Schloss Kriegsblatt.
- [] Jakob leaps out the window, reaching for the gargoyle.
- [] Kurt von Wolfenbuttel rolls a grenade into the room where the Hexenjäger are hiding.
- [] Von Frankenthal taunts Sabina, declaring that Jakob is her boyfriend.
- [] Jakob is knocked unconscious by an unknown assailant just as he is about to race up to the next level of the keep to assist his companions.
- [] The witches emerge from the paintings.
- [] Bethlen reveals that he is a member of the King's Secret.