

BATTLE OF THE BARDS

A Wonderful Week for a Quest, Book VI | Book Club Kit | Michael D. Young

Music, magic, rivalry, true love, and one festival that goes spectacularly off-script.

SPOILER-LIGHT ORIENTATION

The Beandom is running on thin resources when Jackdaw the Wizard is ordered to host the legendary Battle of the Bards. The tournament pulls wizards, performers, rivals, and old friends together just as a darker threat begins gathering around the kingdom.

Sir Roderick and Bellissimo are also trying to rebuild their relationship under a magical restriction that makes even a simple touch complicated. Grimbalewaith, Petra, and the wider ensemble are drawn into overlapping missions as music becomes more than entertainment: it can inspire, persuade, disguise, control, and unite.

Best for groups that enjoy humorous fantasy, genre parody, musical jokes, and character-centered stakes. Begin with the spoiler-light pages, then move into the full-spoiler discussion after everyone has finished the book.

CHARACTERS & THEMES

JACKDAW THE WIZARD - Narrator, host, mentor. He wants the event to prove the Beandom - and himself - worthy of respect. His teasing relationship with Petra hides genuine trust and responsibility.

BELLISSIMO - Farmer, performer, loyal partner. Bell wants Sir Roderick back, not an improved version of him. Her patience, practicality, and musical talent connect the romantic and bardic plots.

SIR RODERICK - Knight, adoptive father, quester. He accepts an illusion that restores his old appearance, but True Love's Touch can break it.

GRIMBLEWAITH - Whatsit turned faekind. He has found love and a place in the world, but is still learning what his new nature means. Loyalty makes him one of the story's most dependable allies.

PETRA - Jackdaw's apprentice. Capable, sarcastic, and trapped in stone through most of the book. She helps organize the contest, investigates danger, and ends on an ominous cliffhanger.

THEMES TO TRACK

Music as Power - Performance crosses into influence, enchantment, memory, intimidation, and control.

Identity vs. Appearance - Roderick's illusion, Petra's stone body, Grimbalewaith's transformation, and stage personas ask how much of a person is visible from the outside.

Pride, Rivalry & Validation - Jackdaw's comparison with Merlin shows the danger of making recognition the goal instead of the work.

Love, Loyalty & Chosen Family - Roderick/Bell, Roderick/Arach, Jackdaw/Petra, and Grimbalewaith/Wren show commitment that matters most when it costs something.

Performance & Manipulation - Felgarath understands that power can be easier to accept when it arrives as spectacle.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Jackdaw narrates while also participating. How does his personality shape what readers notice - and what they may not?
2. Why is hosting the Battle of the Bards so important to Jackdaw? How much is service to the Beandom, and how much is wanting Merlin's respect?
3. Roderick can look like his old self, but the illusion vanishes with True Love's Touch. What does that rule reveal about appearance, vulnerability, and acceptance?
4. Bellissimo wants Roderick rather than a more acceptable version of him. Where does the story test that conviction?
5. Music becomes celebration, competition, memory, persuasion, and weaponry. Which use of music matters most to the story?
6. Petra repeatedly challenges Jackdaw and keeps the event moving. In what ways is she an apprentice, and in what ways is she already his partner?
7. What does the Golden Harp represent to Jackdaw and the Beandom? Does the prize become more or less meaningful as danger increases?
8. Felgarath uses charisma and performance alongside raw magic. Why can performance make manipulation more effective?
9. The book turns danger into game mechanics, musical acts, jokes, and footnotes. Does the humor make the danger feel lighter, sharper, or both?
10. Grimbalewaith has spent much of the series feeling like an outsider. What has changed about the way he sees himself in Book VI?
11. When Precht appears, the conflict shifts from a dangerous festival to a threat against the entire Beandom. How effective is that escalation?
12. The ending leaves several characters physically safe but far from secure. Which unresolved thread most makes you want to read the final quest?

MEMORABLE MOMENTS & ACTIVITIES

MOMENTS WORTH DISCUSSING

Pixie Post Ruins the Potion - A tiny delivery wrecks months of work and forces Jackdaw to confront Merlin's invitation.

The No-Touch Reunion - Roderick climbs a tree to keep Bellissimo from breaking the illusion; the barrier is magical, but the emotional distance is self-imposed.

Extreme Makeover: Arena Edition - Felgarath's transformation of the venue makes his power and charisma impossible to ignore.

The Battle Begins - The Golden Harp, packed crowd, hosting anxiety, and meta hecklers bring the festival's jokes and worries together.

Dragonbond vs. the Fell Five - Arach and Roderick turn family loyalty into literal power while Bell's magical manipulation raises the stakes.

Precht and the Retreat - The threat expands beyond Felgarath, and Petra's final scene turns the cliffhanger into a personal crisis.

GROUP ACTIVITIES

Create a Bard Card: stage name, signature song, special ability, greatest strength, and one spectacular weakness.

Build Your Band: assemble a five-member act from series characters and assign musical roles.

Jackdaw Footnote Challenge: add a one- or two-sentence Jackdaw-style footnote to a serious scene.

Festival Planner: sketch the ideal Battle of the Bards venue, including security, escape routes, and one contingency Jackdaw forgot.

Playlist of the Beandom: choose real songs for six characters and explain the connection.

Debate the Real Prize: Golden Harp versus the relationships and alliances formed during the contest.

FACILITATOR GUIDE

A flexible 60-90 minute meeting plan

BEFORE THE MEETING - Ask each reader to flag one favorite footnote, one musical joke, and one moment that felt unexpectedly serious.

SUGGESTED FLOW

10 min - Warm-up: favorite joke, footnote, or act.

30 min - Core questions: Jackdaw, Roderick/Bell, music as power.

15 min - Deeper dive: Felgarath, manipulation, identity.

15 min - Activity: Bard Card, playlist, or footnote challenge.

10 min - Wrap-up: predictions for the final book.

FACILITATOR NOTES - Start with humor before moving into darker late-book material. Keep romantic discussion focused on choice, acceptance, and self-image. When opinions differ, ask for a specific scene rather than a general impression.

CLOSING REFLECTION

The Battle of the Bards begins as a contest about who can perform best and ends with characters asking who they really are when performance is no longer enough. Which character seems most changed by the time the survivors reach Jackdaw's tower - and what kind of change do you expect the final book to demand?

Carry into Book VII: The survivors are sealed inside Jackdaw's tower, Petra has been restored from stone but is compromised, Felgarath survives, and Precht's threat is bigger than any one wizard, band, or kingdom.