

ADEN POLYDOROS

RING OF SOLOMON

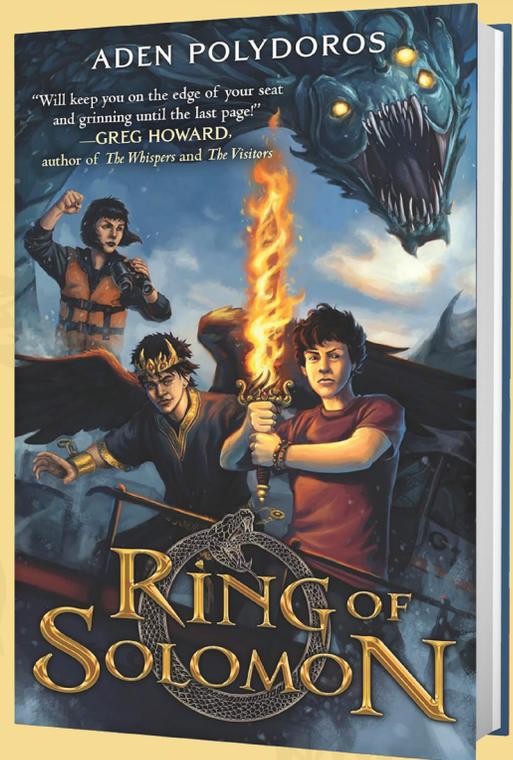
DISCUSSION GUIDE



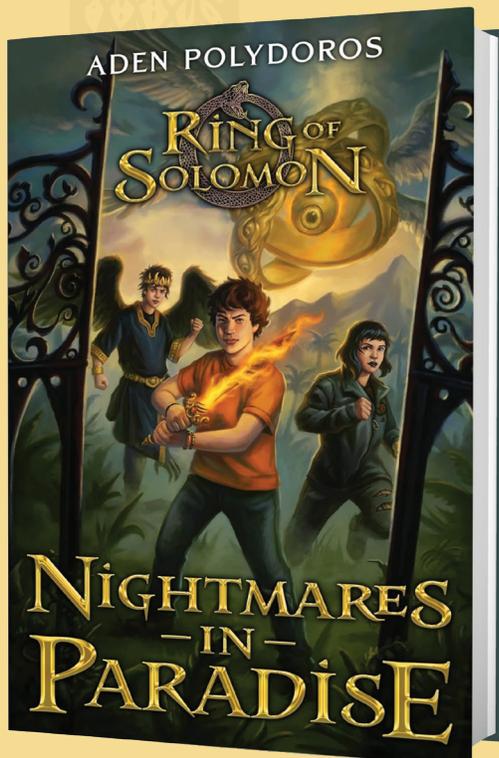
The little beachside town of San Pancras is not known for anything exciting, but when Zach Darlington buys a mysterious ring at the local flea market, his quiet little hometown is turned topsy-turvy by monsters straight from Jewish folklore and a nefarious secret society focused on upholding an apocalyptic prophecy.

Zach discovers that the ring grants him strange powers, and he's intrigued; maybe he can use the ring's strengths to halt the slew of anti-Semitic and homophobic bullying he's experiencing at school. But soon the ring brings unexpected visitors—Ashmedai, King of Demons, in the guise of a preteen boy named Ash, and the local chapter of the Knights of the Apocalypse, a secret society intent on completing a creepy prophecy that will bring three monsters to Earth to start the events of the end of times.

Now responsible for the ring and its consequences, will Zach and his friends, with the help of Ash, be able to stop the Apocalypse and save the world?



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BOOK 2 OF THE RING OF SOLOMON SERIES

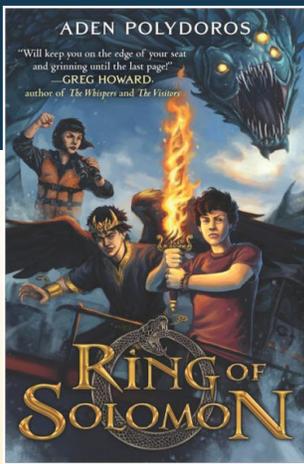
Zach Darlington saved the world from total apocalypse and all he got was grounded. But before Zach can talk some sense into his parents, his little sister, Naomi, lands in an unexplainable coma. Zach's friend Ash (yep, Zach and the King of Demons are friends now) knows this was the work of Ash's eternal nemesis, the Archangel Uriel. And the only way to revive Naomi is with the fruit from the Tree of Life. Yeah, that tree. Like, from the actual Garden of Eden.

Zach and his friends will have to face terrifying angels, monsters, and a serpent to get to the tree and save Naomi's life. He just hopes he won't be grounded till the end of time if they ever make it back.



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RING OF SOLOMON

A NOTE TO TEACHERS ABOUT RESEARCH

It's important to make students aware that there are multiple different religious and secular interpretations of both the fantastical characters in

the Ring of Solomon books, like Ashmedai and Lilith, as well as places like the Garden of Eden. As they learn about and research these people and places, please encourage them to make note of **who** is writing the resource you are looking at, **what** their perspective might be, **how** their religious expertise plays into their analysis, and, in the case of the many secular and pop culture stories that use the names of these characters, **why** their creators might have chosen to use them as a representation for a villain or a particular narrative.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

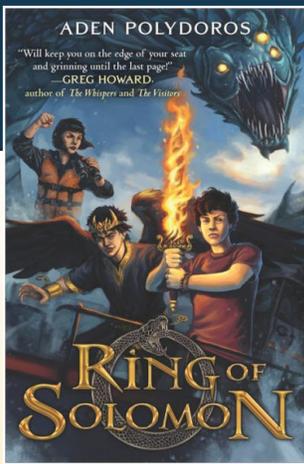
In *Ring of Solomon*, Zach is confronted by terrifying creatures from Jewish theology and mythology that, in this tale, seek to end the world. Before you begin the novel, research with a classmate or friend any of the following biblical creatures: the Behemoth, the Leviathan, and the Ziz. What type of creatures are they? Why were they created? Where and when do their stories appear? What types of power do they have? Additionally, for those interested in extra research, find out about Ashmedai, the king of demons. Who is he? What kinds of things is he known for? How does he factor into some of the famous stories from the Jewish bible, like that of King Solomon?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is Ash's connection to the ring of Solomon? Does it control him? What history does he have with it? What is the nature of his relationship with King Solomon and why is he at first reluctant to share his connection with Zach?
- When Zach asks his mom to explain Ashmedai she says, "calling Ashmedai the king of demons is too simplistic" (p. 41). She then goes on to explain how in Christianity

Ashmedai is called Asmodeus and his demonic nature is much more straightforward and that even though both religions have a version of him, the Jewish version isn't as black or white. Is it possible for demons to be good? How do the differing religious interpretations of demons impact our view of them as readers? Did it surprise you to hear that Ash followed Jewish law and would debate with angels?

- Zach is gay and has realized that about himself but hasn't come out yet to his family. How does Zach's orientation impact some of his actions? He has a crush on his classmate Dominic at first, but after Dominic participates in the bullying Zach sees his true colors. When did you realize that Dominic might not be all that kind? How do you think it felt for Zach to see his crush participate in his bullying? What could Dominic have done instead?
- Another antagonist in this novel is Jeffrey, a classmate of Zach's that bullies him. Why does Jeffrey bully Zach? How are his actions anti-Semitic? How does this impact Zach? If you were a friend or classmate of Zach's, how would you respond to Jeffrey to help Zach?
- When the big reveal about Ash happens on page 223, were you surprised? What hints were given ahead of time about Ash's identity? Why do you think the author chose to make this a part of who Ash is? How does this impact Zach and Ash's connection, and how does Zach ultimately use this to his advantage?
- After Ash is revealed to be the Ziz we see a flashback to Ashmedai and King Solomon. As King Solomon is dying he asks Ash to comfort him taking the form of his "son when he was but a child" (p. 226). Do you think that is really why King Solomon asks him to take this form? Ultimately, the king traps Ash in this form, saying, "You stay within this form, this weak and human form, and for the first time in your cursed existence, understand what it is to feel fear and powerlessness in this world!" (pp. 227-228). Why does King Solomon do this? How does this impact Ash? What hints were given before this flashback that Ash might not be being completely honest about the form he is in?



RING OF SOLOMON

- Zach's best friend is a girl named Sandra. What is their relationship like? How are they similar? How are they different? What does Sandra teach him over the course of

the novel, and how does her own religious and cultural identity impact their decisions when fighting the monsters?

- Throughout the novel we learn about Zach's obsession with monsters. Whether it's through the movies he watches with his dad or the figures he collects, Zach loves all types of monster stories. He says, "the real reason I liked monsters so much was because deep down I felt like one" (p. 27). What does Zach mean by this? How does his own sense of self at times feel monstrous to him? How does this impact his ability to empathize and befriend Ash? How do the people in Zach's life contribute either to his feeling of being an outsider and having to hide who he is or to supporting him?
- In this story the nature of good and evil isn't so clear cut. Do you think Ash is good or evil or somewhere in the middle? Why or why not? Are people inherently one or the other? What do you think impacts a person's ability to be good or bad?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- The Ziz, Leviathan, and Behemoth in this story come from Jewish bible stories and folklore but they also make appearances in other religious traditions. Compare and contrast these three creatures in at least two other religions or cultures. How are they different? How are they the same?
- The Ziz, Leviathan, and Behemoth are all monsters that have specific and epic powers. They are each tied to a specific type of environment (the air, the sea, and the land). Come up with your own monster based on a real animal. What does it look like? What kinds of powers does it have? Is it good or evil?
- The Ziz, Leviathan, and Behemoth can all be found in a variety of popular culture films, books, TV shows, and anime. Research pop culture versions of these monsters and compare and contrast; what's similar and what's different? How does the religious nature of the characters in *Ring of Solomon* impact their portrayal?

★ "Readers will only want to  dive deeper into Ash and Zach's story and the world they inhabit—it's a good thing this is the opener to a planned trilogy."

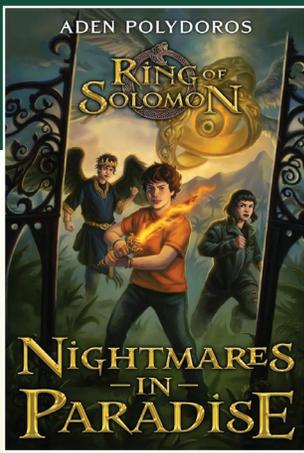
—BULLETIN OF THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S BOOKS, STARRED REVIEW

"Jam-packed with action and humor, *Ring of Solomon* is a rip-roaring good read. Buoyed by the fast pace and excitement of this Jewish mythology-inspired adventure, I plowed right through until there was no more left."

—GRACI KIM, AUTHOR OF *THE LAST FALLEN STAR*

"This exploration of a boy's self is full of fun, humor, and Jewish mythology that I never knew could be so cool."

—REX OGLE, AUTHOR OF *FREE LUNCH* AND *THE SUPERNATURAL SOCIETY*



NIGHTMARES IN PARADISE

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

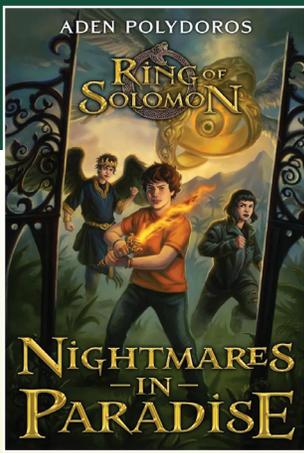
Research the concept of Heaven in different religions with a classmate or friend. Often, we think of Heaven through a particular lens, rooted

in both popular culture representations as well as the predominance of Christianity in our interpretation of religion. But many religions have their own understanding of Heaven and the afterlife. Make a graphic organizer or a compare/contrast chart of five different religions (or more) listing aspects of their beliefs about Heaven. For an extra challenge, add one to two depictions of Heaven from popular culture and see what is similar and what is different!

One of the most important secondary characters in this text is Lilith, considered the first woman God created before Eve. Do some background research on Lilith before you read and make note of who she is, what her specific powers are, why she left/was banished from the Garden and what that might say about her character, how she is treated historically, representations of her across religion and pop culture, and if you think she is entirely bad or if there is more complexity to who she is.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- When Zach is first confronted with the existence of angels, he says, “It shouldn’t have surprised me that they were angels in this world when we had fought the monsters born at the beginning of creation and seeing as Ash himself was the king of demons, but for some reason, when [Ash] said ‘angel,’ all I could think of were the cheesy prints my grandma had hanging in her bathroom—naked winged babies sitting in flower baskets” (p. 76). How does the reality of facing Uriel disrupt Zach’s previous understanding of angels? How does it disrupt yours? Angels are often portrayed as good and demons as bad; how does this book change that narrative? Do you think everyone is inherently good or bad? How do other characters in the book (Jeffrey, Dominic) shift your understanding of good and bad?
- In this book, Zach talks more about his identity as a gay teen. He says, “The reason I loved horror movies so much was because a lot of the time, I felt monstrous myself. Like, why did I always get bullied by Jeffery? Why did being gay feel terrible sometimes, some dark, scary secret I had to hide?” (p. 90). Even though Zach has accepted who he is, how do you think it feels for him to feel this way? How does his love of horror movies overlap with his queer identity? If you have LGBTQ+ friends, how can you support them so they don’t have a similar sense of self? If you are LGBTQ+, who can you talk to for support and affirmation?
- Since defeating the monsters in the first book, Zach has struggled with sharing his terrifying experiences with his family. When the truth ultimately comes out, his parents don’t believe him. He says, “Maybe this was how the survivors felt in all those horror movies, once they’d defeated the monster or serial killer and found their way back to society—separated by a glass wall with no way to get to the other side” (p. 95). What does this say about Zach’s emotional state? How do you think it feels for him, having survived and stopped the end of the world, not to be able to be honest about it with his family?
- How does Zach’s relationship with his parents, specifically his dad, change after the end of the first book? What are some examples of things his dad says to him that reflect those changes? How does this make Zach feel? How does this impact Zach’s understanding of himself as a queer teen and his feelings regarding whether or not he can come out to his parents? Do you think it is safe for him to come out to his parents? Why or why not? How or why does this change or not change at the end of the book?
- Lilith is a significant secondary character in this book. Why do you think the author chose her and Sabine to be a part of Zach’s story? Using your previous knowledge of Lilith based on the pre-reading activity, do you think she is entirely evil? Why or why not? What about her life experiences has influenced her actions? How does this change, or not change, your feelings about her?



NIGHTMARES IN PARADISE

- When Zach finally tell Ash that he is gay, how does Ash react? Why is Zach surprised? How does Ash's reaction make Zach feel about himself? How does Ash's reaction change Zach's thinking?
- When Zach finally meets the Shamir on page 276, how does he react initially? How do his actions reflect the actions of others before him (like Jeffery)? Why does Zach react to the Shamir the way he does? How does he ultimately change his perspective on the Shamir? What might this teach us about prejudging others?
- Right before Zach and Ash part for maybe the final time, Zach gives him the sword. In response, Ash says, "There are more weapons in the world than this one. . . . More importantly, you can't live your life always on the offensive, or your fear will consume your joy until there is nothing left." What does Ash mean? What final message is he trying to impart to Zach?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- List all the different fantastical creatures that Zach and Sandra encounter. Write down their magical powers, what they look like, and if you think they are good or bad. Then create a map of Eden. Draw what you think Eden looks like based on the author's descriptions and chart Zach and Sandra's journey from the gates to the Tree of Life by drawing pictures of who and what they meet along the way.
- One of the main antagonists in this book is Uriel. Research the historical and religious background of the relationship between Ashmedai and Uriel.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Jewish Mythology

[Leviathan: The Biblical Beast of the Brain](#)

[A Demon for the Ages](#)

[Monsters, Demons, and Other Mythical Creatures in Jewish Lore](#)

[Heaven and Hell in Jewish Tradition](#)

[The Estrie - A Jewish Vampire Legend](#)

[Jewish Women's Archive: Lilith](#)

[Support for LGBTQ+ teens \(adapted from the Human Rights Campaign \(HRC\) website\)](#)

[TrevorChat](#)

[TrevorSpace](#)

[Trans Lifeline Hotline](#)

[Q Chat Space](#)

[PFLAG](#)

[LGBTQ Centers](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Aden Polydoros is an award-winning author who transitioned from female-to-male when he was 14. After going "stealth" for over 10 years, he came out as transgender in order to support trans youth and vocalize how transitioning saved his life. His YA gothic fantasy novel,

The City Beautiful, won the Sydney Taylor Book Award and was a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award, the National Jewish Book Award, the Cybils Award, the South Carolina Book Award, and the 2022 World Fantasy Award.