



## *Wildlord* Reading Guide

Greetings and salutations,

I'm Philip Womack, and I've written several novels for young people, including *Wildlord* and *Ghostlord*, which are for a teen audience. Both books are about teenagers encountering a magical world, and how they battle with their growing abilities and against those who want to do great harm to the universe. I love myths and legends, and I usually weave in some form of magic into my stories.

This is a Reading Guide for *Wildlord*. The first half will take you through the narrative, with some exercises and questions you can try out. The second half has some further suggestions for exploration.

Thank you for reading, and I hope you enjoy *Wildlord*.

### **PART 1**

#### **About *Wildlord***

Tom Swinton is in the sixth form at boarding school. Because his parents are dead, and his guardian's away, he has to spend the summer at school, pretty much alone. So when he receives a letter from a long lost uncle called James Swinton, inviting him to stay on the family farm, he accepts at once - despite the warning given to him by a mysterious being he meets at night. Tom arrives at Mundham Farm, and soon discovers some very strange things going on indeed.

*Wildlord* is my ninth novel, and came from some very deep places in my heart: the boarding school Tom is at is modelled on my own school, Lancing College, which sits among the rolling South Downs. I spend a lot of time in Suffolk, and there are plenty of moated houses there (even some farmhouses, like the one in *Wildlord*), as well as lots of burial mounds, like the famous ones at Sutton Hoo.

Usually the moats are there for the purposes of drainage, but I thought they were obviously there to stop magical beings (who can't cross running water) from getting in. So why would a burial mound be near a moated house? Thus was born the idea of the magical beings I call the Samdhya, who are besieging Mundham Farm, for reasons that become clear later on. Tom discovers there's a lot more to his uncle than meets the eye, and is thrown into a battle that threatens to become cosmic.

*Can you think of a place that you love? What are the features of that place? Is it a beach, a house, a forest? Describe the place as if you are coming back to it, ten years after you've last seen it.*

## **Reading *Wildlord***

This section will guide you through the narrative; whenever you reach the end of a particular group of chapters, take stock, and try answering the questions.

### **Before you start reading**

Q. Look at the cover of *Wildlord*. Based on the cover and the title, what kind of story do you think this will be? Note down each, and do a word association game with each one eg. Hare - swift, form, wild.

### **Chapters 1-3: Leaving School**

Each chapter has an extract at the beginning: the first set of extracts are from the (fictional) diary of Margaret Ravenswood, the daughter of a rector in the 19th century. In the first, she mentions the Samdhya. What do you think a Samdhya might be? Do you think that Margaret's story might link in with Tom's?

How do you think Tom feels about being at school for the summer?

What two events contribute to Tom's decision to leave school? Do you think he makes the right decision?

Put yourself into Tom's shoes: what would you do if you received a letter like the one he is given?

**BONUS TASK:** Compose a letter with a set of mysterious instructions in it. Think up an interesting way of delivering it.

### **Chapters 4-6: Introduction to Mundham Farm**

When Tom arrives at Holt station, he is met by a horse and cart. The driver has long silver hair and silver eyes. What role do you think Kit will play in the rest of the narrative?

What do you think the horse and cart might symbolise?

When Tom first meets his uncle, Jack, what are your impressions of him?

Can you find two or three images in these chapters which express how Tom might be feeling?

### **Chapters 7-9: Magic**

Tensions appear throughout these chapters. What were the things that took you most by surprise?

How are your impressions of Jack changing, and his relationship with Kit and Zita?

How do you think Tom feels about Zita?

Think about the imagery in these chapters: is there anything that strikes you in particular?

## **Chapters 10-13: Revelations**

A lot comes out in these chapters, in particular about Zita. Try writing the scene where Zita first meets Jack.

We learn a lot more about Jack and his powers here: think about knowledge and power, and how the two interact. Is there ever such a thing as too much knowledge?

Had you heard of The Good Folk before? If so, how do you think their magic / power is distinct from Jack's? If not, think about how natural magic and sorcery might differ.

## **Chapters 14-17: Acknowledging the past**

Tom must now acknowledge the death of his parents and how it happened. The chapters move towards a climax.

He encounters many strange things, including phantoms. These test him in different ways, and he realises the extent of Jack's powers and corruption. Find some imagery in the chapters, particularly in relation to Jack.

What do you think the function of Leana is in these chapters?

Love is an important theme throughout the novel. How does it function, in all its many types?

## **Chapters 17 – 21: End**

The climax of the book sees Tom and his friends trapped and fighting against terrible odds.

Prison (incarceration) and freedom are central to the book's premise. Can you think of ways in which these themes and images work, particularly in these chapters?

What do you think of the climax? Do you think it's successful?

Now that you've finished the novel, read the opening entries alone as a separate story. Does it throw a new light on the narrative?

We all have to make decisions about our lives: there are certain expectations as to what we do at school, university and with our jobs. Do you think Tom makes the right choice? What would you do?

## **Names and Sayings**

All of the character and place names were chosen very carefully. Were there any that stood out to you?

The name Samdhya was built from Proto-Indo-European building blocks. This is the theoretical language from which all Indo-European languages are descended. The links between words can be fascinating – for example, the Latin word “canis” (dog) and the English word “hound” initially appear very different - but both descend from a word that began with a “kw” sound (you can hear the “h”.)

Try making up your own names and language from these roots. The Online Etymological Dictionary is free and very useful.

Some of the chapters begin with “Sayings of the Samdhya.” How do these fit in with the book’s general themes? Try making up some of your own.

*Wildlord* is the title of the book, but it also has many other resonances. Whom do you think it applies to?

## **Necromancers**

James Swinton is very much based on the idea of the “necromancer” – someone who uses magic for ill. Can you think of other famous necromancers from literature? What does James have in common with them, and what’s different?

## **Time**

One of the ideas behind *Wildlord* was to do with time. Living in our own contemporary bubbles, the past can seem impossibly distant. But in reality, it's not that far away -- my grandmother, for example, was born in 1920, and grew up amongst Victorians, and they in turn would have known people born in the early 19th century. The past and present cross in unusual ways. Think about your own life: are there any objects or stories that have been passed down in your family? Is there anything you see around you, on your walk to school or work, that has a story behind it?

## **Texts**

Texts – letters, diaries, manuscripts and so forth – are very important throughout *Wildlord*. Try writing a journal from the point of view of one of the characters.

There are several references to other books in *Wildlord*. Zita mentions T S Eliot's poem, "Gerontion". Read the poem and discuss its themes.