

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Fantasy literature has cemented its place as a favorite among readers because it creates imaginative worlds that offer excellent escapism. In some cases, these imaginative worlds connect to our real one. They can differ completely from reality, closely resemble it with very little fantastical elements, or be anywhere in between. Regardless of how far they stray from reality, all fantasy worlds remain tied to our own because they are created within it and consumed by people who live in it. According to Roslan et al. (2016), fantasy has been understood for its ability to make us wonder. Thus, this genre is presented as a mechanism for readers to explain and comment on reality by creating imaginary worlds that may be magical or impossible yet still connect back to the real world we know. In this way, fantasy stories exist not merely as escapism but also encourage readers to explore and critique real-world issues and the human condition. Sometimes, we come across a fantasy trope in which two groups within a society are sorted into dominant and subordinate roles, usually justified by blood and social status. This hierarchy raises questions about whether it benefits either group in terms of survival or merely as a form of control.

Such a situation is prominently depicted in an urban historical young adult fantasy trilogy written by Cassandra Clare, *The Infernal Devices*. This series consists of *Clockwork Angel*, *Clockwork Prince*, and *Clockwork Princess*, which were published from 2010 to 2013. It is a prequel to Clare's renowned young adult fantasy series, *The Mortal Instruments* (2007–2013), which is a part of her larger literary saga, *The*

*Shadowhunter Chronicles*. Clare has been one of the frontrunners in young adult fantasy for the past two decades. She consistently incorporates urban fantasy elements into her narrative style and takes real world cities like New York and London as the settings. Furthermore, her novels are widely appreciated for their complex characterization. The protagonists are faced with conflicts involving identity, power, belonging, and moral responsibility, while the narratives explore issues such as prejudice and social hierarchy.

*The Infernal Devices* itself portrays a society consisting of two groups that are separated by origin and nature. They coexist in a supernatural realm called the Shadow World. Nephilim are humans who are blessed with the blood of angels in their veins, to which they are given the duty to protect all its inhabitants, as well as those in the mundane world. Their angelic blood gives them enhanced physical strength, sharper minds, quicker healing, better protection against supernatural dangers, and a more well-organized group. On the other hand, Downworlders are the demonic equivalent of the Nephilim. Although powerful in their own ways, Downworlders do not possess the specialty that Nephilim do from their angelic blood, nor the well-structured community. Moreover, Downworlders are unpredictable and possess traits that can be harmful to both groups and the mundane at any time. Thus, Nephilim perceive them as genetically inferior and see this situation as a reason to restrict them from authority in the Shadow World.

Social dominance then is supported by genetic factors, which grant the respective group advantages, including stronger social support, better physical and mental conditions, and a higher chance of survival (Van der Kooij & Sandi, 2015). In accordance with this, Nephilim are in charge of the Shadow World, securing their own survival and needs, and believing they require no help from other creatures, as they

perceive themselves as genetically stronger and superior to others. However, this dominance is only one part of a larger dynamic. The hierarchy between Nephilim and Downworlders also creates situations where the groups, especially the former, cannot survive independently for all time. Downworlders possess supernatural abilities that the Nephilim have yet to realize could be advantageous in facing even greater threats to their world. In this sense, fantasy literature, and literature in general, can also be interpreted as a reflection of human nature, as the fictional elements do not take away the human motives within it. Therefore, the intergroup behavior between Nephilim and Downworlders opens the way to examine *The Infernal Devices* trilogy through a literary Darwinism perspective.

According to Carroll (2004), literature reflects the basic cognitive patterns of the human mind and serves an adaptive function that allows us to understand and respond to our environment. Hence, literature models the human mind and behavior by depicting how humans tackle problems and organize their lives. Cassandra Clare's *The Infernal Devices* trilogy exemplifies this idea, as the series illustrates how a certain group in a society dominates another as a survival mechanism. However, there are circumstances when this hierarchy must be set aside in the face of real danger. The Nephilim must cooperate with the Downworlders they have been looking down on to overcome greater threats. This speaks volumes that, in certain situations, society is best governed by multiple groups with diverse abilities, to allow it to evolve in response to new challenges rather than remaining stagnant under a single authority as a means of survival.

## 1.2 Identification of the Problem

*The Infernal Devices* trilogy by Cassandra Clare illustrates how a group holds more power and has greater access to resources that help with survival and reproduction, using physical and biological characteristics as indicators of status. The problem arises where the dominant group sees the subordinate's nature as dangerous, which puts the latter in a restricted position and as targets of discrimination in their society. However, since future threats are unpredictable, it is doubtful whether this kind of system can last. Over time, everyone's survival is at risk due to greater threats that emerge. Therefore, it is necessary to put aside the dominance and form alliances between Nephilim and Downworlders. By applying literary Darwinism, this study views the dominance of Nephilim that puts Downworlders as subordinates as a means of survival strategies in *The Shadow World* and explores how cooperation and alliances emerge as the response to dominance in facing greater threats for everyone's survival.

## 1.3 Review of Previous Studies

The writer found several previous studies of Cassandra Clare's *The Infernal Devices* trilogy, which shed light on the depth of the Victorian and steampunk settings, the exploration of the Gothic genre and supernatural elements, the analysis of the heroine and characters, literary archetypes, and intertextuality. The first is an article titled "American Mysticism and Feminism in Cassandra Clare's *Clockwork Angel*: A Postmodernist Fiction." Wardhani et al. (2020) analyze the first book of this urban fantasy trilogy through a postmodernist lens by grounding it in Brian McHale's theory. The article examines how the novel's pluralistic worlds—the Mundane World, Downworld, and Shadowhunter World—are ordered and interact through interpolation

and superimposition strategies. The fantastical realms—Downworld and the Shadowhunter World—are hidden dimensions that coexist with the human world, invisible to ordinary people but occupying the same physical space. Furthermore, the study points out the novel's use of epigraphs from pre-Victorian, Victorian, and post-Victorian poems between chapters to reflect the story's theme and Victorian atmosphere, and to foreshadow future events. Mythological and biblical concepts are also integrated to add more depth to the Shadow World and intensify the story's supernatural atmosphere.

The second research is another article entitled "The Heroic Journey of Tessa Gray in Cassandra Clare's *The Infernal Devices*," in which Sharmely (2016) analyzes the heroine of the trilogy, Tessa Gray, using Joseph Campbell's *The Hero's Journey*. Although heroines were traditionally limited to specific roles, Clare's work is one of contemporary young adult fantasy that depicts heroines who are complex, self-determined, and willing to take on the warrior role. Tessa's shapeshifting powers and the challenges she faces enable her transformation from a damsel in distress to a brave woman who eventually saves her world. The research also addresses the importance of talismans—the clockwork angel and the jade pendant—as well as her relationships with Will Herondale and Jem Carstairs, which contribute to Tessa's development and serve as her protective circle during her heroic journey.

The third research is a chapter retrieved from *Race in Young Adult Speculative Fiction* (2021) titled "Asian Masculinity, Eurasian Identity, and Whiteness in Cassandra Clare's *Infernal Devices* Trilogy." Ho (2018) examines how the series uses a neo-Victorian-lite approach to envision a society that has moved beyond racism by analyzing the portrayal of Jem Carstairs, the Eurasian character. However, this creates

whiteness assimilation discourse instead, as Jem transforms into a ‘whiter’ version of himself due to his chronic illness and the demon drug that he consumes. This advocates the idea that he is accepted into Victorian English society mainly because of his appearance which resembles the dominant white group. Moreover, the neo-Victorian framework draws on old stereotypes that portray Jem’s masculinity as weak or feminine and linking his addiction to Orientalist ideas and the “Yellow Peril” image of opium users. Although the trilogy aims to celebrate diversity, this neo-Victorian approach still reinforces whiteness and erases racial history because the readers tend to whitewash Jem despite clear mentions of his Chinese heritage.

The fourth previous study is a doctoral dissertation titled *A Study of the Supernatural in Twenty-first-century Young Adult Gothic Literature* in which Lamara (2019) examines the representation of the supernatural Other, or a hybrid being born from myths, folklore, and fairy tales that symbolizes the cultural anxieties of its time, in *The Infernal Devices*. The series utilizes its supernatural world to push against the limits set by Victorian patriarchy, demonstrating Tessa’s development from a typical Gothic heroine who mirrors characters like Jane Eyre to a powerful Shadowhunter-warlock hybrid with the exceptional ability to shapeshift. Through this transformation, Tessa breaks free from traditional gender roles in her society, finding the strength to accept her supernatural Otherness. By embracing who she is, she frees herself from the victim role, gains real power, and ultimately becomes a hero who puts an end to the threats.

The fifth research is a master’s thesis titled *The ‘Infernal’ Value of the Gothic: A Reading of Gothicism and Romanceness in Cassandra Clare’s The Infernal Devices* in which Spaabæk (2022) argues against the dismissal of Gothic and romance fiction

because they are seen as literature with low to no value, mainly because they are formulaic, or following the literary conventions. *The Infernal Devices* employs elements such as the Gothic heroine-villain dynamic and the popular romance formula in ways that provide readers with a predictable, satisfying experience. A text's value can be determined beyond the classic literary critique. In this case, being formulaic can also hold a sort of literary value. The value of the work depends on what the reader seeks. When the text provides enjoyment, that satisfaction gives the work its meaning and value. Therefore, literature can be appreciated whether it follows or breaks literary conventions.

The sixth previous study is a master's thesis titled *Powerful Mirrors: Neo-Victorian Doubling in the Novels of Libba Bray, Cassandra Clare, and Kady Cross*. According to Graham (2013), *Clockwork Angel* employs the concept of the double (the double self, double objects, and double life) to demonstrate that the heroine, Tessa Gray, has power and agency. She is a shapeshifter (a double self), which is a power she gains by touching objects previously owned by that person (double objects). This ability helps her escape her captors and avoid an arranged marriage, which gives her authority over her own destiny. Moreover, Tessa lives a double life, first as a prisoner in the Dark House, where she is controlled and used, and later at the Institute, where she finds freedom and learns to master her powers. The examples of double in the novel, therefore, conclude that Tessa redefines the traditional image of Victorian women by portraying them as strong and independent.

The seventh research is another master's thesis titled *Clockwork Heroines: Female Characters in Steampunk Literature* which examines Victorian girlhood in *The Infernal Devices* using Judith Butler's framework that explores female identity as a

performance during a period of technological advancements and cultural shifts. Bergman (2013) compares three heroines based on whether they follow or reject traditional roles: The shapeshifting heroine Tessa Gray struggles with her identity and self-discovery, but ultimately breaks free from society's expectations by becoming an independent hero who defeats her enemy by taking on the form of a real angel. Charlotte Branwell, who runs the Institute as both a warrior and a caretaker. Despite facing constant doubt from the male-dominated Shadowhunter council because she is a woman, she proves them wrong and becomes the first female Consul. In contrast, Jessamine Lovelace acts as a foil. She refuses her Shadowhunter duties and wants to live like the traditional "angel in the house." Her focus on being a proper lady makes her betray her friends and be killed by the automatons she would not fight.

The eighth previous study is a bachelor's thesis titled '*All the Stories Are True*': *Intertextuality in Cassandra Clare's Shadowhunter Chronicles* which explores how Clare constructs her Shadowhunter stories by referencing and reimagining classic literary works. According to the author, *The Infernal Devices*, the prequel trilogy in *The Shadowhunter Chronicles*, is loosely based on Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*. Villar (2018) argues that Clare adopts the concept of 'twinned characters,' exemplified by Will Herondale and Jem Carstairs, though she takes an approach that differs from how Dickens presents it. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, Sydney Carton and Charles Darnay look alike, but they share nothing beyond their appearance. However, Clare creates two characters who look completely different from each other; yet, together, they make up two halves of one whole. Furthermore, Will and Jem's sacrifice, which concerns their relationship with Tessa, also parallels Carton's for Lucie Manette.

The last research is another bachelor's thesis under the title of *Once Upon a Fantasy: A Study on Literary Archetypes in Clare's 'The Infernal Devices' Trilogy* which analyzes the characteristics of fantasy literature and fairy tales, as well as finding out if *The Infernal Devices* fits or challenges the conventions of these genres. Muñoz (2024) employs archetypal theories developed by Carl Gustav Jung and Joseph Campbell to explore the characters' archetypes: the heroine, the sidekicks, the mentors, the villain, and the villain's helpers. Moreover, Campbell's *The Hero's Journey* is used to trace the plot archetypes of the heroine's and villain's journey. As a result, Clare's work largely follows the usual patterns of fairy tales and fantasy, but it also introduces changes such as challenging gender norms, a questionable happy ending, and having a diverse cast stepping into roles usually reserved for more conventional characters. This indicates that modern authors are reinterpreting the traditional elements of fairy tales and fantasy to address important issues, reflecting a changing society and creating new literary forms and archetypes.

After reviewing each chosen paper above, the previous studies provide substantial insights on *The Infernal Devices* trilogy, but there is still room to approach the works from a fresh perspective. Therefore, the writer intends to open a new line of analysis by examining aspects of human motives, namely the Nephilim–Downworlder dynamic through social dominance and cooperative alliances, employing Literary Darwinism.

#### 1.4 Research Questions

To guide the writer in conducting the research, the following research questions will be used:

1. How does *The Infernal Devices* trilogy portray the Nephilim's dominance over the Downworlders as an evolutionary strategy to maintain order in The Shadow World?
2. How do the cooperative alliances between Nephilim and Downworlders emerge as an adaptive response to the dominance in facing greater threats?

### 1.5 Scope of the Research

The analysis of the novels is subject to specific limitations, narrowing its focus to the justification of the Nephilim's social dominance over the Downworlders as a survival mechanism. The analysis then relates to the cooperative alliances that gradually develop between the two groups over the course of the narrative as an adaptive response to social dominance. Furthermore, this study interprets these dynamics with the theoretical framework of literary Darwinism supported by evolutionary psychology.

### 1.6 Objective of the Research

This research aims to examine how *The Infernal Devices* trilogy portrays Nephilim's social dominance over Downworlders as an evolutionary purpose and how this dominance collapses in favor of cooperative alliances as a necessary way of survival, particularly in response to greater threats. By examining these, the study reveals how literature serves as a mechanism in the context of survival and adaptation.