

Clockwork Angels – A Reading Guide

Prologue – Chapter 3

1. The Devil has long roamed the imaginations of pop-culture, and in three thousand years has developed quite a reputation as the chief tempter and root of all evil. How then did you react to this interpretation of Lucifer as a character? Was it difficult to imagine the Devil as misunderstood? Did the notion make you uncomfortable? Disgusted? Or was the idea fascinating? Why?

2. What makes for a good character?

3. Many cultures have mythologies describing a great cataclysm. In an age where real life catastrophe seems more plausible than ever – from global warming to the ever present threat of nuclear technology – Stories like *Paradise Lost* or Noah's ark remind us of that man's world has always been fragile. In the prologue of *Clockwork Angels* the reader is dropped into a mythical war with devastating potential. On one side of the battle are characters readily recognizable to a western audience: Michael, Gabriel and the archangels. On the other are gods of a less familiar pantheon, that of the Hindu tradition: Shiva, Hanuman, and Kali. As you began the chapter, did you find yourself wanting to root for the more familiar gods? Did you finish the chapter feeling the same way?

Most of us prefer what is familiar, and view things that challenge what is 'normal' with suspicion. Consider the implications this very normal human behavior, and how this might affect our perception of other religions, races, genders and lifestyles.

4. Myths help us make sense of things we find difficult to explain. Why does Satan often appear swathed in the color red? The association of the Devil to the color red implies a deep connection to blood, violence and passion. In *Clockwork Angels* the color is very significant in the psychology of the main character. Whenever anger burns to the point of losing control the Devil's skin turns blood red, a personal reminder of the consequences of blind rage. Humans also acquire scars, physical and psychological, which remind us that pain sometimes results from our choices. The decision to wrestle an alligator or to continue an abusive relationship has consequences. What do you make of Lucifer's scar? Does it make him a more likeable character, or a more understandable one? Does it make him more human?

5. The interactions of characters innocent and powerless with those that are powerful and terrible make for an interesting juxtaposition. How did you react to the scene between Lucifer and Cindy, the little girl lost in the museum? Is it necessary sometimes for good people to do terrible things, such as what Lucifer did to Dajjaal and the other demons? Are there broader implications for human society in this? For civilization to work is it necessary for the strong to use violence to protect the weak?

6. In chapter 3, is Lucifer trying to teach the boys a lesson, or is he satisfying his own desires?

7. The leader of the gang of boys, Frank, is faced with a terror described only in vague terms. Why would the author choose to leave this horror undefined? What are humans most afraid of? Consider the following quote from Alfred Hitchcock:

The whole design of "Psycho" was to reduce the violence on the screen as the film progressed and to increase the sense of violence in the audience's mind. By the end of the film I wanted the audience to actually feel the violence that they would never see on the screen.

8. Lucifer seems to have some fairly strong opinions of American teenagers today. Does the group dynamic impact individual behavior? Would these boys have acted so recklessly had they not been in a group? What is your opinion of the state of America's youth?

9. If you were making a movie of this book, just 3 chapters in, whom would you cast in the lead roles?

Chapter 4 – 7

1. Nowhere in the world is the contrast between rich and poor more evident than in India. How did you react to the living conditions of Mehbullahpur, India? Why do most people turn away when confronted by the reality of crushing poverty? Do we perpetuate the cycles of poverty if we turn away and do nothing?

2. There have been many interpretations of hell; what it looks like, who belongs there, and what is the nature of its purpose. There is a Nordic tradition where hell is extremely cold and dark. In Mongolian shamanism, sinners are boiled in black tar to atone for their sins. Aztec mythology paints an afterlife more concerned with how a person died than how that person lived. For example, a person that died of old-age would find himself in Mictlan, a place of torment, whereas those that die as sacrificial victims enter Omeyocan, the highest heaven reserved for the gods. French philosopher John-Paul Sartre once said that hell is other people. What were your impressions of Pandemonium? Must Hell be painful, or can it be a place where victims are subjected to bad taste and boredom?

3. As Lucifer returns to Pandemonium, we meet several human souls who are being processed through the system. A man that killed his wife believes he is wrongly accused

because of the voices in his head. Another claims running over her husband several times was purely accidental. And then we have the lawyer. Are people aware of the evil they do? Can an action be evil if the person is unaware he is doing wrong?

4. Everywhere sentient beings exist we see the creation of government – even in Hell. Why does he do so? What is the purpose and function of government? Were you surprised to find government in Hell, or were you expecting something different? What did you think is the purpose of a government in Hell?

5. The council meetings introduced many of the leading figures in Pandemonium, with some interesting interactions. How did you react to the personality dynamics in the group? Was there a character that stood out to you?

6. Ashsis, the lone ‘female’ on the council, has a very strong personality. What did you think of her or how she fit into the group? Do you have an opinion of Lucifer’s handling of the gender dynamic? What would you have done in his place in that situation?

Chapter 8 – 11

1. In chapter 8 Mika is introduced to the reader. At first glance she is just another woman of the night looking to earn a living. So how did it make you feel when she turns out to be something different? Did you have more or less respect for Mika after she robs her client? Is she a character that you can root for in the story?

2. Hanuman and Ganesha are two of the most popular gods in the Hindu tradition. Ganesha is a lord of wisdom and intellect, and Hanuman represents courage, self-control, and devotion to duty. At first glance do the characters in the story reflect these adjectives?

3. What was your reaction to Baboo, the seer? How about the personification of death being called Larry?

4. Lucifer and Uriel have a special relationship. How would you describe it? Does it remind you of relationships in your own life? Are there people around whom you are so comfortable that you could say anything or do anything? If so, what is the impact that relationship has had on you or your life?

5. The storyline begins to come together in chapter 11. The elements of Lucifer, the archangels, Mika, the Hindu gods, and the mysterious horror murdering people are

beginning to coalesce. Was there a sense of anticipation when you read that Lucifer would be visiting India? What did you believe was happening?

Chapter 12 – 14

1. Mika appears to possess extraordinary gifts, some of which seem to be connected to Lucifer. What kind of chemistry is there between the two characters? At this point in the story, where do you see the relationship between them going?
2. Lucifer's interaction with Kroni – and his entourage – was filled with tension and threats, yet Lucky stood his ground to defend Mika despite the apparent danger. Was his motivation based purely on the divine summons to India, or were there other reasons? What does it mean to 'do right no matter the consequences'? Are there limits to what we should be willing to do for others? Strive to be as honest as possible as you make your way through the following list, and try to give reasons for your answer:

Would you...

1. ...step in front of a bullet for a total stranger?
2. ...take a black eye to defend a total stranger?
3. ...give money to a total stranger that clearly needed food to eat?
4. ...tell a total stranger that you are praying for them?

Think about how you responded to each of these questions. Would your answer change if the total stranger were a child? Why or why not?

3. Mika asked to see the real Lucifer, the demon, and he grudgingly obliged. Did this at all change your opinion of the Devil in this story? Why or why not? How important are appearances to the way that we think about people or the world? Did your opinion of Mika change at all because of the interaction?

Chapter 15 – 17

1. These chapters dealt in large part with the interpretation and function of religion. Lucifer is quite irreverent when it comes to the topic, though he certainly sees a place for religion in our culture: *People find comfort in faith...even if the religious apparatus gets so much of it wrong...Religion is a shield to keep madness at bay.* Does Lucifer's suggestion that there is no grand scheme bring comfort, or does it frighten you? Why? In your opinion, what is the purpose and function of religion?

2. What did you think of the author's interpretation of religion? Is it in any way preferable to the mainstream versions? If you could have a say as to what happens after death, what would your version look like? Would you punish those that deserve punishment, and if so, how?
3. The story goes deep with the issue of evil. What, in your opinion, is evil?
4. Mika has her own opinion of right and wrong: *In my world...there is no good. There is no evil. There only is.* Is this the fundamental law of nature? In terms of good and evil, how are humans different than all the other species on this planet? Are we different?
5. In ancient China there were competing schools of thought on human nature. One stresses the goodness people are born with, and the need to nurture this goodness so that people grow into functional members of society (Confucianism). Opposed to this is the idea that people are naturally given to greed and self-advancement; that they are born evil and need to be controlled (Legalism). Are people born good and learn evil, or are they born evil and learn to be good? Why?
6. Why do so many people find evil more attractive than virtue? Why are we drawn to the bad boys, the rebels, and the mavericks?
7. Lucifer describes to Mika his view of Hell's purpose. When evildoers are brought to justice, is it more important to punish or to rehabilitate? What role does emotion play in questions of justice? Do we punish because we think that it will rehabilitate criminals, or do we punish because it makes us – civilization – feel better to know that someone is paying for the crime? Think about this on a smaller, more personal scale. In your own experience as a parent or child, do you feel the use of punishment has been appropriate? Is corporal punishment an outdated idea, or should we return to a version of physical punishment in disciplining our kids?

Chapter 18 – 23

1. Are you more or less attracted to Lucifer because he has weaknesses? Is weakness a reason why Lucky is also capable of mercy? Why are humans merciful? What is our motivation for doing so? Lucifer's mercy on the tiger is contrasted by the attitudes of train passengers who want to see someone roasted for making them late. Are all people capable of mercy, or is it possible to reach a point where empathy is something we can no longer feel?
2. Kali is the Hindu goddess of death and is often associated with violence. How did you react to Kali as a character? Did you find her frightening or exhilarating, or both? Does the

fact that Kali is a woman make her more terrifying? What does your reaction to Kali suggest about gender perceptions in modern America?

3. There are some thinly veiled metaphors for racism in the novel. The demons of Hell freely use the slur *Spicey*, and Hindus use a word that implies demons have sexual intercourse with goats. Why do the characters so easily use slurs against one another? How does this parallel American culture? In what context do people use these types of words, and what does this say about the nature of modern racism? Why does racism exist, and is there anything that we can do about it?

Chapter 24 – 25

1. The tragedy of Mika's backstory is finally revealed, explaining a great deal of her motivations. How much are we shaped by our experiences? Mika has done some very unsavory things in her short life, and now we have a glimpse into why. How much bad behavior are we willing to excuse because of the past? Where do we draw the line between what is justifiable, and what is punishable?

2. Our first glimpse of Elysium, or heaven, comes in chapter 25. What did you think of it? What would it look like if you were the author?

3. Several of the characters we see in heaven are unintelligent. How do you explain this? Is ignorance bliss? Does comfort and ease make us lazy and stupid? In the United States we have seen a significant decline in the performance of our feeder program, the educational system, over the last several decades. Is it possible that too much wealth and prosperity can be a bad thing?

4. Why won't the archangels listen to Lucifer? How much does past experience affect the present? Are we prisoners to our past, as it seems is for these characters?

Chapter 26 – The End

1. What did you think of the climax of the story? Was it satisfying? Why or why not?

2. The climax takes place in Tibet, one of several exotic locations in this novel. Are there places in the story that you would like to see and experience? Which setting do you feel most drawn to?

3. Are there any ideas about the blonde man at the end of the story? How does he fit in?

4. The book is clearly set up for a sequel. What are you most interested to find out in the next book? What unanswered questions are you most interested to see addressed in a subsequent book?

5. Did the novel cause you to reevaluate your thinking on contemporary issues? Do you have a new perspective because of the story? Did you learn something you didn't know before? What were the main points you think the author was trying to make?

One final point for discussion: Why do you think Lucifer smokes?