

Discussion Guide

That Hideous Strength, chs 7–9



OPEN

“It tells us something in the long run even more important,” said the Director. “It means that if this technique is really successful, the Belbury people have for all practical purposes discovered a way of making themselves immortal.” There was a moment’s silence, and then he continued: “It is the beginning of what is really a new species—the Chosen Heads who never die. They will call it the next step in evolution. And henceforward, all the creatures that you and I call human are mere candidates for admission to the new species or else its slaves—perhaps its food.”

“The emergence of the Bodiless Men!” said Dimble.

- Ransom to Dimble, ch 9, p. 194



ENTRY

1. Do you see any potential overlap between the experiments at the N.I.C.E. and the emergence of certain uses of Artificial Intelligence (A.I.)?



RECALL

1. Describe Jane’s encounter with the Director of St Anne’s, the man we know as Ransom.
2. Why does it seem that the N.I.C.E. are so intent on Mark bringing Jane to Belbury? Why doesn’t Mark want her there? How does his resistance change his fortunes?
3. What kind of transformation is meant by Filostrato’s discussion of “cleaning” the planet for a more “hygienic” existence?
4. Who — or what — is the Head of the N.I.C.E. and what do the company of St Anne’s think is the power behind it?



ANALYSIS

1. Describe the society at St Anne’s. What is the relationship like between the residents? What has brought them together? Is their structure one of equality or hierarchy? Is it as you would expect it to be?
2. How does MacPhee’s presence at St Anne’s show a contrast from the kind of inner ring at work in Belbury?
3. What does the Fairy’s argument with Deputy Director Wither, and her subsequent encounter with the Head tell you about the experience of life among the inner ring at Belbury?
4. What seems to finally awaken Mark to the trap that has been set for him and cause him to attempt to leave? Why does this ultimately prove unsuccessful?



DIVING DEEPER

And now, all this had reached the stage at which its dark contrivers thought they could safely begin to bend it back so that it would meet that other and earlier kind of power. Indeed they were choosing the first moment at which this could have been done. You could not have done it with Nineteenth-Century scientists. Their firm objective materialism would have excluded it from their minds; and even if they could have been made to believe, their inherited morality would have kept them from touching dirt. MacPhee was a survivor from that tradition. It was different now. Perhaps few or none of the people at Belbury knew what was happening; but once it happened, they would be like straw in fire. What should they find incredible, since they believed no longer in a rational universe? What should they regard as too obscene, since they held that all morality was a mere subjective by-product of the physical and economic situations of men? The time was ripe. From the point of view which is accepted in Hell, the whole history of our Earth had led up to this moment. There was now at last a real chance for fallen Man to shake off that limitation of his powers which mercy had imposed upon him as a protection from the full results of his fall. If this succeeded, Hell would be at last incarnate.

- ch 9, p. 200-201



REFLECTION

1. How can you cultivate genuine friendships rather than “inner rings” in your social circles? What is the difference?

“You see,” [the Director] said, “MacPhee takes the line that if you hear things talked of, you will carry ideas of them into your sleep and that will destroy the evidential value of your dreams. And it’s not very easy to refute him. He is our sceptic; a very important office.”

- *Ransom to Jane*, ch. 9, p. 181

2. What does it look like to embrace your limits as a human being, rather than trying in vain to surpass all limits and boundaries?