

Discussion Guide

That Hideous Strength, chs 4–6



OPEN

“The Kingdom of God is to be realised here—in this world. And it will be. At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow. In that name I dissociate myself completely from all the organised religion that has yet been seen in the world.” And at the name of Jesus, Mark, who would have lectured on abortion or perversion to an audience of young women without a qualm, felt himself so embarrassed that he knew his cheeks were slightly reddening; and he became so angry with himself and Mr. Straik at this discovery that they then proceeded to redden very much indeed. This was exactly the kind of conversation he could not endure; and never since the well remembered misery of scripture lessons at school had he felt so uncomfortable. He muttered something about his ignorance of theology.

- Straik to Studdock, ch. 4, p. 77



ENTRY

1. What do you think makes it attractive for people or institutions who clearly no longer believe in the true meaning of Christianity to still cling to its outward appearances?



RECALL

1. Describe the change that is taking over Edgestow with the appearance of the N.I.C.E. How is this being managed by the manipulations within the Belbury inner ring?
2. How did Mark's fortunes suddenly change from being a seemingly sought-after member to a merely tolerated nuisance?
3. What is the nature of Mark's work at the N.I.C.E. and what was the strategy behind the two very different articles he wrote for the national papers?



ANALYSIS

1. What does Jane's resistance to “getting drawn in” tell you about her struggle, despite all the evidence that the company of St. Anne's are good, safe people? How is her reluctance a mirror to Mark's eagerness? How is the transparency of St. Anne's a contrast against the occlusions of Belbury?
2. How does the change in the Deputy Director Wither's countenance toward Mark reveal the manipulation of the N.I.C.E.? Why does Mark tolerate it?
3. Why does the N.I.C.E. need Mark to write news stories in advance of their happening? What are they planning? How does this reveal the true nature of the institute?
4. What are the reasons Mark allows himself to compromise his moral and academic integrity? What are his alternatives?



DIVING DEEPER

The more often he re-read the articles the better he liked them. And, anyway, the thing was a kind of joke. He had in his mind a picture of himself, old and rich (probably with a peerage, certainly very distinguished) when all this—all the unpleasant side of the N.I.C.E.—was over, regaling his juniors with wild, unbelievable tales of this present time. (“Ah ... it was a rum show in those early days. I remember once. . .”) And then, too, for a man whose writings had hitherto appeared only in learned periodicals or at best in books which only other dons would read, there was an all but irresistible lure in the thought of the daily press—editors waiting for copy—readers all over Europe—something really depending on his words. The idea of the immense dynamo which had been placed for the moment at his disposal, thrilled through his whole being. It was, after all, not so long ago that he had been excited by admission to the Progressive Element at Bracton. But what was the Progressive Element to this? It wasn’t as if he were taken in by the articles himself. He was writing with his tongue in his cheek—a phrase that somehow comforted him by making the whole thing appear like a practical joke. And anyway, if he didn’t do it, someone else would.

- ch 6, p. 132



REFLECTION

1. Have you ever experienced social pressure to compromise your beliefs in order to fit in? What could you do in a situation like the one Mark is facing?

This was the first thing Mark had been asked to do which he himself, before he did it, clearly knew to be criminal. But the moment of his consent almost escaped his notice; certainly, there was no struggle, no sense of turning a corner. There may have been a time in the world’s history when such moments fully revealed their gravity, with witches prophesying on a blasted heath or visible Rubicons to be crossed. But, for him, it all slipped past in a chatter of laughter, of that intimate laughter between fellow professionals, which of all earthly powers is strongest to make men do very bad things before they are yet, individually, very bad men. A few moments later he was trotting upstairs with the Fairy.

- ch 6, p. 127

2. How does Jane’s experience of a kind of tug-of-war of both attraction and repulsion to the sense of openness, clarity, traditionalism, and authority of the community of St. Anne’s relate to your own beliefs about hierarchy? How might this be related to the themes of authority vs authoritarianism, dominion vs domination explored already in *Out of the Silent Planet* or *Perelandra*?