

***and Falling, Fly* by Skyler White**

Book Club Discussion Questions

<http://www.SkylerWhite.com>

CONTAINS SPOILERS!

Questions of Intent

1. What do you think the title means?
2. Why do you think the book begins and ends with the first lines of Gaehod's letter to Dominic?
3. What are the significances of the characters' names? Of the chapter titles?
4. What is the significance of Olivia and her sisters calling the people from whom they feed "figs"?
5. What distinctions are drawn between *desire*, *hunger*, *craving* and *addiction*?
6. What is the nature of the hotel in Ireland? What do you think is the meaning/purpose of the energy-capture mechanisms there?
7. What is the relationship between *desire* and *choice*? Between *belief* and *choice*?
8. What is the purpose of Alyx's conversation with the Oracle of Delphi after his death?
9. Alyx tells Olivia she has two deaths. What does the book suggest are the two ways *desire* dies?
10. Gaehod tells Dominic that there's vast difference between restraint and sacrifice. What does he mean?
11. Does Olivia feed from the waitress at the Dublin teashop? Why doesn't she make a noise during her final tattooing? Why does it mean for her not to be the tattooist's type?
12. How does Dominic's relationship to *knowledge* change over the course of the book?
13. What do the gifts that Dominic and Olivia give to each other mean?
14. Gaehod toasts love, saying, "love reinvents us, makes us angelic and titanic". Since Gaehod has previously said that Olivia is an angel and Dominic one of the titans, what does that suggest?

Questions of Interpretation

1. What are your views on what it means to be damned? How are they different from or similar to the way the word *damned* is used in '*and Falling, Fly*'? Dominic suggests that maybe the only thing worse than being damned would be to have no god to damn you. Do you agree?
2. Do you think science and myth/religion are inherently at odds?
3. Olivia says she'd rather be a damned angel than a sick human. Is there another option? She also blames *hope* for her suffering. Can you have *desire* without *hope*?
4. Olivia is the Angel of Desire, but has no idea what she actually wants for herself, all her power coming from other's desire for her. Do you ever feel a conflict between *wanting to be wanted* and *what you actually want*?
5. Have you ever had the experience of realizing the way you see the world is so fundamentally different from the way someone you love sees it that things that are obvious to you are invisible to them? How did you reconcile your love with your understanding?
6. Alyx quotes Gaehod as saying "meaningless and hopelessness are the curse of modernity" and that "the end of humanity is more likely to be a shrug than a battle". Do you agree?
7. Dominic says his work is motivated by *fear*, the only other reason for doing anything being *love*. Do you agree that, fundamentally, *love* and/or *fear* are the root causes of what we do?
8. The snake tells Dominic that the apples on the tree of knowledge gave humans an awareness of *duality*, of *good vs. evil*, of *self vs. other*, and that the tension between them is what causes suffering. Do you agree?
9. At the abbey, Olivia defines *love* as being the feeling of sharing the same vision of another, of the alignment of desires and ideals. Dominic explains the sensation as series of neuro-chemical events. It's demonstrably true that love lights up specific parts of the brain: it primes dopamine receptors, elevates energy, focuses attention and increases reward-winning motivation. What do you think?

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10. Olivia says *belief* is knowledge without choice. Do you agree? Gaehod says that the difference between *servicing* people and *being used* by them is the same as the difference between a *belief* and an *idea*. What do you think that means?
11. Dominic talks about the concept of *wabi-sabi*, the beauty of broken things. Both Dominic and Olivia are broken, and ultimately it is the places where they are most uncertain that they heal or redeem each other. Do you find yourself attracted to the intimacy of sharing those places where you're uncertain, where you feel broken?
12. Olivia says that the one thing *science* and *reason* can't offer people is *redemption*, and that irrational desires still thrive in reasonable minds. She believes *primal desires* trump *reason*, and only *stories* and *myth* can reach the deeper, non-rational levels of thought. What do you think?
13. The snake is impressed by Dominic's willingness to question what he thinks he knows, not because it's been called into question, but simply in order to continue to learn. Do you find it difficult to hold yourself open to new ways of seeing? Do you think the effort is worthwhile?
14. If you woke up from a traumatic injury with no memory, and reading your diary showed you that you had been trying everything possible to try and forget, would you accept your new condition as something you caused deliberately, or would you undo it?
15. Can you have a *self* without memories, or are you what you remember?
16. Both Dominic and Olivia get what they said they wanted, but both of them find they were happier with the *wanting* than the *having*. Have you ever had an experience like that?
17. Vivian describes the sisterhood of vampires as having the right to determine who is too damaged to live amongst them. If Ophelia can't fight her sisters and win, she has to accept their judgment. Do you think all societies are ultimately dependent on the use of physical force, as Olivia implies?
18. When he writes the symbols on the window of Dominic's hotel room, Gaehod explains that each marks a pivot point in a past life. Dominic observes that the symbols all look painful, and Gaehod says "pain is a catalyst for change". Do you believe that?
19. Gaehod also says that *heartbreak* is necessary for a complete life, and that you can't really fall in love until you've had your heart broken. Do you agree?
20. Dominic tells Olivia that *science* is good with *fact*, but it's useless with *meaning*. Do you agree?

Easter Eggs

1. The garden at the base of the hotel doubles as both Eden and Gethsemane, but the Garden of Eden is foreshadowed in the scene with Adam at the sushi restaurant. How many allusions to the Genesis story can you find in that scene?
2. How many references to T.S. Eliot's poem '*The Wasteland*' do you find throughout the book?
3. How many to Shakespeare? To Greek mythology?
4. There are direct quotes and references to the following Biblical passages: *Genesis 1:28 and 2:17*, *Isaiah 65:21*, *Matthew 22:36*, *Luke 22:19* and *John 20:27*. Did you notice them?
5. Why do you suppose the author borrowed so much from these sources? What does it say about her belief in God or in Story?