

Reading Group Discussion Questions

NOCTURNE BY JUS NEUCE

Which character did you most like? Dislike? With which character did you identify most, personally? Explain.

What did you think of the portrayal of women in Nocturne? Think of the character (man or woman) who was portrayed in the most black-or-white way, and vote on the character you believe was most villainous or virtuous.

There are no families on Nocturne—children are given up to the “state” at an early age, at which point they take as their surname the name of their school, where they will live until graduation. The status of an adult well out of school still relies largely on the reputation—past and present—of that school. What does this say about the values of Nocturne’s inhabitants? What problems in your own area’s educational and social systems today might be solved by such an arrangement? What would be the cost, and would it really be too high?

Nocturne is a cloud-covered planet orbiting a red dwarf (“an insignificant sun”) in a small solar system. As a tidally-locked planet its face always points in the same direction. Due to the location of settlement, the people of Nocturne live in perpetual twilight. In what ways might this setting have affected the characters and the plotline of the story?

The names of the places and towns on Nocturne held meaning to the early colonists, just as place names in your area held meaning to its earlier inhabitants. What does the fact that Nocturne’s capital is named “Jefferson” tell you about Nocturne’s original colonists? About their ancestry and ideals?

Chauncey is in a difficult position as leader of the most visible minority group on the planet. What would you do in her shoes?

Early in the story Graham and Kellan find themselves in a new land: a welcome change for Graham, and a difficult one for Kellan. Some corporate expatriate specialists today say it is more difficult for a transplant to adjust to the culture of a country that *seems* very similar to their own. For instance, it may be more challenging for a transplanted American to truly adjust to the culture of England than to the culture of the Middle East. Can you think of reasons that would be the case? Given the choice, which would you take: a country similar to yours, or a radically different one? Why? Name the country you would choose.

In *The Reader's Choice*, a book designed for reading groups of general and literary fiction, the author says this: "Book clubs are hungry for another kind of writing, what the publishing world refers to as "the midlist book." These are well-crafted, thoughtful books, mostly novels, that cover a broad range of subjects and themes. ... They tend not to concentrate on sensational action or violence, but rather tell the stories of people facing some kind of personal challenge or conflict and growing in the process. Often, it is the manner of telling—the writer's style, voice, and vision—that makes the story so interesting. [They] grab you and hold you, not so much because you're wondering whether the characters are going to die or be maimed or swept off their feet by passion, but instead whether they will come through their problems with hearts and minds intact." What stands out most in *Nocturne*: the writer's style, voice, or vision... or something else?

The story provides a behind-the-scenes look at politics and power plays. Often, even the powerful find themselves in the position of the powerless. For instance, in *Nocturne* Quinn controls the lives of many, but is often frustrated in her attempts to manipulate the more powerful Fifty. Think of a public figure or person you believe to be powerful. With whom or what does he or she have to contend? Does this thought cause you to view him or her differently?

By the end of this book, the scene is set for a showdown between three factions on Nocturne—and one is still largely a mystery. Speculate on the Back, using what you know of its history and leader. What reasons might they have to halt communication and supplies to Jefferson and Grosvenor? To quietly continue shipping to Kaettegut?

Kellan, who identifies closely with Kaettegut, longs for a position that will allow him to "make a difference." Jenning would seem to be offering him that chance. Given the nature of this chance—assisting Jenning in her goals by interpreting his native culture's habits and values to her—and the fact that he knows Jenning can expertly manipulate him and others, should he settle into the offered role? Knowing what you do of her motivations, strengths, and shortcomings, should he trust her? Is this a relationship that could work? Why or why not?

Stefan is a quiet idealist who is thrown into what would seem to be a position of power, however temporary. A deep thinker among those who tend to the practical side of things, how do you think he would compare to the very first settlers of Nocturne—the descendants of some of Earth's "finest minds"? These settlers faced the challenge of setting up societal structures that would serve an entire planet for generations or even hundreds of years. Imagine, now, that you're building your own society in a way that will solve the ills of today's civilizations. Describe it to others in your group. Take turns analyzing your fellow members' societies. Can you foresee any unintended benefits or pitfalls in the proposed structures?

What did you take away from this book? Will you take away anything that will stay with you months, or even years?