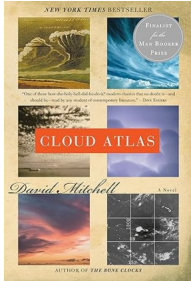




Lambda Sci-Fi

DC Area Gaylaxians



Cloud Atlas
By David Mitchell
Discussed January 2013

Characters, style and tone (section by section):

Character notes from Cloud Atlas BookCaps Study Guides. Kindle Edition.

1, 11 The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing

Journal entries; 1849

Places: New South Wales, Chatham Islands, The Prophetess, ship, bound for San Francisco

Characters:

Adam Ewing - Young man, notary from San Francisco; plagued by a mysterious Ailment

Dr. Henry Goose - An eccentric doctor, Henry's friend; accompanies him on the Prophetess; ends up poisoning him to steal his money

Autua - An escaped Moriori slave, stowaway aboard the Prophetess; Adam convinces the captain to let him stay on board

The journal's style recalls Herman Melville; Recalled as a novelized journal by Frobisher in the next chapter
The Prophetess appears in the Luisa Rey Chapter

2, 10 Letters from Zedelghem

Letters, to a man named Sixsmith; 1931

Place: Belgium, Chateau Zedelghem

Characters:

Robert Frobisher - Young musician, composer. From London, and in debt. Travels to Belgium to work with Vyvyan Ays. Has a comet-shaped birthmark. Hints that he is in love with Sixsmith

Vyvyan Ays - Famous composer, elderly and ill. Hires Robert and comes to depend on him

Robert Frobisher and Vyvyan Ays were inspired by [Eric Fenby](#) and [Frederick Delius](#) (Fenby was an amanuensis to the great English composer - Echoes the work of Christopher Isherwood; Recalled as a series of letters to 'Sixsmith' by Luisa Rey and Sixsmith's Niece in the next chapter

Vyvyan Ays dreams the music of Sonmi's dinery

3, 9 Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery

Series of short, third person chapters; 1975

Place: Buenas Yervas

Characters:

Luisa Rey - Young journalist for a gossip magazine called Spyglass. Investigating Seaboard Incorporated.

Has a comet-shaped birthmark

Rufus Sixsmith - 66 year old atomic engineer, worked at Seaboard Incorporated. Meets Luisa on an elevator. Is assassinated for his plans to expose Seaboard's cover-up. Most valuable possession, letters from his lover, Robert Frobisher

Is this a John Grisham story set in the 70s? Is Luisa Rey a reference to Thornton Wilder's "The Bridge of San Luis Rey"?; Recalled by Cavendish as a novel/manuscript in the next chapter

4, 8 The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish

First person memoir; set in an unidentified but near future

Place: London, Hull

Characters:

Tim Cavendish - Elderly man. Runs a small book publishing company Has a comet shaped birthmark (?)

Denholme ("Denny") - Tim's brother, sends him to an elderly home Nurse Noake's - Resident nurse at Aurora House

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Mr. Withers - Gardener at Aurora house

Ernest Blacksmith - Fixes the boiler, plans on escaping

Victoria Costello - In love with Ernest, also plans on escaping

The white-male-reactionary flavor to his Ordeal—hints of Saul Bellow, Updike, and maybe Clockwork Orange by Anthony Burgess; Recalled by Sonmi as a film in the next chapter

5, 7 An Orison of Sonmi-451

Interrogation; set in an unknown, far future

Place: Nea So Corps, Korea

Characters:

Sonmi-451 - A server fabricant who achieves Ascension. Has a comet-shaped birthmark

Archivist - In his early 20' s, conducting Sonmi's interrogation

Yoona-959 - Sonmi's fellow server, achieves Ascension, is killed

Wing-027 - A disaster fabricant, gives Sonmi her laptop

Hae-Joo Im - Takes Sonmi out of University, revealed as rebel officer

This section harks back to work by Orwell, Huxley and Philip K. Dick; Recalled by Zachry and Meronym in the next chapter

6 Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After

first person narrative; unknown, post-apocalyptic future

Place: The Valley (Hawai'i - The Big Island - esp. Mauna Kea)

Characters:

Zachary - Young goat-herder

Old Georgie - Mythical devil, haunts Zachary

Meronym - Prescient woman, in 50' s. Comes to the Valley to observe, stays with Zachary. Has a comet-shaped birthmark

Written in invented argot that recalls Russell Hoban's post-apocalyptic Riddley Walker. or William S.

Burroughs in a Cities of the Red Night

Meronym has visited locations from the Luisa Rey chapter

Literally all of the main characters, except one, are reincarnations of the same soul in different bodies throughout the novel identified by a birthmark...that's just a symbol really of the universality of human nature. The title itself

"Cloud Atlas," the cloud refers to the ever changing manifestations of the Atlas, which is the fixed human nature which is always thus and ever shall be. So the book's theme is predacity, the way individuals prey on individuals, groups on groups, nations on nations, tribes on tribes. So I just take this theme and in a sense reincarnate that theme in another context.- BBC Radio Interview With David Mitchell, BBC Radio 4. 2007-06.

David Mitchell told the Paris Review in 2010 that "Cloud Atlas' is a novel about whose echoes, eddies and cross-references even its author possesses only an imperfect knowledge."

Discussion Questions

1. What were your overall impressions of Cloud Atlas? How well do you think it flows as a whole?
2. Which was your favorite story in the novel? Why?
3. Here are some commonly discussed themes:
 - A) The number Six (sextet, six chapters, sixsmith...)
 - B) Cycles, Samsara/Reincarnation
 - C) Ascent, descent
 - D) Running, escape
 - E) Enslavement
 - F) oppression, liberation, intervention
 - G) Injury and rescue by an outsider
 - H) Capitalism; Corporate morals vs. social morals
 - I) Prejudice
 - J) Scars/Birthmarks
 - K) "Truth"
 - L) Prophets, prophecy, dreams
 - M) Stories, recorded history, mediaWhat did I miss?
4. Why is the book structured as it is, with the stories only half told to start with, and then being finished in the reverse order? How does this reflect the themes of the novel?
5. What role does science play in this novel?
6. How is the idea of race dealt with?
7. How are the subjects of gender and sexuality handled?
8. How do the queer characters fare?
9. *Cloud Atlas* is often referred to as one of the "unfilmable" novels, like *Ulysses*, or *Gravity's Rainbow* - Did you see the film? Does it work, or is a mess?