

Reading Group Questions - Dead Fall

Instructions: For best results, distribute the questions before the book is read so that readers can consider them while the information is still fresh. When answering any question, the group member should be able to back up his/her opinion by citing examples from the book.

1. For the most part, the "hero" of the story is Dr. Thaddeus Palmer. What are his flaws? What are the personal demons that he deals with?
2. Several characters could play the part of the villain in the story - Beechum, Phillips, Turtleman. Who, in your opinion, best fits the bill and why?
3. Two characters deal with PTSD symptoms related to childhood abuse, sexual abuse on Meyers's part, and physical abuse and bullying where Turtleman is concerned. Meyers rose above it. Turtleman seems to have succumbed to it. Discuss abuse and the effects it has had on these characters as well as where it can take them in the future.
4. Control is an important thing in any person's life. The characters in this book are no different. Think of the different characters/story lines and discuss the level of control they exercise. Pay particular attention to Thad, Beechum, Meyers, and Turtleman. Ask yourself, who is in control in their situations?
5. There are several parallels that can be drawn between the different storylines. Discuss each in turn.
 - In Interlude #1, Jennifer uses a pillow case to try and stop someone from bleeding. Later, Brandon uses a pillow case to wipe blood from a bat.
 - In one scene, Brandon and Lizzy find a family dead in a bedroom and are able to reconstruct what might have happened. Later, a similar theme unfolds with Thad, where he reconstructs a scene based on the evidence presented to him. Brandon and Lizzy go into the bedroom. Thad does not, preferring to leave the door closed. Compare and contrast these two scenes.
 - Lizzy and Brandon go the other way when they see signs that people may be in the vicinity. In Turtleman's case, the voice accuses him of doing the same, which he denies.
 - Both Brandon and Thad consult wilderness survival guides. Contrast the way each uses them.
6. Different zombie books/movies have different "rules" that govern their worlds. Sometimes zombies move slow, sometimes they are fast. The infections are spread in different ways and exist for different reasons. Often zombies are mindless, but other times they show signs of intelligence. Discuss the "rules" of the zombie world created in Dead Fall.
7. In Chapter 6, readers meet a group of survivors who are invading the prison located in the valley below Thad's mountaintop home. The reader never learns much about them, and the entire chapter is a bird's-eye view from Thad's perspective. Why write a chapter with characters the reader could never

come to know? What can you gather about the group and the people in it based solely on Thad's take of how things played out?

8. There are several things that are mentioned in Thad's world that are never fully explained in this book. Someone once told Thad that there are no safe havens, but who and why? For some unknown reason, Thad decides to deconstruct his father's barn. There is something flapping at the side of the cliff that Thad wants to get rid of, but Karen won't let him. What is it? And at some point, Allison, Thad's ex-wife dies (her grave is mentioned more than once). These things will be made clear in the next book, but what do you think is the answer to each of these situations?

9. Why doesn't Thad send his telegraph message in the last chapter?

10. As the book progresses, more and more of the dead gather outside the prison fences, which means more and more of the dead fall from the cliff above Thad's home. Is this a metaphor? Discuss.

11. In the Beechum/Meyers narrative, rivers are often mentioned. When we meet them, Moss is trying to find a route over the Licking River. In a later chapter, the convoy is "just passed the Cuyahoga River" in Ohio. Later, they spend the night in a town in Pennsylvania that requires they cross the Allegheny River to get to. What symbolic meaning is often given to rivers in literature?

12. Discuss the brother/sister relationship of Lizzy and Brandon. Who is the leader? In the absence of a parental figure, who has taken on the role? What does the eventual inclusion of Turtleman into this narrative mean for this dynamic?

13. In Chapter 12, Beechum brings up "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost. Find a copy of this poem, read it, and compare it to the stories of the various characters in *Dead Fall*. Which characters had a choice in their paths, which had their paths chosen for them? What is your take on the poem and self-determination in general?

14. Both the last chapter and the Epilogue end with a surprise for the reader. Discuss what these cliffhangers could mean for the next book, *Dead Fall: Zero Day*