



# L. Ron Hubbard presents **Writers of the Future** Volume 35 Discussion Guide

## **“Untrained Luck”** by Elise Stephens

1. Mag considers taking risks as a regular part of her life. Is risk-taking ever wise, or is it always foolish? Is taking a risk ever the best option? Why or why not?
2. Lio’s powers of sympathetic sway function by usurping a person’s emotions and steering them as he pleases. Are his powers unethical? Give an example of a theoretical scenario in which his powers might be justified, if there is one. Is such a violation always wrong? Why?
3. Mag’s job as a mediator puts her in many unusual, often dangerous situations. Which aspects of her profession would you deem worth the risks she takes? Do any aspects of her profession seem foolish or unworthy of risk-taking?

## **“The First Warden”** by Kai Wolden

4. How do the characters exert different types of power over one another? (Consider the Council, Shae, and Noch.)
5. How does tradition and change shape or affect the lives of the characters?
6. What purpose does Noch serve to the Council, Shae, and the clan as a “warden”?
7. Is there a source of evil in the story? If so, what is it? If not, who or what is the story’s antagonist?

**“The Damned Voyage”**  
by John Haas

8. The ship is never named in the story, but it seems fairly obvious which ship it is. Name it.
9. Are Dr. Shaw’s actions justifiable? Why or why not?
10. Should Singh have joined the doctor on the voyage? Why or why not? If he had, how might the story have turned out differently?
11. H. P. Lovecraft inspired and encouraged fellow writers like Robert E. Howard and Robert Bloch, and continues to inspire writers who were born long after he died. What other writers can you name who have inspired stories based on the worlds and characters they created? Which stories do you feel are the most inspirational, and why?

**“The Idealist”**  
by L. Ron Hubbard

12. What era of European history does the Author’s Note remind you of? What was the outcome of that time period?
13. Given their circumstances, what do the attitudes of Stephen Gailbraith and Vicky Stalton say about them as a couple? If you were in a similar situation, with which of the two characters would you most closely identify? Why?
14. What do you know about “Kilkenny Cats”? How does that relate to Blacker and Mauchard in particular, and to the story in general?
15. What is your understanding of the phrase “cured by the poison itself”? If this story were expanded into a novel, what do you foresee as a probable outcome?

**“Thanatos Drive”**  
by Andrew Dykstal

16. In the post-Spasm world, people think and talk about the high-splice entity in analogies: they call it God, or liken it to an infectious disease or to various models of the human mind (most of which modern psychologists would meet with skepticism). They describe the entity’s possible motivations in terms of guilt or frustration. How do these analogies shape the characters’ views of the entity? Do they illuminate, obscure, or both? Is it possible to do without the analogies? Why or why not?
17. A staple of the post-apocalyptic genre is scavenging among the ruins of the old world. The People’s Republic of Austin has appropriated symbols from the University of Texas, Alan Li has built himself a persona straight

**“A Harvest of Astronauts”**  
by Kyle Kirrin

**“Super-Duper Moongirl  
and the Amazing  
Moon Dawdler”**  
by Wulf Moon

out of a Western, and there are hints that Ralph Nader and William Shockley have become semi-mythic figures. Will this mining of history continue, or will the old world fade away? What will the world look like—culturally, politically, and economically—fifty years after the events of the story? A hundred years?

18. Does Amelie Bourreau have God in her head? Is it possible to tell? Explain why you do or do not think so.
19. Do you believe that X09’s theft was justified? Could you see yourself doing the same thing for a loved one if you knew that the rebirth the story theorizes was a factual, provable experience?
20. What are the ethical implications of falling in love with a computer, specifically one that’s hardwired to keep its users safe and happy?
21. How do you imagine the world would change if even the simplest piece of technology was perfectly capable of passing for human?
22. Some people are destroyed by tragedy and live as victims, while others overcome, changing tragedy into triumph. What are some traits of those who are able to overcome?
23. In your own life story, have your responses to any traumatic events prevented being derailed from achieving your goals and dreams? How were you able to triumph over the tragedy?
24. If it is not within one’s power to change the outcome of an undesirable event, is it still possible to triumph? What are some ways one might do so?
25. Is there danger in creating artificial intelligence with feelings? What are the danger(s) involved in doing so? Will sentient AI itself, if created, be in danger from those that view it as mere programming? Explain your answer.
26. Do you feel FlashPoint Corporation was trying to help Dixie reach her dreams, or using hers to reach theirs? If both got what they wanted, does it really matter?
27. Sometimes, the best therapist has fur and four legs. How did this prove true for Dixie, even though her dog was made of metal?

**"Lost Robot"**  
by Dean Wesley Smith

**"Are You the Life  
of the Party?"**  
by Mica Scotti Kole

**"Release from Service"**  
by Rustin Lovewell

28. What do you make of the person telling the story?
29. What do you know about the war with the Titans in a place called Atlantis? How does this story relate?
30. Sky Tate is part of a band of individuals with special powers. What special powers would you find valuable?
31. What are your thoughts about sentient robots and the possibility of their existence at some point in the future?
32. What character traits made Eddie susceptible to becoming the person he is now? How might you yourself be forged into such a person?
33. If an extraterrestrial race did ever wage war on humanity, in what ways might they employ humans to work against humanity? How might they coerce humans into betraying their own kind? Can you name any examples of this from sci-fi movies or stories?
34. What sort of upbringing do you think Eddie may have had? What do you think his human relationships may have looked like—including his relationship with his daughter before she passed away? Might he, or his past relationships, have negatively affected Rissa in a way that contributed to her tragedy?
35. Labyrinths/mazes are common tropes spanning all of human history. What is it about labyrinths that fascinates us? What famous stories can you think of involving labyrinths? How does this tale of a labyrinth compare with those?
36. How do we define morality, and how far down an amoral path can a person travel before losing his or her moral center?
37. Caste systems have existed in many cultures throughout history. What are the benefits and pitfalls of a caste system, and why do castes persist in some parts of the modern world?
38. For those modern-day occupations that deal directly in violence (soldier, police officer, etc.), much is made about the willingness to sacrifice one's own life. Is the willingness to *take* life, and suffer the consequences of that action, less of a sacrifice, or more of a sacrifice? Why or why not?

**“Dark Equations  
of the Heart”**  
by David Cleden

**“Yellow Submarine”**  
by Rebecca Moesta

**“An Itch”**  
by Christopher Baker

39. The *arithmos* addicts in the story have become addicted to the beauty inherent in various mathematical proofs and constructs. What might be involved in a detox and recovery program for such addicts?
40. What is “art”? Do you think the human brain is hard-wired to appreciate certain art forms (e.g. painting, sculpture, music) over others? For example, most people do not consider the “beauty” of an equation or a scientific conjecture to be “art.” Why not? Name some other similarly overlooked art forms.
41. Do you think Belgrum’s motives towards Isobel were honorable in the end? Should she have trusted him?
42. Are Andre’s mother’s concerns about his first submarine purchase well-founded?
43. Where would Marianas High most likely be located? What do you know about this area of the ocean?
44. What do we learn about Andre’s character through his interaction with the salesman? The test drive?
45. Would you like to live under the sea in a similar habitat? Explain why or why not. How would that lifestyle differ from your current situation?
46. How and when is magic used in the story? Do you think complex magic systems are needed in fantasy, or is magic only magical when it is vague and mysterious?
47. What moments stand out to you in the development of the sisters’ relationship? Is anyone in the wrong?
48. What is the significance of the natural world in the story? When do the characters interact with it?
49. This is a story about a family. How, and to what extent, do you think the actions of the characters’ parents influence their lives?

**"Dirt Road Magic"**  
by Carrie Callahan

50. What do you think the necklace that Old Hurley gives Jake represents in the story?
51. Considering the potential "way out" that magic represents for the disadvantaged Jake, why does he ultimately decide not to join Old Hurley? If you were Jake, what would you choose? Why?
52. Compare and contrast the magic in "Dirt Road Magic" to the magic of the Harry Potter universe. How are these systems different? What are some implications of their differences?

**"A Certain Slant of Light"**  
by Preston Dennett

53. How well do we really understand the nature of time? How does our perception of time affect our perception of the universe?
54. When does the destruction of our environment reach the point of no return?

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