


Discussion Guide

**ALL
THE
BIRDS
IN THE
SKY**

**CHARLIE
JANE
ANDERS**



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The information and discussion questions that follow are intended to enhance your reading of *All the Birds in the Sky*. Please feel free to adapt these materials to suit your needs and interests.

- 1) In *All the Birds in the Sky*, Laurence Armstead and Patricia Delfine embody two worlds and two often brutally competing forces: science and magic. In what ways do those separate realms keep the two characters apart—and are there other ways in which their seemingly opposite powers make them familiar to each other, or draw them closer? How is it that they understand each other so well across such a divide?
- 2) When Patricia and Laurence first really get to know each other, they are both deeply unhappy—trapped in schools and homes in which they are scorned or even punished for their greatest gifts and for the truth of who they are. How do you think that experience affects the way their adult relationship unfolds once they meet again in San Francisco? Have you ever renewed a friendship with someone who knew you long ago, at a time when you felt your life was at its worst? What was it like to revisit that relationship as an older and different person?
- 3) Patricia and Laurence’s worlds orbit each other throughout the book, clashing more often and more severely as their story escalates. Are science and magic—as worldviews—essentially at odds? What are the goals and priorities of each? Are there any goals that they share? Could there be benefits to their overlapping or working together, and do you see any examples of that in the book?
- 4) The witches’ code of avoiding “Aggrandizement” at all costs seems to be a constant thorn in Patricia’s side. Do you see Patricia as self-aggrandizing—trying to gather attention or praise for her abilities? What is it about her behavior that makes the other witches monitor her so closely? And how

does the notion of Aggrandizement balance against her extraordinary—and growing—powers and skills? Why is humility so important to the community of witches?

- 5) Laurence's world, on the other hand, is part of the Silicon Valley culture that celebrates aggrandizement in the constant search for the most buzz, the most celebrity, the most funding, and the most attention. What is Laurence's relationship to that culture? What are his truest priorities, the goals that he cares most about? Have they changed substantially since childhood?
- 6) In the course of Patricia's story, we learn that the world of witches spans a divide, between Healers and Tricksters. Do you see one or the other power as being stronger in Patricia? What role does each type of witch have to play in the world? Do both groups use their powers for good? If you were one of the witches in Anders's story, which type would you be? Do you see analogous groups in the mortal world?
- 7) The Tree is, in effect, the beginning of Patricia's life as a witch, and the birds are the ones who first guide her to it. Throughout the book, Patricia dreams of being in the forest, near or searching for the Tree. How do these dreams reflect what is happening in her waking life? What does the Tree most crucially symbolize? What do you make of its riddle—and Patricia's ultimate answer to it?
- 8) Guilt seems to be a powerful driving emotion for both Patricia and Laurence. What does each of them feel guilty about? Do you think that their guilt is usually justified? How does it influence the push and pull of their relationship with each other? And how does it affect their relationships with the other people closest to them?
- 9) Priya's disappearance and subsequent reappearance haunts





the second half of Anders's story. What does this incident mean to Laurence? Why is it so hard for him to move past it? What does this scientific mistake say about the things he values most—his intellect, knowledge, and abilities? How does Patricia's role in rescuing Priya affect him?

- 10) At the core of this story is nature, and the relationship of Laurence, Patricia, and their respective worlds to it. What does Anders have to say about humanity's relationship to nature? How do Patricia and Laurence's communities relate to nature? What do they believe about natural powers that can or cannot be controlled by humans, by magic, or by science?
- 11) Patricia and Laurence fall in love just as a catastrophic natural force hits the United States, starting a chain of events that throws the country into chaos. After having traveled such a long road toward each other, the two are suddenly spun off in opposite directions by these disasters. What do you think Anders intends by this timing? Is love at the mercy of larger forces? In the end, what does it take to decide the fate of Patricia and Laurence's relationship?
- 12) The reappearance of Peregrine comes late in the story. Were you surprised by his identity? What role has he played—and does he now play—in Laurence and Patricia's lives? Born in their tumultuous childhood, built, in a sense, by both of them, what does he represent? Why do you think he emerges as such a strong positive force by the story's end?