



## The Tilted World

By Tom Franklin  
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### Questions for Discussion

- In the opening scene, Dixie Clay spots what she mistakenly thinks is a baby's coffin. Whose coffin does she think it is? How does this discovery and this image foreshadow the events of the novel? How does it set the tone for the story to come?
- On page 12, the River Commission is quoted as saying, "There has never been a single break nor a single acre of land flooded by a break on a levee constructed according to Government specifications." In the context of the novel, is this true? What does the government's attitude and behavior surrounding the flood crisis tell you about those in charge and, perhaps more broadly, the majority of the US population at the time? What parallels do you find between this novel's central incident and natural disasters of more recent years?
- Why does Ham call Ingersoll "the orphan expert" (page 21)? Why do you think Ingersoll insists on taking the baby to Greenville, even as his partner proceeds with their assignment to Hobnob?
- Though Dixie Clay and Jesse do business with many folks in Hobnob, their relationships to their neighbors differ significantly. Compare the relationships Dixie Clay and Jesse each form with the people of Hobnob.
- The townspeople divide themselves somewhat uneasily into two groups: the Flooders, who want to accept an offer from New Orleans bankers to flood their town intentionally, and the Stickers, who want to try to ride out the storm. Discuss the perspective of each side and in your own words explain why Dixie Clay and Jesse align themselves as they do. Which side would you choose?
- Jesse has two different colored eyes — one blue and one green, "both so marble-pretty, and almost like you could choose between two people to talk to." (Page 85) How apt does Dixie Clay find this description as she gets to know Jesse better? How does Dixie Clay's opinion of Jesse change from her young adulthood through the end of the novel? Describe how your opinion of Jesse changes, if it does. Who else in the novel is misjudged or underestimated because of his or her appearance?
- The Tilted World* is set in 1927. What techniques do the authors employ to bring the era of Prohibition to life? In what ways did you find the world of the novel similar to or different from your own?
- Many characters, including Ingersoll, are surprised to discover that Dixie Clay is the bootlegger and her husband just the salesperson. Why is that surprising? Identify and discuss other "role reversals" or incorrect assumptions about people that occur in the novel. What do you think the authors might be trying to say with these choices?
- On page 44, the authors describe the baby's head resting on Ingersoll's shoulder "as if knowing he'd dodged a close one." Why doesn't Ingersoll leave the baby at the orphanage? What shifts for him during the drugstore scene on pages 46-47?
- Dixie Clay muses on the history of the tributary river that bends near her home. She shares that the Indians named it "Gawiwatchee," which means "place where the world tilts." (Page 53). What significance does this name have for Dixie Clay? What significance does it have for the novel, the title of which might have derived from this moment?
- When Ingersoll arrives in Hobnob after helping Dixie Clay heal baby Willy, he discovers that he's missed some very important events. What problems does Ingersoll's absence cause for Ham and their mission? Why does Ingersoll feel so ashamed of himself? Would you have made the same choice in his shoes? Why or why not?
- In this novel, the authors explore themes related to how we are given, find, or shape our identities. For example, Ham never tells the same explanatory story about his nickname (or any other detail) twice. Discuss how each character's identity emerges and changes throughout the course of the novel.
- On page 253, Ingersoll thinks of Dixie, "Maybe she'd needed her dream to come true to realize it was the wrong dream." How complicit do you think Dixie Clay is in the way her life has turned out, especially concerning her bootlegging activities? Do you have any sympathy for her? Why or why not?
- The book ends with the beginning of the story Dixie Clay imagines telling Willy when he gets older: "This is the story of how we became a family" she imagines saying (page 300). What else is *The Tilted World* the story of?