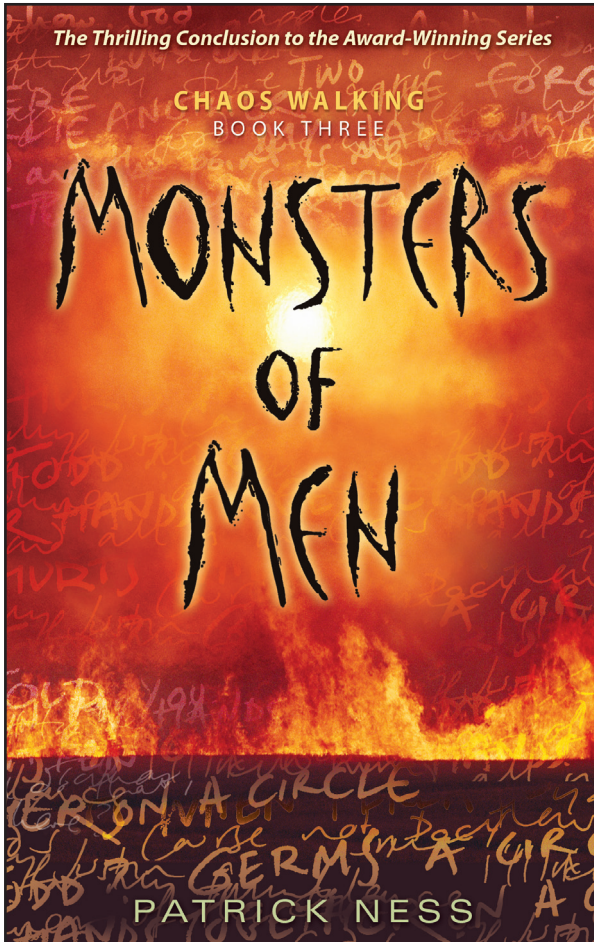


MONSTERS OF MEN

THE THIRD BOOK IN THE CHAOS WALKING SERIES



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What a sad thing men are. Can't do nothing good without being so weak we mess it up. Can't build something without tearing it down.

ABOUT THE BOOK

In *Monsters of Men*, the final installment of the Chaos Walking trilogy, a horrific war surges around Todd and Viola, and it forces them to face monstrous decisions. The indigenous Spackle, thinking and acting as one, have mobilized to avenge their murdered people. The ruthless human leaders of the Ask and of the Answer prepare to defend their factions at all costs as a convoy of new settlers approaches. As is often true in war, the projected will of the few threatens to overwhelm the desperate desire of the many. The consequences of each action are unspeakably vast: To follow a tyrant or a terrorist? To save the life of the one you love most, or thousands of strangers? To believe in redemption, or assume it is lost? Becoming adults amid the turmoil, Todd and Viola question all they have known, racing through horror and outrage toward a shocking finale. As Robert Dunbar writes in *The Irish Times*, *Monsters of Men* “triumphantly concludes what will almost certainly come to be seen as one of the outstanding literary achievements of the present century.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Publishers Weekly* called *Monsters of Men* “one of the most important works of young adult science fiction in recent years.” Michael Cart, an editorialist for *Booklist* magazine, named *Monsters of Men* his top young adult book for 2010, and it was also his pick for the Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature. In addition, *Monsters of Men* received several starred reviews. As you begin reading

the final installment in the Chaos Walking trilogy, look for evidence that the book is deserving of these accolades. Discuss what qualities make this book an award-winning book.

2. In the opening line of *Monsters of Men*, Mayor Prentiss says, “War. . . . At Last.” Many have called the book a war story. In *The Knife of Never Letting*

Go and *The Ask and the Answer*, Todd's caretaker, Ben, tells him that "War makes monsters of men." *Monsters of Men* clearly demonstrates the ugliness of war. Which characters in this final book of the trilogy could be considered "monsters" who do monstrous things in the midst of war? Does war make them monsters, or are they monsters to begin with? Mayor Prentiss disagrees with Ben's statement when he says on page 11, "It's war that makes us men in the first place. Until there's war, we are only children." Do you agree or disagree with Mayor Prentiss? Explain.

3. On page 10, Todd describes the Noise of the Ask's army as "a monstrous thing, tuned together and twisted round itself, roaring as a single voice, like a loud and angry giant pounding its way down the road." This is an example of what type of figurative language? Explain.
4. Examine the four factions involved in this war and their leaders: the Ask (Mayor Prentiss), the Answer (Mistress Coyle), the Spackle (the Sky), and the newcomers (Simone Watkin and Bradley Tench). What are the similarities and differences in their military tactics and leadership styles? What are the strengths and weaknesses of these different tactics and styles? How do these leaders prepare Todd, Viola, and the Return for leadership? Do Todd, Viola, or the Return want the roles that are being thrust upon them? Explain.
5. Todd continuously repeats, "I am the Circle and the Circle is me." Where does the line come from, and what is its significance? The Mayor tells Todd many times that if he controls his Noise, he can control the world. On page 75, Todd thinks, "If I can control my Noise, I can control myself. And if I can control myself—Maybe I can control him." Describe how Todd's Noise changes throughout *Monsters of Men*. How does he learn to control his Noise? Does he ever use it to control Mayor Prentiss or others? What are the consequences?
6. Keep track of the ways war is described throughout *Monsters of Men*. Find examples in the story that either support or negate these descriptions. For instance, on page 37, Mistress Coyle says, "War makes ugly necessity." On page 49, Todd thinks, "There ain't no time for nothing in war except war." On page 62, Todd says, "That's the nasty, nasty secret of war. . . . When

yer winning, it's effing *thrilling*." On page 85, the Sky tells the Return, "Today was a battle. . . . But a war is made of many battles." Bradley repeatedly tells Viola that war can't be personal. Mayor Prentiss tells Todd on page 190, "That's how war goes. You have to make impossible decisions." Viola thinks on page 287, "Wars make no sense. You kill people to tell them you want to stop killing them." What do these statements mean? Do you think there is truth in each statement? How do they relate to our lives in general? Explain.

7. On page 580, Viola says, "It's a hell of a thing to kill someone—Even when you think they deserve it." Is Viola a killer or not? Is Todd a killer or not? Both are faced several times in this war with the need to kill or be killed (see page 35, for example). What happens in each situation when they are faced with this moral dilemma? In the end, when they are perhaps ready to kill, how are they saved from this dilemma? How are Todd and Viola and the Return alike in this sense?
8. Discuss Todd's relationship with Angharrad, Viola's relationship with Acorn, and Mayor Prentiss's relationship with Morpeth and Juliet's Joy. How is the personality of each of these animals similar to that of their human counterparts? What is the fate of each of these animals?
9. On page 68, Viola tells Bradley, "If you ever doubt anything here, if you ever not know what to think or who to trust, you trust Todd, okay? You remember that." Though Todd and Viola say they trust each other and that they will always tell each other the truth, there are moments when they experience doubt and are not entirely truthful with each other. This is partly due to Mayor Prentiss's and Mistress Coyle's manipulations, and partly a matter of their own choosing. What are the secrets they withhold from each other? Why do they withhold the truth in these instances? What impact does withholding the truth have on them and their relationship? Once they supposedly reveal the truth to each other (see pages 260–261), they assure each other that everything is under control. Is it?
10. Patrick Ness introduces a third narrator on page 77 of *Monsters of Men*. Who is this narrator? Review this narrator's story on pages 194–199. Do you feel the addition of this voice is necessary? How does the addition of this voice add to or detract from the story?

This narrator talks of the *Sky*, the *Land*, the *Clearing*, the *Burden*, the *Return*, and the *Knife*. What is the meaning of each of these terms?

11. How is the language of the Land different from the language of the Burden and of the Clearing? What impact does this have on the members of each? What does the language of each group tell the reader about their belief system?
12. The Return speaks of his “one in particular.” What does this phrase mean? Who is this? Describe the development of their relationship, how it ended, and the impact this had on the Return. Read pages 268–270. Are there details that surprise you? The Source tells the Return about his own “one in particular” on page 426. How are their situations similar?
13. The Return talks to the Sky about the Knife on page 84. He tells the Sky that the Knife “is worse than the others. . . . He is worst of all of them. . . . Because he *knew* he was doing wrong. He felt the *pain* of his actions. . . . The rest are worth as much as their pack animals . . . but worst is the one who knows better and does *nothing*.” What is your response to this statement? The Return’s motivation in this war seems to be to avenge the actions of the Knife. Why? Explain how his motivations shift as the book goes on.
14. Viola wears a band with the number 1391 on it. Why does she wear this band? How does it impact her? What might the band be symbolic of? The Return wears a similar band. Why does he wear it? What impact does it have on him? What does it symbolize? Who else wears bands? What is the fate of those who wear the band? Explain. How is this eventually resolved? When Mayor Prentiss says on page 565, “And that . . . is my parting gift to *you*, Viola,” to what is he referring?
15. On page 114, the Return thinks, “The Land is all one, is it not? The land has no *others*, it has no *they* or *those*. There is only one Land.” Compare this philosophy to the thinking of the Mayor, Mistress Coyle, Todd, and Viola. Do these characters value separateness or unity more? How does this influence their actions, especially in terms of the war that is being waged? Are there those who are seen as “others” in our culture? How does this thinking affect us all?
16. Which characters advocate for a peaceful solution to the war? What is their reasoning for this solution? Do you feel that, even in the end, peace is actually possible for those on New World? How about for humans on Earth? Explain your reasoning.
17. Todd and Viola are completely devoted to each other. In their conversation on page 164 Viola says, “If they’d hurt you, if they’d *killed* you . . . I’d have killed every last one of them.” Todd replies, “I’d do the same, Viola . . . without even thinking twice.” On page 166, Viola wonders, “Does it make us dangerous?” What do you think she means? What specific action on her part causes her to ask this? Other characters recognize the power of Todd and Viola’s devotion to each other and use it to manipulate them. Do you think this makes them dangerous? Explain.
18. Mistress Coyle says to Viola on page 175, “Ideals, my girl. . . . Always easier to believe in than live.” Bradley responds by saying, “But if you don’t at least try to live them . . . then there’s no point in living at all.” What is the definition of *ideal*? What are the ideals being discussed here? Do you agree with Mistress Coyle and/or Bradley? Explain.
19. Choice is discussed many times throughout the Chaos Walking trilogy. For instance, in *The Ask and the Answer*, Mistress Coyle tells Viola, “We are the choices we make.” (page 98). On page 182 of *Monsters of Men*, Bradley tells Viola, “To say you have no choice is to release yourself from responsibility and that’s not how a person with integrity acts.” What are some good choices and some poor choices that Todd, Viola, and the Return make? What impact do these choices have on their lives and the lives of others? Think of situations in your life where you have made choices that have significantly impacted the course of your life. Did you or did you not take ownership for these choices? What were the consequences of these actions?
20. On page 183, Todd looks through his mother’s journal and can only read the words “*My dearest son.*” He thinks the pages of her journal contain “my ma, talking and talking. And I can’t hear her.” The fact that he is illiterate haunts him. Author Patrick Ness continues to remind us of Todd’s illiteracy through Todd’s use of misspellings (“projekshun,”

“impayshuntly,” “emoshunal”) and poor grammar (“ain’t,” “speechify”). On page 249, Mayor Prentiss offers to teach Todd to read. The irony is that Mayor Prentiss is the reason that Todd can’t read. In the end, is this an honest offer? Explain how the Mayor uses books and education to manipulate Todd and the others. What might we learn from Todd’s experiences with education and reading?

of the whole? Explain and give examples. How do you feel about this military tactic? Can we consider these individuals martyrs?

21. The concept of redemption is a key theme in *Monsters of Men*. On page 190, Mayor Prentiss tells Todd that before his son’s death Todd had redeemed Davy: “You changed him, Todd Hewitt. . . . He was a wastrel, and you nearly made him a man.” Does Todd redeem Davy? Give examples to support your response. The Mayor is described by Mistress Coyle on page 393 as a “terrible, savage, brutal genius.” However, the Mayor says on page 396, “You’ve *redeemed* me, Todd Hewitt. Redeemed me when no one else would have thought it possible. . . . Or even desirable.” However, Todd says on several occasions that Mayor Prentiss is not redeemable. For instance, on page 374 he says, “I look at his face, his completely untrustworthy, unredeemable face.” Does Todd change and redeem Mayor Prentiss? Think of the events that take place at the end of the book. Is the Mayor capable of redemption? Does he deserve redemption? Explain.

23. On pages 255–256, Mayor Prentiss and Mistress Coyle each describe the actions of the other. Review these accusations. Do you feel that these accusations are accurate?

24. Mistress Coyle says of Mayor Prentiss on page 300, “Usually when a man calls a woman a bitch . . . it’s because she’s doing something right.” What are your thoughts on this?

25. The relationship between Mayor Prentiss and Todd is multilayered and complex, as is the relationship between Mistress Coyle and Viola. Describe these relationships. Do you believe the Mayor when he repeatedly tells Todd things like, “You’re a remarkable young man, you know that?” (page 325)? What about Mistress Coyle when she says things to Viola like, “You’re lucky, you know. So young. So many chances ahead of you. You could turn out to be a better version of me. A version of me who’s never forced to be so ruthless” (page 330)? Consider Mistress Coyle’s and Mayor Prentiss’s final acts. Do these acts support or negate the statements above? Explain. How do Todd and Viola see the Mayor and Mistress Coyle? Discuss how Todd and Viola’s feelings for the Mayor and Mistress Coyle change throughout the book.

22. The leaders of the different factions involved in this war believe that the death of one or a few is sometimes necessary in war to save the whole. On pages 209–210, when apologizing to Viola for the bomb in the cathedral that could have taken her life, Mistress Coyle tells Viola, “Leaders must sometimes make monstrous decisions . . . and my monstrous decision was that if your life was likely to be lost on an errand *you* insisted on taking, then I would at least take the chance, however slim, to make your death worth it. . . . Then you would have been a martyr for the cause . . . and we would have fought in your name. . . . You’d be surprised at how powerful a martyr can be.” What is a martyr? How is the idea that martyrs have great power borne out in *Monsters of Men*? After the death of several members of the Land, the Sky says, “*Necessary in small numbers only. . . . Necessary to save the entire body of the Land. And necessary to finish this was before the convoy arrives.*” (page 235). Think of modern-day warring factions. Do they knowingly sacrifice individuals for the sake

26. At one point, while looking at Bradley, the Return realizes that he “is only newly arrived, a forerunner of all those who are still to come. Still to come to push the land out of its own world. Still to come to make *all* of us the Burden. And more will no doubt come after. And more after that” (page 346). Why is it that Bradley’s and Simone’s people cannot return to their homeland? Think of examples throughout history where a member of an indigenous group may have looked at a colonialist and thought these same things.

27. “Can you blame me if I’m curious about new technologies?” the Mayor asks Todd on page 376. This is an example of Ness’s use of foreshadowing. What events does this statement foreshadow?

28. Which character makes a surprise return in *Monsters of Men*? Where has this character been? (See page 453.) Why do you think author Patrick Ness made

the choice to bring this character back? What impact does this character's return have on the relationship between Todd and the Mayor, and on the story in general? Do you feel that the return of this character was necessary to the story?

29. On page 452, the Source says to Todd, "That's the secret of this planet. . . . Communication, real and open, so we can finally understand each other." What prevents humans on earth from having that "real and open" communication being talked about here? Could this type of communication be the solution to the conflicts between contemporary warring factions? Why or why not?

30. The Mayor tells Todd on page 532, "So many important things have happened to you in churches . . . I thought it only fitting to bring you to one for what is

either your last chapter. . . . Or your first." Later, on page 555, Viola gets a "sinking feeling of how many terrible things have happened to me and Todd in churches." What are some important events that have taken place in churches throughout the three books in the Chaos Walking trilogy? In the present day, what important events often take place in churches? Have any significant events in your own life taken place in churches? Do you feel that any of the characters in the series are particularly religious or spiritual? What do you think the churches in Chaos Walking symbolize?

31. What is your interpretation of the last section of *Monsters of Men*, "Arrival"? What do you think will happen after the story ends? Is there hope to be found in the final pages of the trilogy?

ABOUT PATRICK NESS



Patrick Ness was born on an army base in Virginia, where his father was a drill sergeant. As a child he also lived in Hawaii, Washington state, and California. As a young adult, Patrick Ness studied English literature at the University of Southern California. In 1999 he moved to London, where he has lived since.

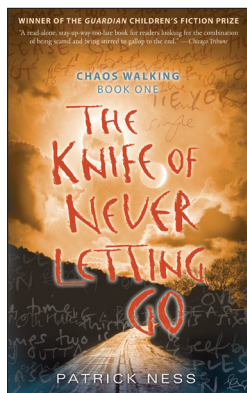
He has taught creative writing at Oxford University and written book reviews for several publications. Most of his time is spent writing.

The books in the Chaos Walking trilogy have won many awards. Most recently, *Monsters of Men* was short-listed for the 2010 W. H. Smith Children's Book of the Year. It also appears on several "best books of 2010" lists.

Interesting facts about Patrick Ness include that he was a goth as a teen, has a tattoo of a rhinoceros, is a certified scuba diver, will not eat onions under any circumstances, is a marathon runner (and says he gets his best ideas while running), was accepted into film school but turned it down to study writing, wrote a radio comedy about vampires, and always knows the last line of his books before he starts writing.

ALSO BY PATRICK NESS:

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Winner of the *Guardian* Children's Fiction Prize

An Amazon.com Best Book of the Year

An American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults

A *Booklist* Editors' Choice

A Booktrust Teenage Prize Winner (U.K.)

Short-listed for the Branford Boase Award

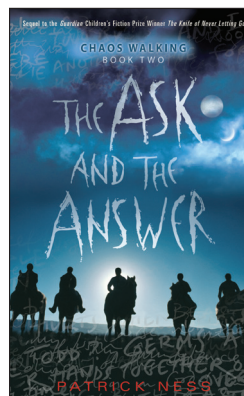
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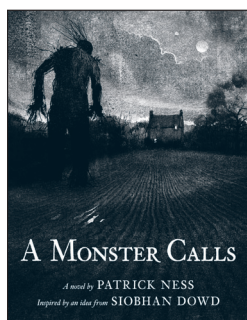
★ "Grim and beautifully written. . . . Uses a brilliant cast of well-developed characters and its singular setting and premise to present a provocative examination of the nature of evil and humanity. This is among the best YA science fiction novels of the year."

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A Monster Calls

★ "From a premise left by author Siobhan Dowd before her untimely death, Ness has crafted a nuanced tale that draws on elements of classic horror stories to delve into the terrifying terrain of loss."

—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

★ "Beautiful in its execution, and fearless in its honesty."

—*Booklist* (starred review)

★ "A profoundly moving, expertly crafted tale of unaccountable loss."

—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

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This discussion guide was written by Terri Evans, media specialist at Champlin Park High School in Minnesota. In 2010, Patrick Ness visited Champlin Park High School to spend three days discussing *The Knife of Never Letting Go* with the nearly 3,500 students and staff who had read the book over the summer.



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