

Toward the Gleam

Reading Guide

About *Toward the Gleam*

Between the two world wars, on a hike in the English countryside, Professor John Hill takes refuge from a violent storm in a cave. There he nearly loses his life, but he also makes an astonishing discovery—an ancient manuscript housed in a cunningly crafted metal box. Though a philologist by profession, Hill cannot identify the language used in the manuscript and the time period in which it was made, but he knows enough to make an educated guess—that the book and its case are the fruits of a long-lost, but advanced civilization.

The translation of the manuscript and the search for its origins become a life-long quest for Hill. As he uncovers an epic that both enchants and inspires him, he tracks down scholars from Oxford to Paris who can give him clues. Along the way, he meets several intriguing characters, including a man keenly interested in obtaining artifacts from a long-lost civilization that he believes was the creation of a superior race, and will help him fulfill his ambition to rule other men. Concluding that Hill must have found something that may help him in this quest, but knowing not what it is and where it is hidden, he has Hill, his friends at Oxford, and his family shadowed and threatened until finally he and Hill face off in a final, climactic confrontation.

A story that features a giant pirate and slaver, a human chameleon on a perilous metaphysical journey, a mysterious hermit, and creatures both deadly and beautiful, this is a novel that explores the consequences of the predominant ideas of the 20th Century.

Q & A with T.M. Doran

Author of *Toward the Gleam*

What inspired you to write this book?

I've always enjoyed a story that challenges me to think and reflect, while being a good story on its own merits. That's what I was after with *Toward the Gleam*.

I was motivated to write the story for several reasons: first, I wanted to try my hand at a suspenseful story that keeps readers on their heels, a story that mystifies and surprises the reader, but also because the dark ideologies that caused so much misery in the 20th century are still moving—seducing—the world today. In spite of the all-too-recent misery, these ideologies are still being promoted as the answer to the world's problems.

The story was hard work but it was a labor of love. I had many inspirations that went beyond my own skills and talents, things I heard or read, or an idea that came to me at just the right moment.

Please tell us a little bit about the storyline of the book.

Toward the Gleam is layered with mystery on top of mystery, big mysteries and little ones, so I have to be careful talking about the story without spoiling the mysteries.

The story follows John Hill from early manhood to old age, but mostly as a younger man. Quite unexpectedly, he discovers something remarkable that

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T.M. Doran

467 pp, Hardcover, \$24.95

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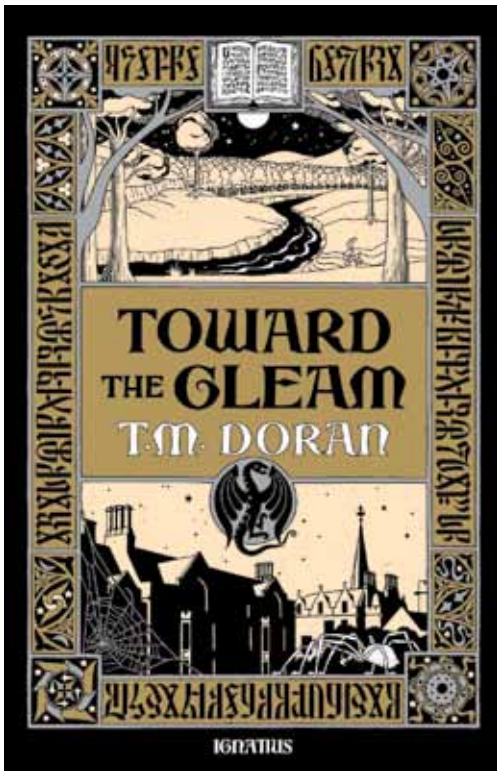
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affects the rest of his life and causes him to seek out people he believes can help him in his quest to understand this thing. Some of these people are helpful, and some are...unhelpful. Discovering who these characters are, and their motives, is an important part of the story. My goal was to make these characters vivid and memorable.

The solutions to some of the mysteries are explained as the story progresses while it's up to readers to solve some of them for themselves. I wanted to create many "Aha" moments in the story, but it's not necessary for the reader to solve all of these mysteries to enjoy the story.

Who is the main character, John Hill?

First of all, John Hill is a fictional character, but he is based on a famous 20th century author, someone everyone has heard of, a man for whom I have high esteem. A challenge I faced was to give this character flaws and weaknesses, even though I have such high regard for his historical counterpart.

This novel is a mystery story, but it also discusses philosophical questions and the predominant ideologies of the 20th century. What are some of these ideologies?

They include philosophical materialism, determinism, relativism, and utilitarianism. The reader doesn't have to understand these ideologies to understand and enjoy the story, but these ideas are always lurking in the shadows, so to speak. Having said this, I think readers can enjoy the adventure and the mystery without getting bogged down by the ideological contest.

These ideologies sound dry and academic but they've had a big—and devastating—affect on the world. A central theme in *Toward the Gleam* is that ideas have meaning for good or ill, that they affect people's lives in a profound way whether people realize it or not, that ideas move the world.

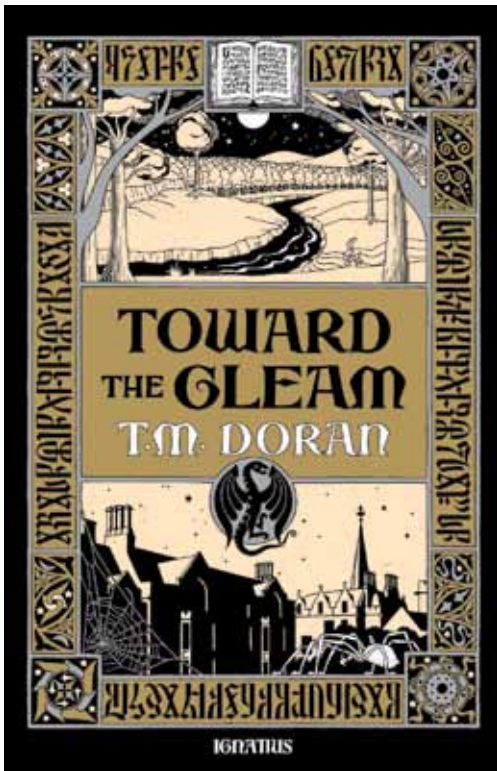
You introduce several famous people into the book who help the main character. Who are they and why did you choose them?

I chose these characters because, in their own ways, they were champions of the ideas that countered the dark ideologies in the book. These people were humanistic in the best sense of the word, in the sense of promoting human freedom, human dignity, and human transcendence.

My hope is that some of the enjoyment the reader gets from the story is deciphering who these characters are, so I have to be a little coy with this question. These historically based characters are intentionally veiled. I wanted to be able to take them places and do things with them that differed from their historical counterparts.

I hope that some of the non-historical characters, like Agnes, are interesting too. To the writer, some of these characters were as "alive" as the historically based characters.

Then, there is Alembert...he's a big part of the mystery.



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What were the greatest challenges in writing the story?

The historically based characters were a big challenge, making them true to their historical counterparts while having the freedom to take them in new directions. Making the science of the central mystery plausible also took a lot of research, but it was necessary. In a certain sense, the story spans 40,000 years.

How to resolve everything—the ending—was a big challenge too. I had an inspiration that the story ought to end with a certain word, a word that is a kind of antidote to the dark ideologies in the book.

Discussion Questions

Contrast the concept of human dignity expressed by John Hill and his allies with the materialistic philosophies in the book, especially utilitarianism, relativism, Epicureanism, and positivism.

How do the scenes with John and Jacob Basile, and with John Hill and Gosdier Jones advance the story? How are reason, science, and progress viewed by each of these characters?

What do the puzzle-plot mysteries—Sir Richard Hope and The Count's Gaming Table—reveal about characters in the story?

Identify thematic and dramatic parallels between *Toward the Gleam* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

What manner of beings are the characters referred to as the Necromancer and the Pilgrim? Are they super-scientiae, as Alembert asserts, or something else?

What does the encounter between Gilbert and Alembert reveal about both men?

How does E.M.'s art transform her and her relationship with John as the story progresses?

In what sense is John a co-creator of the manuscript along with its author(s)?

What is the significance of the names Hill, Adler (also, the variation produced by substituting for one letter in this name), Agnes CurLio, Drake, and Christopher?

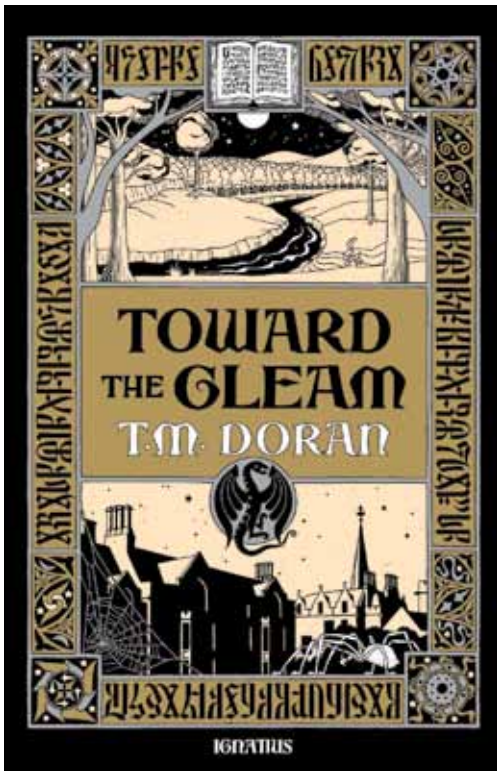
Who are the two men in the September 21, 1929 chapter, and what does this short chapter reveal?

What is the significance of the last word in the story? How might this word be applied to events in the story?

Who is Edith's historical counterpart and how was that person connected to the philosophers Edmund Husserl and Max Scheler? Where did her quest for truth take her?

How does E.M. influence John's response to Alembert, and how is E.M. affected by John's response to Alembert? What can be said about their relationship?

According to John Hill and his allies, how are movements like Soviet Marxism and German Nazism, and the Jacobins before them, connected at the roots?



There are few clues about the book that changes Agnes' life. Who are possible authors of this book?

How are the malignant animals in the story connected to the book's primary themes and ideologies? What is the significance of Alembert's attraction to butterflies and stick insects?

How do Hermann's, Edith's, and Kuiper's views speak to the zeitgeist of early 1930s Germany?

What are the parallels between Alembert and the powerful enemies of the ancient civilization in the book; that is, the Necromancer and the Traitor?

Explore the role that science occupies in the story: the climatology, geography, and biology of the ancient civilization; Einstein's and Godel's ideas, and how is science connected to the philosophies and ideologies in the book?

What is the explicit connection between Alembert and Conan Doyle's Moriarity?

How closely was the adventurous Drake aligned with his pre-WWII historical counterpart, and how closely was Drake's worldview aligned with John Hill's?

How does the dust jacket art complement the story?

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