

“Twelve Chairs” DISCUSSION QUESTIONS for the May 30th meeting:

- 1.) The novel takes place in the late 20s—a few years after Lenin's death, but with his economic stimulus policy, the “New Economic Policy” (NEP) still in effect, permitting limited private enterprise in commerce, industry, and agriculture. What example of “limited private enterprise” is found in Chapter 1, and how are the entrepreneurs depicted in terms of character and livelihood?
 - 2.) What kind of person (in terms of looks, mentality, disposition, etc.) is Ippolit Matvyeevich (“Kisa”) Vorobyandinov, what kind of town does he live in, and what is revealed about his past & present? What does Vorobyandinov do for a living, what confuses the young couple in his office, and what causes them to “stand in awe” of him? Why does Vorobyandinov loath his mother-in-law, Madam Claudia Ivanovna Petrovna, why does he shed a tear as she lay dying, and what does she say before dying that causes him to scold her? What kind of person is Father Fyodor Vostrikov, why does his wife mistrust him, and under what circumstances do he and Vorobyandinov get into a physical fight? What kind of person is Ostap Bender, how do he and Vorobyandinov meet, and what prompts Vorobyandinov to enter into an agreement with him?
 - 3.) In Chapter 5, raconteurs on a train pass the time telling “Jew” jokes, after which “passengers collapse in laughter”. Based on the two examples of these jokes in the chapter, what’s your take on why the passengers find the punch lines so hilarious? Why include such jokes in the novel?
 - 4.) Chapter 8 is reminiscent of Gogol's “Inspector General”—an imposter inspector wined and dined by corrupt people in power who fear exposure. What is Bender’s motive for posing as a fire inspector at the Stargorod Social Security Office, and what kinds of corruption are exposed?
 - 5.) The novel is rife in characters, organizations, and places that impact the protagonists on their hunt for the sought-after chair. How is each of the following connected to the protagonists and their hunt? *Bashful Chiselleer; Mechanic, Parrot, and Fortune-teller; Mirror-of-Life index; Alliance of the Sword and Ploughshare; Brother Berthold Schwartz Hostel; Ellochka the Cannibal; Absalom Vladimirovich Iznurenkov; Automobile Club; Naked Engineer; author of “Gavrillad”; Columbus Theater; Et Alia.* (This is a partial list; feel free to add to it.)
 - 6.) What adventures/mishaps of the three treasure hunters stand out to you as especially entertaining and why? (e.g., auction, student dormitory, riverboat trip, mountain trek, etc.)
 - 7.) What are the respective fates of the protagonists, and how did you react to the novel's ending?
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