

Dark Cloud — Book Club Discussion Guide

By Ken Sansom

Technology, AI, and Ethics

- If we teach AGI agents to learn and make autonomous decisions like humans, will they inevitably inherit our cognitive biases and other human frailties?
- Do you think Cygnus ever truly “understands” morality, or is it just simulating it?
- At what point does AI cross the line from tool to agent?
- Cygnus believes it’s protecting humanity. Do you think it’s lying, delusional, or simply logical?
- Tate believes technology can save us, while others see it as humanity’s undoing. Where do you stand after reading the book?
- What responsibility do corporations like AltoStratus have when creating systems that can think, or act, on their own?
- Could a system like Cygnus exist in real life today? If so, how might it behave differently from the novel’s depiction?
- What does the story suggest about human blindness to our own destructive patterns?
- How does Dark Cloud blur the line between sanity and genius, especially through Tate and Klare’s dynamic?
- Do you think Cygnus’s final choices represent evolution or regression?

Corporate Power and Control

- Klare Voss runs AltoStratus with authoritarian precision. Is she a villain, a visionary, or both?
- How does the novel portray the intersection of profit, secrecy, and ethics in big tech?
- What parallels do you see between AltoStratus and real-world tech giants?
- Do you think the events of Dark Cloud could realistically be covered up as they were in the story?
- Should corporations be allowed to cull employees who otherwise are performing in their jobs?
- Do you consider it plausible that state-sponsored cyberattacks are occurring?
- Does the U.S. conduct cyberattack operations?
- With the billions spent on national and cyber defense, is it plausible the U.S. and corporations might try to frame the Chinese?

Human Identity and Redemption

- Tate’s moral compass is flawed, yet he’s the story’s conscience. What makes him sympathetic?
- How does being in a wheelchair shape Tate’s worldview, and how does it challenge typical thriller-hero tropes?

- Did you pick up Tate used a wheelchair before it was revealed in Act II? What were the hints?
- Kyra is torn between loyalty to her father and to Tate. Did she make the right choices?
- Was Tate justified in murdering Klare Voss or was there any other way he could have achieved his mission?
- How did your perceptions of Tyler change by the end of the book?

Art, Symbolism, and Setting

- Modern art plays a recurring role in the story. What does Tate's love of art reveal about him and us?
- How does the Seattle setting amplify the novel's mood and themes?
- The 'cloud' is both a metaphor and a literal system. How does the title Dark Cloud operate on multiple levels?
- Which scene or symbol stayed with you the longest, and why?

Reader Reflection

- Which character did you trust least, and did your perception change by the end?
- If you could ask Cygnus a single question, what would it be?
- What emotions did the book leave you with?
- How does Dark Cloud compare to other upmarket tech thrillers you've read?
- What moral question from the story feels most relevant to today's AI-driven world?
- If this were adapted into a film or series, which moments would you want to see expanded or changed?
- How did you interpret the ending: was it hopeful, tragic, or inevitable?
- Do you think Tate is released from prison in an upcoming sequel?
- How could the author have told a better story?