Shaken Loose
By Ilana DeBare

Discussion Questions for Book Groups

1. The title *Shaken Loose* refers to souls who are suddenly expelled from the sea of fire into the desert of Hell. But some of the characters—especially Annie—are also "shaken loose" from the assumptions and behavioral pattern of their lives. How does Annie change over the course of the book? Which of the other humans change during their time in Hell? Which ones continue in the same roles they played when alive?

2. Being in Hell overturns Annie's basic assumptions that the universe runs on the laws of science, and that Hell, Heaven, and God are all myths. Have you ever been in a situation where you suddenly found that some of your deepest beliefs—about other people, about your family or religion or country—were wrong? How did you respond?

4. *Shaken Loose* portrays a Hell of endless physical torment, a place of punishment that includes both vicious evildoers and decent people who were not baptized Christians. Does this seem like a fair and just afterlife to you?

5. Do you believe in the existence of an afterlife that includes Hell? If so, how is your image of Hell similar to or different from the Hell of *Shaken Loose*?

5. Annie tries praying for the first time at the marsh of Limbo and is frustrated when God doesn't answer her. If you are someone who prays, what do you see as the purpose of prayer? Do you hope for a response from God? Or does prayer play some other role for you?

6. The marsh of Limbo horrifies Annie. Today's Roman Catholic Church offers "prayerful hope" that unbaptized infants will be welcomed into Heaven. But leading Catholic theologians of the past such as Augustine of Hippo and Peter Abelard said that unbaptized children would go to a limbo where they would not suffer physical pain, but neither would they be in God's presence. Do you come from a faith tradition that requires baptism? If so, how does your faith deal with the fate of children who die before they've had a chance to be baptized? Do you think Christian attitudes about this have changed over the centuries?

7. Through much of Western literature and religion, the figure of Satan has represented pure evil. But John Milton in *Paradise Lost* and some later writers have shown a tragic or sympathetic side to him. In the recent TV show *Lucifer*, he's even the hero! What was your reaction to the version of Satan shown in *Shaken Loose*? Why do you think many people are willing to look on the devil more sympathetically today?

8. Hell offers plenty of punishment but, as Annie says towards the end of the book, "It offers no mercy – no chance to repent, to change, to do better." The balance between justice and

mercy is a challenge on Earth as well as in Hell. How do you view the proper balance between justice and mercy in our legal system? How do you view that balance in your personal relationships, or in parenting?

9. The human characters in *Shaken Loose* hold different ideas of how God relates to humankind. For instance, Oudine believes God is going to send an angel to rescue her. Ishaq says, "Know that even if you can't see Him, He sees you." Henry Mwango says, "The Lord would never make decisions for you, but He might provide little nudges if you weren't too busy and self-important to notice them." And Trua suggests that "the Christian God is just a story." How would you describe the various views of God in *Shaken Loose*? Did any of them resonate with you?

10. *Shaken Loose* portrays two kinds of torment—the sadistic violence inflicted by the marauders in the canyon, and the physical torture of being in the fire. Did one feel more disturbing to you? Why?

11. At the end of the book, Annie faces a choice between returning to Earth and staying in Hell. What are the factors pulling her in each direction? Which would you choose, and why?

12. Do you consider this a "happy ending?" Why or why not?

13. There will be a sequel to *Shaken Loose.* What questions or loose ends would you like to see addressed in the sequel?

Source: https://ilanadebare.com