



BLACK RIVER ORCHARD

CHUCK WENDIG

BOOK CLUB KIT

A LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear Reader,

Ideas are mostly bullshit. Stories are stories are stories, told again and again throughout time, the bones of them the same even when their shape looks different. What *is* original, however, are the authors themselves. We are a unique culmination of our anxieties, our fears, our experiences, our traumas, our joys, and of course, our obsessions. And it is the combination of those things, and how we apply them to stories, that are ostensibly timeless—that's the narrative alchemy that matters.

First thing is this: In my couch I found a note. This paper said:

ADRAMELECH
MEPHISTOPHELES
BAPHOMET

I did not write this. I do not know who wrote this. My couch is not a previously-owned couch. And yet, somehow, the couch contained that note, which had the list of three demons on it, and the letters M and E underlined in each. Well, that's fucking weird, I thought.

Second thing: I once didn't care much for apples. My only interest in apples was in their usage in the form of *pie*. Fast-forward to my adult years, where we discover, unsurprisingly, that I am the kind of person who goes to farmer's markets. Our farmer's market of choice was the Emmaus Farmer's Market, and in the middle of our first summer attending, a new vendor showed up: North Star Orchards.

I looked at the bounty of bins, each heaped with apples of every color, shape, and texture. I read the names of these apples. I did not recognize a single one of them. They sounded like they had crawled out of a fantasy novel. In those apples I tasted a panoply of flavors I'd never before tasted in an apple, or really, in any other fruit. It was wild.

Needless to say, I got real interested in apples.

Point is, this story is a culmination of all that fucking weirdness inside of me. It's apples and demons and the area in which I live here in Pennsylvania, and it's some of who I was growing up and some of what I saw with my own family and other families. I just went with it. And I hope if you're a writer, you go with the weirdness too. And if you're a reader, then I hope you like the weirdness, because it's all here. Glory be.

Chuck Wendig

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which character in *Black River Orchard* did you most identify with? Why?
2. Why do you think some characters were able to spit out the apple or stop eating it when they felt something was “off”—and others weren’t?
3. What traits did the characters who didn’t eat the apple share? What about those who did?
4. Where did you find the lines between good and evil blurriest?
5. Do you think the apple caused evil thoughts and actions in those who ate it—or was it water seeds that were already there?
6. What did you make of the italic snippets scattered throughout the book? Whose voice did you imagine you were reading?
7. How does Calla defy the cliché, “The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree”?
8. How might the events of *Black River Orchard* have been different if the evil food in question wasn’t an apple—something we associate with health, goodness, and even Americanness? Do you think the same things would have happened if it were, say, the most delicious Twinkie anyone had ever tasted? Why or why not?
9. Many characters have to betray those they love—on the apple-eating side and the abstainers’ side. What was the point for each character where you knew they’d made a choice they couldn’t undo?
10. What in our culture today reminds you of the Ruby Slipper apple (even symbolically)? Explain.

