



# How Like a God

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## **How Like a God** Brenda W. Clough

When a Washington, D.C. software developer wakes up one morning able to read--and influence--the hearts and minds of everyone around him, he expects to enjoy his godlike power. But soon his power shows its darker side, driving him away from his family and onto the streets of New York City, where he explores the depths of despair and degradation.

## **How Like a God Details**

Date : Published February 15th 1998 by Tor Books (first published 1997)

ISBN : 9780812571363

Author : Brenda W. Clough

Format : Paperback 288 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Fiction, Urban Fantasy, Science Fiction, Paranormal

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# From Reader Review How Like a God for online ebook

## David says

Unfortunately disappointing. It's an interesting premise that used up all the interesting just showing up and the rest of the deal is boringly prosaic. The manly man, Tim the Toolman Taylor stuff was comically overdone and strangely undersold at the same time. Then there was the whole men good/women bad thing which was more than a little hair raising. Granted it's a 15 year old book, but it would have been more than eyebrow raising even then. Additionally, there's the whole peculiar Christian element oddly embarrassedly woven throughout. I believe that's my ultimate problem with the whole book. Nothing much happens or is presented with any conviction, lots of things and ideas show up sheepishly and then disappear quietly.

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## Goffacat says

What did I learn about this book? Power! Power affects people differently. Some can handle it some cant and some need to learn how to handle it. This book had it's ups and downs but I have to say that overall I really enjoyed it.

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## Ruby Ridge says

I was given this book complimentary from LibraryThing.com in e-book form in return for my honest review. Everything stated in this review is of my own opinion and I was not compensated monetarily for providing this review.

I am a big fan of superhero books and this is what this one is - ordinary guy comes into extraordinary (super) powers. I guess all of us who have read superhero books or comics wonder what would happen if these powers came to regular folks like us. Well for the first half of the book Brenda Clough gives us her take on this, which I figure is pretty close. Most of us have small goals – raise, promotion, shut up the noisy neighbors. I did not go along with his reasons for leaving home but maybe other folks would. The time in New York was kind of untrue also – given the choice of a park bench and staying in a luxury hotel passing ‘fairy money’ I know what I would be doing!

The second half of the novel gets the story moving forward. Don’t want to say too much and spoil it but it is a satisfying ending and sets us up well for the sequel – which I will be reading. A solid four stars

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## Storm Chase says

I was intrigued by the blurb because I love superhero comics and I’ve never come across a modern fiction author before who writes about Gilgamesh.

The good: I enjoyed the way Clough explores the crushing impact of sudden power. It was particularly fun to see Rob being a thoroughly normal person who at first abuses his talent and then runs from it.

The way Rob hides from everyone and tops up on food and shelter by occasionally using and abusing the rich was particularly wonderful. I also liked the way he got his humanity back by working with his hands.

Edwin, the clever and helpful scientist who acts as an external conscience, is a caricature but I thought he was perfect considering this is a story about the birth of a superhero. As a sidekick, I liked Edwin.

The not so good: I thought the reason for Rob leaving home wasn't very convincing. He didn't even make an effort to see if he could control his powers; he just upped and went.

I also wondered why Rob wasn't more upset by his wife's relative lack of interest. When he reveals his "gift" she doesn't really consider what it means to him; she just focuses on what he can do for her. She also spills his secret to several people within 24 hours. She came across as a nasty, selfish type and yet Rob doesn't seem to notice.

Finally, the appearance of Gilgamesh was disappointing. He came across as a cartoon bad guy and was disposed of in a classic good versus evil battle. It was expected as part of the superhero story but I would have liked that part more if Gilgamesh had been a more rounded character.

Verdict: I enjoyed this. It's fun, interesting read that's a little out of the ordinary. I'd give it a three and a half but as I can't, it's a four.

Note: Received as a free copy in return for a review.

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## **Robert says**

Some bits were great; some bits I wasn't keen on. [spoilers]

My main problem was I didn't like the main character. I know this is about power=corruption, but I found it odd how long he went so long without missing his family, and he doesn't seem to like his wife much except for sex. Strange too that he doesn't miss his job - everyone has days when they don't want to go to work, but unless you're in a deadend job, there's always something you like about it. In addition, I don't like men who are brilliant with tools, but that's me. I won't mention his murders.

Considering this was published in 1985 (I think), it's worn very well - I had a slight chuckle about "Byte" and 3.5" discs, but there are few instances of dating, which is clever writing. The premise is original and interesting, and there are lots of twists and turns to take the reader by surprise. I should have loved this book, but in the end, I only liked bits of it. All the same, I am now reading the sequel.

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## **Peter Tillman says**

Rating: "A" -- Gilgamesh as a software engineer, very nicely done.

When I picked up this book, I flipped to the back, read the author's note, and sighed -- another urban fantasy.

Well, contemporary suburban mythic science-fantasy, as it turns out, and very nicely done. Clough has an "appealingly cheeky imagination" and the chops to carry thru to a pleasing and satisfying resolution. A noteworthy plus is her effortless and accurate drawing of her male protagonist -- and, at 288 pages, a refreshing lack of flab. It's written in Marvel-comix style -- bright colors & a fast, jumpy plot -- that may not appeal to all. Recommended to both SF and urban-fantasy readers -- not to mention suburban mythic science-fantasy (and Spiderman) fans.

Another good review, by Christina Schulman:

<http://www.epiphyte.net/SF/how-like-a...>

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## **Gyula says**

The central idea of the story was quite interesting. It made me think what would happen if I was the guy with the superpower. How it would change my life? What would I do? What I wouldn't do? I like books which make me think. I was especially curious, because Rob was an average man with a wife and two kids and everyday problems, just like me. How a godlike power changes a guy like him?

Which brings me to the point I didn't like: there were so many missed opportunities this concept offered. I wanted the hero to go places. I wanted him to rescue people from criminals. I wanted him to make a ton of money, buy exclusive cars or an extravagant house or a small country. I wanted him to realise that the parties and the cocktails doesn't give satisfaction. I wanted him to suffer like a dog without his loved ones. I expected him go high and low, do amazing and stupid things. I would have done that. I was bored seeing that he spent his time reading in the library. Playing cards in casinos was an improvement, but it didn't really raised the stakes.

It somewhat compensated me that the protagonist had spiritual experiences, went deep in his consciousness, discovered the depth of his soul to be able to understand himself.

I liked the voice of the author, the writing flowed smoothly, besides it showed that the book was well edited. Recently I read a number of self-published books, and some of them could use an editor. It wasn't the case with this book.

I suggest this book for those who don't mind less action and more spiritual discovery.

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## **David Haws says**

This does explain some of the second book, which I read out of sequence (mea culpa).

We have lived—for thousands of years—in societies that allow some members to develop extraordinary power over the rest of us. The truly marginalized are too busy trying to survive, but those of us in the middle tend to resent the imbalance: so we ostracize Pericles, or gripe about Bill Gates, and come up with what Nietzsche called the morality of slaves. Kant called it the Categorical Imperative, and assumed that it represented an objective moral value—a response to “the moral law within”—that we as moral agents are obliged to respect the autonomy of those with the potential to become fellow-moral agents themselves (and respect us in turn). According to Kant, Rob has an imperfect duty to support his family, and a perfect duty to

leave Courtenay unmolested. Of course, Kant assumes that these are objective moral values, and they might not be (the basis of reciprocity seems more social than moral). If these values are simply subjective—in place because they smooth the functioning of society—then they are the counsels of prudence (etiquette) rather than the commands of morality. If Rob is as empowered as he appears, then he is beyond the obligations of prudence. This exploration is enough to sustain an interesting novel.

That said, writing a cross-gender narrative is always difficult—not that we can't tap the cross-gender part of our self, but we never really know whether we got it right. Clough frequently has Rob or the male narrator with Rob's POV think or do "girlie" things. For example, socialized heterosexual males are generally too homophobic to cuddle with each other on cold nights in a sleeping bag (as far as I can tell, this is the only reason to take your wife/girlfriend on a camping trip). Similarly, a male narrator with Rob's POV is probably not going to make even an oblique reference *The Bell Jar*.

Rob doesn't have sufficient motivation to abandon his family: he didn't "damage" the twins—at worst, he contributed to their precocious development (something Piaget tells us is the American obsession). Similarly, I don't see him being put off by Courtenay's teddy bear (if he's probing at the port of entry, we have to assume he has his business in hand—or somewhere nearby—and I don't see him exercising the will to stop). And why introduce the actual Gilgamesh (which feels a little like gilding the lily)?

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## **Wamuhu Mwaura says**

Interesting incorporation of Mesopotamian mythology into contemporary fiction.

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## **Mjhancock says**

\*trigger warning for attempted sexual assault\*

Rob is a fairly ordinary guy: office job, wife, two twin toddlers. One day, he starts to have these insights about the people around them, and starts being able to push their actions in directions he intends. Soon, he's got unlimited mind reading and mind altering abilities, and he ultimately abandons his family for fear he can't stop himself from warping his toddlers' minds with his projections. Fleeing to New York, he's all but resigned to life as a isolated bum until he runs into Edwin Barbossa, a microbiologist whose scientific approach to life convinces the nigh omnipotent Rob to test the limits of his powers and move to get his life back. Buddy comedy hijinxes ensure.

...Well, comedy may be overstating the case a bit much. *How Like A God* is a book I liked in spite of myself; we'll start with what I liked, because I have a feeling the other list will go on a while. There's something I find deeply comforting about the idea that someone who becomes "like a god" will behave in a fundamentally decent manner, even if "decent" sometimes really deserves those scare quotes. It's the part of me that likes superhero stories and epic fantasies where the good guys always win; even though I know the real world is more complex, these stories where a good person stays true to themselves can be deeply satisfying. That said, there's also something fascinating about Rob working out the rules to his powers, and coming tantalizingly close to temptation. Edwin makes a nice addition to the story, in that he takes Rob out of his moping; I wouldn't say he's a satisfying foil or anything, but it's a comfort to have someone in the story Rob considers an equal (and yes, he does have a wife; more on that in a minute). And finally, there's some

neat mythical twists involved too.

That said, while Rob may be someone you can trust with divine powers, I personally don't think I like him. As the saying goes, there's not a lot of there there. Other than having very firm ethical beliefs on how to use his powers (he and Edwin take months at one point to get passports and visas, and it never occurs to him to just present a blank paper and promise customs it is what he says it is) and devotion to his family, he's mostly a blank slate with claims to an inner darkness. The odd thing is, though, even when I felt I didn't know anything about him, I still felt there were instances where he was out of character. He's constantly worrying about his family, but despite his mind powers, he never even considers checking in on them (he's a telepath! They don't have to know!) or using his powers to help out his now single wife who has the nightmarish task of raising two toddlers alone after her husband disappears. His darkest moment **\*\*SPOILERS\*\*** is when he attempts, but doesn't go through with, coercing a 13 year old girl into sleeping with him. Granted, that's really dark and gross--but it also doesn't fit with Rob as established. Aside from this scene and a scene with his wife, his sexual interest is nonexistent, and while he has a tendency towards violent dark moods, that's a long way from "hey, I'm going to be a pederast." The lack of even thinking of helping his family is a strange omission given his established character; the almost-rape is a shorthand for how far he's fallen that goes too far to be taken seriously.

And there's a lot of stuff like that, plot points that might not ring false, but definitely feel a bit off. It's a little eyebrow raising that this world is filled with quite this many far-flung Christians, but at least that can be explained by Edwin's faith and connections. There's some weird pre-marital sex baggage that I'm not quite sure belongs to Clough or Rob--when considering how to stop the 13 year old from her plans of sleeping with an entire basketball team, Rob ponders shutting off her sexual desire but "she'll need that when she marries" and when he meets Edwin's fiance, the author makes a point of telling us that he knows they're not sleeping together, even without his powers. I don't have any qualms with waiting for marriage or not, but it does feel as if we're being reassured that the "good" characters have the "right" attitude towards sex.

That's kind of the tone of the book--not preachy, not holier than thou, but with a sliver of what could be condescension if you squint at it. It's there in the attitude towards pre-marital sex, it's there in the way Rob treats his wife (he determines that since she's asking him to use the power to advance her career--and admittedly, more long-term conquering schemes--that she can't handle knowing the truth, and erases it from her mind) and it's there in an early phase of the book, where he tests his powers by rewiring an entire prison population (9000 people) to be decent, honest, polite, and law-abiding. I don't want to say it's white godhood privilege (because that's clearly a ridiculous phrase) but there is a whole series of assumptions baked in there--that being law-abiding and polite is a useful trait to have hardwired into a person's being rather than something, that people in prisons are automatically already not decent or honest, for starters. Granted, it's early in his telepathic career, so he's acting more forcibly than usual, but it's not like he ever comes back to see how his divine decree turns out, either.

And I think that's what fascinates me about the book, that it posits that a person with godlike powers can only maintain their humanity through a strict moral code, but then turns an oddly blind eye to the limitations and possible interrogations of that code. That's a really interesting tension. For a book where a character has omnipotence thrust on them unwillingly, I have to say Le Guin's *Lathe of God* still has top placing, but for a quick read that got me thinking (even if maybe not in the way the author intended), this was nice.

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**Sarah says**

I was predisposed to like this book. I bought this directly from the author at the Baltimore Book Festival after listening to her speak at the SFWA booth. She was the only one on her panel to speak with any sense of history or context. I decided on the basis of that talk that I wanted to buy one of her books, and I chose this one because she had referenced it and it sounded like something I'd be interested in reading. She was kind enough to sell it to me for the remaining cash I had on hand, even though I was a few dollars short.

On the surface, the book has several elements that appeal to me. It's about an ordinary guy who suddenly finds himself in possession of some pretty impressive powers. I like books in which mythology intrudes on modern life, such as Lisa Goldstein's *Dark Cities Underground*. I like superheroes. I like the idea of exploring what that power would ultimately mean for someone who suddenly found himself in possession of it. Clough does a good job at that last one in particular, exploring the dark side of superpower in a way that isn't often done.

Unfortunately, I had some issues with the book that detracted from my full enjoyment. Some of it seemed a little overwritten, heavy on the adverbs and adjectives that are currently so out of vogue. The dialogue didn't always ring true. Both Rob and Edwin, while strong characters, seemed to converse a little anachronistically. A few too many "Holy Mike!" and golly and goshes for me to believe them as thirtysomething guys of the nineties. There were a few other characters who seemed to speak in constant exclamations.

Despite those flaws, I thought it was well paced and well plotted. The central conceit was examined well. I'd be curious to read something more recent by the author.

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## **Gerry LaFemina says**

Thinking person's sci-fi, playing with the myth of Gilgamesh and the moral responsibility of power. Sure, I can quibble about the dialogue (I can only take so many "Golly" and "Holy Mackerel"s after all) and some of the characterization, but overall, I thought the book engaging on multiple levels.

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## **Anna Tan says**

In *How Like a God*, computer programmer Rob Lewis is happily married and loves his crazy and hectic life with his twins - until he suddenly gains the power to read and change minds. At first, he is filled with moral impulses to help fix everything that's wrong with the country. But his power soon gets out of control and when he finds himself inadvertantly influencing his eighteen-month-old toddlers to act like adults, he takes the only solution that seems open to him: he runs away.

I found myself enjoying the story despite my earlier misgivings. Rob, in the vein of all super hero journeys, has to find himself and what really defines him before he can set out to defeat his nemesis; in this case he has to discover the perpetrator behind the strange messages being dumped in his psyche, and hopefully, the source of this mysterious power that plagues him.

Overall, it was an interesting read and an interesting concept to explore.

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## **Chelle Bell says**

I loved this book! I had no idea what the story line was, had not read a review. One reason I love Goodreads so much is the opportunity to find a jewel like this.

Brenda W. Clough's 'How Like a God' is quite easily the most entertaining and captivating book I've read in a long time. GREAT character development, particularly the two main characters Rob and Edwin.

Rob Lewis is an average suburban husband of father of toddler twins, who suddenly finds himself with the amazing power of mind control. At first it is an oddity and he tests it a bit. Then tells his wife who has grandiose ideas for his powers.

To gain some sort of control and protect other and himself from these powers, he walks away from humanity and lives the life of a homeless man. A chance encounter with an NIH microbiologist, Edwin Barbarossa, gives him an ally with the intelligence and training to him him understand what has happened and how to control it.

Add to it ancient history and plausibility, along with a super fast pace writing - and you have a fine book. What a great ride!

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## **April Gain says**

This was an interesting modern sci-fi The narrative changes frequently without being difficult to follow or dragging too much anywhere. I wanted more from the story in general so I found this one to be somewhat unsatisfying.

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