Grist Mill Road: A Novel
by Christopher J. Yates

"The plot is darkly, intricately layered, full of pitfalls and switchbacks, smart and funny and moving and merciless… When the jagged edges work their way to the surface, they can be devastating." – Tana French, *New York Times* bestselling author of *In the Woods* and *The Trespasser*

ABOUT THE BOOK
Christopher J. Yates's cult hit *Black Chalk* introduced a rare talent: a literary writer who could write a plot with the intricacy of a brilliant mental puzzle and with characters so absorbing that readers are immediately gripped.

Yates stuns in his second outing: *Grist Mill Road.*

1982: In an Edenic hamlet some ninety miles north of New York City, among craggy rock cliffs and glacial ponds of timeworn mountains, three teenage friends – Patrick, Matthew, and Hannah – are bound together by a terrible crime.

2008: In New York City, living lives their younger selves could never have predicted, the three meet again – with even more devastating results.

What really happened in those woods twenty-six years ago?

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. At the beginning of the novel, Patch poses the following questions: "What does it mean to watch? When a crime takes place in front of you, what is watching? Is it a failure to act or is it simply keeping your eyes open?" How would you answer these questions? In what ways does the conclusion of the novel influence your answers?
2. The narration of the novel toggles between first person and third person, allowing Hannah, Patch, and Matthew to speak, as well as an omniscient narrator. Why do you think the author may have chosen to alternate vantage points in this way? How does this style of narration affect your interpretation of the novel?
3. In many ways, the town of Roseborn and its surrounding landscape comes alive as a character unto itself. How would you describe the nature of this place? In what ways do you see this town's particularities impact Patch, Hannah, and Matthew in their adult lives?
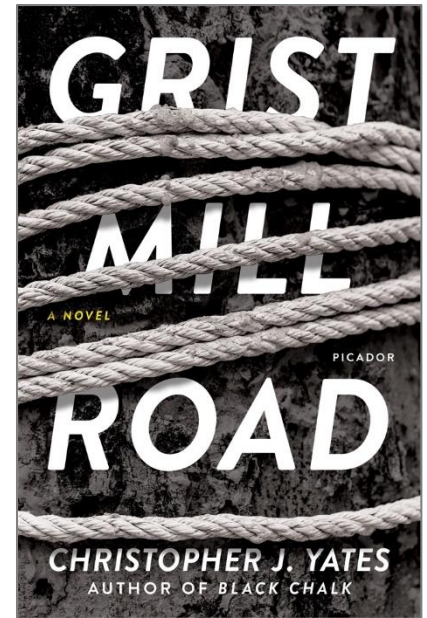
4. In many ways, the town of Roseborn and its surrounding landscape comes alive as a character unto itself. How would you describe the nature of this place? In what ways do you see this town's particularities impact Patch, Hannah, and Matthew in their adult lives?

5. Stalking pervades the novel, from Patch's following of Trevino and Matthew's shadowing of Patch to a particularly grisly crime that Hannah covers. But it also transcends such physical action; past memories and traumas stalk the present-day lives of the characters in dreams, journal entries, fantasies, and everyday thoughts. Why do you think there's such a thematic preoccupation with stalking in the novel?

6. We find out about the secret in Patch and Hannah's marriage, that Hannah doesn't know Patch was there when Matthew shot her, about midway through the novel. Hannah, in fact, tells Jen that, "He actually saved me." To what extent do you agree or disagree with Hannah that Patch saved her? Do you think Patch was culpable in the crime perpetrated against Hannah? In what ways might he have played both roles?

7. At the beginning of Matthew's section, he writes, "Truth is seldom a lens, truth is a kaleidoscope." How do you interpret this statement? How do you see this idea play out thematically across the novel?

8. We don't hear directly from Matthew until over halfway through the novel. In what ways does getting the story from his perspective shift your view of his character?

9. Patch fails to tell Hannah that he was present for part of Matthew's shooting spree. Do you think that means their marriage was based on a lie? Why or why not?

10. Hannah, Patch, and Matthew all have complex relationships with their fathers. Discuss the ways in which their fathers shape each of these characters.

11. Why do you think Matthew is so resistant to labels? In what ways do labels complicate his life?

Guide written by Laura Chasen

About the Author
Christopher J. Yates was born and raised in Kent and studied law at Oxford University before working as a puzzle editor in London. He now lives in New York City with his wife and dog. His first book, Black Chalk, was an NPR "Best of the Year" selection.

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