

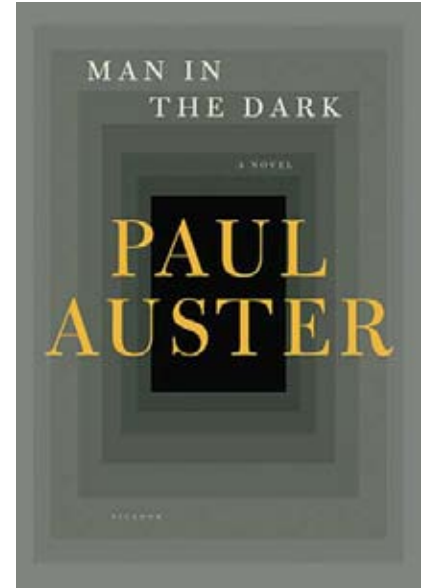


Reading Group Gold

Man in the Dark

A Novel

by Paul Auster



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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Man in the Dark* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *Man in the Dark*.

About the Book

Seventy-two-year-old August Brill is recovering from a car accident in his daughter's house in Vermont. When sleep refuses to come, he lies in bed and tells himself stories, struggling to push back thoughts about things he would prefer to forget – his wife's recent death and the horrific murder of his granddaughter's boyfriend, Titus. The retired book critic imagines a parallel world in which America is at war not with Iraq but with itself. In this other America, the twin towers did not fall and the 2000 election results led to secession, as state after state pulled away from the union and a bloody civil war ensued. As the night progresses, Brill's story grows increasingly intense and what he is so desperately tiring to avoid insists on being told. Joined in the early hours by his granddaughter, he gradually opens up to her and recounts the story of his marriage. After she falls asleep, he at last finds the courage to revisit the trauma of Titus' death. Passionate and shocking, *Man in the Dark* is a novel of our moment, a book that forces us to confront the blackness of night even as it celebrates the existence of ordinary joys in a world capable of the most grotesque violence.

About the Author

Paul Auster is the bestselling author of *Oracle Night*, *The Book of Illusions* and *Timbuktu*, *I Thought My Father Was God*, the NPR National Story Project anthology which he edited, was also a national bestseller. He lives in Brooklyn, New York.



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Discussion Questions

1. *Man in the Dark* begins with lines “I am alone in the dark, turning the world around in my head as I struggle through another bout of insomnia, another white night in the great American wilderness.” Discuss the role that sleep and insomnia play in the novel and how it affects the various characters.
2. “The story is about a man who must kill the person who created him, and why pretend that I am not that person? By putting myself into the story, the story becomes real. Or else I become unreal, yet one more figment of my imagination.” Discuss what Brill means by this, and whether it makes the story-within-the-story more real or less real.
3. What role does darkness play throughout the book? How does the idea of nighttime influence the mood of the novel?
4. August Brill says of the stories he makes up “they might not add up to much, but as long as I’m inside the, they prevent me from thinking about the things I would prefer to forget. Concentration can be a problem, however, and more often than not my mind eventually drifts from the story I’m trying to tell to the things I don’t want to think about.” How does the story of Owen Brick give way to the things that August Brill doesn’t want to think about? What are these things, and how do the stories throughout the book relate to them?
5. There are obvious differences between the two versions of the United States – in what ways are they similar?
6. Discuss similarities between August Brill and Owen Brick.
7. What is the significance of the Rose Hawthorne quote “as the weird world rolls by?” Why does Miriam know that her father will like that particular quote? What does his fondness for that quote say about August Brill’s character? How can it be applied to the stories that August tells?
8. What are some possible reasons that August relates stories of real-world tragedy and coincidence right after he finishes the Owen Brick story? What do the stories have in common?
9. Katya says “inanimate objects as a means of expressing human emotion. That’s the language of film.” Discuss other instances in the book where inanimate objects are used to express human emotions.
10. August says that the films are “all about women... they take care of the real business while their men tumble about making a hash of things.” Besides August Brill and Owen Brick, most of the characters are women. What is the role of women in *Man in the Dark*?
11. Discuss the idea of alternate realities. Frisk tells Brick “each world is a creation of the mind.” This is literally true in the sense that Brick is a creation of Brill’s mind. Are there other examples of this elsewhere in the novel?



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12. Discuss the conclusion of the Owen Brick story. Owen Brick has died, August Brill is still awake, staring in the dark, and the war continues. August Brill says: “does it have to end that way? Yes, probably yes, although it wouldn’t be difficult to think of a less brutal outcome. But what would be the point? My subject tonight is war, and now that war has entered this house, I feel I would be insulting Titus and Katya if I softened the blow.” Discuss what the August Brill means by this. How would giving his story a different, softer ending be an insult to Titus and Katya?

13. During Katya and August’s talk in the dark, she says that the story has to be about her Grandmother because “she is the one who isn’t here anymore.” Discuss the role that absence plays in the novel. How are Katya, Miriam and August shaped by loss?

14. How does Titus’s death reverberate throughout the book? His death is discussed on the very first page of the book, but it isn’t until the end of the novel that the circumstances of his death are revealed. What are some possible reasons for this?

15. This book was first published during George W. Bush’s second term and draws heavily on the political climate of those years. Discuss whether recent political developments might change the way that the reader relates to the novel.

16. “War stories. Let your guard down for a moment, and they come rushing in on you, one by one by one...” In what ways is *Man in the Dark* a war story?