

# BOOK CLUB KIT



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—NO SHELF CONTROL BOOK CLUB

# AN INTERVIEW

## with Alex North



**ALEX NORTH** is the internationally bestselling author of *The Whisper Man* and *The Shadows*. He lives in Leeds, England, with his wife and son, and is a British crime writer who has previously published under another name.

### HOW DID YOU COME UP WITH THE IDEA FOR *THE ANGEL MAKER*?

There's a long tradition of stories about forgotten or forbidden works of art — semi-mythical films or texts that are talked of in hushed tones. In fiction, there will often be legends attached to them: Perhaps everyone at the only showing of a movie was driven insane, for example, or the theater it was playing in mysteriously caught fire. A single copy may or may not still exist, and so on. I think there's a seductive power to the idea that there's something dangerous out there in the world that only a few people know about, and which they might be driven to search for despite the apparent risk of finding it. It's an interesting question: If you knew there was a secret work of art out there — one so powerful that it might destroy you — wouldn't a part of you still want to be one of the few who experienced it?

It's a tradition I wanted to add to in my own way, and the initial idea for the story was a notebook, alleged to have been written by a notorious serial killer, that passed through various people's hands, affecting their lives as it did so. When I started writing, the contents of that notebook were never revealed — but I realized early on that that was a bit of a cheat! I needed to have the courage of my convictions. And so then it was a case of imagining what might be inside it that would be so shocking and damaging, and building the story and the characters around that. Which took time. I think *The Angel Maker* has been through more drafts than anything else I've written, and the final book is very different from where I started.

### *THE ANGEL MAKER* SHOWS THE RIPPLE EFFECT OF A SERIAL KILLER WHO CLAIMS TO KNOW THE FUTURE AND BELIEVES OUR ACTIONS ARE PREDESTINED. WHAT DREW YOU TO THIS SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY IN WRITING YOUR BOOK?

Well, I have a degree in philosophy, but it's important to point out that it was a long time ago now! And also that while *The Angel Maker* does touch on those ideas, they are used very much in service of the story rather than with any kind of academic rigor. But it's an area I've been fascinated with for years, partly because I find it horribly convincing.

I think it's very hard to look at what we know about the world and conclude we have free will in the way that most people think of it. At a basic level, everything — from a stone falling, to the roll of a dice, to the decisions we make — has to be either caused or uncaused by what went before it, and that really doesn't leave much room for us to be doing much.

Of course, we certainly have the illusion that we're in control of our own actions, and I think it's probably very important to pretend we are, but it's still a sobering realization to come to. It has the feel of a dangerous idea about it, and I decided that it might be fitting subject matter for the contents of my serial killer's mysterious notebook. And of course, it raises countless interesting questions. How culpable are we? And is it possible for us to escape that string of cause and effect in some way — to take charge of our lives and steer them where we want them to go rather than simply doing what was set out for us.

### **THE MAIN PROTAGONISTS IN THE NOVEL ARE SIBLINGS, RATHER THAN PARENT AND CHILD LIKE IN YOUR PREVIOUS BOOKS. WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO SHIFT YOUR FOCUS TO THIS TYPE OF RELATIONSHIP?**

I'm not sure it was a decision so much as just a consequence of how the story evolved during different drafts. The characters and relationships developed over time — and actually, parenthood remains a key theme here too, albeit to a lesser extent than in the previous books. I was interested in writing about two characters who have a responsibility to each other, but one that is more conditional than between a parent and child. In the book, Katie has always been protective of her little brother, Chris, but he's done some things that find them estranged at the beginning of the story. Then he resurfaces, mixed up in a murder investigation and in possession of something that some very dangerous people are hunting for. She's lived with a lot of guilt and resentment over the years, and what happens next gives her an opportunity not only to resolve those issues but to discover the dark secret that's been haunting her family all this time. Siblings just seemed the best fit for the relationship I needed them to have and for the kind of story I wanted to tell.

### **HOW DO YOU GET INTO THE MINDSET TO WRITE SUCH DARK AND CHILLING STORIES?**

I don't know if I do! I'm certainly not a "method" writer — I don't need to be in a different mindset to write a scary scene rather than a happy one. In fact, when I'm writing, I'm usually focused on things at a sentence level, and so I'm not always worrying too much about the subject matter. I think it probably helps that the effect I'm aiming for with the story as a whole is at least somewhat positive. The books do go to some dark places along the way — and not everyone makes it out in one piece — but hopefully the darkness goes some way towards emphasizing the light, and it's the light that is always at the back of my mind. But ultimately, rain or shine, the process is what it is: The book won't write itself. So whatever's going on in your head that day, you have to put it to one side. And then you need to open the laptop and get to work.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 One of the central themes of *The Angel Maker* is determinism. Did this novel change the way you think about whether our lives are dictated by fate or freewill?
- 2 Discuss how each character is intertwined and what their significance is in relation to one another. How does determinism play a role in these connections?

SUBMITTED BY BASIC BITCHES BOOK CLUB (MAYNARD, MA)

- 3 Throughout the story, the author examines sibling bonds. How would you compare the relationship between Katie and Christopher to the one between Leland and Alan? Are there any similarities?
- 4 While Katie explores what happened to her brother, she is also investigating who is stalking her daughter. How did the two mysteries influence each other as Katie worked to solve them?
- 5 What role does Leland and Alan's childhood home play in the story? Why do you think Alan continued to live in the house even after the tragedies that occurred there?
- 6 The novel explores nature versus nurture. Do you believe that a person is defined by their upbringing, or do you think it's possible to fully overcome it?
- 7 The author deliberately leaves some elements of the plot open-ended. Do you think the Jack Locke notebook actually foretold the future? Which paranormal elements of the story do you think are real versus myth?
- 8 The author mixes thriller, paranormal, and horror elements into the story. Did you find the blending of genres and elements compelling?



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 9 Discuss Michael Hyde's role in the story.  
SUBMITTED BY JUST FOR THE THRILL OF IT (DALLAS, GA)
- 10 This book alternates between the perspectives of Katie, Leland, Alan, Christopher, and Lawrence. Which character did you connect to the most? Whose storyline was most compelling?
- 11 Did you anticipate any of the plot twists in *The Angel Maker*? What surprised you the most?
- 12 Was Alan Hobbes innately a good person who rose above his childhood experiences and upbringing? If so, could he have come up with an alternative way to handle baby Nathan?  
SUBMITTED BY GALLEY BOOK GROUP (BLUFFTON, OH)
- 13 If you've read other books by Alex North, what crossovers do you see in theme, use of time, or even characters?

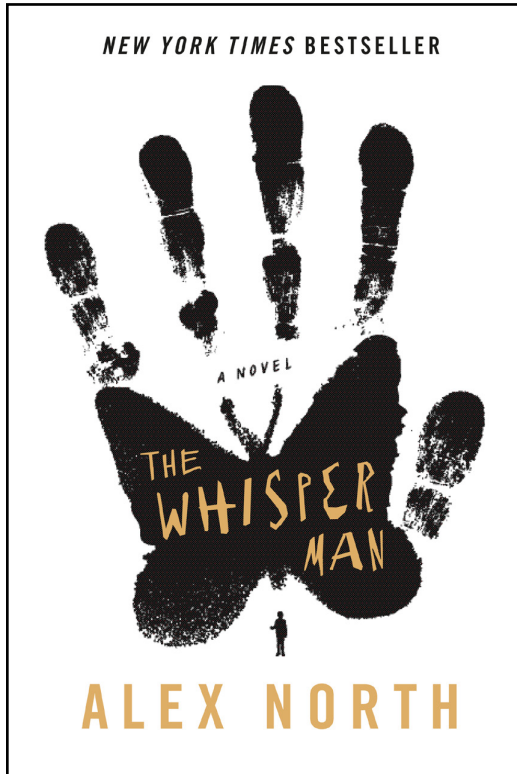
If you decide to adopt *The Angel Maker* for your book club, we would love to hear about it! Please let us know by emailing us at [reader@celadonbooks.com](mailto:reader@celadonbooks.com) or post on social media using the hashtags **#CeladonBookClub** and **#TheAngelMaker**.

Thank you for your consideration.

*Your friends at Celadon Books*



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LEARN MORE

*“The Shadows was a great book club book! It was creepy and scary, with plenty of twists and turns and a gripping plot that kept us reading, and had lots of intriguing plot points to discuss.”*

—READING BETWEEN THE WINES BOOKCLUB (ALBANY, NY)



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