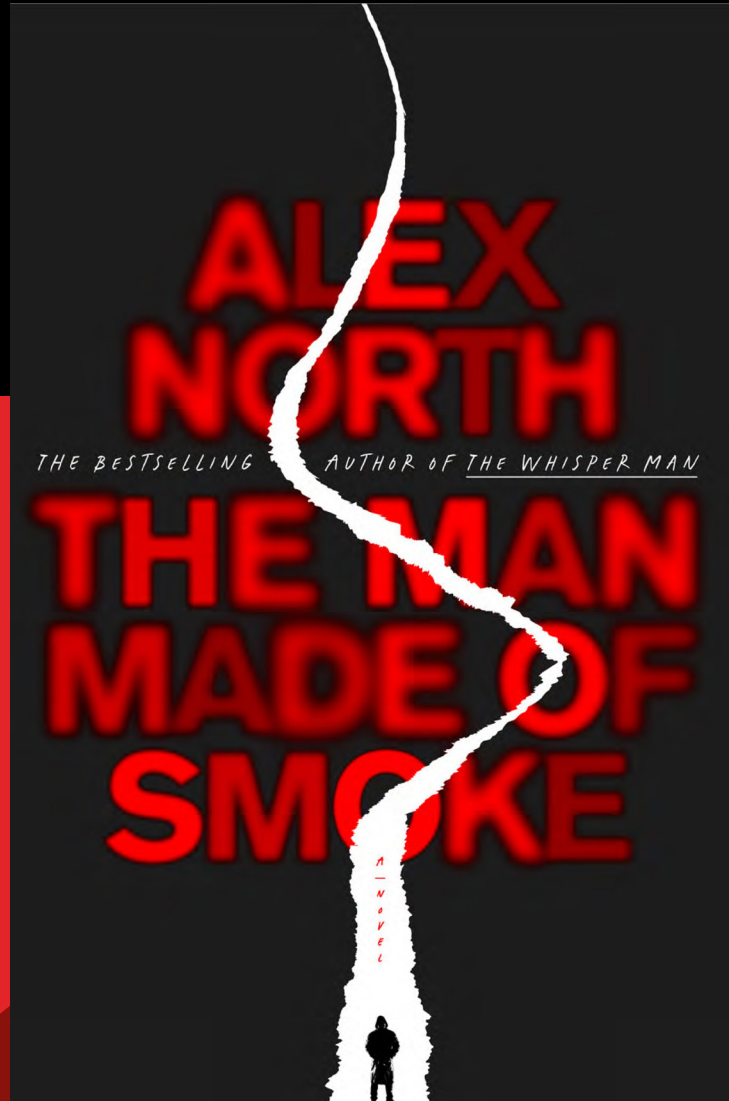


BOOK CLUB KIT



“This is a perfect book club choice! Not only is it captivating from page 1 with good pacing and enough twists and intrigue to keep the pages turning, but there are so many fun and unique elements to discuss. The story explores difficult complex themes, characters and perspectives that lead to engaging discussions. We enjoyed the discussion almost as much as we enjoyed reading the book!”

—THRILLERS BY THE BOOK CLUB MKE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe the father–son relationship at the heart of the book?
2. Do you agree with Dan that his father is envious of his success? Or do you think that he’s actually just proud of his son? Who do you think is responsible for their inability to communicate their feelings to each other?
3. “My mother was a woman who was always impatient to be somewhere else, even when she’d just arrived.” This is a quote from Dan at the very beginning of the book. After reading the rest of the book, would you describe Dan himself as someone who is always impatient to be elsewhere? Why or why not?
4. Why do you think no one intervenes during the gas station scene? Is the bystander effect more prevalent in certain places or communities? Would you act differently if you witnessed something similar? What factors influence whether or not people get involved?
5. Do you think that the people at the gas station that fateful day owed it to James to save him from the Pied Piper just because they were there?
6. “Nobody sees. And nobody cares.” Do you think that’s true of today’s society? How might technology, urban life, or other factors contribute to that feeling?
7. “You can’t erase history... it’s always there.” Can someone ever fully escape their past, or do we all carry our histories with us? How does Dan’s attempt to “start over” (leaving the island, studying psychology) reflect broader themes of denial or healing?
8. Dan always says of the criminals he studies for his work: “They’re human beings, not monsters. There’s no such thing as monsters.” Do you agree? Is every act of violence rooted in trauma or reason, or are some people simply born evil? What does this novel suggest?
9. How does the novel blur the line between villain and victim?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

10. We see the pivotal scene at the gas station take place in full twice — first from Dan's perspective, then from James's perspective. How are the two versions different, and in what ways are they the same?
11. Why do you think the Pied Piper kept James alive for so long? Do you think he loved him?
12. What do you think drives the killer most: revenge, validation, madness, or something else? Did your theory change while reading?
13. What does the book suggest about justice — who deserves it, who delivers it, and whether it's ever truly served?
14. Did you see the ultimate twist coming? Who did you think the killer was at various points in the story?
15. Was Craig Aspinall just out for revenge, or was he trying to teach the townspeople a lesson? If the latter, was the lesson learned?
16. Can someone's invisibility in society make them more vulnerable to harm — or more capable of doing harm?
17. If you were one of the victims who survived, would you go to the police? Would you speak out? Why or why not?



CELADON
BOOKS

If you decide to adopt *The Man Made of Smoke* for your book club, we would love to hear about it! Please let us know by emailing us at reader@celadonbooks.com or post on social media using the hashtags #CeladonBookClub and #TheManMadeOfSmoke.



AN INTERVIEW

with Alex North

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



Some say *The Man Made of Smoke* is your “most psychological” thriller yet. Why did you choose to have your protagonist work in the field of psychology, and what did your research entail?

When he was 12 years old, my protagonist, Dan Garvie, had a terrifying encounter with a serial killer known as The Pied Piper. That incident has stayed with Dan his whole life, along with what he might have done to save one of the man’s victims. It made sense to me that he would pursue psychology as a career. Dan wants to understand why someone would commit such terrible crimes: how their mind works; what compels them to kill; how they might be caught. But it’s also an attempt to process the fear he felt as a child. Dan talks about the patients he works with as being men not monsters, but he’s trying to convince himself as much as other people. And the events of *The Man Made of Smoke* are going to test the truth of that for him.

The story takes Dan away from the comfort zone of a clinical setting, so it was less about specific research around his profession and more about imagining his thought processes and his reactions to events as they unfold. Dan likes to think of himself as being calm and detached. He thinks through the evidence logically, imagining conversations with the killer in his head. At the same time, he questions everything, including his own instincts and preconceptions. It was fun to follow him on that journey, and hopefully the reader will enjoy discovering the killer in the same way that Dan does.

In addition to chilling scenes, you are known for exploring complex family dynamics in your work. Tell us about the father/son characters in this book and why you feel it’s important to include these familial relationships in your novels.

Dan and his father, John, are very different people. Where Dan is quiet and contained, John struggles with controlling his emotions. And while Dan has established a successful career as a forensic psychologist, John’s a retired policeman on a small island who can’t shake the feeling that he should have done more with his life. They both struggled badly in the aftermath of Dan’s encounter with The Pied Piper: Dan wrestling with his guilt over the

life he might have saved; John desperate to help his son without understanding how to do it. They've reached a kind of peace in the present day, but there's still a lot about each other that they don't know. And so when John goes missing, Dan is faced not only with a mystery to solve but a chance to learn more about his father as a man.

I do include family dynamics in my novels, but it's really relationships in general that interest me: the things we choose to share with others and the things we don't; the way people see us versus how we see ourselves. Family is an obvious place to go to explore those ideas, but in some ways the most important relationship in *The Man Made of Smoke* is actually Dan's relationship with someone he doesn't really know at all: the little boy he was too frightened to help.

The book has thematic similarities to *The Whisper Man*, and yet you take this story in a completely different direction. What new territory did you seek to explore when setting out to write *The Man Made of Smoke*?

There are certainly thematic similarities with *The Whisper Man*. I mean, every writer has their preoccupations, and I've always been interested in how the past affects the present, cause and effect, ghosts and monsters, good and evil, urban legends, and so on. But I write and rewrite a great deal, and the final draft is usually very different from the first. That was definitely the case with *The Man Made of Smoke*. I became much more interested in how we process trauma — and what happens when we don't.

If you could sum it up in one sentence, how do you want your readers to feel after reading *The Man Made of Smoke*?

Thrilled, chilled, surprised, and moved — but basically, I hope they enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it.

More book club picks from Alex North...

