

PICADOR

Reading Group Gold

Black Chalk

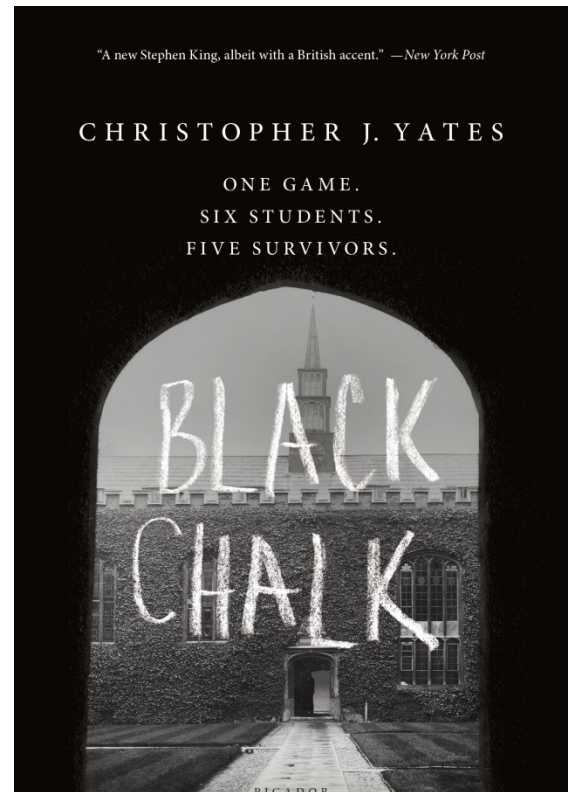
by Christopher J. Yates

ABOUT THE BOOK

One game. Six students. Five survivors.

It was only ever meant to be a game. A game of consequences, of silly forfeits, childish dares. A game to be played by six best friends in their first year at Oxford University. But then the game changed: the stakes grew higher and the dares more personal, more humiliating, finally evolving into a vicious struggle with unpredictable and tragic results.

Now, years later in Manhattan, one player, who believed he had fled the Game long ago, discovers that it is far from over.



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QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. *Black Chalk* opens with a D.H Lawrence quote: 'Never trust the artist. Trust the tale.' From the beginning of the novel, the identity of the narrator is unclear. And even after he introduces himself, we soon learn there might be alternative explanations as to who wrote everything down. Who do you believe is telling us the story and why are they telling it?
2. Why might the novelist have chosen college students as the six people who came together to play the Game?
3. Dream up a light-hearted *Black Chalk*-style dare that you personally would find very hard to perform. (The novelist has admitted that he would be terrified of singing in public.) What is it about this dare that scares you? Would anyone else in your group find the same challenge just as hard?
4. Do you see the Game as a metaphor for anything bigger? Sports? Politics? Human interaction? Capitalism? Conspiracy?

5. As well as writing, the author of *Black Chalk* compiles puzzles for a living. Do you think this shows through in the novel, and if so, how? Which aspect of your work or life would show up most clearly if you wrote such a book?
6. Jolyon taunts Mark into following him up onto the roof of the college tower known as Loser's Leap. Later, even though he feels guilty about what happened, he claims not to have planned for Mark to fall to his death. Do you believe Jolyon? Do you think Jolyon is in any way criminally responsible for Mark's death? (Murder? Manslaughter?) And who do you think is morally responsible for Mark's death?
7. If you were one of the characters playing the Game, how long would you last? What would motivate you to keep playing? Money? Competition? Seeing your friends humiliated? Needing to win?
8. And out of everyone in the room/group, who would win your own game and why?
9. At the end of the novel, Chad has gone missing. The two most likely explanations for his vanishing are: one, he has run away to escape from Game Soc; or, two, he has left to join up with Game Soc. Which of these do you think the most likely? (Or what's your alternative theory?) Was it wrong of the author not to provide the reader with an answer?
10. Who do you think Game Soc really were? Conspirators in a larger game that's been played for centuries? Rich boys behaving badly? Something else?

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. 'Black Chalk' is his debut novel.

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