



All the Colors of the Dark

By Chris Whitaker

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Discussion Questions

1. Let's first talk about the significance of the title in relation to the story as a whole. What is your interpretation of it?
2. Why did Patch immediately jump in to rescue Misty, a girl who had never acknowledged him? What does it say about his character?
3. Saint, Patch's best friend, is in love with him and determined to bring him back after he's taken. This dedication to Patch will span decades and multiple incidents. Do you feel this friendship was even, or was it somewhat one-sided?
4. We learn that Patch is taken by a serial killer and held in darkness for months. But a girl named Grace was there to help provide comfort and serve as a light in the darkness. Did you believe that Grace was real the entire time?
5. How did Patch change from the beginning of the novel to the end? Did you think he had a solid character arc? Why or why not?
6. Thanks to Saint's nonstop dedication, Patch is eventually rescued. But he's concerned about Grace and becomes obsessed with finding out where she is. Why do you think Patch never gave up looking for her?
7. Upon his return, Misty pursues Patch and they date for a bit until her father pays him off. Do you feel Misty was in love with Patch or was it infatuation? What lessons did she learn from Patch?
8. Why did Patch turn to painting as he searched for Grace?
9. The reader is lead to believe that the local doctor Tooms was involved with the girls' disappearance. Did you think he was or did you suspect he was innocent?
10. We eventually learn about Tooms performing safe abortions for local girls in need and also his secret relationship with Nix. What were your thoughts about the reveals? Why didn't Tooms tell the authorities the truth about his actions to begin with?
11. Saint goes into law enforcement and even becomes a key investigator in finding Patch after it's revealed he's been robbing banks. Why did she pursue a career in law enforcement?

12. Saint's grandmother somewhat forces her to marry Jimmy as she hopes it will get Saint away from Patch and to provide stability. But Saint never truly loved him. Why didn't Saint reveal the truth about Jimmy and the violent injuries he caused? Why didn't she tell her about keeping the baby?
13. A big theme of the novel is the price of loyalty. For instance, Tooms doesn't tell the truth about the abortions; Saint doesn't want to upset her grandma with the truth about Jimmy; and then there's Patch's blind loyalty to Grace. Let's discuss the theme of loyalty in relation to this novel.
14. Eventually it's revealed that Patch is a father. And he's the sole guardian after Misty passes away from cancer. But despite being a father, he can't escape his quest to find Grace. Why didn't he make more an effort to be there for his daughter?
15. We do learn that Grace is in fact real, and that she's the daughter of Eli Aaron, the serial killer. What were your thoughts as you read her reunion with Patch? How did this help give Patch closure? Will they stay in touch?
16. What did you think of the reunion with Patch, Charlotte and Saint on the boat? What happens next for those three characters?
17. Do you feel Patch is the hero of the story? Why or why not?

Author Interview

KAILEY COSTA: Your debut novel, *Tall Oaks*, won an award with CWA. *We Begin at the End* had massive success, a Good Morning America pick, Barnes & Noble book club, do you feel any pressure with each successive novel to follow that up and if so, how did you deal with that pressure?

CHRIS WHITAKER: I think only the pressure that I put on myself. Certainly for the first few books, what you don't realize for an author is that normally, when a book is published, not a lot happens unless you're very lucky. So, my first couple of books did well critically, but didn't sell that well, so I never felt that pressure until after *We Begin at the End*. I think that book was way better than the first two, because I'm a better writer. Like anything, the more you practice, the better you get. Conversely, the more that I write, the harder it gets. I think that's because I'm pushing myself further as an author. I'm very self critical. After *We Begin at the End* came out, all of a sudden there were a million people waiting for the next one. I had a new agent and a new UK editor, I did feel the weight of it... all these people waiting, but I also knew I wouldn't rush it and wouldn't compromise on the story. I missed my deadline by a year and a half because I couldn't do it in time. I think that's because the story evolved into something way bigger than what it began as.

KC: Congrats on being a Read With Jenna pick! What does that mean to you?

CW: She's the most passionate, most caring, kind, supportive champion of books. When she announced it, she was so effusive and it went straight to #1 on Amazon which is completely mind-blowing. It sold thousands of copies in pre-orders because of how much she loved it and how much people respect her opinion. I found out about the book club pick quite a while ago but wasn't allowed to tell anyone. I was really excited about it, but at the same time didn't quite believe that it was real until I physically saw the book and saw the Read with Jenna sticker. I saw it in a book shop in Aspen and that's when I met Jenna. It was really cool. I don't write a book with any other goal than just to entertain people and hope that they care as much about the characters as I do. So, when that seems to be happening it feels like I've done my job, which is a really nice feeling.

KC: It was just announced that UPC is adapting your book, *All The Colors of the Dark* into a series. What has that process been like so far?

CW: I found out from Jenna the other day that there's already a pilot written. I knew they were writing it. I knew Sarah Gubbins, who is just the best writer. I met with lots of people who were interested in adapting it and now there's a dream team of Jenna, Sue Naegle and Sarah Gubbins. There couldn't be three better people to adapt it. I'm desperate to read it, and apparently it's coming to me this week. I'm really excited, I know it's the first draft and early stages, but it's really exciting.

KC: Where did the idea for this novel take place?

CW: So, I had finished *We Begin at the End* and had quite a simple idea. The topline pitch was two abducted teenagers fall in love in the pitch black basement they're being held in, having never seen each other, and the boy escapes and can't find his way back to the girl. Police don't believe that she's real, but he knows in his heart that she is. I think it was three lines, and they bought the book based on those three lines. I knew I had the skeleton of the story, but it evolved into something way bigger. It turned into this boy searching for this missing girl, who may or may not be real, over 27 years. It became this huge story about obsession, first love, coming of age, family, and I just couldn't let it go. I felt like it could be way bigger, and I think I kind of knew it would be when I pitched it. Until I started writing and really got to know the characters... It was supposed to be delivered in a year, and it took 4 years to finish.

KC: Your books deal with heavier subject matters, is there something that draws you to that?

CW: I had quite a difficult childhood, and have had a fairly eventful life. I had to decide early on with the PR team whether or not to talk about my story in relation to this story and I couldn't separate the two.

When I was ten, my mother's boyfriend at the time was a drinker and quite rough. I was asleep and he pulled me out of bed and my arm broke. I couldn't tell anyone afterwards, because he wouldn't allow it because he'd get in trouble. I told my parents I'd done it playing football. I feel slightly Patch-like in that, I went into the dark of that night—it was the whole night I couldn't tell anyone or cry or anything—I went into the dark as one person and came out as someone else. I feel like it was a pivotal moment in my life.

When I was a teenager, I was mugged and stabbed. I think that happened because of what happened when I was ten. I didn't like feeling powerless or like a victim when I was ten, so when someone pulled out a knife, I think I would've rather died than give them my cell phone.

It sounds mad on the surface, but it didn't feel like a choice at the time. I felt like that was how it was supposed to be, there was no option to walk away.

Later, I got into loads of debt in the city and broke the law and lost loads of money, and I think on some level, it was because I was unable to ask for help. I knew, when I was crying out for help when I was a kid, that no one came. I've had loads of counseling, but I just think those scars are borne of my childhood. When I go to write, I'm particularly interested in, like, early teens, because that's where I was when my life changed, and I think it's quite an interesting time.

I think I'm drawn to that as a subject matter: How does your childhood affect the rest of your life? Is it something you have to outrun, how much control do we have over the choices we make and the good or bad things that happen? This was the first book I've properly explored it.

KC: You seem to have a knack for writing these underdog, unforgettable characters. Where do they come from and can you talk about how you develop them into such memorable people? On paper, you wouldn't necessarily root for them but they create such a lasting impression.

CW: In a strange way, actually. I spend the first year of writing doing dialogue, before I get to the story. People find it strange, but if you think about how you get to know someone, it's through conversation. Through talking and sharing, so I need to do that part of the book. I might take these traits of Patch that I know he has, or the same with Duchess, the key thing is why? The more you talk to someone and spend [time] with someone, the less you're able to put them in a box, good or bad. We're all more than the worst or best things we've done, that's the foundation that I start with when I'm writing a character. The more time I spend with them, the more I grow to love them. I know that once I love the character, I'm part way there. If I don't like them and don't want to spend time with them, I can't expect the reader to as well.

KC: Where did the title come from?

CW: The title was really difficult, actually. I wrote for years without any title, and nothing felt right. Normally you can pull something out of the text, so my editors were looking and looking to pull things out of the text, and it was my UK editor who suggested All the Colors of the Dark and it fit in such a way that nothing else did. It's so bleak for Patch, even his life before is really dark, he's kind of living slightly in the darkness, and then this terrible thing happens, and his world gets even darker, but then, because of Grace, you get to see these slivers of light coming in, and it's like, all this light pours in as he gets out and starts to realize that people love him and how much Saint cares for him. He does these bad things but people don't give up on him. A kid like that might not have ever discovered that had this thing not happened to him. I look at it now and can't imagine it being called anything else.

KC: Can you talk at all about what you're working on next?

CW: I don't have a lot, but I can give you a little bit! I've started writing a love story, it's called The Time Keeper. It's a bit like The Time Traveler's Wife meets The Fault in Our Stars. I'm looking at love and time and it'll be ready in like, fifty years probably!

Author Biography

Chris Whitaker is the author of the New York Times and Sunday Times bestselling *All the Colors of The Dark*. His other acclaimed and bestselling novels include *We Begin at The End*, *Tall Oaks*, and *All the Wicked Girls*.

Chris's novels have been translated into thirty languages and have won the CWA Gold Dagger, the CWA John Creasey Dagger, the Theakston Crime Novel of the Year, the Ned Kelly International Award, and numerous awards around the world.

His books have also been selected for the Read with Jenna Book Club, Waterstones Thriller of the Month, Barnes & Noble Book Club, Good Morning America Book Club, and for BBC2's *Between the Covers*.

All the Colors of The Dark is currently in development with Universal Pictures.

Chris was born in London and lives in the UK.

Reviews

I really had no idea what to expect when I cracked open Chris Whitaker's *ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK*. I hadn't read any of his previous novels, and the advance copy provided by the publisher offered no plot synopsis. Instead, the back cover is full of accolades from the likes of Alex Michaelides and Patricia Cornwell. But since the book weighs in at just under 600 pages, I thought I had time to figure it out.

Now that I've finished it, I find myself not wanting to give away too much of the plot so that readers of this review can have the same experience that I did --- of eagerly coming to understand this suspenseful, powerfully affecting novel that's part crime fiction, part coming-of-age tale, and part heartbreaking love story, as easy to immerse yourself in as it is difficult to define.

The book is set largely in the picturesque small town of Monta Clare, in the Ozark mountains of Missouri. When it opens in 1975, its main characters are young teens. Saint is a talented pianist and aspiring beekeeper, living alone with her grandmother Norma. When Joseph (nicknamed Patch for the patch he wears over his missing eye), a noted petty thief and shoplifter, attempts to make off with one of her precious jars of honey, the two clash at first but eventually become loyal friends.

But then tragedy strikes. Patch disappears for a long time, and when he returns, nothing is the same. Saint, who has spent many months trying to bring Patch home, wants to pick up their friendship where they left off. Patch, on the other hand, has become focused not on Saint but on another girl, who shared in his trauma. Her voice and stories inhabit his memories and dreams, and he grows obsessed with finding her.

From there, the novel unfolds over decades, as Saint, Patch and other members of their small town live out their lives, forever changed by the horrific events of one pivotal year. Throughout the book, Whitaker explores how childhood trauma shapes adult selves: the decisions we make, the paths we take, the relationships that succeed or fail. Saint's and Patch's stories are also commentaries on the ways in which a vocation, particularly an artistic one, can be a form of salvation, and kindness and loyalty can come back and grow hundredfold.

Whitaker's writing can take a little time to settle into. The book is broken up into very short chapters (more than 250 of them, some as brief as a single paragraph), but the prose, especially in the early sections, is both impressionistic and somewhat improvisational, with words sometimes used in unusual ways: "Four days and she was remnants of before"; "Only the low purple from her attic lava lamp kept the smother from total." This idiosyncratic syntax adds to the novel's atmosphere, encouraging readers to sink further into a tale that only becomes more absorbing as it proceeds. Nearly every piece of this complicated, epic story falls into place in surprising, satisfying ways.