

The Midnight Visitor

Character Analysis & Motivation

1. **Analyze** how Ausable uses the conventional expectations of a spy's appearance and demeanor, which he himself lacks, as a tool to disarm both Fowler and Max.
 2. "Ausable's most powerful weapon is not a gun, but his mind." **Critically evaluate** this statement by dissecting the specific ways his intellect triumphs over Max's physical threat.
 3. **To what extent** is Fowler more than just a passive observer? Discuss how his presence and his romanticized ideas about espionage are crucial for the story's development and its final impact on the reader.
 4. Beyond obtaining the secret report, what can you **infer** about Max's deeper motivations and his professional insecurities from his dialogue and actions?
 5. **Contrast** the professional approaches of Ausable and Max. What do their different methods reveal about the true nature of intelligence work versus the fictional portrayal?
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Plot, Structure & Literary Devices

6. **Trace** how Robert Arthur builds and sustains an atmosphere of suspense within the confined space of a single hotel room. Focus on his use of pacing and dialogue.
 7. **Discuss** the significance of the story's title, "The Midnight Visitor." Who is the *real* "midnight visitor," and how does the title create a layer of irony?
 8. **Explain** how the story masterfully employs situational irony with the balcony and dramatic irony with the knocking at the door. Which is more effective in deceiving Max, and why?
 9. The entire climax of the story is based on a fabrication. **Analyze** the two key elements of Ausable's invented story (the balcony and the police) and explain why they are so convincing to Max.
 10. **Imagine** the story was told from Max's point of view. How would the narrative, tone, and the reader's perception of Ausable change?
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Themes & Deeper Meaning

11. **Elaborate** on the central theme of **appearance versus reality**. Use examples from the setting, the characters' physical descriptions, and the plot's central deception to support your argument.
 12. **Argue** whether Ausable's actions are morally justifiable. Does the successful neutralization of a threat excuse the elaborate lie that leads to a man's probable death?
 13. In what ways does "The Midnight Visitor" **subvert** the typical conventions of the spy thriller genre? Consider the protagonist, the setting, and the nature of the conflict.
 14. **Discuss** the role of the setting—a gloomy, top-floor room in a French hotel—in enhancing the story's claustrophobic and tense atmosphere.
 15. What commentary does the story offer on the theme of **wit over brute force**? How is this a timeless and relevant message?
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Hypothetical & Critical Thinking Questions

16. What if Max had called Ausable's bluff about the police at the door? **Construct** a plausible alternative ending to the story.
17. How does Fowler's disillusionment at the beginning of the story serve as a **narrative frame** for the thrilling events that follow? Does his opinion of Ausable completely change by the end?
18. **Identify** any potential moments of foreshadowing that might hint at Ausable's cleverness and his capacity for inventing stories on the spot.
19. Does the story suggest that being underestimated is an advantage? **Formulate an argument** using Ausable as the primary example.
20. After the incident, what kind of conversation do you imagine takes place between Ausable and Fowler? **Write a short dialogue** that captures Fowler's astonishment and Ausable's nonchalant attitude.