



Book Club Kit

Author's Note

Dear reader,

It's with enormous delight (and a dash of relief) that I share with you my forthcoming novel, *The Brightness*. I've been working on it for a dozen years, or a baker's dozen, depending on how you count it—years that encompass great change in my own life (becoming a father, for instance) and, of course, in the world we all inhabit.

The Brightness revisits the central characters from *The Art of Fielding*, most significantly Pella Affenlight, while introducing several new ones, such as Pella's best friend, the fierce and übertalented Irma Friske. The novel travels from Westish College, that humble liberal-arts school in northeastern Wisconsin, to a sun-splashed wedding on Block Island, to the immensity and glamor of New York City, and back again—providing, I hope, plenty of pleasures along the way, along with some unavoidable heartbreak.

Its events take place a few years after the conclusion of *The Art of Fielding*—at a culturally potent moment just after the legalization of gay marriage (which may feel like a long time ago) and just before the election of Donald Trump and the start of the #MeToo movement (which may feel like yesterday). Finally, I think, it's a novel about transcendence—through art, through love, through friendship, and through the impassioned search for new and better ways to live.

I sincerely hope you enjoy your time inside the world of *The Brightness* as much as I've enjoyed mine.

With gratitude,

Chad Harbach

Discussion Questions

(Note: There are spoilers ahead for *The Brightness*)

1. Chad Harbach's bestselling debut novel, *The Art of Fielding*, appears a few times as a book-within-a-book within Harbach's follow-up novel, *The Brightness*. If you've read *The Art of Fielding*, how did it inform your experience reading *The Brightness*?
2. How do you think the college campus setting shapes the novel's central conflict? Does *The Brightness* remind you of any other campus novels? Why or why not?
3. What do you make of Dahlia and Pammy's decision to tattoo men that night with that particular phrase? How does this decision affect Dahlia's life in the long term?
4. How does Hunter Stroman interact with and incite the "Witches of Westish"? Is he culpable in any way?
5. What do you think makes Irma so magnetic at Owen and Martin's wedding? Is it the article she wrote, the persona—modeled after Dahlia—that she was performing, or had she simply found the right audience?
6. Pella inspires Owen to write his bestselling sensation, *The Art of Fielding*. What is it like to be a muse for someone else's art? How would you feel in her shoes?
7. Mike appears in *The Art of Fielding* as well as *The Brightness*. Discuss his arc, and how he grows and changes throughout the latter novel.
8. How culpable are Pella and Mike in the dissolution of their relationship and in Pella's move to New York? What do you make of the decisions each of them makes?
9. What traits do Irma and Pella have in common with Nicholas's mother? Do you think those traits were part of what drew Nicholas to them? Discuss why.
10. What do you think is Sylvie's ultimate message in her video, *The Death of My Husband*? How do you interpret the final line of the video, when the interlocutor asks whether she would prefer a son or a daughter and Sylvie replies, "There's no way out"?
11. What do you make of Pella's choice to become a mother at the end of *The Brightness*?

Pella's Gin Fizz

"Pella uncorked Judy's rosé and splashed it into jam jars, while the sweating pitcher of gin fizzes stood at the ready....Sunlight bounced pinkly through its hexagonal facets. Carbonation sparkled in the air like tiny fireworks. 'We have so much to celebrate,' she said."

- 2 oz gin
- ¾ oz fresh lemon juice
- Club soda or sparkling water to top
- Ice cubes
- Rosemary sprig for garnish

1. Fill a cocktail shaker with ice. Add the gin and lemon juice. Shake hard until chilled.

2. Strain the liquid into a glass filled with fresh ice.

3. Top with a splash of club soda. Garnish with a fresh rosemary sprig from the garden. Enjoy with a far-reaching book club discussion about *The Brightness!*

