



THE VICTIM

A NOVEL

MAX
MANNING

READING GROUP GUIDE

1. At the opening of *The Victim*, we see Gem fall prey to what appears to be a carjacking. If you were in Gem's shoes, how would you react? Do you think you would submit, or would you try to fight back?
2. Compare Gem throughout these two scenarios—Gem the victim versus Gem the warrior. What differences do you see? Do you think the decisions we make fundamentally change us as humans?
3. What do you make of Drew? Do you think he got what he deserved in the end? Why or why not?
4. Describe the role fate and choice play in the story. What do you think has the most influence: fate or the choices we make? Or is it a combination of both?
5. Con Norton is the mastermind behind the story. Why do you think he is obsessed with this game? What drives him to act in both story lines?

6. Describe Detective Day. What are some of his strengths? What faults does he fall victim to? Do you think his demotion was warranted?
7. At one point, Revell asks Gem what advice she would give to women who found themselves in the same situation. What advice would you give?
8. What drives Norton's fascination with Gem? What does it say about him as a character?
9. Detective Day says he doesn't believe in good luck or bad luck; rather, he believes in good people and bad people. Do you agree with this? Why or why not?
10. What is Gem's relationship with her job in both scenarios? Imagine you were in Gem's shoes. What do you think your reaction would be? Would you want to go back to work, or would you make a different lifestyle choice?
11. What happened in Norton's childhood that influenced the person he became? Do you think he was "born bad," or was he a victim of his circumstances?
12. Describe the connection between Norton and Drew. What do you think brought them together? What set the wheels of this game in motion?
13. How do the choices Gem makes ultimately influence her fate?

A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR

***The Victim* is a taut and gripping thriller. What was your inspiration for the story?**

The idea for the plot of *The Victim* came to me while I was halfway through my first crime thriller, *Don't Look Now*. I spent many years covering crime incidents as a news reporter, and when considering the plight of victims, I'd often wondered if things might have turned out better or worse for them if they'd made different choices. What if they'd gone to a different bar that night? What if they hadn't turned down that street? What if they'd handed over their money straightaway? Of course, where there is a victim, there is also a criminal, and he or she has choices to make too.

The narrative structure you've created is extremely unique. What made you want to write a story with two opposing threads?

I decided that I needed to write a story with two threads to emphasize how powerful the choices we make are when it comes to determining who we become. I wanted to explore how our

moments of decision can shape our personal futures. Gem has to make a split-second decision at the beginning of *The Victim*. At that point, the story divides into alternating threads and leads to very different outcomes.

Were there any challenges to writing in this format? How did you overcome them?

Writing two parallel story lines is definitely a challenge! I had to make a lot of notes to keep track of each thread. They had to be different but not too different, complex but not too complex. I wanted each of the story lines to be entertaining and gripping in their own way.

Which character was the most fun to write? Which presented the greatest challenge?

I thoroughly enjoyed writing the character of Con Norton, the mastermind behind the Fight or Submit game that runs through *The Victim*. I always find trying to delve deep into the mind of a psychopath a fascinating and sometimes deeply satisfying exercise. But there is no need to be alarmed! There is an immense amount of research material available on the workings of a psychopath's mind, and imagination can be more powerful than knowledge. Gem was great fun to write, too, but definitely challenging, especially as her character developed differently in each thread.

Gem as the victim is almost a completely different character compared to Gem as the warrior. Was this intentional? How did you keep them so different yet still connected?

The whole point of the separate threads is to explore how the choices we make can determine who we become. The lives of Gem the victim and Gem the warrior take different twists and turns, and

their characters develop differently in response. At the same time, Gem the victim and Gem the warrior are the same woman. It's just that they respond differently in a moment of crisis, and that takes them on different journeys.

What do you think ultimately drives our lives—choice, fate, or a little bit of both?

This is a big question! I think maybe it's a little bit of both, with choice being the more powerful of the two. It's how we respond to what fate puts in front of us that shapes our future. Certainly, as a crime thriller writer, I would warn the characters in my books to shape their own destinies, or someone else will take control and do it for them!

What does your writing process look like?

My writing process may appear pretty chaotic, but I've come to realize that I have quite a rigid routine. I am not a morning person and never start writing until mid- to late afternoon and go on until I hit my daily word target. I always know how the story begins and how I want it to end. The hardest part is finding my way through the maze in the middle. I write via a laptop, and as ideas often pop into my head, I scribble them down on Post-it Notes and stick them on the wall of my office. I rarely look at the notes again, and probably wouldn't be able to read them anyway because my handwriting is so untidy.

If you could give one piece of advice to future thriller writers, what would it be?

Above all else, once you start to write, focus on getting the first draft finished. Don't obsess about rewriting or editing your work as you go along. It will slow you down, confuse and demoralize you.

Getting the first draft completed is so important. Once you have it, then you can rewrite, rewrite, edit, edit, edit.

When you're not writing, how do you spend your time?

When I'm not at my desk writing, I'm often reading. Also, because being a writer involves spending so many hours sitting down in an office, I like to spend time outdoors. I love walking, especially coastal walks, and cycling.