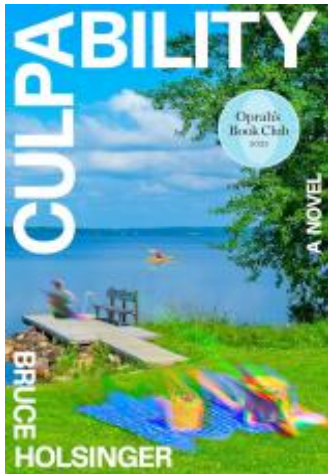


# Culpability

by Bruce Holsinger

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## About the Book

**A suspenseful family drama about moral responsibility in the age of artificial intelligence.**

When the Cassidy-Shaws' autonomous minivan collides with an oncoming car, 17-year-old Charlie is in the driver's seat, with his father, Noah, riding shotgun. In the back seat, tweens Alice and Izzy are on their phones, while their mother, Lorelei, a world leader in the field of artificial intelligence, is absorbed in her work. Yet each family member harbors a secret, implicating each of them in the accident.

During a weeklong recuperation on the Chesapeake Bay, the family confronts the excruciating moral dilemmas triggered by the crash. Noah tries to hold the family together as a seemingly routine police investigation jeopardizes Charlie's future. Alice and Izzy turn strangely furtive. And Lorelei's odd behavior tugs at Noah's suspicions that there is a darker truth behind the incident --- suspicions heightened by the sudden intrusion of Daniel Monet, a tech mogul whose mysterious history with Lorelei hints at betrayal. When Charlie falls for Monet's teenage daughter, the stakes are raised even higher in this propulsive family drama that is also a fascinating exploration of the moral responsibility and ethical consequences of AI.

CULPABILITY explores a world newly shaped by chatbots, autonomous cars, drones and other nonhuman forces in ways that are thrilling, challenging and unimaginably provocative.

## Discussion Guide

1. At the heart of the book is a family of five, struggling under extreme pressure to sort out what happened in the most pivotal moment of their lives. Did you guess who is responsible for the accident? Do AI and human action share in the blame?

2. When the family is first introduced, they seem happy and functional --- and yet the accident puts pressure on fault lines between them that existed long before the novel's beginning. How did the crisis expose each character's strengths and weaknesses? Who rose to the occasion, and who fell short?

3. Throughout the novel, the friction between family members often comes from comparison: the brilliant wife and the humble husband; the favorite child and the overlooked sibling. How do the characters assess their place within the family, and how do they react to it? Are those assessments accurate?

4. There's a memorable character in *CULPABILITY*: tech billionaire Daniel Monet. You likely bring a lot of associations and preconceptions to those words: "tech billionaire." How does Daniel Monet fit the type you expect? How does he subvert your expectations? Did you have anyone in mind when you read his character?

5. We're all anxious about our shared AI future --- and yet AI can also make our lives easier and even save lives. Did reading the novel make you more fearful of AI's possibilities? Are there any parts of AI that you use in your day-to-day life?

6. How did you feel about Alice's friend, Blair? When did you suspect she was a bot? Do you see Blair as helpful or menacing, or a mix of both?

7. Many of the characters have secrets they keep from each other. How would things have been different if the characters shared their secrets sooner? What about if they held on to their secrets longer? What would you have done in their shoes?

8. Lorelei, the wife in the story, is a world-class AI programmer and researcher and also a leader in the ethics of AI. Do you see her roles as inherently contradictory? Can AI be moral? Do you view her as ethical in her own life within the family?

9. There are two love stories in the novel --- the one between Charlie, the high school graduate who was driving the car, and Dissee, the daughter of billionaire Daniel Monet, and the marriage between Lorelei and Noah. In both cases, the relationships are between people who have very different backgrounds. Discuss the role of class and privilege and how they intersect in the novel.

## Author Bio

Bruce Holsinger is the author of five novels, including *CULPABILITY*, *THE DISPLACEMENTS* and *THE GIFTED SCHOOL*, as well as many works of nonfiction, most recently *ON PARCHMENT: Animals, Archives, and the Making of Culture from Herodotus to the Digital Age*.

His books have been recognized with the Colorado Book Award, the John Hurt Fisher Prize, the Philip Brett Award, the John Nicholas Brown Prize, the Modern Language Association's Prize for a First Book, and others. His essays and reviews have appeared in *The New York Times*, *Vanity Fair* and many other publications, and he has been profiled on NPR's "Weekend Edition," "Here & Now" and "Marketplace."

A Guggenheim Fellow and Fellow of the Medieval Academy of America, he teaches in the Department of English at the University of Virginia and serves as editor of the quarterly journal *New Literary History*. He also teaches craft classes and serves as board chairman for WriterHouse, a nonprofit in Charlottesville.

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