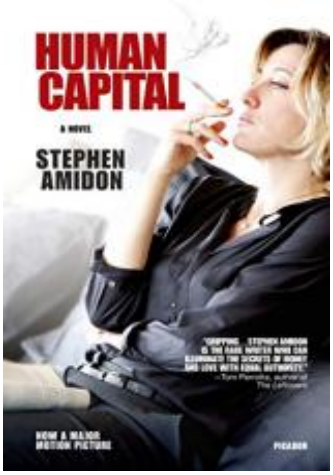
Human Capital

by Stephen Amidon



About the Book

It?s the spring of 2001. Drew Hagel has spent the last decade watching things slip away --- his marriage, his real estate brokerage and his beloved daughter, Shannon, now a distant and mysterious high school senior. But as summer approaches, Drew forms an unexpected friendship with Quint Manning, the manager of a secretive hedge fund. Drew sees the friendship leading to vast, frictionless wealth, but Drew doesn?t know that Manning has problems of his own: his Midas touch is abandoning him, his restless wife has grown disillusioned and his hard-drinking son is careening out of control.

As the fortunes of the Hagels and the Mannings collide, a terrible accident gives Drew the leverage he needs to stay in the game. At once brilliantly observed and masterfully paced, HUMAN CAPITAL by Stephen Amidon ?deftly slices open the rich, corrupt heart of suburban America and lets its dark secrets bleed out? (*Elle*).

Discussion Guide

1. What do you believe are David?s intentions toward his nephew Ian? Does he think of him as a son, and if so, does David carry expectations of Ian in the same way that Quint does of his son Jamie or Drew of his daughter Shannon?

2. Running throughout the novel is the notion of the characters? self-awareness (or lack thereof), and the motivations that in some ways fueled by this lack of understanding. Look back through the novel and ask one another, do the characters know what they feel? Did Carrie, for instance, really not know she was falling for her friend John?

3. One of the more subtle details of the novel is that Quint has a brother with Down?s syndrome. How might this influence his personality as an adult?

4. Furthermore, what traits does Quint share with other characters in the book, and what other traits to characters share

with one another? While these characters are different in notable and active ways, how do their similarities affect the choices they make?

5. Which characters does Amidon seem particularly critical of? Why are these folk singled out for deeper scrutiny?

6. Emotionally speaking, Carrie seems to take more risks than the other characters in the book, and yet she seems to emerge largely unscathed by the final pages. What are your thoughts about Carrie?s choices through the book? Think of her feelings for her son, her husband, John, even Drew.

7. HUMAN CAPITAL, and the world of Totten Crossing, is littered with material goods, products and objects that signify more than their functions. What products serve as symbols (this is particularly true of gifts)? Is there imagery of products that linger in your thinking on the book, and if so, why do you think those products stand out?

8. How is the suburban world of Totten Crossing defined by automobiles and the roads they travel?

9. Following a confrontation with her son on page 305, Carrie attempts to reassess the achievement-by-way-of-education world around her and her children. Do you agree with this assessment?

10. Both Drew and Carrie engage in illicit activities in order to save their respective families. Are their actions, in this regard, believable? Is this something you believe they would do, or you would do, in order to hold your family together?

11. Why do you believe the author decided to name the novel HUMAN CAPITAL?

Author Bio

Stephen Amidon was born in Chicago and grew up on the East Coast. He lived in London for 12 years before returning to the United States in 1999. He now lives in Massachusetts and Torino, Italy. His books have been published in 16 countries and include two works of nonfiction, a collection of short stories and eight novels, including HUMAN CAPITAL, adapted as a film directed by Marc Meyers in 2019, and SECURITY, also adapted as a film and released by Netflix in summer 2021.

Critical Praise

?Gripping?Stephen Amidon is the rare writer who can illuminate the secrets of money and love with equal authority.?

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Publication Date: January 6, 2015
Genres: Fiction, Literary, Thriller
Paperback: 384 pages
Publisher: Picador
ISBN-10: 1250075300
ISBN-13: 9781250075307