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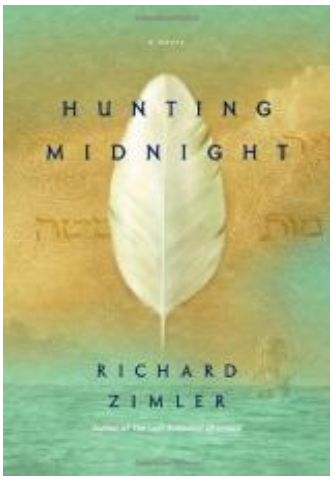
Hunting Midnight

by Richard Zimler



About the Book

From the internationally bestselling author of **The Last Kabbalist of Lisbon** comes a novel of incomparable scope and beauty that takes the reader on an epic journey from war-ravaged nineteenth-century Europe to antebellum America. A bereft child, a freed African slave, and the rich history of Portugal's secret Jews collide memorably in Richard Zimler's mesmerizing novel--a dazzling work of historical fiction played out against a backdrop of war and chaos that unforgettably mines the mysteries of devotion, betrayal, guilt, and forgiveness.

Hunting Midnight

At the dawn of the nineteenth century in Portugal, John Zarco Stewart is an impish child of hotheaded emotions and playful inquisitiveness, the unwitting inheritor of a faith shrouded in three hundred years of secrecy--for the Jews of the Iberian Peninsula have been in hiding since the Inquisition. But a season of loss and bitter discovery brings his innocence to an abrupt end. It is only the ministrations of a magical stranger, brought to Porto by his seafaring father, that restore his safety: Midnight, an African healer and freed slave, the man who will become John's greatest friend and determine the course of his destiny.

When Napoleon's armies invade Portugal, violence again intrudes on John's fragile peace, and seals his passage into adulthood with another devastating loss. But from the wreckage comes revelation as he uncovers truths and lies hidden by the people he loved and trusted most, and discovers the act of unspeakable betrayal that destroyed his family--and his faith. And so his shattering quest begins as he travels to America, to hunt for hope in a land shackled by unforgivable sin.

With stunning insight and an eye for rich historical detail--from the colorful marketplaces of Porto to the drowsy plantations of the American South, from the Judaism John discovers as a young man to the mystical Africa that Midnight conjures from his memories--in **Hunting Midnight** Richard Zimler has crafted a masterpiece.

Discussion Guide

1. What themes of freedom and oppression are represented by this time period? Was Napoleon's revolution comparable to America's? Is John able to establish any sense of national identity as a child?

2. What historical details surprised you, especially regarding Portugal and Africa? Did any of your ancestors experience scenarios similar to the ones portrayed **Hunting Midnight**?

3. What parallels and distinctions can be made between Western Europe's role in oppressing Jews and Africans? What mind-set made these pogroms possible?

4. Do John and Violeta arrive in America through the traditional immigrant experience? How did Midnight influence America after he was kidnapped and forced to live in the States?

5. What is John's attitude toward the many losses he has suffered? How does his perception of grief and suffering compare to yours?

6. Besides the visual association with darkness, what other meanings can be derived from Midnight's name, especially in terms of time and the natural order of life?

7. Are Midnight's healing powers limited to physical ailments? In what sense is he like a contemporary physician? In what sense is he like a warrior? Is he able to heal himself?

8. How does John evolve throughout the novel? What changes did you observe in him as he progresses from childhood to adulthood?

9. Discuss the novel's initial scenes, particularly those involving Daniel and the efforts to free the birds. To what extent do these introductory characters and events enhance your reading of **Hunting Midnight**? Do they predict the outcome of the novel or do they make it ironic?

10. How would you have advised John's father to address the issue of his wife's infidelity? What does the affair with Midnight indicate about the emotional hierarchies of both men?

11. In what ways does John's Scottish ancestry complement that of his mother? What entity has the greatest amount of social control in John's life?

12. What is the effect of the varying points of view introduced in Part II? Why might the author have used chapter titles only for scenes narrated by Morri?

13. How does Morri compare to the other female characters, both in terms of personality and life experience?

14. What approaches to parenting are presented in the novel? Does John follow in his father's footsteps or take a new path? How is Midnight able to remain central to his daughter's life?

15. Discuss the role of religion and spirituality in the novel. In what or whom do the primary characters place their faith? Who are the novel's most "faithful" characters? Who are its most godless ones?

16. How might the wisdom of Midnight, particularly the inspiration he derives from the animal world, improve our modern lives?

Author Bio

Richard Zimler was born in New York and studied journalism at Stanford University. He has published eight novels over the last 15 years, including the famous THE LAST KABBALIST OF LISBON.

Richard has won numerous prizes for his work, including the Marquis de Ouro prize in 2010 --- as Book of the Year in Portugal --- for THE WARSAW ANAGRAMS. He also won the 2009 Alberto Benveniste prize in fiction for GUARDIAN OF THE DAWN (for best Jewish-themed novel published in France), and the 1998 Herodotus Award, for THE LAST KABBALIST OF LISBON (Best First Historical Novel). Additionally, THE LAST KABBALIST OF LISBON was picked as 1998 Book of the Year by three British critics. HUNTING MIDNIGHT, THE SEARCH FOR SANA and THE SEVENTH GATE have all been nominated for the International IMPAC Literary Award, the richest prize in the English-speaking world. He was also granted a 1994 U.S. National Endowment of the Arts Fellowship in Fiction.

Richard is also a contributor to the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*. When he?s not writing, he enjoys gardening at his weekend house in the north of Portugal.

Critical Praise

"A big, bold-hearted love story that will sweep you up and take you, uncomplaining, on a journey full of heartbreak and light."

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