ReadingGroupGuides
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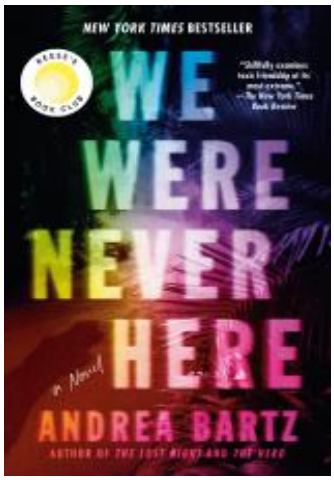
We Were Never Here

by Andrea Bartz



About the Book

A backpacking trip has deadly consequences in this ?eerie psychological thriller...with alluring locales, Hitchcockian tension and possibly the best pair of female leads since Thelma and Louise? (*BookPage*), from the bestselling author of THE LOST NIGHT and THE HERD.

Emily is having the time of her life --- she?s in the mountains of Chile with her best friend, Kristen, on their annual reunion trip, and the women are feeling closer than ever. But on the last night of the trip, Emily enters their hotel suite to find blood and broken glass on the floor. Kristen says the cute backpacker she brought back to their room attacked her, and she had no choice but to kill him in self-defense. Even more shocking: The scene is horrifyingly similar to last year?s trip, when another backpacker wound up dead. Emily can?t believe it?s happened again. Can lightning really strike twice?

Back home in Wisconsin, Emily struggles to bury her trauma, diving headfirst into a new relationship and throwing herself into work. But when Kristen shows up for a surprise visit, Emily is forced to confront their violent past. The more Kristen tries to keep Emily close, the more Emily questions her motives. As Emily feels the walls closing in on their cover-ups, she must reckon with the truth about her closest friend. Can Emily outrun the secrets she shares with Kristen, or will they destroy her relationship, her freedom --- even her life?

Discussion Guide

1. Emily and Kristen have been best friends since college, ever since Emily?s breakup with her high school boyfriend. What did you think of the way this breakup cemented their friendship? Do you think it was the beginning of a pattern that is followed throughout the novel? Do you have a pivotal moment in your life that you saw one way in the moment, but in an entirely new one light years later?

2. Emily notes: ?In the US, 40 percent of murders go unsolved. Some arithmetic, then: That meant that detectives threw up their hands at almost 7,000

murders a year --- 7,000 cadavers with no origin story, no clarity around the moment they went from human to body. And that meant there were thousands, maybe millions in the aggregate, of people walking the earth this very moment who?d gotten away with murder.? These stats are accurate. Did that surprise you? Did you find yourself sympathizing with Emily, despite her at least partial responsibility for two deaths?

3. Ever since Emily?s traumatic experience in Cambodia, she has struggled to move forward in her life, particularly regarding romantic relationships --- and, especially after the events in Chile, she discovers that Kristen?s help alone is not enough and begins to see a therapist. What does it show about Emily?s character when she reaches the decision to finally seek professional help for her recovery? What does Kristen?s reaction to this demonstrate about their relationship?

4. At one point, Emily reflects, ?All the handwringing about women tempting fate by going on adventures, how it was our responsibility to protect ourselves...wasn?t it just a way to keep women?s lives small? To keep us cowering at home, controlled, contained?? Do you believe women are responsible for protecting themselves from violence? Have you ever been told you were ?tempting fate? for something you said, did or wore?

5. Kristen often uses uniquely subversive ?gestures of friendship? to disguise her threats to Emily. Did this kind of manipulation ring true to you? How did you feel about the way Emily handled these moments? Would you have reacted in the same way?

6. As the secrets from Kristen?s past bubble to the surface, Emily realizes just how much of Kristen?s life she?d held back from Emily over their decade-long friendship. What did you think of this? Did you believe Kristen?s reasons for withholding her past? Can a friend keep their most private traumas secret and still be trustworthy?

7. Though the book?s central traumas revolve around those nights in Cambodia and Chile (and the fallout), Emily is no stranger to ?casual violence,? citing examples from her ex-boyfriend and father, and even street harassment. Kristen, too, is both a victim and perpetrator of abuse. Why do you think the author included these elements from the characters? pasts?

Author Bio

Andrea Bartz is a journalist and the *New York Times* bestselling author of Reese?s Book Club pick WE WERE NEVER HERE, THE LAST FERRY OUT, THE SPARE ROOM, THE LOST NIGHT and THE HERD. Her work has appeared in *The Wall Street Journal*, *Marie Claire*, *Vogue* and many other outlets, and she?s held editorial positions at *Glamour*, *Psychology Today* and *Self*, among other publications. She lives in Brooklyn and the Hudson Valley.

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