



Mysteries of Pittsburgh

By Michael Chabon
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Introduction

Set in industrial Pittsburgh in the mid-eighties, **Michael Chabon's** breakthrough coming-of-age novel chronicles the last summer of Art Bechstein's youth. Art meets the witty and beautiful Arthur Lecomte, who then introduces Art to the equally stunning Jane, her boyfriend, the legendary Cleveland, and worldly, exotic, and slightly eccentric Phlox. In the course of one summer, this band of colorful friends guides and thwarts Art in surprising ways as he confronts himself, his family, his sexuality, and the heartache of growing up.

Questions for Discussion

1. Arthur Lecomte and Art share the same name. What is the significance of this?
2. As their friendship blossoms, Art even begins to "affect an over grammatical, precious manner toward people,"(page 57) following Arthur's example. Does Art want to be Arthur? Why?
3. "I had the impression that as far as Arthur and Jane were concerned, Cleveland flew, or had flown, as far above their twin blond heads as I saw them flying above me—but he had fallen, or was falling, or they were all on their way down." (Page 38-39). Art meets up with his newfound friends at the end of college. What draws them all together?
4. Do Jane, Arthur, and Art unrealistically idolize Cleveland? What does Cleveland represent to the three friends? Is his death the inevitable severing of their fragile friendships?
5. Describe Art's relationship with his father. Does he resent his father more for his mob connection or for the death of his mother?
6. Art's mother's death is a mystery up until Art blurts out in the hospital, "Ever since what, Lenny? They killed my mother instead of him?" (Page 290). How does that explain Art's uncertainty throughout the story, his childlike behavior around his father, his reluctance to talk about his mother to Phlox, and/or his insecurity about his masculinity?
7. After Art introduces Cleveland to his father, Art realizes he has lost any remaining respect his father may have had for him. What makes Art turn to Arthur for solace?
8. What does the Cloud Factory represent to these characters?
9. Is Cleveland a genuine friend of Art's, or an opportunist?
10. Aside from Art's troubled relationship with his father, explain Jane's, Cleveland's, and Arthur's relationships with their parents, and how these relationships shaped the characters.

About the Author

Michael Chabon was born in Washington D.C. He received his B.A. from the University of Pittsburgh and his M.F.A. from the University of California at Irvine. He is the author of **The Mysteries of Pittsburgh**, **A Model World**, **Wonder Boys**, **Summerland**, **The Final Solution**, and **The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay**, for which he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. He lives in Berkeley, CA with his wife, Ayelet Waldman, and their four children.