



BOOK CLUB
RESOURCE GUIDE

CRIME NOIR
GRAPHIC NOVEL

A watercolor illustration of a cozy living room. On the left and right are tall wooden bookshelves filled with books. In the center, there is a wooden chair and a small table. The room is lit with soft, warm light, creating a comfortable atmosphere.

THANK YOU FOR
CONSIDERING ASH & INK:
THE DELAY FOR YOUR
NEXT BOOK CLUB READ

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TIMOTHY R. BALDWIN



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TIMOTHY

Seven years ago, retired detective Axel Twigg watched a man he'd helped convict walk toward execution — and told himself the case was closed. It wasn't. When Victor Arnold's widow, Olivia, walks back into Axel's life demanding the truth he was too afraid to chase back then, she isn't looking for a memoir. She's looking for a witness. Before Axel can decide how much of her story to believe, Olivia disappears — and what looks to the police like a woman who simply walked away looks to Axel like a carefully staged absence, tied to a dead accountant who slipped through his fingers once before. Pulled back into a case he never truly closed, Axel has to reckon with his own former partner, a network of corporate money and "ghost steel" that reaches further than he ever suspected, and the seven-year-old lie he's been telling himself just to keep sleeping at night. *Ash & Ink: The Delay* launches the Axel Twigg Files — a hard-boiled graphic noir about guilt, corruption, and the stories that refuse to stay buried.

WORD COUNT:15,000

PAGE COUNT: 90

KEY WORDS: Graphic noir | Hard-boiled detective | Corporate conspiracy,

DEMOGRAPHICS: Readers who love hard-boiled noir mystery told through striking visual storytelling.

COMP BOOKS: Criminal by Ed Brubaker & Sean Phillips | Sin City by Frank Miller |

Stumptown by Greg Rucka & Matthew Southworth

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Setting the mood

- Low, warm lamp lighting only — no overhead lights.
- A desk or side table styled like a detective's office
- A typewriter (real or prop)
- Scattered papers, an ashtray (empty, for décor)
- Rotary phone if you have one.

Music

- Play the Spotify playlist low throughout the evening.

Clothing suggestions

- Classic noir attire
- Trench coats, fedoras, dark suits,
- Femme-fatale-inspired dress for guests who want to channel Olivia.
- Keep it moody rather than costume-y.

Fun, easy props

- A typewriter or old notebook as a centerpiece
- a single desk lamp for "interrogation" lighting during the games
- Prop key on a chain (a nod to the book's central clue) for guests to pass around.

THEMED ACTIVITIES - A Norwick Noir Night

Build the File

Give each guest an index card with a fake "clue" written on it (a name, an object, a location); as a group, they have to arrange the cards into a plausible story before comparing it to what actually happened in the book.

Who's Lying?

Each guest makes one true and one false claim about a decision their character would make in Axel's shoes; the group votes on which is the lie.

Noir Trivia

A quick round of questions about the book's plot, characters, and twists, styled as an "interrogation."

THEMED ACTIVITIES - A Norwick Noir Night

Classic American diner comfort food — the kind of meal a hard-boiled detective eats at a corner booth at 2 a.m. while working a case.

Classic Diner Burgers

Serves 6

- 2 lbs ground beef (80/20)
- 1 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp black pepper
- 6 slices American cheese
- 6 burger buns
- Lettuce, tomato, onion, and pickles, for serving
- Ketchup and mustard, for serving

Form the ground beef into 6 thin patties and season generously with salt and pepper. Cook on a hot griddle or skillet for about 2–3 minutes per side, adding a slice of cheese in the last minute to melt. Toast the buns lightly and assemble with lettuce, tomato, onion, and pickles.

Diner-Style French Fries

Serves 6

- 4 large russet potatoes, cut into fries
- Vegetable oil, for frying
- Salt to taste

Soak the cut potatoes in cold water for at least 30 minutes, then drain and pat dry thoroughly. Fry in 325°F oil for about 5 minutes until soft but not browned, then remove and let rest. Raise the oil temperature to 375°F and fry a second time for 2–3 minutes until golden and crisp. Drain and salt generously while hot.

THEMED MENU - The Norwick Diner

Black Coffee Pie

Serves 8

(a nod to the diner-noir atmosphere)

- 1 pre-made 9-inch pie crust, blind-baked
 - 1 cup strong brewed coffee, cooled
 - 1 cup heavy cream
 - 3 egg yolks
 - 1/2 cup sugar
 - 2 tbsp cornstarch
 - 1 tsp vanilla extract
 - Whipped cream, for topping

Whisk together coffee, cream, egg yolks, sugar, and cornstarch in a saucepan. Cook over medium heat, whisking constantly, until thickened, about 8–10 minutes. Stir in vanilla, then pour into the baked pie crust. Chill for at least 3 hours before topping with whipped cream and serving.



A dark, smoky bourbon cocktail — the kind of drink Axel keeps at the bottom of his desk drawer.

Ingredients:

- 2 oz bourbon
- 1/2 oz coffee liqueur
- 2 dashes chocolate bitters
- 1 thin lemon twist, for garnish

Instructions:

Combine bourbon, coffee liqueur, and bitters in a mixing glass with ice. Stir for about 30 seconds until well-chilled. Strain into a rocks glass over a single large ice cube. Express the oils from a lemon twist over the top and drop it in. Serve slowly — some truths take seven years to catch up.

SIGNATURE DRINK – The Delay

Feeling Good By Nina Simone
Black Coffee By Ella Fitzgerald
Angel By Massive Attack
Glory Box By Portishead
My Funny Valentine By Chet Baker
Strange Fruit By Billie Holiday
Red Right Hand By Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds
Summertime By Miles Davis
Down in a Hole By Nina Simone
The Wind By PJ Harvey
I Put a Spell on You By Screamin' Jay Hawkins
Cigarettes and Chocolate Milk By Rufus Wainwright
Que Sera, Sera (dark cover) By Sly and the Family Stone
Way Down in the Hole By Tom Waits
Hallelujah By Leonard Cohen



SPOTIFY MUSIC RECOMMENDATIONS

A soft, watercolor-style illustration of a living room. On the left is a tall wooden bookshelf filled with books. In the center background is a fireplace with a mantel. To the right is another wooden bookshelf, also filled with books. In the foreground, there is a light-colored, plush sofa and a wooden chair. The overall atmosphere is warm and inviting.

THIS GUIDE CONTAINS POSSIBLE
SPOILERS FOR THIS BOOK IN
THE DISCUSSION SECTION.

WARNING

- Axel spent seven years telling himself that walking away from the Arnold case was the smart move. What do you think finally pushes him to reopen it, and did his reasoning feel earned to you?
- Olivia Arnold is initially set up to look like a classic femme fatale, but the book reveals her to be something closer to a survivor and strategist. How did your read of her change over the course of the book?
- Roberts represents institutional corruption throughout the story — a cop who "follows outcomes" instead of evidence. What did his character add to the book's larger themes about complicity?
- The book uses a graphic novel format to tell a fairly dense noir mystery. How did the visual storytelling change your experience of the plot compared to reading a prose detective novel?
- Axel's line "it only delayed the bill" captures a lot about his character. What do you think the book is saying about guilt that gets postponed instead of confronted?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Victor Arnold is dead before the book even begins, and yet his choices — teaching Olivia to disappear, protecting her from what he knew — drive nearly everything that happens. What did you make of a central character we only ever see through others' memories?
- The "ghost steel" and corporate conspiracy plot sits underneath the personal mystery of Olivia's disappearance. How well did the book balance those two layers for you?
- Axel's relationship with his sister, who negotiated his early retirement, adds a personal cost to his original decision to walk away. How did that family dynamic shape your understanding of Axel's choices?
- The book ends with Axel finally deciding to "finish the report" after seven years. What do you think that resolution says about the cost of doing the right thing late, versus not doing it at all?
- As the first book in the Axel Twigg Files, what do you hope the series does next — and which unresolved thread (Weiss, Sloane, Roberts) are you most eager to see followed up?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Timothy Baldwin grew up in Syracuse, New York. He currently resides in Maryland where he teaches English, Creative Writing, Film, and Theatre on the middle school level. At the insistence of his own students, he began writing seriously in 2014.

He credits his love for story to his mother, who spent countless hours reading to him and his siblings when they were growing up. Growing up, he devoured the literary words of C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Piers Anthony, and many others. Mysteries, thrillers, and fantasies are among the genre he most frequently reads. When he's not writing, he's reading, teaching, camping, or enjoying a live music concert.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

WEBSITE: www.timothyrbaldwin.com

OTHER BOOKS: A Crock of Sundries, A Shot in the Dark Series, Cassie Maddox Mystery Series, Kahale and Claude Mystery Series, The Unwanted Guest and other short thrillers