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BLACK BUCK by Mateo Askaripour

Questions for Discussion

1. Before you read *Black Buck*, how did you define a salesperson? Now that you have read the book, has your definition changed? If so, how?
2. Discuss the author's note at the beginning of the novel and the tips addressed to the reader throughout. What do you make of Buck's advice? And why do you think Askaripour chose to structure the novel this way—almost like a business memoir or sales manual?
3. When Darren reverse closes Rhett at Starbucks, everything changes (13–14). What does Rhett see in Darren in that moment? Why is Darren reluctant to accept Rhett's job offer to work at Sumwun? Have you ever been afraid to pursue a new opportunity in your own life?
4. Discuss Darren's relationship to Ma, Soraya, and the "gargoyles" (Jason and Wally Cat) and how those relationships change when Darren begins working at Sumwun. How does his professional success impact his closest relationships? Have you seen anything similar happen to yourself, friends, or loved ones?
5. What is the culture like at Sumwun? What are the various rituals and hierarchies? Discuss the way Darren ("Buck") is treated compared to his colleagues as well as the ways people at the top, like Rhett and Clyde, engage with race.
6. [Spoiler] How does Darren recalibrate after Ma dies? What harm does he cause to himself and others?
7. Discuss the media's relationship to Darren—from his first TV appearance on *Rise and Shine, America* to Bonnie Sauren's coverage of him. What are the narratives they create for him, and how does he fight back?
8. In interviews, Askaripour has mentioned that he didn't set out to write a satire; in fact, it took him a little while to get on board with the idea that his novel could be, at once, earnest and satirical. Discuss what this means. In what ways is this novel satirical? In what ways is it earnest?
9. Discuss the origins of the Happy Campers and its quick success. What does Brian offer Darren, and vice versa? What did you make of the lessons that Darren put his early members through—from the subway car entertainment to the dine and dash? What, if anything, did these scenarios teach Brian, Rose, and the rest of the crew?
10. Discuss the criticism of the Happy Campers from the White United Society of Salespeople and the media. How do they try to thwart the Happy Campers' mission? Why do they feel threatened by the Happy Campers' success?



11. “The turns in this story are half absurd, half jaw-dropping, and a whole heaping of crazy” (305). What did you make of the big reveal that opens Part V? Did you see it coming, or was it a surprise?
12. [Spoiler] Darren hurt many people in his life, especially Mr. Rawlings, whom he never had the opportunity to apologize to. What do you think of the measures his grandson, Trey, took to exact revenge on Darren? Did Darren deserve it?
13. Discuss your feelings toward Darren, and how they might have changed, over the course of the novel. Despite his worst actions, do you think he’s ultimately redeemed?