

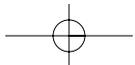
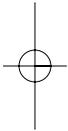
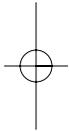
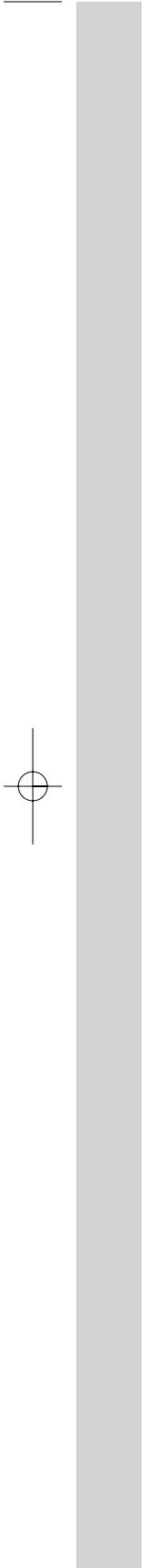
A Reader's Guide

DIZZY CITY

NICHOLAS GRIFFIN



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Questions for Discussion

1. The beginning of the book finds Ben on the front lines of World War I. Griffin intercuts these first scenes with Ben's recollections of "playing" at war with his friends as children. Do you find this to be an effective technique? What does it accomplish?
2. Throughout part one, as we are introduced to Ben, we learn that he does not hesitate to steal, swindle, and cheat. We also discover that he is — or was — something of a womanizer and, most significantly, that he has murdered a fellow soldier. Given these actions, do you find you like Ben? Is it possible to like him? Do you empathize with him? If so, can you point out some of his mitigating characteristics? And if so, how does Griffin compensate for his flaws to ensure he can still function as a sympathetic protagonist?
3. Who is your favorite character in the book? Least favorite? Why?
4. Do you think that Ben had a right to desert the army? What do you think you would have done in his situation?
5. Ben's war experience has left him mentally and physically scarred. However, the book is set long before the coinage of such medical terms as *post-traumatic stress disorder* — something from which Ben certainly suffers. Discuss some of the occasions in the book when this affliction manifests. Does Ben seem likely to ever fully recover from his wartime trauma? Do you think he ever will?

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6. One of the ironies in *Dizzy City* is that regardless of Ben's faults, he is (excluding very minor characters) perhaps the most moral character in the book. Comment on this. How does he display his sense of ethics throughout the narrative? Is it a sense that seems to be waxing or waning as the narrative progresses?
7. On page 320 are the statements, "For men could change. Ben was sure of it." Based on this book, do you agree with that conviction? Discuss how Ben has changed throughout the book. Do other characters change at all? Do they seem capable of doing so?
8. When Jergens's mentor, Gallon, is explaining his continued enmity towards McAteer, he tells him, "There are rules, boy." Soon after this, we are told several of these, such as "Always operate within your own store," and "Never fish in your own lake." Is it possible to apply a code of laws to an utterly illegal enterprise? Should ethics in criminality exist? If McAteer represents the "unethical" con man, while Gallon is the "ethical" swindler, is one better than the other? Which category does Jergens fall into?
9. On page 179, we read, "Katherine wrote that she believed that Dent was a good man. It made Henry laugh. Only in Katherine's opinion was it possible to be a liar, an adulterer, a layabout, and a louse and still be good." What do you think? Is this possible, or is Katherine wrong? Is Jergens a hypocrite for believing this, or do you agree with the logic behind his thoughts? Does Jergens deserve to think of himself as being different from — and morally superior to — Dent?
10. The book switches perspective — from Ben, to Henry, to Katherine, and then back to Ben. Do you find this to be effective? Which was your favorite viewpoint? Why?
11. When Jergens senses that Katherine is slipping away from him, he attempts to keep his wife by doing his best to

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impregnate her. Later in the book, on page 349, Ben — feeling the same way — wonders if he should come clean with Katherine: “He couldn’t think of a surer way to draw Katherine into his confidence, to be drawn into hers, then by telling her everything.” Each of these men is seeking to become closer to Katherine — one by means of family, the other through honesty. Is one method more fair? Does the ulterior motive of love justify manipulation? And are these tactics indeed manipulation, or something else?

12. On page 117, Ben reflects that “As a child he had thought he loved the theater his father worked in, but later realized what he adored was the knowledge of artifice.” Later, on page 215, we are told that Katherine “had warmed to the prospect of stepping on stage. It was such a natural extension of what she and Henry did.” Do you agree with this? How closely intertwined is the art of theater and the practice of artifice? Can you think of other situations in society, besides acting, where artifice is deemed acceptable or even praiseworthy?
13. There is an interesting exchange on page 245, where Jergens asks Katherine if she has slept with Dent and she replies she hasn’t: “‘Well maybe now’s the time.’ She nodded, crumpled a little. That’s why, she told herself, you have to move on.” Read this passage again. What do you think about it? Is this a point where Henry conclusively loses his wife? Comment on their relationship. Can you understand it?
14. Throughout the book, Ben has lived in fear of war — the war that he left behind, and the war (and punishment) that awaits him if he is returned to Europe. But at the book’s end war, in a fashion, comes to Manhattan: On page 358 we read: “Only Ben thought he knew what was happening. How they had dreamed of this sitting in their trenches, dreamed of wars coming to cities to bring an understanding, to impose fear, to share their cruelties, and to let the world know that war had come and war had won and war would stay.” What is the

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tone here? Does Ben seem oddly relieved at what has finally happened — that what he feared would occur did indeed transpire in some way? If so, why might this be? What do we know of Ben's character that might have suggested he would feel relief? If not, what predominant emotion does he appear to feel?

15. The majority of *Dizzy City* takes place in New York, and at various points characters are conscious of the dizzying effect produced by the tall buildings, the vertical landscape of the city. But other sentences indicate a different sort of dizziness. On page 179, Jergens thinks that the rich are constantly “spinning around New York . . . until they were quite dizzy and had achieved absolutely nothing but a pleasant memory, enough to sustain themselves until the next event.” Whether true or not, is this observation at all indicative of a larger tendency within the book? Does Jergens's thought unintentionally say something about the book's main characters, and even about he himself? Consider the ending. Does it suggest that perhaps Ben and Katherine might break free of this dizzying cycle?
16. The novel ends with a conspicuous inconclusiveness. We do not know if Ben and Katherine will remain together or reach San Francisco; we do not know what becomes of the other main characters, especially Jergens and McAteer. Does this ending work for you? Would you have preferred a more definite conclusion? Why do you think the author chose to end *Dizzy City* in this fashion?