

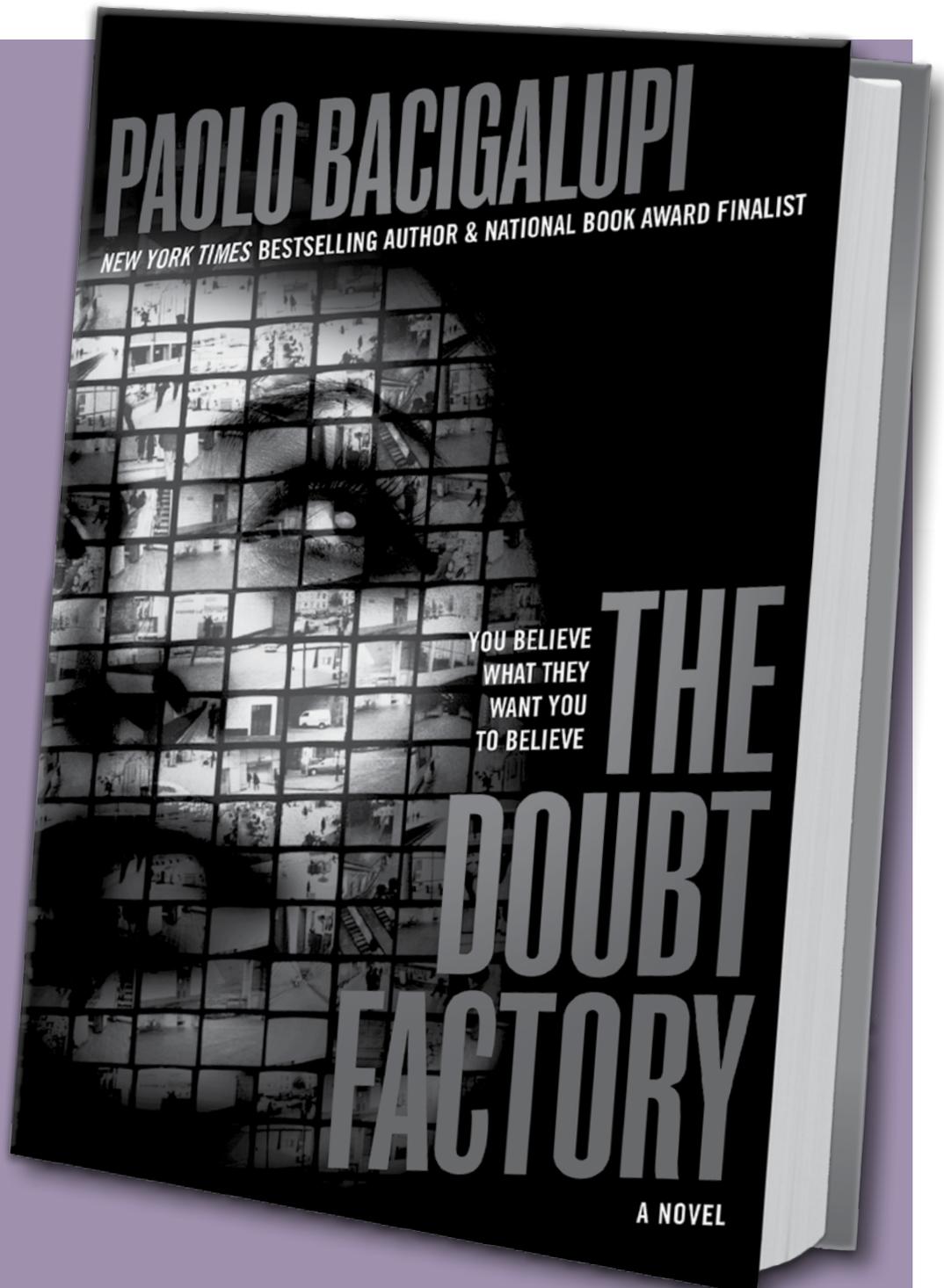
THE DOUBT FACTORY

Themes

- ❖ Activism
- ❖ Politics
- ❖ Ethics

Ages: 15 & Up

BY
PAOLO
BACIGALUPI



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The author uses the very first sentence in the book to set up the tension in the story: “He’d been watching her for a long time.” When you read that line and the subsequent paragraphs, did you think that the girl he was watching was in danger? What are some other, specific ways the author maintains the tension throughout the rest of the book?
2. The prologue introduces Moses Cruz as a potentially menacing character. How long is it before readers stop being wary of him? Is Alix afraid of him when she first encounters him? Why or why not? At first, does she think she can trust him? Do you think she can trust him? Why would she let him inside her house? When she does, she “was suddenly horribly aware of decisions she couldn’t take back.” When have you made decisions you couldn’t take back? Why did you make them?
3. Moses and his “family” commit criminal acts. Do you admire them for this? Does Alix? What are some ways the author makes breaking the law seem like an attractive quality? Why do you sometimes want to “root” for the bad guys in a book or movie?
4. Would you fit in at Alix’s exclusive school, or do you feel you belong with Moses’ crew? Why? What skills could you offer to an outlaw group like Moses’? Do you like the kids in Moses’ crew? Do you think you could trust them? Do you understand their motives?
5. Is it easy to make assumptions about someone based on their looks, appearance, clothes and car? What kinds of assumptions? Moses is black and Alix is white; does this cause the reader to make any assumptions about them?
6. In chapter 29, after Alix is kidnapped, she asks herself: “How do you know what truth is? How do you know if someone is lying to you?” Are you the type of person who needs proven facts and figures to believe something, or are you able to trust someone’s version of events? Does it have to be someone you know well? Have you ever trusted a stranger because of an attraction to them? Conversely, have you ever doubted someone you’ve known a long time?
7. There are several types of “family” presented in the novel. Compare Alix’s biological family with Moses’ chosen family. Does one seem better than the other? Closer, more supportive or more honest? At the end, were you happy with the family that Alix chose?
8. Until she starts to trust and believe Moses, Alix thinks her dad is kind of a cool parent. Did you start to mistrust him before she did? In chapter 10, where she is quizzing him about 2.0, is he being evasive or convincing with his arguments? At that point, do we think he believes in what he is doing, or just trying to justify it to his daughter?
9. Would you want to know if one of your parents was involved with something illegal or unethical? What would you do if you found out they were? How does suspecting her dad affect Alix? In chapter 8, Moses tells Alix, “You don’t have any idea where all your money comes from.” Is this true about you—do you have any idea where your family’s money comes from? Do you care?
10. In chapter 12, Alix feels like she is “crossing a boundary” and “becoming someone else” when she escapes her security detail and runs off with Cynthia. Have you ever felt like this? If not, have you ever wanted to? Why? What are the dangers of doing this? What are some potential benefits?
11. Alix and Moses, the two main characters in the novel, are opposite genders. Who, in your opinion, is the stronger character? Is it because of their gender? Does the voice of Moses sound “truer” because the author is a man? Could that also be why Dad is a more fully realized character than Mom?
12. Moses cites many real examples of “doubt PR firms” at work and “junk science” that has affected consumers’ lives. Can you think of other examples in today’s media that you might suspect could be the work of such firms hired by corporations or organizations? What makes you think so? Can you find evidence to support or reject your suspicions?

ACTIVITIES

Writing

Choose one of the following statements from the book and write an opinion essay supporting, or opposing it:

- Moses: “The thing about belief is that you can’t prove it. You have to ‘believe’ in God, because, hey, the only way you’ll ever find out if you’re right or wrong is after you get cancer and die, right?”
- Alix: “But I’m not an idiot. I can trust myself. Just because I get fooled once by someone, it doesn’t mean I’m always going to be fooled by them.”
- Moses: “Because sometimes, if you see something bad, you can’t let it stand. Sometimes you see something so bad you know that if you walk away, you’re just as bad.”
- Kook: “If you go to a school and shoot a bunch of kids, we call that murder. But if you’re a CEO who keeps a cholesterol drug on the street for an extra three years and you take out fifty thousand people with heart attacks, you get a bonus and your face on the cover of Forbes.”

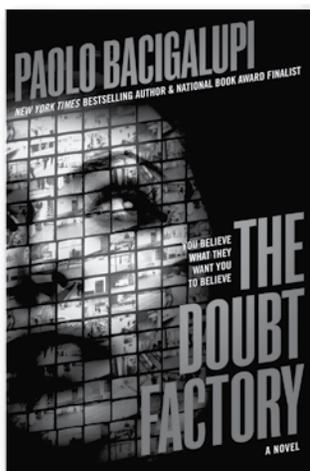
Betrayal is a central theme in the novel. Write an essay examining the various betrayals, such as corporations lying to individuals, Cynthia’s acting like a friend to Alix and Dad’s hiding his true work from his family. Write about a betrayal you’ve made, or that has happened to you. Was it resolved? How, or why not?

Research/Current Events

Some of the corporate cases in the novel are fictional, but there are references to real cases as well. Using the book as a springboard, identify, research and write a report on the details of a real-life controversy involving a pharmaceutical or other corporation misrepresenting a product to the buying public.

In chapter 36, Alix explains what a “money anonymizer” does, using Donors Capital Fund and Donors Trust as examples. Find and write a report on another anonymizer company.

about the book



THE DOUBT FACTORY
by Paolo Bacigalupi
HC 978-0-316-22075-0
Also available as an ebook

In this page-turning contemporary thriller, National Book Award-Finalist and New York Times bestselling author Paolo Bacigalupi explores the timely issue of how public information is distorted for monetary gain, and how those who exploit it must be stopped.

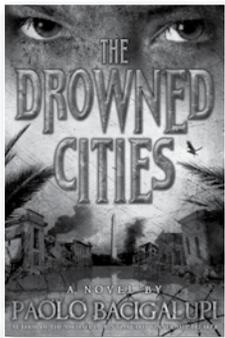
Everything Alix knows about her life is a lie. At least that’s what a mysterious young man who’s stalking her keeps saying. But then she begins investigating the disturbing claims he makes against her

father. Could her dad really be at the helm of a firm that distorts the truth and covers up wrongdoing by hugely profitable corporations that have allowed innocent victims to die? Is it possible that her father is the bad guy, and that the undeniably alluring criminal who calls himself Moses—and his radical band of teen activists—is right? Alix has to make a choice, and time is running out, but can she truly risk everything and blow the whistle on the man who loves her and raised her?

★ “This openly didactic novel asks challenging questions about the immorality of the profit motive and capitalism, but does so within the context of a highly believable plot and well-developed, multifaceted characters. Fans of Cory Doctorow’s work should love this book.”

—Publishers Weekly, starred review

also by Paolo Bacigalupi

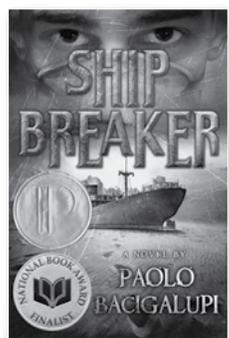


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- ★ “The novel’s greatest success lies in the creation of a world that is so real, the grit and decay of war and ruin will lay thick on the minds of readers long after the final page...” —*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review



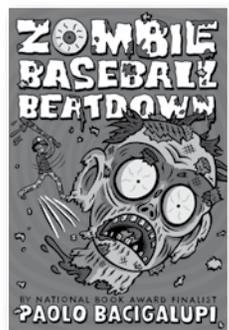
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- “Simultaneously smart, funny, and icky, this book asks a tough question: Is it worth looking the other way in order to save yourself?” —*Booklist*
- “A high-energy, high-humor look at the zombie apocalypse.” —*Kirkus Reviews*
- “Defies the expectations of the comedy-horror genre, turning this zombie novel into an effective bit of social commentary while staying true to the story’s grisly and goofy roots.” —*Publishers Weekly*
- “[A] fast-paced home run.” —*School Library Journal*

about the author



JT Thomas Photography

Paolo Bacigalupi is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the highly acclaimed *The Drowned Cities* and *Ship Breaker*, a Michael L. Printz Award winner, and a National Book Award finalist. He is also the author of a novel for young readers, *Zombie Baseball Beatdown*, and the adult novels *The Windup Girl* and *Pump Six and Other Stories*. He is a Hugo, Nebula, Locus, Compton Crook, John W. Campbell Memorial, and Theodore Sturgeon Memorial Award winner. He lives in western Colorado with his wife and son. Visit him online at windupstories.com.



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Bobbie Combs, *We Love Children's Books*.