



The Fourth Stall

SERIES DISCUSSION GUIDE

BOOK 1



The Fourth Stall

BY Chris Rylander

ABOUT THE BOOK

Do you need something? Mac and his best friend and business manager, Vince, can get it for you. Their methods might sometimes run afoul of the law—or at least the school code of conduct—but if you have a problem, if no one else can help, and if you can pay him, Mac is on your side. And business is booming, or at least it was until things turned ugly after providing protection for a needy third grader. Soon Mac and Vince realize that the trouble with solving everyone else's problems is that there's no one left to solve yours.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

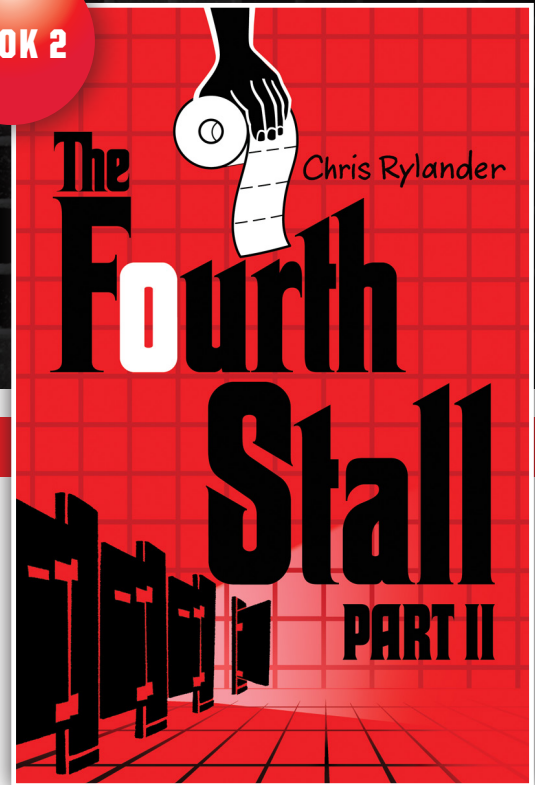
1. “We’ll make him an offer he can’t refuse,” says Mac. “Like I said, I always try to say that as often as possible. I love that movie. I think it’s called *The Godfather*, but it doesn’t have any pizza in it and it isn’t about some guy’s crazy godparents or anything, so don’t let the title mislead you” (p. 147). Compare the book jackets of *The Godfather* and *The Fourth Stall*. In what ways are they alike? Why?
2. Look for gangster expressions used by the characters in *The Fourth Stall*. For example, Mac says that Evan deserved to be “taken out” (p. 78). What does this mean? What does it mean to “make someone an offer they can’t refuse”?
3. How do expressions like the one in question two add to the humor of the book? And how have such expressions become part of our culture?
4. The serious business of Mac and his friends is also very funny at times. When? How?
5. Why does Mac make sure to tell the reader exactly what grade a kid is in at school? Why is this important?
6. Mac says, “In grade school there are bigger things than getting beat up” (p. 19). What do you think he’s talking about? Why?
7. In chapter eight, Mac tells “a little more about the bullies” so that the reader can understand what he was experiencing. Where does each bully’s name come from? How is this related to Mac’s observation that “in real life kids usually just call it how it is” (p. 82)?
8. How can Kitten be the top bully?
9. When you first meet Fred, how does he appear? By the end of the story, what do you know about Fred?
10. Why are the bullies so loyal to Mac? Why is loyalty (and betrayal) so important in the book?
11. Why do Mac and Vince, two best friends, connect over their love of the Chicago Cubs? How do the Cubs help Mac and Vince communicate with each other? Why?
12. How do Mac and Vince look after each other? In what ways does each make up for the other’s weaknesses?



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BOOK 2



ABOUT THE BOOK

In the second installment of *The Fourth Stall* series, things are looking up for Mac and Vince. Mac took down evil high school crimeboss Staples, business has been booming lately, and Mac and Vince are getting ready for middle school baseball tryouts. But the good life is about to change when the mysterious, dark-haired Trixie Von Parkway shows up in the fourth stall. As Mac digs deeper into the new science teacher's past to figure out why he won't get off Trixie's back, he finds trouble brewing at his school that could put more than just his business at risk.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

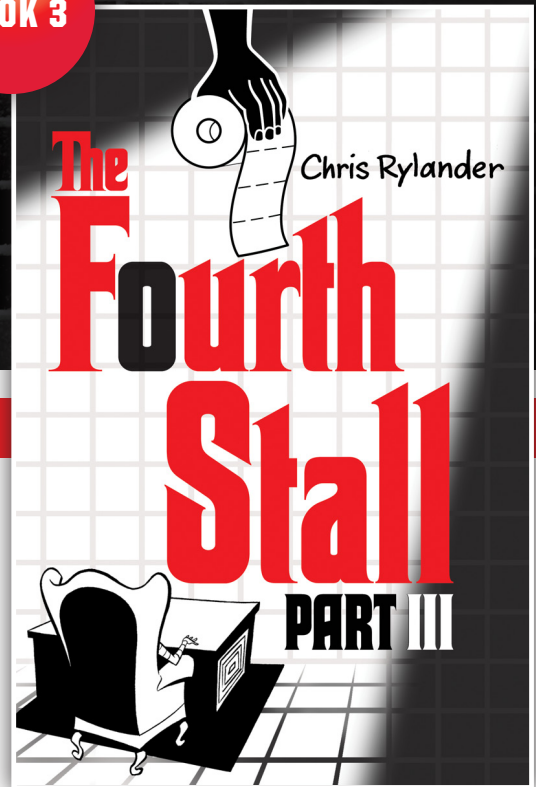
1. As you read, you'll notice that the book is divided into twenty-seven chapters and an epilogue. What two things do each of the chapter subheadings have in common? What do these subheadings suggest to you about the action of this second installment?
2. What are some of the weird things happening at school that have Mac wondering what is going on?
3. Mac says, "All of this business had me wondering what was up" (p. 51), and shortly after, "But I had a feeling something was up" (p. 52). Why is it so important for Mac to figure out "what's up?" What does he mean by this phrase?
4. Mac says of himself and his business, "I was just a simple businessman, not a troublemaker" (p. 67). What does he mean? Why does Dr. George then tell Mac, "We're not going to tolerate any funny business around here anymore" (p. 68)?
5. Think about what you remember about Kitten from *The Fourth Stall*. What are the contrasts in Kitten's character as he is drawn by the author in *Part II*?
6. Teachers and school administrators don't figure so well in *The Fourth Stall Part II*. What does Mac think of the teachers and school administrators in the story? What do they have to do with Mac's worries that "something was up" (p. 91)? What does Mac mean when he says, "Anything abnormal that teachers did usually was a good thing" (p. 153)?
7. What are the SMARTs and why are the kids so scared of them? How are they used?
8. Why has Trixie hidden her true identity from Mac? Why does she eventually tell him her real name?
9. What questions does Mac ask about lab-animal waste being found in kids' lockers? What does this have to do with the larger mystery Mac is trying to solve?
10. Why does Mac think Hannah is a liar?
11. What role does Dr. George play in the mystery? Why?
12. By the end of the story, Mac has a new respect for his school. Why? In what ways?



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BOOK 3



ABOUT THE BOOK

Mac's and Vince's lives have finally become simple again—no fortune or glory or risk of juvenile prison. Their business is finished, and there's even a new one that has taken its place. Life is finally good again. But that was before things at their middle school started to go haywire. Just when Mac and Vince thought they were out of the crime business, they get pulled back in. But this time, will they be able to escape with their lives and their permanent records intact?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is “simple” Mac’s new favorite word at the beginning of the book?
2. What menacing character from *The Fourth Stall* reappears at the beginning of the book? Where has he been and what is he like now? What does he want from Mac?
3. Who is Jimmy Two-Tone? Why is that his nickname? What does Jimmy Two-Tone have to do with Mac and Vince wanting to really “get out” of their business?
4. Why does Vince tell Mac that Jimmy Two-Tone “just made us an offer we can’t refuse” (p. 49)? Where have readers of *The Fourth Stall* series heard and read that expression before?
5. Mac reminds the reader, “Vince and I learned over the years from watching a lot of mobster movies like *The Godfather* that dirty money had to be laundered to conceal where it came from” (p. 53). What does he mean by this statement? What does it have to do with really “getting out?”
6. What happens when Staples talks about his sister? What conclusion can you draw about the way Mac describes this moment in his narration?
7. What does Mac mean when he asks Jimmy, “How deep are you in?” (p. 126)? What is Jimmy’s explanation for how this could have happened?
8. What does the reader learn about Ken-Co?
9. Who are the three new bullies we meet in Part III? Where do their names come from? What does it mean when Mac asks, “How would you all like to get paid to wreak some havoc?” (p. 190)? Why does he want them to do this and what will it accomplish?
10. What do you learn about Mac wanting to get out of the business? What are the differences between Mac’s business starting out and the business now?
11. Who reappears at the beginning of chapter twenty-nine when all looks lost? What does he do? What happens to him afterward? Why do you think this occurs?
12. Chapter thirty-seven ends with the following statement: “Two schools had been trashed. Thousands of dollars lost . . . But suddenly, for just a moment, everything seemed just as it should be” (p. 285). How is that possible? What happens?

