

# BOOK GROUP READING GUIDE

## 4 a.m. by Nina de la Mer

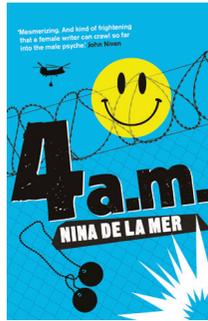
Set in the early 1990s on a British army base, *4 a.m.* tells the story of Cal and Manny, soldiers posted to Germany as army chefs. Bored and institutionalized, the pair soon succumb to the neon temptations of Hamburg's red-light district, where they dive into a seedy world of recreational drugs and all-night raves. But it is only a matter of time before hedonism and military discipline clash head on, with comic and poignant consequences.

Life-affirming raving soon gives way to gloomy, drug-fuelled nights in fast-food restaurants, at sex shows, and in Turkish dive bars. As a succession of events ratchets up the pressure on Cal and Manny their friendship is tested, a secret is revealed, and a shocking betrayal changes their lives forever.

Drawing on personal experience and extensive research, *4 a.m.* depicts life in a peacetime Army, and a civilian milieu in which conflict is never far away. Driven by two distinctive voices, and written in a lively and buzzing style, Nina de la Mer's debut novel holds a mirror up to youth culture at the end of the twentieth century. The reflection is not always a flattering one.

For more information on Nina de la Mer, and for other books published by Myriad Editions, please visit [www.MyriadEditions.com](http://www.MyriadEditions.com)

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1. Of the two narrators, Cal and Manny, did you have a favourite? If so, why?
2. What surprised you about the presentation of drug-taking in the novel?
3. Is the novel nostalgic?
4. Is Iain a stereotypical villain? Does he have any redeeming qualities?
5. Did he remind you of other 'bad' characters in fiction?
6. What insights does the novel give you into army life? How true to life do you think the depiction is?
7. Does the book seem critical of the army?
8. What role do women play in the novel?
9. How much have Cal and Manny's backgrounds influenced their current situation?
10. Does the novel provide any commentary on the society in which they've been brought up?
11. What elements of the story are universal – could you identify with Cal and Manny's situations at all?
12. Does Cal learn any lessons from his experiences in the novel?
13. What does the book seem to say about nature versus nurture?
14. What does the book say about male friendships?
15. Were you shocked by what happens to Manny?
16. Who is ultimately responsible for Manny's downfall?
17. Were you satisfied by the ending of the novel?
18. What do you think Cal's future holds for him?
19. Has the novel changed your view of drug-taking and/or drinking?
20. Do you think your reading of the novel was affected by knowing that the author was a woman?