



# The Visible Man

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## **The Visible Man** Chuck Klosterman

*New York Times* bestselling author of *Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs* and *Downtown Owl*, “the Ethicist” of the *New York Times Magazine*, Chuck Klosterman returns to fiction with his second novel—an imaginative page-turner about a therapist and her unusual patient, a man who can render himself invisible.

Therapist Victoria Vick is contacted by a cryptic, unlikable man who insists his situation is unique and unfathomable. As he slowly reveals himself, Vick becomes convinced that he suffers from a complex set of delusions: Y\_\_\_, as she refers to him, claims to be a scientist who has stolen cloaking technology from an aborted government project in order to render himself nearly invisible. He says he uses this ability to observe random individuals within their daily lives, usually when they are alone and vulnerable. Unsure of his motives or honesty, Vick becomes obsessed with her patient and the disclosure of his increasingly bizarre and disturbing tales. Over time, it threatens her career, her marriage, and her own identity.

Interspersed with notes, correspondence, and transcriptions that catalog a relationship based on curiosity and fear, *The Visible Man* touches on all of Chuck Klosterman’s favorite themes—the consequence of culture, the influence of media, the complexity of voyeurism, and the existential contradiction of normalcy. Is this comedy, criticism, or horror? Not even Y\_\_\_ seems to know for sure.

## **The Visible Man Details**

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# From Reader Review The Visible Man for online ebook

## Scott Rhee says

I have thoroughly enjoyed Chuck Klosterman's cleverly-written and intellectual articles and essays about Pop Culture that he has written for publications as varied as GQ, Esquire, and The Washington Post on topics as varied as movies, sports, religion, politics, 80s glam metal, and breakfast cereal (usually in that precise order of ascending importance), but I was unsure whether he had the wherewithal to attempt a full-length novel. He does. It is evident in his second novel, "The Visible Man", a thought-provoking, creepy sci-fi/horror/black comedy about a man who has a cloaking device. What is it about the thought of an invisible man that terrifies us? Is it simply the thought of an unseen presence standing in the corner of your room, or the thought that someone could be watching you during the moments in which you are most yourself and vulnerable? Klosterman's re-imagining of H.G. Wells's classic novel "The Invisible Man" is a post-modern parable about voyeurism, exhibitionism, the notion of self, and our fascination (and oftentimes dismissal) of the unseen and the hidden.

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## Vonia says

Oh, Klosterman. You are one of the few writers today who can be educational, funny, endearing, intelligent, and sentimental. And all at the same time. I have read his nonfictional pieces on pop culture, of course. And this novel is approached with the same wit, candor, and humor that has become his style.

The novel is set in Austin, Texas, with a few nice references, albeit not entirely accurate in the details, including The Texas State Capitol, Lavaca Street, BookPeople, Waterloo Records, etc.

None of the characters are especially likable. Somehow, though, the reader inadvertently finds themselves with a certain affinity for Victoria (Vicky Vicks), the unnervingly inadequate "Psychologist", her distant less-than-great husband, and, of course, "Y\_\_\_\_\_", the man with an "invisible" cloaking solution (that he insists does not make him "invisible", as people see what they expect to see, but someone really trying to locate him would be able to).

The premise is ingenious to begin with. I am not sure how accurate all the scientific references are, but "Y\_\_\_\_\_" is able to make himself, for all points and purposes, invisible to the world. How does he utilize this power? He spies on individuals he chooses at random, following them into their homes, watching, observing, noting their everyday actions, taking narcotics in order to stay awake. It is his strongly defended stance that what he is doing is not only alright, but most noble. He is observing individuals to better understand people, as we are only truly ourselves when we believe ourselves to be completely alone. He tells Vicky that he is seeing her to better understand his guilt; his guilt, he is clear to indicate, that he knows for a fact he should not be feeling, as he is doing absolutely nothing wrong.

The novel is told from Vicky's point of view, with her trying to sell this story of "Y\_\_\_\_\_" to a publisher. Most of the text is in the form of edited transcripts of her sessions with "Y\_\_\_\_\_", as he tells her various stories of people he has observed.

Needless to say, Vicky & "Y\_\_\_\_\_" develop a very unprofessional relationship... which can only end badly. In the end, "Y\_\_\_\_\_"'s motives for... well, pretty much everything are still a little unclear. Vicky's action are

also far from understandable. But, it is the journey that counts. And Klosterman made it an intriguing, exciting, hilarious, and fun one.

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### **Melissa says**

Oh my. I loved this book. Most of this has to do with the fact that Klosterman's writing strikes such a chord of perfection in my soul. I love his writing.

"He would see the raw ingredients for whatever recipe you use to create the public version of yourself."

"I saw this serious forty-something woman there, all by herself on a Friday afternoon. She didn't look like she was thanking God for anything."

"This is why Facebook caught on with adults: It's designed for people who want to publicize their children without our consent."

It's writing like this that makes my life worth living.

I knew nothing about this book going into it, and I think that's what made it so compelling and awesome. The idea is brilliant, the execution is spectacular. It reminds me of the 1993 movie *When A Stranger Calls Back* - an awful movie in many ways, but no one will ever convince me that the very beginning and the very end are not really scary. The premise of the movie reminds me of this book, but the book itself isn't scary. It's no horror movie, it's just unsettling. Eerie. Read this and see if you become hyper-aware of the unconscious things you do when you're alone - but I've already said too much!

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### **Derek says**

It's rarer now that I finish a book in what amounts to one sitting than it was when I was a kid, so when a book captures my attention so completely that I put aside all distractions to finish it, I know there's something unique about its style and substance. Chuck Klosterman is one of those writers whose work captivates me directly and significantly, and his latest novel is no different. *The Visible Man* is a psychologically-oriented science-fiction story, but it's as much about giving Klosterman a vehicle for his philosophical meanderings as it is about having a plot driving the action. His wanderings are more than interesting enough to sustain my attention, and he has provided a structure that allows him to transverse diverse territory and digress often from the plot, which could itself be summarized in a short paragraph. To accomplish his ends, he focuses simultaneously on two narrators, the therapist Victoria Vick (the protagonist) and the subject of her writing, the enigmatic Y\_\_\_\_\_, a man who has invented a suit that renders him non-visible to humans and whose story Vick is recalling to the publisher. In some ways, the construct is more ingenious than the content (which is not to diminish the content), as it allows Klosterman to indulge the kind of parenthetical tangents and bombastic blatherskyte that makes his writing so entertaining. *The Visible Man* is an interesting idea executed well, though it may be inaccessible to anyone who finds Klosterman's brand of post-modern meta-media analysis aggravating, incomprehensible, or otherwise emotionally draining. It's the kind of book, like any of Klosterman's, that I feel I could re-read every six months and have it still feel fresh.

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### **Todd Drager says**

I wanted to like this book. I've enjoyed other work by Klosterman and enjoy his perspective, but ultimately this novel just felt cluttered and unfinished. It felt a little like coffee house filler, a cluster of topics that are

interesting to discuss but ultimately don't make for a very good composed narrative. The book is told from the perspective of Victoria Vick, a therapist. The book in itself is supposedly her package of information she put together for her publicist in order to turn her adventure with the invisible man into a novel. So the work isn't supposed to be complete. This is how Klosterman attempts to avoid many basic storytelling techniques, by simply having this novel be the work before the actual novel. It makes me wonder if there will ever actually be a real novel written, and maybe it would be a more enjoyable read. That said, the book does make for an entertaining read and warrants some thought after reading certain segments. The book is told through a series of recorded therapy session recordings, notes, and ramblings from her patient, the invisible man. I didn't really have an attachment to any of the characters, but certain ideas discussed throughout are entertaining at face value. It's worth a look, but not if you value a structural storyline arch.

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## Eric says

Klosterman is a weirdo.....I enjoy weirdos....

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## Jason Pettus says

(Reprinted from the Chicago Center for Literature and Photography [cclapcenter.com]. I am the original author of this essay, as well as the owner of CCLaP; it is not being reprinted illegally.)

So yes, after reading the abysmal *Downtown Owl* a few years ago, I infamously declared here that I would never read a Chuck Klosterman book again; and indeed, I would've never read this latest of his, *The Visible Man*, if it had not randomly shown up on the "New Releases" shelf of my neighborhood library on an exact day when I was perusing it. But now that I have, I'm sure glad I did, because the book is something I thought Klosterman incapable of; this is Klosterman quite convincingly reinventing himself, shedding his Postmodernist, Gen-X skin precisely by writing a book that stabs that skin to death, sets the corpse on fire, then sh-ts all over the ashes. And to explain that better, I need to go into a little literary theory of mine, which I've gone over here before but will do again, because I find it naturally interesting; and before I start, let me acknowledge that it's an unproven theory that a lot of people don't agree with...

The basic crux is that I and a lot of others believe that Postmodernism officially died on September 11th; and by "officially" I mean "symbolically," because as with any cultural movement, Postmodernism actually changed only gradually over a period of a few decades, with us as humans making order out of the chaos by arbitrarily picking important dates in those periods to serve as beginnings and endings of such eras. And just like how the last couple of decades of Modernism, the 1950s and '60s which you can also call "Late Modernism," can be further broken up into "Beat" writers, "Pop" painters, "New Wave" filmmakers and more, so too can the last few decades of Postmodernism (or "Late Postmodernism," the 1980s and '90s) also be broken into subdivisions like "Generation X" writers, "Brat Pack" actors, "grunge" musicians, "Deconstructionist" architects, etc. These are the unfortunates of any given era, because the tropes of that era are so well-known by then, the last artists of that movement can only achieve fame through cartoonish exaggerations of them; and although many of them push through to become the groundbreakers of the next era, that group of creatives in general tends to get blamed for driving that era into the ground for good, and for necessitating the cultural shift to the new era in the first place.

And so that means these artists must basically all reinvent themselves in the middle of their careers, or

become passé faster than a three-year-old rerun of *American Idol*. And so some Postmodernists like Douglas Coupland and Bret Easton Ellis successfully did so, becoming relevant to a whole new generation by trying to strip all the cool irony and empty pop-culture references of Late Postmodernism from their work, by embracing genre conventions sometimes and wallowing in earnestness others; and then some people like Augusten Burroughs or James Frey simply didn't, and their quasi-true, quasi-BS smartypants '70s-laced gimmicky shtick started getting *real* old *real* fast the moment the World Trade Center was destroyed. And this new era too can be given a name, which some call The New Sincerity and some Post-Irony and some simply Post-9/11 Literature or the 21st Century Arts; it's really up to history to determine which terms like these stick, and especially right now when things are so new that no one's in agreement about any of it yet.

And so for a long time did I think Klosterman was going to fall into this latter camp, of essentially gimmicky hacks who were never able to transcend the gimmicks that gave them successes right at the end of the Postmodernist period, much like all those trendily popular "Genteel" writers of the early 20th century, huge in their own time but now nearly forgotten because of the ascendancy of Early Modernism in those same years; and especially after the bitter failure of his full-length fiction debut, *Downtown Owl*, which had been hyped as his opportunity to break out of the endless clever-but-empty essays about heavy metal and breakfast cereal and celebrity interviews that his entire nonfiction career had so far been based on, but which turned out to be more like a 200-page Chuck Klosterman article but even more quirky and precious than his journalism work, if such a thing is possible. But with *The Visible Man*, Klosterman has done something very smart indeed, and what a lot of Postmodernists have ended up doing as a transition into Sincerism (see for example Eric Bogosian's *Perforated Heart*, which has the same device at its core), which is to announce the death of Postmodernism but through a highly original, highly symbolic metaphor, a sideways look at the subject but which ultimately says more about them as '80s and '90s artists than the subject matter might indicate at first.

So in this case, Klosterman wrote a literal psychological horror tale, with a premise that feels very much like it could've been an early David Cronenberg film; basically, an Asberger's-suffering sociopathic genius manages with military resources to invent a suit/gel combination that effectively turns a person invisible (or that is, the cutting-edge micro-lenses contained in the gel that's smeared over the suit has the almost magical ability to bounce back all light to a viewer as the images directly behind the suit itself), then becomes obsessed with silently observing people in their homes for days on end, to back up his nihilistic thoughts about the worst of human behavior, pumping himself full of amphetamines to stay awake and suppress his appetite, slowly turning himself crazier and crazier with each successive experience. And so part of the book is written as a series of direct monologues from this literal mad scientist, polished things that feel the most Klostermanian and I assume were the first parts the author wrote; but then perhaps realizing that he needed something more to hold it all together, part of this is written from the standpoint of the psychologist who our unnamed narrator Y. starts seeing, a highly confrontational relationship where the doctor is able to parlay all the critical things about Y.'s character that Y. himself would never be able to acknowledge through first-person monologues. And that's smart of Klosterman to do, and shows a legitimately profound jump in maturation for him as a writer; because the Klosterman of *Fargo Rock City* would've been happy with just the polished monologues themselves, and *The Visible Man* would've again been a clever but ultimately empty book like all his others, and we wouldn't have had a chance to explore this fascinating character in a much more complex way, or for Klosterman to be able to make some really critical comments about Y. himself, for example just how troublingly polished these monologues of his precisely seem, as if the patient had pre-written these glib anecdotes and then memorized them all for the benefit of the doctor during their sessions.

And that gets into what I was talking about before; that on top of this being a literal simple genre tale, it's also easy to argue that on a deeper level, this is an autobiographical novel as well, Klosterman angrily

rejecting the over-analytical pop-culture-obsessed celebrity-interviewing cartoon character he had become by the early 2000s, literally by turning that persona into a borderline-psychotic villain. And the reason it's easy to argue this is that Klosterman himself throws all kinds of little clues into the mix that point in this direction; for example, there's the fact that so many of these monologues sound like Klosterman essays in the first place, or the moment that Y. directly compares what he does to the job of the average celebrity interviewer, the aspect that lazy journalists have most picked up on this fall when talking about the book. But there's also a whole series of smaller digs that he gets in, such as when the doctor asks why Y. doesn't just write a book about his experiences instead of relaying them vicariously through combative therapy sessions, and he responds that "everyone seems to hate it when I try writing down my stories," and that he doesn't know what gets lost in the writing process that remains when he's simply talking about it to someone else.

Make no mistake -- *The Visible Man*'s narrator is deliberately designed to be unsympathetic to the point of sometimes being despicable, with the Victorian-style story-framing very early on hinting at a grand tragedy to end it all; and whenever our psychologist hero (not coincidentally the most earnest, sincere character to ever appear in a Chuck Klosterman book) complains about Y's overuse of empty pop-culture references, his haughty intelligence combined with manic bouts of self-loathing, his habit of stilted, one-sided "conversations," and his mocking intolerance for anyone who doesn't agree with his grandiose theorizing, I think it's very safe to assume that Klosterman is not only talking about the worst parts of himself at the same time, but just in general about the aspects of Late Postmodernism that had most turned it into an eye-rolling parody of itself right at the popular height of Klosterman's early career.

Like I said, after *Downtown Owl* I had thought Klosterman incapable of career-redefining insights like these; so I'm glad to see that I was wrong, and now officially again look forward to his next books down the pike. Although definitely still with its problems, which is why it isn't getting a higher score today, *A Visible Man* has a lot to teach us about the ways our entire culture is changing here early in the Obamian Age, and it comes strongly recommended to one and all.

Out of 10: **9.1**

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### **Elizabeth says**

Unique. Disturbing. Funny. This book scared more than I think was intended. I loved the formatting-a rough draft to a book of psychological non-fiction with notes from the author, Vicky. The characters were thoroughly messed up and unlikable but have that special charm of being f\*\*\*ing interesting! I will definitely have to pick up more of Chuck Klosterman's work. (Oh, one of my favorite aspects of Klosterman's writing is how he effortlessly mixes in pop culture without coming off sardonic or awkward. Gotta love the pop culture!)

The ONLY reason this isn't a solid five star review is that the ending fell a little flat. Don't get me wrong, it was still enjoyable, but I was hoping for a bigger explosion\*.

\*There are no explosions in this book.

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### **Kelly says**

**The Problem With External Internalized Misogyny:** About halfway through *The Visible Man*, one of the characters says, "If an author wants to make a fictional character seem sympathetic, the easiest way to make that happen is to place them in a humiliating scenario." At this point in the book, I was already thoroughly skeeved by the portrayal of Vicky (the female protagonist) so maybe I was primed to find this line meta-gross, but ... yeah. Vicky spends a lot of time in humiliating scenarios. The events of the narrative are frequently humiliating, and if she missed it the first time around, the narrative device (more on that in a second) requires her to reflect on these events and mine them for further embarrassment.

Vicky is weak and professionally flawed and has serious issues. I'm not saying that writing about a female character who has terrible judgement and is bad at her job is inherently misogynistic. But, writing the book in the female character's first person voice, and having part of your narrative device be that her first person voice is directed at a fictional intended audience (basically: it's not just a book that happens to be written in the first-person, it's a book about a person writing a book in the first person, so it's like the fictional character is aware that she's in a book) -- when the point-of-view is that tight, and Vicky is TELLING you that she's weak and flawed and has poor judgement and is bad at her job, that feels creepy to me. It was off-putting from when I first started reading the book. Part of the problem is that I bought this book *because* I generally love Chuck Klosterman, so there is no way for me to not be hyper-aware that this character was written by a dude, a dude who once wrote a book that was supposed to be about the sites of famous rock star deaths that turned into a memoir about women who had rejected him.

It's awkward -- it's sort of like when people complain that movies like *Juno* send a pro-life message and it's like, "Yeah, but the movie is about the adoption, so if she had an abortion, there'd be no movie." The story Chuck Klosterman wants to tell requires Vicky to be the kind of therapist who will get inappropriately, overly attached to one of her clients, without those characteristics there'd be no story. But I guess I didn't enjoy spending so much time trapped in the head of a fictional character who is so aware that she's been created to fail.

**Nitpicking the Narrative Device:** Chuck Klosterman read an excerpt from this book at the Boston Book Festival, and his rambling, manic attempts to frame, disclaim and explain the excerpt he was about to read took about as long as the amount of time he spend reading from the actual text. Which perhaps should have been indicative of the problems Klosterman had framing his narrative. It seems like he wanted to write a book where two unreliable narrators just monologued at each other for two hundred pages, but he couldn't do that, so he frames it with an epistolary device, THREE different kinds of textual annotations, with a tape-recorded conversations device, etc. etc. etc. This feels like a lot of window dressing for what is actually a pretty short story (closer to a novella than a novel), and the fact that Klosterman has more experience writing essays than long-form narrative shows.

(And this is disappointing, because one of the reasons why I was excited about *The Visible Man* is that when I finally read *Downtown Owl* it was so, so, so much better than I expected and I really incredibly loved it. But *Downtown Owl* switched between three different main narrators and had a handful of guest narrator chapters, so it was much more like a series of coincidentally interconnected short stories than anything else.)

As a particularly nitpicked aside: one of the textual annotations involves comments made by Vicky (directed at her book editor) [*bracketed and set in italics*]. Something about the bracketed text drove me crazy. It was probably my least favorite thing about the entire book. Bracketed italicized text reads to me like something that's been formatted that way on the internet because it's the only way to differentiate thoughts while using a shitty blog platform. This is a book. A book with incredibly generous margins and line spacing to help inch it up to that 250-page mark. He really could have just put those asides in italics and gotten his point across.



**Chuck Klosterman: He Proof-Read My Novel:** Despite having seen him speak on several book tours, and following his professional writing pretty closely, I have no idea why Chuck Klosterman decided he wanted to start writing novels. I wonder if part of the appeal is the ability to present pop cultural insight in a different medium. Chuck Klosterman really cannot ever write another essay about reality television. Starting with the Real World essay in *Sex Drugs and Cocoa Puffs*, he's pretty much covered everything there is to say. But he can write about a fictional character who has an opinion about reality television (and Y\_\_\_\_'s opinions on the different levels of realness in reality television were straight out of that Real World essay, and the idea that the San Francisco season was a war between Puck and Pedro to define the concept of reality as we know it).

This isn't a bad thing, even. Some of my favorite parts of *Downtown Owl* were the pop culture time capsule character nicknames, and their opinions on movies and music. It reminds me a little of my relationship with Kevin Smith movies: I loved Kevin Smith's early movies when I was high school, but loved them significantly less in retrospect the older I got. There are a bunch of different reasons why those movies didn't age very well that are not unique to my experience, but one reason they didn't age well for me was that when I was in high school, I wanted to have friends who had conversations like Kevin Smith movies, and once I was an adult I had conversations like that and watching people have those conversations in movies became less interesting. So Chuck Klosterman spends a good part of his career writing essays analyzing pop cultural ephemera, and in some way he contributes to a reality where people actually sit around and discuss things like metaphysics and "Saved By the Bell." Why wouldn't he want to dive into a fictional world where everyone talks like they've read *Sex, Drugs and Cocoa Puffs*? At this point, it doesn't even come across as unrealistic.

But ... I'm not sure Chuck Klosterman actually knows that much about writing fiction.

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## christa says

It's obvious where Chuck Klosterman came up with the premise for his to-be released novel "The Visible Man." Old Red Beard's 2009 book of essays "Eating the Dinosaur" includes a chapter about watching through the window a twentysomething woman who lived in an efficiency apartment similar to his own in Fargo. Making dinner, working out on a NordicTrack, cooking an elaborate dinner, then fighting with her boyfriend.

Did she watch him, too? He suspects she did. Maybe even watched him barf one night. Or maybe that was a dream.

"For two years I watched a revolving door of nonevents that never stopped intriguing me," he wrote.

Thus the invention of the character with the alias Y\_\_. Victoria Vick is a therapist who has begun sessions with Y\_\_, who reveals that he was involved with a government project that resulted in the creation of a series of sprays and creams that make it possible through light refraction to travel through the world unseen. He's not invisible, per se. He's just deeply camouflaged.

He takes advantage of this invention -- a project that was abandoned by his fellow creators and forgotten by the government -- to slip into people's homes and observe them. He is fueled by the belief that you can never really know someone unless you see them when they are alone. That their public self is merely an adaptation that shifts depending upon who they are with.

Y\_\_ doesn't necessarily want a therapist. He wants to unburden himself of a secret. The nights spent silently watching a woman go for a run, come home and go nuts on a bong, binge and run some more. Eventually he feels he has to intervene. He believes that if he throws off this cycle, she will find some relief from her addictions.

Then Victoria becomes a little too interested in Y\_\_ and his unique lot.

The novel is played as a series of meetings with Y\_\_ that have been compiled for publication. It includes summations of sessions and emails that she wrote to herself afterward, the standard note-taking of professionals who have to record inane details about your life so that the next time you get a cavity filled you can resume a conversation about pets and vacations.

"The Visible Man" suits Klosterman's strengths as a writer, debater, and pop culture expert in a way that his debut novel "Downtown Owl" did not. His forte is the hypothetical scenario that includes a wild card element -- then giving it fan fiction treatment. With "Downtown Owl," the wild card was merely a looming storm. The end result was Klosterman squeezing himself into some sort of mold of what a novel should look, feel and sound like. It was better than okay, but it felt like Klosterman wearing Jon Hassler face paint.

Chuck Klosterman has a very distinct and powerful voice. Like, if you spent too long with him or read his entire canon, you would be in danger of catching it. This is a pro when it comes to his essays; a detriment to his work as a novelist. The three main characters in "Downtown Owl" sounded like incarnations of the same person, all saddled with the burden of a Klostermanian accent. Almost all of "The Visible Man" is the in the words of Y\_\_. So when he leans Klostermanian, it works because he isn't pitted against another version of himself. (Adversely, with the character Victoria Vick, Klosterman seems to have over-corrected and written a woman who is pretty dim and seems like an unlikely candidate for a career in therapy).

Klosterman still makes a better essayist than a fiction writer, but with "The Visible Man" he gets pretty damn close. This is a super fun read that leaves you watching yourself a little more closely in those alone moments, wondering "What would Y\_\_ see?"

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## **Shane says**

An intriguing premise of an invisible man who seeks out the help of a therapist as a witness to his lonely life, rich only with its naked observations of others, similar to a writer's life in a sense.

Told in a series of e-mails, recorded phone conversations, letters to her publisher, and transcripts of their therapy sessions, the therapist, Victoria, constructs the bizarre case of her patient known only as Y\_\_. While this narrative device is inventive and probes deep into the patient's character, it takes until page 83 to set up the premise and prove it. In today's hurried world of "give me the plot on the first page," I wonder how much more interesting this novel would have been if we had opened with, "Y\_\_ donned his camouflage suit, applied the special cream that would render him invisible to the eye, and stepped out into the night..."

Y\_\_ is not a nice person. He spends his "invisible time" invading the homes of ordinary citizens and spying on their activities. Like a writer who has intimate knowledge of his characters, he observes his "subjects" at their most vulnerable moments, especially when they are alone, to form and replay his judgements on society to his shrink. And the scary thing is that all of his subjects seem to be living empty lives themselves: the

jogger, Valerie, who binge-exercises and binge-eats to keep her external and internal lives in balance; the philosophic band of musicians that discuss heavy subjects, eat mushrooms and drink schooners of beer; the young man, Bruce, who takes days to compose an e-mail to a girlfriend, watches endless You Tube videos, reads reviews on Goodreads, posts comments on political blogs and 'likes' on Facebook, watches entire series on Netflix, posts reviews on Amazon, and masturbates routinely and unemotionally—"like taking out the trash," comments Y\_\_\_\_.

Occasionally Y\_\_\_\_ runs into a problem, or into one of his subjects, like the time when one guy being "observed" goes crazy and starts shooting up his apartment, yelling, "Come on out, I know you're there!" Therefore Y\_\_\_\_ is extra vigilant even when crossing the road in traffic, even at a cross walk!

Things get more complicated when Y\_\_\_\_ steps out of his incognito role and tries to help his subjects—people die! This further fuels his isolation from his fellow man, even when he has the most intimate grandstand view into their lives.

The therapy sessions take a turn for the worse when a romantic attraction develops between therapist and patient. We are also told at this point that Victoria is having some marital troubles with her much older and highly opinionated black husband, John. Therapist and patient begin to meet outside the consulting room, emotions are let loose, and the sparks fly, with some unpleasant consequences for everyone.

Y\_\_\_\_'s invisible peregrinations raise some interesting questions:

- a) Are we all Valeries and Bruces in one way or another?
- b) Do we have an innate curiosity to spy on our fellow beings?
- c) If granted the power of invisibility, would we take advantage of it?
- d) Are Social Media and the Selfie already benign manifestations of this Peeping-Tom curiosity?
- e) Does the gap that exists between who we are and who we want to be the cause of human dissatisfaction and the resulting "life unlived?"
- f) Does this statement hold true: "Society works best when everyone plays within their allotted box. Step out of it and chaos ensues"?

A thought-provoking read, topical for these times.

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## **Alec says**

As a kid, I feel like it was protocol to have a stock answer chambered just in case someone (possibly a genie with Robin Williams' voice) asked you what your three wishes would be. Setting aside the inane "I'd wish for a million wishes!" response that always generated playground controversy, I vividly recall my official list of three wishes. It went as follows:

1. The ability to fly
2. The ability to turn invisible on command
3. The ability to eat leaves (and be nourished by them, I guess?)

In retrospect, the third wish is an embarrassing waste, but apparently the act of sitting unseen high in a tree while munching on scrumptious Oak leaves (full flavor in autumn) had huge appeal to young Alec. Weird. (Side note: even invisibility is a bit odd to me, since this would have been well before the "I'd sneak into the

ladies locker room!" aspect would hold much, if any, appeal.)

Anyway, I bring this up because *The Visible Man* by Chuck Klosterman is about a man who is able to, for all intents and purposes, become invisible to the naked eye. He is identified only as Y\_\_\_\_\_ (names changed to protect the innocent and whatnot) and the narrative is written from the point of view of his therapist, Vicky. The book is basically a thought experiment (in classic Klosterman fashion) of what would happen if a certain kind of person was capable of going unseen and undetected by those around him.

I absolutely loved the premise, which should be no surprise given the above wish list. The idea of being "invisible" has obviously been around for quite some time in literature, but in this manifestation, all (well, almost all) predatory or sexual avenues are ignored and the situation is approached from a strictly voyeuristic and pseudo-scientific angle. I suppose this is, in a way, what reminded me of my childhood wishes -- might I have wanted the same things as Y\_\_\_\_\_? Actually no, I think I just wanted to eat leaves in peace. Duh.

The subject matter also fit Klosterman's writing strengths perfectly. I have always been impressed (in both his writing and his work on the Simmons podcast) with his powers of objective observation as it pertains to the people around him, and when speaking as a man whose freedom to observe is limitless (Y\_\_\_\_\_ 's dialogue is clearly written in Klosterman's voice), his observations are insightful and incredibly entertaining. I laughed out loud many times in the book at both the language and the absurdity of the situation. If anyone reads it, the "Heavy Dudes" section was especially fun.

The actual story-arc was much less interesting to me, and the only thing preventing *The Visible Man* from a 5-star rating. The "only" in that sentence seems very much out of place, but if you read the book, the story really does seem secondary. The characters (other than Y\_\_\_\_\_) did not interest me and I didn't find much of the action to be surprising; it didn't matter. It's almost like some publisher said, "Listen, Chuck, essays don't sell. Write a novel." So he wrote a novel that very much resembles a collection of essays squeezed into a narrative...but in, like, the best way possible. For any Klosterman fans out there, this is a must-read.

(Note: I'm embarrassed by the length of time since my last review. I blame television. Seriously. There are way too many good shows on right now...and I might or might not be referring to the fact that *How I Met Your Mother* is syndicated.)

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## **Bill says**

Man, I really want to give this book five stars. I really do. Even as I write this, I'm trying to figure out exactly what it was about the book that is keeping me from throwing that last star up there. Those descriptions, however, have got me hung up because, in fact, it did really like it, but I can't in good faith say that I loved it.

Let's start with the good.

- 1) It's Chuck Klosterman. I've read all his books, nonfiction and fiction alike. I pretty much love his writing.
- 2) He has finally branched out. My main knock on *Downtown Owl* was that I couldn't shake the feeling that he was essentially creating a fictional story in his own adolescence. This book, however, is a fantastic turn from that precedent.
- 3) The story grabs you from an early point, and really does hold you.

There are certainly more high points, but at the fear of giving away spoilers, I will keep it quiet.

The only thing I'm not completely sold on is the ending. It just seemed like Klosterman knew he'd reached a logical point of conclusion and said "okay, I'm done." It's not that the story doesn't resolve, I just wasn't satisfied with the resolution. It could be my own personal hangup, it could be that I'm critical of Klosterman because I believe he really is an incredibly talented writer. Whatever the reason, I just wanted a little more out of the last ten to twenty pages. And despite being really into the first 210 pages, I can't help but knock this review down to four stars.

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### **Cathy says**

This novel concerns a therapist, Victoria Vick, who becomes overly involved with an unusual patient, Y\_\_\_\_, someone who has developed a suit that makes him essentially invisible to others. He spends his time following people into their homes and observing them while they are alone. These observations progress from simple surveillance to intervening in their lives leading to dire consequences.

Told through Y\_\_\_\_'s narrative along with the therapist's notes, correspondence and transcriptions which document the course of therapy and the cataclysmic end.

An entertaining sometimes disturbing read I give it four stars.

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### **RandomAnthony says**

Chuck Klosterman's *Visible Man* sneaked up on me. When was this novel released? I read everything Klosterman writes but, honestly, this is probably his weakest work yet. I don't think *Visible Man* suffers from lack of effort. But Klosterman trying to be a "real" novelist, if you will, is Klosterman trying not to be Klosterman. And Klosterman can't help but be Klosterman.

What do I mean? The book's narrator is a female psychologist but, at best, the character sounds like Chuck Klosterman in drag. I don't want to visualize the author in drag, thank you very much. And the visible man (who seems invisible but isn't, really, long story) sounds like an angry, crazier Klosterman. Both characters engage in the rapid-fire, brain-twisting cultural analysis inherent in the author's catalog, usually in the form of first person essays. I very much admire Klosterman's cultural analysis, don't get me wrong, but I can't pretend the novel's premise (a man in a special suit becomes obsessed with observing people when they're alone, then tells his psychologist all about his observations) is anything but a thinly veiled vehicle for Klostermanesque commentary. The novel has its moments, and appears to pay tribute in PK Dick (both in name and style) but falls way short of PKD territory. I wouldn't start new Klosterman readers on *Visible Man*. I'd recommend, warily, the book to fans, with a "if you want to be a completist, check it out" message. I didn't hate *Visible Man*. But I was kind of waiting, honestly, for the book to end.

Sidebar: this is the first book I've ever read that cites goodreads by name. I wish I had copied the reference before I returned the novel to the library, but I remember the passage's gist. When describing a character, the visible man says (near quote), "he doesn't read many books but devotes a lot of time to a site called goodreads.com." This makes perfect sense. If you would asked, a year ago, "Which author on your goodreads list is most likely to mention goodreads by name?" Klosterman would be a no-brainer response. That's a blessing, because he's good at what he does, but it's a curse, I'm afraid, because he hasn't proved he

can do anything else. I get the author probably want to branch out, but *The Visible Man* doesn't work, kind of like when Bruce Willis tried to sing or models try to act. You know what I mean.

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