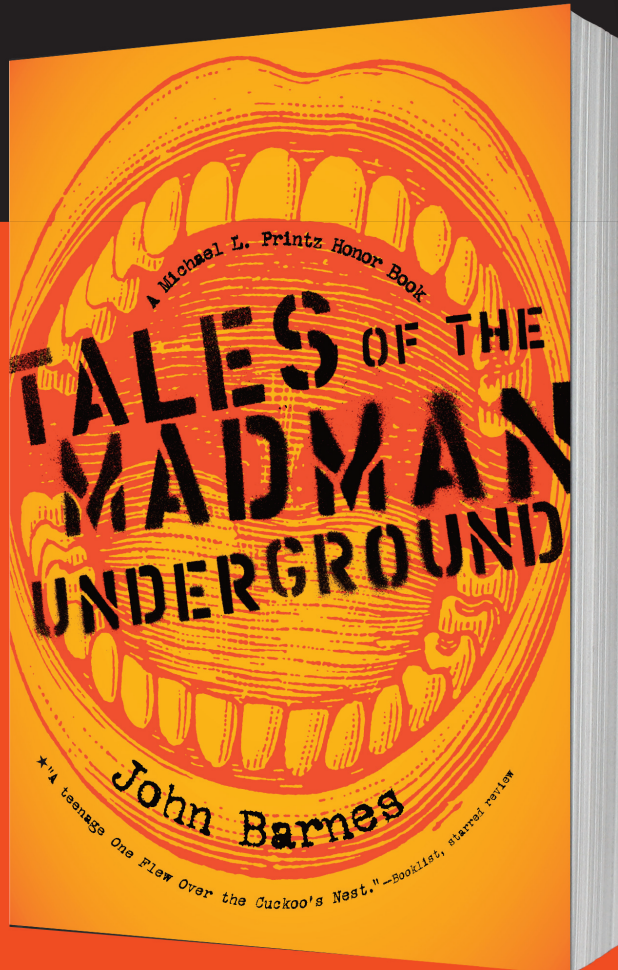


TALES OF THE MADMAN UNDERGROUND

978-0-14-241702-7 (PB) • \$9.99

Ages 14 up



Wednesday, September 5, 1973: The first day of Karl Shoemaker's senior year in stifling Lightsburg, Ohio. Karl's goals for the year are simple: graduate and join the army, try to lose his virginity, and to be Normal. And being Normal means leaving the Madman Underground, a group of students who are called out of class to attend therapy during school. But with five afterschool jobs, a dead father, a house that is basically a litter box, an ex-best friend, and a seriously unhinged mother, Normal might not happen.

Hilarious and dark, heartbreaking and sharp, welcome to a gritty, uncensored rollercoaster ride, narrated by the singular Karl Shoemaker.

2010 MICHAEL L. PRINTZ AWARD HONOR BOOK

★ "Always ambitious, often caustic, and frequently moving."

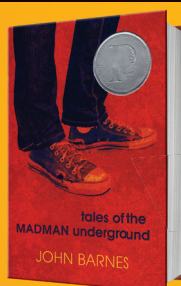
-Booklist, starred review

★ ". . . so easy and engaging, so sweet and funny, so astonishingly truthful . . ."

-School Library Journal, starred review

★ ". . . sharp, funny dialogue and crisp personalities . . ."

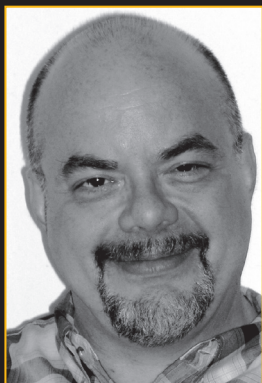
-VOYA, starred review



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Karl has spent years enabling his mother's addictions. Why do you think he has such trouble saying "no" to not only his mother, but other adults in his life?
- All of the Madmen Underground come from fairly dysfunctional family situations, and all of the other Madmen know about it. Karl reasons that telling everyone's secrets would do more damage than good—do you think he's correct? What are some alternate consequences to the Madmen telling the police or children's services about what's going on at home?
- In addition to the Madmen, there are a lot of adults that have an impact on Karl, like Coach Gratz and Mr. Browning. Are these adults likeable characters? Is Karl correct in his trusting (or not) of these adults? Why or why not?
- *Tales of the Madman Underground* takes place in the fall of 1973. How would the histories of the various characters and the consequences in the narrative be different if this story took place in our present day? Would the Madman Underground even exist? What would it look like?
- When reading *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* Karl thinks that Huck would make a great addition to the Madman Underground. What are some other characters that the Madmen might identify with?
- Karl spends a lot of time working, and he hides all of his money around the house. Why do you think having so many jobs is so important to him? He also doesn't spend much of his money—just on meals, the occasional book, and the bills that his mother forgets. He's not saving for college, so why do you think he saves so much of his money?
- Karl calls Paul his best friend. How much does Karl really share about Paul and his family? Why do you think he's so reticent and vague with the details of Paul's family situation and sexuality? Do you think by the end of the book that Karl and Paul are truly reconciled? What will their friendship look like over the course of the year?
- When Paul runs off to Toledo in his drum major uniform, Karl and Cheryl are more concerned with him being found by their schoolmates than the fact that Paul is out prostituting himself. Would that be the case today?
- Sex is something that Karl thinks about a lot, especially since so many of the girls in the Madman Underground seem to have problems expressing their sexuality in healthy ways. How does Karl act upon and react to the sexualities of Bonny, Darla, Cheryl, and Marti? How do the other Madmen? People outside of the Underground?
- No matter how much she steals from him, or how awful she seems, Karl really does love his mother and seems willing to forgive her. Would you forgive her? What's the worst transgression that Beth commits against Karl—stealing his money? Ripping up his to-do list? Do you think the other Madmen are as forgiving of their parents as Karl is to Beth? Why does Karl love his mother?



John Barnes has written twenty-nine other books, but this is his first novel for teens. Most of his work has been science fiction, but he has also written a number of non-fiction articles, including more than fifty in the Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance. John has held a variety of jobs including a college professor, stage and lighting designer, and political speechwriter. He lives in Denver, Colorado.