


AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL 
BOOK CLUB
DISCUSSION
GUIDE

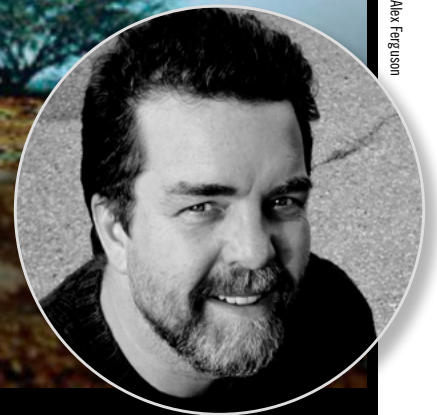
419

A NOVEL

MAY/JUNE 2017 DISCUSSION GUIDE

419 BY WILL FERGUSON

RECOMMENDED BY GUEST READER **NINO RICCI**



© Alex Ferguson



Barine Ateni, farmer, whose land has been destroyed by oil pollution in K. Dere, Nigeria

TAKE ACTION!

The “Open for Justice” Campaign seeks to create an ombudsperson to handle grievances of people affected by Canadian oil, gas and mining companies abroad.

—See page 9

All the characters in *419* are affected to some degree by multinational oil interests in Nigeria

The Amnesty International Book Club is pleased to announce our May 2017 book, *419*, by Will Ferguson. This title has been recommended by guest reader Nino Ricci, the Book Club’s first guest reader in January 2014. In this guide, you’ll find Ricci’s reflection on the book and the time he spent teaching in Nigeria, as well as discussion questions, an Amnesty background section, and an action you can take to improve Canada’s role in international mining activities.

419 provides an in-depth look into a Nigerian email scam that most people are familiar with. The novel starts with Laura learning of her father’s suicide. We soon find out that he had fallen for an email scam and as a result, remortgaged the house she grew up in, leaving her mother with almost nothing. Weaving through Laura’s story and that of three other characters from various parts of Nigeria, *419* provides readers with adventure, thrill, and, at times, heartbreak.

Each character has their own unique tale: Laura, who will stop at nothing to recover her family’s losses; a young man from the bustling city of Lagos who takes great pride in his criminal activity; an expectant mother escaping the only life she knows; and lastly a young man from the Niger Delta simply trying to create a life for himself with the limited opportunities before him. Their stories, all of which are affected to some degree by the multinational oil interests that have taken hold in Nigeria, culminate in a heart-wrenching conclusion leaving you wondering if their efforts were all worth it.

The Amnesty International Book Club hopes that through the reading experience you reflect on how people are impacted by the extractive sector, including oil, mining,

and gas. We’ve included background information on Shell’s presence in the Niger Delta. Then, consider adding your voice to Amnesty International’s call for an extractive sector Ombudsperson in Canada.

Thank you for being part of the Amnesty International Book Club. We appreciate your interest and would love to hear from you with any questions, suggestions or comments you may have. Just send us an email at bookclub@amnesty.ca.

About Amnesty International

Amnesty International is a global movement of more than seven million supporters, members and activists in over 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights.

Our vision is for all people to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion, and are funded mainly by our membership.

Until everyone can enjoy all of their rights, we will continue our efforts. We will not stop until everyone can live in dignity; until every person’s voice can be heard; until no one is tortured or executed.

Our members are the cornerstone of these efforts. They take up human rights issues through letter-writing, online and off line campaigning, demonstrations, vigils and direct lobbying of those with power and influence.

Locally, nationally and globally, we join together to mobilize public pressure and show international solidarity.

Together, we make a difference.

For more information about Amnesty International visit www.amnesty.ca or write to us at: Amnesty International, 312 Laurier Ave. E., Ottawa, ON K1N 1H9.



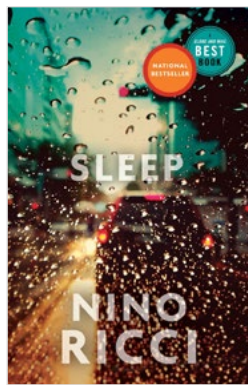
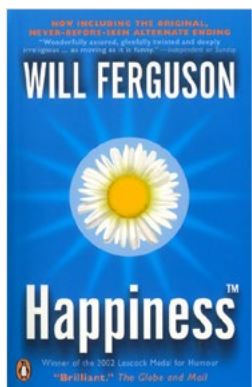
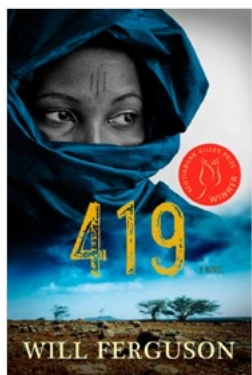
About this month's
featured author,

Will Ferguson

Travel writer and novelist Will Ferguson is the author of several award-winning memoirs, including *Beyond Belfast*, about a 560-mile walk across Northern Ireland in the rain; *Hitching Rides With Buddha*, about an end-to-end journey across Japan by thumb; and most recently the humour collection *Canadian Pie*, which includes his travels from Yukon to PEI.

Ferguson's novels include *Happiness™*, a satire set in the world of self-help publishing, and *Spanish Fly*, a coming-of-age tale of con men and call girls set amid the jazz clubs of the Great Depression. His work, which has been published in more than twenty languages around the world, has been nominated for both an IMPAC Dublin Award and a Commonwealth Writers' Prize, and he is a three-time winner of the Leacock Medal.

www.willferguson.ca



About this month's
guest reader,

Nino Ricci

Nino Ricci's involvement with Amnesty International began in the 1980s, when the founder of the school he taught at while in Nigeria with CUSO, political reformer Tai Solarin, was arrested following a military coup and was adopted by Amnesty as a prisoner of conscience. Since then he has worked with Amnesty in a number of ways, most recently as a spokesperson for the Amnesty International Book Club. He has also been active with the writers' freedom of expression organization PEN Canada, and served as its president during a period when it helped spearhead an international campaign against the imprisonment of Nigerian writer and environmental activist Ken Saro-Wiwa.

Nino is the author of the *Lives of the Saints* trilogy, which was adapted as a miniseries starring Sophia Loren, and of the novels *Testament*, *The Origin of Species* and, most recently, *Sleep*. He is a two-time winner of both the Governor General's Award and the Canadian Authors' Award for fiction, as well as of England's Betty Trask Award and Winnifred Holtby Prize and France's Prix Contrepoint. In 2011 he was appointed a member of the Order of Canada. He lives in Toronto with writer Erika de Vasconcelos and their children.

www.ninoricci.com

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Guest Reader Nino Ricci's reflection on *419*

Will Ferguson's 419 takes its title from those email scams most of us are familiar with by now, the ones offering us unclaimed lottery winnings or legacies from unknown relations or massive commissions for assistance in transferring billion-dollar estates. These in turn take their name from a section of the criminal code of Nigeria—where many of the scams originate—that governs fraud. Such scams have enjoyed a surprising degree of success worldwide, usually by appealing to a lethal mixture of compassion and good old human greed.

Ferguson's novel starts out with a victim of such a scam who has just died in a mysterious car crash, and with the daughter who sets out to avenge him. What seems at first a simple revenge tale, however, slowly reveals itself as a chilling exploration of the complex social and political realities that underlie these scams, and of the people at the other end of them who are often as much victims as those who get scammed. Set mostly in Nigeria, the novel gives a vivid portrait of the many lives that intersect in such schemes and of the many layers of Nigerian society that inform them.

During the 1980s I taught in Nigeria with CUSO, during a period of relative political calm in the country and of great hope, fueled both by the resilience and enterprise of the people and by the great wealth being generated at the time from Nigeria's oil boom. Shortly after my departure, a military

coup brought that period to an end. Since then the country has known mainly setbacks, and has gradually deteriorated into one of the most dangerous places in Africa and in the world. Those setbacks have deep roots in the country's history of British colonial rule, which tried to yoke together over three hundred distinct cultural and language groups under the umbrella of a single state and which left little behind in the way of infrastructure—either physical or political—when it decamped. They also have roots in the fluctuations of the oil market of the past decades and in the machinations of the multinationals that control it. Most of us will remember the case of Nigerian activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, who for his efforts in trying to expose such machinations was executed in 1995 on trumped-up charges by the military government then in power.

419 gives us an inside view of how these sorts of malignant forces continue to play out at the level of individual lives, so that young men of intelligence and promise turn to 419 scams as the only hope of bettering their prospects and even those who try to get by through honest work find themselves caught up against their wishes in cycles of violence and criminality. As the novel moves toward its harrowing conclusion, the question of who is perpetrator and who is victim grows ever more murky and troubling.

“What seems at first a simple revenge tale, however, slowly reveals itself as a chilling exploration of the complex social and political realities that underlie these scams, and of the people at the other end of them who are often as much victims as those who get scammed.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON 419

Discussion questions from guest reader Nino Ricci

1. How does your view of Laura's quest for revenge change as the novel progresses?
2. Is Laura's father truly a victim or does he simply get what he deserves? Do we see his plight differently when we place it in the context of the plights of some of the Nigerian characters?
3. How does knowledge of Nigeria's history help inform your understanding of events in the novel?
4. For all its political troubles, Nigeria has produced an impressive crop of talented writers since independence, from Chinua Achebe and Nobel Prize winner Wole Soyinka to Booker Prize winner Ben Okri and MacArthur Genius Grant recipient Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. If you have read any of these writers, how does their view of Nigeria compare to the one in *419*? If not, has *419* stimulated you to seek some of them out?

Discussion questions, including some from Penguin Canada

1. What did you know about the human rights issues in the Niger Delta prior to reading this book?
2. Many of the main characters in the novel willingly take part in some form of illegal activity and feel somewhat justified in doing so. Do you believe that any of the characters have good reasons for their actions? Did any characters cross a moral line that changed your sympathy for them? And while all the characters felt somewhat justified in their actions, do you feel, at the end of the novel, that any of them got what they deserved?
3. Laura edits other people's lives. What is the significance of this, symbolically as well as practically, in the plot line?



4. We like to believe we inhabit a borderless, interconnected world. Laura lives online, works online, yet she is isolated and alone. Her experience of other cultures comes primarily in a food court. On balance, do you feel that technology brings people together or alienates them?
5. Nnamdi's journey from the oil-soaked Delta to his horrific death in Lagos is an incredible arc that dominates a considerable part of the novel. Why is his story so central to the book and to the lives of the other characters?
6. While Winston's 419 scam sets the whole story into motion, the author stops short of making him the villain in the story. What were your initial feelings toward the character, and did you develop any sympathy for him when Ironsi-Egobia and Laura closed in on him? How does the scene where Laura visits Winston's parents affect your sympathy for him?
7. What do you feel about Laura's quest for revenge against Winston in the latter half of the book? Do you believe that she is justified in doing so? Is it morally acceptable for her to use lies and fraud because she feels she's a victim? Do you think that she ultimately acquits herself by the way she helps Amina find a new life?
8. The novel offers a look at three families in three very different parts of the world—the Curtis family in Calgary, Winston's family in Lagos, and Nnamdi's family in the Delta. In light of the widely distant locations, what traits do these disparate families have in common, and what makes them different?

BACKGROUND

ABOVE: The creeks at Kegbara Dere (K.Dere) are heavily polluted with oil, and mangrove trees along the banks have died as a result.



LEFT: Barine Ateni, resident of K. Dere whose farmland has been destroyed by oil pollution.

Shell in the Niger Delta

Home to 31 million people, the delta is one of the 10 most important wetland and coastal marine ecosystems in the world. Shell first started pumping oil in 1958, and now runs around 50 oil fields and a 5,000 km pipeline network.

And every year, more oil from its broken pipelines and wells seeps into the delta's water and soil.

Sadly, despite its riches, Shell still hasn't come up with any bright ideas for how to stop this happening—or how to clean up the environment properly afterwards.

“Everything just died like that,” says Barine Ateni. Barine, a farmer from Kegbara Dere (known as K. Dere) village, a tiny dot on the map of Africa's largest river delta.

She is describing the aftermath of an oil spill that hit her community in 1970, when she was just a baby. It “destroyed all the aquatic life in the stream where we used to fetch water—our farmlands, every living thing there,” she says.

Nigerian law says oil operators have to start cleaning up all oil spills within 24 hours. Shell claims to have cleaned

up the site twice. But two years after a 2009 spill near K. Dere, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) found massive pollution, many times above the government's safety limits.

And when Amnesty's researchers visited in August 2015, we saw soil soaked with crude oil outside the Bomu Manifold. Water with an oily sheen was also running down the hill into a swamp called Barabeedom, where many villagers like Barine have their farms and fishponds.

"We are sad and angry, and we have been made poor," says Barine. It's easy to see why. Shell's toxic legacy still lingers in her village, its half-hearted clean-ups having changed absolutely nothing.

So while Shell's executives and shareholders have made a fortune, whole communities across the delta have been driven deeper into poverty.

Barine and her neighbours talk of explosions and fires, people injured, of oil-filled drinking wells and fish dead in the river. Instead of enriching people, oil has poisoned their lives for over 50 years.

Shell says most oil pollution is caused by sabotage and theft, even in cases where our research clearly shows

that its own equipment has been to blame. It has also massively underestimated the volume of oil spilled.

After years of lobbying, on 29 April 2015 President Buhari's government announced it would start the clean-up programme on 2 June. The clean-up was called for in 2011 by the UNEP, in a report exposing massive levels of pollution caused by oil spills from Shell pipelines in the Ogoniland region.

This is a welcome effort, but Amnesty International is calling for Shell to match the Nigerian government's new commitment to tackle oil pollution in the Niger Delta by dramatically improving how it cleans up spills.

The Nigerian community that took on Shell and won

On August 28, 2008, a fault in the Trans-Niger pipeline caused a significant oil spill into Bodo Creek in Ogoniland, Nigeria. The pipeline is the responsibility of Shell. The spill, which was due to equipment failure, resulted in tens of thousands of barrels of oil polluting the land and creek surrounding Bodo, killing the fish

In Port Harcourt, Nigeria, activists, partner organizations and Amnesty International call on Shell to own up, pay up and clean up the Niger Delta, as part of a week of action in April 2012.



that people depend on for food and livelihood. A second major spill began on December 7, 2008.

Legal action in the UK has driven Shell to make an out-of-court settlement of £55 million (CAD\$83 million) to compensate the Bodo community of Nigeria after the livelihoods of thousands were destroyed by oil spills. The £55 million will be split between £35 million for 15,600 individuals and £20 million for the community.

Chief Sylvester Kobara, Chairman of Bodo's Council of Chiefs, says the compensation money will help improve local education and health services, and provide better drinking water. But Shell's payment will not fix all of Bodo's problems. Above all, the people of Bodo want the pollution cleaned up. If your livelihood has been destroyed, compensation only goes so far.

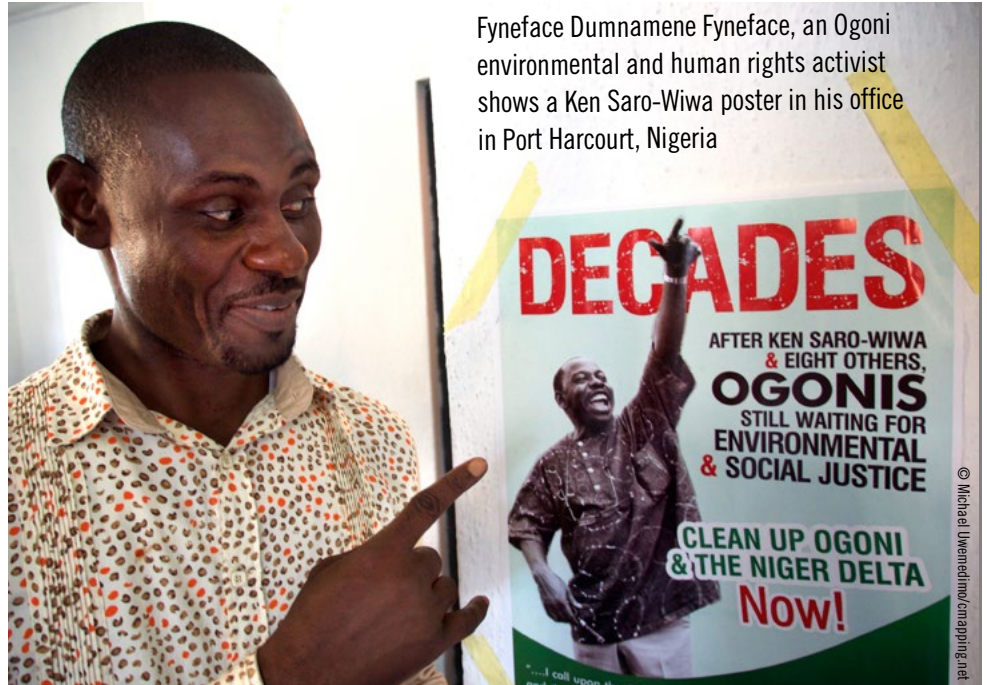
Nigeria: A new generation fights for a pollution-free future

"People talk about pollution," says Fyनेface Dumnamene Fyनेface. "But many have not experienced it. I have felt pollution. I have drunk polluted water. I have spent my whole life in a polluted environment."

This life steeped in pollution propelled Fyनेface into a movement made famous by another tenacious activist: the writer Ken Saro-Wiwa—an icon of the struggle for human rights and environmental justice in Nigeria. "Ken Saro Wiwa's activism played a significant role in my life," Fyनेface continues. "It inspired me to work for the Ogoni people [Ogoniland is part of the wider, oil-rich Niger Delta region]. I saw him once speaking in 1992, three years before he was killed."

Saro-Wiwa formed the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People in 1990 to challenge the oil companies' toxic legacy. He also led a mass movement challenging Nigeria's then military rulers to give Ogoniland political autonomy, and a bigger share of the oil wealth. The region's unfolding environmental disaster made international headlines when the Nigerian military government condemned Saro-Wiwa to death alongside eight other men in 1995. Together, they became known as the Ogoni 9. Their execution on 10 November 1995 sparked a worldwide outcry. Nigeria's environmental movement had lost a dynamic leader. But since then a new generation has stepped in to carry on the legacy.

Fyनेface works hard to keep the issue alive. Amnesty and a local organization—the Center for the Environment,



Human Rights and Development (CEHRD)—have also trained Fyनेface and many other activists to monitor how Shell responds when oil spills happen in their communities.

"Twenty years and Ogoniland is still polluted," says Fyनेface. "20 years and no justice has been achieved. Twenty years have gone by and what they fought for still has not been addressed. That cannot continue."

And this is what really gets Fyनेface going. This refusal to accept the status quo. This determination to achieve what Ken Saro-Wiwa and his movement fought so hard for.

The Nigerian government has its own part to play in this tragedy. Fyनेface wants it to pass a new law guaranteeing stronger regulation of the oil industry, and that people will benefit from local oil projects.

TAKE ACTION NOW

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



OPEN FOR JUSTICE

Human rights abuses at Canadian-owned mining and oil and gas sites around the world are widespread and well documented. Amnesty International's Business and Human Rights team focuses on individuals and communities whose human rights may be at risk. Victims of such abuse have nowhere to turn to seek justice. To fix this problem, Amnesty International urges Canada to be "Open for Justice".

At the core of the Open for Justice Campaign is the demand to create an ombudsperson to handle the grievances of people affected by Canadian oil, gas and mining companies abroad. An effective ombudsperson would investigate allegations of human rights abuse or environmental damage and form an opinion on whether companies are causing or contributing to harm. He or she would make public recommendations of actions that could be taken by companies or the Canadian government to stop abuses and provide remedy to victims or prevent future harm. In 2015, the federal Liberal Party, New Democratic Party, Green Party and Bloc Quebecois each committed to creating a human rights ombudsperson for the extractive sector.

Write a letter to the Minister of International Trade, the Honourable François-Philippe Champagne. You can use the sample letter on the next page to guide you.

Why do we need an effective ombudsperson for Canadian oil, gas and mining companies abroad?



INDEPENDENCE, INTEGRITY & FAIRNESS

- Arms-length from government
- Avoids undue influence by big business
- Measures to correct power imbalance and ensure fairness
- Appointment is transparent and merit-based
- Confidence in office and office holder is key



EFFECTIVE INVESTIGATION

- Investigates complaints of harm and significant risk of harm
- Screens out vexatious, frivolous complaints
- Has legal mandate and legal powers to undertake effective investigations
- Includes robust protections for companies, individuals and communities



PUBLIC REPORTING

- Regular public updates on progress
- Information posted in a timely manner throughout the complaint process, including requests for information and final recommendations



RECOMMENDATIONS & REMEDY

- Ombudsperson issues public report with findings and recommendations for remedy and harm prevention
- Recommendations can focus on the company, but also the Government of Canada - including withdrawing support



MONITORING & FOLLOW-UP

- To be effective, recommendations and settlement agreements must be monitored
- Progress on implementing recommendations must be reported to ombudsperson, who is tasked with monitoring (including seeking community response) and publicly reporting on that progress

SAMPLE LETTER

Dear Minister Champagne:

When the federal budget became public on March 22, 2017, I was very disappointed to see nothing budgeted towards a Human Rights Ombudsperson for Canada's international extractive sector. Not only was this commitment made by the Liberal Party of Canada during the 2015 election campaign, but ignoring this issue allows for continued suffering at Canadian extractive projects around the world.

Letters from around the world have been sent to Prime Minister Trudeau about this matter, and Prime Minister Trudeau's response is clear: corporate accountability matters fall under your purview as the Minister of International Trade.

Canada is home to more than half of the world's largest mining and exploration companies as well as many medium to large-sized oil & gas companies. Many of these companies operate in the developing world. A 2009 report, commissioned by the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada, found that of 171 high profile conflicts involving mining companies over the previous decade, Canadian companies were involved in four times as many incidents as their closest peers in Australia and the UK. A 2016 report of the Justice and Corporate Accountability Project at Osgoode Hall Law School documented 100 incidents of violence associated with Canadian extractive companies operating in Latin America between 2000 and 2015. This included 44 deaths, 30 of which the researchers described as "targeted".

This is unacceptable, and has been able to go unchecked for far too long.

Existing mechanisms such as the CSR Counsellor's Office and the OECD National Contact Point have proven themselves toothless and ineffective. I strongly encourage you to use the draft model legislation prepared by the Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability (www.cnca-rcrce.ca) as a blueprint for the creation of an extractives human rights ombudsperson office. The model bill would create an office that investigates human rights allegations and recommends remedial action, is independent of political or corporate influence, and is accountable to Canadians through public reporting.

I look forward to hearing about your plans to make Canada open for justice.

Sincerely,

[name] _____

[address] _____

**Send the letter to: The Honourable François-Philippe Champagne
Minister of Trade,
House of Commons, Ottawa
K1A 0A6**

(No postage needed)

MORE ABOUT THIS ISSUE

VIDEO: *Assessing our Impact – Shell in the Niger Delta* at <http://bit.ly/2pyNLN7>

REPORT: *Clean it Up: Shell's False Claims About Oil Spill Response in the Niger Delta* at <http://bit.ly/1RNbzUg>
The Life of Ken Saro-Wiwa <http://remembersarowiwa.com/background/the-life-of-ken-saro-wiwa/>

TESTIMONIES: Powerful testimonies from the Niger Delta at <http://bit.ly/2pz0T57>

Read more about Amnesty's Open for Justice Campaign at <http://www.amnesty.ca/our-work/campaigns/open-for-justice>

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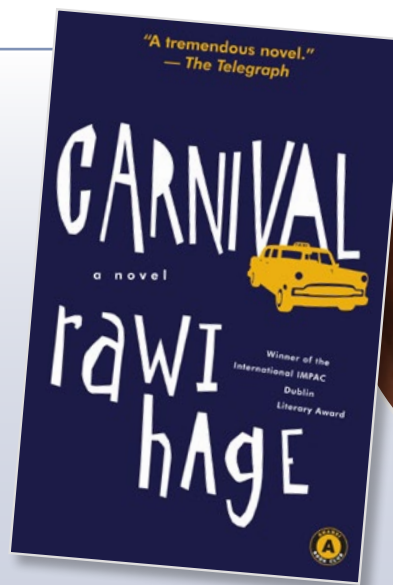
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COMING UP IN JULY 2017

Carnival

by Rawi Hage

Recommended by guest reader
Kamal Al-Solaylee



In *Carnival*, internationally acclaimed author Rawi Hage takes us into the world of Fly, a taxi driver in a crime-ridden apocalyptic metropolis.

Raised in the circus, the son of a golden-haired trapeze artist and a flying-carpet man, Fly sees everything, taking in all of the city's carnivalesque beauty and ugliness as he roves through its dizzying streets in his taxi. Fly is a reader, too, and when he's not in his taxi he is at home in the equally dizzying labyrinth of books that fills his tiny apartment. His best friend is Otto, a political activist who's in and out of jails and asylums, mourning his dead wife and lost foster son. On one otherwise tawdry night Fly meets Mary, a book-loving passenger with a domineering husband. So begins a romance that is, for Fly, a brief glimmer of light amid the shadows and grit of the Carnival city.

The discussion guide will be sent out July 2017.

In the meanwhile, if you have any questions or comments, please contact us at bookclub@amnesty.ca.