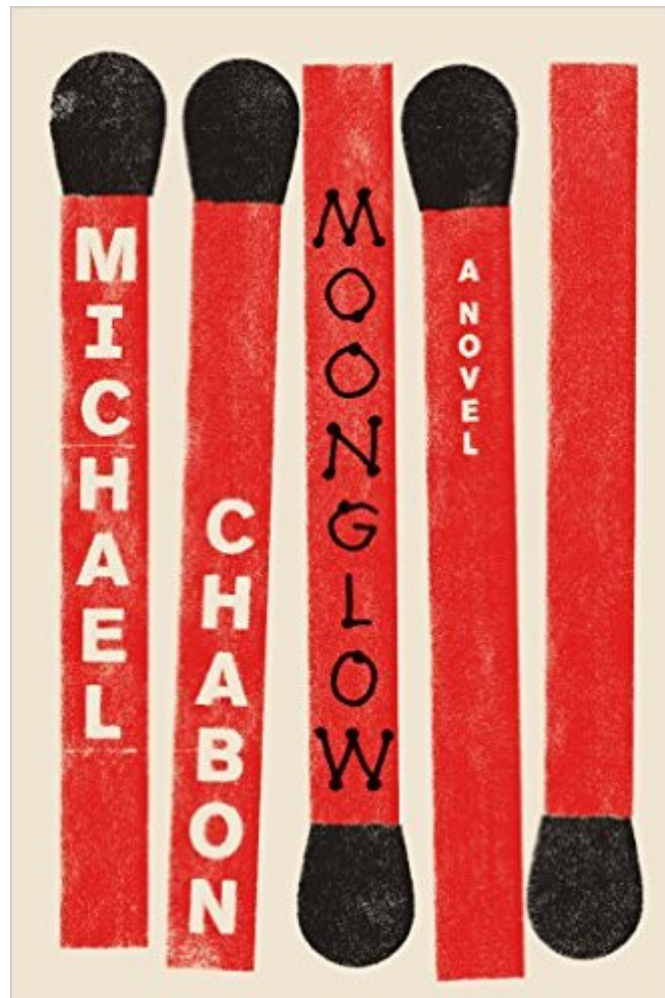


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Moonglow: A Novel



Synopsis

Following on the heels of his *New York Times* bestselling novel *Telegraph Avenue*, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Michael Chabon delivers another literary masterpiece: a novel of truth and lies, family legends, and existential adventure—and the forces that work to destroy us. In 1989, fresh from the publication of his first novel, *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh*, Michael Chabon traveled to his mother's home in Oakland, California, to visit his terminally ill grandfather. Tongue loosened by powerful painkillers, memory stirred by the imminence of death, Chabon's grandfather shared recollections and told stories the younger man had never heard before, uncovering bits and pieces of a history long buried and forgotten. That dreamlike week of revelations forms the basis for the novel *Moonglow*, the latest feat of legerdemain from Pulitzer Prize-winning author Michael Chabon. *Moonglow* unfolds as the deathbed confession of a man the narrator refers to only as "my grandfather." It is a tale of madness, of war and adventure, of sex and marriage and desire, of existential doubt and model rocketry, of the shining aspirations and demonic underpinnings of American technological accomplishment at midcentury, and, above all, of the destructive impact—and the creative power—of keeping secrets and telling lies. It is a portrait of the difficult but passionate love between the narrator's grandfather and his grandmother, an enigmatic woman broken by her experience growing up in war-torn France. It is also a tour de force of speculative autobiography in which Chabon devises and reveals a secret history of his own imagination. From the Jewish slums of prewar South Philadelphia to the invasion of Germany, from a Florida retirement village to the penal utopia of New York's Wallkill prison, from the heyday of the space program to the twilight of the "American Century," the novel revisits an entire era through a single life and collapses a lifetime into a single week. A lie that tells the truth, a work of fictional nonfiction, an autobiography wrapped in a novel disguised as a memoir, *Moonglow* is Chabon at his most moving and inventive.

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Customer Reviews

Moonglow, by Michael Chabon, tells a fictionalized history of his immediate family centered on being with his grandfather during the last two weeks before he succumbed to a painful cancer. His grandfather was a man not given to personal revelation, but under the influence of powerful painkillers and his imminent demise, he reveals the story of his life with Michael's grandmother and mother. None of these key figures in Michael's life are ever named, nor is his father. The reminiscences are possibly incorrect or self-serving as is Michael's reportage. "Whatever liberties have been taken | they have been taken with due abandon." This novel takes the form of a non-linear narrative delving into the history reported by the grandfather on his deathbed. The grandfather was an engineer and has a history wound up in dreams of space travel from starting some time before WW II to the the landing on the moon and beyond. During WW II he was seeking to capture as much as possible of the Nazi missile program directed by Werner Von Braun. The grandfather helped liberate the V-2 complex and attendant concentration camps. He was an engineer enthralled by the possibility of space flight, sharing this dream with Von Braun and others, but his experience in the war showed him that Von Braun was not an innocent scientist and that the U.S. government was amoral in whitewashing Von Braun's name. The emotionally broken grandmother is a French jew who comes to the U.S. with a young daughter, Michael's mother. Grandfather and grandmother meet at an affair at a local synagogue where the local yentas are trying to connect grandmother to the new rabbi, She is tormented by insane visions and is deeply loved by the grandfather.

Grandfathers retired to Florida are a familiar cliché: tube socked and sandaled, shorts belted at the nipples and garden hose cocked to deter any of "those damn kids" considering trespass. In Michael Chabon's imagination, grandfathers glow with an other-worldliness: they are lovers, scientists, misfits, and adventurers. If in later years, they notch their Bermudas way too high, what they remember (or we remember for them) is the stuff of family legend. Michael Chabon's family legend is a terrific one. Moonglow is a marvelous tale "an honest memoir, if only because it admits to being fictitious. It's the story of hardscrabble Jews growing up in Philly, one son hustling pool,

the other the answer to every Jewish mother's prayer (no, not a doctor, a rabbi briefly). It is also a generational saga. The author takes a look across the last half of the 20th century at his taciturn grandsire and his holocaust survivor wife and pays them the compliment of seeing them not as "Bubbe" and "Kayde" but as people. Long before they were known by their honorifics, they had names, they had struggles, and passion. They had lives. This is their story. If I have one complaint (and it's a minor one) there is a bit too much "at the crossroads of history" in the story with the tale bumping into Wild Bill Donovan, the ghost of Wernher von Braun and the Challenger disaster (all the while putzing about your retirement community.) Even the author's maternal grandfather and paternal great uncle cross paths, in of all places, minimum security prison. Many of Chabon's stories play with history but personally I prefer when he does so big-scale, in an over-the-top manner "The Yiddish Policeman's Union, Kavalier & Clay, etc.

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