



Man in the Woods

By Scott Spencer
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Reader's Guide to *Man in the Woods*

1. *Man in the Woods* begins in the last two months of the 20th Century. Why do you think the author chose that time? What do you think the lead-up to what was then called Y2K (Year 2000) has to do with the themes of this novel?
2. The novel is divided into two parts, and each begins with a line from a country song. Why do you think the author chose those quotations, and what bearing do you think they have on the story and the underlying themes of the book?
3. At one point in the novel, Paul Phillips and his friend are walking through the woods, and his friend recalls that early settlers in America used to believe that the American woods were a kind of church, and, in fact, some preachers used to say, 'No Jesus in the parlor.' How does this idea play itself out in

Man in the Woods?

4. Though secular in tone, *Man in the Woods* seems to be imbued with religious imagery and religious concerns 'there are angels, serpents, etc. Can you identify the ones that seemed most meaningful to you and discuss how they work their way through the novel?
5. What happens to Kate's belief in a Higher Power and what happens to Paul's?
6. Shep is for some readers a character in this novel as fully realized as the human characters. What do you think of Shep? What is his function within the novel? How is he different from other dogs in other novels?
7. If Shep were given a voice, would his account of the events cast a different light on the story? What is Shep feeling by the story's end?
8. From time to time, the novel cuts away to a police investigation, in which logic, and a belief in the law lead a detective through a step-by-step search for the person who has killed the man found in Martingham State Park. How does this character and his actions lend itself to the book's overall story and meaning? Who else in this novel is trying to bring the killer to justice?
9. Paul Phillips is a classic American type 'the loner who communes with nature and makes his living with his hands. *Man in the Woods* examines the conflict between the individual and the community. Did you think Paul needed to be punished for his act of violence? Can a person be his own judge and jury, or does he need to stand trial in a court of law? Are there laws that go beyond earthly law? Can a person be pure of heart and still deserve to be punished for wrong-doing?