

BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS

Jigsaw Man by Elena Forbes

1. The word “jigsaw” has two definitions: a puzzle intended to be fitted together for pleasure, and a type of saw that is adept at cutting curved lines. How do these two meanings pertain to your task as a reader of mystery novels? At the end of *Jigsaw Man*, which pieces of the puzzle are still missing?
2. In the opening chapter, a strangulation is depicted in a decidedly sexual manner: “Breathless now, and hot with rage, he rocked backwards and forwards, squeezing harder and harder, shaking the limp neck until it felt like a wet rag in his hands, until he was sure there must be no life left” (p. 3). On the same page, it is also suggested that the killer may be impotent. How do these details affect your understanding of Adam and the motivations behind his murders? Can you think of other instances in literature or film where sexual impotence acts as a catalyst for violence?
3. Both Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 begin with an unconscious body in a bed: in Chapter 1, it’s the drugged body of Claire Donovan right before she’s strangled; in Chapter 2, it’s asleep and hungover Detective Mark Tartaglia, about to learn of this very crime. Throughout the novel, scenes often seem to echo those from previous chapters, creating a dreamlike sense of déjà vu. Does this technique seem appropriate for a story about serial killers? How does it affect your reading experience?
4. “It’s the dead speaking to the living,” Mark Tartaglia explains to crime scene manager Tracy Jamieson, about the meaning of *Eris Quod Sum*, the Latin phrase carved post-mortem, into victim Claire Donovan’s legs (p. 21). In what other instances do ghosts and hauntings manifest themselves in the novel?
5. Claire Donovan is strangled by Adam in a room at the Dillon Hotel. The crime scene is located in the rear wing of the hotel, which the reader is told “had once been a small theatre or cinema” (p. 15). Other references to theatre and performance are peppered throughout the novel. For example, a victim of Dave Simpson is later identified as John Smart, a well-known actor who had been working on a Sherlock Holmes production for BBC Radio 4 shortly before he was killed. Also, near the end of the book, Mark Tartaglia must go through a curtain to enter the cellar where Dave Simpson is

hiding. Are these details significant? How? Did you find the novel itself theatrical?

6. During her interrogation, Tatyana tells Mark Tartaglia that “Chris” (later revealed to be serial killer Dave Simpson), has a cross-shaped scar on his palm. Although this claim proves not to be true, Catholic imagery is sprinkled throughout the novel, suggesting this detail is more than simply a red herring. For example, Mark uses the Latin he learned during his Catholic upbringing to decipher the message etched on Claire Donovan’s legs; elsewhere, it is noted that Chantal wears a small gold crucifix hanging from a chain (p. 307). Can you think of other moments in the novel when the author employs Catholic imagery? What do you think author Elena Forbes is trying to tell us through her use of this religious imagery?
7. Adam mysteriously receives a copy of *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, and “the drawing on the cover showed a pair of spectacle frames and the outline of a dead man” (p. 249). Could this also be a good book cover for *Jigsaw Man*? Why or why not? Are there certain characters that remain an outline by the end of the book?
8. When asked by Mark if Dave Simpson is capable of murder, Chantal responds: “Isn’t everyone, in the heat of the moment, if they’re pushed too far” (p. 272)? Do you agree?
9. “What about fire?” Melinda asks Mark as she tries to uncover the details of the ongoing investigation for her newspaper. “Is it symbolic, do you think? Are we talking the eternal flames of punishment or purification (p. 166)?” Discuss the significance of fire in the book, as well as the significance of ice. What do you make of the fact that the novel ends with the image of a warmed heart?
10. What is the significance of Guy Fawkes to the novel, and the fact that his effigy proves to be made up of actual body parts? In real life, Fawkes’ body was quartered, and authorities displayed the pieces as a warning to would-be traitors. Do you think Dave Simpson was sending a similar message with his displays of severed limbs? What other reasons can you think of for why he might want to dismember and reassemble the body parts of his victims? What do you think of Mark’s hunches about Simpson’s motivations on p. 340–341?
11. Why do you think the reader is privy to Adam’s thoughts (in chapters written from his point of view), but not Dave Simpson’s? How does knowing, or not knowing, what is

going on in the killers' minds affect your sense of horror and comprehension of their crimes?