

Island Life

by Michael W. Sherer



About the Book

How do you live without someone who's been part of your life for twenty years? Jack Holm begins to find out when his wife doesn't return to their suburban Seattle home after shopping one day. Her absence is not unusual given her flight attendant's job, and it's a respite from recent marital discord, so Jack feels relief not worry. But when a day goes by with no word, then another, Jack, his teenage daughter and ten-year-old son do worry. After three days, Jack reports her missing.

Suddenly, Jack is swept up in a terrifying conflagration of events that threaten to tear his world apart. The police suspect him of foul play. Children and Family Services suspects him of abuse. And someone is spying on his kids.

Now a single dad, Jack tries to help his kids deal with their mother's disappearance, but when he's arrested on suspicion of murder, he stands to lose it all. The state and his mother-in-law want to take away his kids. The police want him in jail. Abandoned by friends and family, Jack has nowhere to turn, and the mounting evidence begins to make him think he might actually be a killer.

But mysterious phone calls and a CD containing child pornography that turns up in his wife's belongings convince him otherwise. He quickly realizes the only way to stay ahead of the law and prevent his children from being put in foster care is to find out what happened to his wife. With new-found courage from a woman who believes in his innocence and the help of another outcast, Jack pursues a shadowy Japanese Yakuza crime boss from Seattle to Las Vegas and back, putting himself and all the people he loves in mortal danger.

Discussion Guide

1. In **Island Life**, Jack Holm is an ordinary man thrown into extraordinary circumstances. How do you think you would react under such circumstances? To what lengths would you go to protect your family?
2. Other than his fear of going to jail for murder, what motivates Jack to pursue the truth about his wife's death? Do his motivations change during the course of the book?
3. What observations does this novel make about family life? How has our concept of "family" changed over time?
4. What is interesting about the way this story is told? How are the episodes arranged and linked? Are there turning points in the novel? Did you anticipate them?
5. We see the world of suburbia and family life through Jack's eyes. Is this a good way to tell this story? Many novels of suspense use the third person point of view, allowing the author to shift from the protagonist's viewpoint to that of the villain. Do you think that would have been a better way to tell Jack's story?
6. Jack reveals his relationship with his wife through sessions with his therapist. Do you feel you got a fair picture of the type of person she was? Is Jack justified in thinking and behaving the way he does based on what you know about Mary? Why or why not?
7. Jack and his friend Jian feel alienated among a group of single mothers. What kind of parenting job do you think they are doing with their children? Are they parenting as well as single moms can? Men's domestic skills are often belittled and lampooned in the media. Do you think this is fair? How do you think men can be encouraged to be more like Jack? Would that be a good thing or not?
8. What is the central theme of the novel? Is there an idea or message that links the components of the novel together?
9. How would you describe Jack's relationship with Amy? Do you think his feelings for her are realistic? What role do you think love plays in Jack's motivations throughout the novel?
10. What is your impression of the community in which Jack lives? Do you know of similar communities? What would you like about living there? What would you dislike?
11. To keep his kids and maintain his freedom, Jack must unravel the mystery of his wife's murder. At any point in the novel did you think Jack was responsible? When did you know for sure that Jack wasn't the killer? Did you figure out who it was before Jack did?
12. In the book, Jack must balance his responsibilities as a parent with his desire to exonerate himself. What do you think of his decision to take his children to Las Vegas with him in pursuit of Takeshi?
13. Mystery and suspense novels usually fall into separate genres. Which would you say best describes *Island Life*? Which elements of suspense or mystery worked best for you? Why?
14. Why do you think we read mysteries? Are they morality plays? Are they worlds of black and white, or worlds of gray like real life? What sort of world did the author create in *Island Life*? Is it a world in which justice exists? What

kind?

15. In what ways does this novel deal with the effect of violence and crime on people's lives? In what ways does love affect these same people's lives?

16. Has this novel changed your ideas about gender roles, family or parenting in any way? How? In what other ways has this novel changed you or your thoughts?

Author Bio

After stints as manual laborer, dishwasher, bartender, restaurant manager, commercial photographer, magazine editor and pr executive, Michael W. Sherer decided life should imitate art --- he's now a freelance writer. He has five novels in the Emerson Ward series (**An Option On Death**, **Little Use For Death**, **Death Came Dressed In White**, **A Forever Death**, and **Death Is No Bargain**). **Island Life**, a stand-alone thriller about an ordinary suburban father's race to find out what happened to his missing wife before he loses his children, his freedom and possibly his life, comes out in March, 2008. He's now working on the first novel in a new series set in Seattle.

Critical Praise

?**Island Life** is a terrific novel of a tortured husband doing his best to deal with a missing wife and his therefore motherless children. Michael W. Sherer is a seasoned pro who adopts a fascinating narrative voice: While the plot is developed through the first-person voice of Jack Holm, the reader is provided back-story through short prelude scenes of Jack with his psychotherapist, trying to work through why his wife might have left her family. A truly different and fascinating story.?

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