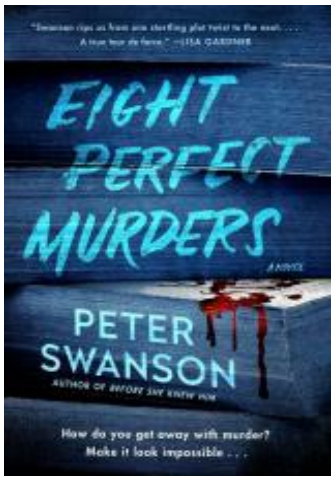
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

Eight Perfect Murders

by Peter Swanson



About the Book

From the hugely talented author of BEFORE SHE KNEW HIM comes a chilling tale of psychological suspense and a homage to the thriller genre tailor-made for fans: the story of a bookseller who finds himself at the center of an FBI investigation because a very clever killer has started using his list of fiction?s most ingenious murders.

Years ago, bookseller and mystery aficionado Malcolm Kershaw compiled a list of the genre?s most unsolvable murders, those that are almost impossible to crack --- which he titled ?Eight Perfect Murders? --- chosen from among the best of the best, including Agatha Christie?s A.B.C. MURDERS, Patricia Highsmith?s STRANGERS ON A TRAIN, Ira Levin?s DEATH TRAP, A. A. Milne's RED HOUSE MYSTERY, Anthony Berkeley Cox's MALICE AFORETHOUGHT, James M. Cain's DOUBLE INDEMNITY, John D. Macdonald's THE DROWNER and Donna Tartt's A SECRET HISTORY.

But no one is more surprised than Mal, now the owner of the Old Devils Bookstore in Boston, when an FBI agent comes knocking on his door one snowy day in February. She?s looking for information about a series of unsolved murders that look eerily similar to the killings on Mal?s old list. And the FBI agent isn?t the only one interested in this bookseller who spends almost every night at home reading. A killer is out there, watching his every move --- a diabolical threat who knows way too much about Mal?s personal history, especially the secrets he?s never told anyone, even his recently deceased wife.

To protect himself, Mal begins looking into possible suspects...and sees a killer in everyone around him. But Mal doesn?t count on the investigation leaving a trail of death in its wake. Suddenly, a series of shocking twists leaves more victims dead --- and the noose around Mal?s neck grows so tight he might never escape.

Discussion Guide

1. After reading EIGHT PERFECT MURDERS and the commentary about the eight classic crime novels included in it, do you believe there?s such a thing as a perfect murder? If so, do you think any of these nine novels has a perfect murder?

2. The third novel on Malcolm Kershaw's list, and the first he discussed with FBI agent Gwen Mulvey, is Dame Agatha Christie's THE A.B.C. MURDERS. Malcolm pokes some holes in this selection as he is describing the plot. What was it about this title that made him second-guess it? Why didn't he choose Christie's AND THEN THERE WERE NONE, which he says describes a more perfect murder as the killer is one of the potential victims and fakes his own death to hide his guilt?

3. Why do you think Malcolm posted this list on his bookstore's blog? Do you believe he had any ulterior motive? Was he simply sharing his love of the mystery genre, or could he have been seeking someone to respond with an offer to attempt one of these allegedly perfect crimes?

4. Mulvey presents Malcolm with DOUBLE INDEMNITY from his list and points out how closely it mimicked the real-life crime featuring the man on the tracks. Why do you think she thought his list might have something to do with that case? Wouldn't you think that murders involving adulterous couples were quite common?

5. What relation did Malcolm's blog article, "Mysteries for a Cold Winter Night," have with the tragic passing of his wife in a car accident on New Year's Eve? Would any of the books in that piece lead you to believe that Malcolm may have had something to do with her death?

6. Malcolm makes it a practice to share books with his staff that he wants them to read. Discuss these titles and what symbolism, if any, they may possess.

7. Why was Malcolm so obsessed with the posts to his article from a person calling himself ?Doctor Sheppard?? What was the significance of that name, and how did it affect Malcolm?

8. At what point does Malcolm believe he is ?not innocent?? Why does he want so badly for Mulvey to learn the truth?

9. Chapter 13 opens with this statement from Malcolm: "Being an avid mystery reader as an adolescent does not prepare you for real life." Discuss why he felt this way and whether or not you concur with this statement.

10. What relationship does Malcolm have with his mostly silent partner in the bookstore, Brian? Why does Brian make it a point of stating to Malcolm that "there's no such thing as a perfect murder"?

11. How does the series of murders that Mulvey is investigating continue to touch on the titles in Malcolm's now-infamous blog? Is it a stretch, an uncanny coincidence, or was Malcolm somehow living out his own mystery novel dreams?

12. Why was Mulvey taken off the case? Talk about her relationship with Malcolm and how his involvement in the string of murders caused some to call her unprofessional for her work with him.

13. Malcolm is not necessarily an unreliable narrator, but he does lie to the reader along the way. Discuss those lies and

what part they play in the various plot twists that result from them.

14. Thinking about the journey that the principal characters are on from the beginning to the end of EIGHT PERFECT MURDERS, who do you believe had the most impact on everyone else in this twisty novel? Why?

15. Which of the eight titles have you read? After examining the list, which are you most eager to read? Which of them would make the ideal book group novel and why?

Author Bio

Peter Swanson is the *New York Times* bestselling author of THE KIND WORTH KILLING, winner of the New England Society Book Award and finalist for the CWA Ian Fleming Steel Dagger; HER EVERY FEAR, an NPR book of the year; and EIGHT PERFECT MURDERS, a *New York Times* bestseller, among others. His books have been translated into 30 languages. He lives on the North Shore of Massachusetts, where he is at work on his next novel.

Eight Perfect Murders
by Peter Swanson

Publication Date: January 26, 2021
Genres: Fiction, Psychological Suspense, Psychological Thriller, Suspense, Thriller
Paperback: 304 pages
Publisher: William Morrow Paperbacks
ISBN-10: 0062838199
ISBN-13: 9780062838193