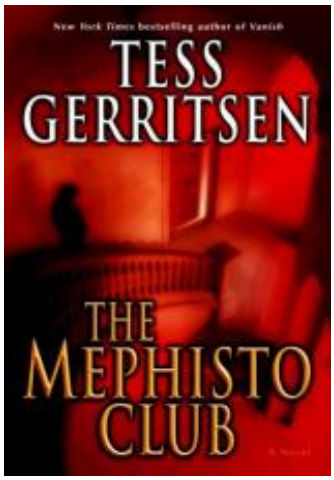
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

The Mephisto Club

by Tess Gerritsen



About the Book

Evil exists. Evil walks the streets. And evil has spawned a diabolical new disciple in this white-knuckle thriller from New York Times bestselling author Tess Gerritsen.

PECCAVI

The Latin word is scrawled in blood at the scene of a young woman's brutal murder: I HAVE SINNED. It's a chilling Christmas greeting for Boston medical examiner Maura Isles and Detective Jane Rizzoli, who swiftly link the victim to controversial celebrity psychiatrist Joyce O'Donnell --- Jane's professional nemesis and member of a sinister cabal called the Mephisto Club.

On top of Beacon Hill, the club's acolytes devote themselves to the analysis of evil: Can it be explained by science? Does it have a physical presence? Do demons walk the earth? Drawing on a wealth of dark historical data and mysterious religious symbolism, the Mephisto scholars aim to prove a startling theory: that Satan himself exists among us.

With the grisly appearance of a corpse on their doorstep, it's clear that someone --- or something --- is indeed prowling the city. The members of the club begin to fear the very subject of their study. Could this maniacal killer be one of their own --- or have they inadvertently summoned an evil entity from the darkness?

Delving deep into the most baffling and unusual case of their careers, Maura and Jane embark on a terrifying journey to the very heart of evil, where they encounter a malevolent foe more dangerous than any they have ever faced . . . one whose work is only just beginning.

Discussion Guide

In **The Mephisto Club** you?ll find numerous references to both Biblical and pre-Christian lore. This guide will help you understand the real history that inspired the book.

1. What is the significance of the word, ?Mephisto??

Mephisto (also known as Mephistopheles) is a demon whose name first appears in literature in the 1500?s, in reference to the German legend of Dr. Faust. Faust is thought to have been a real person, a scholar and theologian who began to dabble in the occult in search of divine knowledge. According to the legend, Faust used magical symbols to conjure up an evil spirit known as Mephistopheles. (The name is perhaps drawn from a Greek translation for ?not a lover of light?.) Mephistopheles claims to be a servant of the Devil, and he offers a deal: he will faithfully do Faust?s bidding for the next 24 years, after which Faust will surrender his soul to Satan. Faust agrees, and for 24 years, with the demon?s help, he lives a debauched life of whoring and drunkenness.

But when his 24 years is almost up, Faust has a sudden change of heart. Horrified by the idea of spending eternity in Hell, he tries desperately to break the agreement with Satan by repenting of his sins. But it is too late. At midnight, Faust is heard shrieking in terror as Satan comes to claim his soul. All that is left behind is Faust?s horribly mutilated body.

Among 16th century Lutherans, the original legend of Faust was a cautionary tale that illustrated the dangers of performing magic and seeking divine knowledge. But the story?s basic theme ? the perils of forging a pact with the Devil ? has been used many times since then, in literature and music. (E.g.: Christopher Marlowe?s Dr. Faustus, Geothe?s Faust, and the opera Faust by Charles Gounod.)

Over the centuries, the name has morphed into an alternative name for Satan. But in his original incarnation, Mephisto was known merely as the Devil?s servant, a fallen angel who joined Lucifer in his original rebellion against God.

2. Are the evil creatures, the Nephilim, actually mentioned in the Bible?

Yes, although the most common translations refer to them not by their original Hebrew name Nephilim (the fallen), but as, simply, ?giants.?

There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown. And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. (Genesis 6:4-5, King James) There are other references to ?giants? in the Bible, including the following description of the Anakim, who lived around Hebron. Though it?s not entirely clear that the giants mentioned below are the Nephilim, the phrase ?which come of the giants? is a tantalizing clue that these are among the descendants of the original Nephilim: *The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers. (Numbers 13:32-33)*

3. Do Nephilim appear in other ancient texts?

Yes. They appear in the Book of Enoch, a non-canonical text written sometime around the second century BCE. Only fragments of the Book of Enoch were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were discovered in 1947. But the complete text managed to survive hidden away for two millenia in Ethiopia, where they were discovered in the 1700?s by a Scotsman.

Within the Book of Enoch are numerous references to Nephilim, the offspring of fallen angels (Watchers) who mated with human women. They are described as:

?great giants, whose height was three thousand ells, who consumed all the acquisitions of men. And when men could no longer sustain them, the giants turned against them and devoured mankind. (Book of Enoch, VII:2-4) The Nephilim are described as unremittingly evil beings: *And the spirits of the giants afflict, oppress, destroy, attack, do battle, and work destruction on the earth. (Book of Enoch, XV:11)* Nephilim also appear in another ancient Jewish text, the Book of Jubilees, written around 100 BCE. Here we learn that most Nephilim were wiped out by God during the age of Noah. But God did not kill them all. *And He said: Let the tenth part of them remain before him, and let nine parts descend into the place of condemnation? And a tenth part of them we left that they might be subject before Satan on the earth. (Book of Jubilees X:9-12)* So Nephilim continue to live alongside mankind. And as subjects of Satan, they will continue to torment mankind by starting wars and committing violence.

4. What is the real-world basis for legends of such strange beings?

Legends of powerful (and often evil) creatures who are descended from fallen gods are not uncommon. In Sumerian myth, the Anunnaki were sky gods who fell to earth, and have been interfering in mankind?s business ever since. In ancient Greek mythology, the gods of Mount Olympus who mated with humans produced half-breeds such as the tragic Hercules. Some modern conspiracy theorists believe that the Nephilim are, in fact, alien creatures from space who have interbred with humans over millennia to produce an exalted bloodline of kings and leaders. Among modern-day believers in a coming apocalypse, many think that the Anti-Christ himself will in fact be one of these powerful world leaders ? as well as one of the Nephilim.

Then there?s the Biblical description of these beings as ?giants.? Could the ancient texts be describing an actual primate species that lived at the same time as humans? Cryptozoologists (people who study creatures whose existence has not been substantiated) have long theorized that Bigfoot could actually be the last surviving tribe of Gigantopithecus ? a giant ape that has lingered into the modern age.

5. Did Adam really have a first wife named Lilith?

Lilith?s role as Adam?s wife does not enter historical documents until fairly recently, in a medieval Jewish text (The Alphabet of Ben-Sira). But the character of Lilith herself seems to date back much earlier, to ancient Jewish and Mesopotamian folklore in which she appears as a night demon. In these earlier myths, Lilith is said to be a dangerous being who hunts for newborn babies. As later described in the Dead Sea Scrolls, she is said to be one of the dwellers in the desert, living among evil spirits and fallen angels. In even later incarnations, she is transformed into an overtly seductive character with long flowing hair and a seemingly insatiable sex drive. She forces sleeping men to have

intercourse with her, and at night, in her wanderings, she causes men to ?defile themselves?. As a result of her uninhibited matings with various desert creatures, she becomes the mother of a whole host of evil creatures.

Today, feminists could well point to Lilith as an example of how male-written history treats a sexually emancipated woman: she becomes known as a demon!

6. Does a Mephisto Club really exist?

According to author Andrew Collins, the author of **From the Ashes of Angels**:

In the United States there is an organization known as the Sons of Jared, who take their name from the patriarch Jared, the father of Enoch? In their manifesto, the Sons of Jared vow ?implacable war against the descendants of the Watchers?, who, they allege, ?as notorious Pharaohs, Kings, and Dictators, have throughout history dominated mankind?. The existence of the Sons of Jared is difficult to confirm, since it is said to be a secret society. But rumors about it are widespread across the internet.

Author Bio

Internationally bestselling author Tess Gerritsen took an unusual route to a writing career. A graduate of Stanford University, Tess went on to medical school at the University of California, San Francisco, where she was awarded her M.D.

While on maternity leave from her work as a physician, she began to write fiction and in 1987, her first novel, CALL AFTER MIDNIGHT, was published. It was just the first of 32 suspense novels that she?s written over a 36-year writing career. She also wrote a screenplay, "Adrift," which aired as a 1993 CBS Movie of the Week starring Kate Jackson.

Tess's 1996 medical thriller, HARVEST, marked her debut on the *New York Times* bestseller list and her novels have hit bestseller lists around the world ever since. Among her titles are GRAVITY, THE SURGEON, VANISH, LISTEN TO ME, and THE SPY COAST, which has been optioned by Amazon Studios for a television series. Her books have been translated into 40 languages, and more than 40 million copies have been sold around the world.

Her series of novels featuring homicide detective Jane Rizzoli and medical examiner Maura Isles inspired the hit TNT television series "Rizzoli & Isles," starring Angie Harmon and Sasha Alexander.

She lives in Maine.

Critical Praise

"A powerful story that will haunt you long after the last page is turned."

The Mephisto Club

by Tess Gerritsen

Publication Date: September 12, 2006
Genres: Fiction, Suspense
Hardcover: 368 pages
Publisher: Ballantine Books
ISBN-10: 0345476999
ISBN-13: 9780345476999