

The Reflecting Pool by Otho Eskin

Book Club Discussion Questions

1. The author believes that all criminal acts are motivated by greed, lust for power, and revenge. He chose Washington, DC, as the venue for *The Reflecting Pool*, a city he knows well having lived there for more than 60 years. But for what other reason?
2. He depicts the two sides of Washington: the lesser-known gritty city with a high rate of crime—murder, drug wars, and gangs—and the familiar sophisticated city that is the seat of the Federal Government, and the location of The White House, and assorted famous landmarks, museums and monuments. What is the author saying about the nature of crime? How believable are his descriptions of the dark side of DC's criminal activities?
3. When the novel opens, top DC homicide detective, Marko Zorn, discovers the dead body of a young woman found in the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool. She is soon identified as Sandra Wilson, a secret service agent. Did you feel yourself immediately pulled into the story? If so, how did the author achieve this? If not, why weren't you engaged?
4. Immediately afterward, Marko is pressured to meet with an elderly woman called Sister Grace, the boss of one of Washington's most powerful gangs. He has collaborated with her in the past to expose the criminal activities of rival gangs. She makes a demand of him to get rid of her chief rival, her grandson Cloud, who is planning to take over her crime syndicate. Marko responds that he will never accept a job that requires him to commit murder. She threatens him. How does he respond knowing that he himself cannot do this?
5. The author spins a fast-paced, complicated, action driven story: Marko Zorn's subsequent investigation into the murder leads him to a white supremacist group with connections deep in the White House—a White House that does not want her death investigated and puts Zorn's own life at risk. He also has to locate and stop a trained assailant, brainwashed to kill by the domestic terrorist group, from assassinating the president of the United States. At the same time, on the side, he's secretly maneuvering to take out two crime bosses. In keeping with the thriller genre was the plot believable and did it keep you wanting to read to the end to find out what would happen? Explain your reaction.

6. A complex man with contradictory traits, he follows his own ethical compass and does not always play by the rules in bringing about justice. He is capable of extreme violence but only if his life or the life of others is threatened. What do you make of Marko Zorn, the thriller's central character? Do you find him sympathetic at least most of the time? Or a flawed character whose behavior you dislike?

7. Marko is able to prevail over his opponents due to his intelligence, guile and ability to remain cool no matter what the circumstances. Does that make him unique or at least different from other thriller protagonists?

8. Marko persuades secret service agent, Larry Talbot, to guard the gorgeous, manipulative Mariana, because her boyfriend, crime boss Cloud, might kill her out of jealous rage. Talbot is found shot dead by someone who entered the apartment and Mariana is gone. Marko is devastated and blames himself for Talbot's death. How did you react to this one fatal mistake Marko makes? Do you think Marko acted irresponsibly?

9. Why did Marko set up the shootout between the warring gangs? What does it have to do with Cloud, grandson of Sister Grace, one of DC's most powerful crime bosses?

10. Marko lies to two competing crime bosses (Cloud and Lamont) making each believe that he can purchase a huge shipment of illegal weapons that would allow him to become the most powerful crime boss of DC. He manages to lure them to the delivery site for the guns at a remote location, and a shootout begins. At the same time, a timed explosion goes off that Marko had secretly set, destroying the guns and killing most of the thugs and the two crime bosses. How did you react to this pivotal, most violent scene in the thriller?

11. Marko also keeps the \$20 million he took from the two feuding crime bosses. How do you feel about the ethical implications of how Marko dealt with the gangsters? Did you find yourself cheering for Marko? Or did you wish instead that he had caused these gangsters to be arrested and tried in the court of law?

12. Marko has expensive taste in classic cars, art, and women. These cost far beyond the means of a police officer. He earns money to pay for them by taking jobs on the side that entail dealing with shady characters and are legally dubious. Do you consider having a cop earning extra money this way acceptable behavior? Or not?

13. What do you think of how Marko treats the women in the novel? Arora Lovelace, an FBI agent; Carla Lowry, head of the FBI's Criminal Division; Mariana, Cloud's girlfriend; Ms. Shaw, personal assistant to the First Lady; and First Lady Marsha Reynolds?

14. Marko can be a bit of a loner and often appears detached in certain ways. Can you recall any scenes in the book in which he reveals the humanity beneath his tough exterior?

15. Marko Zorn does not like guns and rarely carries one. Is that credible for someone in his profession? Why do you think he dislikes guns? Is there any scene in the story that might help explain Marko's aversion to guns?"

16. Were you surprised to learn at the end who was responsible for the murder of Sandra Wilson? Were there any subtle clues that appeared earlier in the story?

17. Would you like to read the second Marko Zorn thriller, titled *Head Shot*? It will be published by Oceanview in December, 2021.