

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR **THE PAINTED GUN**

1. In many ways *The Painted Gun* adheres to the strict formula of classic detective novels from the 1950s although it is set in the late 1990s. How well does the book color inside the lines of the genre, and in what ways does it push against them?
2. How have the technological innovations since the time of the story affected your reading of the work? And how does your knowledge of the impending Internet explosion affect your impression of David “Itchy” Crane’s career choice?
3. Itchy seems intelligent, but he also makes a lot of mistakes and is almost certainly an alcoholic. To what extent are his obvious character flaws responsible for the situations he finds himself in?
4. Itchy appears to have a problem with authority, including his previous employer, the *Chronicle*, McCaffrey, and the police. Was he wrong to keep details to himself when the police first contacted him? If he had accepted their help, might he have been able to prevent further deaths?
5. In the late ‘90s, surveillance had yet to become a daily part of life. Is *The Painted Gun* a cautionary tale?
6. Throughout most of the book Itchy is searching for Ashley, and he only gets tiny pieces of information about who she is or what she’s like. Do you think he actually falls in love with her, or is it merely an infatuation or obsession due to his search for her?
7. McCaffrey is in many ways the orchestrating villain of the entire novel. But how does his experience compare with Itchy’s?
8. The historical background of America’s relationship with Guatemala in the 1950s is true. Were you familiar with this part of American history before reading this book? How does this make you feel about the CIA, the Dulles brothers, or eating bananas? While the Old Man’s claims of involvement with various murders deemed “suicides” are the author’s invention, do you wonder if such conspiracies are real?
9. Why was the Old Man so protective of Ashley, and why was he so angry at both Balam and McCaffrey? The Old Man has obviously done a great number of evil things, and yet he sees a similarity between himself and Itchy. Is this true? Why or why not?
10. Itchy is told that he must kill Balam, and he does it. Why? Did he have a choice? Is there another way he could have protected himself and Ashley other than becoming a killer? Or was he a killer all along? What happens next?

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CONTACT: SUSANNAH LAWRENCE | AKASHIC BOOKS | NEW YORK | SUSANNAH@AKASHICBOOKS.COM | tel. 718-643-9193