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## Mystery book group guide for *Permafrost* by Peter Robertson

### About *Permafrost*

Two friends grew up together in Scotland. Now one is missing in Northern Michigan and the other, a successful businessman, has time on his hands. The hunt for the lost man begins as a mystery and evolves into an act of redemption.

*Permafrost* by Peter Robertson is published by Gibson House Press, 2012. 252 pages. Trade paperback ISBN-13: 9780985515805. Also available in ebook formats.

### Reviews

“There are plenty of mysteries in this tight, taut novel. . . . Even such details as the narrator’s full name (he’s identified only as Tom) and the time in which the book is set are murky (internal evidence points to the mid- 1990s). We know that Tom is extremely wealthy, but beyond that, Robertson seems intent on keeping a lot of the particulars of his story hidden in the shadows. That could easily have come off as coy or just plain annoying, but here it works. . . . We find answers, of a sort, but it’s the journey that proves captivating, as we ride along with the narrator, who, by looking for the missing man, is forced to re-examine his own past. Skillfully written and, ultimately, deeply satisfying.” Read more: <http://gibsonhousepress.com/portfolio/permafrost/> (*Booklist*)

“Behind the wheel of his luxury sedan and stopped in traffic, a man scans the newspaper and learns a friend from his childhood in Scotland has gone missing, last seen alone on a borrowed bicycle near a small town in Northern Michigan. Neither authorities in the U.S. nor the U.K. seem interested in the disappearance. . . . This fine first novel contrasts the lives of two men who start out amid similar circumstances but whose paths diverge until they are violently reconnected on a stretch of Michigan beach. Along the way, we are treated to well- drawn characters and places and a great music playlist that serves as backdrop and window into Tom’s mind. . . . Mystery readers who enjoy Michael Connelly, John Harvey, and Reginald Hill will enjoy it.” Read more: <http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2012/11/book-review-permafrost-by-peter-robertson/> (*Public Libraries Online*)

“Peter Robertson’s *Permafrost* is to picturesque northern Michigan what Harlan Coben’s novels are to his beloved New Jersey. In fact, Coben fans will find kindred spirits—and page-turning suspense—in this smashing psychological thriller about a man troubled by secrets and a past he is trying to understand. Robertson’s world is granular, vivid, and complex—his characters, filled with regret and menace, search for redemption in an entirely genuine and moving way. Robertson’s lyrical prose hooked me by the third sentence—I turned the pages right into dawn where the sun was rising on the damage, with the hint of salvation—just maybe. The welcome beginning of a superbly smart and addictive series.” (Doug Stanton, best-selling author of *In Harm’s Way* and *Horse Soldiers*)

# About the author

Peter Robertson was born and raised in Edinburgh, Scotland. He lives in the Chicago area. Follow on Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/PeterRobertsonAuthor> or website [www.peterrobertsonauthor.com](http://www.peterrobertsonauthor.com). *Permafrost* is the first in a mystery trilogy that follows Tom to new places in *Mission* and *Colorblind*.

## Discussion questions

- What is the meaning of the title *Permafrost*?
- How do the musical references set the timeline?
- What does the odd fascination/obsession with certain physical objects/brands say about the character? Does this change as he makes his journey? Are we living in an age of soulless people who define themselves by the brand names on their shelves?
- Tom paints his assistant Nye as having obsessive repetitive behaviors—but is it really him?
- For a first person narrative, the protagonist is not very forthcoming, His name isn't mentioned until halfway through the book. Do you find how he describes himself believable?
- Is he likable or not? Why or why not?
- Have you had a friend like Keith Pringle before, someone for whom it is difficult to describe your relationship? Explain.
- What does it say about Tom's pointless life that he cares about the missing man—a mere acquaintance?
- Keith is described as "charming and helpless." He lived in the rough, and is seen as a bum, hobo, or a new age traveler. How did Keith become not just unencumbered, but so unmoored?
- Many of the people that Tom meets along the way in his journey are women. What do you think about Robertson's portrayal of the various women in *Permafrost*?
- What does Tom's attitude about his marriage say about his character? "My wife has less soul than I."
- Which characters did you suspect of killing Keith? Did you guess who it was before the end of the book?
- Does the ending make you want to read more books with Tom as the main character?
- How does the resort town setting work with the plot?

Thanks to the creators of this guide: **Jane Gibson** is a librarian at the Seattle Public Library (SPL), where she organizes and presents literary programs and special events, provides readers advisory to all ages and leads book groups. Jane has served on a variety of reading promotion, selection and programming committees with SPL, YALSA (Young Adult Library Services Association) and the National Endowment for the Arts. **Amy E. Mark** is Head of Instruction, Information Literacy Librarian & Associate Professor, University of Mississippi, Oxford.