

The Shelter Cycle

A Novel

Peter Rock

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Introduction

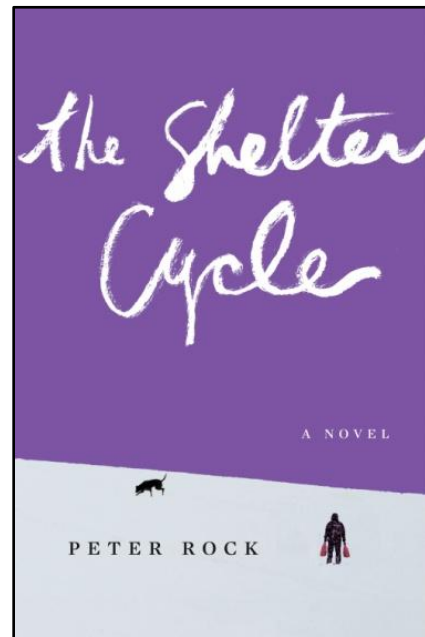
Hailed for his gripping storytelling, award-winning novelist Peter Rock creates twists of fate that speak to our most essential questions about risk and trust, fear and hope.

Inspired by true events, *The Shelter Cycle* tells the story of two children, Francine and Colville, who grew up in the Church Universal and Triumphant, a religion that predicted the world could end in the late 1980s. The Church's members built an elaborate network of underground shelters to withstand an impending Soviet missile strike. When the prophesized apocalypse did not occur, the sect's children were forced to enter a world they had been taught to reject. When Francine and Colville are reunited twenty years later while searching for an abducted girl, they confront the Church's misguided teachings, which suddenly feel all too true.

We hope that the following discussion topics will enhance your reading group's experience of this haunting tale.

Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. Discuss the novel's title. Though it refers to a phase in the work of the Church, how does it apply to the characters' lives? Where do Francine and Colville find shelter—emotional as well as physical?
2. What beliefs from your youth did you abandon as an adult? Francine and Colville are able to confront their conflicted memories by visiting well-preserved sites from their past. Which locales from your youth do you revisit?
3. Was it right for Wells to read Francine's manuscript? What did it reveal about his wife's vulnerabilities, as well as her sources of strength? How were you affected by Peter Rock's use of two narrators?
4. Were any aspects of the Messenger and her message appealing to you? Which of her teachings were destructive? Do her beliefs, especially regarding the spirit world and the Ascended Masters, overlap with those of mainstream religions?
5. How did your impressions of Colville shift throughout the novel?



6. Discuss the role of Della and Kilo in *The Shelter Cycle*. In the novel, how does reality unfold through the eyes of a child? In what ways is Della both wise but naïve? How does Kilo reflect on the relationship between animals and humans? Who protects whom?

7. What accounts for the ways in which Francine and her sister, Maya, have such different impressions of their time in the Church? Among their generation and their parents' generation, what determined who would continue believing and who would abandon the faith?

8. Discuss the shelters themselves—from the types of food being preserved to the quest to preserve knowledge in the form of encyclopedias. What do the shelters indicate about the believers' ideal post-war world? What would you bring with you into such a shelter?

9. How do Colville's interactions with Jeremy compare to his interactions with the Messenger years ago? Is Jeremy following her doctrine, or is he corrupting it?

10. How was your reading affected by the fact that the novel was inspired by true events? In what ways can fiction enhance our understanding of historical realities? Visit the website of the Church Universal and Triumphant. What are your impressions of the proclamations you find there?

11. How does Montana's landscape serve as a mirror of the characters' immersion in a world that is both beautiful and treacherous? What tone does the landscape set for the novel's closing scenes?

12. Discuss the role of Wells and Francine's baby. What power do Colville and other believers ascribe to newborns? How did you react to the concept that we choose our family before we are born?

13. Colville believes that the vibrations of the teachings resurfaced when Della's sister disappeared. In a way, was he right?

14. Discuss previous works by Peter Rock that you have read. How does *The Shelter Cycle* amplify his other explorations of human resilience?

About the Author

Born and raised in Salt Lake City, Peter Rock now teaches writing at Reed College in Portland, Oregon. He attended Deep Springs College and Yale University, and was a Wallace Stegner Fellow in Stanford's creative writing program. During the Church Universal and Triumphant's shelter cycle (circa 1987-1990), he worked on a nearby ranch above Paradise Valley in Montana. His most recent book is *My Abandonment*, which won an Alex Award and the Utah Book Award. He is also the author of the novels *The Bewildered*, *The Ambidextrist*, *This Is the Place*, and *Carnival Wolves*, as well as a story collection, *The Unsettling*.