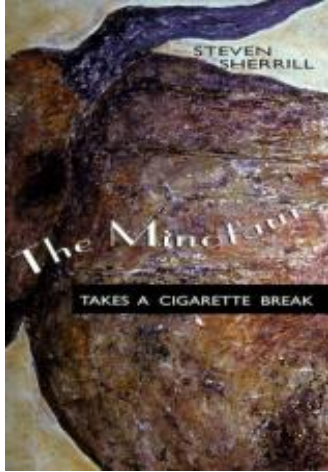


# The Minotaur Takes a Cigarette Break

by Steven Sherrill

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## About the Book

Five thousand years out of the Labyrinth that held him captive, and as many years beyond the dubious bargain that set him free, the Minotaur finds himself struggling to negotiate the American South with the body of a man and the head of a bull.

The Minotaur tries to balance the past, the present, and a looming future from behind the cooks' line at Grub's Rib, where his coworkers know both his skill with a chef's knife and the sometimes dangerous nature of his horns. At Lucky-U Mobile Estates, the Minotaur lives in a boat-shaped trailer and shares with his neighbors an appreciation for a quiet lifestyle and a respect for auto repairs.

Over the duration of his life, the Minotaur has roamed the earth and seen much, yet he has reaped little wisdom to help him navigate the complex geography of human relationships. Inarticulate, socially inept, tolerated at best by modern folk, he has been reduced from a monster with an appetite for human flesh to a broken creature with very human needs.

During the two weeks covered by the novel, the delicate balance tips, and the Minotaur finds his life dissolving into chaos while he simultaneously awakens to the possibility of love.

Among the characters peopling the Minotaur's world are Kelly, whose own debilitating flaw allows her affinity for the Minotaur; Sweeny, the rough-hewn but kindly proprietor of the mobile-home park; and Buddy, Sweeny's unforgettable, unlucky, randy bulldog.

**The Minotaur Takes a Cigarette Break** is an effortless blend of the mundane and the mythic, a unique world in which kitchen work becomes high drama and meetings between legendary creatures almost pass notice. But strangest of all in Steven Sherrill's debut novel, everything seems to make perfect sense.

## Discussion Guide

1. From what point of view is the story delivered? Is it constant? Are there moments or passages that occur outside the ongoing narrative.
2. How does the Minotaur resolve the paradoxical work that he now finds himself doing?
3. What roles do Grub and his family play in the book and in the Minotaur's life?
4. How do the dream sequences/chapters function?
5. In your opinion, what is the reason for placing the Minotaur in the twentieth-century American South? How does this setting resemble and/or differ from the Minotaur's original home of Crete?
6. Throughout the book, in the Minotaur's journey, he has several encounters with creatures who share his mythic past. Describe these meetings and explain their significance in the context of the story.
7. The entire book takes place in a span of less than three weeks in the Minotaur's never-ending life. What are some possible reasons for this? How does time function throughout the book?
8. Are there themes and/or images you can identify as recurring throughout the book?
9. How do the Minotaur's assorted neighbors and his life at Lucky-U Mobile Estates reflect the themes and issues in the book?
10. What, both literally and mythically, does the corn-dog trailer represent to the Minotaur?
11. How can you explain the Minotaur's appreciation of and understanding for things mechanical?
12. What are the various moments and levels of humor at work in the book?
13. The Minotaur seems to display his most human emotions in his reactions to Kelly. What is it about Kelly that evokes his feelings of compassion and pathos?
14. What of the Labyrinth that was created for the Minotaur in myth? Does its existence suggest anything about the Minotaur's future?

## Author Bio

Steven Sherrill is a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and holds an MFA in poetry from the Iowa Writers' Workshop. He was the recipient of a Lila Wallace/Reader's Digest Fellowship to the McDowell Colony. His poems and stories have appeared in such publications as *Best American Poetry*, *Kenyon Review*, and *Georgia Review*.

He lives in Altoona, Pennsylvania.

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