

2nd Chance Study Guide

2nd Chance by James Patterson

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Plot Summary

James Patterson has created a suspenseful, twisty, and easily readable tale of crime, revenge, and the inevitable conflict between a mentally ill and obsessed serial killer and those in law enforcement who are driven to identify and stop him before his rampage continues. Seemingly unrelated crimes in two separate communities are quickly linked by the killer's "calling card," the insignia of Chimera, a Greek mythological two-headed monster, which is eventually identified as the symbol of a vicious, white supremacist group, operating both within and outside of prisons. The killings continue and the eventual connection to police officers is made.

As Lindsay Boxer, Lieutenant in the San Francisco homicide department sets out to bring the killer to justice, she is joined by three friends, an Assistant District Attorney, the Medical Examiner, and a reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle, all four of whom have recently solved another vicious serial murder spree. Each has a part to play in the investigation, including dogged police work, research into police personnel files and newspaper archives, and autopsies that provide valuable clues regarding the killer's weapons, marksmanship abilities, and the existence of a tattoo on his chest. Lindsay and fellow officers follow the trails of evidence, but the killer is always one step ahead, and the frustration only ends when thorough analysis of the few clues leads to a former police officer, Frank Coombs, who, twenty years earlier, had been convicted of manslaughter in the murder of a young black boy. The search for Coombs and his ultimate death on the steps of Justice Hall, as he attempts to kill Lindsay, provide temporary relief to both the department and the public, both of whom are now assured that this racist, mentally ill, vengeful murderer has been brought to justice.

The satisfaction is short-lived, however, as Chimera strikes again and as Lindsay realizes that the autopsy evidence on Coombs does not fit the true killer. The final conclusion that the true Chimera killer is Coombs's son, a model college student/athlete, is a shock to all, but, as he is pursued, the reader is given the final pieces of information which demonstrate that he, in fact, is as mentally ill and as obsessed with revenge as his father. The final moments of the killer's life involve a shoot-out between Lindsay and him at the top of a tower, with throngs of people below and the excruciating peeling of carillon bells.

Interspersed throughout the work are important comments on society's institutions, to include police departments and the justice system in general, as well as on continuing social issues of racism, terror, and the criminally insane. As Lindsay struggles over the relationship with a father who has re-entered her life after twenty years, as Jill Bernhardt struggles with the conflict between a career and a desire for children, and as Cindy begins a new relationship with a black church pastor, realistic and natural issues of personal lives, though minor events, serve to lend credibility to the characters being portrayed.

Prologue and Part I: The Women's Murder Club - Again

Prologue and Part I: The Women's Murder Club - Again Summary

The Prologue and the first twenty-five chapters introduce the reader to an apparently random crime of violence and to the Women's Murder Club, a group of four women who have worked together to solve a previous crime. Lindsay Boxer, now a lieutenant in the San Francisco Homicide Division, has been taking time off following the resolution of an earlier homicide and the death of a lover. This new crime, the shooting of a young black choir member leaving an evening rehearsal at La Salle Heights Church, has brought her back into focus on the responsibility of her position. Upon hearing of the shooting from ex-partner Warren Jacobi, Lindsay rushes to the scene, already filled with police and reporters.

The church is rifled with bullet holes, and the new stained glass window destroyed. Dead is an eleven-year-old child, Tasha Catchings, who lived just a short distance away in the LaSalle Heights Projects. Lindsay is amazed that more were not killed, given the number of gunshot holes in the church. Following the path of shooting, it is clear that the gunman hid in a large group of bushes a number of yards away and probably escaped through a nearby alley. A six-year old boy is able to give Lindsay a description of a white van, parked at the end of the alley with a strange decal on its bumper. He describes the decal as looking like "Mufasa" from "The Lion King" movie, with the exception that this figure has two heads.

Back at the Hall of Justice, Chief of Police Earl Mercer arrives in Lindsay's office with the public relations "folks," insisting that the murder is a hate crime, should be treated as such, and that she should begin to look into racist and white supremacist groups active in the area. Lindsay is certainly willing to follow this avenue, but instinct tells her that all avenues must ultimately be explored. Part of her thinking is the result of word from her friend and member of the Women's Murder Club, Cindy Thomas, crime reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle, who has asked her to meet at Susie's, their favorite restaurant/bar that evening. Apparently, Cindy is planning to investigate this crime from another angle and informs Lindsay that there has been the murder of an elderly woman in Oakland, Estelle Chipman, also black. Estelle was found lynched from a steam pipe in the basement of her apartment building, and Cindy wants to explore a possible connection, albeit far-fetched. Lindsay prefers to focus on the Tasha Catchings murder, but is somewhat intrigued with Cindy's perspective.

Another member of the Women's Murder Club is Claire Washburn, an Assistant Medical Examiner. She has completed the autopsy of Tasha Catchings, with an interesting finding. Tasha was hit twice in almost exactly the same spot, indicating that the death was not the result of random bullets but, rather, the result of a sharpshooter who



targeted the child specifically. This information places a new twist on the case, and Lindsay is now willing to take a look at the Estelle Chipman murder. In Oakland, Lindsay and Jacobi discover that skin scrapings under Estelle's nails are non-Caucasian, thus discounting the "hate crime" theory somewhat. Nevertheless, they visit the crime scene, where Lindsay discovers the same two-headed symbol crudely drawn on the wall of the basement crime scene. The focus of Lindsay's investigation will now be two-fold: trace the van and identify the two-headed symbol present at both scenes. Revealing the details of the two crime scenes to her three cohorts in the Women's Murder Club, Lindsay excites her friends, who all now wish to participate in the investigation. Jill, an Assistant District Attorney, also reveals that she is pregnant and appears thrilled. She is a driven prosecutor, with an equally driven husband, and the others wonder how she will juggle pregnancy with her obvious obsession with her career.

The reader is briefly introduced to the killer, as he sits in his room, looking at old photographs of southern lynchings, adding a photograph of Estelle Chipman to the album. His motivation is somewhat revealed with his thoughts: "It's not about hate - soon they'll see this - they had to pay - the guilty had to be punished; reputations had to be restored." (p. 65). On his chest is the two-headed symbol tattoo. Lindsay, meanwhile, has been directed to explore active hate groups, and is reading through mounds of files, without success, when she receives a call that the van has been discovered.

The van had been dumped in an affluent neighborhood and, in fact, had been reported stolen a month previously. The decal on the bumper was not originally on the van; however, Lindsay is now able to get a clear picture of the symbol. One head is that of a lion, the other of a goat. The tail of the figure appears to be somewhat like that of a serpent. She now has the detail needed to research the figure, along with the newly received information that Estelle Chipman was the widow of a San Francisco police officer who died of a heart attack five years earlier. The pieces are not quite fitting, but every detail and item of information must be considered.

Cindy, for her part in the investigation, has decided to interview Aaron Winslow, pastor of LaSalle Heights Church, in an attempt to gather further detail on Tasha Catchings and the murder incident. Claire Washburn is requesting the Medical Examiner's report on Estelle Chipman, and Lindsay continues to research the symbol, as well as look into Edward Chipman's personnel file. As Part I closes, Lindsay has managed to discover one piece of important information. The symbol is revealed on the back of a jacket in an FBI photograph of a group called The Templars, an offshoot of Hell's Angels. Except for Jill, whose work will primarily revolve around warrants and indictments, the Women's Murder Club is back in business.

Prologue and Part I: The Women's Murder Club - Again Analysis

The Women's Murder Club is back in business after a respite following the successful investigation of a high profile murder case in San Francisco. The author hints that Lindsay Boxer, now a lieutenant in homicide, has been on leave following this case,

evidently having lost a partner/lover and suffering from emotional illness, not specifically defined. She is nudged back into operation by a call from another officer, Jacobi, when an assault on a church in a predominantly black neighborhood has resulted in the death of a child. Lindsay obviously has a great deal of interest in disadvantaged youth, working as a volunteer in a troubled teen center, so this motivation to return to police work is credible for the reader.

Part I, the first twenty-five chapters, sets up the initial conflicts and characters for this murder mystery. Lindsay is conflicted within herself about returning to police work; there are hints of conflict between Mercer and Lindsay regarding exposure to the press, his directive of silence, and the possibility of FBI involvement; the larger conflict, obviously between the murderer and those who seek to identify and prosecute him, begins to form, as the reader is given some small insight into a man who is obsessed with revenge for some as yet unknown wrong.

Members of the Murder Club are all presented as strong protagonists, aggressive, smart, and fully focused on their careers. Three are involved in the justice system in some manner, and the fourth, Cindy Thomas, is a crime reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle, young, but fully capable of doggedly pursuing successful investigations and contributing important information. Chief Mercer is portrayed as an individual who is honorable and ethical but who, as well, must bend to pressure from the press and his community, balancing investigations against the public clamor to know all. Warren Jacobi is a long-term police veteran whose loyalty to Lindsay Boxer is obvious and who has convinced her to return to the important work of solving homicides.

It becomes obvious to the reader, as Part I proceeds, that the murder of Tasha Catchings is not an isolated incident, a random act of violence to be solved. The strange symbol appearing at two crime scenes, Claire's conclusion that Tasha's murder was at the hands of a sharpshooter, and the very brief but important introduction to the murderer demonstrate that this tale will be complex, twisty, and suspenseful.

Part II: Justice Will Be Served

Part II: Justice Will Be Served Summary

Now that Lindsay has viewed the strange symbol on the jacket of a member of The Templar, she is conducting research on the group. It is purported that the members have been involved in quite a bit of violent activity and that they operate out of a bar called Blue Parrot. With this information, she sends Jacobi and fellow officer Cappy off to the bar for further information. Lindsay will be attending Tasha Catching's funeral with Cindy, who is clearly now smitten with Aaron Winslow. At the funeral, Cindy reveals the results of her research into the symbol found at both crime scenes. The figure is called "Chimera" and is from Greek mythology. The lion head represents courage; the goat, stubbornness and will, and the serpent tail, stealth and cunning. The chimera was eventually killed by a hero on a winged horse, who cut off its head.

In rapid succession, information is discovered. Claire has visited the Medical Examiner's office in Oakland and learns that the killer is not black, as originally believed. The pigmentation of skin cells under Estelle's nails is from ink, probably a tattoo. As well, the van's owner is located. He is a professor at a local junior college and had reported the van stolen while he was out of town. The decal, he states, was not his. Jacobi has discovered that The Templars are no longer operating out of the Parrot Bar but have moved further south. One redheaded male, Richard Earl Evans, who knew The Templars, discloses that the symbol denotes that the wearer is a "patriot," a white supremacist who believes in a "free and orderly society." As well, he reveals that the fellow sporting the symbol on his jacket is dead. The most important information, however, is the fact that both victims have connections to San Francisco police officers. Tasha was the niece of a current officer, and Estelle Chipman's husband, who died five years ago, was also a cop.

The police receive a call reporting a disturbance at the Driscoll Hotel on 7th Street. Art Davidson, the beat cop, goes into the building, hears a verbal altercation on an upper floor, bashes in the door, and finds a boom box on a chair in a deserted room. As he is attempting to make sense of the incident, he is murdered by a shot through the window from a nearby building. Art Davidson is black, and Chimera has struck again. The 911 call, which brought the police to the Driscoll, is discovered to have been made by a cell phone, probably cloned. One clue has been found on the rooftop of the building from which the shooter sniped - a partial sneaker print with chalk dust in it. More important, Lindsay is now concluding that black police officers, or relatives or black police officers, are being targeted, perhaps by someone who believes he was victimized. She asks Jill Bernhardt, Assistant District Attorney and member of the "club," to research cases in which a white defendant might have been convicted on the basis of black officers' testimony.

A driver drives Chief Mercer home each evening, in the department-owned Lincoln. The killer is stalking him and finds his opening, as Mercer disembarks at a shopping area,



strolls through a few shops and then proceeds to walk the short distance home. Accosting the chief from behind some bushes, Chimera shoots him three times. Mercer dies in surgery - another black officer murdered. During the crime scene investigation, it is revealed that a book on Greek mythology was left in Mercer's pocket. Chimera has left a message - "More to come...justice will be served."

Lindsay calls a meeting of the club at Susie's. Claire has the autopsy results from Mercer's murder. He was shot three times at intervals, and perhaps the murderer and the victim were conversing, indicating Mercer knew his killer. Lindsay and Jill have not been able to find any connection among the four targeted police officers. They will have to continue their research, looking for either a white supremacist or someone who has a personal vendetta. Lindsay, Jill and Claire are surprised when Cindy announces she has a date, who will be picking her up. The surprise turns to shock when Aaron Winslow pulls up to take Cindy to a jazz performance.

As Lindsay drives home, she detects a white Toyota following her. Pulling into her apartment parking lot, she pulls her gun and accosts the stalker, only to learn that it is father, Marty Boxer. Marty is a former San Francisco police officer who deserted Lindsay, her mother and sister twenty years ago. Lindsay has only seen him once since that time, when she discovered him in the audience at her police academy graduation. Her anger and dislike are apparent in this shocking face-to-face encounter, but Marty convinces her to allow him in for coffee and a short conversation. Bringing her up to date on his whereabouts and activities over the past twenty years, he explains that he would like to renew their relationship. Lindsay reluctantly agrees to give it a try and offers her spare bedroom for a short while. She will be home very little anyway, she concludes, because a task force has been formed, including homicide and the FBI, and her work hours will be lengthy.

When Cindy's research finds a connection between Chimera and Pelican Bay, a maximum-security prison, Lindsay and Jacobi visit the warden. Lindsay wants to speak with a dangerous and isolated prisoner, Weisz, who is considered the head of Chimera among prison inmates in the area. Weisz is a huge man, who is chained to his chair as Lindsay enters the room to question him. Lindsay has nothing to offer in return for information, but Weisz requests that she hold up a mirror so that he may view himself. Grabbing her compact, Lindsay opens it up for him, and he is obviously shocked by what he sees. Weisz states that he is happy to learn that Chimera is doing his work on the outside, killing blacks, and gives her a snippet of a clue. Perhaps, he says, one of her own has come to his senses. Acting upon this clue, Lindsay requests the names of all officers held at Pelican Bay over the past twelve years.

This research reveals that Frank Coombs, a former San Francisco cop, was convicted of killing a young black teen in Bay View, the black neighborhood that is now known as LaSalle Heights. While at Pelican Bay, he was a member of Chimera. Armed with a name, Lindsay delves into Coombs's background. During his career, he was a SWAT trained marksman, but was convicted of manslaughter when he choked the black child. Claiming it was self-defense, he was still unable to gain support from any other officer in the department. Lindsay's father fills in some holes for her as well. Coombs was a



violent cop with whom no one wanted to partner. During the time of the case against him, black and Latino officers had formed an organization for equal treatment, pay and promotion, and Coombs always believed that the pressure from this group, Officers for Justice, resulted in his conviction. Chief Mercer was Coombs's lieutenant at the time.

Lindsay now has her Chimera, but finding him may not be easy. Chimera, moreover, is busy stalking his next victim. Waiting for her to return home, Chimera calls Claire on the telephone in her study. Asking her to think about what she and the other victims have in common, Chimera shoots through the study window, grazing Claire in the neck. Son Willie calls 911 and his father, and almost immediately, the street is ablaze with police lights. Chimera has missed his mark but realizes that Claire is really just target practice for his next victim. Claire, only superficially wounded, tightens her resolve to get this guy.

Part II: Justice Will Be Served Analysis

Dogged police work and a bit of luck portray a realistic picture of criminal investigations in this section of the novel. Thus Lindsay must pursue multiple avenues, as she attempts to learn the meaning of the mythological symbol, the activities of white supremacist groups within the area, the possible motives of the killer, the connection among all of the victims, the results and inferences of autopsies, and, in the end, the identity of Chimera. Fortunately, the pieces of investigatory work begin to come together and result in the name of a former San Francisco police officer, who was clearly racist and violent. His motives become obvious, once Lindsay is able to gain additional information from her father, relative to his conviction for manslaughter. The obvious foreshadowing, regarding Marty Boxer's possible involvement in the indictment and conviction of Frank Coombs, is given, as he explains to his daughter that he was not necessarily a totally "clean" officer and that he, indeed, has lied many times in his past. The abrupt re-introduction of Marty Boxer into his daughter's life, as she is investigating this series of murders, moreover, is seen as a bit suspect.

The relationship between Lindsay and her father is obviously improving. Lindsay wants to believe that he has re-entered her life out of a sincere desire to form a familial connection, and Marty appears to be credible in his motives. His explanation for deserting the family, moreover, is believable, as he speaks to his gambling, his debts "on the street," and the belief that the family would be in a better position without him. His further revelation that he may have committed a crime informs the reader that there is more to the Marty Boxer story than is currently revealed.

Discovery of the identity of Chimera at this point in the plot tells the reader that the remainder of the tale will involve tracking and capturing the culprit, and, with so much of the novel remaining, this event will probably involve a great deal of action and reaction. The reader is now ready for the suspense that is certain to follow, as an entire police department and an FBI-involved task force pit themselves against a single, cunning killer.

Part III: The Blue Wall of Silence

Part III: The Blue Wall of Silence Summary

Finding Frank Coombs launches a new focus for the department and the task force. Coombs's parole officer informs Lindsay that he has vacated his registered residence, and Lindsay learns that the officers involved in Coombs's conviction were Mercer, Tasha's uncle, and Art Davidson. Estelle Chipman's husband was the precinct representative to the OFJ (Officers for Justice). Armed with all of her information and the identify of Coombs, Lindsay presents herself to the Acting Chief's office, only to discover that the task force is meeting without her. She is the one who has moved the investigation forward, however, and the chief supports her desire for homicide to retain control of the case.

A visit to Coombs's ex-wife reveals no new information, other than the fact that he has maintained contact with fellow former officer, Tom Keating. A visit to Tom Keating reveals a man who is angry with the department for abandoning Coombs for simply doing his job. Keating further insists that, while Coombs visited him once, he has not since heard from him. Lindsay and Jacobi move on to Stanford University, where Coombs's son is a student and athlete. He states that his father visited him once after his release, asking about some old police items he had left with his mother. Rusty states that he has not heard from his father since. As they are willing to see the visits as unproductive, Keating's wife calls with the additional information that Coombs had been given money, old police uniforms and guns by her husband. As well, she has a telephone number for Coombs.

A trace on the telephone number reveals that Coombs is staying at the Hotel William Simon, a boarding house. Once Lindsay sees him enter the hotel, she orders twenty-four hour surveillance and goes to Jill for a warrant. Despite the clear knowledge that Coombs is Chimera, Jill cannot issue a warrant without solid evidence, and none exists. To move the case forward, Lindsay decides to rattle Coombs with a surprise visit. The visit proves almost useless, with Coombs mocking them for complete lack of evidence connecting him to the crimes. Lindsay is angry and, acting on impulse, returns to the Hotel Simon that evening, believing that Coombs may attempt to thwart the surveillance.

As she suspects, Coombs leaves the hotel by a back entrance, and Lindsay follows. He is eventually picked up and driven to a dilapidated house, where, peering through the window, Lindsay is able to see a group of men, one of whom has a Chimera tattoo. She is accosted by late arrivals and ultimately held at gunpoint by Coombs himself. Shots ring out and the Chimera group disbands, Coombs wounded in the shoulder as he escapes. Marty Boxer is the "savior," and Lindsay is shocked that her father has been following her and suspects that her father may have more involvement than he has stated. As she presses him for answers, Marty admits that he was at the scene when Coombs choked the boy, told Coombs to stop, but did nothing else, and was ultimately



sent away by another officer who arrived, never to mention it again. Coombs contacted Marty when he was paroled and vowed to "pay him back" for not coming to his support during the trial and conviction. Marty knows that Coombs is after Lindsay and has returned to protect her. Lindsay believes he is there to protect himself, perhaps by killing Coombs himself.

Armed with several charges against Coombs, including attempted murder, resisting arrest, etc., Jill issues a search and arrest warrant, and the department issues an APB on Coombs. In his room, Lindsay finds a manila envelope filled with old clippings from Coombs's trial and appeal, as well as newer clippings regarding the current murder investigations. His notes in the margins call individuals "liars" and "traitors," and he has circled in red pictures of those he intends to harm. Lindsay's head is circled from a recent press conference photo. She calls the "club" together to update everyone on recent events.

During the club meeting, Lindsay reveals that Marty has disappointed her again. Jill plans to go through the entire Coombs trial file and see if Marty was in any way involved. As she reads the file, the deposition of a young man is found, one that was never used in court, because he had a lengthy juvenile record, rendering him not credible. Locating him, Jill discovers that he actually observed the killing of the boy from his window, that there were two police officers present, and then identifies Marty Boxer from a photograph Jill presents. Marty's story is thus verified, and Lindsay, upon hearing this news, is conflicted and furious with her father. Ultimately, she throws him out of her apartment, despite his protests that he is truly there for her protection.

Coombs calls Lindsay from a pay telephone across from Justice Hall, informing her that she is his target, taunting her about the department's inability to find him. A trace on the call reveals the location of the phone booth, and the entire department rushes for the outside steps of the Hall, yelling for people to vacate the premises. A police officer Lindsay does not recognize is coming toward her, and, too late, she realizes that the uniform is all wrong. Coombs pulls a pistol and shoots at her. Jacobi and Cappy blast him. Wounded but able to move, Lindsay goes to Coombs, who, in dying, grins and whispers, "One last surprise." EMTs arrive to work on Coombs, tearing his shirt off, revealing no tattoo on his chest.

Coombs is dead, and Lindsay, from her hospital bed, tells Claire that he had no tattoo, requesting as well that, during the autopsy, Claire comb his body for any pigmentation that could have been scraped by Estelle Chipman. She also informs Jacobi and Cappy that she has doubts about Coombs being Chimera, especially since he missed killing her at such close range. Her fears are confirmed when Claire presents the autopsy results. Coombs has no pigmentation and, as well, was suffering from Parkinson's Disease, clearly unable to make the shots in the earlier killings. Chimera has not been found. Despite the acting chief's orders not to re-open the case, Lindsay puts her department back on the investigation, and events will show her correctness.

As Aaron Winslow and Cindy sit down for a romantic dinner at Cindy's, a sniper begins to shoot from outside the dining room window. No one is injured, but Chimera is

obviously on the move and becoming far more reckless. Further, there are no leads as to his identity, given that all of Coombs's contacts and previous associates are ruled out. Something is nudging Lindsay, however, to take a second look at the evidence collected from Coombs's room. In the evidence room, she finds the small brass marksmanship trophy that had sat on a windowsill. A more careful look reveals that the name on the trophy is not Frank C. Coombs, but, rather, Frank L. Coombs, the son, now called "Rusty."

As Lindsay analyzes the other pieces of evidence, she realizes that the van had been stolen by a junior college professor who often tutored students from Stanford, particularly athletes. Although Rusty has no adult record, the access to juvenile records of law enforcement officials allows Lindsay to view a long history of violence and vandalism, including killing of animals, vandalism of homes and places of worship of blacks and Jews, and membership in a youth white supremacist gang. She remembers, as well, that athletes use white chalk on their hands when lifting weights. The team is off to Stanford to confront Frank L. Coombs.

Rusty is out for his daily run when he observes multiple police cars at his fraternity house. Turning quickly away, he heads for the quad, taking the elevator to the top of the Hoover Tower. In his duffel bag is the disassembled gun and sniper's scope he will now use to make his last stand. Through his scope, he views several targets - an Asian girl, and a black male among them - and begins shooting. By the time Lindsay and Jacobi get to the quad, five students have been shot, and chaos reigns. Zigzagging around bushes and other buildings, Lindsay is not a good target for Coombs, although she is his final goal, before he faces certain death. Climbing 13 flights of stairs, Lindsay arrives on the roof to see Coombs and the huge carillon bells that ring each hour. After a short cat-and-mouse game, Lindsay is finally overcome by Coombs, who now stands over her ready for his final triumph. In the fray, Lindsay has lost her weapon. At this moment, however, the bells begin their hourly peal, and the noise is deafening. Rusty coils himself, covering his ears, while Lindsay pushes herself away, agonizing from the reverberations and sound. Pulling her small spare berretta from her pant leg, Lindsay is able to get off three shots directly into Rusty's chest. The fourth shot, to the throat, ends his life and allows Lindsay to discover the Chimera tattoo on his chest.

Lindsay takes a few days to reflect, contemplating alternative avenues of life, but in the end returns to work. She meets with Acting Chief Tracchio, who informs her that the normal investigation into the killing of Frank Coombs Sr., revealed a bullet that did not come from the officers who shot him. Immediately, Lindsay realizes that her father was there, protecting her again, but she will not reveal the information. The case is closed, the real Chimera dead, and it is time to move on.

Epilogue: I'll Fly Away: LaSalle Heights Church has been repaired, and there is a moving re-dedication service which members of the "club" attend. Aaron Winslow and Cindy are still an "item," a fact that pleases her friends immensely. Arriving home, Lindsay finds an intriguing piece of mail. It is a letter from Marty, from Mexico. He has purchased a fishing boat, and, in a grainy photograph of himself by his newly painted

treasure, Lindsay can barely make out the name, "Buttercup," her father's nickname for her.

Part III: The Blue Wall of Silence Analysis

Chapters 76-120 include the continuing rising action of the plot, as the police attempt to anticipate Chimera's moves and to identify him as Frank Coombs. As is often the case in police investigations, Lindsay knows that Coombs is Chimera but has not one bit of physical evidence connecting him to the scenes of any of the murders. Lacking such evidence, there is no probable cause for search warrants or an arrest. As is probably typical of actual police work, Lindsay's tactic is to rattle Coombs by paying him a visit, organizing surveillance, and, in general, hoping to somehow find the connection needed or to goad him into reckless action.

As the continued tracking of Coombs continues, however, Lindsay's relationship with her father, somewhat in repair, is again destroyed, as she comes to realize that perhaps he has presented himself for reasons far more selfish than the re-establishment of a father-daughter relationship. The suspicion that grows within Lindsay leads to the eventual confession of her father relative to his involvement in the Coombs situation and the severance of their ties once again. She now sees him as a selfish, lying old man who is only interested in saving himself from potential implication in a twenty-year old crime. The reader certainly develops empathy for Marty in this process, because it is easy to assess his motives as altruistic and to understand that, as many mistakes as he has made, he does care for his daughter and would like to remain a part of her life. Some plot credibility is lost during the attempt to determine the level of Marty's involvement, however, as Jill finds a witness who is able, twenty years later, to identify Marty from a photograph.

As the showdown with Coombs occurs on the steps of Justice Hall, the plot climax has clearly occurred too early, and the reader is then given the important information that the case is not yet solved. Coombs has no tattoo, he has missed an easy shot at Lindsay, and his mysterious words, "one last surprise," reveal that there is more to come in this twisty tale. The re-introduction of son Rusty is at first incredible, for here is a lad who has apparently grown into a productive student/athlete, despite his father's early influence. Lindsay's ability to access his juvenile records, however, reveals a terribly troubled teen and allows the reader to accept the fact that Rusty is, indeed, Chimera, a young man strongly influenced, by nature and/or nurture, during his early years with an angry, racist father.

The denouement allows for potential sequels to the "Women's Murder club" novels, as all four friends are intact and remain committed to investigation and solution of crimes. As well, the beginnings of a repair in the relationship between Lindsay and her father leave the reader satisfied that, indeed, familial bonds, although cracked and broken throughout life, can ultimately reach a degree of mutual acceptance and love.

Characters

Lindsay Boxer

Member of the San Francisco Police Department for a number of years, Lindsay Boxer is initially portrayed as a fragile figure, recuperating from a horrible homicide case and having lost her lover in the course of the investigation and resolution. She has taken time off and is using voluntarism at a local teen center as a method of coping with trauma and grief. It is obvious that her heart is with the homicide department, however, as she quickly moves back into action when a child is murdered outside a church in a predominantly black section of town. Having been promoted to the rank of lieutenant in the homicide division, Lindsay now directs the investigation, along with fellow officers and friends Jacobi and Cappy. Her true support, however, comes from the friendship of three other women, two of whom are also involved in law enforcement and one who is a crime reporter for the local newspaper.

Lindsay is a strong protagonist, who has overcome personal tragedies in her life - the desertion of her former police officer, Marty, and the death of her mother and lover - and manages to put such personal matters aside in order to focus on solving a horrible crime which quickly escalates into a series of murders. Using her superior investigatory techniques, the bits of information gathered by other officers and her "club" members, Lindsay analyzes her way into a theory that, despite frequent opposition from the acting police chief and the FBI, proves correct. In the midst of the investigation, moreover, Lindsay's father re-appears into her life, a man with whom she has not communicated in twenty years, and she is horribly conflicted relative to her feelings for this man who turned his back on his family and yet successfully persuades her to give him an opportunity to be the father he never was. Lindsay deliberately puts her life at risk, survives two assaults, and ultimately places her life in complete jeopardy as she confronts the killer on her own. Her triumph cements her resolve to continue in her career, as she realizes that police work is the source of her professional satisfaction.

Marty Boxer

A former San Francisco police officer, Marty Boxer left the force twenty years before under questionable circumstances. He was a gambler and risk-taker, evidently squandering much of his pay, even borrowing money on the "street" in order to feed his gambling addiction. Exactly why he chose the specific time to leave is not initially clear but becomes more so as the plot unfolds. During his absence, Lindsay Boxer has grown up and joined the force herself, having seen Marty only once, at her academy graduation, but not having spoken to him since the desertion. Her mother has died of cancer, and she holds a great deal of anger toward Marty over this.

When Marty chooses to re-enter his daughter's life, Lindsay is confused and conflicted, but, a bit fragile herself, is willing to accept the fact that he simply wants to establish a



relationship with his daughter once again. As the story continues to increase in complexity, it becomes known that Marty was actually present when Frank Coombs strangled a young black boy to death, resulting in his conviction for manslaughter, when no other officers would support his plea of self-defense. Marty is obviously experiencing some guilt relative to his behavior, but, more important, has actually returned because Coombs, now out of prison, is threatening the life of Lindsay. As well, Marty seems to be focused on killing Coombs before he can reveal Marty's presence during the twenty-year old murder. Boxer himself is a complex individual, torn between the need to protect himself and the fatherly obsession with protection of his daughter.

In the end, he is redeemed somewhat, as he rescued Lindsay from a dangerous encounter with Coombs and, ultimately, shot Coombs as he assaulted Lindsay on the steps of Justice Hall. In the end, Marty, shunned by Lindsay and believing that he has accomplished his mission, disappears again. Weeks later, however, he sends Lindsay a picture of his new fishing boat in Mexico, named "Buttercup," his nickname for her as a child. One is left with the belief that further communication will occur between this father and daughter.

Frank Coombs Sr.

Frank Coombs was a violent, racist police officer with whom no one wished to partner. When he strangles a young black boy to death, for no reason other than hate, he is deserted by his fellow police officers, who refuse to provide collaboration of his story that he killed the boy in self-defense. Convinced that he was made a scapegoat of affirmative action pressure within the department, Coombs spends twenty years in prison, where he has the opportunity to allow his hatred and rage to fester. He emerges from prison bent upon revenge and becomes the primary suspect in a series of murders of officers and relatives of officers. He is a member of Chimera, a white supremacist organization, and this fact certainly convinces the homicide department that he is the killer. Coombs is ultimately killed, in an attempt to murder Lindsay Boxer, on the steps of Justice Hall, but, as he lies dying, he tells Lindsay that there is "one more surprise," triggering doubt that he, in fact, is the true Chimera killer. Coombs is not, in fact, Chimera, as further investigation reveals.

Aaron Winslow

Pastor of the LaSalle Heights Church, Winslow has worked in this poor black neighborhood for years, becoming a well-known figure in San Francisco. He has built a loyal congregation and is significantly involved in social action for the benefit of his neighborhood. He conducts a children's choir, preparing them for a competition, and is devastated when a barrage of apparently random gunfire kills his youngest choir member. Undaunted, he vows to repair the church, replace the destroyed stained glass window and oversee the healing of the community. During the course of the murder investigation, he meets Cindy Thomas, reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle, and a



love relationship ensues. Winslow is portrayed as a deeply religious, ethical, and strong individual whose loyalty to his congregation and neighborhood is unwavering.

Claire Washburn

Member of the "Women's Murder Club," Claire is a medical examiner for San Francisco. In this capacity, she performs the autopsies on all individuals who die as a result of Chimera's activities. She is thorough, analytical, and able to make conclusions that provide important clues in the investigation. For example, it is Claire who discovers that Tasha Catchings, the child victim of Chimera's first murder, was actually shot twice in the same spot, indicating that she was a specific target and that the killer is a sharpshooter. At one point, Claire is the victim of a Chimera assault; however, she is only grazed and moves forward with additional resolve to bring this killer to justice.

Jill Bernhardt

Assistant District Attorney Bernhardt is the quintessential "Type A" personality, working long hours and willing to put forth whatever time and effort necessary to uncover important information in criminal investigations. As well, she is charged with decisions to issue warrants, both for searches and arrests, and must weigh her friendship and loyalty to other members of the "club" against the evidentiary requirements of the law. Jill is married to an equally driven husband who travels, but is thrilled when she discovers that she is pregnant. During the course of the murder investigation, however, Jill has a miscarriage, devastating her friends, but rallies well and continues to play her strong role in the capture of Chimera.

Cindy Thomas

The youngest member of the "Women's Murder Club," Cindy is a crime reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle. She loves her life and especially the strong friendship of her three cohorts and supports the efforts to solve the Chimera murder case with dogged research into news archives. Cindy is the member who uncovers the meaning of the Chimera symbol and who is able, as well, to link the Chimera organization to Pelican Bay Prison. Cindy becomes the first assault victim of the true Chimera after the death of Frank Coombs Sr. has put the case to bed in the police chief's eyes. On a romantic level, Cindy successfully pursues Aaron Winslow with whom she shares a love of jazz. As the tale ends, it is apparent that this relationship will continue.

Frank

Rusty is the son of Frank Coombs, who appears to have overcome his earlier trauma of a father convicted of manslaughter and imprisoned for twenty years. Rusty's mother has re-married, and he is now a student/athlete at Stanford University, publicly disavowing any relationship with his father. When Frank Sr. is killed, however, and it become clear

that Chimera is still operating, Lindsay Boxer begins to look at Rusty. His juvenile record includes killing animals, vandalism directed at blacks and Jews, and membership in a white supremacist gang. As the police close in, the reader is given insight into the serious mental illness of this young man, as he climbs to the top of a tower and vows to die while engaged in continued revenge for his father and acts of violence against groups he hates.

Warren Jacobi

Fiercely loyal to Lindsay Boxer, Jacobi convinces her to emerge from her respite from police work, in order to direct the investigation of the murder of a young black girl. The single murder quickly becomes merely one of several murders that are to occur, in the name of Chimera, a Greek mythological figure and name of a white supremacist organization. Jacobi is a dogged investigator, willing to probe, wait, engage in long surveillance assignments, and certainly provides invaluable assistance to Lindsay.

Acting Police Tracchio

Assuming the position of police chief with the death of Chief Mercer, Tracchio is portrayed as a man torn between his loyalty and support for his officers and his need to provide appropriate public relations and responses to pressure from the community. While Tracchio trusts Lindsay Boxer's expertise, he nevertheless involves the FBI in the Chimera investigation and, at one point, considers turning Lindsay's case over to them. As well, once Frank Coombs is killed, he is unwilling to listen to Lindsay's doubts about Chimera's identity, apparently because he is not willing to destroy the public satisfaction with the case's resolution. Thus, as most police chiefs, Tracchio must balance two personas, often a difficult task.

Objects/Places

LaSalle Heights Church

Church in the LaSalle Heights neighborhood, pastored by Aaron Winslow, and site of the murder of Tasha Catchings.

Chimera

A Greek mythological figure, with the heads of a lion and a goat, the tail of a serpent, and the insignia of a white supremacist organization in California

Justice Hall

Home of the San Francisco Police Department, the District Attorney's offices, and the Medical Examiner's facility.

Pelican Bay

Name of maximum-security prison close to San Francisco and home of prisoner Weisz, the purported leader of Chimera

Oakland

City in which Estelle Chipmann lived and was killed by Chimera

Susie's

Restaurant/bar at which the Women's Murder Club frequently meets

Hotel Driscoll

Virtually abandoned transient hotel at which Officer Art Davidson is killed by Chimera

Hotel William Simon

Transient hotel at which Frank Coombs Sr. is living when discovered by the homicide detectives

San Francisco Chronicle

Newspaper for which club member Cindy Thomas is a crime reporter

Stanford University

Site of student Frank "Rusty" Coombs's college study

Hoover Tower

Tower in the quad at Stanford University which is the site of the ultimate killing of Rusty Coombs, the real Chimera

Themes

Revenge

Human nature involves the desire for revenge, and most will admit that they find some pleasure in obtaining it when another has wronged them. For most, however, revenge includes minor acts and, occasionally, use of the legal system through lawsuits. For those individuals who become obsessed with revenge, however, the desire transforms into mental illness, or, in some cases, mental illness itself create the obsession. When revenge becomes a singular motive for existence, it transcends rationality and causes individuals to commit horrific acts against even innocent individuals. Thus Frank Coombs can find no other purpose in his life than to achieve revenge against those whom he believes are responsible for his conviction and sentence. Adding to this purpose, he expands the injustice to blacks in general and embraces the white supremacist group, Chimera. In the pursuit of his own concept of justice, moreover, he has somehow managed to influence his son to follow the same path, although Rusty's beliefs and behavior may be a result of his own mental illness as well. Obsession with revenge, however, can never result in positive outcomes, for it destroys the obsessed individual, if not physically, as it did in this tale, but at least emotionally, and prevents the productive, healthy lifestyle which result in personal happiness.

Racism

Despite the obvious progress in race relations in America, author Patterson reminds readers that the issue of racism is far from eradicated. While legal, political and economic gaps between whites and minorities are progressively closing, evidenced in the novel by the placement of blacks in significant leadership positions with the San Francisco legal system, the deeper, dangerous and violent hatred of minorities still persists within white supremacist groups, such as the Templars and Chimera. Such groups are portrayed quite credibly, through both words and actions, they obviously permeate prison populations and, indeed, exert obvious control on the "outside." Thus Weisz informs Lindsay that he knows of Chimera's activities, that perhaps Chimera is one of police enforcement's own, and that the work of all white supremacists will go on despite the best efforts of law enforcement to contain them.

As American society becomes increasingly more diverse, it appears that these groups will become more active, albeit "underground," as they pursue what certainly are unachievable goals. Their ability to instill fear, however, remains strong, as they infiltrate normally law-abiding but extremely conservative sub-populations, influencing their attitudes toward minorities and political activities. White supremacists are consumed with rage over what they perceive to be the destruction of America, and that rage will continue to place minorities in leadership positions at risk.

Public Perceptions of Law Enforcement

James Patterson's support of law enforcement and its dedication to investigation and capture of criminals are evident throughout the novel. At the same time, however, he is willing to allow what the reader already knows. Just as in any organization, there are those in law enforcement who do not share the ethics, values, and principles of their profession. While most Americans rely on local law enforcement to maintain an orderly, safe, and legally just society, there are, within any large police department, those who violate public trust. Police brutality, a common complaint, is exhibited through a twenty-year old crime, in which Frank Coombs chokes a young black boy to death, obviously a result of his rage, racism, and sense of power. Marty Boxer, having done very little to stop Coombs, and certainly willing to leave the murder scene when told to do so, follows the "blue wall of silence," choosing to leave both career and family, but, as he later admits, realizing that he had truly participated in the crime with his silence.

Tom Keating, out of a sense of loyalty to a fellow officer, supports Coombs's condemnation of the police department and, as well, provides him with uniforms and guns with which to perpetrate his crimes of revenge. When loyalty for and protection of one another's misdeeds place the public at risk, the entire profession is diminished. An additional, though only sporadically addressed criticism of law enforcement is the politics involved within the top leadership of departments. Chiefs of police, mayors, and, to some degree, offices of district attorneys are, by necessity, political, and answerable to both media and public pressure. This may serve to cause such officials to resist thoroughness of investigation and analysis in order to secure convictions and resolutions, demonstrated by Acting Chief Tracchio's unwillingness to re-open the Chimera case, even when such request was backed by solid evidence. Fortunately, the system, though flawed and occasionally peopled by rogues, malcontents, and political beings, generally works within the framework of a democratic society.

Style

Point of View

Jockeying between third and first person omniscient narrative is particularly effective in the progression of this plot. Much of the action is described by a third person narrative, as the murders occur, before the reader becomes aware of Chimera and Frank Coombs's connection to the killings. Once this is achieved, however, it is important to allow the reader to see inside the mind of Frank Coombs and, as well, the true killer, who initially appear to be one and the same. It is impossible to understand the motivation for the murders without a first person view in these sections. To understand Lindsay Boxer, moreover, first person narrative is absolutely essential. For example, the conflicted responses to her father's re-appearance and to her suspicions relative to his motivations must be seen through her eyes. As well, her analytical thought as she processes what she knows about Chimera and the inability to fit all of the evidence to Frank Coombs senior can only be achieved through the first person. Occasionally, other characters are given first-person narrative, when their thoughts are critical to the situations at hand, such as Cindy Thomas's feelings about Aaron Winslow. The transitions between third and first person narratives, moreover, are smooth and easily achieved for the reader, without disruption to the overall flow of the plot, a tribute to author James Patterson.

Setting

San Francisco, a large urban metropolitan area, is the obvious setting for a novel involving the complexities of investigating and solving a serial murder spree. Because of the large diversity of characters, the various neighborhoods, from low-income black neighborhoods and projects, to the middle-class dwelling of Lindsay Boxer, to the more affluent homes of individuals such as those of Chief Mercer and Claire Washburn. Consider as well, the need for the "seedy" downtown areas that house transient hotels, dark bars, and shadowy deserted places from which to commit murder, such as that of Art Davidson. The diversity of a large urban setting also allows the credibility of the wide variety of groups living within close proximity, including, of course, the violent, racist white supremacist organizations like Chimera alongside a large law enforcement organization and colleges and universities.

The existence of a variety of prisons, many of which are mentioned in the novel, also demand a larger urban setting, as does the ability of "bad guys" to avoid discovery. The setting is modern for obvious reasons. The forensics used as the medical examiner conducts her autopsies, the swiftness with which Cindy is able to conduct research into the newspaper archives, the use of cell phones and rapid tracing of calls are all small but essential elements for the story to progress effectively.

Language and Meaning

The reader will note great diversity of language, as it is used to develop the personalities of all characters in this novel. Overall, the language used is standard for a reader from adolescence through adulthood. In an effort to portray characters credibly, however, there is significant variety of both of word usage and tone. Law enforcement officials in leadership positions, to include Lindsay Boxer, Chiefs Mercer and Tracchio, and Assistant DA Jill Bernhardt, exhibit grammatically correct and appropriate adult language. Street cops, on the other hand, use a bit less formal English, including standard police language, such as "unsub," "perp," or "snitch." Medical Examiner Claire Washburn uses just enough medical terminology to provide believability. Once the reader is introduced to Frank Coombs, a member of the Templars, and the criminally insane Weisz, however, the language by necessity alters significantly, with the use of cursing, words of anger and rage, and, in the case of Rusty Coombs, an intelligent, yet insane, individual. Language typically used within the justice system is interspersed as well, so that the reader is reminded that investigation, traditional police work, securing warrants and arrests, and indictments remain realistic.

Structure

The overall structure of *2nd Chance* is the division of the tale into three distinct parts. Part I, *The Women's Murder Club - Again*, introduces the reader to the chief protagonist, Lindsay Boxer, but, as well, the three other members of the female "club" which has obviously been involved in the investigation and solution of a particularly horrific crime spree. As a result, the women have become fast friends and are all too willing to collaborate as a new horrendous murder of a child occurs. The rising action includes the discovery that Tasha Catching's murder is not a single incident but, rather, a part of a larger vendetta perhaps involving black police officers and/or their relatives.

The reader is briefly introduced to the killer, but is given little real information, and to the Chimera symbol which will become the key to the killer's identity. Part II, *Justice Will be Served*, develops the solid police work involved in an investigation and the conclusion that Frank Coombs is the suspect. The meaning of the title of this section is two-fold and reveals the difference between the concepts of justice by law enforcement and by the killer, for whom justice is equal to revenge. Part III, *The Blue Wall of Silence*, brings more complexity to the plot, including the discovery of the details of the original incident that placed Coombs in prison, the silence of officers involved, and the eventual discovery of the killer's true identity and death. The extremely short chapters (some little more than a page) can be a bit distracting, but are adeptly arranged to heighten the overall suspense.

Quotes

The killer was playing desert command and he was a master...He was a champion at this. Great hand-eye coordination...His fingers twitched on the trigger. Ghouls, sand mites, towel-heads. Come at me, baby....Phffft, phffft...Up through the dark corridors...He smashed through an iron door, came upon a whole nest of them, sucking on tabbouleh, playing cards. His weapon spit a steady orange death. Blessed are the peacemakers, he smirked. (p.31)

Last I heard from Cat, he was down in Redondo Beach, doing his own thing, private security. Old-timers down in the Central district still asked me how Marty Boxer was. They still told stories about him, and maybe it was good someone could think about him with a laugh. Marty, who once nabbed three perps with the same set of handcuffs...Marty Boxer, who stopped off to lay a bet with the suspect still in the car. All I could think about was that the bastard let me tend and nurse my mother while she was dying and never came back. (p. 62)

It was always the eyes that got him. Naked on his bed, in the stark, cell-like room, he sat staring at the old black-and-white photographs he had looked at a thousand times...It was always the eyes...that deadened, hopeless resignation...How they posed, even knowing that their lives were about to end. Even with the nooses wrapped around their necks...In the loosely bound album, he had forty-seven photos and postcards arranged in chronological order. He had collected them over the years. The first, an old photograph, dated June 9, 1901, his father had given him. Dez Jones, lynched in Great River, Indiana. On the border, someone had written in faded script: "This was that dance I went to the other night. We sure played afterwards. You son, Sam." In the foreground, a crowd in suit coats and bowler hats, and behind them the limply hanging corpse. (p. 64)

Late that afternoon, I sat at my desk as one by one my staff called it quits for the day. I couldn't leave with them...My mind tried over and over to put together the parts. Everything I had was based on assumption. Was the killer black or white? Was Claire right, that Tasha Catchings was intentionally killed? But the lion symbol had definitely been there. Link the victims, my instincts said. There's a connection. But what the hell is it? (p. 81)

He was so much smarter than them. While they were looking for white vans and silly-ass symbols, he was here, about to blow the lid wide open. Tonight, they would finally begin to understand. His heart slowed as he aimed across the street, at the rear of the transient hotel marked 303. On the fourth floor, a dimly lit apartment shone through the window. This was it. The moment of truth. He calmed his breath to a whisper and licked his dry lips. He aimed at a picture in his mind he had held for so long. He feathered the sight. Then, when it was just right, he squeezed. Click...This time he wouldn't even have to sign it. They'd know from the shot. From the target. Tomorrow, every person in San Francisco would know his name. Chimera. (p. 84-5)

He said, his voice soft but powerful, that he could not forgive, and he could not help but judge. "Only saints don't judge," he said, "and believe me, I'm no saint. I'm like all of you, just someone who has grown tired of having to make peace with injustice." He looked toward Chief Mercer. "Find the killer. Let judgment be in the courts. This isn't about politics, or faith, or even race. It's about the right to be free from hate. I am convinced that the world doesn't break in the face of its worst possible deed. The world mends itself." (p. 93)

I smiled. Then I leaned forward. "Jill, I need you to help me. I need to find some connection between these victims. I know it's there. I need to check out past cases in which a white plaintiff was victimized by a black police officer. That's where my gut leads me. It's where I think these killings might start. It has something to do with revenge." (p. 135)

I stared incredulously at the man who had left our family when I was thirteen. Who had stayed away all the time my mother was sick. Whom I had thought of as a coward or a cad or even worse for most of my adult life. I hadn't seen my father since he'd sat in the back row on the day I was sworn in as a cop. I didn't know if I wanted to slug him or take him in my arms and give him a hug. (p. 170)

"And don't be so sure you didn't get something in return. You'll never catch him. He's Chimera..." Weisz jerked his head down to his chest, pointing at a tattoo igh on his shoulder. All I could make out was the tail of a snake. "We can endure as much as you can dish, copper lady. Look at me...They stuff me in this hellhole, they make me eat my own shit, but I can still win." Suddenly, he was loud and angry again, twisting at his restraints. "Victory comes in the end. God's grace is the white race. Long live Chimera...." (p. 197-98)

We talked for three more hours, until after eleven, the wine bottle empty, Martha asleep at his feet. Every once in a while I had to remind myself that I was talking to my own father. That I was sitting across from him for the first time in my adult life. And slowly, I began to see. He was just a man who had made mistakes, and who had been punished for them. He was no longer someone I could blindly resent, or hate. He hadn't murdered anybody. He wasn't Chimera. By the standards I dealt with, his sins were forgivable. (pp. 202-03)

"Coombs was an animal but he was also a cop. Things were different then. That famous blue wall of silence...Every cop is taught at the academy, Keep your yap shut. It'll be there for you. Well, it didn't hold up for Frank Coombs; it came tumbling down on him. Everyone was glad to give him up. We're talking, what, twenty years ago? The affirmative action thing on the force was strong. Blacks and Latinos were just starting to ge placed in key positions. There was this black lobby group, the OFJ..." (p. 237)

I stood there inches from Chimera, watching his arrogant grin. "You think just because you affirmative action flunkies come up here and look tough at me, I'm gonna shove up my ass and say, 'Hey, stick it here...'. It gives me a real kick seeing those assholes drop

one by one. You took my life away. You want to make me sweat, Lieutenant, then pretend you're real cops. Find something that will stick." (p. 273)

You can't bring the dead back. You can't even make sense of why things happen. All you can do is the best you can to let the living believe their souls are at peace. The detectives circled around me and watched..I wiped Earl Mercer's name off the slate. (p. 333)

In those days, if I could have come up with one meaningful thing I wanted to do with my life, I might have said, Let's give it a ride. If I could paint, or had some secret urge to open a boutique, or the stick-ti-itiveness to write a book...I was so hard to find even the thinnest slice of affirmation...But by the end of the week, I just went back to work. (p. 379)

"We are all linked. Everyone here, the families who have suffered loss, and those who have simply come to remember. Black or white, we are all diminished by hate. Yet somehow, we heal. We carry on. We do carry on." (p. 386)

Topics for Discussion

Trace the emotional responses Lindsay experiences relative to her father. How are these ultimately resolved?

Discuss the term "Blue Wall of Silence?" How prevalent do you believe this is?

How credible is the final revelation that Frank Combs's son is the true Chimera? With a father absent from his life for so long, how do you think Rusty "became" his father?

What contributions do Clair Washburn's autopsies and Cindy's research make to the identification of Frank Coombs as the potential Chimera killer?

What was the original meaning of the Chimera symbol? How do they relate to a modern white supremacist group?

Identify the incidents which show Lindsay Boxer to be a risk-taker and somewhat impulsive.

Why does Marty Boxer really desert his family? Were his motives justified? What else might he have done?