

Four Blind Mice: A Novel Study Guide

Four Blind Mice: A Novel by James Patterson

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Plot Summary

Alex Cross is retiring from the Washington police department and Nana and his three children are looking forward to seeing him a lot more often. He is almost finished when his best friend John Sampson arrives, asking for his help. John's friend Ellis Cooper has been charged and convicted of murdering three young women and John is convinced he is innocent. With only a short time before his execution, John and Alex travel to West Point in an effort to secure a stay of execution and eventually his freedom, but are met with roadblocks at every turn.

The army seems reluctant to even look at the evidence mounting that suggest Ellis's innocence. The deeper Alex and John dig, the stranger the story becomes. With ties that link back all the way to Vietnam, they uncover many similar murders where in each case the man charged and convicted has proclaimed his innocence right up until his execution. In each case, calling cards are left behind in subtle places, and the bodies are painted red, white or blue. The deeper they investigate, the more dangerous it becomes, until Alex finds himself under fire outside his own home, and later is almost killed by the very men who are responsible for the entire affair. For a while, it looks as though the killings have been orchestrated from inside the supermax prison where Kyle Craig is housed. The former FBI agent that Alex helped to arrest enjoys playing games, but while the killings have links to the prison, it is not Kyle Craig who is responsible. Despite that, he takes the opportunity to threaten the safety of Alex and his family.

The killings turn out to be revenge for the murders of Tran Van Luu's family in Vietnam - a crime committed by US Special Forces soldiers known as the Three Blind Mice, and covered up by ranks as high as General. Trained as assassins for the Army, the Three Blind Mice are good at what they do, and have learned to enjoy their work. Now, they are not only killers for hire, but kill for amusement when the contracts are executed. Hired by Tran Van Luu because he is unable to get justice via legal channels, they are the very men who killed his family, and now are asked to hunt down and kill all those responsible for the cover up. They are never told the identity of the man who hires them or the reasons for the execution of the men they are killing, but to these men it doesn't matter. When the Three Blind Mice are killed in a shoot out with Alex and John, Tran enlists the services of his former gang the Ghost Shadows to finish the job. In an exciting finish, Alex comes close to losing his life, but finds he appreciates it even more and the investigation not only leads him to a new career with the FBI, but also leads John to find the love of his life, Billie Houston and marry her. When Alex catches the garter, he fearlessly faces Jamilla, knowing deep down they are destined to spend more time together as well.



Part One: The Last Case: Chapters 1 - 8

Part One: The Last Case: Chapters 1 - 8 Summary

Alex Cross is retiring from the Washington police department and Nana and his three children are looking forward to seeing him a lot more often. He is almost finished when his best friend John Sampson arrives, asking for his help. John's friend Ellis Cooper has been charged and convicted of murdering three young women and John is convinced he is innocent. With only a short time before his execution, John and Alex travel to West Point in an effort to secure a stay of execution and eventually his freedom, but are met with roadblocks at every turn.

Sergeant Ellis Cooper, a fifty-five-year-old war hero, is convicted of killing three women and sentenced to death. The real killers attend the final day of the trial, and leave amused by the outcome. Detective John Samson goes to his best friend, Alex Cross in Washington, DC. Samson learns from friends that his good friend Ellis Cooper was found guilty of murder and has only three weeks until his execution. He asks Alex Cross, a homicide detective, to come with him to North Carolina and see Ellis and assures Alex that Ellis couldn't have done what he is accused of. They leave together almost immediately, but not before Nana Cross makes him promise that this will be his last case. At eighty-two years of age, she is still active mentally and physically, and looks after Alex's two children whenever he is gone. They get to Central Prison in Raleigh, North Carolina, and are subdued by the surroundings. Sergeant Cooper is brought to them in shackles, and Alex stands back as Cooper hugs Samson bringing tears to Samson's eyes for the first time that Alex has ever seen.

Samson sits Cooper down after introducing Alex, and asks him to explain the events that led up to his arrest, and he does. He explains how that Friday had been a payday, and he had stopped for a few drinks at the club. He calls his girlfriend Marcia, but she isn't home so he has another couple of drinks and then decides to walk home. Marcia still isn't there, and near eleven that evening he hears the front door opening. He calls out, thinking it is Marcia, but it is half a dozen MPs with a CID investigator instead. When he is finished, he again asserts that he had nothing to do with the murder of the three women, and Samson knows it is the truth.

The real killers, Thomas Starkey, Warren Griffin and Brownley Harris, had been friends for more than three decades, and had served together in Vietnam. Half a dozen times a year, they all spend a long weekend together in Georgia at a log cabin on Kennesaw Mountain where they indulge themselves in all the behavior they can't get away with at home. They smoke cigars, drink way too much, and listen to old music. Between them they have eleven children but they don't get together to share photos of family. Instead, they reminisce about the action they've seen and the lives they have taken - fondly remembering the more creative types of killing they have been responsible for.



Part One: The Last Case: Chapters 1 - 8 Analysis

Sergeant Ellis Cooper is a war hero, and can't believe he is jammed up so tightly in this murder trial. No one seems to grasp that he is innocent, despite the overwhelming evidence against him, and he sits in disbelief as he is actually convicted. Even worse is the fact that the district attorney uses the love letters he wrote to one of the victims that had been returned unopened as further evidence of his guilt, adding embarrassment to shame. So surprised that the district attorney tells such lies about him to the jury, he explodes during the DA's summation, giving him 'proof' of Cooper's tendency toward violence not previously evident.

Detective Samson knows that his partner Alex Cross is retiring and that this is his last day, but the FBI detective is the best that John knows and when he hears about his friend Ellis, he doesn't know where else to turn. He is close to Alex, his mother and the three children - close enough to know that Nana won't be thrilled to hear he is asking for Alex's help, but he doesn't feel as though he has any other option. He is desperate to save the man he is sure is innocent. Alex, being the friend to John that he is, of course is ready to drop everything to help him, and Nana Cross, realizing the sensitivity of the issue, doesn't even fuss about it any more than telling Alex that after this one, he'd better live up to his promise. They drive from Washington to Raleigh, North Carolina, enjoying each others company until they arrive at Central Prison which is a sobering affair for both. Alex witnesses an emotional and rare moment when Samson and Cooper hug, bringing tears to his friends eyes - something he has never seen before.

Ellis tells them about the night in question, and Samson knows without doubt that his friend is innocent. Even Alex, who spend his life analyzing people, comes to the conclusion that Ellis did not commit the crime he will soon be executed for.



Part One: The Last Case: Chapters 9 - 16

Part One: The Last Case: Chapters 9 - 16 Summary

The Three Blind Mice enjoy what they are doing to such a degree that they even film the horrendous crimes they commit. They meet as usual in a log cabin at Kennesaw Mountain where they frequently assemble to smoke cigars, drink too much and relive their youth, telling stories of the past and watching the movies they have made. Watching their latest escapade, they are highly entertained, praising everything from camera work to the killings themselves.

Samson and Alex go to Fort Bragg, and begin asking questions. Alex is immediately struck by the fact that the roads on the base are also used by civilians, making access to the base easy for anyone. The base is like a small town, with all the amenities, including theaters and golf courses. Alex's FBI credentials get them in most doors, and after lunch they meet with Captain Jacobs who is with the Criminal Investigation Division and was assigned to Ellis's case from the beginning. Jacobs' records the conversation and makes no secret of the fact that he thinks Ellis is guilty, though he doesn't understand his behavior or motives.

On their second day at the Holiday Inn, they drive to the street where the murders occur and separately begin canvassing. Soon after Samson comes running and takes Alex to the Hodge's residence. Inside, Anita Hodge's son Ronald, who is confined to a wheelchair as a result of spina bifida, tells them that he witnessed three men next door on the night of the murders. One of them had a camera and they appeared to be filming. Though Ronald is obviously still bothered by what he saw, and took the time to repeat it to police and to Captain Jacobs himself - nothing was done. Alex and Samson go back to the hotel where Alex calls Inspector Jamilla Hughes in an ongoing effort to bridge the distance between them and build on their relationship. She agrees to come to Washington to meet with him. The next morning, Alex checks on rental car agencies for irregularities and finds that Hertz had been stiffed for a rental by someone using phony identification. Then they go to Cooper's house and notice that the place had been broken into. The military police show up but John has a letter from Ellis giving them permission to be in his home.

The next morning John and Alex compare notes and discuss the different things that bother them while jogging together. When they return, Alex gets a phone call from a woman who claims to have been with Ellis on the night of the murders, giving him an alibi, but because she is married and fears her husband's response should all of it become public knowledge. Again, she claims to have told all of this to Captain Jacobs, and then before giving her identity she hangs up.



Part One: The Last Case: Chapters 9 - 16 Analysis

While some Vietnam veterans return and have difficulty dealing with the horrors they witnessed there, the Three Blind Mice are not in that category. They are part of a small group that relish the worst of their experiences, and even want to relive them, enjoying the power and feelings of superiority it gives them. These three men enjoyed killing so much that when they returned, they continued to explore the sadistic side of themselves further, taping their crimes to be watched and enjoyed over and over. They have done this often enough that they believe they are getting better with each experience, mugging for the camera while committing the murders even.

Samson and Cross spend three days investigating and discover clear and irrefutable evidence that Cooper is innocent. What makes matters worse is that it is also clear that the Criminal Investigation Division Captain Jacobs is aware of all of the evidence that Cooper did not commit this crime, and still sat back and allowed his conviction without so much as bringing any of the evidence to light. It is obvious to both Alex and John that something else is going on.

Alex keeps in touch with his family, enjoying the fact that they continue to remind him that this is his last case. Part of that stems from his desire to increase the depth of the relationship he is beginning with Inspector Jamilla Hughes. She works in California, but is not adverse to the idea of coming to see him in Washington, and he is hopeful that if they both make effort, something good can come of their feelings for each other.



Part One: The Last Case: Chapters 17 - 24

Part One: The Last Case: Chapters 17 - 24 Summary

General Stephen Bowen consents to see Alex and Sampson and for a moment, they actually feel a glimmer of hope that they can do something for Cooper. However, the General listened while Alex laid out the evidence they had when they were finished, the General informed them that as far as he was concerned, Sampson is guilty and he looks forward to attending his execution with the families of the victims.

The Three Blind Mice find themselves back on the base, and though they are nervous, Starkey tells them to conduct themselves properly. They are there on business as senior sales agents for Heckler & Koch, promoting the sales of guns to the army. The meeting goes well, and they leave in high spirits and looking for trouble. After too much liquor, Starkey convinces a thin blond hooker to get into the Suburban with them. They drive to a secluded area and begin yelling commands at her in Vietnamese. They kick her out of the car and slap and kick her until she understands that they want her to run into the swamp. Frightened, she does it anyway. They let her get a good head start, and then a trooper pulls up to check on them. At that moment she screams and Starkey shoots the officer dead. Starkey tells the other two to go find the woman and he stays behind to hide the patrol car. Then he joins his men, disappointed that their game would now be rushed. When he caught up, his men already had her bound and gagged. He shoots her dead and tells the men to get the red paint.

Alex and John go back to Washington, and try to get back into their routines. The first morning he gets up, goes for a run, and finds Nana is still in bed which is something that just never happens. At eighty two, Nana has never been the type to lay around, so concerned, Alex checks in on her. She is tired, and he leaves her to rest while he gets the kids ready for school. Later she seems more like herself, but refuses to make a special trip in to the doctor. Alex and John go back to the base and continue investigating. They find Tori Sanders who is the woman that called Alex, but under pressure she admits that her husband believes in Ellis's innocence and asked her to call and offer up an alibi.

Part One: The Last Case: Chapters 17 - 24 Analysis

Alex and John believe they have enough evidence to reopen Cooper's case, if not even overturn it, and when General Stephen Bowen consents to see them, they see light on the horizon. John is strangely quiet while Alex lays out the many reasons that they believe Ellis is innocent, but when they are finished the General instead tells them how much he's looking forward to the execution. It isn't at all what they expect, but somehow seems to fit the pattern. So far, no one seems to care whether or not Ellis actually



committed the crime. The evidence is overwhelming to be sure, but so are the contradictions. Surprisingly, Ellis won't admit that he was with a married woman that night. His alibi - the one that would clear him - is one that he vehemently denies. None of it makes sense to the two detectives.

The real killers are back at the scene of the crime, but this time on legitimate business. Starkey is confident as always, but the other two are nervous. Despite this, their meeting goes well. The former rangers are now looking for a way to celebrate in Fayetteville. They pick up a hooker and proceed to play their favorite game with her. The plan is to let her go, and hunt her down in the night and kill her. They are interrupted by a patrol officer who becomes collateral damage as Starkey kills him as well. They operate without remorse, and when the hooker is dead, they paint her red.

Alex and John go back to Washington, but find themselves returning again to the base. This time they find Ellis's alibi, who promptly recants, saying her husband believed in Cooper's innocence and and put her up to it.



Part One: The Last Case: Chapters 25 - 31

Part One: The Last Case: Chapters 25 - 31 Summary

Sampson and Cross go for a bite to eat and overhear a woman describing a murder that had just occurred. Curious, Alex asks her what happened and she briefly describes how Vanessa was shot. When her boyfriend gets angry that she is talking to them, Alex shows identification to prove he's a homicide detective which only makes matters worse. Before they can say much more, they find themselves in handcuffs and on their way to jail for disturbing the peace. It takes no time at all before Cross puts together the fact that the whole thing is a set up. The four army types that were also arrested were let go, and they are told in no uncertain terms that they should forget all about Cooper and go home.

They go back to Washington where Cross finds an email signed only by 'Foot Soldier' describing several instances where innocent men were arrested and executed for murders that they claimed their innocence for right up until they were killed. In each case, overwhelming evidence is presented against them, and this convicts them despite their alibis. Alex reads the note to Sampson who doesn't know what to think about it either. In Arlington, they get in to see General Shelly Borislow of the Army Court of Criminal Appeals. Again, the General listens attentively and then tells them how guilty she thinks Cooper is. Alex and John leave convinced that the army is hiding something and they want Ellis dead. They go to see him, harshly aware that time is passing swiftly. Ellis is calm, and grateful that they came. He tells John that he knows John and Alex did all they could but that the deck was stacked against him from the start, but he did not kill those women, and has no reason now especially to lie.

Alex and John both attended the execution although neither man wanted to be there. Ellis locked eyes with them, and when asked if he wanted to make a statement, he simply and clearly announced his innocence. When the execution had been carried out, Alex and John left knowing they had just witnessed a murder.

Part One: The Last Case: Chapters 25 - 31 Analysis

John and Alex continue to come across information that leads them to further believe Ellis Cooper and his innocence. While eating a meal, they overhear a conversation about another killing and Alex tries to question the people discussing it, but it soon becomes clear that the whole situation was a set up to get their attention. Four army personnel butt in and initiate a fight that continues until all are supposedly taken to jail but even that isn't entirely true. They find out while incarcerated that the army personnel were not held and they were the only ones kept. It is becoming increasingly clear that



the army wants Alex and John to stop investigating the murders, but neither can understand why.

They go back to Washington and Alex gets an email from someone who will only identify himself as 'Foot Soldier.' This person details examples where similar situations have occurred in the past that are like their situation with Ellis Cooper. He won't reveal his identity, but again reinforces their perception that the Army is content to execute an innocent man for reasons that neither one of them can fathom. They manage to get in to see the General of the Army Court of Criminal Appeals, but the story is the same. She listens politely and then tells them that she wholeheartedly believes in Cooper's guilt and looks forward to the day of his execution. They go back to see Ellis, even though they have nothing good to share, but he is strangely calm about the whole thing. He has come to understand the one thing that neither of them can get their heads around. He was selected for some reason to be the scapegoat for the moment, and nothing he can do or say will change that. He recognizes that they know he is innocent, and don't care. They have their man and he is going to die for crimes he did not commit. Case closed.

When the execution takes place, both John and Alex attend although neither man wants to be there. Both feel as though they have failed Ellis, and it is even more difficult when Ellis makes his final statement, once again proclaiming his innocence. Afterward, Alex and John are only too well aware that what they just witnessed was a state sanctioned murder by execution.



Part Two: Jamilla: Chapters 32 - 39

Part Two: Jamilla: Chapters 32 - 39 Summary

Jamilla takes a leap of faith and boards a plane to go and see Alex in a personal capacity for the first time. They have gotten along well when working together on stake outs but though they stayed in touch after the case was over, they never have so much as kissed. Having had bad relationships in the past and suffering from a bit of insecurity, it is a big step for her, but she is excited to see him again. Alex is just as nervous, knowing he is bringing her home to meet his three children and his mother for the first time. It is something he doesn't normally do. Despite their nervousness, Jamilla puts Alex at ease in the airport by getting the first kiss out of the way immediately and admitting her nervousness to him.

They go back to Alex's where Jamilla is accepted immediately and well liked by all. Nana makes a huge meal, and even the kids are supportive of Alex's choice of girlfriends. This helps them both relax to a degree, but despite what Alex's family thinks, they have yet to discover each other in a more intimate fashion. Jamilla spends the first night in the guest room but on the second day, Alex takes her to an intimate residential style hotel that is not well known but is elegant and has old world ambiance. Jamilla loves it and they discover that they are compatible both mentally and physically. It is difficult for Alex to say goodbye to her at the airport, but he enjoyed everything about her visit, including the bittersweet feeling that he is left with when she goes home.

John comes by the house late the night that Jamilla leaves. He is drunk and in the worst shape that Alex has ever seen him. Alex tries to calm him down, but John is angry and combative, and blames Alex for his inability to find a way to save Cooper. He yells at Alex and when Alex tries to settle him and keep him from waking the whole household, John provokes him until they come to blows. When Nana comes down to see what all the noise is about, she has to break up the first fight they have had since the age of twelve. Her disappointment in them is so obvious that John mumbles an apology to her before leaving, but says nothing to Alex at all.

Part Two: Jamilla: Chapters 32 - 39 Analysis

Jamilla decides to pursue a more personal relationship with Alex. Despite her fear of flying since 9/11, and her personal insecurities, she boards a plane and flies to Washington to see him and meet his family. She is nervous, having had little success with relationships to date. Alex is nervous as well; his track record with relationships is not great either, and he doesn't usually bring girlfriends home to meet his three children and Nana. It is especially nerve wracking because they have never so much as even kissed, although the attraction was mutual and obvious when they worked together and in their conversations since.



He needn't have worried though. Jamilla puts him at ease right away by kissing him at the airport and then as a result of his family's instant acceptance of her, including Nana, whose opinion he highly values. They spend the first night with his family, but the next day he takes her to a more private residential style hotel that is not well advertised, but caters to the affluent. Jamilla loves the place, and they discover they are good together both mentally and physically. She admits her marriage was a mistake, and he admits to having brought his wife to the same hotel - each revealing just a little more of themselves emotionally. It is difficult for Alex to see her leave, but he knows that the visit went so well that they will find a way to bridge the distance between them.

Later the evening that Jamilla leaves, John shows up drunk and disheveled, and looking for a fight. He goads Alex, getting louder and more obnoxious until they finally come to blows, waking Nana in the process. John is consumed with guilt over the state sanctioned murder of Ellis Cooper by execution, and blames himself and Alex for not being able to find a way to save the innocent man. When Nana breaks up their scuffle, he is momentarily chastised, and apologizes to her for his behavior, but still says nothing to Alex as he leaves. Alex knows that the root of the issue is not that John blames him directly, but that he feels a sense of loss and helplessness over the situation.



Part Two: Jamilla: Chapters 40 - 47

Part Two: Jamilla: Chapters 40 - 47 Summary

When Alex gets up the next morning, John is sitting at the table with Nana having breakfast as though nothing had happened the night before. John apologizes for his behavior and Nana supports him encouraging Alex to forgive him and let it go. Alex does, and reciprocates for not having been able to save his friend, and then gives him a new direction. Payback - it is all they have left. He takes John upstairs and shows him evidence he has found that proves that Ellis was not the first soldier executed for the crimes of these men.

Thomas Starkey is a family man, just as the other two killers are. Starkey sees himself as just an ordinary man with a job to do. Starkey likes to be in control and is the driver when they are 'working.' Griffin is the rear security when they are on patrol, and Harris is the point man. Their current job is one that has lasted over two years and involves multiple targets, making it the most lucrative job they have ever had. They have no idea who their employer is and are given a new target only when the last one is complete. This time, they are out on the Appalachian Trail, and Harris leaves after camp is set up to scout out their targets. He enjoys his job, and the thrill it gives him to slip in and out of other people's camp sites unnoticed. By 6:30 the next morning, he is back in camp for breakfast, and ready to report on the targets. The next night they quietly find the campsite of the couple designated as targets, coming across the male as he is hunched over relieving himself. Starkey is on top of him before he can get up, and while Harris films, slits his throat.

Sampson and Cross head for Harpers Ferry, West Virginia as soon as they hear about the murders of the young couple painted red. The FBI notified Cross when the similarities were evident as per his request to all agencies. The suspect in custody is a former army colonel turned Baptist minister with no prior record. Reverend Reece Tate is first very suspicious, but when Cross and Sampson explain the reasons for their involvement, he assures them he is innocent and they believe him. He can't explain the blood on his clothes, claiming he didn't even wear them on the day the young couple was murdered. The statements mimic what Cooper told him almost exactly.

Part Two: Jamilla: Chapters 40 - 47 Analysis

John and Alex have been friends for so long, having pretty much grown up together, that they are able to weather the kind of explosion from John the night before. He apologizes, and Alex is gracious after needling him just a little. Then he assures John that he hasn't given up, and while there is no hope for Cooper now, perhaps they can still clear his name and get vengeance for his death. The idea gives John a focus that he needs to get past the senseless killing of his friend.



Starkey, Griffin and Harris present themselves as just a group of 'good old boys' who love their families and enjoy each others company. They socialize regularly, and their wives all get along. None of them see anything wrong with the occupations they have as hired killers. In fact, they believe that the army trained them this way, and if anything, the army is to blame for their behavior now. They maintain the same habits and positions they had in the service, each keeping his status. They all feel a thrill of excitement when on a job, and look forward to each 'contract' issued. Starkey never feels guilty, and in fact would describe what he feels as more like elation. The hunt and the kill are satisfying, and give him a feeling of control and power over life. When they have no contract, they kill for the pleasure of it. This most recent collection of murders are the result of a single contract. Oddly, the targets are irrelevant in that who they are doesn't matter. The important part of this collection of contracts is the person framed for the murders, and that they be gruesome enough to inspire outrage and vengeance. Starkey doesn't understand his employer, or know who he is, but it really doesn't matter as long as he gets to continue doing the work he so enjoys. Starkey insists that they treat each contract like a real life war, using absolute silence, and hand signals. Harris is much the same as Starkey. While he appreciates Starkey's leadership, he still gets excited when he scouts alone, selecting targets and being the recon necessary for each job. It is his specialty, and he thrives on it. Warren is content to go along. He organizes their gear, and takes pride in knowing they have everything they need, sticking closely to the system that works - the army way. It is their comfort zone, and they stay close within it.

Alex puts out the word that he wants to be notified about any homicides that resemble the one Ellis Cooper was convicted of. He quickly learns of the couple killed on the Appalachian Trail because of the red paint used on them, and it doesn't take long to see how similar the murders are. Again, a rather unlikely suspect is caught with evidence that is irrefutable, and yet the suspect is confused and adamant about his innocence. Like so often happened in his career, he is drawn into this one, and unable to let it go.



Part Two: Jamilla: Chapters 48 - 56

Part Two: Jamilla: Chapters 48 - 56 Summary

Alex cashes in frequent flier miles to go and see the wife of a man who had been convicted of murdering a gay couple. Mrs. Etra is suing the army for wrongful death. When Alex gets there, she also has a lawyer with her, having sold her story to Hollywood. The entertainment lawyer stays only long enough to ensure Alex isn't a threat. Alex asks to see Lieutenant Colonel Etra's things and comes across a straw doll that is an exact duplicate of the creepy straw doll they had seen in Ellis Cooper's home. In another drawer, he finds another artifact seen at Coopers - a lidless eye. Mrs. Etra is positive that neither of these items belonged to her husband. She lets Alex take them both.

At the same time, Sampson is driving to meet with Mrs. Billie Houston, who lost her husband after he allegedly killed another soldier and painted his face white and blue. He is immediately taken with her, and the Jersey Shore is like a breath of fresh air to John. He tells her about Ellis, and she tells him the circumstances that surrounded her husband's conviction and subsequent murder by the State of New Jersey. John likes her a lot. Alex meets Jamilla as prearranged in Tempe. Seeing her, it is almost easy to forget the eye and the doll in his case. She is smiling and eager. They check into the hotel and spend the weekend enjoying each others company and getting to know each other better.

John finishes interviewing Billie, and goes back to his bed and breakfast. The phone rings almost immediately, and Billie invites him to come for dinner. He returns, they cook on the grill, and listen to music. It is the first time he can put his thoughts about Ellis aside for a while. He learns more about her, feeling very comfortable with her. After dinner, he asks her again about her husband, and inside he sees an exact replica of the straw doll that was at Cooper's house. Billie is sure she hasn't seen it before. It reminds her of the big ugly eye she found in the same cabinet and threw out a few days earlier. Later, she walks him to his car, but somehow, neither is ready for the evening to end. He invites himself in for a late coffee.

Jamilla and Alex go for a midnight swim in the pool, both wishing it would never end, neither understanding why they do what they do. Alex tells her he is probably leaving the police force in Washington, and tells her that as far as he's concerned, they're great, and she happily agrees.

Part Two: Jamilla: Chapters 48 - 56 Analysis

Alex still hasn't managed to retire as planned. He can't let this last case go. There is something about it that gnaws at him, and makes him want to dig deeper. The more he learns, the more creepy it all is. He and John split up and each goes to see a widow of



another seemingly innocent man, convicted and killed for murders they swore they never committed. Their wives are equally adamant that their husbands were not responsible, and were set up. Alex gets permission to look through Lieutenant Colonel Etra's things and finds two creepy artifacts that were identical to ones found in Cooper's home. One is a straw doll from Vietnam, considered to be bad medicine and related to evil spirits and the dead. The other is a big, ugly, lidless glass eye. The wife swears she's never seen either item before and is only too happy to have Alex take them away with him. He leaves and meets Jamilla in Tempe as prearranged for a weekend get away. She is smiling and beautiful, and enough to take his mind off of Cooper, the doll and the eye at least for the time being as they get to know each other better.

John sits at the Jersey Shore, alternately amazed by the peaceful and unpopulated beauty of the area and by the humble and unique woman who is the widow Billie Houston. She is a petite woman who is honest and forthright, and believes without a doubt that the State murdered her husband for a crime he did not commit. After interviewing her, he goes back to his bed and breakfast, but Billie felt the same connection he did, and calls him right away to invite him to dinner. He agrees, hardly giving it a thought, showers and goes back. Now on first name bases, they discover more about each other while having dinner, and afterward, John again talks about her husband. Inside, he notices a straw doll on the cabinet that is exactly like the one he saw at Cooper's home. Billie can't remember having seen it before, or for that matter the eye that she'd thrown out days earlier which had given her the creeps. Now, they are both a little taken aback. Still, as John is leaving, Billie realizes she isn't ready for the night to be over. She tries to find the words to ask him to stay but when the right phrase escapes her, he comes to her rescue, inviting himself back in for coffee. There is a connection there that neither can deny.

Neither Alex nor Jamilla have thought about work all day. This is a first for both of them, and when Jamilla asks Alex how he feels about 'them,' she gets the answers she is hoping for. The fact that he is talking about leaving the Washington police force is a bonus. The best part is that she realizes she trusts him, completely.



Part Three: The Foot Soldier: Chapters 57 - 64

Part Three: The Foot Soldier: Chapters 57 - 64 Summary

When Alex gets home after the weekend with Jamilla, he finds Nana awake, and one look at her face tells him something is wrong. She dodges the issue, asking him about his weekend, but then confesses to pain in her chest and shortness of breath. She admits having seen a local doctor named Kayla Coles, and reminds Alex that she is eighty two. Later, unable to get it out of his mind, Alex goes upstairs to work on the army case again, reviewing old cases with similarities when he hears footsteps on the stairs. Damon bursts in and begs Alex to come and help his friend Ramon who has been doing Ecstasy. Though he is only twelve years old, Ramon's parents are musicians and addicts. They go to the flop house where Ramon has been staying and find Kayla Cole working on Ramon, in an effort to stabilize him. After giving him Damon a hard time about the stupidity of drugs, she ends her lecture by telling him that he likely saved Ramon's life. It is almost two in the morning when Alex takes Damon home and he finally gives in to his emotions, crying on his Dad's shoulder.

Starkey, Harris and Griffin travel separately to New York City. They have arranged to meet at the Palisade Motel just outside the US military Academy at West Point. This is the site of the next two murders, and Starkey still has not met the person they are working for. He draws little attention to himself adding up the totals involved in this contract. Twelve thousand dollars including the bonus for completing the mission. The three men meet on the base, and spent a short time watching their targets before going in. Colonel Robert Bennett and his wife Barbara are just about to sit down to dinner. Robert tells Barbara everything will be okay, but Starkey corrects him. They speak in Vietnamese again, and Bennett pretends to pass out, trying to get his gun, but he is not successful. From there it just gets worse.

Alex and John are called in because of the similarities again, and even FBI ERTs have been given access. The CID officer Captain Conte tells them it looks like Robert and Barbara had a fight that got violent and after killing her, Robert killed himself - all with his service revolver. Alex and John can already tell that isn't what happened. They talk to Michael Fescue who is the ERT who worked on the Appalachian Trail murders and he confirms that three men over powered the Bennetts at dinner. They killed them, and carefully and professionally set up the scene to make it appear otherwise.



Part Three: The Foot Soldier: Chapters 57 - 64 Analysis

Alex and Jamilla are getting to know each other better, each willing to go out of their way to spend time with the other. This time, they meet in the middle, and their time together passes much too quickly for either of them. A trust is developing between them and slowly, a belief that they might have a future together. Alex goes home feeling psychologically refreshed, and finds Nana still up. Any variations on her routine worry him, and after a bit of prying he discovers good grounds for concern. Nana minimizes the problem, but describes chest pain and shortness of breath. Alex is more than worried. He doesn't know what he and the kids would do without her. He goes up to his office to work and Damon interrupts him. His friend has been doing Ecstasy, and is in trouble. Alex lets Damon show him where Ramon is, his concern mounting as he asks Damon questions. The fact that Damon was not home in bed where he should have been does not come up, but Damon assures his father that he is not doing drugs - merely supporting a friend in need. The doctor working on Ramon when they get there admits that if not for Damon, his friend would likely have died. Suddenly, Damon is not feeling so grown up, and when they get home in the early hours of the morning, he cries on his Dad's shoulder for the first time in many years.

The three killers are busy again. This time, their contract takes them to West Point. None of the three are particularly concerned with the fact that they haven't met the person who hired them, and they have no conscience about the people they are killing, the people they set up to take the fall, or the manner in which they are committing the crimes. They are a frightening combination of intelligent and organized mercenaries who take great pleasure in the work they do. This is also the last piece of what is truly a puzzle. This time, they kill a couple on the base and make it appear as though the husband killed the wife amidst a violent argument. Starkey tells Robert that this night he will suffer for the sins of his past. The investigating officer is happy to believe that, but when Alex and John arrive and ask their own ERT for his opinion, they are told that the same three men are at work here as well. Given full cooperation from the base because they are so very good at what they do, the opinion of the Emergency Response Team is given much latitude.



Part Three: The Foot Soldier: Chapters 65 - 72

Part Three: The Foot Soldier: Chapters 65 - 72 Summary

Starkey, Harris and Griffin are celebrating the end of their contract. It has taken them three years to complete, and they are ready to go home. Part of the party they throw themselves includes a private club called the Asia House. After giving the pass code in Vietnamese to the woman who answers the buzzer, they are admitted to the Asian whorehouse. When they are in the room, they pull out revolvers with silencers, telling the three girls to be quiet and no one will get hurt. In the next room, where a couple is monitoring the surveillance equipment, he shoots them dead and removes the tape. He joins his friends, looking forward to the evening ahead. This is not the first time they have 'celebrated' this way. It has happened many times before. One girl tries to resist, but the men know each other so well that they act in concert without exchanging a word, killing all three girls just like in An Lao Valley, Vietnam, where the madness had begun.

This time the victims had not been painted, and Alex and Sampson spend time at the hotel discussing the Bennett murders and the connection to the others. Alex logs onto his computer and finds another message from the Foot Soldier who suggests he see a Colonel Owen Handler who might be able to help or identify the killers. As it can't hurt, they do so, and the Colonel seems nervous. Finally he suggests they pick him up that evening to talk and quickly leaves. They meet that evening and Alex asks him if he is the Foot Soldier, but the Colonel denies it. Alex sees an approaching car in the mirror, and a gunman hanging out of the window. They duck as the bullets fly. The sedan stays with them as Alex drives for their lives. When it appears that he's lost them, he slows and discovers that Handler is dead - shot twice, in the shoulder and in the head. General Hutchinson shows up at the hospital, but he seems strangely unconcerned about the condition of Alex or John. Alex recalls only two men in the car, and calls Jamilla, finding that even just talking through it with her helps.

The next morning, the papers report the killings at Asia House. Alex keeps thinking about one name Handler had given them. Tran Van Luu who is now on death row in the same facility as another murderer Alex caught named Kyle Craig. The prison is a 'super max' and one of thirty six now in the States. Alex goes to see Tran, but not before Nana in her way lectures him about the passing time. Tran is fifty-four, and used to be a scout for the US Special Forces. Despite promises, he had been left in Saigon, coming by boot to America in 1979. He joins a gang called the Ghost Shadows and is eventually convicted of killing rival gang members. Then he tells Alex that he only agreed to see him because his good friend Kyle Craig asked him to.



Part Three: The Foot Soldier: Chapters 65 - 72 Analysis

The thrill of the kill for the three killers is one that has its roots in their service to their country. Before then, they were likely average family men with wives and children, who lived ordinary, and routine bound lives. Once they had enlisted, and put together in the service of killing, it unlocks a desire and satisfies a lust for power that likely would have remained buried for ever had it not been for the push given them by the army. Now, home again, they lack the thrills they were given overseas, and the opportunity to act like Gods - taking lives with impunity. As a result, they continue to behave the way they were taught and drilled to behave. They lure, chase, torture and kill without conscience. It is only logical that they find employment as hired killers, and when the work is done, they continue to kill for sport and for the thrill of it. They have learned to enjoy it, and that is what makes them so dangerous. While many people are killers or discover they enjoy taking another person's life, they are apt to make mistakes and are usually easily caught. These men have been trained in surveillance, taught how to kill effectively and efficiently and how to blend with their environment. It is a very dangerous combination and the three men feed off each other, acting in harmony.

Alex and Sampson have the difficult task of not only trying to unravel the reasons behind the multiple murders, but overcoming the desire for local police departments to accept the simplest solutions to each crime, and the army's desire to bury the crimes entirely so that they are not 'painted' with the same brush and their reputations are not smeared. It often seems as though they are working at odds with the local law and the army and in fact often are. Now, to add to their growing list of hurdles, Alex discovers that his old nemesis, Kyle Craig, might have something to do with the killings. It is a frightening thought, as he is one of the most challenging and costly cases Alex worked on. Having to deal with him again is both difficult and frightening, even though Kyle is securely locked up and awaiting an execution date.



Part Three: The Foot Soldier: Chapters 74 - 78

Part Three: The Foot Soldier: Chapters 74 - 78 Summary

John drives back to the Jersey shore to talk to Billie again. After Alex's meeting with Kyle Craig, he has follow up questions regarding her husbands' death, but that doesn't imply that he isn't enjoying the drive, the place, and the whole idea of seeing her again. He wonders if he's getting soft. Driving into Bay Head, he happens to see her climbing out of her car with an armload of groceries, and has to calm himself from getting too far ahead in his thinking and hoping.

Billie and John settle down to a glass of ice tea, and his smile is so radiant that she can't help looking him over again. She has the sense that he doesn't smile or relax often. She asks him if something else happened, but he denies it, telling her he came to see her. She brushes it off, outwardly at least, and he tells her about the recent deaths of the Bennetts' in West Point. He adds that he and Alex both believe that the roots go back as far as Vietnam and that her husband may have been involved in some way, even if he didn't realize it. Billie admits her husband talked little about those days, and drank more afterward. She relates an incident when Laurence went fishing one night that the bluefish were running and after an hour she worried and went looking for him. She found him on the beach beside an empty pint of whiskey, despondent and he would only tell her that 'you can't outrun your past.' It broke her heart to see him that way. They go for a swim and before long, Billie finds herself in John's arms. He's again taken with how tiny she is as they sit together later on the swing, and dance on the porch. Billie takes him upstairs and they slowly get to know each other much better. He is amazed at how at peace he is afterward.

Alex is looking forward to some family time, but finds a note on the front door instead. Nana has taken the kids out for the evening. He goes inside, feeling lonely when Jamilla calls and they talk for a while bring each other up to date. He goes upstairs later and finds two jars on his bed filled with marbles to represent how many Saturdays he had left with his family which is Nana's way of reminding him of the parable she told him earlier. He takes one marble out, and reflects on the time passing. The next few days, Alex gets the feeling he is being watched. He reviews all of the murders again, looking for a connection in Vietnam and finding none. Another note from the Foot Soldier arrives in his email citing his disappointment in Alex's lack of progress, and suggesting he look back to the past again because the answers are all there. He goes to the Vietnamese embassy and a translator helps him go through boxes of files before they stumble on a file from the An Lao Valley. The file cites serial killing of civilians that was investigated by Army Rangers where bodies were painted red, white and blue. After searching through



more files on another floor, the translator finds the name of the assassins. They are the Three Blind Mice, she tells Alex.

Part Three: The Foot Soldier: Chapters 74 - 78

Analysis

John has never been married. He's never even thought about getting married before. Now, suddenly, everything is changing. Since meeting Billie, he seems to have softened his whole attitude, and it's so unlike him that he can't help wondering what is happening to him. He even greets her with the phrase 'Hey, little one,' and immediately gives himself a mental kick for being such a schmuck. He can't figure out what happened to the smooth and ultra detached person he used to be.

Billie knows that John is there to discuss her husbands' case, but that doesn't stop her from thinking outside the box either. She tells herself that emotionally she has a silly crush, but still examines his strong, handsome frame and is curious about him in a way that she hasn't been about anyone since Laurence died. She finds herself wanting to know everything about him, and alternately telling him things about herself and Laurence that she hasn't shared with anyone else either. It is a feeling she is enjoying, even if it makes her a little giddy. The day progresses in a wonderfully romantic way, culminating in her bed, and neither has any regrets after. In fact, John feels a peace he has never known before. He can't believe how corny he is with her, and how much he is attracted to her in every way. What is wonderful about the whole thing is that it appears as though Billie feels the same way.

Alex goes home to find the house empty, and a pair of digs from Nana involving the amount of time he spends with them. The first is the note on the door that explains where they are and asks if he misses them, and the second he finds after going upstairs. Two jars of marbles are on his bed, reminding him of the parable she had told him about the man who was given a jar of marbles to represent the amount of Saturdays he had remaining in his life. Each Saturday, he was told to take one out to remind him of the passing time, and the finite amount of Saturdays remaining. It helped him to put life into perspective and not focus quite so much on work and the need to succeed. Alex hears the hint, loud and clear. He spends the next few days reviewing everything they know about the murders that they believe are related. He tries to find a link, but there doesn't seem to be one. Just as he is ready to file it all again, he gets another message from the Foot Soldier, giving him a kick start and suggesting he go back to the past one more time as the answers are there. Alex finds the connection when he goes to the Vietnamese embassy and goes through boxes of files from Vietnam. They find two files in separate places that refer to a number of civilian killings in the An Lao Valley. The connection is the fact that the bodies were painted red, white and blue. The translator even finds the names of the assassins. They are the Three Blind Mice.



Part Four: Exit Wounds: Chapters 79 - 86

Part Four: Exit Wounds: Chapters 79 - 86 Summary

Alex gets confirmation from Ron Burns at FBI that the Three Blind Mice are suspected in two other murders, and he and John head to the town of Rocky Mount, North Carolina where the three men live. They settle into a bar named Heels and talk to a plant supervisor from Heckler and Koch where the men work, and get the general impression that they are well liked. Just after seven that evening, the three men show up looking perfectly normal, and Alex and John spend the remainder of the evening just watching them. The next morning, they cruise the neighborhoods that the assassins live in, amazed at how well they blend in. They go back to the hotel to get ready to attend the H & K company picnic where they know the three men and their families will attend also.

Alex and Sampson watch the three with their families, speculating as to whether or not the men know who they are. After playing softball on the team opposing the Three Blind Mice, they walk to Starkey's house, break in and look around. They find a locked box full of dirty pictures but little else so leaving everything disturbed to announce they were there, they head out to find the three men waiting outside for them. John and Alex take out their guns, but Starkey tells them nothing is going to happen, that they know who they are, and suggest they return to Washington. Alex baits Starkey, mentioning An Lao and the Three Blind Mice. Starkey denies none of it and insists they were just doing their job, adding they should leave their homes alone in the future. Alex asks Starkey how he knows about them, and his answer shakes Alex: Foot Soldier.

On the way back to Washington, Sampson relays a story to Alex about their childhood and one of the many times Nana had saved him by convincing Social Services to allow her to look after him when both his parents were in jail. Alex senses he has more to say, and waiting he gets a surprise. Sampson has a girlfriend. It is the first time he has ever known Sampson to be in love. It looks good on him. When they get back, Alex finds an EMS truck parked in front of his house. Inside he finds Kayla Coles who tells him that Nana had a fainting spell and Damon had gone down the street to get Dr. Coles who had waited with Nana until he returned. Now they are both laughing and Dr. Coles takes Alex aside to talk to him.

Part Four: Exit Wounds: Chapters 79 - 86 Analysis

Alex gets the confirmation he needs to be sure that the men he is after are the right ones, and he and John go to North Carolina to get a closer look at the assassins. They see them on their home turf, with their children, and talk to people in the community casually, and everything they hear is positive. It's as though they are after three men who live two entirely separate lives. On one hand, they are family men. They are attentive, and loving. They care about their children and they enjoy getting all three



families together. They are well known in the small community of Rocky Mount, and well liked. On the other hand, they are stone-cold killers. They plan, stalk and execute with a precision that makes them difficult to catch. It is a combination that is hard for Alex and John to reconcile. After attending the Heckler and Koch company picnic, posing as new employees and even interacting with the three men, John and Alex slip away and walk to the house that belongs to Starkey and his family. They search his home after breaking in, hoping to find incriminating evidence, but knowing deep down they won't. All they find is a locked box of dirty pictures, many of them depicting Asians and the photos lead them to speculate that perhaps these men were also responsible for the killings at Asia House. These men are too smart to leave any evidence of their handiwork at home though. They leave and find Starkey with Harris and Griffin out front waiting for them. The confrontation that follows is harmless as Starkey clearly doesn't bring his work persona home with him. He suggests that Alex and John go home after letting them know that he knows who they are. He doesn't seem to be the least bit nervous or intimidated by the presence of police in his home. His only comment is that they should stay away from his home. Despite the fact that they are killers, they adhere to a code of conduct and tell Alex and John that showing up at their homes just isn't the way it's done. Alex tries not to be rattled, but when he asks Starkey how he knows so much about them, Starkey says the Foot Soldier is his source. That surprises him. Now he doesn't know what to think.

They head back home, and Sampson confesses that he is seeing someone. This is another surprise, as John has never had a girlfriend. It's nice to see him smiling and laughing when he talks about Billie and lightens Alex's mood as well. The feeling lasts until he gets home and finds an EMS vehicle in his driveway. Dr. Coles is inside with Nana and though Nana thought she was having a heart attack earlier. Luckily, Damon had notice the EMS truck down the road and convinced Dr. Coles to return with him. Now, they were both laughing and joking, so it seemed as though the crisis was over, but Dr. Coles wants to talk to Alex about the amount of time he spends working at night.



Part Four: Exit Wounds: Chapters 87 - 93

Part Four: Exit Wounds: Chapters 87 - 93 Summary

Dr. Coles takes Alex out onto the porch. Nana is not well, and she is getting old. She has to rest more than she does, and Kayla chastises Alex slightly for the hours he keeps. The next day Alex works upstairs for a while, knowing Nana's tests are due. When he talks to Kayla, she confirms that Nana has atrial fibrillation, but with noninvasive treatment should live to see a hundred. Director Burns offers Alex a job with the FBI, but Alex postpones him. He'd rather concentrate on getting closure with the case he is now working on. Alex goes downstairs and Nana jokes about still being on the right side of the grass, and they talk about taking a vacation after she's had her procedure. A fax is waiting when he goes back upstairs. A copy of the Miami Herald reports on an execution of a man named Tichter - formerly of Vietnam Special Forces. A note at the bottom from Foot Soldier tells him Tichter was innocent and is number six in case Alex isn't keeping track. He is.

Alex goes shopping for Nana and on his way out he notices a Jeep approaching. While he is watching, a gun points out the window and fires. Alex manages to stay out of the line of fire with his youngest son as he returns fire. He manages to hit the shooter, and the Jeep leaves in a hurry. He goes in, telling Nana and the kids to stay down, and calls Sampson who comes right away.

Alex and John go back to Starkey's and hide a location device on his suburban, courtesy of the FBI, and follow him, Griffin and Harris for hours. They end up in Northern Georgia, five hundred miles from their starting point. Alex hides the car, and using more FBI loaners like night vision goggles and directional microphones, they sit, watch and listen. They are stunned when Ellis Cooper's lawyer pulls up, and money is exchanged. Then two Vietnamese women show up and the party begins. Two hours pass before Alex and John hear the beginnings of an escalation of tension. Before long, they realize the lawyer has been stabbed, and chaos reigns. Harris yells kill in Vietnamese and Sampson translates for Alex.

Part Four: Exit Wounds: Chapters 87 - 93 Analysis

Alex spends more time at home. He works, but sticks around, and thinks a great deal about the fact that Nana is getting to an age where she can't keep up with all of it any more. When Director Burns offers him a job, it is not unexpected, but Alex finds himself refusing. He wants to see this case through, but then, he isn't sure what he'll do after. He offers to take Nana on a vacation after her procedure, and she jokes about all the destination possibilities. She asks him what he'll do about work, but he is determined to make this work for Nana's sake. He is much more aware of the marble parable now. He suggests that he might even invite Jamilla, but adds that she is quite busy at work. Nana suggests Alex get her a couple of jars of marbles as well.



When Alex is leaving to do the grocery shopping and finds himself under fire from a Jeep that drives up and stops, he is fearful first, then responsive, and then all of that gives way to anger. Alex manages to fire back and hit the shooter, but once he's assured himself that everyone is okay, and he's called John, Alex gets more angry than he has ever been. He recognizes that this was a warning. Had the intention been an assassination, he feels that they would likely have succeeded.

Angry, Alex takes Burns up on his offer of help and loads up with the latest in surveillance equipment, rifles and a tracking device which he and John affix to Starkey's suburban. When he leaves, they follow discreetly and many hours later are sitting in the forest and listening from a distance to the exchanges in the cabin the men have stopped at. John can barely contain himself when he sees Ellis Cooper's lawyer pull up, and take payment for services rendered. They talk about hunting, and the lawyer is about to leave when two Vietnamese girls show up ready to party. He decides to stay and enjoys himself until the mood and temperament changes. A party with the Three Blind Mice is a dangerous thing. They kill for money and for fun. Soon they are once again primed to kill and Alex and John watch and listen in stunned disbelief as Cooper's lawyer is stabbed and the violence escalates.



Part Four: Exit Wounds: Chapters 94 - 99

Part Four: Exit Wounds: Chapters 94 - 99 Summary

Alex and John race for the cabin, bursting in with guns ready. Cooper's lawyer is dead on the floor, and Starkey gives the command to move out. The Vietnamese girls run out the back door and the Three Blind Mice follow, shooting them in the back before they can get to their car. Alex and John both know that they will have to shoot to kill to survive. The quiet that follows is oppressive. Both Alex and John are intensely aware that these men are skilled killers and they are behind enemy lines in a war zone. John notices one of the women is moving and in a low crouch, he runs out to check on her. The shots ring out and Sampson goes down. Alex calls his name and gets no answer. He moves forward cautiously, but everything seems surreal now. Alex calls out to John again, but there is no response and no movement. Alex realizes he has to regroup or he is going to die. He sits behind a large hemlock, knowing darkness is in half an hour, and tries to decide what to do. He knows with a sinking realization just how much trouble he is in.

His only hope is to evade and escape. He thinks about how badly he wants to bring these three men down, but Starkey particularly. He is the leader. Sampson's words ring in his ears: Take no prisoner. He slips into a hollow and edges forward listening intently for any sign that anyone has heard him changing his position. He hears nothing. He feels guilty for leaving John, and odd facts that John has told him about his time in Vietnam come to his mind. He circles and waits again. Something moves, and he sees a bobcat, unconcerned and unaware. He hears someone coming, and he is very close. Alex doesn't move. He doesn't dare. Alex shifts so that he can see whoever is coming as soon as he clears the ridge. Inches at a time, he is advanced on, and then Brownley Harris rolls over the edge and his eyes widen when he sees Alex right there. Alex shoots just once, but it is enough. He takes Brownley's rifle and waits shuffling under cover again. Alex is almost back where he started. John still hasn't moved. He knows all he can do is wait. Suddenly a voice tells him to put the gun down. Warren Griffin is behind him. Then Starkey shows up and they both have night vision goggles as well. Alex asks Starkey what the hell happened in Vietnam, still trying to find the truth. Alex looks past Starkey and realizes that Sampson is gone, and tells Starkey and Griffin to drop their weapons. Starkey tells Alex he's going to cut him up, but then from behind them Sampson tells them to put their weapons down as well. Griffin spins around and John shoots. He goes down. Starkey raises his weapon, pointing it at Alex and John shoots him in the chest. A second shot goes through his forehead, finally stopping him for good.

Part Four: Exit Wounds: Chapters 94 - 99 Analysis

When John and Alex burst into the cabin, it is with little thought to their own safety. Reacting entirely on instinct, and years of experience in law enforcement, they are only



concerned for the safety of the innocents inside. There is no debate or call for back up, knowing that every moment lost is another moment closer to death for those inside, and having seen the kind of damage these three men can do, neither man is willing to wait it out. They are surprised when Starkey issues the command to move out. They fully expected a firefight, and adrenaline is high compared to the oppressive silence that follows. The girls ran out as soon as Alex and John had distracted Starkey and his crew. They didn't need any encouragement to leave, knowing they were likely the next to die. They were right. Starkey's call to move out was not motivated by his fear of John and Alex. Rather, he was more concerned with stopping the girls from leaving. All of their training is kicking in as they hurry outside to contain the situation. They don't hesitate to remove the escaping threats, shooting the girls in the back before falling back into the forest which is their element. John and Alex realize the trouble they are in very quickly. Miles away from help, and up against three men who like to kill and have been trained by the government to do so. While nervous, they head outside and when John believes one of the girls is still moving, he hurries to her aid Alex tries to stop him, instinctively aware that they are in extreme danger, but John is already on his way across the open space to her side. The shots ring out before he gets there, and despite his training and staying low to the ground, Starkey and his men hit their mark and John goes down. Alex is stunned almost to a point where his own life is in mortal jeopardy. He can't think about anything other than his part in John being there. He calls out to him, and when he gets no answering movement, despite several attempts, he knows that he has to get a grip on himself. If he keeps thinking about his friend on the ground, the others will kill him for sure, and by calling out to John, he has also given his position away. He moves behind a tree knowing darkness is near. All he can do now is try to evade and escape.

His movement likely increased his chances of survival. By circling back, he is able to watch the area he was in previously, and by remaining vigilant, he is able to remove one of the three men threatening him. He tries to out think them, but finds himself caught when one gets behind him. The two men would have likely gotten away if they had just shot Alex and left the scene. Starkey and Griffin enjoy the torment and fear too much for that. They talk instead, and are so busy with how good they are that they don't notice that John has gotten up, but Alex has. He gives Starkey and Griffin a chance to put their weapons down, but neither is likely to surrender. John shoots them both before either manages to get a shot off to injure or kill Alex. e assures Alex he is fine before collapsing on the ground.



Part Five: Four Blind Mice: Chapters 100 - 107

Part Five: Four Blind Mice: Chapters 100 - 107 Summary

Jamilla calls every day. Dr. Coles shows up and Alex invites her to breakfast, but her real agenda is to ensure that Nana is okay for the procedure the following day. Nana makes jokes, and later asks Alex to take her for a drive. She doesn't seem to want to talk about the procedure, though it is obviously on her mind. Alex worries, but keeps a brave front so the kids aren't worried. It seems to take a long time, but finally Kayla comes out and tells them Nana is fine. They visit, Alex drops the kids at school and then deals with Ron Burns for information. In return, he has to work a case involving sex offenders. He looks through the army records, but finds nothing documented that would act as the catalyst for the rest and he comes to the conclusion that the records must have been cleaned up. He talks to Burns about the possibility that former agent Kyle Craig is responsible for orchestrating everything. Burns asks if Alex has thought about his offer of employment, but Alex again defers even though Burns tells him he can't hold the position forever. Then Burns gives him an envelope containing a straw doll that closely resembles the one found at Cooper's house, and a patch that came from a gang member of the Ghost Shadows. The former leader of the gang was Tran Van Luu - Kyle's new friend. Now Ron is as interested in this case as Alex is. They fly together to the Colorado facility to talk to Tran Van Luu again.

Alex asks Tran about the significance of the doll. Tran tells him that sometimes when he was a scout in Vietnam, they used the dolls as calling cards and left them at the homes of the victims as threatening messages to remind the offender that they should be in the doll's place. All Tran will admit to is being Foot Soldier, and tells Alex the rest is too much for his country to hear. Finally, he admits that it was him. He orchestrated the killings and asked that the dolls be left behind. Motivated by revenge because his family had been killed and left for him to find, Tran tried first to tell his CO but he and even his superiors already knew. One of their own teams had gotten out of control, and they had sent more soldiers in to fix it.

Part Five: Four Blind Mice: Chapters 100 - 107 Analysis

Alex tries to spend more and more time at home with Nana and the kids, ever aware that she is not well and that so much time is spent at work that it amounts to neglecting those he loves. He thinks about what life would be like without her, and can't fathom it. He puts on a brave face so that the kids don't see how worried he is about Nana when they take her in, but the procedure takes such a long time that even Alex is worried by



the time Kayla finally arrives with the news that she is ready to see them. Alex leaves her to rest and goes to see Ron Burns. He still can't let go of the feeling that he's missing something big. He needs the kind of information that Alex can't get without help from Ron, and Ron knows it so he makes a deal with Alex. He wants Alex to come and work for the FBI but Alex is waffling in light of recent events at home. He knows he needs to spend more time with his family, and though he is highly addicted to solving crimes and the rush he gets from it, he also is only too aware of the finite state of life - Nana's in particular. Ron gives him files that tell Alex very little. Then Ron gives him another file that comes from an active case they have. It involves the gang that used to be run by Tran Van Luu and includes a straw doll like the ones found at the crime scenes. The link is more than coincidence. Now Ron is hooked by the mystery of this case as well and accompanies Alex to the supermax prison where both Tran Ban Luu and Kyle Craig are being held.

Tran is not very forthcoming to begin with, but finally admits to Alex that he is the Foot Soldier. He also takes responsibility for orchestrating all of the killings, having hired the Blind Mice to carry out his revenge. He tells Alex about the days when he was part of the army and his family was killed by renegades of the army who had lost their way and begun killing everyone they came across. These soldiers had marked their victims by painting them red, white or blue as a message to anyone who found them, and leaving tokens like the straw doll behind. That was how Tran had found his family. He had gone to his commanding officer, but he was unapologetic and buried the information instead of acting on it, as did his superior. Tran, in desperation for some kind of revenge, took matters into his own hands and hired the same men to act as assassins on his behalf. He admits at the same time that he had nothing to do with the killing of Colonel Handler, and speculates on their being a fourth blind mouse. All in all, Tran is a frightening specimen. The last thing he does is tell Alex that Kyle says hello. Alex warns Tran that Kyle usually has his own agenda, but Tran isn't worried.



Part Four: Exit Wounds: Chapters 108 - 115

Part Four: Exit Wounds: Chapters 108 - 115 Summary

Alex waits eagerly for Kyle Craig to be brought in. He looks sunken and has lost weight, but is still defensive and confrontational. He goads Alex every chance he gets, and especially enjoys the fact that Alex is coming to him for help, but doesn't offer any.

John is recuperating with Billie Houston's help on the Jersey shore. Alex calls him daily. He goes through every data base he can think of and one name keeps coming up linked to the An Lao Valley. Colonel Peyser at the pentagon flatly refuses to talk to Alex after he brings up the events in Vietnam, making Alex believe he is closing in on the truth. He goes to West Point, and thinks more about the offer made by Ron Burns and about Jamilla and how to work out the distance between them. Finally, Alex arrives at West Point and asks for General Hutchinson, but the General refuses to see him, telling Alex that the General doesn't care about the past or what happened in the An Lao Valley. Alex leaves and parks on a side street to wait for the General to come out. He follows him home, and lets him get settled in before knocking. When the General sees Alex, he threatens to have him arrested for trespassing. Alex tells him what he has figured out, and the General denies all, believing no traces of his involvement remain, but he is wrong and Alex corrects him. He gives the General details proving his statements and is rewarded with the arrival of Adjutant Colonel Walker and a man he calls Taravela, telling him now he won't be going home. Alex is cuffed and put in the trunk of a sedan and taken approximately forty minutes from West Point before the trunk is opened again. He knows now he is going to die. They strip him and swab his naked body with cold paint and just before they kill him, gunshots sound and half a dozen men appear out of the darkness, killing all three men. The Ghost Shadows are speaking Vietnamese, and take their time killing Hutchinson, helping Alex to his feet and offering him the choice of watching or leaving. Respectfully, they return Alex's clothes and drop him off near the gates of West Point. Ron Burns calls him the next morning to tell him about three murder victims found in the mountains of Ellenville. Their faces were painted red, white and blue. Alex tells Burns everything he knows before telling Burns he will accept his invitation to work for the FBI.

Epilogue: Billie and John are married in Falls Church Virginia. Everyone attends, including Director Burns, and Alex catches the garter much to Jamilla and Nana's amusement.

Part Four: Exit Wounds: Chapters 108 - 115 Analysis

Despite the close call with the Three Blind Mice, Alex can't let the matter go. While John recuperates with Billie's help, Alex continues to look for answers through every channel



he can think of. All the evidence goes back to West Point, and one name keeps coming up. Alex goes to talk to General Hutchinson but is told to leave. Alex doesn't give up easily. He waits outside the gate, following the General home to confront him once and for all. He tells the General that he knows everything, and as a result, finds his life in danger again. He is cuffed, stuffed in a trunk and driven miles away to a remote location in the wilderness. Just as things look hopeless, and Alex is thinking about never seeing his family or Jamilla again, the Ghost Shadows step in and take over. Two men are killed instantly, but the General will not get off so easily. The Ghost Shadows scare Alex half to death, and he is surprised when they free him, respectfully taking him back to West Point after giving him the option of watching the General's death.

The next morning, Ron Burns calls to see what he knows about the three men that were killed in the woods. Alex tells him all he knows for sure, and in the process comes to the realization that he is not able to say goodbye to this line of work entirely. He agrees to work for Ron at the FBI.

John recovers with Billie's help, and to his great surprise realizes that he does not want to be without her. They are married in a ceremony that includes Alex and his family, director Burns and a room full of guests that share his joy. No one is more surprised and pleased than Alex, never having known his friend to have fallen so deeply for anyone. When Alex catches the garter, he laughs, enjoying the digs from Nana and Jamilla, and knowing that one day soon he might be inclined to do the same thing.



Characters

Alex Cross

One of the best homicide detectives in Washington, Alex Cross is a widower with three children - little Alex, Damon and Jannie. They are under the care and supervision of Nana Cross when Alex is called to work. He has promised to retire, but on the day it becomes effective, his best friend John Samson shows up and asks for his professional help with a friend of his. Alex of course can not refuse. Alex has a frame and appearance that Samson describes as being like Ali when he was younger.

He is an FBI detective and psychologist, called in to assist on the worst of crimes committed across the country. He is well known and well respected in his field, having caught and incarcerated many of the country's worst criminals. One such criminal took the life of his wife, leaving him a widower with three children. His mother, known by all as Nana Cross, has moved in to help look after the children while Alex works. Alex is thinking about quitting. He wants to spend more time with his family, but his job is an obsession and it is difficult for him to put that part of his life away.

John Sampson

A big man, John Samson is a detective in Washington. He had grown up without a father as the man had run out on them when he was three, and his mother was an addict and a dealer. As a result, he is not prone to sentimental displays excepting when it comes to Alex's family and Nana who was as much a mother to him growing up as she was to Alex. John is a strong and handsome man, but he lives in emotional isolation. He has never had a successful serious relationship with a woman, and never even considered asking anyone to marry him. His parents taught him one thing and that was to have no faith in love, so he keeps a distance from all possible ties to ensure his own safety. Although he has watched his friend Alex fall in love, and knows it is possible, deep down he feels that it just isn't in his cards. His fate is to be alone, and he has long ago accepted it.

John's best friend, Ellis Cooper, is convicted of murder and John can think of no one better to help him than his friend Alex Cross. Sadly, they are unable to stop Cooper's execution, and the death haunts John. What drives him forward is the thought of payback, and justice, and the need to find the person responsible for the crimes his friend was committed of. While researching cases that have a similarity to the murder his friend was convicted for, John meets Billie in Bay Head, New Jersey, and his life changes. Suddenly he has gone from being the cool and aloof detective to looking forward to their every meeting, and trying hard not to think up excuses to go back to see her again. Though she is much smaller in stature than he is, she brings out the protective nature in him, and he finds that he can't get enough of her company. Slowly, the shell he has built around himself begins to crumble.



Ellis Cooper

Ellis Cooper is a Sergeant in the United States Army Special Forces. He served in Vietnam, and now, at the age of fifty-five, he still has a waist that is only thirty two inches around which is the same as it was when he was eighteen years old. He earned not only a Purple Heart, but a Distinguished Silver Cross and a Silver Star throughout his service. The black war hero is accused of multiple murders, but maintains his innocence. He is convicted and sentenced to death after only two and a half hours of deliberation by the jury.

Thomas Starkey

Leader of the group of assassins given the code name of the Three Blind Mice in Vietnam, Thomas Starkey still controls the other two men that are part of his 'group.' His leadership stems from the fact that he is the toughest and the smartest of the three, and things haven't changed much since the days in Vietnam. Like then, he still boasts a thirty-three inch waistline, is six-foot-one-inch tall and his weathered and tanned face is complimented with blond hair now peppered with gray - appropriate for his fifty five years of age. He is a serious man, but on the odd occasion that he laughs, those around him tend to laugh with him. Former ranger stationed at Fort Bragg, he had belonged to the seventy-fifth Ranger Regiment, Third Battalion from Fort Benning in Georgia. Starkey is usually the driver, preferring to be in charge, and is also the one in charge of entertainment musically speaking and favors Janis Joplin, The Doors and Jimi Hendrix.

Thomas was born in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. He is devoted to his family and the families of the two men he calls his best friends. He often gets the three groups together to barbecue or have tailgate parties on Friday nights. His son Shane is a high school student who plays tailback and is being courted by colleges already, but Thomas wants him to do a tour in the army like he did first. He prefers to commit his crimes 'the army way,' meaning more preparation than probably necessary, but habitually comforting in it's routine.

His wife is a blue eyed, tall brunette named Judie who speaks with a southern accent and smiles a lot. He still feels lucky to have found her.

Browley Harris

Brownley is five-foot-eight with a stocky frame that still bears his fifty one years of age well. He is surprisingly well toned considering his consumption of alcohol, and he is the second of the Three Blind Mice. His hair is still black although now it is flecked in places with gray, and his eyes are brown, hooded and topped by bushy, thick eyebrows that almost form a unibrow. He still wears his hair in a buzz cut common to the military style but not quite to the extent of 'high and tight'.



Brownley had attended Wake Forest and then had gone on to complete graduate school at UNC. As a result, he tends to intellectualize and thinks of himself as a family man and a professional killer. He suffers no guilt about it. Harris is the usual point man. At fifty one, he is in the best shape of the three men, and still plays basketball and takes part in triathlons twice a year.

Warren (the kid) Griffin

Warren is the most impulsive and youngest of the group. The third of the Three Blind Mice, he respects and listens to the other two. He is six-foot-two-inches tall and has a lanky frame that sometimes reminds people of James Taylor. He has strawberry blond hair that he allows to grow longer on the sides, but is thinning on top. He is especially mindful of Starkey and his leadership.

Griffin is in charge of readying the packs and supplies they'll need. He is also rear security and junior man despite the years the group has been together, but is doesn't bother him.

Jamilla Hughes

Jamilla is thirty-six years old and is an inspector in the police department in California. She has deep brown eyes and both inner and outer beauty that she is unaware of. She is insecure about her appearance, both physically and emotionally as a result of prior bad relationships. She has been married once lasting four years, and engaged once afterward. She dresses unpretentiously, and is quick to smile and honest about the way she feels. She grew up in Oakland with three brothers and four sisters, and is completely at ease with Alex's three children as a result. As a detective, a part of her is always on the job which is a quality that Alex easily identifies with.

Nana Cross

Nana Cross is eighty-two years old and still lives life to the fullest. She lives with Alex and his three children, looking after them full time whenever Alex is away, which tended to be frequently when he was working. She rules with strength and commands respect, instilling these qualities in Alex's children as well. She cooks, cleans and generally takes the place of the wife Alex lost years ago. Nana worries that her son spends too much time working and not enough with his children to enjoy his life. She definitely approves of Jamilla when Alex begins seeing her, and is hopeful that they will become much more to each other.

Kyle Craig

Nemesis of Alex Cross, Kyle is a killer Alex had helped catch and incarcerate in Florence. Kyle's time in prison has aged him, making him resemble his father now. He is



still gaunt, having lost another twenty pounds in prison, shaves his head bald revealing the tattoo on one side that is part snake and part dragon. He now more closely resembles the killer he is. He is still looking for a way out of prison, and is writing a book about his experiences. He reveals that if he gets out, he would like to come and visit with Nana and the children. He has interacted with many other killers during his incarceration, and finds them fascinating though somewhat conservative for his expectations.

Tran Van Luu

Born in the Son Trach Village in the Quang Binh province, Tran lived in one of the countries poorest provinces. He worked with his family, and though his family grew rice, they often went hungry, eating only one real meal a day. Still, family was everything to Tran, and his loyalty to them runs deep. In 1963, his family moves south and Tran enlists in the Army to avoid starvation. He develops into an excellent scout, and is recommended to the US Army Special forces. It is his first real encounter with Americans, and in the beginning he likes them. Later, despite many promises, he is left behind in Saigon, and comes to America as a boat person in 1979. He survives by reconstructing the same kind of family units as he knew from Vietnam, forming a gang called the Ghost Shadows.

Normally a Buddhist, he admits, Tran is fifty-four years old, and speaks English, French and Vietnamese fluently. Looking more like a college professor than a criminal, Tran wears gold rimmed glasses and sports a long goatee that has turned gray.

Kyle Craig

Kyle is on death row in a supermax prison in Colorado. Caught by Alex Cross, Kyle now awaits his execution. He is gaunt, having lost about twenty pounds during his incarceration. He shaves his head bald and has a tattoo on one side of his skull that is part dragon and part snake. He now looks more like a killer than he did when Alex first caught him. He is intelligent and manipulative, and enjoys toying with Alex at any opportunity. Even now, he still tells Alex that he will come to visit Alex's family at his first opportunity.

Kayla Coles

Kayla is a doctor who makes house calls in Southeast Washington. Seeing the need for this type of health care, she organizes close to a dozen doctors and nurse who go into the neighborhood in an effort to help people there. Those that know her describe her as a good doctor and a good person. She is a tall woman and a bit heavysset with an attractive face. Her manner is straightforward, but kind. She did her undergraduate work at Brandeis, and went to medical school at Tufts. She is thorough and competent and genuinely cares about her patients.

Ron Burns

Ronald Burns is the Director at the FBI headquarters in Washington. He has known Alex for years, and now, hearing that Alex is retiring from the police force, he is attempting to recruit him into the FBI as a behavioral specialist. They had worked together years earlier when one of the FBI's own agents, Kyle Craig had gone bad and Alex had aided in his capture and incarceration. In an effort to recruit Alex, he uses every method he can think of, allowing Alex the use of 'company' resources and helping him in any way he can with the Bluelady killings which have now developed into the Blind Mice killings. He is intelligent, hard working and thrives on intrigue.



Objects/Places

Bluelady Murders

Name given to the murders committed in North Carolina because of the killer's unusual habit of painting the victims blue after they are dead.

Central Prison

Located in Raleigh, North Carolina, Central Prison is the only one in North Carolina that has a death row which currently houses an astounding 220 people awaiting their execution.

Appalachian Trail

Popular hiking trail in West Virginia where the killing crew kills a young couple.

Jefferson Rock

Point of interest in West Virginia from which Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia can be seen.

The Mansion

Located on O Street in Washington, The Mansion is a swanky residential style hotel that gets its clientele largely by word of mouth. It is the first place that Alex and Jamilla spend time alone other than on stakeouts while working.

Wyndham Buttes Resort

Resort in Tempe where Alex meets Jamilla for their second weekend together to get to know each other on a more personal level.

Florence ADX

Super max prison that houses Kyle Craig and many others on death row in Florence, Colorado.



Bay Head, New Jersey

Town on the Jersey shore where John first meets Billie Houston when he goes to investigate the death of her husband.

An Lao Valley

A valley in Vietnam where serial killing of civilians, including children was documented and investigated by a team of Army Rangers.

Kennesaw Mountain National Park

Located in northern Georgia, this is where the Three Blind Mice go for recreation. The cabin is owned by Starkey and is near a small lake fed by Jacks River.

Cockadau

Vietnamese word for kill.

Straw Dolls

Object left behind at each murder scene, but done is such as way as to not be an obvious part of the murders themselves. Meant as a calling card, they are tied to the murders in Vietnam.

Ghost Shadows

Name given to the gang formed by Tran in America to symbolize the ghost shadows of his family that haunt him to this day.

The Blind Mice

Name given to the Army's trained assassins who turn into murderers along the way.

Sojourner Truth School

School that Alex's children attend.

Fort Bragg

Army base where Bluelady murder investigation begins.



Themes

Morality After Service vs Life Before

War is hell. There is no disputing this fact. Anyone who has ever served can divide their life into two sections, before and after service to their country. Before, life is simple. While you may or may not be directly aware of the political upheavals and the atrocities committed in other countries, you are certain isolated from them. You live each day in appreciation of the life you have. You have a moral compass that points reliably towards what is right and what is wrong, and the two never really interact. At this stage, the idea of service to one's country is a noble and honorable ideal. You believe in rights, freedom, and the good life that should be enjoyed by all. Then, enlistment.

Afterward, everything changes. First, you quickly discover how much comfort you can survive without. You learn what it is like to have your privacy stripped away, and you are encouraged to think as a unit as opposed to the 'one.' Any time spent in another country will alter your perceptions of life anywhere else forever. Seeing the atrocities of war, and man's inhumanity to man can damage a person's moral compass for life. When fear for your own life, and the lives of your group is your sole compass for an extended time, you learn that you can commit acts of unspeakable behavior never contemplated before. You find you can kill if you must. You can interrogate if you must, and you can and will make decisions based on the welfare of your group instead of listening to your moral compass.

Detective vs Family Man

In *Four Blind Mice*, Alex Cross is introduced as the detective who is working his very last case. He has three children who for the most part are looked after by his mother since his wife's death, and all four of them count the hours until he officially leaves that life behind. The reasons on both sides are apparent. The children want to spend more time with their father, and at the age of eighty two, Nana is only too aware how fast time passes and how much precious time is lost in day to day life. She throws clues out to Alex in the way of parables that all point to how quickly time goes by, and is herself aware of her encroaching age as she suffers from occasional reminders physically. Alex knows that his time with the police force has to come to an end. Not only does it absorb all of his waking hours during the week, but it takes over many of his weekends as well. The issue at hand there is several fold. Alex enjoys his job. He loves taking the criminals off the street and solving the difficult crimes, seeing himself as the avenger of evil. He also has a unique skill set that enables him to catch some of the more complicated killers that might otherwise go unpunished. The down side with that is that he often finds that his professional and private life overlap, and his family is put in danger as a result. Each case brings the possibility that revenge or another motive might possess a criminal to use his mother or children as a weapon against him.



John Sampson is faced with a similar set of challenges. He also loves his job as a police detective, and like Alex, finds that it consumes his life. As a result, he has no personal life to speak of, and has never been able to maintain a relationship of any seriousness. He often uses his employment as an excuse to avoid having a personal attachment, citing it as the reason that he is single, but that all changes when he meets a widow of one of the victims in this story. Billie Houston lost her husband when he was executed for a crime he didn't commit, and during the course of his investigation, John finds himself opening up to her in a way he has never done before. Suddenly, with her at his side, his job is no longer a barrier, and he finds himself crossing the boundary that has always been larger than life to him before. He marries her, divorcing himself from the self important view of his attachment to his job in the process, and giving Alex and Jamilla something to think about as well.

Motivation For Murder

Thomas Starkey is a former Army Ranger colonel who still looks and acts the part despite the fact that he is no longer in the army. His second in the army and in life is Brownley Harris who maintains the same relationship with Starkey as he had with him in the army, acting deferential to his lead just as he had in Vietnam, and Warren Griffin, considered the kid is also still part of the team now, despite the fact that he is approaching fifty years old. The three men were trained together as assassins in the army, and they were good at what they did. In fact, they were so good that they began to enjoy their jobs just a little bit too much. They develop a taste for killing that follows them into the private sector, and they continue to kill at random and by contract using all of the methods the army taught them, varying little from the original and successful formula. Their former training makes them feel as though they have an immunity from the law, and enjoy a special status that regular people do not. They are careful, organized and meticulous, and have been trained by the best the country has to offer. Since the government made them who they are, they believe this gives them the right to 'be all they can be' and see no moral or legal dilemma when they kill for sport or for money. To them, it is all enjoyable.

The motives for these particular murders are unknown to the three assassins, but their roots go back to Vietnam where they first got their training. One particular village was the home of an army scout who returns one day to find his entire family murdered, and left for him to discover. He knows who the killers are, and knows that the murders were not sanctioned by the government, so he brings them to the attention of his superior officer. To his surprise, and horror, the murders are covered up and swept under the rug. The army had no desire to admit that their killing machines had run amok. As a result, Tran Van Luu realizes that to avenge his family, he will have to become the leader of the worst trio of killers he has ever known. He hires them to carry out his revenge, killing all who were either responsible, or sat by idly and did nothing afterward. His motivation is revenge, and it runs deep. He is not satisfied until all who were involved meet justice, and the irony is that all of the motivation for murder traces back to the army. Had the army not been involved in the lives of any of these men, it is highly unlikely that they would have become the cold and calculating killers that they became.



Style

Point of View

James Patterson uses a first person narrative throughout *Four Blind Mice*, switching between the main characters as the story unfolds. In the beginning, the narrative is from the perspective of the character Alex Cross. Since Alex is a detective, and a psychologist, Patterson uses the opportunity to delve into a more internalized style of narrative, where Alex is examining his own motives for carrying on the employment that keeps him away from his family for extended periods, and forces him to delve into the minds of some of the most twisted criminals in the country. This story begins as Alex's last case, as his intention is to retire. His intention is an honorable one, until his best friend John Sampson, who is also a police detective, arrives and begs for his help in solving a crime.

The next perspective comes by way of a new section and introduces Jamilla Hughes who is Alex's new love interest. She is also involved in the police department, but in California which presents a unique set of hurdles for this couple as they explore the possibility of beginning a relationship. Jamilla takes the first step, coming to Alex in Washington and meeting with his mother, Nana, and his three children. Her perspective is somewhat introspective as she examines her own fear of relationships and commitment, and questions her reasons for making the journey to Alex.

While the next section deals with the Foot Soldier, his perspective is not one that is largely expanded on until later, but the reader does get a personal insight into the mindsets of the Bluelady killers, who Alex comes to know as The Three Blind Mice. Thomas Starkey is introduced in the beginning of the story, and as murders unfold, his part in them with his two companions is examined and explained to a degree. Their connection to the army and to Vietnam is also at issue when Patterson describes the motivating factors behind their part in these contracted killings.

John Sampson is also given narrative status as he allows himself to become close to a widow who's husband was caught up in the ongoing murders and was executed after he was wrongfully convicted. Billie Houston is the first woman that John has allowed himself to become involved in, and though at first the story appears to revolve around the relationship developing between Alex and Jamilla, John and Billie are the couple who marry in the end, providing inspiration to Alex and Jamilla in the process. All in all, a well told story with many twists and turns before the end.

Setting

Four Blind Mice is a story told in several places. Beginning in Washington, DC where John Sampson and Alex Cross live, the story starts with John asking for Alex's help in solving a murder that his friend Ellis Cooper is charged with. Ellis Cooper is in North



Carolina. He had been stationed at Fort Bragg when he was accused of the Blue-lady Murders, named because they had been painted that color. Alex and John travel there in an attempt to find enough evidence to exonerate Ellis or at least postpone his execution, but though they find many discrepancies, the army seems unwilling to reopen this case. As they delve further into murders that appear similar, John ends up continuing their investigation at the Jersey Shore in a town called Bay Head where he meets and falls in love with Billie Houston while discussing her husband Laurence. Meanwhile, Alex is meeting with Jamilla in Phoenix where they are attempting to learn whether or not they should pursue the personal feelings they have for each other.

All the while, more killings are contracted and carried out by men who learned their craft in Vietnam, and references to the An Lao Valley are interspersed with memories of their tours of duty there. Finally, a shoot out takes place at Starkey's cabin in the woods in Kennesaw Mountain National Park in Georgia, about eight hours from Rocky Mount, North Carolina where Starkey, Griffin and Harris live with their families.

Language and Meaning

In *Four Blind Mice*, James Patterson makes use of a variety of phrases and sentences spoken in Vietnamese. These are used by the killers as they immerse themselves in the business of a contract, thereby giving them the emotional connection to the training they received to operate in Vietnam. The language is used to terrorize their victims, to communicate amongst each other without their victims awareness, and to bring themselves back to the emotional high and control they felt as they swept small villages in Vietnam. In a small way, the use of Vietnamese is psychological warfare as much as a uniform, or a weapon would be. Starkey uses Vietnamese to issue commands to his comrades, bringing them into the mindset he requires of them to kill again and again. Since they operated with impunity in Vietnam, use of the same language commands implies the same operational freedom. Also, since the language is not widely known in the US, their victims are further traumatized by the use of foreign phrases. It is also a way of gaining an advantage time wise as commands and instructions can be issued without the victim's understanding, confusing their prey while they organize in preparation of attack.

Starkey and his gang feel their strongest in a Vietnamese environment. They even seek out and frequent a service that provides hookers from that country, and kill them and their handlers for pure sport and entertainment afterward.

Structure

Four Blind Mice by James Patterson is written in six parts, each part between sixty and one hundred pages in length, excepting only the Epilogue. Part one introduces Alex Cross and the fact that he is working on his 'Last Case.' It is a promise he made to his family, and one he fully intended to keep until his best friend since childhood, John Sampson arrives asking for his help. Even Alex's mother, known as Nana to all, can't



object although at the age of eighty-two, she is feeling her years and would likely be grateful if Alex were around more to help with the raising of his children. Promising her, and his children that this is really the last case, he embarks on a mystery involving the wrongful conviction of John's friend Ellis Cooper for murder.

Part two introduces Jamilla Hughes, a police inspector from California who meets Alex on a previous case and now is pursuing the idea of something more involved with him. Both Jamilla and Alex are consumed with the need to solve the cases put in front of them, and as a result work more than they play, but despite this they manage to meet more than once and find joy in a deeper intimacy with each other. Part three brings the Foot Soldier into the story. John's friend Ellis has been executed for the crime he was convicted of, and it is increasingly more apparent that Ellis was innocent. He is not the only soldier set up in this fashion, and if Alex wasn't already intrigued, the messages from Foot Soldier would have certainly roped him in. He tells Alex about other cases, and tells him to look in the past to find the answers he seeks.

Part four, Exit Wounds, brings us to the shoot out that is the result of Alex and John following the men they believe are responsible for a number of murders now, including some that were not related to the army. John Sampson is injured in the process, but the three men are killed. Part five is the Four Blind Mice, and in a twisted and convoluted manner, Alex discovers who the fourth blind mice is. Full of surprises, and unpredictable turns, this is a story that is unfolding right to the final pages. The epilogue called Garter is a fun ending to a story of revenge and betrayal.



Quotes

"Your friend murdered these women. Now you ought to go home and let the people around here begin to heal." Chp 11, Pg 39
Captain Donald Jacobs to Alex Cross and John Samson after showing them photos of the murders.

"We found out about Ronald Hodge and the Hertz car in about a day. What's wrong with the local police and the army investigations?" Part One, Chp 16, Pg 54
Alex to John after John asks him what bothers him most about this case so far.

"Do yourselves a big favor while you still can. You're wasting time on a dead man's errands." Part One, Chp 26, Pg 90
Officer who releases John and Alex after a night in jail that follows their 'set up' scuffle in the bar, trying to convince them to leave well enough alone.

"They think I'm guilty of the three murders, but they're pleasant to me all the same." Part One, Chp 30, Pg 104
Ellis Cooper to John and Alex when they go to see him with no news that will help him.

"You fucked up, Alex. You let Cooper die!" Part Two, Chp 39, Pg 132
Samson to Cross when he shows up drunk and angry, still unable to understand why they couldn't save Ellis Cooper from the state sanctioned execution.

"These killers aren't brilliant like Gray Soneji or Kyle Craig. But they are every bit as deadly. They're expert at what they do, and what they do is kill and get away with it." Part Two, Chp 40, pg 137
Alex to John after he shows him evidence he found to support the fact that Ellis Cooper was not the first innocent soldier to be executed for crimes committed by the same men.

"If you want to get a good belly laugh out of God, just tell him about your plans." Part Two: Chp 42, Pg 142
Warren Griffin and one of his favorite phrases, thought about as he packs for another one of their 'outings'.

"These men, they bring force to bear without conscience. You can quote me on that." Part Three: Chp 46, Pg 211
Michael Fescoe to Alex Cross and John Sampson regarding the Bennett murders.

"But the murders might be a little more complicated than they appear. Just like the cadets here at West Point." Part Three: Chp 68, Pg 224
Alex to Colonel Handler at West Point regarding the murders of Barbara and Robert Bennett.

"Why waste your time on them? I'm a hundred times more interesting. You should be studying me." Part Three: Chp 73, Pg 240



Kyle Craig to Alex when Alex goes to him looking for answers to his current murder investigation.

"The answers are all in the past. Isn't that always the way it works out?" Part Three: Chp 78, Pg 257

Message from Foot Soldier to Alex to give him a hint and get him back on track.

"I have names for the assassins, and I think I have a code name for the operation. I believe it was called Three Blind Mice." Part Three: Chp 78, Pg 260

Ms. Nguyen to Alex as she goes through the files at the Vietnamese Embassy for him.

"Three business suits. Don't much look like killers." Part four: Chp 79, Pg 265

John to Alex when they see Starkey, Griffin and Harris for the first time.

"Look at me, I'm grinnin' like a goddamn Halloween pumpkin." Part four: Chp 85, Pg 285
John to Alex after confessing that he's been seeing Billie Houston.

"How's your marble collection? Maybe you should buy a couple of jars for her." Part four: Chp 89, Pg 297

Nana to Alex with regard to Jamilla and how dedicated to their jobs they both are to the detriment of all else.

"We're in deep shit somewhere around Kennesaw, Georgia. We traveled a lot of hours to get here. Now what?" Part four: Chp 92, Pg 307

John to Alex after following Starkey, Griffin and Harris to the cabin.

"They were tough, brave, but more than a few of them got incredibly desensitized. Sometimes they practiced situational ethics." Part five: Chp 105, Pg 350

FBI Director Ron Burns to Alex, discussing his tour of duty as a Marine in Vietnam.

"The straw doll is a threatening message reminding the offending person it is they who should rightfully be in the doll's place." Part five: Chp106, Pg 353

Tran Van Luu to Alex after Ron Burns shows Alex the connection between Trans' gang the Ghost Shadows and the straw dolls found at all the murder scenes.

"I believe in rituals and symbolism, and I believe in revenge." Part five: Chp 107, Pg 357
Tran to Alex by way of explanation for the killings.



Topics for Discussion

What events tie the Three Blind Mice together in such a way that they are still inseparable long after the Vietnam war is over?

What is Alex's primary reason for resigning from the police force?

What hints or parables are given to Alex to make him appreciate or more closely examine the time he spends away from his family?

Why is it unlikely that this will be Alex's last case despite his promises to his family?

How do the murders tie back to Vietnam? In what ways are they similar? What motivates the man who orchestrates these killings?

Why does Alex suspect there is a fourth blind mouse? Who agrees with him?

What items or calling cards are left behind at each murder? Why are they left?

What does John Sampson find when he goes to the Jersey Shore to investigate the incarceration and execution of Laurence Houston?

What makes the murders different from an ordinary assassination? What do the killers do that make them so difficult to find and apprehend?

Who saves Alex from certain death? Why?