

# **The Relic Study Guide**

## **The Relic by Lincoln Child**

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# Plot Summary

Relic is the first fiction collaboration between authors Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child. The week before a new exhibit is about to open at the New York Museum of Natural History, two children are murdered. During the investigation, a guard is killed and a police officer goes missing. Special Agent Pendergast, a New Orleans FBI agent, comes to New York to assist in the investigation, but he is taken off the case when he tries too hard to stop the inevitable disaster that takes place the night of the exhibit's opening. Now a dozen party-goers find themselves fighting for their lives as they are stalked by a creature that even the scientists at the museum do not understand. Relic is a horror story that belongs in the ranks of Stephen King or Michael Crichton, a fine first novel for these two talented authors.

Margo Green arrives at her office in the Museum of Natural History only to learn two children have been killed in the museum's basement. Margo is shocked and haunted by these murders, especially as it comes on the heels of her own father's death. Margo attempts to concentrate on her dissertation, but finds herself constantly distracted by the murders, especially when another takes place.

As the police investigate the murders in the museum, the director of the museum continues to push forward with the planned opening of a new exhibition, the Superstition Exhibit. When Special Agent Pendergast arrives from the FBI's New Orleans office, he takes over the case from New York Police Detective D'Agosta. D'Agosta likes Pendergast and does not mind sharing the investigation with him, especially when he witnesses Pendergast taking the pompous director of the museum down a few pegs. However, this move causes Pendergast to be removed from the case even as he comes close to discovering the true nature of the killer.

Fear runs rampant in the museum, causing many of its workers to call in sick and others to quit their jobs. Despite this fear, writer William Smithback Jr. finds himself fascinated with the idea of a killer, hoping to write a book about it and becomes a bestselling author. Smithback is already at the museum to write a book about the Superstition Exhibit, but finds himself so heavily censored that he begins to wonder if maybe it might not be a better idea to break his contract and sink his teeth into the murder mystery.

On the night of the Superstition Exhibit's opening, it seems everyone who is someone in New York society has shown up. The new FBI agent in charge has had the museum locked down tight, leaving just one security gate open to allow people to flow in and out of the museum. This proves to be a mistake when, at practically the same time, the computer room suffers gunshots, causing the power to go out, and a body is found in the exhibit. The one open security gate closes, locking D'Agosta, Pendergast, and Smithback in the museum. Pendergast leads D'Agosta and Smithback's group into the subbasement while he and Margo hunt the creature on other floors of the building.

D'Agosta leads a group that includes the mayor through the subbasement of the museum while Pendergast baits the creature with Margo's help. Unfortunately, the



creature follows D'Agosta's group through the subbasement, killing a police officer and forcing D'Agosta to follow a path he is unfamiliar with. The creature then goes upstairs and kills both the museum director and the public relations director.

Pendergast and Margo manage to attract the creature toward them near the computer room. Margo, who has defined the creature's features thanks to a computer program, is able to tell Pendergast how to kill it. With the creature dead and everyone safe, the scientists are able to discuss what happened and how the creature might have been created. However, none of them, except for Gregory Kawakita, realize the true nature of the creature. Kawakita recognizes that the creature was once a scientist named Whittlesey who found a tribe of Indians thought extinct in the Amazon. Whittlesey was force fed a rare plant that caused him to change into the creature. Kawakita has discovered how to grow the plant and he now sells it on the street.



# Introduction: Chapters 1-2

## Introduction: Chapters 1-2 Summary

Relic is the first of a long collaboration between authors Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child. This first novel is set in the Museum of Natural History, once the employer of the author Douglas Preston, allowing a great deal of authenticity to be translated to the page.

In chapter one, Whittlesey is alone with a guide during his expedition into the Amazon Basin. Several of the other scientist with whom Whittlesey originally left New York have gone back to civilization with their discoveries. However, one scientist has disappeared and Whittlesey is determined to go find him. Before he goes, Whittlesey finishes packing up the objects he has discovered and writes a letter to a colleague at the Museum of Natural History. Whittlesey tells of the discoveries he has made, including the discovery of a figurine he believes to be of the Kothaga Tribe. This figurine portrays a small creature that appears to be half human and half something else. Whittlesey believes this figurine not only illustrates some of the stories told about the Kothaga, but is perhaps evidence that the Kothaga are still in existence, something Whittlesey went on this expedition hoping to prove. Whittlesey hides the letter in the lid of the crate and instructs his guide to take the crate down to the nearest city and have it sent back to New York with the other crates generated from this expedition.

Whittlesey continues into the forest alone after his guide has reluctantly left him. Whittlesey comes across what at first appears to be the carcass of an animal. On closer examination, Whittlesey recognizes the mutilated body of his missing colleague. Moments later, Whittlesey becomes aware that he is no longer alone with the body.

In chapter two, a man who has been working the docks in Belem, Brazil for some time has become aware that the harbormaster has become suspicious of him. The man decides to hide his final shipment of stolen goods behind some crates that have been sitting in the warehouse for more than a year since its owners were killed during some kind of scientific expedition. The crates were finally going to be moved, but in the meantime would provide the perfect hiding place. However, as the man moves behind the crates, something attacks him and he is killed.

## Introduction: Chapters 1-2 Analysis

These first two chapters are very important to the readers understanding of the developing plot. In the first chapter, the reader is introduced to Whittlesey, a scientist from the Museum of Natural History in New York who is on an expedition in search of evidence that the mythical tribe of the Kothaga Indians not only existed, but still exists. It appears that Whittlesey has found some evidence to support his theories in a figurine of a creature called Mbwun. However, before Whittlesey can return to civilization, his



companion is killed and it is appeared that he will be killed as well. Not only is this, but a man who comes near the cargo carrying the Mbwun figurine also killed. This leads the reader to believe something about the figure is causing or related to these murders. However, some caution should be utilized at this point since the reader has no idea where the plot might lead them. This beginning does suggests more people will die, and this is a conclusion that reader should feel free to come to.



# Part 1, Museum of Unnatural Mystery: Chapters 3-9

## Part 1, Museum of Unnatural Mystery: Chapters 3-9 Summary

In chapter three, two boys lost in the Museum of Natural History wander into the basement.

In chapter four, Margo Green arrives at the Museum of Natural History where she is working on her dissertation to discover that the police are there. It seems someone has been murdered in the museum. Margo goes to the employee lounge with a fellow student, Gregory Kawakita, where she catches sight of another co-worker with blood on his shoes.

In chapter five, the police allow the museum employees to return to work. William Smithback, a writer, comes into the room and tells Margo that two boys were found murdered in the basement and that the police believe some kind of animal might have done it. Margo goes with Smithback to the great rotunda to listen to the press conference the director of the museum is holding. It goes badly and Margo can hear the director blaming the police.

In chapter six, Margo goes to her office to check her email before leaving for a meeting with her adviser, Dr. Frock. Margo and Dr. Frock discuss her dissertation for a moment before they discuss the murders.

In chapter seven, Margo has lunch with Smithback. Smithback complains the whole time about Rickman's edits of his manuscript of the book he has been hired to write on the exhibit Superstition, claiming the director of public relations will not allow Smithback to write anything that might appear unflattering for the museum. They are joined by George Moriarty, the assistant curator working on the new exhibit, Superstition.

In chapter eight, Police Detective Vincent D'Agosta takes a team and a dog handler into the basement of the museum in search of the killer. The dogs get away from the group and are killed by something the group does not see. D'Agosta orders everyone out of the basement.

In chapter nine, Moriarty asks Margo to help him with some plant classification for the exhibit. Moriarty takes Margo into the storage area where the plants are being kept and tells her what he needs. It is clear that George likes Margo, but she hurts his feelings when a discussion of Dr. Frock and his Callisto Effect causes Margo to become angry. Margo manages to soothe George's feelings and learns that the artifacts from the Whittlesey expedition have been moved to the secure area before their use in the exhibit.



## Part 1, Museum of Unnatural Mystery: Chapters 3-9 Analysis

Two young boys are killed at the Museum of Natural History five years after the ill-fated Whittlesey Expedition. These murders cause some disruption in the museum, but it seems most of the workers are more concerned with getting on with their own work than with the deaths of two young boys. Margo, however, is concerned about the murders and finds it all disarming. This shows the reader that Margo is a kindhearted woman and suggests that she might become involved in the investigation in one form or another.

Several characters are introduced in these early chapters. The first is Gregory Kawakita, a fellow graduate student who appears to be highly ambitious and one of those who is more concerned with his work than the murders. Kawakita appears to be a periphery character, but might prove to be of definite importance as the plot develops.

Smithback is a writer who has been given the task of writing a non-fiction book about the museum's newest exhibition, Superstition. Smithback is annoyed with the public relations director and her determination that Smithback only write flattering stories about the museum. Smithback is a quirky character who provides some comic relief in the plot at this point, as well as a darker personality to measure Margo by.

Dr. Frock is an intelligent scientist who has recently suffered some damage to his reputation with his Callisto Effect. Frock claims that fast changes in DNA can create creatures that are outside the typical evolution of humans and animals. However, no evidence has ever been found of one of these creatures, causing Frock to be dismissed for his theories.

George Moriarty is an assistant curator who tends to keep to himself and has few friends. However, George has a crush on Margo that has inspired him to request her help with his current project, the Superstition Exhibit.





## **Part 1, Museum of Unnatural Mystery: Chapters 10-15**

### **Part 1, Museum of Unnatural Mystery: Chapters 10-15 Summary**

In chapter ten, D'Agosta attends the autopsies of the boys murdered in the museum. During autopsy it is discovered that the hypothalamus has been removed from the brains of both boys and eaten. The doctors also remove what appears to be a claw from inside one of the boys' chest.

In chapter eleven, Margo goes home and receives a call from her mother. It reminds Margo she must make the decision whether or not to continue her education or to go home to run her recently deceased father's business.

In chapter twelve, a security guard is murdered in the museum after finishing a marijuana cigarette at a door opening onto a private courtyard.

In chapter thirteen, Smithback has another unpleasant conversation with Rickman over his manuscript.

In chapter fourteen, D'Agosta arrives to investigate the murder of the security guard, but finds the scene so overwhelming that he becomes sick. D'Agosta is joined by a strange gentleman who is able to pick up clues D'Agosta and his team missed. Later D'Agosta is properly introduced to Pendergast, an agent with the New Orleans office of the FBI. A second look at the crime scene leads Pendergast to the conclusion that the person who attacked the guard was attempting to enter the secure area of the museum.

In chapter fifteen, Margo goes to the herbarium to get samples of the plants she needs for her dissertation. Kawakita arrives behind her and distracts the assistant curator. The curator talks about the murders and tells Kawakita that this is not the first time that such a thing happened in the museum. The old curator tells them that a man involved with an ill-fated expedition around five years ago disappeared.

### **Part 1, Museum of Unnatural Mystery: Chapters 10-15 Analysis**

During the autopsy of the two boys killed in the museum basement, it is discovered that the killer ate the hypothalamus, a part of the brain that releases a large number of hormones. This discovery is important to the developing plot because it reveals a possible motive for the crimes even if the reader nor the investigators fully understand that motive. The autopsy also makes the discovery of a claw like object embedded in the muscle of one of the boy's chest. This suggests that an animal is the killer and gives



the investigators another object to use to find the killer. As this investigation continues, another murder takes place. The authors describe this murder in a little more detail, suggesting to the reader that it is in fact an animal doing the killing.

A new character is introduced in these chapters. This character is Special Agent Pendergast, an agent with the New Orleans office of the FBI. Pendergast just shows up with no explanation and takes over the case, finding evidence the New York detective and his team missed and handling the head of security at the museum with ease. This causes D'Agosta, who has been in charge but who is at something of a loss with this case, to like Pendergast. This suggests a friendship that will be a great asset to the investigation.

Finally, Margo goes about her work as usual even as she is attempting to make a moral decision between her own future and her family responsibilities. As Margo works, she hears gossip around the museum. Some of this gossip suggests that a man went missing in the museum five years previously, suggesting that these are not the first murders in the museum. This is an interesting bit of gossip, but if it is true it could suggest the murderer has been around longer than the reader and investigators could imagine.



# Part 1, Museum of Unnatural History: Chapters 16-20

## Part 1, Museum of Unnatural History: Chapters 16-20 Summary

In chapter sixteen, D'Agosta and Pendergast wait a long time for a meeting with the director of the museum, Dr. Wright. When he finally arrives with the head of security, Wright attempts to intimidate Pendergast. However, Pendergast manages to turn the tables and intimidate Wright. Pendergast informs Wright that he expects full cooperation from the museum's staff and that he will be interviewing everyone who works in the area where the two sets of murders took place. Pendergast also warns that he might insist that the Superstition Exhibit's opening party be canceled. Wright is deeply angered by this last suggestion, but goes along with Pendergast in fear of a release to the media suggesting the museum does not want to help in finding the murderer.

In chapter seventeen, a scientist at a private lab begins an analysis on the claw found during autopsy of the two boys killed at the museum. Unaware of the origin of the claw, the scientist begins to believe it is a joke when his DNA analysis comes back with a mixture of human and gecko DNA. The scientist sends a report to his boss filled with phrases meant to be funny in response to what he believes to be a joke.

In chapter eighteen, Margo meets with Dr. Frock to discuss the new rules being implemented in the museum because of the murders. Then Dr. Frock learns that Pendergast wants to meet with him in the basement, so he instructs Margo to accompany him to help with his wheelchair. On the way down, Dr. Frock suggests Margo use Kawakita's Genetic Sequence Extrapolator computer program to analyze the plants for the next chapter of her dissertation. In the basement, Pendergast shows Dr. Frock and Margo a cast made of the claw found in autopsy. Dr. Frock suggests the claw is a fake, making Pendergast wonder if the murderer has taken an artifact housed in the museum somewhere to create a murder weapon, but Dr. Frock insists there is no such artifact in the museum. Pendergast then takes Dr. Frock and Margo into the secure area and shows them the crates he believes the killer was interested in. There are several crates that were moved to the secure area by Dr. Cuthbert in anticipation of the Superstition Exhibit because they appear to have been broken into. Dr. Frock believes the crates were broken out of, but says nothing to anyone but Margo. These crates are from the Whittlesey Expedition and have not been cataloged except for a Mbwn figurine taken out for the Superstition Exhibit.

In chapter nineteen, Smithback visits Von Oster deep in the basement. It is Von Oster's job to remove the flesh from bones given to the museum. Von Oster was once a star at creating exhibit displays; therefore, Smithback wants to ask him questions for his book about the Superstition Exhibit. After the brief interview, Von Oster tells Smithback about



the fit Rickman had when the Mbwun figure was taken to the exhibit hall, insisting that everyone leave before the figure was brought in.

In chapter twenty, Margo has finished her work for the Superstition Exhibit and goes in search of George Moriarty to give it to him. When Margo cannot find him at his desk, Margo goes down to the exhibit hall, but it has been sealed in anticipation of the opening party. Margo goes around to a back door and sneaks in. Margo views the displays, amused by the lighting that has been installed to increase the fear intended by some of the displays. When Margo sees the Mbwun figure, she recognizes the claws on its hands as similar to the cast Pendergast showed her and Dr. Frock. Suddenly Margo hears a sound behind her and comes to believe someone is there with her. Margo rushes forward, searching for a way out. As Margo pushes through the doors, she believes she can hear someone clearing his throat behind her.

## **Part 1, Museum of Unnatural History: Chapters 16-20 Analysis**

Pendergast shows some of his character when he deals with Dr. Wright. Dr. Wright makes it clear to both Pendergast and the reader that he is willing to put people in danger in order to go forward with the opening of the Superstition Exhibit because of the embarrassment and financial ruin a cancellation might cause. Dr. Wright is ambitious and wants the museum to flourish under his care so that he might be remembered by future generations as a smart and efficient director. However, Pendergast is afraid that the party would set up a perfect set of targets for the killer. This foreshadows exactly that type of situation as the plot continues to develop.

When Pendergast meets with Dr. Frock and Margo, he reveals a number of interesting details about the case. First, Pendergast shows them a cast of the killer's claw that suggests the killer is using some sort of artifact to kill his victims. When Margo later recognizes the claw on the small figurine of the Mbwun, it leaves the reader wondering if perhaps the killer is not the figurine coming to life somehow or a creature that closely resembles the figurine. Pendergast also makes a connection to the Whittlesey Expedition when he takes them into the secure area and shows them the crates from the expedition that appear to have been broken into. Dr. Frock becomes excited when he realizes that there are claw marks on the inside of the crates, suggesting that Whittlesey might have inadvertently sent back a creature from the Amazon that might be evidence of his own Callisto Effect. This suggests to the reader that the killer is some sort of creature, a creature that is a freak of nature created by a quick change in DNA in some animal of the Amazon. At any rate, the killer seems to continuously be connected to the Whittlesey Expedition, suggesting that whatever it is, it came from the Amazon and is something modern man might not fully understand.



## Part 2, Superstition Exhibition: Chapters 21-26

### Part 2, Superstition Exhibition: Chapters 21-26 Summary

In chapter twenty-one, Margo convinces the cop watching the exhibit's doors that she was allowed in the room because she was searching for George Moriarty, one of the curators. The cop lets her go, unwilling to do the paperwork associated with her intrusion. Margo finds George in his office and gives him the work she had done while telling him about her scare. Margo and George go to a local bar and discuss the situation. Smithback joins them and tells about what he has learned of the Whittlesey Expedition, which appears to be connected to everything somehow. It turns out everyone on the expedition died. Whittlesey and another scientist disappeared in the Amazon and all the others died in a plane crash on the way back to New York. Margo suggests they need to see the records of the artifacts that returned to New York from the expedition. George disagrees, however.

In chapter twenty-two, the cop watching the exhibit's doors hears a noise. The cop calls for help, but finds himself mocked by his fellow cops. Eventually backup is sent, but becomes lost, so the cop decides to check out the noises alone. When the cop comes up missing, his colleagues assume he left his shift early to begin a short vacation he had planned.

In chapter twenty-three, Pendergast takes D'Agosta to the lab where the claw from the killer's first victims was analyzed. The technician tells how he thought it was a joke at first because of the combination of gecko and human DNA. The technician suggests the claw can be from an animal and the human DNA came from contamination. Pendergast asks them to do a more detailed test, instructing them to bill the FBI.

In chapter twenty-four, the reader learns that nearly half of the more than two thousand people employed at the Museum of Natural History called in sick, took vacation time, or quit, while visitors were few and far between on the Thursday after the first murders were discovered.

In chapter twenty-five, Smithback visits Kawakita in his office in the Physical Anthropology Lab. Smithback suggests to Kawakita that he allow Margo to use his computer program for her dissertation. Smithback then asks Kawakita to help him get information on the Whittlesey expedition, but Kawakita refuses because of a new memo warning staff members not to talk to members of the press.

In chapter twenty-six, D'Agosta has spent most of his day running down strange sounds and sightings throughout the museum, most of them unrelated to the murders. In the computer room a technician has heard a sound in the electrical room. D'Agosta checks



it out, but finds nothing. D'Agosta leaves a cop behind to keep watch over the computer room for twenty-four hours. Just after D'Agosta leaves, the cooling system goes down, causing all the computers to crash.

## **Part 2, Superstition Exhibition: Chapters 21-26 Analysis**

The cop watching the doors of the exhibit hall goes to investigate a noise and disappears, suggesting that the creature who followed Margo inside most likely killed the cop. However, the fact that his body is not quickly found leaves the reader wondering what the circumstances of his discovery will be. Margo and Smithback talk about the Whittlesey Expedition and its connection to the Mbwun figure, which in turn Margo believes is connected to the killer. This leads them to wonder about the expedition and to begin an investigation into the expedition, which seems to be connected to so much of the gossip around the museum. At the same time, D'Agosta and Pendergast continue their investigation, appearing to be placing a great deal of importance in the claw found in one of the first victims. Pendergast appears willing to believe that the killer is some sort of creature. The fact that the claw has both gecko and human DNA does not seem to phase Pendergast, suggesting he already has an idea of what the killer might be. Finally, the museum seems consumed with fear, leaving the reader wondering how fear might cause trouble for the investigation, as well as for the opening for the new exhibition which is slated for the following day.



## Part 2, Superstition Exhibition: Chapters 27-32

### Part 2, Superstition Exhibition: Chapters 27-32 Summary

In chapter twenty-seven, Smithback goes to the museum library and researches the Whittlesey Expedition. Smithback learns that everyone associated with the expedition is dead, lost either in the Amazon or killed in a plane crash. The crates filled with the expedition's artifacts sat in Brazil for a year before it was finally placed on a ship to New York. However, the ship was delayed in New Orleans for several months for unknown reasons.

In chapter twenty-eight, Margo is in her office when George calls to invite her to lunch. Margo is waiting for Dr. Frock to return a call so she invites George to her office. Smithback arrives before George, making it appear as though Margo has tricked George into looking up information on the Whittlesey crates for them. When they look up Dr. Whittlesey's journal, they discover someone has erased the information. However, George is able to recover the information because of the computer crash earlier in the day and ascertain that Rickman was the last person to check out the journal. Smithback then tells them how the ship that carried the Whittlesey Expedition's artifacts back to the United States was discovered adrift in New Orleans with all crew members dead.

In chapter twenty-nine, Dr. Frock calls Margo to his office and she tells him all she has learned about the Whittlesey Expedition. Pendergast arrives and tells them about the DNA results on the claw, but insists he cannot show them the results. However, Pendergast leaves the results behind when he leaves as though by accident. Dr. Frock comes up with a scheme to get Margo into the secure area so that she can check out the artifacts from the Whittlesey Expedition.

In chapter thirty, Margo enlists Smithback's help in obtaining access to the secure area. Margo has Smithback distract the guards while she goes inside and looks at the crates, taking some of the packing material and several small artifacts. In the lid of one of the crates, Margo finds the letter Whittlesey wrote to a colleague just before he disappeared. Margo and Smithback read the letter together after leaving the secure area.

In chapter thirty-one, Rickman, Cuthbert, and Wright are having a meeting in Wright's office, discussing the investigation. Pendergast drops by and insists that Wright cancel the opening party for Superstition the following day. Wright refuses. When Pendergast leaves, Wright makes a few phone calls.



In chapter thirty-two, Smithback and Margo track down a scientist mentioned in Whittlesey's letter who still has an office at the museum. This man tells them of the tragedy of the expedition, which they already knew, and of the young scientist who disappeared after the expedition. It seems that a young scientist working under Whittlesey obtained permission to catalogue the artifacts some time after they arrived at the museum. However, within a very short time the man disappeared and the artifacts were never catalogued.

## **Part 2, Superstition Exhibition: Chapters 27-32**

### **Analysis**

Smithback learns that the ship carrying the crates from Brazil to New Orleans lost all men aboard to some kind of murder rampage. This tells the reader two things, first that this is the reason Pendergast has come from New Orleans to investigate the museum killings. Second, this tells the reader that there is a definite connection between the artifacts and/or the expedition and the murders. Smithback and Margo also learn that Rickman has the missing journal from the expedition, suggesting there is something in it to hide. Finally, they also learn that there was a disappearance in the museum connected to the crates of artifacts soon after they arrived in New York, suggesting again that there is something in or associated with the crates that is involved in the killings. At the same time, Wright is determined that the opening for the Superstition Exhibit go on as planned, suggesting a dangerous situation for the party goers.





## Part 2, Superstition Exhibition: Chapters 33-41

### Part 2, Superstition Exhibition: Chapters 33-41 Summary

In chapter thirty-three, the museum closing finds George alone in his office, attempting to get up the courage to ask Margo out. George decides against it and leaves for the night.

In chapter thirty-four, D'Agosta meets Special Agent Coffey, the man assigned to take Pendergast's place on the investigation. Pendergast takes the news well, telling D'Agosta that it will just give him more time to investigate on his own.

In chapter thirty-five, Smithback meets with Rickman, where he is forced to sign a memo restricting his access to the museum and what he can write about regarding the museum. Smithback agrees only because he catches sight of Whittlesey's journal in her desk drawer. Smithback hangs back after Rickman leaves and steals the journal. Smithback rushes to Margo's office where they read the journal, but find nothing of help.

In chapter thirty-six, the head of security describes to Pendergast and D'Agosta the museum's security system. The security system was designed to trap a thief in one section of the museum by enclosing sections of the museum with security doors. It has been decided that all but one of the security doors in section two, the section that includes the Hall of the Heavens where the party will take place, will be lowered during the party to keep out the killer. However, Pendergast and D'Agosta both see this as dangerous, allowing only one way in and out of the hall and the exhibit. Unfortunately, Coffey overrules them.

In chapter thirty-seven, Kawakita gives Margo access to his computer program and teaches her how to use it. Margo extracts DNA carefully from her plants and waits while the computer runs its computations. As Margo waits, she thinks about Whittlesey's description of the day he found the figurine of Mbwun and realizes that the woman who warned them about the creature was upset before they found the figurine. This leads Margo to test the packing material Whittlesey used, a native plant found outside the woman's cabin. This test reveals that the plant has been infected with a virus that causes it to have high levels of hormones normally found in the human hypothalamus.

In chapter thirty-eight, Pendergast arrives at the museum with a bunch of blueprints and some notes. Pendergast begins exploring the museum.

In chapter thirty-nine, Dr. Frock joins Margo in the lab to see the results of her test on the packing materials. Dr. Frock suggests that they insert the DNA information on the claw into the program and get a description of the creature.



In chapter forty, D'Agosta stands at his post and watches as the guests begin arriving for the Superstition party. D'Agosta finds himself at odds with Coffey, unhappy with Coffey's plans to protect the guests.

In chapter forty-one, Margo and Dr. Frock get their results on the creature's DNA. The creature has a highly developed sense of smell and hearing, leaving Dr. Frock frantic to get the people out of the museum because having so many people in one, small location will draw the creature to them.

## **Part 2, Superstition Exhibition: Chapters 33-41 Analysis**

The day of the Superstition Exhibit party, Pendergast is replaced as the lead FBI agent and D'Agosta is pushed into a support role to the new FBI agent in charge. George leaves his office and is not heard from the following day. Margo begins using the Extrapolation computer program to work on her dissertation, but is quickly distracted by the murder case. It is Margo who realizes that it is the plants Whittlesey used to pack his artifacts that is associated with the Mbwnun fear displayed by a woman Whittlesey and his expedition came in contact with on the day they found the Mbwnun figurine. This leads her to test the fibers and discover they are filled with a high concentration of the same hormones secreted by the hypothalamus, suggesting a motive for the killings. Perhaps the creature needs the hormones and could not get them from the plants when they were moved to the secure area, so it began killing humans. Margo and Dr. Frock takes this a step further by having the machine guess what the creature might look like based on its DNA. This leads to a deep sense of fear when they realize it has a highly developed sense of smell and this could place the people at the Superstition party in danger.

As Margo and Dr. Frock continue their investigation, Pendergast begins exploring the basement area of the museum for reasons the reader has not yet discovered. At the same time, the party has begun and the security is questionable because of the ambition and contempt of the new FBI agent in charge. Finally, George Moriarty has disappeared, but no one has noticed as of yet.



## Part 3, He Who Walks On All Fours: Chapters 42-48

### Part 3, He Who Walks On All Fours: Chapters 42-48 Summary

In chapter forty-two, Smithback arrives at the party and makes a beeline for the refreshment table as he watches the rich and famous fill the room. D'Agosta gives his men direct orders to keep the only door open on the exhibition clear when it is opened. The officer in the computer room becomes nervous when a noise begins to sound in the electrical room.

In chapter forty-three, Margo pushes Dr. Frock into the Hall of the Heavens in an attempt to stop the party. However, no one will listen to them, even Kawakita.

In chapter forty-four, the exhibition is opened after speeches by Wright and the mayor. D'Agosta joins his men, attempting to keep the flow of people manageable. As the doors become congested, D'Agosta notices blood on a display case. When D'Agosta finds a body on top of a display case, he tries to keep the news quiet, but a few people notice and begin to panic.

In chapter forty-five, Margo and Dr. Frock learn Pendergast was last seen in the basement, so they make their way down there to find him in hopes he will help them evacuate the museum. In the computer room, the noises come again and the technician disappears inside the electrical room. The cop panics and shoots his weapon into the darkness of the electrical room, destroying the central switching box and causing the lights to go out in the entire museum.

In chapter forty-six, panic explodes in the exhibition, causing people to rush the only exit. The panic spreads to the Hall of the Heavens where people begin rushing the only open security door to leave the museum. The security door begins to fall, causing even more panic. In the basement, Pendergast catches sight of the creature and fires a bullet at him, but it bounces off his steel-like skull.

In chapter forty-seven, Smithback rolls under the refreshment table and continues to eat as people rush out of the museum. In the basement, Margo pushes Dr. Frock into a storeroom as she smells the goat-like scent of the creature coming toward them.

In chapter forty-eight, D'Agosta and his men make their way out of the exhibit as the last of the panicking party-goers leave. D'Agosta discovers that several of his officers were crushed when the pillars at the entrance fell. There are also several people trapped under the security door at the exit of the museum. D'Agosta discusses the situation with Coffey as he organizes the dozen or so people left inside the Hall of the Heavens with him. Pendergast calls D'Agosta on the radio and tells him what he now knows about the



creature. Pendergast suggests D'Agosta evacuate his group to the basement. As D'Agosta and one of his officers, Bailey, enter the stairway, they are attacked by the creature. They force the creature back and instruct everyone to follow them down to the basement. Wright refuses to go, however, so he, Rickman, and Cuthbert go up to Wright's old office.

## **Part 3, He Who Walks On All Fours: Chapters 42-48 Analysis**

As the party begins, Dr. Frock and Margo try to warn everyone, but no one will listen. As a result, a dead body is found in the exhibit, most likely the cop who disappeared earlier in the week, causing a panic that kills several people. At the same time, a cop panics and shoots the central switch box, knocking out the lights to the museum and causing the security gates to fall. This leaves D'Agosta and a dozen people to be locked in the museum with no hope of getting out any time soon. Not only can they not get out, but they are locked up with a murderous creature. D'Agosta and Bailey see this creature, as does Pendergast in the basement, confirming that the murderer is not human, but an unexplained creature. Not only this, but Margo and Dr. Frock know that this creature is deadly and will be difficult to kill. The situation now seems desperate, leaving the reader anxious to know how the creature will be stopped, adding tension to the already suspenseful plot.



## Part 3, He Who Walks On All Fours: Chapters 49-55

### Part 3, He Who Walks On All Fours: Chapters 49-55 Summary

In chapter forty-nine, Coffey becomes desperate to find a way to open the security doors because the mayor is one of those locked inside, but it becomes obvious they will have to wait for the power to be restored. Coffey then turns his attention to sending a group of men inside. Coffey then tries to relieve D'Agosta of his duty because of his insistence that there is a creature loose in the museum, but Bailey refuses to take charge in his place.

In chapter fifty, Margo and Dr. Frock are found by Pendergast. Pendergast has tried to lead D'Agosta and his group to where they are, but the door has been damaged and jammed shut. Pendergast, Margo and Dr. Frock are left powerless as they listen to D'Agosta and his group run from the creature.

In chapter fifty-one, Wright begins drinking as he, Cuthbert, and Rickman hide in his old office. Cuthbert tells Rickman to hide in the connected storeroom should the creature come after them. In the stairwell, D'Agosta leads his group down to the subbasement, making them run when he becomes aware that the creature is on the stairs behind them. Pendergast reloads his weapon and gives D'Agosta instructions on how to get out of the museum before turning off the radio to avoid Coffey's angry orders.

In chapter fifty-two, D'Agosta leads his group through a water-flooded passage in the subbasement while Bailey takes the end of the line. When the group reaches the end of the passage, they find a locked door. Pendergast instructs them to turn back and take another path, but the creature is behind them. Up one floor, Pendergast and Margo quickly go to the secure area, planning a way to distract the creature.

In chapter fifty-three, D'Agosta returns to the fork in the passage where Bailey is waiting for him. Bailey suddenly disappears in the darkness. Smithback manages to find Bailey's gun as D'Agosta urges the group to return to the locked door. D'Agosta gets the people inside the locked door and Smithback wedges a flashlight in the lock to keep the creature out. Outside, Coffey gives instructions to a SWAT team as they prepare to go inside. In the basement, Pendergast takes packing materials from one of Whittlesey's crates.

In chapter fifty-four, D'Agosta and his group make their way through the passages, lost. Margo and Pendergast hide in a storage area across from the secure area, hoping to lure the creature with the packing materials. However, the creature proves to be too intelligent to fall for this trick. The creature smells them behind the door and tries to break it open. When the door opens, Pendergast scares it away with his headlamp.



In chapter fifty-five, the creature goes upstairs to where Wright, Cuthbert, and Rickman are hiding. The creature presents breaks into the office after Wright and Rickman go hide in the storeroom. Cuthbert fires four shots at it. At the same time, the SWAT team enters the museum through the roof. The SWAT team makes it way down to the Hall of the Heavens and begins removing the bodies.

## **Part 3, He Who Walks On All Fours: Chapters 49-55 Analysis**

Three groups of survivors remain in the museum, Pendergast, Margo and Dr. Frock, D'Agosta and his group, and the cops in the computer and security area. The SWAT group comes in as well, determined to get out the victims of the panic fueled stampede. The creature is also locked in the museum. The creature stalks D'Agosta and his group, but is distracted when Margo and Pendergast try to trap it in the secure area with the packing materials. However, the creature proves itself intelligent, making the possibility of killing it even more difficult. The creature has a strong skeleton and is intelligent, therefore it looks as though it will take a great deal of firepower to kill it.

Smithback and Margo show their bravery in their actions during this part of the novel. Smithback saves a group of people by finding a way to lock a door, while Margo uses her intelligence to find ways to trap and kill the creature. D'Agosta and Pendergast also prove themselves to be highly courageous, but this is not new to the reader as they have both been diligent in their duties before. Coffey proves himself to be an incompetent intent on blaming everyone else for this huge disaster. Wright is the same way, becoming drunk and despondent in the face of this tragedy. This leaves the reader rooting for some of the characters and hoping others will receive what they deserve at this point in the novel.



## **Part 3, He Who Walks On All Fours: Chapters 56-62 and Epilogue, Chapter 63**

### **Part 3, He Who Walks On All Fours: Chapters 56-62 and Epilogue, Chapter 63 Summary**

In chapter fifty-six, D'Agosta and his group continue through the deepening water as Cuthbert confronts the creature and begs it not to kill him. Cuthbert is spared, but Rickman and Wright are killed. The SWAT team comes into Wright's office and attacked storeroom where they are killed as well. Coffey orders the rest of the SWAT team out of the museum. Coffey tries to speak to Cuthbert, but he has been driven insane.

In chapter fifty-seven, Pendergast and Margo lock Dr. Frock in the secure to keep him safe while they attempt to kill the creature. Unfortunately, the corridor is broken in two by a security gate. D'Agosta and his group come to an intersection they cannot cross, but there is an opening in the ceiling. However, it is too high up to reach at the moment.

In chapter fifty-eight, Pendergast and Margo go to a corridor where they believe they will have the space to hobble and kill the beast, but the corridor is cut in two by the security gates. They have no choice but to attempt to kill the creature anyway. There are a group of men in the security room, but there is nothing anyone can do to help them. In the subbasement, Smithback comes up with an idea to use belts as a rope and to allow the rising water to lift them up to the opening in the ceiling.

In chapter fifty-nine, Pendergast and Margo set up their trap while the men in the security room begin to panic as the creature attempts to enter their room.

In chapter sixty, Smithback is able to reach the latter leading to the opening in the ceiling. The opening brings them into a large room with a foul smell. Pendergast instructs Margo to make noise to attract the creature and to hold a light on it when it arrives. As the creature comes toward them, Margo calls out to Pendergast.

In chapter sixty-one, D'Agosta lights a lighter and discovers hundreds of human and animal bones and several bodies hanging on the wall. It appears to be the creature's lair. They walk through the room and eventually find a pothole leading the street above. In the security room, the men are shocked to find Pendergast and Margo entering with the news that they killed the creature by shooting it through the eye.

In chapter sixty-two, Pendergast, Smithback, Margo, D'Agosta, and Kawakita meet in Dr. Frock's office. The creature has disappeared, thanks to the FBI, but they have learned all they could about it. They now believed the creature lived in the Amazon and it followed the crates from the Whittlesey Expedition to New York because it was the only remaining source of the unique plants because the government in the Amazon destroyed the whole area in order to mine for minerals. In the creature's lair they found



evidence that the creature killed Whittlesey and the bodies of Whittlesey's assistant and George Moriarty, as well as homeless men the creature has killed over the years. Dr. Frock continues to insist it is an example of the Callisto Effect. D'Agosta has been promoted and Special Agent Coffey demoted. Smithback has gotten his book deal and Margo has decided to remain at the museum.

In chapter sixty-three, Kawakita has figured out that the creature was not an example of the Callisto Effect, but Dr. Whittlesey changed into a creature by the packing material that was force-fed to him by the Kothaga Indians. The plant and the Kothaga no longer exist, but Kawakita has found a way to grow the plant and is now selling it like a street drug to addicts.

## **Part 3, He Who Walks On All Fours: Chapters 56-62 and Epilogue, Chapter 63 Analysis**

The creature kills Wright and Rickman, as well as a large portion of the SWAT team, but only drives Cuthbert insane. After Pendergast manages to kill the creature, Dr. Frock continues to believe the creature was an example of his Callisto Effect, even though no one was ever able to examine the carcass and prove this theory. They did find evidence that the creature came to New York with the crates and that it killed all along, but it was intelligent to hide its kills in order to protect its existence in the museum and its supply of plants until Cuthbert moved Whittlesey's crates. This proves the connection to the crates. What is a surprise to the reader, however, is Kawakita's insistence that the creature was actually Whittlesey, changed into a monster by the plant. Not only this, but Kawakita continues to create and consume the plant, leaving the reader with the impression that the creature will return to New York at some point.





# Characters

## William Smithback Jr.

William Smithback Jr. is a journalist who has been hired by the Museum of Natural History to write a non-fiction book about the Superstition Exhibit that is about to open. Smithback is to write a book that covers the history of the exhibit as well as the impact of such an exhibit on the museum itself. The idea behind writing such a book is to promote both the exhibit and the museum. However, in order to do this, Smithback finds himself heavily censored by the museum's public relations director, Mrs. Rickman. Smithback is annoyed with Rickman and often threatens to rebel against her orders, but finds himself doing as he is told in the hopes that this book will lead to a bestselling list and a good job with a daily publication.

Smithback is a curious man who is both pompous and insecure. Smithback befriends many other characters in the book, but most of these characters only put up with Smithback because he is helpful in getting certain information they would like to possess. In the end, however, Smithback proves himself to be a brave man, especially when he is the only person willing to jump to D'Agosta's aid when his fellow cop is killed during their escape through the subbasement. This is the first of several books by Child and Preston in which Smithback will appear.

## Special Agent Pendergast

Special Agent Pendergast is a mysterious FBI agent that the reader knows nothing about in the beginning and learns little about during the development of the plot. Special Agent Pendergast appears at the museum in the middle of the novel after the murder of the security guard, the third known murder to have taken place within the museum. Pendergast proves helpful in the investigation, befriending the lead detective on the case, Lt. D'Agosta. Eventually Pendergast is removed from the case by the local FBI office because he wants to shut down the Superstition Exhibit's opening night party. However, Pendergast insists this gives him more time for his own investigation and he goes in search of the creature in the basement.

Pendergast is a quiet, gentle man who rarely raises his voice, but he is not afraid to exert his power over people and to do what it takes to get done what he feels is necessary. Pendergast has come to New York because of similar murders that took place in New Orleans, but he neither offers this information to anyone or bothers to explain himself. Pendergast has lost his wife at some point, a woman he clearly loved deeply and with whom he often went hunting, but the reader never learns how this woman died. Pendergast remains as much a mystery at the end of the novel as he was at the beginning. Pendergast will appear in later Child and Preston novels.



## Margo Green

Margo Green is a graduate student who is working on her dissertation at the Museum of Natural History under the guidance of Dr. Frock. Margo's father has recently died and she finds herself forced to make the decision between continuing her education in New York or returning home to take over her father's business. As Margo struggles with this decision, she becomes aware of the murders in the museum and begins doing some minor investigation on her own. Eventually it is Margo, with Dr. Frock's help, who discovers that the creature is attracted to the packing materials in the cargo sent to the museum from the Amazon. Margo also learns what the creature looks like and how powerful it might be.

Margo and Dr. Frock find themselves trapped in the basement after going in search of Pendergast. Margo comes up with a plan to trick the creature to come to them, but this trick does not work because the creature is more intelligent than they suspected. In the end, Margo goes with Pendergast in another attempt to trap the creature, eventually realizing how they might kill the creature. Without Margo's help, Pendergast might never have killed the creature and saved everyone's lives.

## Lieutenant Vincent D'Agosta

Lieutenant Vincent D'Agosta is the lead detective on the murder investigation in the Museum of Natural History. D'Agosta is over his head and he is aware of this fact; therefore, when Pendergast comes in, D'Agosta is more than willing to follow his lead. Together, Pendergast and D'Agosta come to the conclusion that the killer might not be human, but might be some kind of creature. However, Pendergast is removed from the case and D'Agosta finds himself forced to follow the orders of Pendergast's less than professional replacement. D'Agosta knows that this man is leading thousands of guests into danger, but does what he can to protect them.

D'Agosta finds himself trapped inside the museum with the creature and a dozen party guests after the power goes out and the security gate falls. D'Agosta listens to Pendergast's warnings and leads the group into the subbasement. Through some good luck and bravery on both D'Agosta and Smithback's part, they are able to bring these people to safety and D'Agosta is promoted for his work.

## Gregory Kawakita

Gregory Kawakita is another graduate student working at the museum under Dr. Frock. Kawakita has created a computer program that takes the DNA of two unrelated creatures and is able to guess at what an evolutionary creature between them might have been like. Using this program, Margo is able to figure out what the creature might look like and how formidable it might be to face. Also using this program, Kawakita recognizes the properties of the packing material and the creature and uses this information to begin manufacturing the plant that created the creature and sell it as a



street drug. This action suggests that Kawakita might create several more of these creatures, placing the people of New York in danger.

## **Dr. Frock**

Dr. Frock is a scientist who specializes in plants and DNA. Dr. Frock defined the Callisto Effect, the idea that the quick change in DNA that sometimes takes place in evolution might create a creature that is unlike anything that might have been discovered before. Dr. Frock continues this theory by suggesting that occasionally when a creature has become too perfect, untouchable by any predator, a new creature might come into existence to kill these creatures. This new creature will then also die out when its prey disappears. For this reason, Dr. Frock contends that none of these evolutionary anomalies has ever been discovered. Dr. Frock becomes excited about the creature that terrorizes the museum because he believes it is an example of his Callisto Effect. For this reason, Dr. Frock does all he can do to help find this creature.

## **Dr. Ian Cuthbert**

Dr. Ian Cuthbert is a curator at the Museum of Natural History. Cuthbert and Frock are colleagues, but when it came time to choose between two new exhibitions, Cuthbert's was chosen based on the fact that it was most likely to bring in large crowds. Cuthbert's exhibition is the Superstition Exhibit, an exhibit based on the religious and spiritual rituals of ancient peoples. It is this exhibition that is set to open the same week a creature begins killing people within the museum. Cuthbert insists the exhibition go on as schedule, however, and he uses his friendship with the director, Wright, to ensure it does. In the end, Cuthbert locks himself in Wright's office at the museum and goes insane when he comes face to face with the creature.

## **Lavinia Rickman**

Lavinia Rickman is the director of public relations at the Museum of Natural History. Rickman is in charge of making sure all publicity regarding the museum is good. Rickman takes this job a little too seriously; therefore, she makes a quick enemy of Smithback when she continuously edits his manuscript for the book about the Superstition Exhibition. The reader learns later that Rickman is close friends with both Cuthbert and Wright. In the end, Rickman goes with Wright and Cuthbert when they decide to rise rather than go into the basement with D'Agosta and his group. Rickman is killed by the creature.

## **Winston Wright**

Winston Wright is the director of the Museum of Natural History. Wright was once a scientist but is now more of a politician, more worried about how he will be remembered in museum history than anything else. Wright pushes the opening of the Superstition



Exhibition because he believes it will bring infamy and money to the museum. Wright does not believe Pendergast when he tells him that people will be in danger if the opening of the exhibit goes as scheduled. In the end, Wright realizes Pendergast was right. Wright gets drunk while he waits for the creature to come get him. Wright dies with Rickman in the storeroom behind his old office.

## **Whittlesey**

Whittlesey is a scientist who works for the Museum of Natural History. In 1987, Whittlesey leads an expedition into the Amazon. Whittlesey secretly hopes to find evidence in the area that the Kothaga Indian tribe still exists. Instead, Whittlesey disappears. Later, it is established by Gregory Kawakita that Whittlesey was taken captive by the Kothaga and forced to eat a plant that has been infected with a strange virus that changes him into a violent animal. Whittlesey then followed his crates from the expedition back to the Museum where he haunted the halls until he is caught and killed by Pendergast.



# Objects/Places

## Packing Material

Whittlesey breaks a jar during his expedition and is forced to replace his packing materials with natural materials within the area. This packing material turns out to be a plant infected with a virus that causes the plant to contain a high level of hormones normally found in the human hypothalamus gland. This plant is a source of both pain relief and nourishment for the Mbwun that haunts the Museum, causing it to kill in order to both relieve its pain in a new way and to obtain access to this material.

## Kawakita's Extrapolation Program

Kawakita creates an extrapolation program that can take the DNA of two animals or plants and use logic to come up with a plant or animal that comes between the two, containing elements of both animals or plants. Margo uses this program to discover both the properties of the packing material and the nature of the beast killing inside the museum.

## Frock's Callisto Effect

Frock's Callisto Effect is a theory that when changes are made quickly to a creature or plant's DNA, it can create a freak of nature that defies everything known about the creature or plant. Frock believes the Mbwun creature terrorizing the museum is one such creature.

## Wright's Office

Wright, Cuthbert, and Rickman are trapped in Wright's office during the power outage after refusing to leave the Hall of the Heavens with D'Agosta's group. It is here, in the elephant storage room, that Wright and Rickman are killed and where Cuthbert loses his sanity.

## Secure Area

The museum contains many storage areas. One area in particular is locked behind metal doors that allow highly sensitive and expensive collections to be housed in a secure area. It is in this area that the artifacts from the Whittlesey Expedition are moved, causing the creature to begin killing while separated from the crates.



## **Computer Room**

The museum has a room committed to the large number of computers and hardware required to run the museum's internal systems and security system. This room takes some damage during the Superstition Exhibit's opening, causing the lights to go out to the entire museum.

## **Hall of the Heavens**

The Hall of the Heavens is a large room in the main part of the museum where the reception for the opening of the Superstition Exhibit is held.

## **Subbasement**

The museum has been rebuilt and expanded a multitude of times since opening its doors at the beginning of the century. For this reason, the museum has many levels, including a subbasement that dates back to the original museum building. It is in this area where Smithback and D'Agosta become lost after the opening of the Superstition Exhibit.

## **Whittlesey Expedition**

The Whittlesey Expedition is an expedition that took place in the fall of 1987 in the Amazon Basin. Whittlesey and his team were exploring the basin for artifacts, but Whittlesey was secretly hoping to find evidence of the continued existence of an Indian tribe called Kothaga in the remote area.

## **Mbwun**

Mbwun is the name of an artifact Whittlesey found during his hunt for the Kothaga that is supposed to represent the child of a devil the Kothaga tribe was given as a reward for killing and eating all of their children. This artifact will later become a part of the Superstition exhibition at the Museum of Natural History in New York under the supervision of Dr. Ian Cuthbert.

## **Superstition Exhibition**

The Superstition Exhibit is an exhibition planned within the Museum of Natural History that is composed of artifacts of historic tribes and peoples that deal with religious and superstitious rituals related to these peoples. Included in this exhibition is the Mbwun, a figurine believed by the Kothaga people to be the child of a demon.

## **Museum of Natural History**

The Museum of Natural History in New York City is a famous museum that houses one of the largest collections of natural history items, such as prehistoric animal bones and tribal artifacts. This is the setting of this novel.

# Themes

## Survival Instinct

People are being killed in the Museum of Natural History. As a result, the people are afraid. People stop coming to see the exhibits and the employees begin calling in sick in record numbers. No one knows what is terrorizing the museum, they just know that they do not want to be next on its list. This is an example of a survival instinct, of people avoiding danger in order to avoid dying.

Another example of this survival instinct is the creature itself. The creature was created in the Amazon where a group of Indians, believed to be extinct, fed a man a plant infected with an unusual virus that caused the man to become physically changed, to become stronger and animalistic, and to become addicted to the properties of the plant. The government of this area learned of certain deaths in the area and they decided to destroy the area in preparation for not only ridding it of these dangers, but to prepare to mine the area for precious minerals. This caused the plant to be eradicated along with the people living in the area. As a result, the creature created by this unusual plant decided to follow crates filled with the last remaining examples of this rare plant.

The creature, who was once an intelligent scientist, follows the crates he packed with this plant himself, to the Museum of Natural History. Once there, the creature was content to hide out in the subbasement of the museum, dining on the packing materials that were made up of his addictive plant, for several years. However, when the crates were moved behind a secured door, the creature had to find another way to survive and to supplement the pain relief he found in the plants. For this reason, the creature began killing people, an act that saved him from pain but eventually led to his death. Survival instinct drove the creature to kill, but it also led to his own death because the survival instinct of the humans was just as strong, if not stronger, than the creature's. This makes survival instinct a theme of the novel.

## Ambition

The novel is set in a museum filled with students and scientist who want to make a name for themselves. The main characters of this book are these same students and scientists. Margo Green is a student on the verge of finishing her dissertation, hoping someday to become a tenured professor somewhere like her adviser, Dr. Frock. Gregory Kawakita is a fellow student who has his eye on the directorship of the entire museum. The current director only wants to make history for himself, to become someone who will be remembered fondly long after his death. Dr. Ian Cuthbert hopes to replace the current director someday.

William Smithback Jr. is another character in the novel who at first does not seem to fit in. Smithback is a writer who has been given the task of writing a non-fiction book about





the Superstition Exhibit that is to open in a short time. Despite the restraint placed on Smithback by the public relations director, Smithback hopes to become a bestselling author and to receive a job offer with a major publication.

Whittlesey is a scientist who believes the long believed extinct Kothaga tribe still exists. Whittlesey goes to the Amazon in hopes of finding proof of this tribe and becoming famous for his discovery. Unfortunately, Whittlesey does not take stories about this tribe seriously and finds himself turned into a terrible creature that will go on to terrorize the same museum that funded his expedition. All of the characters in this novel have a deep sense of ambition that rules their actions, making ambition a theme of the novel.

## Responsibility

Margo Green is a graduate student who is working at the Museum of Natural History until she can finish her dissertation and begin a career of her own. However, Margo's father has died and her mother needs her to return home to run the family business. Margo finds herself torn between her own desire to finish her education and her need to stand up and do the responsible thing for her family. Margo struggles with this decision throughout the entire novel until she finally makes the conscious decision to remain in New York to work on her own career.

The director of the museum, Dr. Wright, knows that the patrons of the museum are in danger. However, Dr. Wright has a responsibility to bring money and prestige to the museum. Therefore, despite his responsibility to keep the people of New York safe, Dr. Wright decides to go ahead with the opening of the Superstition Exhibit in order to make money for and to extend the prestige of the museum, as well as his own career.

The police are trying to find the killer within the museum because it is their job to keep the people of New York safe. When FBI Special Agent Pendergast comes to the museum, the police are not willing to give up their responsibility in the case, and instead insist on working with him. This only lasts a short time because the local FBI office comes in to take over the case. However, Pendergast refuses to leave because he continues to feel responsible for finding the creature killing people in the museum. For these reasons, responsibility is a major theme of this novel.



# Style

## Point of View

The point of view of this novel is third person omniscient. The writers of this novel tell their story through multiple viewpoints, including those of Margo Green, William Smithback Jr. and Special Agent Pendergast. The changes in point of view character allows the reader to see the story through multiple viewpoints, including events that might take place out of the view of the main characters. One example of this is when the security guard is killed in the museum. This murder takes place when no one else is around and to a character who only narrates this small section of the novel because it is essential the reader understand the danger of the creature, but the writers do not want to kill off a major character who might have an important impact on the plot later in the story.

The point of view of this novel works well within the plot because it is a point of view that allows the authors to use the view point of many characters without causing a great deal of confusion for the reader. The story is one that is deeply complicated and needs to be told from many points of view. This novel is plot driven, meaning that the characters are important to the story, but they are not the focal point of the story. Therefore, it is important that all aspects of the plot are explored, allowing the reader to see every angle in order to understand the events that lead to the story's conclusion. In this way, the third person point of view is an important tool in creating such a complicated, plot driven story.

## Setting

The novel is set entirely in the Museum of Natural History in New York City, New York. The museum is a large building, taking up several city blocks, and is composed of multiple constructions. This results in a labyrinth of hallways and rooms, many of which it would be easy for a creature or a person to get lost for days. The Museum also includes many basement levels, including a subbasement that often floods when it rains. This creates a setting that is both exciting and frightening.

The novel is about a creature who becomes trapped inside the museum and begins killing people when it is kept from the plant that is its life's sustenance. This creature is able to hide from multiple searches by police and museum employees because there are so many passages and rooms that it is impossible for someone who does not know the building to search them all. The creature has lived in the museum for years; therefore, it knows many of these passages and rooms and is able to escape all searches. This causes a situation in which fear is allowed to build until the tension of the plot is almost overwhelming. It is a perfect setting for such a plot.



## Language and Meaning

The novel is written in a simple language that is easy for readers of all ages to understand. The novel also includes some technical terms, such as those used by scientists and researchers. These terms are often quickly explained within the text, keeping the language both appropriate to the education and profession of the characters, but also simple enough for even the youngest readers to comprehend.

The language of this novel works because it presents an educated language that is appropriate to its characters, but it is explained and made simple enough for even the youngest readers to be able to understand what is happening. The novel is a horror novel, filled with murder and strange, almost mythical creatures, but it is also a novel that relies on the scientific to explain its creature; therefore the language must reflect this reliance on science. As a result, the novel is filled with scientific methods, conjecture and language, but it is a language that is quickly explained and therefore simple enough for even the uneducated reader to understand and follow.

## Structure

The novel is divided into sixty-three chapters, three parts, and a prologue and epilogue. The novel's chapters tend to be short. Each chapter contains a complete scene. The chapters end between scenes, allowing the reader to know when there is a change in location as well as a change in narrating character. The novel is told in both dialogue and exposition, firmly rooted in the showing of a story rather than the telling of one.

The novel begins with the Whittlesey Expedition and then jumps five years into the future when the creature begins his killing spree by murdering two little boys who wandered into a dark section of the museum. The plot then follows the murder investigation as the museum prepares for the opening of a new exhibition, the Superstition Exhibit. The two plots come together when a dead body is discovered on the night of the exhibition's opening and results in the panic of the party-goers. The two plots come to a conclusion together at the end of the novel with an epilogue that explains the true nature of the creature and suggests the possibility of a similar tragedy taking place in the near future.



## Quotes

"He inserted the letter beneath the lid of the crate." Introduction, Chap. 1, p. 7

"But as he walked closer, he saw that the carcass was wearing a khaki shirt."  
Introduction, Chap. 1, pg. 10

"'Image is everything today,' Kawakita went on. 'Pure science alone doesn't get the grants anymore.'" Part 1, Chap. 4, p. 26

"The New York Museum of Natural History consisted not of a single building, but several large buildings, connected over the years to form one sprawling, rambling structure."  
Part 1, Chap. 9, pp. 51-52

"Lewis Turow stood in the window and watched an enormous barge, piled with garbage and surrounded by countless seagulls, being pushed out to sea. Probably one minute's worth of New York City garbage, he thought." Part 1, Chap. 17, p. 101

"Later, the Museum switchboard would tabulate the number of creature-related calls it received that day: 107, including crank messages, bomb threats, and offers of assistance from exterminators to spiritualists." Part 2, Chap. 24, p. 161

"If a graduate student in plant genetics actually thinks Mbwun might be loose—if even Margo Green starts seeing conspiracies behind every door—what about the rest of the Museum?" Part 2, Chap. 28, p. 196

"'Whittlesey told me the name of Zilashkee's child was Mbwun. He Who Walks On All Fours.'" Part 2, Chap. 32, p. 234

"Almost overnight, the opening of the Superstition Exhibition had become the preferred event among the fashionable of New York." Part 3, Chap. 42, p. 296

"Pendergast knew exactly what had happened. He had seen the streak of white once before, hunting bear: the bullet had ricocheted off the skull, taking a strip of hair and skin while exposing the bone." Part 3, Chap. 46, p. 323

"Pendergast adjusted his tie knot with two slender fingers—unusually fastidious, Margo thought, considering the blood and bits of gray matter covering his white shirt." Part 3, Chap. 61, p. 442

" But who needed a Nobel Prize, when the whole world was suddenly there for the plucking?" Epilogue, Chap. 63, p. 468



## Topics for Discussion

What are the Kothaga people? How are they related to the Mbwun figurine? What is Mbwun? Why is the woman in the Amazon afraid of the Mbwun? How does Margo make a connection between this woman and the packing materials? What are the packing materials? How did they get into the cargo? What does Gregory Kawakita do with these packing materials at the end of the novel? What does this suggest about the future for both the people of New York and Gregory?

Who is Margo Green? What tragedy has taken place in her family? Why does she work at the museum? What is the nature of her research? Why is she writing a dissertation? What is a dissertation? What decision does Margo have to make? Why does she hesitate to make this decision? What does this say about Margo's character?

Who is William Smithback Jr.? What is his job at the museum? Why does Smithback's writing continuously get torn apart by Rickman? What is Rickman's job at the museum? Why has she hired Smithback if she does not like him? Why does Rickman not want Smithback to write an honest book about the new exhibition? What is Smithback's plan with the book? What does Smithback hope the publication of the book will do for him? Will it? What book does Smithback end up writing?

Who is Special Agent Pendergast? Why has Pendergast come to New York? What crime took place in New Orleans that is similar to the murders in New York? Does Pendergast have authority to investigate the museum crimes? Why is Pendergast removed from the case? How does this affect Pendergast? What does his reaction say about Pendergast? What might have been different during the exhibition party if Pendergast had remain in charge?

Why do Pendergast and Margo lure the creature to them? How do they hope to kill it? Why does Pendergast force Margo to hold the flashlight? What is Margo's role in the killing of the creature? Why are the first few shots against the creature unsuccessful? How does Pendergast finally kill the creature? Why did no one think of this sooner? Why is Frock unable to autopsy the creature? What might Frock have found if he had? Would the creature have been proven to be evidence of his Callisto Effect? Why or why not?

Who is Gregory Kawakita? What computer program has he designed? What does this program do? Why does Margo want to use the program? What does she hope to learn with the program? What does she learn? How does Margo and Frock use this program to learn about the nature of the creature? Is this description accurate? Explain. What does Kawakita do with a sample of the packing material later in the novel? What does this mean for the safety of New Yorkers?

How does Smithback end up in the subbasement with D'Agosta and the mayor of New York? What is following them? How do they know which way to go? Do they get lost? What room do they find themselves in after escaping the flood waters? What is hanging

in this room? How are they rescued? What do they learn of that room after everything is over?