

Never Saw Me Coming Discussion Questions

by Vera Kurian

Author Bio: (from Fantastic Fiction & Authors Website)

Vera Kurian is a writer, scientist, and psychologist living in Washington, DC. Her short fiction has appeared in *Glimmer Train*, the *Pinch*, and *Southern California Review*. **Never Saw Me Coming** is her first novel.



Characters:

- **Chloe Sevre** – (18) – Freshman at John Adams University in Washington, DC. Participant in a psychology study for psychopaths.
- **Will Bachman** – A junior majoring in Political Science. In a fraternity, Sigma Alpha Epsilon (SAE). On the lacrosse team and likes swimming. Chloe wants to kill him. Has a younger brother, Davey.
- **Detective Bentley** – In charge of the Boonark investigation. Wyman knew Bentley when he was a child and his Bentley's father was a police detective. His partner is Deever.
- **Michael Boonark** – Student killed in the Psychology lab. Roommate was Kirby Gurganus.
- **Brett Miller** – Will's friend who held the phone.
- **Chad** – President of the SAE. Lives at the frat house.
- **Cordy** – Will's roommate. In a relationship with Miranda Lee.
- **Daisy Crosby** – Student who committed suicide by jumping off a school building/tower the previous year.
- **Emma Dufrense** – Megan's twin sister. Knows Professor Wyman from childhood. Emma is a Junior at Adams and is in the psychopath program. Likes to take photographs of insects.
- **Megan Dufrense** – Emma's twin sister. Used to be a gymnast until she was injured as a child. Megan is now at American University.
- **John Fiola** – Wyman's former grad student. Was killed in a car accident. Fiancé was Mira Wale.
- **Andre Jensen** – Black. Freshman at John Adams University. Pretending to be a psychopath for the scholarship. Has a brother Isaiah. Older sister, Kiera died to an asthma attack when Andrew was 12. Mom is a nurse and dad an EMT. Roommate is Sean.
- **Kellen** – 2nd murder victim.
- **Trevor Koch** – Computer guy. In the psychopath program at Adams.
- **Mercer** – Charles Portmont's father's "fixer".

- **Charles Portmont** – Junior at John Adams. In the SAE. Called “Terrible Charles” by his frat brothers. Running for Student Council president. Has a girlfriend, Kristen. His father, Luke, is the Virginia state chairman for the Republican National Committee.
- **Gregory Ripley** – CRD Killer. (CRD stands for choke, rape, dismember.) Also known as the Rock Creek Killer. A famous serial killer who was caught in the 90’s and 2000’s. Was treated by Wyman. Executed in 2006. Had a wife and 2 children.
- **Elena Torres** – A doctoral candidate in the Psychology department. Girlfriend’s name is Mai.
- **Kristen Wenner** – Charles’ girlfriend.
- **Leonard Wyman, PhD** – Psychology professor at John Adams. In charge of Adam’s psychopath project. Consults for the MPD, the local police department. Once consulted on the CRD killer.
- **Yessica** – Chloe’s roommate.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. The story is told from multiple character viewpoints. Did you like the way the story was set up or did you find it confusing?
3. One of the main criticisms of this book is the pacing – many people thought it was too slow. Did you find the pacing of the story slow or did you like the pacing of the book?
4. ***Never Saw Me Coming*** is written from the perspective of psychopaths and features other characters who are psychopaths. Did your view of psychopaths change over the course of the book? How does ***Never Saw Me Coming*** portray psychopathic characters differently than other media?
5. Who was your favorite character in the book? Who was your least favorite? Why?
6. If you were in “the program,” would you have tried to figure out who the murderer was? Why do you think Chloe, Andre, and Charles are so invested?
7. What do you think about the interactions between Chloe and Will?
8. Why do you think Charles “helped” Chloe when she hit Will with the geode? What did he get out of it?
9. Do you think studying psychopathy, like the program at John Adams, is important? Why or why not? What are the advantages? What are the disadvantages?
10. How did you feel about Dr. Wyman? What do you think his motivations were for the psychopathy program?
11. If you were to find out that your (or your child’s) university was running a program like the one at John Adams, what would you think? What would you do?
12. Does knowing that the author is a psychologist change the way you see the book? Why?

13. The reader eventually discovers that Andre isn't really a psychopath but is only pretending to be one. Why do you think he kept up the ruse? Was it worth it? How do you think he got away with fooling Dr. Wyman?
14. Discuss Charles's relationship with Kristen. Do you think he loved her? Do you think psychopaths are capable of love?
15. "He thought of the pantheon of podcasts, TV shows, and movies about serial killers that he consumed as a form of entertainment. It was all too easy to forget that the people involved were real people and not characters." (Ch 62) What do you think about that statement?
16. Did you know the killer was before it was revealed? What clues were given?
17. ***Never Saw Me Coming*** was Vera Kurian's debut book. Will you read her next book?

References:

- Fantastic Fiction – <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/k/vera-kurian/>
- GoodReads – <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/56383038-never-saw-me-coming>
- Hoopla Book Club – <http://prod.hooplabookclub.avatarsyn.com/media/1627/never-saw-me-coming-discussion-guide.pdf>
- Vera Kurian's Website – <https://www.verakurian.com/>
- Novelist – <https://web-p-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.clevnet.org/novp/detail?vid=2&sid=3a2fa811-d3e9-4b9c-a2b9-d287641f83d2%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9bm92cC1saXZl#UI=11001423&db=neh>

Vera Kurian's Books

Stand-Alone Novels

- Never Saw Me Coming (2021)
- A Step Past Darkness (2024)

If you liked Never Saw Me Coming, try...

- Survive the Night – Riley Sager
- In the Blood – Lisa Unger
- The Maidens – Alex Michaelides
- Blood Sugar – Sascha Rothchild
- Dead Girl in 2A – Carter Wilson
- The Fear Factor – Abigail Marsh (nonfiction)
- Confessions of a Sociopath – M.E. Tomas (memoir)
- Snakes in Suits – Paul Babiak and Robert Hare (nonfiction)

Key Traits of Psychopathy (from Vera Kurian)

(<http://theclub.hoopladigital.com/media/1638/never-saw-me-coming-companion-guide.pdf>)

The definition and specifics about psychopathy have changed over the years and can vary by researcher, but we could broadly define it with four clusters of traits:

1. Interpersonal traits: the individual is charming, manipulative, a grand sense of self, and lies a lot.
2. Affective (emotional) traits: lacks guilt or empathy.
3. Lifestyle traits: impulsive, thrill-seeking, parasitic.
4. Antisocial traits: early behavioral problems, juvenile delinquency, violating legal or social norms.

Estimates vary, with researchers saying that somewhere between 1 and 3% of the US population has psychopathic traits but might not be diagnosed. Psychopathy is disproportionately represented in criminal populations, but many psychopaths find themselves at home in some professions that might prize ruthless behavior (corporate America, for example).