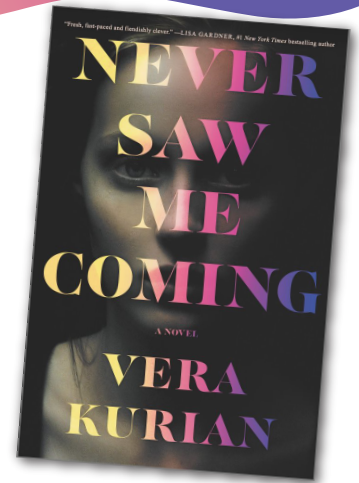


Psychopaths exert quite a hold over our collective imagination. We enjoy them as villains in our fiction, whether on the page or the screen, and eagerly await new documentaries and podcasts on their exploits. But the traits of psychopathy are more common than we may realize, and they manifest themselves in more people than just serial killers. With that in mind, author Vera Kurian came at it from a different angle: a novel with a psychopath as the protagonist. The result is *Never Saw Me Coming*, a fast-paced and addictive thriller set on a college campus.



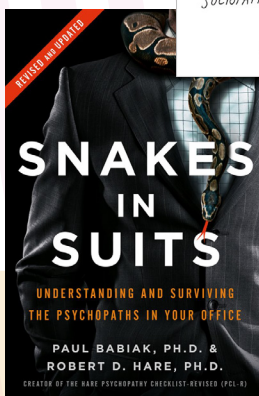
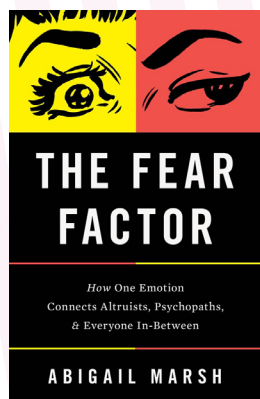
Key Traits of Psychopathy, from Vera Kurian

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).

A DEEP DIVE INTO PSYCHOPATHY



Want to learn more about psychopaths in real life? Kurian, who has a background in psychology in addition to the research she did for this novel, offers her recommendations, and the hoopla team has a few as well. Find the collection on [hoopla:hoopladigital.com/collection/16846](https://hoopla.hoopladigital.com/collection/16846)

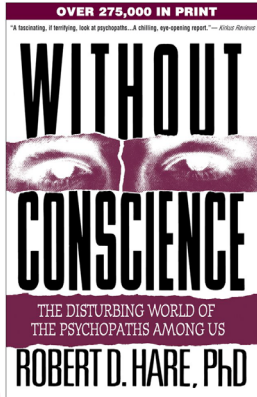
Author Picks:

The Fear Factor, Abigail Marsh: “Accessible nonfiction written by a neuroscientist and expert on psychopathy. An in-depth look at two sides of the same coin: extreme altruism on one end, and psychopathy on the other.”

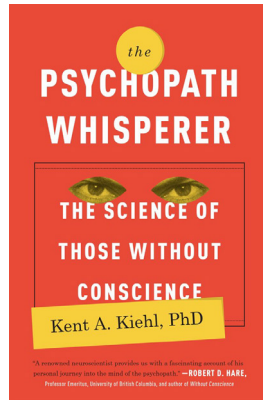
Confessions of a Sociopath, ME Thomas: “A memoir written by a self-described sociopath (this is effectively the same thing as a psychopath). It’s very interesting to hear from her perspective on how she views herself and others.”

Snakes in Suits, Paul Babiak and Robert Hare: “Hare is one of the formative experts in the field, and this book looks at corporate psychopaths.”

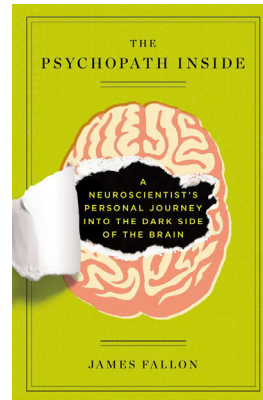
hoopla Picks:



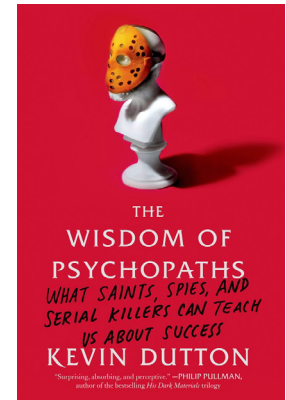
Without Conscience
by Robert D. Hare



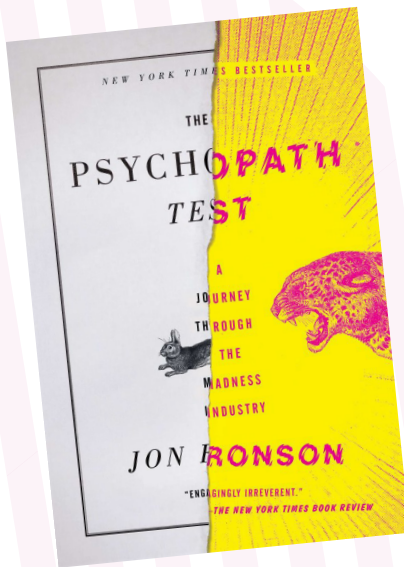
The Psychopath Whisperer
by Kent A. Kiehl



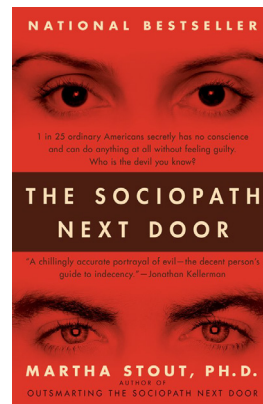
The Psychopath Inside
by James Fallon



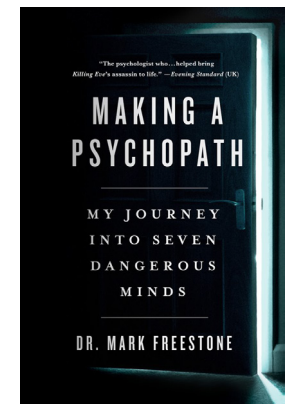
The Wisdom of Psychopaths
by Kevin Dutton



The Psychopath Test
by Jon Ronson



The Sociopath Next Door
by Martha Stout



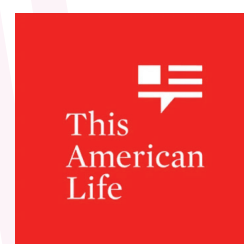
Making a Psychopath
by Mark Freestone

FURTHER RESOURCES

You can learn more about psychopathy at
psychopathyis.org



or check out this fun episode of
This American Life, 436: The Psychopath Test
thisamericanlife.org/436/the-psychopath-test

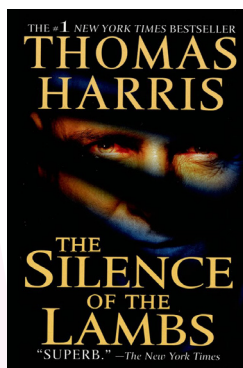


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Psychopaths in fiction can make for compelling characters and incredible stories. Here are Kurian's recommendations for the best books and movie adaptations for hoopla Book Club readers seeking even more thrills.

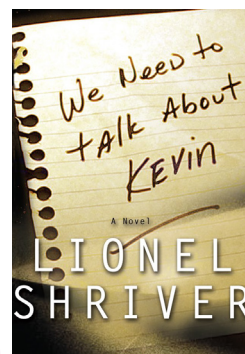
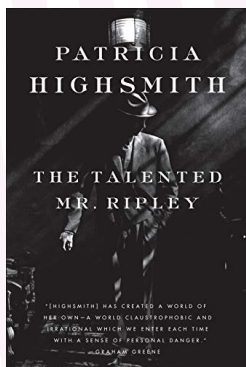
Author Picks:



The Silence of the Lambs by Thomas Harris

The Talented Mr. Ripley by Patricia Highsmith

"Hannibal Lecter and Tom Ripley are the best and most fun representations of psychopathy in fiction I can think of. While both are serial killers—and most serial killers are not psychopaths—both authors reflect the inner emotional life of these characters extremely well."

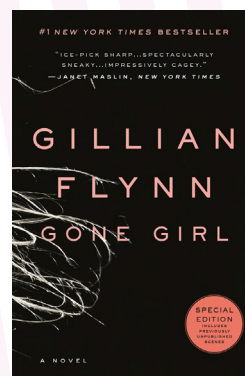


We Need to Talk About Kevin by Lionel Shriver

"A terrifying look from the perspective of a mother who thinks there may be something seriously wrong with her son."

Gone Girl by Gillian Flynn

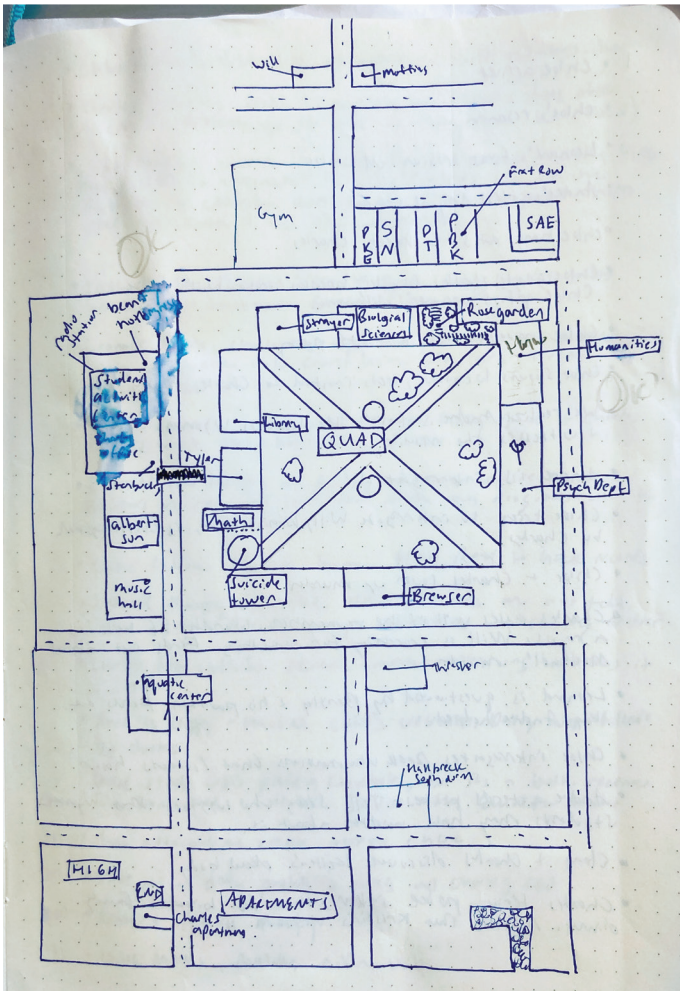
"All hail Amy Dunne!"



A CAMPUS COMES TO LIFE

In many suspense novels, the setting is key, playing a vital role in evoking the range of emotions a reader will experience. *Never Saw Me Coming* is no exception. Kurian painstakingly planned out the campus environs that serve as her story's backdrop. She was kind enough to share this map of the fictional John Adams University with the hoopla Book Club, along with insight on how and why she created it.

For me, setting is always an extra character in a novel, which should have attention paid to it. I wanted DC to feel fully realized, and also the campus inside it, although the city is real while John Adams University is not. I dislike when I am reading fiction and the location of things feels vague—sometimes authors insist their book takes place in New York City and there are a few references to landmarks but I in no way feel that this person has actually ever lived in NYC. To me, the more an author understands the geography of what they are writing about, whether it is New York or Middle Earth, the clearer this confidence comes across to the reader, even if the author doesn't go into in-depth discussions of where things are. This is why for all my books I draw maps of the key locations, whether it is a college campus or a map of an entire small town.



John Adams is based on my alma mater, the George Washington University, but I wanted the book to take place at a fictional university so I could control more aspects of what it looked like and the rules that governed it. I very much pictured the quad at JAU the same as GW's main quad, which is on H Street NW on the block between 21st and 20th Street. I arranged the various important buildings to surround the fictional quad (vaguely located in Shaw), to include Chloe and Andre's respective dorms, the library, and the Psychology Department. The Student Activities Center (the ink has run a bit on the map here) is very much in my mind like a fancier version of GW's University Student Center, and includes my favorite throwaway joke, a coffee shop called Bean and Nothingness. Frat row is close by, with the central frat, SAE, located on a corner lot. Will's house is placed across the street from a muffin shop, which, at the time of writing, really existed as the Uprising Muffin Company, now since closed. You can see Charles's apartment, a few blocks away in a cluster of high-end apartments. There are a couple references on the map that aren't explicitly included in the book, such as the rose garden in the northwest corner of the quad—this existed in GW's quad in the late '90s—and a few of the other less important dorms.