

A WOMEN'S MURDER CLUB THRILLER

14<sup>TH</sup>

DEADLY SIN

JAMES  
PATTERSON

THE WORLD'S BESTSELLING THRILLER WRITER

AND MAXINE PAETRO

## Contents

About the Book

About the Authors

Also by James Patterson

Title Page

Dedication

### Part One

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Chapter 19

Chapter 20

Chapter 21

Chapter 22

Chapter 23

Chapter 24

Chapter 25  
Chapter 26  
Chapter 27  
Chapter 28  
Chapter 29  
Chapter 30  
Chapter 31  
Chapter 32  
Chapter 33  
Chapter 34  
Chapter 35  
Chapter 36  
Chapter 37  
Chapter 38  
Chapter 39  
Chapter 40  
Chapter 41  
Chapter 42  
Chapter 43  
Chapter 44  
Chapter 45  
Chapter 46  
Chapter 47  
Chapter 48  
Chapter 49  
Chapter 50  
Chapter 51  
Chapter 52  
Chapter 53  
Chapter 54  
Chapter 55

Part Two

Chapter 56  
Chapter 57  
Chapter 58

Chapter 59  
Chapter 60  
Chapter 61  
Chapter 62  
Chapter 63  
Chapter 64  
Chapter 65  
Chapter 66  
Chapter 67  
Chapter 68  
Chapter 69  
Chapter 70  
Chapter 71  
Chapter 72  
Chapter 73  
Chapter 74  
Chapter 75  
Chapter 76  
Chapter 77  
Chapter 78  
Chapter 79  
Chapter 80  
Chapter 81  
Chapter 82  
Chapter 83  
Chapter 84  
Chapter 85  
Chapter 86  
Chapter 87  
Chapter 88  
Chapter 89  
Chapter 90  
Chapter 91  
Chapter 92  
Chapter 93  
Chapter 94

Chapter 95

Chapter 96

Chapter 97

Chapter 98

Chapter 99

Chapter 100

Chapter 101

Chapter 102

Chapter 103

Chapter 104

Read on

Acknowledgments

MEET THE WOMEN'S MURDER CLUB

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## About the Book

**A new terror is sweeping the streets of San Francisco.  
And the killers look a lot like cops ...**

As Detective Lindsay Boxer investigates whether the perpetrators are brilliant impostors or police officers gone rogue, she receives a chilling warning to back off.

On the other side of the city, an innocent woman is murdered in broad daylight in front of dozens of witnesses. But there are no clues and no apparent motive.

With killers in disguise, a maniac murderer on the loose, and danger getting ever closer to Lindsay's door, could this be one case too many for the Women's Murder Club?

## About the Authors

**JAMES PATTERSON** one of the best-known and biggest-selling writers of all time. His books have sold in excess of 350 million copies worldwide. He is the author of some of the most popular series of the past two decades - the Alex Cross, Women's Murder Club, Detective Michael Bennett and Private novels - and he has written many other number one bestsellers including romance novels and stand-alone thrillers.

James is passionate about encouraging children to read. Inspired by his own son who was a reluctant reader, he also writes a range of books for young readers including the Middle School, I Funny, Treasure Hunters, House of Robots, Confessions, and Maximum Ride series. James has donated millions in grants to independent bookshops and has been the most borrowed author in UK libraries for the past ten years in a row. He lives in Florida with his wife and son.

**MAXINE PAETRO** is the author of three novels and two works of nonfiction, and she is the coauthor of more than a dozen books with James Patterson. She lives in New York with her husband.

# **Have You Read Them All?**

## **1<sup>ST</sup> TO DIE**

Four friends come together to form the Women's Murder Club. Their job? To find a killer who is brutally slaughtering newly-wed couples on their wedding night.

## **2<sup>ND</sup> CHANCE**

**(with Andrew Gross)**

The Women's Murder Club tracks a mystifying serial killer, but things get dangerous when he turns his pursuers into prey.

## **3<sup>RD</sup> DEGREE**

**(with Andrew Gross)**

A wave of violence sweeps the city, and whoever is behind it is intent on killing someone every three days. Now he has targeted one of the Women's Murder Club ...

## **4<sup>TH</sup> OF JULY**

**(with Maxine Paetro)**

In a deadly shoot-out, Detective Lindsay Boxer makes a split-second decision that threatens everything she's ever worked for.

## **THE 5<sup>TH</sup> HORSEMAN**

**(with Maxine Paetro)**

Recovering patients are dying inexplicably in hospital. Nobody is claiming responsibility. Could these deaths be tragic coincidences, or something more sinister?



**THE 6<sup>TH</sup> TARGET**  
**(with Maxine Paetro)**

Children from rich families are being abducted off the streets – but the kidnappers aren't demanding a ransom. Can Lindsay Boxer find the children before it's too late?

**7<sup>TH</sup> HEAVEN**  
**(with Maxine Paetro)**

The hunt for a deranged murderer with a taste for fire and the disappearance of the governor's son have pushed Lindsay to the limit. The trails have gone cold. But a raging fire is getting ever closer, and somebody will get burned.

**8<sup>TH</sup> CONFESSION**  
**(with Maxine Paetro)**

Four celebrities are found killed and there are no clues: the perfect crime. Few people are as interested when a lowly preacher is murdered. But could he have been hiding a dark secret?

**9<sup>TH</sup> JUDGEMENT**  
**(with Maxine Paetro)**

A psychopathic killer targets San Francisco's most innocent and vulnerable, while a burglary gone horribly wrong leads to a high-profile murder.

**10<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY**  
**(with Maxine Paetro)**

A badly injured teenage girl is left for dead, and her newborn baby is nowhere to be found. But is the victim keeping secrets?

**11<sup>TH</sup> HOUR**  
**(with Maxine Paetro)**

Is one of Detective Lindsay Boxer's colleagues a vicious killer? She won't know until the 11th hour.

**12<sup>TH</sup> OF NEVER**  
**(with Maxine Paetro)**

A convicted serial killer wakes from a two-year coma. He says he's ready to tell where the bodies are buried, but what does he want in return?

**UNLUCKY 13**  
**(with Maxine Paetro)**

Someone returns to San Francisco to pay a visit to some old friends. But a cheerful reunion is not on the cards.

**14<sup>TH</sup> DEADLY SIN**  
**(with Maxine Paetro)**

A new terror is sweeping the streets of San Francisco, and the killers are dressed in police uniform. Lindsay treads a dangerous line as she investigates whether the criminals are brilliant imposters or police officers gone rogue.

**15<sup>TH</sup> AFFAIR**  
**(with Maxine Paetro)**

Four bodies are found in a luxury hotel. Lindsay is sent in to investigate and hunt down an elusive and dangerous suspect. But when her husband Joe goes missing, she begins to fear the suspect she is searching for could be him.

**16<sup>TH</sup> SEDUCTION**  
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At the trial of a bomber Lindsay and Joe worked together to capture, his defence raises damning questions about Lindsay and Joe's investigation.

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**14<sup>TH</sup>**

**DEADLY SIN**

**JAMES  
PATTERSON**  
AND MAXINE PAETRO



CENTURY



*For Suzie and John, Brendan, Alex, and Jack*

# PART ONE

# CHAPTER 1

IT WAS A blindingly sunny morning in May, and Joe Molinari was out for a walk in the park with Martha, his smart and funny dog, and Julie, his adorable nine-month-old baby girl.

Julie was in a sling, her belly against her great big daddy's chest, looking over his shoulder and waving her fingers toward the lake with every confidence that she was making real words and that her dad would be happy to take direction.

"Do you have a license to point those things?" Joe said to the child.

"Damn right," Joe replied in his best imitation of how Julie would speak if she could. "We all know who's in charge here, Daddy. I only need to point and babble. Heh-heh. Race you to the bench. By the ducks."

Joe ruffled Julie's hair and got a better grip on Martha's leash as he took in the scene again. He ran his eyes across the path to the bench, checking out the people with dogs and strollers, the shadows between the trees, and the traffic beyond the glare of the water; then he paused to double-check a middle-aged guy smoking a cigarette, staring deep into his phone.

These were the habits of a former federal agent and until recently the deputy director of Homeland Security. He was

now a consultant specializing in risk management assessment for big corporations, government agencies, and other authorities.

Currently, Joe was six months into a job he'd been working eighteen hours a day, mainly from his office in the spare bedroom. It was a complex project, an obstacle course of practical and political complications. He felt fine about how it was coming along. And he also felt good about the lay of the land as he settled onto an empty bench with a fine ducky view of the lake.

Julie laughed and beat the air with her hands as he unstrapped her from the sling and sat her on his lap. Martha came over and tried to wash Julie's face before Joe interceded and pulled the border collie to his side. Julie loved Martha and giggled a long peal of baby talk just as Joe's cell phone rang.

It wasn't Lindsay's ring. Pawing his shirt pocket, he saw that the caller was Brooks Findlay, the exec who'd commissioned his assignment with the Port of Los Angeles. Joe pictured the man: a former college football player, fit, thinning blond hair, dimples.

It was odd to get a call from Findlay first thing in the morning, but Joe answered the phone.

Findlay said, "Joe. It's Brooks Findlay. Is this a good time to talk?"

Findlay's voice was shaded by a dull metallic tone that put Joe on alert.

*What the hell is wrong with Findlay?*

## CHAPTER 2

“I’M FREE TO talk,” Joe said to Findlay. “But I’m not at my computer.”

“Not a problem,” said Findlay. “Look, Joe. I’ve got to terminate our arrangement. It’s just not working out. You know how it is.”

“Actually, I don’t know,” Joe said. “What’s the problem? I don’t understand.”

A crowd of young boys entered Joe’s field of vision, shouting to one another, kicking a soccer ball along the asphalt path. At the same time, the baby was giving Joe a new set of directions. He kept his hand on her tummy and hoped she didn’t start screaming. Julie could *scream*.

“Brooks, can you hear me OK? I’ve put a lot of time into this project. I deserve an explanation and a chance to correct—”

“Thanks, Joe, but it’s outta my hands. We’ll take it from here, OK? Your confidentiality contract is in effect, of course, and, uh, your check’s in the mail. Listen, I’ve got incoming. Gotta sign off. Take care.”

The line went dead.

Joe held the phone for a few long moments before he returned it to his pocket. *Wow*. No apologies. Not even a face-saving explanation. Just a needlessly brutal chop.

Joe reviewed his last conversations with Findlay, looking for clues to something he might have missed, some hint of a complaint—but nothing lit up the board. Actually, Findlay had seemed happy with his work. And Joe was sure his preliminary analysis of the container security protocols at the Port of Los Angeles was solid.

He really hadn't seen this coming.

After pushing through the initial shock and confusion, Joe glimpsed his new reality. First there would be the loss of income, then the humiliation of having to explain this sinkhole to the next guy interviewing him for a job.

That thought was just about intolerable.

He wanted to call Lindsay, but on the other hand, why ruin her day, too?

"Hey, Julie," Joe said to his now fussing daughter. "Can you believe it? Daddy got fired. Over the phone. *Bang.*"

Joe buckled the baby back into her sling, and she reached up and touched his cheek.

"I'm OK, Julie Anne. I'm thinking we should all go home now. I'm in the mood for a banana smoothie. Sound good to you?"

Julie looked like she was going to cry.

His little girl was mirroring his feelings.

Joe said, "OK, OK, sweetie. Don't cry. We can come back and see the ducks later. We can come back every day into the foreseeable future. I can put peaches in that smoothie, all right? You like peaches."

"I sure do, Daddy," Joe said in his baby voice. He swept his gaze around the park and then stood up with Julie.

"You ready, Martha? That's the girl."

She woofed and jumped, so he gave her the full length of her leash till they were leaving the park, then pulled the lead in for the couple of blocks toward home.

By then, Joe wasn't thinking of fruit and ice and yogurt. He was thinking of Findlay, pressing that gutless piece of crap through the blender.

## CHAPTER 3

I WAS BEHIND my desk that morning as light streamed through the Bryant Street windows and slashed across the squad room's linoleum floor.

My partner, Inspector Rich Conklin, was standing behind me to my right, and Chief of Police Warren Jacobi loomed impatiently over my left shoulder.

Jacobi had caught a couple of bullets in his leg and hip a few years ago and the injuries had aged him. He was fifty pounds overweight, his joints crackled and popped when he walked, and the pain had drained the fun from his salty sense of humor.

He grumbled, "Wait till you see this," and handed me a disc; then he sighed loudly as we waited for my "lazy-ass computer" to boot up.

I slid the disc into the drawer. The drive whirred, and then a video, time-dated 3:06 this morning, appeared on my screen. The camera had been positioned under flickering streetlights in a nearly deserted block in the notoriously sketchy Tenderloin. The footage was grainy, shot with a cheap surveillance cam of the type used more as a prop than as a tool for actually identifying people.

"That's Ellis Street," said Jacobi. "And that's what I call crud," he added, stabbing a sausagelike finger at three figures entering the frame. The men wore black billed caps

and navy-blue Windbreakers with white letters reading SFPD across the back. They also held automatic handguns as they headed smartly toward an all-night check-cashing store with a yellow sign above the window reading Payday Loans. Checks Cashed.

I straightened in my seat, then turned to shoot a look at Jacobi.

*What the hell is this?*

“Balls on these bastards,” he said. “Boxer. It’s hard to make out. Can’t you focus that picture?”

“What you see is what you get,” I said.

For long, gritty seconds, we watched the cops advance along the dark commercial street lined with low, blocky buildings. Then they converged on the lit-up storefront and went through the door in single file.

A moment later, the lights inside the store went out. The door burst open and one of the “cops” ran out with a satchel under one arm, followed by the other two men, who were carrying similar bags.

Now that they were heading toward the camera, I looked for facial features, something that could be run through facial-recognition software.

*But the faces were all the same.*

Then I got it. The bad guys were wearing latex masks that completely disguised their features. Seconds after leaving the store, the men in the SFPD Windbreakers had run out of camera range.

Jacobi said, “Christ. Someone please tell me that these men are anything but cops.”



## CHAPTER 4

I FELT SICKENED at what I had just seen on the footage. Like Jacobi, I hoped we were looking at holdup guys with a bad sense of humor, not actual police officers pulling off an armed robbery.

I asked Jacobi, "Were there any fatalities?"

"One," he said. "The owner wouldn't give up the combination to the safe until he was shot to pieces. He managed a few words with the EMTs before he bled out on the floor. He said cops did it. The kid who worked for him was interviewed on scene. He said there had been about sixty grand in the floor safe."

Conklin whistled.

Jacobi went on, "This is the second one like this. A few days ago, three men in SFPD caps and Windbreakers robbed a Spanish market. A mercado. No one died, but it was another big score. It goes without saying, these guys have to be stopped or every man and woman in uniform is going to take shit for this whether we deserve it or not."

Conklin and I nodded, and Jacobi kept going.

"Robbery squad is already working the case, but I told Brady I want the two of you to work with them now that we've got a homicide.

"Boxer. You know Philip Pikelny, who heads up Robbery? Call him. You and Conklin work with his guys. This is the

most important case in the house.”

“We’ve got it, Chief.”

Muttering to himself, Jacobi stumped out of the bullpen.

About now, Robbery would be canvassing Ellis Street and Forensics would be taking apart a check-cashing shop called Payday Loans. Checks Cashed. All we could hope for was a snitch or that this professional crew had left evidence behind.

I called Phil Pikelny and repeated Jacobi’s instructions. The sergeant told me what he knew about the case so far.

“The scene is still off-limits,” Phil said. “CSU has barred the doors until they’re done, which could be later today.”

Phil told me he would get us the footage of the first “Windbreaker heist,” the armed robbery of a mercado.

“It’s with the DA’s Office, but I’ll put in a request to get a copy to you ASAP.”

I called Administration and asked for time sheets for every cop at every rank in the Southern Station, thinking maybe we could at least make a list of cops who were off duty when those heists went down.

And for me, question number one was: Were these robbers really cops? Or just crooks in cops’ clothing? Either way, wearing police Windbreakers probably gave the robbers a few seconds’ grace before the victims knew they were being hit.

My good-doin’ partner made a breakfast burrito run and I put up a fresh pot of coffee in the break room. Then we settled into our facing desks, ready for a roll-up-your-sleeves desktop investigation.

## CHAPTER 5

HOURS AFTER TALKING with Phil Pikelny, Conklin and I were still waiting for the DA's Office to send over the video of the Windbreaker cops' first known heist. I checked my watch. I could still make it. I told my partner I'd be back in a couple of hours.

"I have a date and I can't be late."

Richie opened his desk drawer, pulled out a slim, brightly wrapped package with a bow and a gift card, and handed it to me.

"This is for Claire. Try to bring me back some cake." He grinned winningly. He's a handsome guy who has somehow avoided becoming vain.

I took the gift, as well as the one I'd stashed inside my top drawer, then got my car out of the lot across the street. Two twisted streets and ten minutes later, I parked my ancient Explorer at the curb in front of the Bay Club. I put my ID on the dash. Then I walked around the corner to Marlowe, a fabulous eatery housed in a brick building with wine and food quotes etched on the large-paned casement windows.

I peered through the glass and saw Yuki and Claire in the back at a table for four. They seemed intensely involved in conversation, and from the looks on their faces, they were taking opposite sides. I came through the door into the

bright, industrial-style interior, and Yuki spotted me right away. It almost looked like she was hoping for rescue.

She called out over the loud conversation that was bouncing off the tile and steel surfaces: "Lindsay, over here."

I headed toward my pals, and Claire stood up for my hug. She looked gorgeous, wearing black pants, a V-neck sweater, and a diamond pendant shaped like a butterfly around her neck. Claire is usually trying to lose a few pounds, but she always looks perfect to me.

I said, "Love you, Butterfly. Happy birthday, girlfriend."

She laughed. "Love you, too, Linds."

She hugged me back, and I swung into a chair across from her and next to Yuki. Small-boned Yuki was impeccably dressed in a blue suit, her sleek hair falling to her creamy silk collar. A string of pale angel skin coral beads at her throat. When I'd last seen Yuki a week ago, she'd looked a little happier than she did now.

"You OK?" I asked.

"I'm good," she said.

We embraced, and I had just hung my jacket over the back of my chair when Cindy sailed up to the table, glowing like a rose at sunrise.

There was more hugging and kissing all around, Cindy adding a gift to the growing pile of sparkly paper and ribbons in the center of the table. We high-fived each other and I signaled to the waiter.

I was hungry for the specialty of the house: a hamburger made with Niman Ranch beef, topped with caramelized onions, bacon, cheese, and horseradish aioli, nestled between halves of a hot, buttered bun. With fries. And even more than that upcoming delight, I was very glad to be with my best friends.

It was Cindy who had named our little group the Women's Murder Club. It was kind of a joke, and at the same time entirely for real, because the four of us certainly

surrounded the subject of murder: me in Homicide; Claire, San Francisco's medical examiner; Yuki, a rising star in the DA's Office; and Cindy Thomas, a top-tier crime reporter at the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Cindy was a new author, too. Her nonfiction book, *Fish's Girl: A True Story of Love and Serial Murder*, was grounded in a case Conklin and I had worked and two killers we had both known very well. Cindy had followed up the case and helped bring one of those killers down.

Her book was coming out at the end of the week. I was pretty sure that was why she was glowing.

After we'd ordered drinks, Claire piped up. "Yuki's quitting her job."

Cindy and I both said, "No way!" at the same time.

"I'm *thinking* about it," Yuki said, "just *thinking* about it. It's, like, an idea, you know? Geesh, you guys."

Cindy jumped in with what I was imagining.

"Oh. My. God. I know what's going on with you. You're *pregnant*."

Yuki was married to my boss, the tough but fair Lieutenant Jackson Brady—but they'd only been married for four *months*. I didn't have a chance to get my mind around the idea of Yuki and Brady having a child, because Yuki was answering Cindy in her typical rapid-fire style.

"No, no, *no*, I'm not pregnant, but if you don't mind, all of you, we have to order lunch *now*, because I absolutely have to be in a deposition in an hour."

And that was when my phone rang.

I looked at the caller ID while everyone stared bullets at me. We had one rule for our no-holds-barred get-togethers.

No phone calls.

"Sorry," I said. "I've got to take this."

And I did.

## CHAPTER 6

I LEFT THE girls and found a niche where I could take the call in private.

“What’s wrong?” I said to Lieutenant Brady.

“A dead body at Twenty-Fourth and Balmy Alley,” he said. “I need you and Conklin to do a preliminary workup. Lock down the scene and sit tight until replacements arrive. Jacobi wants you and Conklin on the check-cashing heist, nothing else.”

I rejoined my friends.

I said, “Sorry, guys. That was the boss. I’ve got to go.”

Yuki tossed her napkin a few inches into the air in exasperation.

Cindy said, “What can you tell me?”

You can take the reporter out of the *Chronicle*, but you can’t take the reporter out of Cindy.

“Nothing,” I said. “I can’t tell you even one little thing.”

“How many times do I have to prove I’m trustworthy?” said Cindy. “Plus, you owe me.”

Actually, Cindy was right. On both counts. I trusted her. And a few months ago, she’d saved my life.

“I still can’t tell you anything. Not a word.”

I grabbed for my jacket and had just about secured it when Claire said, “I cannot believe this is happening *again*.”