

# **The Lazarus Covenant**

**John Fenzel**

## **Reader's Group Guide**

### **About this Guide**

The questions that follow are intended to enhance your reading and discussion of *The Lazarus Covenant* by John Fenzel. We hope these questions will provide you with new ways of looking at and talking about this psychological suspense fiction novel set against the backdrop of a gathering international crisis.

As no previous novel before it, *The Lazarus Covenant* explores the scourge of religious extremism, terrorism, and war in an unforgettable tale of friendship, faith and forgiveness. With scenes extending from the Oval Office in Washington, D.C. to the catacombs of the Vatican to Apparition Hill in Medjugorje, Bosnia, *The Lazarus Covenant* is a revealing and compelling story of how international crises are truly managed—by ordinary people in extraordinary, often desperate, circumstances.

The Lazarus Covenant is a character-driven story. As such, this Reader's Guide is organized first by general questions about the book, but then by each of the major characters who drive the story to its stunning conclusion.

### **General Questions**

Why do you think the author selected the Balkans as the setting for this novel? Could he have staged the same kind of plot in the United States, with all American characters?

Who do you believe plays the dominant role in resolving an international crisis? Can crisis resolution be performed solely from the Pentagon or the White House? Who are the real “break-glass-in-case-of-emergency” people who actively resolve crises, but who we never seem to hear about?

How do you feel Mark Lyons changes throughout the novel? What devices does the author employ? How do the other characters change Mark's life? How do those characters, themselves, change?

The Vatican is a sovereign government. As a government, do you believe the Vatican would unilaterally defend itself against an international terrorist threat?

Would it be possible for one of the great western religions to be "hijacked" by fundamentalist extremists or even terrorists? When this occurs, how can it be stopped?

How does this story reveal the process of "connecting the dots" to form a coherent intelligence picture for special operations and intelligence organizations to use in addressing a gathering WMD threat?

Is it fair for a journalist to assume the role of a covert CIA operative? Under what circumstances would such a role be justified?

Given the circumstances, do you agree with President Sells' decision to conceal the ambush at Oborci as a "mine accident" in order to prevent the crisis from escalating into a war?

Do you believe the Ravno Crisis to be a realistic scenario for a future crisis in the Balkans? Did the Dayton Peace Accords fully resolve the war in Bosnia?

What would have occurred had Papa Voyo been successful in accomplishing his goals?

Would you characterize this novel as "anti-Catholic?"

How does the Prologue set the stage for the rest of the novel? What important introductions are made? What themes are introduced?

Do you believe terrorists could design and construct a nuclear weapon? If they were successful in doing so, how do you believe they would attempt to target it?

How does the discovery of Lazarus' identity represent a closure for Mark?

## **The Main Character: Mark Lyons**

The novel begins with an especially traumatic experience for Mark as a boy. How does this experience change Mark's life? How does the experience affect his attitudes toward others?

Mark is engaged in a constant struggle with his past. Does he ever really "let go" of his past?

How important is it for Mark to reconcile the tragedies of his past in order for the confrontation he has with his nemesis at the end of the novel?

How does Mark ultimately channel his energy to reconcile his past, once and for all?

Is it ever really possible to fully reconcile one's past, even when it is marked with violence and tragedy?

What is Mark's attitude toward the past? Toward the future? How are these attitudes changed by the end of the novel?

Dreams and flashbacks are a recurring motif in the novel. Do Mark's dreams help or inhibit his progress in reconciling his turbulent past?

What clues Mark in first to the fact that Kate Kamrath's death was not an accident?

## **Sandy Evenson**

Would you describe Sandy Evenson as an antagonist for Mark Lyons? If so, in what way?

Sandy describes herself as a "global citizen." Do you agree with her own characterization? Who else that you know could this label apply to? In an era of globalization, do you think this role becoming more or less prevalent?

Do you agree with Sandy's decision to visit Mark's aunt in Chicago? What did it help her achieve? Would you have done it?

Sandy has a set of rules when it comes to romance, but she admittedly and consciously breaks them in Mark's case. In general terms, is this a good idea or a bad idea?

## **Papa Voyo**

Do you believe Papa Voyo is a realistic villain? Could an Archbishop in the Catholic Church actually be so evil?

Does Papa Voyo have any redeeming traits?

How does the way in which Papa Voyo kills reveal his true personality?

Does Papa Voyo force Mark to change? How?

What is Papa Voyo driven by? How are his belief systems misaligned?

In his own mind, what connects Papa Voyo to Mark? What connects Mark to Papa Voyo?

In what way does Cardinal Alosjiya Stepinac become a significant character in the novel?

## **Celo**

How do the dynamics between Celo and Marko change in the prologue? How does the relationship between them change throughout the rest of the novel?

Could the crisis have been resolved without Celo? Would you characterize his role as direct or indirect in guiding Mark toward resolution?

Celo is portrayed as a catalyst for the Ravno Crisis. He kills, takes hostages and even blows up a church! And yet, somehow, he emerges as a sympathetic character in the novel. Why?

What role does Celo play in Mark's evolution and transformation?

## **John Thorpe**

How does General John Thorpe ultimately achieve operational success in resolving the WMD threat?

Consider the relationship between Mark and John Thorpe. And the relationship between John Thorpe and Jim Goodwin. Between each, there is an undeniable and profound trust that has been forged in the past...on battlefields and in obscure war zones. How are each of their relationships unique?

What role does John Thorpe play in Mark's evolution and transformation?

## **Roman Polko**

As United Nations High Commissioner for the Balkans, how does Roman Polko inject himself to achieve an ultimate resolution for the crisis?

Could the crisis have been resolved without Roman Polko?

What role does Polko play in Mark's evolution and transformation?

Do you accept Roman Polko's premise that long-term conflict resolution is possible only through building tolerance in the minds of the children? What other ways can generational (often genocidal) conflicts be resolved for the long-term?

Does Mark ultimately succeed in accomplishing Polko's vision for a lasting peace in the Balkans?

## **About the Author**

John Fenzel is a senior active duty Army Special Forces officer who has served on our nation's battlefields throughout Europe and the Middle East. He has served on the personal staff of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, as a Special Assistant to Vice President Cheney, and as a White House Fellow during

the Clinton and Bush administrations. He commanded the Special Forces Training Battalion at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. In the wake of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, he served as Staff Director for the Homeland Security Council for Tom Ridge. He was the principal architect of The Homeland Security Advisory System—our nation’s color-coded alert system.

Born and raised in Chicago, John lives with his wife and two children in Washington, D.C. *The Lazarus Covenant* is his first novel.