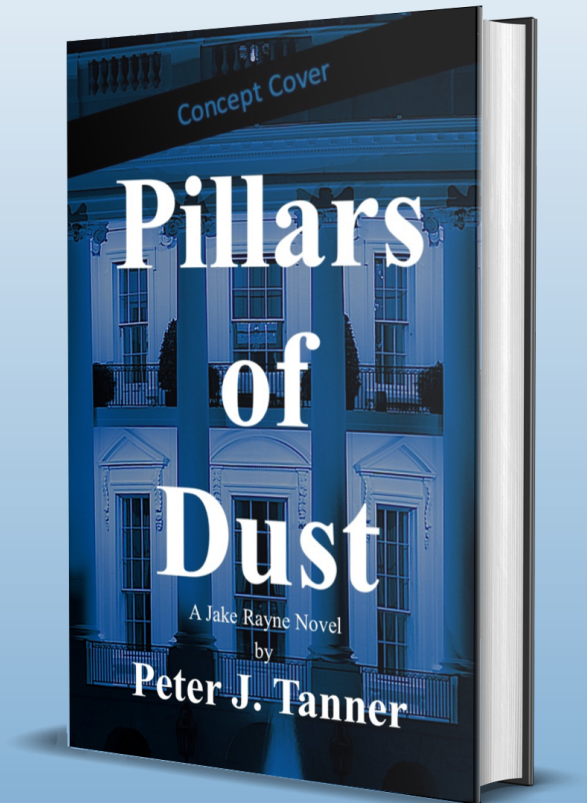


Pillars of Dust

BOOK CLUB KIT (Pre-publication Version)



Jake Rayne is a former secret service agent whose best friend was just brutally murdered in his own home. From the moment Jake arrives at the scene of the crime, his suspicions of who might be involved are peaked. It was no burglary or random act of violence, and yet his friend had no known enemies. At least that's what everyone thinks until the family history reveals otherwise.

As he looks deeper into the killing, Jake and his goddaughter, Faith Williamson, uncover a history of twenty-year-old crimes that lead them down a path no one would want to travel, and no one would believe. A path leading straight to the White House steps. Together they must follow a trail of clues to unravel the evidence, elude their pursuers in a cat and mouse game of life or death, and expose the truth before they're buried along with all the evidence.

Readers Group Questions for Discussion (contains spoilers)

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1. Tyler Grayson, the chauffer, convinced himself not to date Faith, even though he has a crush on her. Faith asked Tyler out many times, but he always politely turned her down.
 - Do you think Tyler Grayson made the right decision to not date Faith?
 - What are your thoughts about social segregation relative to wealth or position in society?
2. Was the shooter in the woods at the Williamson estate really after Jake, Katherine, both, or neither that evening?
 - Was the shooter there just to observe?
 - What is your reasoning for the choice you made?
3. Eric Williamson apparently never told Katherine the details of what he found hidden away by his father about embezzlement.
 - Why do you think he kept it from her?
 - Who do you think it was that Eric Williamson met at the Whitehouse? Chief of Staff, the President, the Vice President, someone else?
4. When they were together, Ashley never told Jake that his chosen career path with the secret service worried her. That she was always fearful he would be hurt or killed.
 - Ashley's thoughts when making dinner at Ashley's townhouse: *"It was something she'd always whitewashed in her mind. She just buried it since there wasn't anything she could do about it. For the first time in years, she became lost in thoughts of Jake being hurt or killed."*
 - Do you think it's always best to surface feelings of concern that are out of your control, or might it be better sometimes to just suppress those thoughts.
 - Do you think that may have contributed to their breakup?
5. The apparent reason for Ashley and Jake breaking up when they were young was neither of them making time for the relationship and blaming each other for not doing so.
 - Do you feel that is an attribute of youth and immaturity?
 - Is that a legitimate reason to stop seeing someone or simply an excuse to focus on one's own career?
 - Do you think if they would have stayed together if one of them would have just taken the first step to discuss it?
6. At one point, Jake considered the possibility that Griff could be part of the cover up and possibly had come to kill him. He knew Griff wouldn't betray him under normal circumstances, but also believed that most anyone could be coerced with the right pressure.
 - Is Jake right in believing that most everyone might at least consider a heinous act of violence against someone else if their family were threatened if they didn't comply?
 - Or, is Jake's outlook too bleak and most everyone would stick to their moral values, regardless of the outcome?
7. Near the end of the story, the Vice President's wife, Madeline Ashmore, encourages her husband to go and confront the President.
 - Are her motives simply to do the right thing or might she have some other, more selfish interests; such as her husband becoming the President of the United States.

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8. Derek Hovland, the media lab technician intentionally avoided dating Rachel Arakawa.
 - First, do you remember why he chose to not date her?
 - Second, is that a good reason to not date or start a relationship with someone? At what point does that seem like it would become a good reason?
9. Discuss some of the relationships between characters in the book.
 - What was a relationship that stood out to you and why?
10. What if there were really were a clandestine organization somewhere in the government managing only the very worst of society without the use of due process?
 - Would you condone such a method or condemn it?
 - What if it were used only to subdue those individuals, but still then placed them through the usual judicial system? So, the organization would have freedom to pursue and arrest in any fashion necessary; their methods and practices would not be scrutinized by the lawyers and courts.
11. The obvious and most important question.
 - Did you enjoy the book? Why, or why not?
12. Reflecting on all the different characters in the book.
 - Who was your favorite character and why?
 - Who was your least favorite character and why?
13. Griff Anders lost his wife to cancer in previous years. While he and the team were meeting in the hotel, he was reflecting on his memories of her while overlooking the National Harbor.
 - Do you feel this type of reflection on memories of those no longer with us reaches a point of being mentally or physically unhealthy?
14. The Williamson family is extremely wealthy in the book. One of Eric Williamson's overindulgences that his wealth allowed him was his car collecting.
 - If you had such wealth (or if you do) what would be (or is) one of your overindulgences (traveling, airplanes, expensive jewelry, clothes, etc.)?
15. What was Jake Rayne's favorite room at the Williamson's?
 - If you could have any type of room or space you wanted in your home, what would it be; maybe you already have it?
16. Do you think Bishop Taylor got his due reward in life or would it have been better that he suffers the wrath of the judicial process?
 - Or, do you feel he would have been able to fend off any punishment due to his station in life?
17. Faith responds with a thought near the end of the book, "*You got what you deserved, you bastards.*".
 - Was she justified in this thought after what happened to her family?
18. In the book, Bishop Taylor and Margaret Hoffman had an alliance going back over twenty years.
 - What personality traits do you feel each of those characters displayed in the book?
 - Based on the personalities of those characters, which of them do you feel was the driving force of that alliance?

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19. As the story unfolds Elias Richter shows a level of reluctance and internal conflict of having to silence Jake Rayne.
 - Do you feel Richter actually possessed some level of human compassion and truly didn't want innocent people to be harmed or is he heartless and it was just having to deal with another complication that frustrated him?
20. Elias Richter was carrying out directives given to him by the administration. The intent of which Richter believed was originally for the benefit of the nation. *"The real menaces to the world. The degenerates that are true threats to the nation. The psychopaths on the verge of doing real harm."* Persons that were *"...well-known threats across national security agencies"*.
 - Do you think he could have protected himself by exposing the corruption of the administration when he realized the targets were no longer of a criminally violent nature?
21. Jake decides to confront Elias Richter several times, initially with his suspicions of Richter's involvement, and then finally with the evidence, and an ultimatum.
 - What do you feel was driving Jake to continue risking his life to confront Richter in person?
 - Why wouldn't Jake have just taken everything to the DOJ, or the media, or some other entity, for them to expose it all?
22. In the book, the origin and ongoing impetus for the history of criminal behavior was stated to be the desire for power.
 - Do you feel it was purely the lust for power that drove Bishop Taylor and Margaret Hoffman?
 - What psychological factors or personality traits do you think of relative to persons with such extreme needs for power and money that they'll do anything to obtain either one?
 - Money and power seem to go hand in hand in our world. Which one do you see as the most dangerous desire to obsess over?
23. Shortly before he was killed, Eric Williamson met with someone at the Whitehouse.
 - Who do you believe it would have been that he met with and how do you think the conversation would have gone?
 - What do you feel would have been the next move Eric would have taken if he weren't killed?
24. It's never confirmed in the book who the shooter in the woods was at the Williamson house, or even if their intent was to kill.
 - Who did Jake suspect that person was and do you believe Jake's suspicions were correct? What leads you to your conclusion?
25. As the story unfolds, Jake and Ashley are reunited after many years of not seeing each other.
 - What are your thoughts of their relationship before and during the story?
 - Where do you see their relationship going after the story?