



READING GUIDE

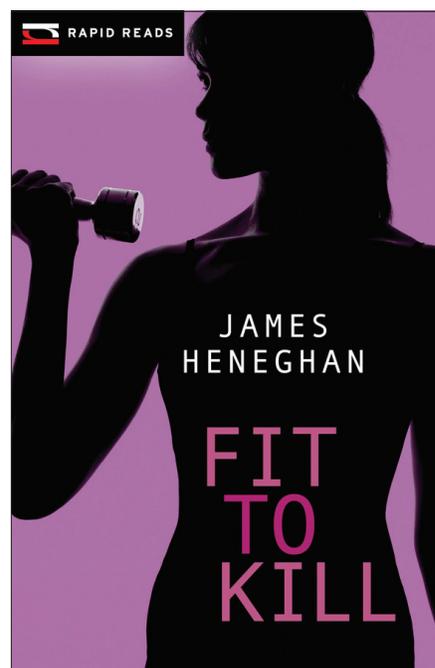
FIT TO KILL JAMES HENEGHAN

Reading level: 5.0

Interest level: Adult

Themes: thriller, murder and mayhem, relationships

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Summary

When jogger Julie Dagg is murdered in Vancouver's West End, the city is shocked—and Sebastian Casey, reporter with the *West End Clarion*, realizes that his beloved city no longer feels the same.

With the help of his physician, Casey also realizes he's getting a bit soft around the middle. He takes up at his local gym, where he's introduced to a wide variety of characters. There's the surgeon, Doc; the busybody, Pope; the neighbor, Albert. And then, there's Emma Shaughnessy.

As more young women turn up murdered—one every thirteen days—Casey follows the situation, musing about what kind of monster might be behind such a grisly rampage. Fellow reporter Jack Wexler fills in the details from the cop beat, while Deb Ozeroff, who covers fashion, women's issues and the environment, provides a broader interpretation of the misogynistic murders.

It looks like a serial killer at work. Each woman has been murdered in the same way: attacked; silenced; raped; beheaded. They're all fit women who take pride in their appearance—and they all disappear after working out at the same fitness center that Casey goes to. Whoever is doing the killing has these women's gym schedules down pat.

Developing alongside Casey's view of events is the story of his across-the-street neighbor, 62-year-old Matty. Uneducated and unappreciated by her husband, Albert, Matty reflects on how disappointingly her life has turned out. Matty's secret loathing of Albert reaches fever pitch as his treatment of her devolves into dish-throwing tantrums and glowering silences.

As Matty's story unfolds, so does Casey's relationship with Emma. When Emma is attacked on her way home one evening, Casey happens to be close by. He drives off her assailant—but he's not able to relieve Emma of her feelings of fear, revulsion and utter powerlessness in the wake of the attack. He's only able to support her as she struggles to move past the violation. She was the "lucky" one who managed to escape death.

The mystery is solved when a strong winter storm upends a chestnut tree onto Matty and Albert's house. Rushing to the scene, Casey finds Albert crushed by the tree—and Matty digging holes in the backyard to hide the mounted heads she discovered in her husband's workshop.





Questions for Discussion

1. In the first line of *Fit to Kill*, the author uses a literary technique known as *personification*, where inanimate objects are given human qualities: “Vancouver’s Stanley Park Peninsula hunched its granite shoulders against an early November storm.” For what reason does Heneghan personify the peninsula in this way? How does it add to the writing?
2. When he reads about Julie Dagg’s murder in the newspaper, Casey muses that things have changed: Vancouver’s West End is no longer safe. Significant events often shape the way we see and feel about places. Write or talk about a time when you experienced a similar feeling—that a familiar icon in your world was forever changed by a single incident.
3. At breakfast one morning, Matty observes her husband, Albert, across “the wide Arctic tundra” of their kitchen table. In literature, this kind of exaggeration is called *hyperbole*. How is hyperbole effective? Find other examples of hyperbole in *Fit to Kill*.
4. Matty contemplates how life would be different if her husband were dead, which tells the reader much about what their marriage is like. Do you think these kinds of thoughts are unique to this relationship? Why is it that people so often stay, when they know in their hearts that things could be different elsewhere?
5. Heneghan takes different characters’ points of view throughout the book. What are the advantages to approaching the story in this way?
6. In chapter 3, we learn that Casey is a loner and always has been. He doesn’t need a woman. Doesn’t need anyone else. What other book or movie characters do you know who fit this archetype?
7. The open letters the killer writes to the police quote the Bible extensively. What’s the danger in people taking such literal translations of religious texts?
8. Matty labors under the illusion that people who go to college are smarter than those who don’t. Do you agree? If not, what would you say to challenge Matty’s belief?
9. What are your views on the way women are often represented in religious texts?
10. In *Fit to Kill*, Heneghan gives shape and life to each of the characters that he subsequently kills off. Why does he do this?
11. In chapter 7, when Matty formulates her plan to kill Albert, how is it that the reader can sympathize with her?
12. As you see it, how does Deb Ozeroff’s character help to develop the story?
13. When every copy of the *Clarion* is snatched up by readers in the wake of Roseanne Agostino’s death, Casey reflects that newspapers succeed because of the misfortunes of others. Do you agree? What do you think about the news?
14. Casey isn’t big on Christmas, preferring to spend the day alone. *No small talk, no dressing up, no false sentiment*, are his thoughts. What’s your take on sentimental holidays?
15. Near the end of chapter 11, Casey finally kisses Emma. How do you think their relationship would have played out differently had he actively pursued her?

