

Killing Monarchs - DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Killing Monarchs opens with Jon Lockhart, a diabolical drug runner, questioning Jerry Traylor, a former business associate. Lockhart is picking up a shipment of heroin. But he also wants to know what happened to his money, stolen five years earlier. In what ways does Lockhart's treatment of Jerry presage Lockhart's fate? If Lockhart had shown mercy, would the smugglers still be in business?
2. Sam Rivers shared his knowledge about the monarch butterfly migration with sixth graders at Hopkins Elementary. How does Sam's knowledge of that migration and the monarch life cycle eventually help him understand the chrysalises shipped from Mexico may be conduits for illicit drugs?
3. When Sam first meets Hopkins Detective Raven Marschel, she treats him with suspicion. Like many law enforcement officers, she is unfamiliar with the USFW and its mission, and doesn't think Sam is qualified to investigate a drug overdose. How does their relationship evolve over the course of the novel? By the end of the novel, how does Detective Marschel feel about Sam?
4. Sam first learns about Suthy Baxter, another former Lockhart business associate, on the day Jerry Traylor is found dead from an overdose. Sam cannot visit Suthy until the following morning. How is that delay fortuitous? What physical evidence does Sam find at Suthy's house? How does that evidence help Sam with his investigation? Does Sam learn anything else important about the connection between Jerry, Suthy, and others?
5. When Sam and Carmel walk their dogs in the woods, how is what they see and experience poignant? How does their hike contribute to a growing interest in each other?
6. In what ways are Carmel and Sam similar? How do their likes and dislikes, personal histories, interests, and the other things we learn about them contribute to their mutual attraction?
7. When does Sam learn the identity of the Mexican drug cartel's Minnesota contact? How does that knowledge change the course of his investigation? In what ways is the Minnesota contact different from his former meth partners?
8. In pursuit of a drug runner, Sam jumps off a cliff into a cold river in the dark. Do you think this was a reasonable risk to take? Why would Sam make such a crazy leap? Given similar circumstances, would you?
9. Toward the end of the novel, scorpions escape from a jar inside Jon Lockhart's getaway car, several stinging him to death. For the moment, Sam wants to keep the news of Lockhart's demise quiet. Why? If Lockhart's death would have become known, would it have changed the end of the novel?
10. Technically, Jon Lockhart is drug runner Domina's boss. When does the tension in their relationship first appear? Over the course of the novel, how does their relationship change? By novel's end, how do their different perspectives influence their different fates?

