

Kenzie Gilmore

Afterburn

Biba Pearce



Discussion Topics

Choose your book below to download the accompanying discussion guide.

Be warned! There are spoilers in the guides, so make sure you've finished reading the book first.

Discussion Topics for *Afterburn*

1. Journalistic Responsibility vs. Law Enforcement Consequences

- **Topic:** Kenzie's published article exposed an ongoing sting operation, leading to the murder of undercover officer Bianca by the Morales cartel. Kenzie insists she was misinformed by her police source, Xavier Ortega, who claimed Bianca had already been extracted, while Reid initially holds her and the press accountable for the fatal leak.
- **Discussion Angle:** Where does the boundary lie between a journalist's duty to report the truth and the responsibility for collateral damage? Do you view Kenzie as

an innocent messenger manipulated by Ortega, or should she have verified the extraction independently before going to print?

2. **Grief, Guilt, and Self-Imposed Isolation**

- **Topic:** Both Reid Garrett and Kenzie Gilmore are shaped by profound past trauma. Reid carries intense guilt over Bianca's death and retreats to an isolated cabin in the Everglades, while Kenzie's drive for investigative truth is rooted in the unsolved disappearance of her mother when she was twelve years old.
- **Discussion Angle:** How do Reid and Kenzie's respective coping mechanisms influence how they approach justice and form personal relationships? In what ways does the remote Everglades environment serve as a sanctuary—or a prison—for Reid's grief?

3. **The Morality of Unofficial Partnerships**

- **Topic:** After her career as a police officer was halted by a severe leg injury at the academy, Kenzie bridges the gap by becoming an investigative reporter. In *Afterburn*, she and Reid form an informal, off-the-books partnership to investigate Natalia Cruz's murder alongside the Swamp Strangler cases.
- **Discussion Angle:** Does Kenzie and Reid's unconventional partnership strengthen the investigation, or does sharing confidential police details with a reporter cross an ethical line? How do Kenzie's journalistic methods contrast with Reid's strict police protocols?

4. **Serial Crimes vs. Personal Motives (The Red Herring)**

- **Topic:** Natalia Cruz's murder is initially suspected to be the work of the "Swamp Strangler," a serial killer targeting young women in the Glades. However, the investigation reveals her death was a targeted plot orchestrated by her husband, DJ Snake, and his ex-lover, Bella Montague, to secure her inheritance.
- **Discussion Angle:** How does the narrative manipulate expectations by intertwining a serial killer hunt with a calculated financial murder? What does this reveal about how real-world criminals might exploit public panic to hide their own crimes?

5. **Sympathy for the Bad Guys: Memoir vs. Exploitation**

- **Topic:** In *Afterburn*, Kenzie agrees to write the memoirs of cartel boss Maria Lopez (*Lady Caine*), delving into Maria's history of childhood abuse. Reid argues that writing the book humanizes a convicted felon responsible for countless deaths, while Kenzie maintains that everyone has a right to tell their story.
- **Discussion Angle:** Is Kenzie's decision to document Maria's life a pursuit of complete truth, or does it risk glorifying a dangerous criminal? Where should true-crime writers draw the line between humanizing a subject and exploiting trauma?