

Solve With Me This

By J Jones

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Have you ever been following an unsolved case and just thought to yourself, 'I wish I could do something'? Trust me, you're not the only one. And the honest truth is... You can. In this book, I'm going to walk you through how you can ethically and effectively investigate a true crime case, all from your own home. By the time we're done here, you'll have a solid framework for how to organise evidence, analyse information, and maybe, just maybe, help crack a real cold case. We'll cover the exact steps to build a case file from the ground up, how to make sense of what you find, and most importantly, how to do it all respectfully, ethically, and in a genuinely helpful way. So, forget the Hollywood stereotypes. This is for anyone who wants to try to make a difference. We have a lot to get through, so let's jump right in.

The First Principle: An Ethical Foundation.

Before we even think about opening a file or typing a search, we have to talk about the single most important part of this whole thing: our ethical foundation. This isn't a game. These are real people, real families, and real tragedies. Our desire to help can never come at the expense of their dignity and privacy. This is the absolute bedrock of responsible investigation. Every single thing you do has to be filtered through this lens first. The number one rule is "do no harm." That means we commit to never, ever interfering with official investigations. Law enforcement has resources, evidence, and legal authority that we just don't. Our role isn't to replace them; it's to support their work from a distance, using only information that's public and legal to access. This means you never, under any circumstances, try to visit a physical crime scene, even if it's been years. Professionals are trained to preserve a scene's integrity to prevent contamination, which just goes to show how sensitive these physical locations are. It also means we have to be incredibly careful with the information we share. The internet is an amazing tool, but it's also a wildfire for bad information and harmful theories. One wrong accusation, one unverified theory that goes viral, can destroy a person's life, send police chasing bogus leads, and cause unimaginable pain for a victim's family. Before you even think about posting a theory, you have to ask yourself: Is this a confirmed fact from a solid source? Or is this just my personal speculation? Here, we stick to the facts. We're information organisers and analysts, not rumour-mongers. And finally, most importantly, we always centre the victim. We have to remember that behind every case file is a human being whose life was taken or changed forever.

We honour them by seeking truth, not by sensationalising their story for clicks. This means avoiding graphic details unless they are absolutely vital to understanding the case, and always talking about the victims and their families with the deepest respect. This ethical framework isn't a suggestion; it's the only way to do this work right. It's what separates a dedicated citizen investigator from a reckless amateur. If you can't commit to these principles, this isn't for you. But if you can, you might just bring a valuable perspective to a case that's grown cold.

Choosing a Case with Purpose.

Okay, so we've got our ethical ground rules set. Where do you even begin? The number of unsolved cases out there can feel pretty overwhelming. The trick is to choose a case strategically—one where your efforts might actually be effective. Not every case is a good fit for an at-home investigation. For example, you should generally steer clear of active, ongoing investigations. Law enforcement keeps information in those cases locked down for a good reason, and public meddling can be seriously damaging. Your sweet spot is "cold cases." These are cases where the initial investigation has wrapped up without an answer, and there haven't been any new, solid leads for a while. In these situations, information is often easier to find, and a fresh pair of eyes can be a genuine asset. Sometimes, law enforcement agencies are even more open to public help on cases that have been stalled for years. So, where do you find them? A fantastic place to start is with public databases. The National Missing and Unidentified Persons System, or NamUs, is an invaluable resource from the Department of Justice. It's a national database for missing, unidentified, and unclaimed persons cases, you can search by location, date, and other details. Just exploring NamUs gives you a sense of the scale of the problem and provides structured case info that's a perfect launchpad for your research. Local and state police department websites are another gold mine. Many agencies have a "Cold Case" or "Unsolved Homicides" section, which often provides official summaries and sometimes even asks the public for information.

Focusing on a case in your own area can be a smart move. You'll have a built-in understanding of the geography and local culture, and you might find it easier to dig up archived local news stories. As you're picking a case, think about how much public information is out there. A case that got a lot of media attention will probably have a bigger digital footprint, giving you more articles and interviews to work with. On the other hand, for a lesser-known case, your organisational skills could be a game-changer, since it's possible no one has ever gathered all the scattered bits of information into one place. Finally, choose a case that speaks to you, for the right reasons. Maybe the victim reminds you of someone, or the whole situation just feels deeply unjust. That personal connection can be a huge motivator, pushing you to be extra thorough. But also, be very aware of your own mental health. These stories are heavy. You have to be able to step back and take breaks. Pick a case you can research with passion, but not one that will swallow you whole. The goal is to be a sustained, objective asset, and that requires taking care of yourself, too.

The Art of Information Gathering.

Once you've picked a case, it's time to gather every single piece of publicly and legally available information you can find. This is the bedrock of your entire investigation. Think of yourself as an information architect, building the structure that all your analysis will stand on. This process is often called Open-Source Intelligence, or OSINT, which is just a fancy term for collecting data from open sources to produce useful intelligence. Your best friend here is your search engine. But don't just type in the victim's name and call it a day. You've got to be systematic. Use advanced search operators to narrow your results. For example, use quotes to search for an exact phrase like "Jane Doe found." A minus sign can exclude a word, like "Jane Doe -theory." And "site:" lets you search just one website, like "Jane Doe site:nytimes.com." Search for the victim's name, any publicly named persons of interest, the locations, the dates, and any other keyword you can imagine. Mix and match.

Your goal is to create a full-blown library of documents. This includes:

1. News Articles: Start with the big national papers and then dig down into the local papers from the area where the crime happened. Local reporting often has details that national stories gloss over. Use archive sites like

Newspapers.com or see what your local library offers online. Collect every article you can, from the first day it was reported to anniversary stories written years later. Those follow-up articles can be gold, often containing new

info or interviews.

2. Official Documents: This can be trickier, but it's super important. Look for any official press releases from the police department. Can you find any court documents through public records websites? Full case files are almost never public, but you might find related documents. You're basically trying to rebuild the official case file as best you can with what's out there, which mirrors how professionals start a cold case review: by re-examining all the original paperwork.

3. Social Media and Online Footprints: This is a delicate area, so tread carefully and ethically. Look for public social media profiles of the victim. They can sometimes offer a glimpse into their life and state of mind before

the crime. But this is not an invitation to start digging into the private lives of their friends and family. Stick to what's public and what's relevant to the case timeline. You're trying to understand the victim's life as it

relates to the crime, not to be a digital voyeur.

4. Broadcast Media: Search for TV news reports, documentaries, or podcasts that have covered the case. These can have interviews with police, family, or witnesses that you won't find in print. Listen very carefully to the exact

words people use. Sometimes a tiny detail in a spoken interview can spark a whole new line of thought.

7.

As you collect all this, be meticulous. Save everything. Make a dedicated folder on your computer for the case. Save web pages as PDFs, take screenshots, and download every document you find. The internet isn't forever—pages disappear, and articles get taken down. Preserve your sources. Every piece of data is a piece of the puzzle. Right now, you're just dumping all the pieces on the table. In the next step, we'll start putting them together.

Organising Chaos: Building Your Case File.

So, you've now got a mountain of data: news clippings, PDFs, links, and scribbled notes. If you just leave it like that, it's digital clutter. It's useless. The single most important skill for a home investigator is organisation.

Professionals use meticulous case management systems, and you need to do the same. This is the step where you turn that chaotic pile of info into a structured, usable case file. Trust me, this process alone can show you connections and contradictions you never would have seen otherwise. There are a bunch of ways to do this. You can use a simple word processor, a spreadsheet, or free tools like Trello, Notion, or Obsidian. The tool itself isn't as important as the system. Here's a framework to get you started:

First, create a Master Timeline. This is going to be the spine of your entire investigation. Open a spreadsheet or a document and make columns for Date, Time, Event, Source, and Notes. Now, go through every single thing you've collected and pull out any event that can be placed on this timeline. Start from way before the crime to get some context, and go all the way up to the present day. Get specific. "January 15th, 1998: Jane Doe leaves work," is a start. But this is better: "January 15th, 1998, 5:05 PM: Jane Doe clocks out from her job at the downtown library. Source: Local News Article, 1/17/98." Every fact on your timeline must be cited with its source. This is non-negotiable. Why? Because you have to be able to tell the difference between a fact from a police press release and a detail from a random comment in a forum.

This timeline will become a huge document, but it will be your most powerful tool. It lets you see the sequence of events clearly and can instantly show you gaps or contradictions. For instance, if one source says a witness saw a car at 10 PM, and another says that same witness was at a party across town, you've just found a critical conflict that needs a closer look.

Second, create a ****Dramatis Personae****, which is just a fancy way of saying a list of key people. For every person involved—the victim, family, friends, witnesses, any publicly named persons of interest—make a separate profile page.

On each page, pile up all the info you have on them: their relationship to the victim, what they told the media, and their alibi if it was public. Again, cite every single piece of information. This helps you build a clear picture of the social web around the case.

Third, build a Location Map. Use a tool like Google My Maps to plot every important location mentioned in the case. Pin the victim's home, their work, where they were last seen, where their car was found, and the crime scene itself.

Seeing these locations laid out spatially can give you incredible context. How far is it from their work to their home? Is the spot where their car was dumped on a logical route, or is it somewhere they had no reason to be?

You can add notes and photos to each pin, creating a geographic database for your case.

Finally, create a Questions & Inconsistencies Log. As you do all this work, you're going to have questions. You're going to spot things that don't add up. "Why did it take three hours for anyone to report them missing?"

"Source A says the car was blue, but Source B says it was green." Write every single one of them down. This log is where you'll focus your analysis later. It's your roadmap to the heart of the mystery. Building this case file is slow, painstaking work. It's not glamorous. But this *is* the real work of an investigation. It's all about discipline. By the time you're done, you'll have a deeper, more organised understanding of the case than 99% of people who have ever looked at it. You will have turned raw data into a powerful analytical tool.

Analysis: Connecting the Dots.

With your beautifully organised case file, you can now shift from being a collector to being an analyst. This is where you use your greatest asset: your fresh, objective perspective. You're not tied to the initial assumptions that might have steered the original investigation. Your job is to look at the structured information you've built and ask, "What is this actually telling me?" Start with your Master Timeline. Read it. Then read it again. Look for patterns in the victim's life in the days and weeks before the crime. Did they change their routine? Look for "temporal proximity"—did anything weird happen shortly before or after a key event? Sometimes, things that seemed unrelated suddenly become significant when you see them in sequence. The timeline is also your number one tool for finding gaps. Are there hours, or even days, in the victim's life that are totally unaccounted for in the public record? Those gaps are where the truth loves to hide. Nailing them down is a huge step.

Next, go to your Location Map. Analyse the spatial relationships you've mapped out. Is there a geographic pattern? Are all the key locations clustered in one neighbourhood? Think about travel times. Could someone realistically get from Point A to Point B in the time a witness described? Use Google Maps to check driving and walking times. An alibi that sounds fine on paper can completely fall apart when you look at the geography. Cross-reference everything. This is absolutely critical. Take a statement from one news article and hold it up against a statement from another. Compare a witness account to your timeline.

This is how you use the Questions & Inconsistencies Log.

When you find a discrepancy—a different colored car, a conflicting time—don't just note it. Dig deeper. Try to trace each piece of conflicting info back to its original source. Is one source more reliable than the other? A direct quote from a police spokesperson is usually more credible than a third-hand account on a forum. The goal is to either resolve the inconsistency or, if you can't, to flag it as a key unanswered question. This is also where you can think about forensic possibilities, but from an informed, layman's perspective. You're not a forensic scientist, but you can be aware of what's possible. Research the advances in forensic tech that have happened since the crime. Things like Forensic Genealogy and advanced DNA testing have completely changed the game for cold cases. Does the public record mention that biological evidence was collected but couldn't be identified at the time? If so, that case might be a prime candidate for a modern solution. You can't run the tests, but you can identify the potential.

Throughout all of this, you have to constantly fight your own biases. It's so easy to get a pet theory and then start looking only for evidence that confirms it—that's called confirmation bias. To beat it, actively try to disprove your own theories. If you think a certain person did it, build the strongest possible case for why they **couldn't** have. If that case turns out to be weak, your theory gets stronger. But if it's a strong case, you need to rethink things. Your job isn't to build a case against one person; it's to follow the evidence wherever it leads, even if it leads somewhere you never expected.

The Hard Line: What You Must NEVER Do.

We've talked about the ethical foundation, but as you get deeper into a case, the temptation to cross a line can get stronger. It is absolutely critical that we reinforce the boundaries between a responsible home investigator and a dangerous vigilante. Following these "nevers" isn't a choice; it's your duty to the case, to the victims, and to the justice system.

First, you must NEVER contact anyone directly involved in the case. This means the victim's family, friends, witnesses, or any person of interest or suspect. No exceptions. You might think you have a brilliant question that only they can answer, but your out-of-the-blue contact can cause terrible emotional distress to a family that has already been through enough. It can be seen as harassment, and it could get you in legal trouble. Worse, you could accidentally taint a future witness, making their testimony useless in court. Professionals are trained on how to interview people without leading them; you are not. Leave that to law enforcement.

Second, NEVER misrepresent yourself. Don't pretend you're a journalist, a PI, a cop, or anything other than what you are: a private citizen researching a case with public information. Lying will destroy your credibility and could get you into serious trouble.

Third, we've said it before, but it's worth saying again: NEVER go to a crime scene or any other location to do your own search. At best, it's trespassing. At worst, you could contaminate an area that police might need to re-examine

one day. Anything you "find" would be thrown out of court and could screw up the entire investigation.

Fourth, NEVER publicise the names of private citizens as suspects. You might be totally convinced you've solved it, but you're working with an incomplete deck of cards. You don't have the full case file. Accusing someone publicly based on your research is monumentally irresponsible. It can ruin their life, their career, and their family—and you could be completely wrong. The court of public opinion is not a court of law. This is maybe the single most harmful thing an amateur sleuth can do. Stick to analysing facts, not pointing fingers online.

Your role is to be a quiet, diligent force in the background. You're an analyst, a librarian, an archivist. The second you feel tempted to insert yourself into the real-world story of the case, you have to stop. The line is bright and clear: your investigation stops where the public record stops.

So You Found Something? How to Contribute Responsibly.

After all this work—the gathering, the organising, the analysis—you might actually get to a point where you believe you've found something new and credible. Maybe you spotted a major inconsistency in the timeline that no one ever talked about, or you found a forgotten news clip that connects two totally separate pieces of information. The temptation might be to shout it from the rooftops. Don't. There is a right way to contribute, and it goes through a clear, respectful channel. Your first and only point of contact should be the law enforcement agency in charge of the case.

First, prepare a short, professional summary of what you found. Nobody wants to read a 50-page manifesto full of your theories. These are busy professionals. Make your information as easy to digest as possible. Write a clear, simple report. Start by identifying the case. Then, lay out your specific finding. For example: "I have identified a conflict in the publicly reported timeline on the night of January 15th, 1998. Source A (cite it) states X, while Source B (cite it) states Y. This seems significant because..."

Provide your sources for everything. Be factual. Be objective. Cut out all your personal speculation. Stick to the data. Present the inconsistency or the new information and explain why you think it matters. Once you have your summary, find the right person to send it to. Go to the website for the police or sheriff's department. Look for a general tip line, an email for their cold case unit, or a specific detective if that info is public.

Some places also partner with organisations like Crime Stoppers, which lets you report things anonymously. Use these official channels.

Submit your information once. Don't spam the agency. They have your tip, and if they think it's credible and useful, they'll follow up on it. You have to accept that you will probably never hear back. Their investigations are

confidential. Your job was to pass the baton, not to run the rest of the race. The satisfaction has to come from knowing you did your part—that you did diligent, ethical work and provided a well-researched tip in a responsible way. For a home investigator, that is the definition of success.

So, there you have it. That's the framework. It's a journey that starts with an ethical promise and ends with a responsible contribution. It's a process that demands discipline, patience, and a profound respect for the truth.

From choosing a case with purpose, to meticulously gathering and organising information, to analysing that data with a critical eye, you now have the tools to do this work well. You know the hard lines you can never cross, and you know the right way to share what you find.

The reality is, while it's rare, citizen investigators have provided the tips that have blown cold cases wide open. Your unique perspective, your ability to pour hundreds of hours into a single case, and your skill with digital

tools are all incredibly powerful assets. You really can make a difference. This isn't about finding glory or being a hero. It's about the quiet, dedicated search for answers. It's about honouring the victims by making sure their

stories are never forgotten and that every last chance for justice is explored. The work is tough, but the potential to contribute, even in a small way, to solving a long-unanswered question is a powerful and worthy goal.

The Unsolved Case – Wharlest Jackson Sr.

Welcome to our investigation. I've spent weeks poring over the declassified FBI files, Department of Justice memos, witness testimonies, and historical records on the murder of Wharlest Jackson. All of this information is publicly accessible, thanks to laws like the Civil Rights Cold Case Records Collection Act. This isn't about wild speculation; it's about following the evidence.

Here's how this will work. I'm going to lay out the evidence exactly as it appears in the official file, and we're going to build this case together from the ground up. We'll get to know the victim and the timeline. We'll examine every piece of forensic evidence. We will name the suspects the FBI identified and scrutinise their statements and connections. I'll present the facts, and then I'm going to pause and ask you questions. I want you to be my partner in this. As we go through each chapter of the case, I want you to write down your analysis, your questions, and your theories in a notebook. Don't wait until the end. If a detail about a witness or a piece of evidence strikes you as odd, write it down. Let's create a living document of our investigation right there.

Our goal is to see what the original investigators saw, to walk in their shoes, and ask a simple question: Did they miss something? Or is the truth hidden in plain sight, scattered across thousands of pages of bureaucracy?

Let's get started.

On the evening of February 27th, 1967, a man named Wharlest Jackson Sr. walked out of the Armstrong Tire and Rubber plant in Natchez, Mississippi. He was a 36-year-old Korean War veteran, a father of five, and the treasurer for the local NAACP. He'd just finished his very first shift in a new, more advanced position at the plant—a job that, until that day, had only ever been held by white employees. His wife, Exerlena, had begged him not to take it. She was afraid. Just two years earlier, another Black man from that same plant, their friend George Metcalfe, had also been promoted. A bomb planted in his car nearly killed him. As Wharlest drove his pickup truck home, just six blocks from the factory, he flicked on his turn signal. That simple motion completed a circuit, and a bomb that had been wired to his truck's frame, directly under his seat, exploded with catastrophic force. His eight-year-old son, Wharlest Jr., heard the blast from their house, jumped on his bike, and rode toward the sound. He was the first in the family to find his father's mangled truck and what was left of his body in the street.

The FBI launched a massive investigation, creating a case file that would swell to over 10,000 pages. They had a clear motive. They had a list of suspects from an incredibly violent, secret faction of the Ku Klux Klan. And they had a prime suspect—a man with a reputation for violence and experience with explosives who worked at the very same plant.

So, why did the case go cold? How is it that no one was ever charged with the murder of Wharlest Jackson? The answer, the one clue everyone might have missed, could be buried in the public case file. And today, you and I are going to try to find it.

The Man, The Town, The Timeline.

To understand why Wharlest Jackson was murdered, you have to understand the man he was and the place he called home. This isn't just background info; according to the case file, the context is the motive.

First, the man. By all accounts, Wharlest Jackson Sr. was a respected and dedicated family man. He was an Army veteran who served in the Korean War. After his service, he and his wife, Exerlena, settled in her hometown of Natchez, Mississippi, to raise their five children. For twelve years, he worked at the Armstrong Tire and Rubber Company, a massive plant that was one of the biggest employers in the area. But Wharlest Jackson was more than a factory worker. He was deeply involved in the fight for civil rights. At a time when holding such a position was incredibly dangerous, he served as the treasurer for the Natchez branch of the NAACP. His friend and mentor, George Metcalfe, was the chapter's president. This wasn't a passive role. The NAACP in Natchez was actively pushing for voter registration and the desegregation of schools and workplaces. They were challenging a deeply entrenched system of white supremacy, and that made them targets.

Now, let's talk about the town. Natchez, Mississippi, in 1967, was a pressure cooker of racial tension. It was home to some of the most violent and secretive factions of the Ku Klux Klan in the entire country. The FBI files don't just mention the KKK; they focus on a specific, hyper-violent offshoot known as the Silver Dollar Group. This group was founded in 1964 by a man we're about to get to know very well: Raleigh "Red" Glover.

The Silver Dollar Group was a "Klan within a Klan," made up of the most fanatical members from other Klan chapters who felt the mainstream KKK wasn't violent enough.

Their name came from their calling card. When you were initiated, you were given a silver dollar, often from the year you were born, as a symbol of your commitment to terror. The FBI linked this small group of maybe 20 core members to at least eight murders and a string of bombings, arsons, and other violent acts across Mississippi and Louisiana between 1964 and 1967. Their only goal was to use extreme violence to stop the Civil Rights Movement in its tracks. And many of its members, including its leader, worked right alongside Wharlest Jackson at the Armstrong Tire plant. This brings us to the timeline—the events that led straight to the explosion on Minor Street. According to the FBI, in early 1967, the Armstrong plant, under pressure to comply with anti-discrimination laws, opened up a new, higher-paying job in its chemical mixing department. It was a position that had always been reserved for white employees. Wharlest Jackson, who had more seniority than the two white applicants, applied and got the job. The promotion came with a raise of 17 cents an hour. That was a significant amount of money, enough to finally let his wife, who suffered from Lupus, quit her job and stay home with the kids. Exerlena was terrified. She knew what happened to George Metcalfe just two years earlier. After he got a similar promotion at the same plant, a bomb went off in his car in the company parking lot. He survived, but he was badly injured. The Jackson family had even helped nurse him back to health.

She begged Wharlest not to take the job, but he was determined to provide a better life for his family. The case file is filled with reports from coworkers who said Jackson had been threatened. There were warnings that if he took a "white man's job," he'd pay for it with his life.

On Monday, February 20th, 1967, Wharlest Jackson started training for his new role. A week later, on February 27th, he worked his first official shift. He stayed a little late for overtime. Around 8:00 PM, he got into his green 1965 Chevy pickup and started the short drive home. His wife was at home, seven blocks away, when she heard a massive explosion that rattled the windows. Her first thought was immediate and chilling. As she later told reporters, she shouted, "Oh, Lord, that's Jackson."

He had driven just six blocks from the plant. The bomb, triggered by his turn signal, tore through the floor of his truck, causing horrific injuries to his lower torso. Wharlest Jackson died almost instantly. So, that's the foundation of our case. A good man, a dedicated activist, takes a job that crosses a violently enforced racial line and is killed in a meticulously planned assassination. Now, let's open the case file and look at what the FBI had to work with.

Inside the FBI Case File.

This is where we become detectives. The initial investigation, codenamed WHARBOM, was huge. Eighteen agents from the Jackson field office conducted over a thousand interviews and generated thousands of pages of reports. We're going to break their findings down into three key areas: the bomb, the suspects, and the crucial witness statements.

Part One: The Bomb.

The first thing FBI lab examiners did was analyze the truck and the debris from the blast site. What was left of the pickup told a very specific story. The explosion was centered directly beneath the driver's side. The blast blew a hole through the floorboard and launched the driver's seat and door outward. The steering column was bent, the frame of the truck buckled. Based on this, the FBI concluded the bomb was placed on the outside of the truck's frame, right under where the driver sits. This wasn't random. This was a targeted assassination, designed for maximum lethality against one person. The file notes that the trigger was likely mechanical. The leading theory was a "delay-arming" device. This means the bomber probably placed the device on the truck and then activated a timer. But this timer wouldn't detonate the bomb; it would just "arm" it after a certain amount of time. Once armed, the bomb would then be triggered by something the driver did. Investigators believe that the trigger was connected to the truck's turn signal wiring.

This explains why the bomb didn't go off when Jackson started the truck in the parking lot, but rather minutes into his drive home, as he was about to make a turn. This tells us several things about our killer.

First, they had access to the truck. The Armstrong plant parking lot was the most likely place to plant the bomb. It was a big, busy lot, which offered some cover. The bomber needed to know which truck was Jackson's and have enough time, unobserved, to crawl underneath and attach the device.

Second, they had a sophisticated understanding of explosives. This wasn't some crude pipe bomb. This was a device with a timing mechanism and a specific trigger, built to kill a specific person. A Justice Department memo notes that while the exact type of explosive was never identified, its force was "large." An informant file we'll get to later mentions that members of the Silver Dollar Group would often experiment with perfecting their homemade bombs. This level of skill immediately narrows the field of suspects. You're not looking for someone who was just angry; you're looking for someone with the knowledge to build and deploy a car bomb. This points directly to someone with training—maybe military—or a lot of hands-on experience.

Okay, pause here for a second. What does the bomb tell you? The placement, the trigger, the sophistication. It speaks of planning, not passion. It speaks of a cold, calculated execution. Does this suggest one person acting alone, or a conspiracy? Who has this kind of knowledge? Put your initial thoughts in your notebook. Let's see what you're thinking before we move on to the suspects.

Part Two: The Suspects.

The FBI case file reads like a who's who of the Natchez-area KKK. While many names came up, the investigation quickly zeroed in on the most violent cell: The Silver Dollar Group. And at the very top of that list was one man: Raleigh "Red" Glover.

Let's break down the file on Red Glover. He was a coworker of Wharlest Jackson's at the Armstrong Tire plant. That's critical. He knew the layout of the plant, he knew the parking lot, and he would have known which truck was Jackson's. But the connection goes way deeper. Glover was the founder and leader of the Silver Dollar Group. FBI informants described him as moody, aggressive, and a man who constantly preached violence. He was a bully, a heavy drinker, and had a reputation for picking fights. And most importantly, Red Glover had the exact skills needed to pull this off. He was a veteran of the U.S. Navy Seabees—the construction battalions—where he was trained to handle explosives. This wasn't a hobby; it was a professional skill he learned in the military. That fact alone made him the FBI's prime suspect. The file shows informants placing Glover at the centre of the plot. One confidential source told the FBI that Glover and another Klansman, Elden Hester, who also worked at the plant, were involved in getting explosives shortly before the Jackson bombing. The same informant claimed that right after the murder, as the FBI swarmed Natchez, Glover moved a stash of explosives from its hiding spot, scared of a raid. Another informant from inside the Klan,

Orvin "Coonie" Poissot told agents that Glover had bragged about the 1965 bombing of George Metcalfe's car—the one that injured him but didn't kill him. Poissot quoted Glover as saying that if he had wanted to kill Metcalfe, he would have put the bomb under the dashboard instead of under the hood. Think about that. Two years later, Wharlest Jackson is killed by a bomb placed not under the hood, but directly under the driver's seat. It's practically a confession of his methods. But Glover wasn't the only name. The investigation treated this as a conspiracy, and several other Silver Dollar Group members were persons of interest:

Elden Hester: As mentioned, a coworker at Armstrong and a Klan member. An informant linked him directly to helping Glover get the explosives. He was a key associate.

Kenneth "Head": Another known member of the Silver Dollar Group. Informants linked him and Glover to the earlier bombing of George Metcalfe's car.

Tommie Lee Jones: Described in Klan files as one of the earliest and most violent members of the secret cell. He admitted to making threatening anonymous calls and was suspected in other acts of intimidation.

Jimmie Copeland: His name came from an anonymous female caller who claimed he was responsible, supposedly based on something his own wife said. Copeland lived near Jackson, Mississippi, but when questioned, he denied being in the Klan or having anything to do with the murder.

The FBI had a clear picture of the organisation they believed was responsible. They had a charismatic, violent leader with expertise in explosives. They had a circle of co-conspirators who worked at the same place as the victim.

They had a pattern of using car bombs against NAACP leaders who got promoted at the Armstrong plant. It seems pretty straightforward. So what went wrong?

This is a critical point in our investigation. We have the weapon, and we have a list of prime suspects. Before we get into what they said—and what they didn't say—I want you to look at this list. Does the focus on

Red Glover makes sense? Is there anyone else on this list that catches your eye? The anonymous tip about Jimmie Copeland is interesting, but it feels like an outlier compared to the mountain of evidence pointing at the

Silver Dollar Group is operating out of the plant itself. What do you think? A distraction, or a missed lead?.

Part Three: The Witness Statements & The Informants.

This is where human intelligence comes in. The FBI's 10,000-page file is filled with hundreds of interviews, but a few key statements from informants and witnesses form the backbone of the case against Red Glover and his crew. First, there were the general threats.

Multiple Armstrong employees, both Black and white, confirmed to the FBI that the atmosphere at the plant was toxic. They reported hearing chatter and direct warnings that Wharlest Jackson would be targeted if he took the promotion. This establishes premeditation and shows that the conspiracy wasn't a well-kept secret.

Then you have the crucial informant testimony. One of the FBI's most valuable sources—whose identity is blacked out in the files but was clearly a high-level Klan insider—provided the most direct evidence. This is the source who said Red Glover and Elden Hester got explosives right before the bombing and that Glover moved them right after. This same informant laid out the entire structure of the Silver Dollar Group, its violent purpose, and its members.

This wasn't just gossip; it was an organisational chart of a terror cell.

But here we hit our first major roadblock. This key informant, when pressed to provide evidence that could convict someone, refused to testify further unless he was granted total immunity from prosecution for his own past crimes.

The Department of Justice, under Attorney General Ramsey Clark, denied the request. And with that, the informant stopped talking. The FBI's best source of direct evidence was silenced, not by the Klan, but by legal procedure.

Let's look at the interview with Orvin "Coonie" Poissot, the Klansman who heard Red Glover brag about the Metcalfe bombing. His statement is incredibly damning. It shows Glover's mindset, his capabilities, and his complete lack of remorse. It establishes a clear pattern. Poissot also implicated Kenneth Head as being a "look-out" during that earlier bombing, which reinforces the idea that these were not solo operations. They were coordinated attacks. The FBI interviewed Glover, Hester, and the others many times. The files describe the interviews in detail. The Klansmen were evasive, defiant, and stuck to a wall of silence. Glover himself, despite being followed and photographed by FBI agents constantly after the murder, never even admitted to being in the KKK. He told his fellow Klansmen the FBI was trying to frame him. So let's step back. The investigators have multiple sources confirming the existence and violent nature of the Silver Dollar Group. They have a prime suspect with the means, motive, and opportunity. They have an informant linking that suspect directly to the bomb materials. And they have another witness who heard the suspect basically confess to a nearly identical prior attack. What stands out to you here? For me, it's the informant who wanted immunity. This person clearly had intimate knowledge. They knew who got the dynamite and where it was hidden. They were likely participants, not just an observer.

Was the Department of Justice wrong to deny immunity? It's a classic prosecutor's dilemma: do you let a smaller fish go to catch the shark? By refusing the deal, did they let everyone get away?

The Sticking Point. Why It Went Cold.

We have now seen almost everything the 1967 investigators saw. We have a clear motive, a sophisticated murder weapon, a highly probable group of suspects, and a lead perpetrator with a history of similar violence and the specific skills required. The evidence seems overwhelming. And yet, the initial investigation was officially closed in 1968, and a reopened investigation was closed again in 2015, with the DOJ stating it "cannot be conclusively determined who committed the crime." Why?

This is the heart of the mystery. The case didn't go cold for a lack of suspects. It went cold because of a series of impenetrable walls that the FBI, despite all its resources, couldn't break through.

The first and biggest wall was the wall of silence. The Silver Dollar Group was bound by oaths and, more effectively, by fear. Red Glover was a violent and intimidating leader. Snitching wasn't just frowned upon; it was a death sentence. Informants who talked to the FBI did so at extreme personal risk. The files show that when word got out that certain members, like Tommie Lee Jones, had been interviewed multiple times, Glover and others began to suspect he was an informant and openly talked about killing him. This terror kept mouths shut. Without a cooperating witness willing to take the stand, the informant's testimony was just intelligence; it wasn't courtroom evidence.

The second wall was the lack of direct physical evidence. This might sound strange, since they had the bomb fragments. But in 1967, forensics wasn't what it is today. They couldn't trace the dynamite back to where it was purchased.

They couldn't pull DNA from the bomb parts. They had pieces of wire, tape, and a timer, but without finding a matching stash of materials in a suspect's home, they couldn't make a definitive link. When Red Glover reportedly moved his stash of explosives, he likely broke the only potential physical chain of evidence the FBI had. All the evidence was circumstantial. It painted a very compelling picture, but there was no single "smoking gun"—no fingerprint on the dynamite, no eyewitness who saw Glover under the truck.

The third wall was the potential for local interference. The FBI files are careful, but the context is clear. The Silver Dollar Group didn't operate in a vacuum. One of Glover's boasts, according to an informant, was that the Concordia Parish Sheriff was the Klan's "main protector." In the 1960s, it wasn't uncommon for local law enforcement to be infiltrated by, or at least sympathetic to, the Klan. While the FBI was a federal agency, they were working in an environment that could be actively hostile to them. Records could disappear. Witnesses could be intimidated by local figures they feared more than federal agents. In fact, Wharlest Jackson Jr. has said he was later told the local police records of his father's case had been "lost or stolen." This is where the official investigation slammed to a halt. They had a powerful circumstantial case, but they couldn't pierce the Klan's code of silence to get a confession or a star witness. Their key informant was neutralised by a legal decision. Their physical evidence was inconclusive. And they were working in a hostile environment. They knew who did it. They just couldn't prove it in court.

Red Glover, the man who learned to handle explosives in the Navy and founded a terror group, died in 1984 at the age of 62. He was never arrested for any Klan-related violence. The other primary suspects, Elden Hester, Kenneth Head, and the rest, have also since passed away. But does that mean the case is truly unsolvable? The FBI concluded they couldn't determine "conclusively" who was responsible. But we're not in a courtroom. We're looking at the evidence laid out before us. Is there a piece of this puzzle that, if looked at differently, could have changed everything? Was there a question that was never asked?

The Theories.

Let's put it all on the table. Based on the complete case file, we can look at the most likely theories of what happened to Wharlest Jackson. As we go through these, I want you to act as a juror. Weigh the evidence and decide which theory you think makes the most sense.

Theory 1. The Sanctioned Klan Hit.

This is the theory favoured by the FBI and the one best supported by the evidence. In this scenario, the murder of Wharlest Jackson was a planned and executed operation by the core members of the Silver Dollar Group. The motive was twofold: punish Jackson for taking a "white man's job" and to send a terrifying message to the entire Black community to halt any push for equality. Under this theory, Red Glover, as the group's leader and explosives expert, was the architect.

He either built the bomb himself or supervised it. He used his job at the Armstrong plant to watch Jackson, identify his truck, and pick the right moment to plant the device. He didn't act alone. Other members, likely Elden Hester and maybe Kenneth Head, served as lookouts and helped get the materials. The sophistication of the bomb and the planning involved make a conspiracy far more likely than a lone wolf attack. The threats against Jackson at the plant were part of the psychological campaign leading up to the murder, setting up the "reason" for the hit. The wall of silence that followed was just Klan discipline.

The evidence for this is overwhelming: Glover's skills and leadership, the informant who said he and Hester got explosives, his prior involvement in the Metcalfe bombing, and the specific design of the bomb itself, which matched his known methods. This theory accounts for every piece of evidence in the file.

Theory 2. A Personal Grudge in Disguise.

Could there be another explanation? This theory suggests the murderer had a personal vendetta against Wharlest Jackson and used the tense racial climate as a cover. Maybe it was one of the two white men he was promoted over. Maybe it was a dispute totally unrelated to his job or his activism. The killer could have murdered Jackson, knowing full well that everyone would immediately blame the Klan. The problem with this theory is the complete lack of evidence. The FBI interviewed hundreds of people, and not a single witness or piece of evidence pointed to a personal motive outside of Jackson's promotion and his NAACP work.

Plus, this theory requires us to believe there was another expert bomb-maker in Natchez, unconnected to the Klan, who was also willing to commit murder over a personal issue. Given that the Silver Dollar Group was known for its bombings and its leader was a trained explosives expert, that seems like an unbelievable coincidence. Every road in this investigation leads back to the Klan.

Theory 3. The Lone Wolf.

This is a variation of Theory 1. Could Red Glover have acted totally on his own? Maybe, consumed by his own hatred and ego, he decided to take matters into his own hands without the official approval of his group. He had the skills, the access, and the motive. However, the evidence points away from this. The informant linking Elden Hester to getting the explosives suggests collaboration. The testimony about the Metcalfe bombing also involved a lookout. The sheer number of people at the plant who knew Jackson was being threatened implies this was a widely discussed topic among Klan members, not the secret obsession of one man. While Glover was undoubtedly the ringleader, the culture of the Silver Dollar Group was one of collaborative violence. It's more likely he was the proud leader of the operation rather than a solitary killer. So, where do you land? After reviewing the file, Theory 1 seems to be the only one that truly fits the facts. The case is "unsolved" in a legal sense, but the identity of the killers seems to be an open secret, written between the lines of every redacted report.

So, that's the file. We've walked through the life and death of Wharlest Jackson. We've seen Natchez in 1967, a place where a 17-cent raise could be a death sentence. We've analysed the bomb, we've looked at the suspects, and we've seen how a wall of silence and a single legal decision allowed killers to walk free. The FBI closed the case because the primary suspects are dead, and they could never get a prosecutable confession. But looking back at the entire file, what was the real sticking point? For me, it remains the denial of immunity for the key informant. That one decision may have been the moment the case was lost forever. What was the sticking point for you? Was it a piece of evidence that felt underdeveloped? A witness who you think knew more than they were letting on? The point of this wasn't just to retell a tragic story. It was to show that these cold cases are not empty. They're filled with names, evidence, and leads. They're a puzzle waiting for a fresh set of eyes. Your eyes. Now, I want you to go to your notes. And put a complete breakdown of what you think happened. Name your suspect or suspects. Explain your reasoning based on the evidence we've discussed. Point out the single piece of evidence that convinced you. Read what other people are saying. Let's see if we can solve this together.

The Unsolved Case – Zodiac Killer

For over fifty years, one of America's greatest unsolved mysteries has been the identity of the Zodiac Killer. He stalked Northern California, boasted of killing as many as 37 people, and then seemed to vanish, leaving behind a legacy of fear and a string of taunting puzzles. But what if the key to cracking this whole case has been hiding in plain sight? The Zodiac did something almost no other serial killer has: he left a mountain of clues. Not just for the police, but for the public. For us. He sent newspapers bizarre letters, complex cyphers, and clues to his crimes. Today, much of that material, along with police reports and witness statements, is out there for the world to see. So today, you're not just reading a book. You're a detective. Together, we're going to open the official case file. We'll sift through the evidence, walk through the crime scenes, and analyse the killer's own words. This isn't just a story; it's an active investigation. And we're going to see if a fresh pair of eyes—your eyes—can find something everyone else has missed.

The First Blood - The Confirmed Attacks.

Our investigation starts on a cold, dark night, just five days before Christmas, December 20th, 1968. We're on a remote, gravel turnout on Lake Herman Road in unincorporated Solano County, California—a quiet, lonely spot known to locals as a lover's lane. High school students David Faraday, 17, and Betty Lou Jensen, 16, were on their first date, parked in David's Rambler. Around 11:00 PM, another car pulled up. A man got out, holding a .22 calibre pistol.

The exact sequence of events is debated, pieced together from the scene. The killer may have first shot out the car's window to force them out. David Faraday was shot once in the head as he exited the car. Betty Lou Jensen ran for her life, but she didn't get far. The killer shot her five times in the back, and she was found nearly 30 feet from the vehicle.

Let's pause here. This wasn't a robbery; nothing was stolen. It wasn't a typical crime of passion; the victims seem to have been chosen at random. The attack was brutal and efficient. The location—was it pre-selected? Did the killer know he'd find someone there? The Solano County Sheriff's Department had a vicious double homicide on their hands and almost nothing to go on. For seven long months, the case went cold.

Then, the silence was broken on the night of the Fourth of July, 1969. Just a few miles away, at Blue Rock Springs Park in Vallejo, another young couple was in their car. Darlene Ferrin, 22, and Michael Mageau, 19, were sitting in Darlene's Corvair when a car pulled up and blinded them with its headlights. The driver got out, walked toward them with a flashlight and a 9mm pistol.

Michael Mageau, the only one who would survive a direct Zodiac attack, later described the horror. The man walked up to the passenger-side window and, without a single word, opened fire. Both Darlene and Michael were hit multiple times. The attacker then turned and walked calmly back to his car. But it wasn't over. As Michael screamed in pain, the man returned and fired more shots into the car. Darlene Ferrin died. Michael Mageau, despite being shot in the face, neck, and chest, miraculously survived. He gave us our first description of the killer: a stocky, white male, about 5'8", with a large face.

Less than an hour later, the killer made his next move. At 12:40 AM, the Vallejo Police Department got a chilling phone call. A man's calm, monotone voice told the dispatcher, "I wish to report a murder... no, a double murder. If you will go one mile east on Columbus Parkway to a public park, you will find the kids in a brown car. They were shot with a 9mm Luger." Then, he dropped the bombshell that connected everything: "I also killed those kids last year. Goodbye." With that call, the senseless violence started to form a pattern. This wasn't a series of random acts; it was the work of one man. A man who wanted credit for his work. A man who was about to give himself a name. A few weeks later, on July 31st, 1969, three newspapers—the San Francisco Chronicle, the San Francisco Examiner, and the Vallejo Times-Herald—each received a handwritten letter. The letters contained details only the killer could know, proving they were real. And each one contained one-third of a 408-character cypher. The author demanded that the papers print his code on their front page, or he'd go on a killing spree. He signed off not with a name, but with a symbol: a circle with a cross through it. The mark of the Zodiac. The next attack would be his most terrifying. It was a bright, sunny afternoon, September 27, 1969. College students Bryan Hartnell and Cecelia Shepard were picnicking at Lake Berryessa in Napa County. They saw a man approaching from the trees. He was wearing a bizarre, black executioner's hood, with sunglasses worn over the eyeholes. On his chest was a bib with the Zodiac's cross-circle symbol. In his hands, he held a gun and a long, menacing knife.

He claimed to be an escaped convict who needed their car and money to get to Mexico. Bryan offered him the keys and their cash, but the man had other ideas. He had Cecelia tie Bryan up with pre-cut pieces of clothesline he brought with him. Then, he tied her up. When Bryan asked if the gun was even loaded, the man pulled out the clip to show him the bullets. They were completely at his mercy. Then, he told them he was going to have to stab them. And he did. He stabbed Bryan six times and Cecelia ten times. He then calmly walked over to Bryan's car and, with a marker, drew his symbol on the door. Beneath it, he wrote the dates of his attacks, adding at the end: "by knife."

An hour later, the Napa Police Department got a call. It was the same calm, emotionless voice. "I want to report a murder... no, a double murder. They are two miles north of Park Headquarters. They were in a white Volkswagen Karmann Ghia." He paused, then said, "I'm the one who did it."

Bryan Hartnell survived, but Cecelia Shepard died from her injuries two days later. The Zodiac was escalating. He was no longer just a creature of the night; he was performing in broad daylight. He had a costume, a persona. This tells us something huge about his psychology: he wasn't just killing; he was building a myth. His final confirmed murder was his most brazen. On October 11, 1969, right in San Francisco's wealthy Presidio Heights neighbourhood, the Zodiac hailed a cab driven by Paul Stine. He asked to be taken to the corner of Washington and Cherry, but when they got there, he shot Paul Stine once in the head.

What happened next was a moment of incredible luck for the killer and crushing frustration for the police. Three teenagers across the street saw the killer in the cab, leaning over Stine's body, and called the police. The dispatcher, in a critical error that's never been fully explained, broadcast that the suspect was a Black man. Responding officers Don Fouke and Eric Zelms saw a stocky white man walking calmly away from the scene. Because of the wrong description, they may have only briefly stopped him or just driven past. He pointed them down the street, and they drove on, looking for a suspect who didn't exist. They had just let the Zodiac walk away. Moments later, the corrected description came over the radio, and the officers realised their catastrophic mistake. A massive search followed, but the killer had vanished into the San Francisco night.

This crime, though, gave us our most valuable clues. The teenagers provided a detailed description, leading to the famous composite sketch of a white male, 35-45 years old, with short, reddish-blond hair and glasses. Even more important, when police searched the cab, they found the killer had taken Stine's wallet, his keys, and most chillingly, had torn a large piece from the back of Stine's blood-soaked shirt. Why? Two days later, we found out. A letter arrived at the San Francisco Chronicle. "This is the Zodiac speaking," it began. He mocked the police for talking to him and letting him go. And as proof, enclosed with the letter was a square of bloody cloth from Paul Stine's shirt.

The Words of a Killer - The Letters and Cyphers.

Now, we move from the crime scenes to the psychological battlefield. The Zodiac's letters are his signature. They're our direct line into his twisted mind.

The first three letters, from July 31, 1969, set the stage. Written in a messy, block print, they were full of spelling and grammar mistakes. Was he poorly educated, or was it a clever trick? Let's look at a quote: "I like killing people because it is so much fun. It is more fun than killing wild game in the forrest because man is the most dangerus anamal of all."

Notice "forrest" and "dangerus anamal." Experts have argued for decades: are these real mistakes or deliberate red herrings? An intelligent person trying to sound simple might do this. What do you think? It's a question that hangs over every single word he wrote.

These first letters also had that 408-character cypher. The Zodiac demanded it be printed, and the papers complied. The FBI's top cryptanalysts couldn't crack it. But the solution came from a Salinas high school teacher, Donald Harden, and his wife, Bettye. Working at their kitchen table, they did what the pros couldn't. This is a huge moment. It proves that a fresh perspective, an outsider's view, can be the key. The Hardens figured it was a substitution cypher where one letter could be replaced by multiple symbols. They made some educated guesses—like assuming the killer would start his message with "I"—and from there, the whole thing unravelled.

Here's the decoded message: "I LIKE KILLING PEOPLE BECAUSE IT IS SO MUCH FUN IT IS MORE FUN THAN KILLING WILD GAME IN THE FORREST BECAUSE MAN IS THE MOST DANGEROUS ANIMAL OF ALL TO KILL SOMETHING GIVES ME THE MOST THRILLING EXPERIENCE IT IS EVEN BETTER THAN GETTING YOUR ROCKS OFF WITH A GIRL THE BEST PART OF IT IS THAT WHEN I DIE I WILL BE REBORN IN PARADICE AND ALL THE PEOPLE I HAVE KILLED WILL BECOME MY SLAVES I WILL NOT GIVE YOU MY NAME BECAUSE YOU WILL TRY TO SLOW DOWN OR STOP MY COLLECTING OF SLAVES FOR MY AFTERLIFE EBEORIETEMETHHPITI."

Again, "paradice" and "experience." But the content is what's really terrifying. He's not doing this for money or revenge. His motive is "fun." And he lays out his bizarre belief system: his victims will be his slaves in the afterlife. This is our first real insight into his fantasy world. It's not just about killing; it's about control, power, and a self-made mythology where he's a god. The final 18 letters? Still gibberish. A puzzle inside a puzzle that's never been solved. A few days later, another letter arrived. It started with the now-infamous line, "This is the Zodiac speaking." He was branding himself. He was playing a game with the media and the police, and he was in complete control. As the months went on, the letters got more and more grandiose. He sent the one with the piece of Paul Stine's bloody shirt. He sent a Halloween card to reporter Paul Avery, threatening, "Peek-a-boo, you are doomed."

In another letter, he included a diagram for a "bus bomb" he claimed he'd use to blow up a school bus full of children. The threat caused mass panic. For weeks, police had to escort school buses around the Bay Area. The bomb never appeared, but the psychological terror was immense. The Zodiac proved he could hold entire communities hostage with just a pen and a stamp. He even showed a bizarre sense of humour. He sent a letter paraphrasing a song from Gilbert and Sullivan's opera, **The Mikado**, creating his own "little list" of people he wanted to punish. This suggests a cultural awareness that clashes with the simple spelling errors, deepening the contradiction of who this man was. Was he a brilliant madman or a lucky fool?

Every letter was a performance. He craved the spotlight. Most of these letters are public, and every misspelling, every weird phrase, is a potential clue.

The Usual Suspects - The Investigation Deepens.

The police had a sketch, handwriting samples, a partial bloody fingerprint from the cab, and a voice on the phone. But they didn't have a name. Over the years, police have looked at over 2,500 people. But one name has always stood out: Arthur Leigh Allen.

Allen was a former teacher fired for misconduct. The circumstantial evidence against him is staggering. A former friend, Don Cheney, told police that back in 1969, Allen had talked about hunting people, writing letters to the police, calling himself "Zodiac," and even attaching a flashlight to his gun. It was a bombshell testimony. The physical connections piled up, too. Allen wore a Zodiac brand watch with the cross-circle symbol. He lived in Vallejo, at the center of the crimes. He wore the same boot size as the prints found at Lake Berryessa. A search of his trailer turned up weapons and dissected animals in his freezer. Michael Mageau, years later, hesitantly picked Allen's photo out of a lineup. For the lead investigator, Dave Toschi, and author Robert Graysmith, Allen was the man. But now, let's look at the other side of the file—the evidence that clears him. First, the forensics. The partial, bloody fingerprint from Paul Stine's cab did not match Arthur Leigh Allen. A palm print from a letter didn't match. In the 2000s, investigators developed a partial DNA profile from the saliva on the letter stamps. They compared it to Allen's. It was not a match.

Let that sink in. The fingerprint and DNA evidence, two of our most powerful tools, point away from Allen. Multiple handwriting experts also concluded he didn't write the letters. Plus, the eyewitnesses from the Stine murder described a man much smaller than the large, heavy-set Allen.

So where does that leave us? We have a mountain of suspicious circumstances pointing at one man and a wall of hard science saying it can't be him. It's the central dilemma of the entire case. Of course, Allen wasn't the only suspect. There was Richard Gaikowski, a journalist whose work schedule seemed to align with the Zodiac's letters. There was Lawrence Kane (sometimes spelt Kaye), a career criminal whose sister-in-law believed he was stalking Darlene Ferrin before she was murdered. A French engineer has claimed to have solved a short cypher that spells out a version of Kane's name, but this hasn't been confirmed by officials.

More recently, a group of private investigators called "The Case Breakers" named a new suspect: Gary Francis Poste, a house painter who died in 2018. They point to scars on his forehead that match the sketch and claim to have DNA evidence. But so far, law enforcement has remained sceptical, and the FBI has not confirmed Poste is the Zodiac. The case remains open.

The Code Breakers - The Unsolved Cyphers and Modern Sleuths.

Let's go back to the cyphers. This is where the case becomes a global puzzle, and where citizen detectives have changed everything. In November 1969, the Zodiac mailed his masterpiece: a 340-character cypher. For 51 years, it was one of the most famous unsolved codes in the world.

It taunted everyone. Then, in December of 2020, the impossible happened. A team of three amateur sleuths—David Oranchak, a web designer from the US; Sam Blake, a mathematician from Australia; and Jarl Van Eycke, a computer programmer from Belgium—announced they had solved it.

This is the core of why we're here. Three private citizens, armed with passion and modern computers, did what the FBI couldn't for five decades. They used the same public images of the cipher that we can look at right now. They discovered the killer had written the message in a complex diagonal pattern, a trick designed to beat the codebreakers. And it worked, for a while.

Here's what the Z340 says: "I HOPE YOU ARE HAVING LOTS OF FUN IN TRYING TO CATCH ME THAT WASNT ME ON THE TV SHOW WHICH BRINGS UP A POINT ABOUT ME I AM NOT AFRAID OF THE GAS CHAMBER BECAUSE IT WILL SEND ME TO PARADICE ALL THE SOONER BECAUSE I NOW HAVE ENOUGH SLAVES TO WORK FOR ME WHERE EVERYONE ELSE HAS NOTHING WHEN THEY REACH PARADICE SO THEY ARE AFRAID OF DEATH I AM NOT AFRAID BECAUSE I KNOW THAT MY NEW LIFE IS LIFE WILL BE AN EASY ONE IN PARADICE DEATH"

It's more of the same chilling narcissism. He again misspells "paradise" as "paradice." He taunts the police. But for everyone who hoped it would contain his name, it was a massive disappointment. It offered no real clues to his identity.

But the act of solving it is the real story. It's a huge win for the true-crime community and proves that there are still secrets hiding in this case.

And the work isn't over. There are at least two unsolved cyphers left. They're shorter, which makes them much harder to solve. One, Z13, came with the line, "My name is..." followed by 13 symbols. Another, Z32, came with a map and a cryptic clue about "radians." They are still out there, waiting for the right person with the right idea.

We've walked through the crime scenes, read the killer's words, and looked at the suspects. The Zodiac case is a story of terror, but it's also a story of enduring mystery.

The key clues are all on the table. The bizarre hooded costume. The torn piece of a bloody shirt. The conflicting evidence for and against Arthur Leigh Allen. And the cyphers, a direct window into a mind obsessed with a fantasy of power.

Despite everything, the case remains officially open. New techniques like genetic genealogy offer a glimmer of hope, just like they did in the Golden State Killer case. But until that day, the investigation is carried on, not just by police, but by a global community of citizen detectives.

The Zodiac wanted to create a puzzle that would outlast him. He succeeded. But all puzzles have a solution. He made a mistake somewhere. A flaw in a cypher, a slip of the tongue in a letter, a clue left behind that no one has put together in the right way.

So now, the case file is yours. With all the evidence, what's the one detail that stands out to you? What's the one thread you would pull?

Keep an eye out for more Solve With Me Books.