

Big Trouble Study Guide

Big Trouble by Dave Barry

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Plot Summary

Big Trouble by Dave Barry is a satirical misadventure set at the end of the twentieth century in Miami, Florida. The story opens with a vagrant who recently arrived in the city named Puggy. Puggy has experienced nothing but luck since his arrival in the city, having been hired on as a helper at a local bar called the Jolly Jackal for managing to help the owners throw out two petty criminals, Snake Dupree and Eddie Leadbetter. At nights, Puggy sleeps in the tree on the property of an Arthur Herk, who lives with his wife Anna and stepdaughter Jenny. Arthur is very unkind to Anna, but she stays with him for fear of what he will do to her and her daughter if she tries to leave. Arthur is also a middleman for weapons sales between the same bar that Puggy works at and his company, Penultimate.

Eliot Arnold is a former news reporter, now struggling in the advertising business. He is divorced, but stays in Miami so that he can stay close to his son, Matt, who has a crush on Jenny Herk. He is given the task of "killing" Jenny, which means squirting her with a squirtgun, and decides to break into her house one night in order to do it. Unfortunately for Matt, Arthur Herk has been embezzling from his company lately, and they send two hitmen, Leonard Ferroni and Henry Desalvo, to kill Arthur Herk at the exact time Matt shows up with his friend Andrew to play his prank. Matt rushes in and causes the hitmen to miss Arthur. Police Officer Monica Ramirez shows up to investigate.

The next day, Matt again tries to "kill" Jenny, but is interrupted by Jack Pendrick, who mistakes the prank for an actual crime. Matt, Jenny and Andrew escape. Andrew is picked up by Monica, who tells her that Matt and Jenny have probably gone back to the Herk residence. Meanwhile, Snake and Eddie decide to rob the Jolly Jackal at the exact same time Arthur Herk has arrived to purchase a bomb he intends to use to get rid of his problem with Penultimate. Snake takes him and Puggy back to the house. When Monica and the others arrive, he takes them hostage then travels with Eddie, Jenny, and Puggy to the airport, which is in complete chaos because of a snake that has gotten loose in the terminal. No law enforcement is available to help the characters stop Snake as he books a flight for himself, Eddie, and his captives, headed towards the Bahamas.

Snake manages to board the plane with a gun and the bomb, which is a nuclear device, but Monica, Eliot, Matt, and Anna have followed him. Matt and Monica make it on the plane just before takeoff and unsuccessfully try to stop Snake, who is ultimately thwarted by his companion Eddie, who doesn't like what Snake is doing. Eddie throws the bomb off of the plane and Snake falls with it to try to save it. The bomb detonates a few seconds later, harming no one.



Chapters 1-3

Chapters 1-3 Summary

Big Trouble, by Dave Barry, is a hilarious story of coincidence, crime, and new relationships. The novel carefully weaves encounters amongst the major characters in a humorous fashion, often relying on chance encounters and absurd situations to advance the story. In Chapter One, the reader first encounters Puggy, a homeless vagrant who winds up in Miami and enjoys it greatly, owing to a series of lucky circumstances, beginning with getting paid to participate in voting around the county. He encounters Snake and Eddie in the Jolly Jackal, who steal ten dollars from him and attack him when he tries to get it back. The bartender throws Eddie and Snake out, but Puggy is allowed to stay and drink free of charge after he saves the bartender from getting hurt by Snake. The owner gives him a job there as a result, and Puggy is allowed to drink for free.

Eliot Arnold runs an advertising and public relations business. He is a former a journalist, but was fired when he became frustrated with the editor and kicked his foot through a computer screen. His ex-wife and son, Matt, both still live in Miami, and he became an advertising consultant to stay close to Matt. His business is suffering, however, and he is engaged in an argument over the contents of his latest ad campaign with a particularly frustrating client who wants to run a deeply offensive ad campaign for Hammerhead beer. During the argument, his son Matt calls and asks to borrow the car to "kill" a girl named Jenny. Eliot distractedly approves the use of his car.

Nina is a maid for Arthur and Anna Herk. Arthur has made unwanted advances towards her, and she dislikes the man very much, but chooses to stay because she wants to save up enough money to become a U.S. citizen and bring her family to the country. Also, she likes Anna very much, and worries because Arthur is very abusive towards her. She locks the door to the bathroom and waits for Arthur to leave her alone. He eventually does so, but first ruins her bedsheets by spilling red wine all over them. Unbeknownst to her, Puggy sleeps in a tree besides Nina's room and enjoys the music that she plays.

Eliot's son Matt shows up at the Herk residence that same night, because Jenny is Anna's daughter and Arthur's stepdaughter. He is with his friend Andrew, and must squirt Jenny with a squirt gun with as few witnesses as possible. This is a game organized by high-school students. They decide to enter through the backyard and wait for a good opportunity to rush inside the house. Puggy sees them from his tree as they rush past him, but they are not the first group of people to run towards the house with guns that night. Several moments ago, two other men had come past his tree with real guns.

In Chapter Two, Anna and Arthur's dog Roger, a large and friendly but unintelligent animal, growls at a toad who sits on his food plate and has been keeping him from



eating it. Roger has tried to eat the toad before, but the toad has a powerful poison that it had squirted at Roger. This had made him very sick, so he doesn't attack the toad anymore. Instead, he merely growls at it constantly. He sees the two armed men Puggy had seen in the previous chapter arrive at the house, but since they have no food he goes back to his bowl and growls at the toad.

Anna and Jenny are inside watching TV. Arthur enters the living room and threatens to hit Anna unless the channel is changed. Henry and Leonard are the two men outside. They are waiting for Anna and Jenny to leave the room before they kill Arthur. They have been sent here by Arthur's company, Penultimate Inc., because Arthur has been stealing money from the bribes and weapons purchases he makes for them. Andrew and Matt are in the yard as well. Matt gets ready to rush inside the house and squirt Jenny, who they think is coming to the back door to let the dog in. Matt runs toward the door as Anna opens it. Arthur sees Matt and, thinking the squirtgun is real, ducks just as Henry takes his shot, which misses and shatters the TV. Arthur rushes towards Nina's room and hides inside. Thinking she is in danger from Arthur Herk, Nina escapes by climbing out the window. Leonard and Henry run towards the wall to make their own escape, and Leonard trips over Nina as they collide. Henry finds them, but Puggy jumps down from his tree onto him and takes Henry's rifle. He gets Leonard to his feet and the two flee.

In Chapter Three, Anna and Jenny beat up Matt, whom they think is a serious threat. Officers Monica Ramirez and Walter Kramitz respond to an emergency call placed by a neighbor, and Monica breaks up the fight. Matt explains that he was only trying to squirt Jenny, despite Arthur's constant interruptions and threats. Eliot shows up, worried about Matt. Kramitz discovers the bullet hole in the TV and wall, and Monica realizes it was shot from outside the house. Puggy brings Nina back to consciousness. He explains what happened to her, and then Nina is called back to the house. Detective Henry Baker arrives and tries to begin an investigation, but Arthur is uncooperative and so he gives up in frustration. Anna apologizes to Eliot for her husband as Arthur makes a call to someone for a missile.

Chapters 1-3 Analysis

The opening chapter introduces the reader to each of the major characters in the novel. Serious matters are handled with extraordinary humor. Divorce, corruption, attempted murder, and romance are all carefully woven together. Puggy, the first character introduced, is a vagrant who manages to find the best life he's ever known in Miami, and the city itself is depicted as just the sort of place where someone like him could do well. Despite his history, he manages to find not only employment, but also to save the life of a beautiful woman who adores him instantly. Through Puggy, the characters Snake and Eddie contrast sharply. Both are just as homeless as Puggy, but they are petty criminals, where Puggy is harmless. The reader can expect to see more of Snake and Eddie because attention is drawn to them after the incident at the Jolly Jackal, when Puggy decides to move trees because he sees them in the area. Roger, although he is



just a dog, makes an important appearance in this chapter, and the author takes great care to establish his longstanding feud with the frog.

Eliot is also introduced to a romantic interest in Anna Herk, who displays interest in him and expresses dislike for her husband after the shooting. Unlike Puggy, Eliot has suffered from a series of bad decisions and is struggling to make ends meet, but Anna shows him compassion and the two connect just as immediately as Puggy and Nina. Arthur is an awful man, who makes no attempt to save his family during the shooting. This establishes Arthur as a character for which the reader should have no sympathy.



Chapters 4-6

Chapters 4-6 Summary

Chapter Four begins with Eliot back in his office arguing with the same Hammerhead client as the day before. He is trying to get the client to pay the fee, and is shortchanged a lot of money. Anna calls him to see if he left his glasses at her house, which he did. This gives them an excuse to meet. They agree to meet for lunch at the Taurus that afternoon.

Meanwhile, Henry and Leonard meet with Luis Rojas, a representative from Penultimate, to discuss the failed assassination of Arthur Herk. They agree to investigate the situation and try to kill Arthur again for more money. Henry stops mid-conversation with Luis to tell a group of lawyers to put out their cigars. They refuse, and when one of the lawyers blows smoke in his face, Henry grabs him and puts his cigar out in his drink. He does this to the rest of the group, then continues his lunch.

Matt explains the events of the night before to the student who assigned him to kill Jenny, a boy named Evan Hanratty. He is also forced to tell Evan that Jenny and her mother beat him up. Jenny finds him and apologizes for everything, and lets Matt know she'll be at CocoWalk later that evening so he can "kill" her. Meanwhile, Anna has met Eliot for lunch. She complains that the police aren't trying very hard to find the shooter from last night. Eliot tells her about his latest advertising client, and his divorce. Anna sympathizes with the divorce. She responds by telling him about her first marriage. The two greatly enjoy lunch together, and Eliot finds himself hoping that they will see each other again, despite the fact that Anna is still married. At the end of their lunch, they are approached by Eddie and Snake, who are pretending to be Vietnam veterans. Snake asks them for money, but Eliot tells them to go away. Snake tells Eddie that he wants to rob the Jolly Jackal where Puggy works, to get back at him for hurting his foot when Snake attacked him earlier.

In Chapter Five, Arthur goes to the Jolly Jackal with a large sum of money in order to buy a missile. He often serves as a middleman for Penultimate when they purchase weapons. The Jackal is run by two men called John and Leo, who are actually Russian arms dealers. Arthur knows Penultimate is behind the shooting, and wants the missile in order to stop them from trying again. He means to do this by going to the authorities and uncovering Penultimate's corruption with the missile, but that is as far as he's thought the situation through. Leo and John tell him that a missile would be difficult to get, but offer him a suitcase bomb instead. Arthur takes the bomb and the owners make Puggy carry it out to the car.

Nearby, Matt and Andrew meet Jenny at CocoWalk. Matt carries a squirt gun that looks like a pistol. Henry and Leonard have followed Arthur to the Jackal and see Eddie and Snake arrive not long after Arthur goes inside.



In Chapter Six, Matt has taken Jenny, along with Andrew, across the street to an empty parking lot, so that he can squirt Jenny without other witnesses. They have been followed by Jack Pendick, a man who wants to be a law enforcer but isn't smart enough to be one, and as a result, carries a gun in hopes of using it in defense someday. When Matt points the squirt gun at Jenny, Jack fires the real gun and starts shouting at them all to "FREEZE." Jack is drunk, however, and he trips, dropping his weapon. Andrew grabs the gun and runs away. Matt and Jenny run in a different direction, so that they are separated from Andrew.

Snake and Eddie run into Leo as he exits the Jolly Jackal, and Leo runs into Puggy. Puggy drops the bomb on Arthur's toe, and Eddie collides with Snake. Snake brings everyone inside and begins to rob the cash register, but discovers it has only two dollars in it. John offers them his wallet, which contains eighteen dollars. Snake notices that Arthur is very well-dressed, then takes his car keys and the bomb. He believes Arthur is a drug dealer, and wants to go to his house and rob it. He also believes that the briefcase holds jewels or drugs, and has no idea that it contains an explosive device, even though Arthur insists Snake doesn't want the briefcase.

Eliot is at home when Anna calls, asking after Jenny. Jenny and Matt have not made it back to the Herk residence, and they have lost track of Andrew in their escape. When they get back to the car, Jenny says she wants to call her mom as soon as possible. Meanwhile, back at the Jolly Jackal, Henry and Leonard wait for the robbery to be over. Arthur comes out of the building with a limp, followed by Puggy, whom Henry recognizes as the man that jumped on him the night before. Snake and Eddie come out too, and the two assassins follow them all to Arthur's house.

Chapters 4-6 Analysis

Eliot's life continues to challenge him, but he reacts to his irritating client very differently from the day before, because now he has met Anna, and because he is very sleep deprived from the night before. Anna reinforces the idea that she hates Arthur by complaining about him at length to Eliot. The two continue to connect, and this event serves as something good in the otherwise difficult lives of both characters. Matt is equally excited for the opportunity to see Jenny again, so much so that he fails to realize that the squirt gun he brings resembles a real firearm. His supposedly harmless pranks constantly place his friends and those around him in danger, but if Matt is simply absentminded because of his newfound attraction to Jenny, the man who attacks them is guilty of a stupidity that one typically encounters through the novel. The characters encounter one another often, as represented by Eliot and Anna's encounter with Snake and Eddie. Neither group knows the other yet, but it is even more clear from this encounter that the two thugs will assume greater significance in the novel.

The reader is also given much more information about the Jolly Jackal and its owners. While it's originally suspected that they are not simply owners of the bar, the fact that they are Russian arms dealers becomes significant and reveals their relationship with both Penultimate and Arthur Herk. Arthur, Snake, and Eddie are all portrayed as villains,



and none of them are very intelligent. Leonard and Henry are almost a part of this group, but the fact that they are sent to kill a character that has already been established as bad alters their role in the story somewhat. The novel mocks Eddie and Snake's ambitions, making fun of the fact that they want to move up in the world by robbing a bar, and Henry and Leonard serve as solid examples for the types of characters actually suited for organized crime.



Chapters 7-9

Chapters 7-9 Summary

In Chapter Seven, Monica and her partner Walter are on patrol when they drive past Andrew, who is running with the gun he took from Jack Pendrick. They stop him, and Walter wants to handcuff him, but Monica realizes he's not a threat. Andrew explains that he, Matt, and Jenny were playing the "kill" game when a real shooter came after them with a gun. Jack Pendrick appears shortly thereafter, and begins telling his version of the story before he realizes he might get himself into trouble. Detective Baker shows up and investigates further. He thinks it's too much of a coincidence that real shooters have appeared both times Matt has tried to "kill" Jenny with a squirt gun, but Monica reminds him that they are in Miami, which is a crazy city besides. Andrew thinks that Jenny and Matt have gone back to the Herk residence, and Monica leaves with Walter to investigate. At the house, Matt and Jenny have already arrived with Arthur and Puggy. Eliot is on his way over because of a call from his son, and he is again concerned for Matt's safety. His cab driver is very irritating, and keeps moving very slowly and looking for the wrong street.

In Chapter Eight, FBI agents Greer and Seitz go to the Jolly Jackal in search of the briefcase bomb. John shows them into the back room. The weapons are kept back there, and they look for the bomb inside. Henry and Leonard have followed Snake, Eddie, Arthur, and Puggy back to the Herk residence. They watch the group go inside, where Snake approaches Jenny to touch her, but Matt suddenly holds up the squirt gun, pretending it's real. This works briefly, until Eddie trips over an umbrella stand which startles Matt and causes him to squirt Snake.

The FBI agents determine the briefcase bomb isn't at the Jackal anymore. After Seitz shoots John in the foot, he agrees to tell them who has the suitcase.

Eddie and Leonard enter the backyard, planning to take another shot at Arthur. This time Roger greets them by happily colliding with Leonard. Inside, Snake forces Eddie to start tying people up, even though Eddie is beginning to dislike being in this situation. Walter and Monica arrive with Andrew, and Snake tells Anna to make them go away. Anna opens the door slightly, and Monica pushes it open because she sees Snake threatening her with a gun. Snake brings her and Walter inside, and makes Eddie tie them up too. After Monica and Walter are bound, Snake leaves with Eddie, putting Puggy in the trunk of the police car and forcing Jenny to come with them in the backseat. This terrifies Eddie, who by now wants nothing to do with this situation, but he does nothing, and he is scared of Snake because he has a gun. Eliot arrives just in time to see their vehicle screech away towards the airport.

In Chapter Nine, Nina comes out of her room and unties everyone, except for Walter and Arthur, who are handcuffed to an entertainment center. Monica leaves with Matt and Anna, who insist on coming along. They run into Eliot on their way out the door, Nina



joins them, and they all hurry in Eliot's car towards the airport, after Snake. Henry shoots at Arthur just as Walter crashes the entertainment center to which they are handcuffed through the backyard's sliding glass door. Roger collides with Henry just as he takes his shot, which causes him to miss Arthur. However, Henry and Leonard are very eager to leave Miami, so they decide that they got Arthur and leave. Arthur, having been thrown out of the house by the entertainment center, lands face down in Roger's food bowl and the toad squirts him with a powerful and poisonous hallucinogen.

Chapters 7-9 Analysis

This is the section leading up to the climax of the novel. Each of the major characters have crossed paths with one another by now, and these chapters thrust the various protagonists together towards the airport in hopes of overcoming Eddie and Snake. Eddie, however, is suffering from an attack of conscience, and the reader is led to believe this will become a bigger issue, since Snake's ambition and insanity are getting out of control rapidly. Eddie is deeply disturbed by Snake's ill-founded ambitions to become a drug lord. In previous sections, Snake seemed like the more intelligent of the two, but Eddie seems to realize they can't handle this situation, and Snake seems oblivious to that fact, perhaps because his desire for a better life has got the better of him. He has unknowingly transformed from a half-witted thug into a very dangerous criminal, and his attempts to make a better way for himself in life are no longer humorous, as evidenced by his treatment of Anna and Jenny in the Herk residence. His poor decision-making was brought about by the discovery of the briefcase, which he believes to be filled with drugs, despite its weight. Snake is possessed by a satirically depicted motive to move up in the world and become a kingpin. He has been able to succeed thus far because much of the law enforcement and indeed the city of Miami at large has been portrayed as similarly crazy or incompetent. Officer Walter is the perfect example of this incompetence, because he shows more interest in showing off his biceps than enforcing the law, and Jack Pendrick's hopelessly misguided attempts at vigilantism.

Eliot, Monica, and Anna seem to be the only characters in the novel possessed of intelligence, especially Monica, whose quick thinking has driven the protagonists towards the climax. However, she lacks any clear romantic interest. At this point in the novel, Eliot's attraction to Anna seems ready to drive him to acts of heroism, but she seems to like him enough without it.



Chapters 10-12

Chapters 10-12 Summary

In Chapter Ten, Greer and Seitz meet detective Baker outside the Herk residence, and they tell him they are looking for a suitcase with a nuclear bomb inside of it. The other characters continue hastily towards the airport, and Monica drives the car against oncoming traffic. Walter tries to convince Arthur to help him move the entertainment center to the front of the house, but Arthur is still poisoned by the frog, and believes that Roger is Elizabeth Dole and has come to eat his soul. The FBI tell Baker that they don't want to tell anyone about the nuclear bomb because they know it would cause complete panic in the already crazy city of Miami.

In Chapter Eleven, Snake, Eddie, and the captives arrive at the highly chaotic Miami International Airport. Snake finds a sign advertising flights to the Bahamas, and bribes the clerk, a disgruntled employee of the airline named Sheila, for four tickets with the names "John Smith." Monica and her group arrive at the airport. They find the police cruiser that Snake stole, and head into the airport to look for the captives before Snake and Eddie are able to board a plane. Security is so distracted inside that Snake manages to sneak his gun through customs. He tells security that the suitcase is a portable garbage disposal. She asks him to turn it on, which he does, and unintentionally activates the bomb. The group then boards the plane, but Puggy manages to escape at the last second and runs back towards the terminal. Monica tries to seek help from other police officers, but they are dealing with a large python that has gotten loose in the terminal. She decides that she, Eliot, Anna, and Matt should split up to try to find Snake and the others.

In Chapter Twelve, Nina spots Puggy as he comes back into the airport from the tarmac. They are joined by Eliot and Anna as Matt runs back to find Monica and tell her that they know where Snake is. Greer, Seitz, and Baker struggle to make their way through the airport, which has become very difficult since the commotion involving the python has drawn a large crowd. Monica tries to get past security with Puggy, but the guard insists on scanning Puggy. Snake loses patience with pre-flight procedures and shouts at the pilot to start the plane, threatening him with his gun. Eddie spots Monica and Puggy come onto the tarmac. Snake shoots at Monica and she sends everyone else back inside the terminal to do whatever they can to get help.

Greer approaches the python situation, thinking it involves the briefcase bomb. He arrives just as Henry shoots and kills the snake, which has wrapped itself around Leonard. Henry says hello to agent Greer. The two apparently know each other from Greer's time in the organized crime division of the FBI.

Monica sprints to catch the plane, and nearly collapses from exhaustion but is pushed onto the plane by Matt, who has come running after her. She pulls Matt aboard just as Eliot gets someone to call 911 for help, but the dispatcher believes they are talking



about the incident with the python, and sends no additional help. Greer talks to the head of airport police, who tells him about the plane Snake, Eddie, and Jenny are on. They are too late to stop the plane, though, because it has just taken off.

Chapters 10-12 Analysis

The majority of this section of the novel takes place inside Miami International Airport, which serves to represent a very concentrated version of the general craziness in the city of Miami. The fact that police are unable to respond to the suitcase threat because of a python on the loose serves to reinforce the fact that Snake is operating almost entirely on blind luck, which he has mistaken to mean that becoming a master criminal is very simple. He is completely unaware that the briefcase is a bomb, despite the fact that he activated its timer when he opened it for security. He also makes no mention and doesn't seem to consider what will happen to him when he lands in the Bahamas, but Greer's assurances that no plane will take off are in error, because Snake is crazy and impatient enough to threaten the pilot, co-pilot, and other passengers with the gun when he sees Monica and the others coming out of the terminal. Eddie understands their situation much better and is essentially just another hostage at this point, and he knows that Snake is in way over his head. It still remains to be seen at this point whether or not he will stand up to Snake, and so Monica is still the clearest and strongest protagonist in the story. Her intelligence and determination to stop the plane have brought everyone to the airport, but Matt's last-minute dash towards the plane saves the day, and this novel is still clearly about teamwork amongst the protagonists.



Chapters 13-Epilogue

Chapters 13-Epilogue Summary

In Chapter Thirteen, Eliot is stopped in the airport by three muscular young men who have come because the security staff has been shouting for security. Anna pounces on them and topples them over. Puggy, who has lately had a lot of experience lifting heavy things, throws the men off Eliot and Anna. The group is seen by Greer and Seitz. They try to explain to the FBI agents what has happened to Jenny, but Greer and Seitz are only interested in the briefcase bomb, which Puggy says he has seen, and that it was turned on when security checked the device. Despite the fact that Jenny is on the plane, Greer and Seitz are very concerned that the bomb is going to go off soon, and they will have no choice but to shoot the plane down as it passes over a deep gulf.

On the plane, Snake makes his way toward the back of the plane, where Monica tries to pounce on him from where she's been hiding. Snake shoots her and puts a hole through one of the windows on the plane. Matt tries to get the weapon from him next, but is knocked over. Eddie screams at Snake because he has just shot a police officer, but Snake shoots him in the leg. Then Snake is attacked by Jenny, and Eddie grabs the suitcase and pushes it off of the plane. Snake dives to catch it, but is pulled off the plane by its weight and he falls. The pilots radio back to airport security, who relay the news to Greer. Greer calls off the fighter jets that have been tailing the plane, getting ready to shoot it down.

In Chapter Fourteen, the entire story is covered by the papers the next day, including the bizarre incidents involving Jack Pendrick and the situation involving the Python at Miami International Airport. No mention of the nuclear weapon is made, however, and instead it was considered to be a strange undersea earthquake, which caused a lot of damage along the coastline, but no deaths. Monica is in critical condition from her injuries, but expected to recover. Eddie is listed as a passenger on the plane in the newspaper, but not considered a suspect.

The novel concludes with the Epilogue. Eddie is questioned by the FBI but they decide not to charge him with anything and he is released. Henry is arrested for weapons-related charges for shooting the Python, but during the trial he brings a live python into the room which gets loose and causes a panic. The jury finds him not guilty as a result. Arthur tries to tell authorities about the weapons and corruption conspiracy originating from Penultimate, Inc., but no one believes the story and he dies mysteriously on a fishing trip several months later, even though no one can ever remember him going fishing. John and Leo are deported back to Moscow, where they run a very successful Starbucks. Walter quits the force to become an exotic dancer. Jack Pendrick is charged with crimes and sentenced to a year in prison, but is released early for good behavior and becomes a security guard afterwards. Monica recovers from her injuries and marries Detective Baker, who tells her about the nuclear bomb in the suitcase. Eliot's debt increases until he's approached by a national advertising agency that loved his ad



for Hammerhead beer. They ask him to do a similar campaign for them, and he marries Anna very quickly after she divorces Arthur. They live in the house together with Nina and Puggy. Jenny and Matt try to date for a while, but it becomes weird since their parents are married, and instead they become friends.

Chapters 13-Epilogue Analysis

The conclusion of the novel manages to set everything right, sometimes through misfortune and sheer luck, but the reader should not be surprised about this by now. The most notable case is Eliot, who finally gets a major break from the national advertising agency, even then he is only hired by them because they think his work on Hammerhead beer was rude enough to be incredibly successful. John and Leo might be opening up a Starbucks in Moscow, but there is every reason to believe it is just another front for a weapons smuggling business. Monica, despite lacking a romantic interest throughout the novel, draws the attention of Detective Baker, who despite being somewhat removed from the main action of the novel, is still depicted as intelligent. Each of the characters, aside from Snake, about whom nobody ever worries after he falls out of the plane, comes away from the story with something better than what they had, typically in terms of a new relationship and financial status. Even the owner of the python that was killed in the airport sues security for several million dollars and wins.



Characters

Eliot

Eliot is a former journalist who once had aspirations of exposing corruption in government and corporate America, but is now struggling after his divorce and having lost his job at the Miami Herald. He remains in Miami and runs an ad agency that is failing, but stays to be close to his son Matt, whom he sees often and remains a very important part of his life. He begins the novel overworked and underpaid, and becomes interested in Anna when he meets her at the Herk residence. He feels slightly guilty in his interest, because she is still married, but still agrees to meet her for lunch the next day. Although he could be described as frustrated by his current situation, he does the best he can despite the difficulties in trying to get his clients to pay him. He is scolded by his ex-wife when he lets their son Matt borrow the car to go to Jenny's house, which he only does because he is completely overworked and totally distracted. His desire to keep Matt safe and help Anna fuel his participation in the search for Snake and the others at the airport, and although he is not directly rewarded for his efforts there, he is hired on by a very large advertising firm as a result of an ad campaign he hated being a part of. He also marries Anna very quickly after her divorce from Arthur, and is in a much better situation by the end of the novel.

Anna

Anna is Jenny's mother and Arthur's wife. She is Eliot's age, and very attractive. This is her second marriage, and it is not a pleasant one, but she stays out of fear of what Arthur will do to her and Jenny should she try to leave the marriage. Arthur is often abusive towards her. She is good friends with Nina, and cares very deeply for her daughter. She expresses interest in Eliot when they meet at her house, and uses the fact that Eliot forgot his glasses there to meet him for lunch the next day. When they do meet, she confides in him that she does not like her present marriage, and sympathizes with Eliot over his recent divorce. She is fiercely protective of Jenny, but by no means overbearing or controlling, and is completely disgusted with Arthur when he gladly offers Jenny over to Snake in exchange for being left alone. Her protectiveness leads her to rush with Monica and the others to the airport when her daughter is taken hostage by Snake, and she does everything possible to stop them from leaving Miami International Airport. She also works out regularly, and is very strong. Matt is beaten up by her the night he enters their home uninvited, and she nearly fights off three strong men at the airport when they attack Eliot. She finally divorces Arthur by the end of the novel, and is allowed to keep his house. She quickly marries Eliot afterwards and lives with him, Matt, Jenny, Puggy, and Nina in the same house.



Snake

Snake is a petty criminal who lives in an abandoned boat and bullies people for handouts. He attacks Puggy after stealing Puggy's money, and develops a grudge for the smaller man afterwards. This leads him to try to rob the Jolly Jackal at gunpoint, but he discovers Arthur upon his arrival there and decides to try and become a serious criminal as a result. Snake is suddenly driven by a desire to make it big time, but he is mentally unstable and not very intelligent, and this leads him to make very bad decisions. He gets away with these decisions for quite some time because much of the city is distracted by its own general craziness, and manages to make it all the way onto a plane to the Bahamas with a gun and the briefcase, which he believes carries drugs or jewels, even though he has activated the bomb's timer at the security checkpoint. Once inside the plane, he goes as far as to threaten the pilots with the gun until they initiate takeoff, and he shoots Monica when she tries to take the gun from him. When Eddie throws the briefcase out of the plane, Snake jumps after it, determined to hold on to his treasure. He dies as a direct result, and no one is the worse for his loss. By the end of the novel, not even his best friend Eddie can go along with his insane scheme. Snake represents the worst kind of insanity that Miami has to offer, and is thrust into his deeply criminal acts by a series of bizarre circumstances.

Monica

Monica is a capable police officer, which is very rare in the city of Miami. She does most of the important detective work involving the first shooting, although there is very little detective work to be done since the situation is very confusing and Arthur is fairly belligerent throughout the brief investigation. She fends off the romantic advances of her partner Walter, because he is married and not very intelligent besides. She is the one who figures out where Snake is headed, and drives Eliot's car when they travel to the airport in order to try to stop him. She also manages to make it on board the plane with Matt's help. She is critically wounded in the struggle on the plane with Snake, but manages to survive, and marries Detective Baker afterwards. She is constantly thwarted in her attempts at law enforcement by incompetence of those surrounding her, including the airport security at Miami International Airport and her partner Walter, who she decides to leave handcuffed at the Herk residence instead of freeing. She regrets doing so later, but realizes she had no choice in doing so. She is also very quick at identifying who is and isn't a threat, as she does with Matt at the Herk residence, his friend Andrew whom she encounters on patrol the next day, and Snake, whom she spots holding a gun to Anna when she comes to the door.

Matt

Matt is Eliot's son, who is interested in Jenny, and tries to play a prank on her that is called "killing," a game which involves squirting someone with a squirt gun in the presence of just one witness. His first attempt is completely thwarted by a series of bizarre coincidences, and he is seriously beaten by both Anna and Jenny, who quickly



apologize for their actions when they realize the gun he was carrying was not real, and that he was only playing a game. He is also friends with Andrew, who has been assigned to witness his "killing" of Jenny. He has something of a crush on Jenny, and she returns the feelings by allowing him to "kill" her the next day. This attempt is again thwarted by a person who actually carries a firearm and mistakes the game for an actual crime. He escapes with Jenny and returns with Monica and Walter to the Herk residence, which is visited by Snake and Eddie shortly thereafter. He comes with Monica to the airport and plays an important role when it comes time to rush towards the plane, pushing Monica on board and hiding in back of the plane with her. He is described as intelligent, but having nothing to do with academic activities. He dates Jenny briefly after the incident on the plane, but the two decide to become friends, since they are technically step-siblings after their parents get married.

Jenny

Jenny is Anna's daughter and Arthur's stepdaughter. She hates Arthur because of the way he treats her mother. She is described as attractive, and is in a few of the same classes as Matt at their high school. She decides she has a crush on Matt after he breaks into her house and tries to squirt her, which is all the more comical because, alongside her mom, she beats him up during the incident. She makes no attempt to hide the fact that she finds Matt attractive in front of Matt's friends, which makes Matt nervous and causes his friends to ridicule him somewhat. Later that day, after they escape Jack, she is taken captive by Snake, and boards the plane with him as a hostage, but attacks him after Monica and Matt fail to take the gun away from him. This gives Eddie the opportunity to throw the briefcase off of the plane. She dates Matt briefly afterwards, but since their parents wind up getting married they decide to stop dating and just become friends, and remain so for the rest of their lives. Jenny is portrayed as attractive, but somewhat offbeat and quirky, since Matt's constant awkwardness towards her is simply met with increasing interest. She is also interested in the same kind of music as Matt, and borrows a CD from him as an excuse to have more contact with him.

Arthur

Arthur Herk is Anna's husband and Jenny's stepfather. He is a terrible man, often abusing Anna, and he is responsible for the bomb falling into the hands of Snake. He works for Penultimate Incorporated as a middleman for the bribes and weapons sales the corporation conducts in the area, but has been stealing from them in the recent months. In response to this, Penultimate has sent Henry and Leonard to kill him, and when Arthur discovers this, he decides to try to buy a missile in order to expose the weapons dealers and Penultimate in order to save himself, although he isn't clear on the details past that point.

Arthur is the villain of the novel in many ways, and although he doesn't place anyone in direct danger, he is portrayed as only slightly more intelligent than Snake, and his



actions often serve to make life difficult for the other characters. He shows no interest in protecting either Anna or Jenny from the shooters at the beginning of the novel or Snake and Eddie the next day, and Anna holds a serious grudge against him as a result of his inaction. He is handcuffed to an entertainment center and poisoned by the giant frog in his backyard, and suffers from hallucinations afterwards and is committed to a psychiatric institute. After his release, he is divorced from Anna and dies mysteriously on a fishing trip, even though he has never been fishing before.

Puggy

Puggy is the first character the reader encounters in the novel, and his presence as a new homeless resident in Miami goes a long way towards setting the stage of the novel at large. The city is a perfect place for a homeless person like himself to thrive. He sleeps in trees, and moves onto the Herk's property when he sees Snake and Eddie, of whom he is afraid, walk by his old tree one day. At the Herk residence, he falls asleep next to Nina's room and enjoys the music she plays at night.

He manages to save Nina from Henry and Leonard the first night they try to shoot Arthur, and the two instantly fall in love. Later, he is taken hostage by Snake, who wants to get back at him for hurting his foot, and manages to escape them just before they board the plane. From there, he is able to find Monica and the others and tell them exactly where Snake is and where he plans to go. At the end of the book, he lives with Nina at the Herk residence and the two love each other very much.

Puggy is initially portrayed as a lowlife, but has many positive qualities, including concern for the well-being of others and the willingness to protect them when they are in danger. He stands up for people in danger several times throughout the novel, and this manages to bring about good fortune for him.

Eddie

Eddie is Snake's friend, who becomes nervous when Snake breaks into the Herk residence and takes hostages. Unlike Snake, he is aware they can't get away with this kind of behavior forever, and when Snake shoots Monica, Eddie finally stands up against his friend. Though he gets shot in the leg for his troubles, he nonetheless throws the bomb off of the plane and saves the day, though he is unaware that a bomb is in the suitcase. He is not charged with anything at the end of the novel, since the FBI cannot determine that he was actively trying to steal the bomb or willingly participating in any of the crimes committed by Snake.

Henry

Henry is the assassin that Penultimate sends to kill Arthur. His attempts to do so are thwarted, and he leaves Miami and tells his employers that he won't be returning to the city because the place is insane. Leonard is his partner, and the two were once heavily



involved in organized crime. Their current activities are something of a retirement for them both, but Henry's attitude reflects that of a collected and capable criminal. He forces several lawyers to put out their cigars in a restaurant through the use of force, and is completely unafraid of their threats of assault charges afterwards. He is charged with crimes after the incident at the airport with the python, but the jury finds him not guilty after he brings a live python into the courtroom to demonstrate the threat the animal caused to his partner Leonard.

Leonard

Leonard is Henry's partner, and serves as a lookout during the attempted shootings. He is injured often throughout the book, most notably when the python gets loose at the airport and wraps itself around him. He shares Henry's hatred of the city of Miami, and similarly swears never to return after failing to kill Arthur a second time.

Walter

Walter is a police officer and Monica's partner. He is attracted to her, but she rejects him because he is both married and not very intelligent. He prefers showing off his biceps to actual law enforcement, and winds up handcuffed to an entertainment center with Arthur. Being the smarter of the two, he drags the center around in an attempt to get help from someone. By the end of the novel, Walter decides to quit the force and becomes an exotic dancer instead.

Nina

Nina is the Herk's maid. She hates Arthur, but really likes Anna, and stays in order to save up enough money to become a legal U.S. citizen and bring her family into the country. She falls in love with Puggy when he saves her from Henry and Leonard, then travels to the airport to rescue him along with the others after Snake takes them all hostage. At the end of the novel, she lives with Puggy at the Herk residence, and the two are very happy together.

Baker

Detective Baker is Monica and Walter's supervisor. He becomes concerned when they don't report in, and winds up at the airport with FBI agents Greer and Seitz in order to resolve the situation without detonating the bomb. He marries Monica at the end of the novel.



Greer

Agent Greer is sent from the FBI alongside his partner, Seitz, in order to recover the nuclear bomb inside the briefcase. The two begin their search at the Jolly Jackal, where they determine that Arthur has purchased it. From the Herk residence, Greer travels to the airport in order to try to recover the bomb, and nearly orders the passenger plane carrying the bomb to be shot down.

Seitz

Agent Seitz is Greer's partner, and accompanies him in the search for the bomb.

John

John's real name is Ivan, and he is a Russian arms dealer who has set up business in Miami. He and his partner Leo run weapons through the Jolly Jackal.

Leo

Leo is John's partner at the Jolly Jackal and helps him smuggle weapons to various people and companies there, including Penultimate, Inc.

Roger

Roger is the Herk's pet dog. He is large and likes humans because they typically have food for him, but he isn't very intelligent. He spends most of the day growling at a large toad in his food bowl, but accidentally manages to save Arthur's life the second time Henry shoots at him.

Jack

Jack Pendick shoots at Matt, Andrew, and Jenny at CocoWalk, believing Matt to be in possession of a firearm. He is drunk and unintelligent besides, and is taken into custody shortly after attempting to shoot the teenagers.



Objects/Places

Miami

Miami is the city in which the entire novel takes place. Miami is notorious for being a strange place to live and filled with strange people.

Herk Residence

The Herk's house is the place of two attempted assassinations of Arthur Herk. Much of the novel takes place either inside of it or in its backyard. The house itself suffers considerable damage throughout the novel as people shoot into it and try to escape from it.

CocoWalk

The mall where Matt and Andrew meet up with Jenny to "kill" her, Cocowalk is not far from either the Herk residence or the Jolly Jackal.

The Jolly Jackal

Supposedly a bar and grill, the Jolly Jackal lacks a grill and is really just a front for a weapons smuggling business run by Leo and his partner John.

The Taurus

The Taurus is the name of the restaurant where Eliot meets up with Anna to get his glasses back and the two connect further.

Miami International Airport

Miami International Airport is the backdrop for the climax of the novel, and is even crazier and more disorganized than the rest of the city. Snake is easily able to avoid law enforcement here as a result.

Frog

A giant poisonous frog eats the dog Roger's food and sits in his bowl all day long. The frog later squirts Arthur in the eyes with a poison.



Guns

There are many guns in the novel, most notably the one Snake uses to keep his hostages. Leo and John sell guns out of the Jolly Jackal.

Voting

Puggy is paid to place his vote in many elections, and earns money doing so quite often.

Trees

Puggy lives in trees, which puts him at an advantage the night he saves Nina from Henry and Leonard.

Squirt Guns

Matt tries to use two squirt guns to "kill" Jenny, but they both look like real guns and get him in serious trouble as a result.

Suitcase

The suitcase that Arthur purchases from John and Leo is actually a nuclear weapon. It is stolen from Arthur by Snake, who believes its contents to be valuable.

The Bahamas

Snake wants to become a kingpin in the Bahamas, and boards a plane for the area, forcing the pilot to take off with his gun.

Beer/Alcohol

Many of the characters in the book operate under the influence of alcohol, and their judgement is typically impaired as a result, as with Arthur and Jack Pendick, both of whom appear to be alcoholics.

Penultimate Inc.

Arthur, Henry, and Leonard all work for Penultimate, though for different reasons. The company is completely corrupt, and typically blames its subcontractors when buildings it constructs collapse or otherwise fail in some way.



Themes

Luck

Much of the novel occurs through sheer luck or coincidence, as when Matt and Andrew arrive at the Herk residence the same night as Henry and Leonard, or Snake and Eddie arrive to rob the Jolly Jackal just as Arthur is leaving with the briefcase bomb. These encounters are very common throughout the novel, as characters are constantly running into one another by chance. Arthur's life is similarly saved in this fashion. Puggy and Snake both manage to accomplish a great deal by simply being in the right place at the right time. Some of the characters constantly suffer from bad luck. Henry and Leonard are never able to shoot Arthur because random events keep getting in their way. Monica tries desperately to rescue Jenny and Puggy, but cannot get help because of a random event at the airport involving an escaped python. Eliot, who suffers from poor luck through most of the novel, gets a terrific break when a national advertising agency decides to hire him for a massive campaign, even though he didn't come up with the idea for the project they admired so much. Luck also places each of the characters where they begin at the start of the novel, and is the reason that most of them are in close proximity to each other. For example, Puggy doesn't intentionally meet Nina by staying in the tree next to her room, and there is no way for him to know that the owner of that house also has occasional dealings with his current employers, John and Leo.

Romance

Romantic connections drive the plot as much as luck, if not more so. Eliot and Anna are attracted to each other, which makes the two stay together when they reach the airport. Nina follows them because Puggy is with Snake, and she cares deeply enough about him to try and keep him from getting hurt. Matt and Jenny are similarly romantically attracted to each other, which gives Matt the strength to reach the plane just before it takes off and gives Jenny the ability to try and tackle Snake after he throws Matt to the ground. Even Walter is introduced to a possible romantic interest, herself an exotic dancer, and the reader is given good reason to believe that he enters into a relationship with her, since he becomes a dancer himself at the end of the novel. Monica, who doesn't possess anything by way of romantic interest, is still nonetheless married to Detective Baker in the end. Each of the major characters comes away with an important romantic interest, which often serves to spur the characters into action at important times throughout the novel. These connections are almost entirely driven by luck, but once established, they take on a life of their own. Even Eliot, who feels vaguely guilty about being interested in Anna because she is married, can do nothing to stop himself from being attracted to her. These connections are mocked by Snake, who takes Jenny by force to the Bahamas, and by Arthur, who makes advances towards Nina, who does not like him in any way and has to lock herself in her room to hide from him.



Incompetence

The major characters all struggle with some form of incompetence, typically more than once in the novel. Eliot is deeply frustrated, first by his former boss for trying to force him to cover a story that doesn't matter nearly as much as the story he wishes to cover, and then by his client from Hammerhead Beer, who insists on running a vulgar ad campaign despite Eliot's clever idea. Anna is annoyed that law enforcement does not take more of an interest in discovering whoever it was that tried to shoot her husband. Monica is similarly distracted by Walter's constant attempts to enter into a relationship with her, and his general inability to do much more than flex his biceps. Oddly enough, Walter encounters similar difficulties with Arthur, once he is poisoned by the toad. As Walter tries to escape from the entertainment center, he is constantly disrupted by Arthur's insistence that the dog Roger is in fact Elizabeth Dole, who has come to eat his soul. Matt, Andrew, and Jenny are put in grave danger when the drunkard Jack chases after them and shoots at them. The idea that the entire city of Miami contains this sort of bizarre activity is represented by Henry and Leonard's attitude toward the city. Although the two are fairly intelligent, they are deeply disturbed by the events they witness in the city, and refuse to ever return to the city again after the second failed shooting of Arthur.

Corruption

Eliot begins his career in journalism with the high hopes of exposing corruption and greed in politics and corporate America. Although he has merely become an advertiser by the time the novel begins, corruption is nonetheless rampant in the city of Miami. Most notably, this corruption is represented by Penultimate, Inc., which makes a habit of bribing city officials and engaging in otherwise illegal activities throughout Miami and the rest of the country. Whenever something goes wrong with a building that Penultimate has constructed, the blame is shifted towards the subcontractors and quickly swept under the rug. The jet company that Snake boards with the rest of his hostages is equally corrupt, and the clerk accepts a bribe from Snake for entry onto the plane after stealing a large amount of money from him in the first place. The Jolly Jackal is also an important hub for this corruption, as weapons are constantly being dealt out to citizens and companies in the surrounding area, including Arthur Herk, who is himself employed as nothing more than a professional briber, and his parent corporation, Penultimate. Unlike Arthur and Snake, who wind up being punished for their crimes, Penultimate is unharmed by the event, and in fact wins the contract for rebuilding Miami International Airport to make it more flight and security friendly.

Style

Point of View

The novel is written in third person voice, and follows the thoughts and actions of the major characters. The point of view switches very frequently, often jumping to different places, to show the reader what is happening with a different set of characters at the same time. This is an unusual way for a novel to be structured in terms of point of view, but is important to much of the humor in the novel, since many events that occur require several different groups of characters to have contributed something small and seemingly insignificant to a series of events that assumes much greater importance, as with the appearance of both Matt and Andrew at the Herk house the same night as Henry and Leonard appear to assassinate Arthur, and with the arrival of Snake and Eddie at the Jolly Jackal just as Arthur is getting ready to leave with the nuclear weapon. For incidents such as these, the point of view is highly effective, and most of the major events in the novel require this technique in order to apprise the reader of everything that occurs at the end of major sections in the book. Additionally, the rapid shift between points of view helps the comical aspect of the novel greatly, since many of the characters find themselves in absurd situations. These situations are typically then viewed by characters such as Henry and Leonard, who put the actions themselves into a firmer context of absurdity, as when they see Snake and Eddie wearing panty-hose in order to rob the Jolly Jackal and comment on how inexperienced the two criminals are.

Setting

The action within the novel takes place almost entirely within the city of Miami, Florida. Miami's climate is warm and humid throughout most of the year. The temperature and climate attract many different kinds of people, most notably the homeless, such as Eddie, Snake, and Puggy. The city is considerably large and also contains a significant population of foreign citizens as well, like Nina, John, and Leo, who have come to the city for different reasons. According to the novel, Miami tends to attract strange people, and owing to this and the fact that it has a dense population, the city tends to experience an inordinate amount of crime, which law enforcement agencies struggle to contain. Also according to the novel, due to the strange nature of many of the people who live within the city, absurdity and strange events tend to be a normal way of life for most of the citizens, who are able to shrug off many of the strange occurrences simply because they have experienced many other strange things while living in the city. Henry and Leonard are the ideal characters through which to view the city of Miami. They do not accept any of what they see in the city, and in fact have a very hard time remaining there to finish their job. The city of Miami works perfectly as a setting for the novel, mainly because it is offbeat enough to allow the reader to accept the presence of so many bizarre characters, but also because the author comes from the city and knows it well enough to include several areas in detail, which increases the novel's believability overall.



Language and Meaning

While there is nothing outwardly challenging or particular about the language of the novel itself, the words used to express the viewpoints of different characters do change somewhat from person to person. Eliot tends to have more complicated words associated with his point of view, which is appropriate because he is a journalist, whereas less intelligent characters, such as Snake, tend to have simpler vocabularies. The most important use of language in the book really stems from its role in the humor it creates. Understatement, sarcasm, and repetition are commonly used to establish funny situations and outcomes. The most notable incident of this occurs when Snake and Eddie arrive at the airport. They see a traffic sign for arrivals, and a separate one for departures. Snake cannot determine which road to follow, because he knows he has arrived at the airport, but he also wishes to depart the same airport. Although much of the novel is very funny, each of the characters delivers his or her dialogue seriously, which serves the comedy in the book by providing a highly useful connection to reality, that is to say that even when situations are ridiculous or worse, each of the characters reacts appropriately as opposed to trying deliberately to be funny. The novel would be much harder to believe if each of the characters engaged in obviously comical fashions, and instead the characters within make outrageous or stupid but always believable mistakes. This allows the reader to buy into much of what would be a series of nonsensical encounters, and allows the reader to sympathize with characters who would otherwise be unlikeable, such as Henry and Leonard, who may be pitied for the simple fact that they are in Miami, which they know to be a crazy city.

Structure

The novel is divided into fourteen chapters and an epilogue. The chapters are short, often jumping from area to area and character to character in rapid succession. The written length of the chapters is often a good reflection of the amount of time that passes inside of one, since many sections within a chapter itself happen at the same time, with different characters. In total, the story within the novel lasts for less than a day, with the exception of the epilogue, which remarks on events that take place months and years after the story itself.

The plot of the novel is straightforward, though romantic subplots between several major characters do exist. Also present is the subplot of a conflict between the dog Roger and a venomous toad, and Henry and Leonard's attempt to assassinate Arthur Herk for Penultimate. The story is about several generally well-intentioned people coming together to stop a nuclear bomb from going off and rescuing Jenny and Puggy in the process. The characters come from a wide range of backgrounds, but all seem to share a similar good-natured approach to life that allows them to connect instantly. Matt is the perfect example of this, for even though he's a teenager whose parents have recently been divorced, he is nevertheless a good person and a good son to Eliot, and risks his own life to save Jenny near the end of the novel.

The novel is most likely one of the most fast-paced novels available, and it's difficult to imagine covering as much information more quickly than was done here. The novel is also very funny and even though it seems outrageous at times, the reader is constantly drawn by to reality because the characters are well portrayed and constructed.



Quotes

"When it was Puggy's turn to vote, he gave his name, per instructions, as Albert Green, which he spelled 'Allbert Gren.' The real Albert Green was a person who had died in 1991 but still voted often in Miami."

Chapter 1, p. 13

"Snake was making his fourth attempt to stomp Puggy's face when there was a ringing 'bong' sound and Snake went down. This was because the bartender had hit him in the head from behind with an aluminum softball bat."

Chapter 1, p. 16

"The killing was done with squirt guns. For the kill to be legal, you had to squirt your victim in the presence of one witness—but only one witness."

Chapter 1, p. 28

"As it happened, Arthur Herk, in addition to being an abusive alcoholic, was a fool. To pay off a gambling debt, he had embezzled \$55,000 from Penultimate. Unbeknownst to him, his bosses, experts in the field of dishonesty and far smarter than Arthur, had discovered the theft almost immediately."

Chapter 2, p. 33

"Roger, calculating with his nine functioning brain cells that the chances were better of getting food inside the house with the humans than outside with the Enemy Toad, left his surveillance post and shot a low-flying, furry missile, through the door opening into the family room."

Chapter 2, p. 36

"If you asked the average seventeen-year-old male whether he would enjoy lying on the floor pressed between two attractive women, he would say, Heck Yes. But it was not proving to be a sensual experience for Matt."

Chapter 3, p. 40

"Lawyer A was unable to finish telling Henry what he should do, because Henry had put his hand on Lawyer A's shoulder and squeezed it. He did not appear to be exerting himself, but Lawyer A had gone rigid."

Chapter 4, p. 58

"The lunch lasted for four iced teas. On the way out of the Taurus, Eliot and Anna were accosted by two disabled homeless Vietnam veterans. Except they weren't really disabled homeless Vietnam veterans; they were Eddie and Snake, who were ages nine and six respectively, when the Vietnam War ended."

Chapter 4, p. 63

"The man's name was Jack Pendick. He had just that afternoon lost his job as a salesclerk at a Sunglass Hut, after one too many women customers had complained



about his flagrant attempts to look down their blouses when they leaned over to examine the display case."

Chapter 5, p. 73

"In the rental car outside the entrance to the Jolly Jackal, Henry and Leonard were waiting for the armed robbery, which they viewed as none of their business, to be completed, so they could continue tailing Arthur Herk."

Chapter 6, p. 85

"The first person Matt saw, when he reached the foyer, was Arthur Herk, standing in the doorway. Matt was going to say hello, but the look on Arthur's face—a very unpleasant look, even for Arthur—stopped him."

Chapter 7, p. 99

"Snake had considered simply shooting everyone in the living room, but he was concerned—you had to plan ahead, in this line of work—about using up bullets he might need in the Bahamas to establish kingpinship."

Chapter 8, p. 110

"In the front seat, Eddie was gripping the wheel the way a drowning man grips a life preserver. His driving was erratic, but this was not unusual in Miami, a place where most motorists obeyed the traffic laws and customs of their individual countries of origin."

Chapter 9, p. 115

"They were now heading northbound in the southbound lanes of Le Jeune. This was not unheard of in Miami, but it was irregular, and the southbound motorists were not happy about it."

Chapter 10, p. 127

"The airport smells of musty tropical rot, and it's filled with the sounds of various languages—Spanish, predominately, but also English, Creole, German, French, Italian, and, perhaps, most distinct of all, Cruise Ship Passenger." Chapter 11, p. 135

"The police had a problem. Obviously, they could not allow this creature to remain loose in the airport. Just as obviously, they could not risk trying to shoot it with all these civilians around."

Chapter 12, p. 148

"Justin was feeling very lonely. Next to him, Frank was catatonic with fear. Immediately behind him, the postal-retiree couples were huddled in their seats, both women sobbing, both men staring at the floor."

Chapter 13, p. 164



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the character Puggy. What is his motivation at the very beginning of the novel, and how and when does that change? Is Puggy a hero, or is he simply well-meaning? What about Miami does Puggy seem to like so much?

Compare and contrast the characters Puggy and Snake. Then compare and contrast the characters Henry and Snake. What similarities and differences does Snake share with them? What about his attitude towards Miami? Why does Snake want to go to the Bahamas? How does he feel about the city of Miami?

Are the situations in which the characters find themselves believable? Why or why not? If so, why? If not, does this make the novel less entertaining? Why or why not?

Discuss the characters Henry and Leonard and compare them to Leo and John. How are they similar? Are any of these characters sympathetic, even though they are criminals? Why or why not?

Is Eliot a strong character? What about him makes him so important to the novel, or is he important to the novel at all? Think about the other characters. Does everyone play a certain role, and if so, how important is their role in the book?

The Herk's Dog, Roger, plays a significant role in the novel, even though he does little more than growl at the toad. Explain this significance and also why you think the author chose to include him so frequently.

Why do you think Monica became a police officer? Does the job seem challenging for her because she is a woman? What ultimately brings her and detective Baker together to get married?