

Chomp Study Guide

Chomp by Carl Hiaasen

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Plot Summary

"Chomp," by Carl Hiaasen, is a novel written for middle-school readers. The story takes place in southern Florida. The main character, Wahoo Cray, is the son of an animal wrangler named Mickey. Mickey is competent and brave, but he tends to be impulsive and scattered, perhaps due to a recent concussion. Wahoo is quiet and methodical, the opposite of his father and the opposite of the impression his name might give. Wahoo's mother expects him to look after Mickey and keep him out of trouble, even though Wahoo is just a boy. Wahoo and his father take a job wrangling animals for a so-called reality show, "Expedition Survival!" for their latest episode, to be filmed in the Florida Everglades. The Crays need the money to catch up on their mortgage and truck payments.

The star of "Expedition Survival," Derek Badger, has a fake Australian accent and no real survival skills. He kills and eats a creature on every episode, claiming he must do so in order to survive, but when the cameras stop rolling he departs to spend the night in a luxury hotel with room service.

While buying supplies for their trip, Wahoo and Mickey run into a school friend of Wahoo's, named Tuna Gordon. Tuna has run away from home, an old Winnebago parked at Walmart, because her drunken father gave her a black eye. Wahoo and Mickey consider calling the police, but instead they invite Tuna to join them on their expedition into the Everglades. Tuna is a huge fan of "Expedition Survival!" She memorizes the Latin names of animals to escape from the terror of her home life.

During the filming of "Expedition Survival!" the total ineptitude of Derek Badger is revealed. Despite the best efforts of Derek's production assistant, Raven, to keep him in line, Derek takes stupid chances with wild creatures and ends up bitten and scratched. Mickey come to Derek's rescue more than once, but the footage will be edited to make Derek look competent and brave on television. Ultimately Derek tries to eat a bat, but it bites his tongue in self-defense. As a result Derek develops a fever and an infection, making him delirious. The fact of being bitten by a bat, along with Derek's fondness for vampire movies, convinces him that he is turning into a vampire. He steals an airboat and takes off alone into the Everglades to fight his demons.

Meanwhile Tuna's father, Jared, tracks her to the Everglades. He kidnaps Mickey at gunpoint, then forces him to drive an airboat in search of Tuna. Mickey uses all of his cunning to thwart and delay Jared. It is up to Wahoo to keep Tuna safe. He exhibits great bravery at the climax of the story, challenging a drunk man with a gun in order to save Mickey and Tuna. The delirious Derek Badger attacks Jared, biting him in the neck as a police chopper arrives.

Derek loses his job as the star of "Expedition Survival!" to a younger man, a New Zealander who actually knows how to skydive, survive in the wilderness, and interact with wildlife, but everyone agrees not to reveal Derek's vampire delusions to the police or the media. Wahoo becomes a man during the course of the novel, having finally



emerged from the shadow cast by his larger-than-life father. Wahoo and Tuna stay in touch, perhaps for a lifelong friendship or romance, even though she moves to Chicago to live with her mother and grandmother.

The novel makes important statements about bravery, coming of age, reality television, gun control, conservation, and child abuse, sprinkled with a generous dose of humor and wit.



Chapter One and Two

Chapter One and Two Summary

"Chomp" is a novel written for middle-school readers. The story takes place in southern Florida. The main character, Wahoo Cray, comes of age as he helps his father, an animal wrangler, assist with the filming of a reality show episode set in the Everglades. Wahoo not only has to help manage unpredictable wildlife, but he also must reel in his impulsive father and offer support to a friend who is the victim of abuse by her father. Illusions about reality television are shattered in the novel, because Derek Badger, the star of "Expedition Survival," is an incompetent fool who only pretends to rough it alone in the wilderness. Ultimately Wahoo is given a chance to prove his bravery and devotion to the people he loves, and even Derek Badger redeems himself somewhat by helping to rescue Mickey and Tuna from Tuna's drunk, gun-wielding father.

Chapter One : Mickey Cray is an animal wrangler, out of work ever since he suffered a concussion when a frozen iguana fell out of a tree and hit him in the head. He has headaches and double vision. Mickey's son is named Wahoo, much to Wahoo's embarrassment. He was named after Wahoo McDaniel, a professional wrestler and football player, but Wahoo Cray doesn't have the sort of personality to live up to such a name. When he is older, he plans to change it.

While Mickey recovers from his concussion, Wahoo refers job opportunities to other wranglers. Wahoo takes care of Mickey's many animals, including alligators, snakes, parrots, mice, monkeys, and more. One day, Wahoo's mother confides to him that the family is almost out of money, and she plans to go to Shanghai to teach Mandarin Chinese to American businessmen. Usually the businessmen came to South Florida for lessons, but this job requires her to leave for two months. Wahoo goes outside to feed Alice the alligator while his mom breaks her news to Mickey. Alice is famous, having appeared in films, documentaries, and commercials. She is twelve feet long. Before Wahoo's mother leaves, she asks Wahoo to take care of his father. Mickey remarks that it is like she's leaving them twice, because of his double vision. That same day Wahoo tells his father that he has accepted a job for the two of them, starting the following week. Mickey objects, but Wahoo explains that he will be out of school for the summer, they need the money, and the job is for a TV show that pays \$1,000 per day.

Chapter Two: Wahoo tells his father that the host of "Expedition Survival!" wants to shoot scenes with Alice the alligator and a python. During each episode Derek Badger parachutes into a remote area, then uses his survival skills to find his way back to civilization. Wahoo and Mickey know, from watching the show, that many of the wildlife scenes are faked. Derek Badger's production assistant, Raven Stark, arrives at the Crays' home. She wears flashy clothes. Wahoo thinks her hair looks like a sculpture made with red chrome. Mickey insists that Raven Stark sign a release before looking around on his property, because he once had to pay medical bills when a youngster reached into a raccoon's cage during a tour. Mickey signs the contract for "Expedition



Survival!" Raven Stark gives Mickey an eight-hundred-dollar deposit. While Wahoo gives Raven a tour, she sees Alice and asks if there is also a smaller gator that Derek could wrestle. Wahoo is worried. He knows his father doesn't like people to mess with his animals. Wahoo shows Raven their collection of snakes. Snakes, as well as iguanas and other creatures, had been imported into South Florida, sold as pets, then released by unhappy owners. The government had offered Mickey money to round up and turn in as many snakes as he could, but Mickey prefers to keep them. He does not want them to be euthanized. Raven selects Beulah the python for use in the show. She asks Wahoo about his missing thumb, and he explains that Alice the alligator had bitten it off during a feeding. Wahoo doesn't tell her that it had been his own fault—he had gotten too close to Alice during a feeding while trying to impress a girl. Mickey joins them at the snake tanks. Raven tells Wahoo and Mickey that their TV show is all about keeping it real.

Chapter One and Two Analysis

Chapters One and Two serve to introduce several important characters in the novel and establish their needs and motivations. Wahoo and his family need money, due to his father's recent injury and unemployment, so they are forced to accept a job with a reality show that they might have turned down otherwise. Wahoo is depicted as a boy who is steady, thoughtful, and reliable, the opposite of his name and the opposite of his impulsive father. Wahoo's mother seems steady, like Wahoo, but she expects Wahoo to look after his father while she is away in China, a reversal of normal roles.

Issues involving conservation and animal importation are introduced by the author. Greed motivates unscrupulous dealers to illegally import snakes and lizards and such into Florida, naïve pet owners find the animals too hard to handle, and now too many of these creatures roam free with no natural enemies to keep their populations under control. In a stroke of irony, Mickey Cray the animal advocate receives a concussion from one such imported creature, an iguana which froze during a cold snap and fell out of a tree, striking Mickey in the head. Humorously, Mickey keeps the iguana and cooks it into a pepper stew during his recovery.

Wahoo's missing thumb serves as a reminder that animals can be dangerous, whether in the wild or in captivity. Mickey's hands are so scarred from animal bites that they look like Halloween props. The animal wranglers, along with the crew of "Expedition Survival," are sure to experience some dangerous encounters with a variety of creatures.



Chapter Three and Four

Chapter Three and Four Summary

Chapter Three: Derek Badger, whose real name is Lee Bluepenny, has no formal training in biology or forestry, or in any survival skills. He is a former folk dancer who happened to meet a talent agent in need of a rugged-looking man. The studio changed his name from Lee Bluepenny to Derek Badger, after considering Erik Panther, Gus Wolverine, and a few others. "Expedition Survival!" became a hit and Derek Badger became a star. Raven Stark works hard to keep Derek out of harm's way and discourage him from overeating. She speaks by phone with Derek, who is in Paris, and tells him she has found a twelve-foot alligator to film and a smaller one for him to wrestle. As Raven feared, Derek wants to wrestle the twelve-footer. Derek is excited to hear about the python and a large snapping turtle, also owned by Mickey.

Wahoo's sister, Julie, is away at school, studying law. She calls to tell her father about problems with the "Expedition Survival!" contract, which Wahoo had faxed to her. Julie warns that the contract provides unrestricted use of the animals to the show, meaning Mickey can't tell them what they can or cannot do. Julie suggests they return the deposit, but Wahoo explains that Pop already signed the contract without reading it and spent the deposit on their past-due mortgage.

Mickey is outside, barefoot, admiring his fourteen-foot python named Beulah. Apparently Wahoo had forgotten to feed Beulah recently, because she bites down on Mickey's foot and winds her body around his legs, then coils further up his body. Mickey locks his arms in front of his chest to protect his lungs and yells to Wahoo for help. Beulah continues to chew on Mickey's foot. Wahoo swears he hadn't forgotten to feed Beulah last week, but then doubt creeps in. At Mickey's command, Wahoo runs to the house for bourbon. Snakes can't taste bourbon, but the alcohol stings their mouths. Wahoo finds Beulah's mouth, still chomping on Mickey's foot, and he pours some bourbon in. The snake loosens its grip and Wahoo helps it to uncoil. In the house, Wahoo tends to Mickey's foot and apologizes for not feeding Beulah. Mickey accepts his apology, then talks about how he should be providing Wahoo and his mother with a more normal life. They talk about Julie's warnings. Mickey says he will always have the final say about his animals, no matter what.

Chapter Four: Wahoo's mother calls from China. Wahoo tries to keep his voice from cracking, from revealing how much he misses her. He tells her that he found her hotel on Google Earth. Wahoo goes outside to feed the raccoons, reflecting that he does not have a normal life. They can't go on family vacations because someone has to take care of the animals. Once when they had left for a funeral and entrusted the animals to another wrangler's care, two parrots escaped and other animals suffered injuries.

Wahoo is surprised by the arrival of Derek Badger and Raven Stark. Derek demands to see the alligator he hopes to wrestle and Wahoo goes to get Mickey. Derek admires the



six hundred and twenty pounds of alligator known as Alice, then asks when they can move her. Mickey objects. He has a staging area in the yard that looks like the Everglades, he explains, which Disney once used for a shoot. Derek walks off in a huff. Raven reminds Mickey that he signed a contract. Wahoo offers to show them the Everglades setup in the yard, but Derek is on the phone with the producers in California. Raven reminds Wahoo that his family needs the money from this shoot.

Back at the house, Mickey and Wahoo watch an old episode of "Expedition Survival!" Derek is in a hammock in Costa Rica, pretending to sleep, while a tarantula crawls up his arm. Derek pretends to wake with a start, knocks the tarantula away, then grills it over a fire for dinner while talking about how close he had come to death. Wahoo and his father, unlike most "Expedition Survival!" viewers, know that tarantulas rarely bite people and their sting is no worse than a bumblebee's. Mickey turns off the TV and grumbles. Other shows they have worked for were about the animals, while "Expedition Survival!" is only about Derek Badger.

Chapter Three and Four Analysis

Wahoo has his hands full managing his father, who signs contracts without reading them and sometimes gets injured by his animals. Raven also has her hands full managing Derek, who has no actual survival skills and tends to overindulge on gourmet food. Wahoo and Raven form a tentative bond, understanding that they each have some influence over one party in an important contract, that they each have an incentive to hold the agreement together.

Derek's show is more about Derek than it is about wildlife. He plays fast and loose with facts and clearly doesn't mind using captive animals to create dramatic scenes. However, despite the fact that he is willing to deceive viewers, he is not necessarily lazy. He wants to wrestle Mickey's twelve-foot alligator, not a smaller one. Derek's ego and self-confidence sometimes lead him into risky situations.



Chapter Five and Six

Chapter Five and Six Summary

Chapter Five: Derek tells Raven that he refuses to work with Mickey Cray, and surely there are other handlers with humongous alligators in Florida. Raven knows that most large alligators won't tolerate Derek's presence the way Alice will. Derek dismisses the Crays as hillbillies. Mickey leads Alice to the Everglades set in his yard, using raw chicken to entice her. Derek exits his air-conditioned trailer. He has wet oatmeal splattered on his hiking boots to resemble mud. Derek gets a coating of spray-on tan before shooting begins. Alice is no threat to anyone, with her full belly, but Raven makes sure Mickey has a gun handy, as per their contract. First Derek shoots a scene with a snapping turtle. He wants the camera to film the turtle's tongue, which it can wiggle as bait for fish, but Mickey explains that the turtle will only do that underwater. At Mickey's suggestion, Derek tries to coax its mouth open with a large stick. The turtle snaps at the stick and takes a sliver of flesh from Derek's nose. Derek falls into the lagoon, surprised, near the snoozing Alice. He warns the director to erase all footage of the turtle encounter. Next Mickey and Wahoo uncoil Beulah the python. Mickey tries to show Derek how to handle Beulah, but Derek is not interested. Beulah is still full from the chickens Wahoo had given her on the day she tried to eat Mickey's foot. Derek starts the scene, crawling through Mickey's palmetto scrub, claiming to be in an untouched stretch of the Everglades searching for a python. Derek reaches for Beulah, grabbing her two feet below her head, the worst possible place to grab a snake. Beulah is not interested, however. Derek tries to wrestle the noodle-like snake. Angry, Mickey pulls Derek from the snake and squeezes his midsection until Derek turns dark red. Mickey tells "Dork Man" (p. 47) to take a hike. As Mickey and Wahoo walk away, carrying Beulah, Derek offers three thousand, then thirty-five hundred, if they will let him wrestle Alice. At four thousand dollars, Mickey relents.

Chapter Six: Production of "Expedition Survival!" is suspended due to rain. Wahoo asks his father how much they owe the bank. Mickey says he doesn't know, but Wahoo's mother would, right down to the penny. Mickey wants to call her, but Wahoo reminds him that it costs about ten dollars a minute. In Derek's trailer, Raven tries to cover the turtle bite on Derek's nose with makeup. Derek wants to eat the turtle on camera for dinner, or at least use its shell as a bowl. Raven reminds him that Mickey would never allow it. They discuss other dining options in the Everglades and settle on maggots. Viewers of "Expedition Survival!" don't know that Derek actually enjoys five-star cuisine on set, catered by fine chefs.

Mickey has been fascinated with animals since the age of four, when he found a garter snake and it bit him on the wrist. Mickey visits Alice and promises her that Derek the bonehead will be out of her hair soon. Mickey has raised Alice from very young. Alice is as close to tame as is possible and much larger than most in the wild, due to generous and frequent feedings.

Chapter Five and Six Analysis

It is clear that Derek and Mickey will never get along. Derek is willing to take foolish chances with animals and sometimes even kill and eat them, in the quest to make exciting reality TV. Derek won't even listen to Mickey's useful instructions about how to handle a snapping turtle or a snake, and Derek is injured as a result. Mickey, on the other hand, places the well-being of his animals above other concerns. For Mickey, a turtle should not be sacrificed just to make a bowl from its shell, and a snake should not be manhandled just because it is docile and not fighting back.

The Cray family finances are a constant concern, but Wahoo takes on the parental role and reigns in his impulsive father. Wahoo has to remind Mickey that it costs ten dollars a minute to call Wahoo's mother in China, so they can't do it very often. Now and then, though, Mickey shows some savvy when it comes to negotiation. When Mickey walks away and Derek begs for a chance to wrestle Alice the alligator, Mickey keeps walking until the dollar amount offered is suitably high.



Chapter Seven, Eight, and Nine

Chapter Seven, Eight, and Nine Summary

Chapter Seven: An underwater camera and two others are positioned to record Derek's encounter with Alice. Raven assures Mickey that Derek's knife is merely a prop, but Mickey is skeptical. With cameras rolling, Derek enters the water and tells his audience that he must cross this water in order to survive, despite the presence of a huge alligator lurking below the surface. Mickey angers as Derek says he will defend himself by wrestling the gator and gouging out its eyes. Alice starts to move and Mickey inches toward a bamboo pole he had hidden nearby. The underwater camera captures Derek's flailing limbs dangerously close to Alice. Everyone is relieved when Derek emerges from the water, but Derek wants to do another take. He wants some dramatic interaction with Alice. Mickey grabs for Derek's knife and presses it to his finger, drawing blood. Mickey tosses the weapon in the water and allows Derek only fifteen minutes more with Alice. The crew readies the equipment. Alice surfaces, revealing her immensity. Derek jumps in the water and Alice sinks to the bottom. Derek refuses to recite his lines until Alice surfaces again, but Mickey warns that Alice can hold her breath for hours. Mickey heads to the house for some aspirin. At last Alice starts to surface, just as the underwater camera runs out of battery power. Alligators have survived natural disasters for thousands of years, but in recent times they were nearly hunted to extinction by man, their greatest enemy. Conservation efforts have restored their numbers. Alligators in the wild generally avoid people, but an alligator who has lost that fear can be unpredictable. Somehow as Alice rises from the depths of her pond, Derek ends up straddled on her back. Wahoo yells at Derek to get off, but Derek ignores him and the director silences him, not wanting another voice on the audio loop. Alice begins to spin, throwing Derek in the air. Both ends of an alligator can be lethal—the thrashing tail and the powerful jaws. Derek lands near the alligator's mouth, snagging his shorts on a couple of her teeth. As Alice continues to spin, Derek spins and thrashes. Raven screams for help, but the crew are helpless. Wahoo gets the bamboo pole and does his best to give Derek something to grab onto. Derek fails to notice. Mickey reappears and Raven orders him to shoot the alligator. Instead, Mickey calmly hands his gun to Wahoo and jumps into the water. Mickey grabs Derek by the hair. Raven takes the gun from Wahoo and fires, but the gun is not loaded. Mickey drags Derek to shore and tells everyone to get off his property. Walking back to the house, Mickey comments that Derek is lucky he only lost his pants. He wants to call China now, no matter the cost.

Chapter Eight: Derek survives his alligator encounter with a few scrapes. He blames the director for what happened and fires him. Then the director tries to show him the footage. Derek orders it destroyed. Raven remembers many past incidents when Derek's follies had caused production delays and great loss of money. Only his popularity kept Derek from being fired. The director plays the footage anyway, and Derek is thrilled. His close brush with death will make great television, but only after the "crazy redneck" Mickey (p. 73) is edited from the scene. Raven reminds Derek that



Mickey saved his life. Derek merely replies that Mickey will be rewarded and the director will get a raise.

On the phone, Susan tells Mickey that they are almost eight thousand dollars in arrears on their mortgage and two payments behind on their truck. She asks for Wahoo, to learn details about the TV job and Mickey's health. Derek and Raven come to the door and Mickey aims a fire extinguisher at them. Derek explains that the scene with Alice is fabulous because he nearly drowned, for real, and the footage is bound to go viral. He wants to hire Mickey, the bravest man he has ever met, to help them film in the Everglades. Wahoo bluffs that they have another job lined up, hoping his father will take the hint, but then Derek offers two thousand dollars per day for four days, enough to rescue them from their debt. Mickey asks them, what about Wahoo, and they offer an extra five hundred a day plus screen credit. Wahoo leaves, not sure if he wants his father to accept or not. He fishes Derek's shorts from the water where Alice is pouting. The shorts have two incisors stuck in the fabric. Mickey joins Wahoo and explains how he will be edited out of the footage so it looks like Derek escaped from Alice on his own, then says that he accepted the job offer. Mickey and Wahoo get two chickens for Alice, who earned them, and lure her back to her pen.

Chapter Nine: In preparation for the Everglades trip, Mickey and Wahoo pick up some supplies at Walmart. Wahoo pays with cash his mom had secretly set aside for such a purpose. Mickey wants to know where Wahoo got the money, but Wahoo won't say. In the parking lot they meet Tuna Gordon, a girl from Wahoo's school. She is small and has curly ginger hair. Wahoo doesn't know her well, but he noticed her at school because she knows the Latin names of many animals. Tuna asks them for a ride to anywhere. She has a large tote bag and a black eye. She tells them she fell down the stairs, but they don't believe her. She lives in a Winnebago parked at the Walmart, along with her father. Her mother is out of town, taking care of Tuna's grandma. Tuna admits that her father gets drunk every night. Mickey is tempted to pay a visit to Mr. Gordon in his Winnebago, but Wahoo says Tuna should just come with them on a real camping trip. When Wahoo tells Tuna the nature of their trip, she doesn't believe him.

Derek watches his alligator scene over and over while Raven and the director study a map of the Everglades. Derek is anxious to see his new version of the script, which will feature the alligator-wrestling scene at the end. They must fill in the rest of the show, including a scene of Derek eating something disgusting for his so-called survival. The director wants to use footage of the snapping turtle biting Derek's nose, but Derek reminds him that is supposed to be erased. The director, however, plans to show the footage at the annual end-of-season party, which Derek considers himself to be too important to attend. Raven is trying to find a new place on the map where they can base their operations. The Miccosukee tribe just revoked permission to use their settlement, because they learned of Derek's past disrespect of the Navajos, when he had used an ancient prayer pipe to scratch his back and had broken it into three pieces. They can't use national park land, either, because Derek once disturbed an eagles' nest, despite warnings to leave it alone. That incident resulted in a ten-thousand-dollar fine. Next they discuss what animals Mr. Cray should bring along to the Everglades, and to everyone's consternation, Derek wants to put the "real" back in "reality" (p. 87) by using only wild



animals. The director and Raven step outside by a monkey pen to discuss the problem of Derek's over-inflated ego and his over-indulgence in donuts, until they are forced to flee from disgusting matter being thrown at them by the monkeys.

Chapter Seven, Eight, and Nine Analysis

Derek survives his wrestling encounter with Alice with only a few scrapes and bruises, but he blames everyone but himself for the fiasco. Despite the danger involved, it is funny when Derek's shorts get hooked on Alice's teeth as she spins in the water. Mickey shows bravery and heroism when he jumps in the water to rescue Derek. Once again Mickey stomps away from the crew of "Expedition Survival!" in a huff, ordering them off his property, but of course, the plot of the novel can only develop further if production of the reality show continues.

Derek wants the alligator footage to be destroyed until he actually views the dramatic scene. He realizes that it will make great television once the bits that show Mickey saving his life have been removed. That is the reality of so-called reality TV.

Susan Cray talks on the phone with her husband, Mickey, but she relies on young Wahoo for real information, and she reveals the seriousness of their financial troubles only to Wahoo. Wahoo, of course, realizes that he and Mickey desperately need to keep working for "Expedition Survival!" so that their own family can survive. Mickey accepts an offer to accompany the crew into the Everglades to film Derek's further exploits, foreshadowing future drama between Derek and Mickey. Amazingly, since Derek's encounter with Alice he has a new resolve to work with wild rather than captive animals, thus foreshadowing future drama between Derek and nature. Future drama is also foreshadowed in a comedic way when Mickey's monkeys throw excrement at Derek and Raven.



Chapter Ten and Eleven

Chapter Ten and Eleven Summary

Chapter Ten: Mickey is surprised to learn that Derek wants to use only wild animals on his shoot. Mickey offers Raven the use of a gentle water moccasin or a couple of raccoons, but she says no. Mickey warns that "slow and dumb doesn't mix with wild and raw" (p. 89). The next morning, Mickey wakes Wahoo and Tuna, then tells Tuna she should call her father. She replies that she already called him. He hadn't even realized she was gone. Wahoo comments that her father could go to jail for hitting her. Tuna responds that she fought back, and her father won't be able to ride a motorcycle for a while.

Tuna is excited to see "Expedition Survival!" being made, because it is one of her favorite shows. Wahoo doesn't have the heart to tell her that Derek Badger is a phony. He asks how Tuna came to know the Latin names for so many creatures. She says she enjoys taxonomy, a study that charts all animals by their traits into their genus and species. She asks Wahoo how he came to be named for a fish. Tuna was named for her aunt, who worked at a sushi bar. They both wish they could have new names. Tuna says she sees Wahoo as a Lance. Wahoo retorts that he will call her Lucille. Tuna likes that. Mickey gives last-minute instructions to Donny Dander, a wrangler who he hired to watch his animals while he is away. After the last time, when Donny allowed some animals to escape or get injured, he knows better than to cross Mickey Cray.

The caravan going to the Everglades includes two equipment trucks, a minivan transporting the crew, Derek's luxury motor coach, and Mickey's pickup truck. Mickey has a death grip on the wheel and he downs four aspirins. Tuna asks what is wrong. Wahoo explains about the concussion, the headaches, and the double vision. Tuna says she has just the thing and scrambles out the back window of the cab and into the bed of the pickup. Wahoo and Mickey worry she will fall out, and Mickey says they should have just called the police. Tuna returns and tells Mickey to say "aaahhh". He doesn't, so she jabs him in the gut and flicks pills into his mouth when he responds. A few minutes later Mickey looks more relaxed, but he won't admit that the pills helped.

"Expedition Survival!" sets up its base of operations at a souvenir shop on the Tamiami trail. The shop and three airboats are owned by a portly man named Sickler, who was once run out of Tennessee for selling fake rubies from a fake mine. Sickler offers tourists a full refund if they don't see at least one gator on their airboat tour of the Everglades, but he has a stuffed gator called Old Sleepy mounted on a log near the dock, so everyone is satisfied. Sickler rejects Derek's offer to autograph the wall of his shop. Sickler tells Derek and Raven they will find lots of gators and snakes, and he lies when they ask that they will probably see panthers and bears as well. Mickey, who knows better, gives Sickler a look that makes him slink away to his stockroom. Mickey promises Derek that he can handle anything they might encounter. Derek wanders off for breakfast, and Mickey reassures a worried Raven that they won't find any bears or



panthers. Raven says they can't have a repeat of what happened with Alice the alligator, and Mickey tells her that he isn't a babysitter. He can't help it if Derek is a fool. Raven reminds him that Derek is the whole franchise. Mickey jokes that he hopes Derek won't be bit on the butt by a snake in his sleeping bag, and Raven reveals that Derek doesn't stay at their campsite. He helicopters in and out every day. He will be staying at the Empresario Hotel.

Chapter Eleven: The crew board one of Sickler's airboats to head into the Everglades. Tuna tells Raven she is the taxonomist. Raven asks what happened to her eye, and Tuna asks what happened to Raven's hair. Derek is surprised that Sickler is passing up an opportunity to ride with a world-renowned survivalist such as himself. The airboat driver, named Link, explains that Sickler is too big. Derek is insulted, thinking Sickler considers himself too important. Link corrects him, explaining that Sickler's weight would make the boat sink. Link hands out earmuffs to muffle the noise from the airboat engine. Raven has trouble fitting the earmuffs over her huge cliff of red hair. After a short ride, Link stops the airboat and points out Old Sleepy. Mickey laughs. He can tell that the gator is stuffed. Derek doesn't laugh, because sometimes "Expedition Survival!" uses taxidermied animals when real ones don't cooperate. The director tells Link to move on, because they're not here for the usual tour, they're scouting locations. Mickey is upset about the fake gator, an insult to nature, and he and Link argue. Link orders Mickey out of his boat. Mickey tells Derek "Beaver" (p. 102) that he could probably handle wrestling this gator. Link charges toward Mickey, picks him up, and tosses him overboard. Mickey floats on his back, calling the water paradise. The boat takes off without Mickey, but Wahoo knows his father will be just fine.

The group find a tree island surrounded by a natural moat for its first campsite. The remainder of the day is spent hauling provisions from Sickler's shop to the island and setting up camp. Tuna asks Wahoo if he has a girlfriend, but she calls him Lance. Wahoo tells her not to call him Lance and says he is too busy for girls. Tuna says she once had a boyfriend named Chad, but he had the personality of a cabbage. Tuna asks about Wahoo's missing thumb and touches the bony scar without asking first. Suddenly Wahoo realizes they are holding hands. He tells her that they need this job to stop the bank from taking their house. Tuna says they lost their house too, but at least Wahoo's father is trying, instead of drinking away the mortgage money. Wahoo worries that Mickey will get them fired from the show because of his temper, but Tuna promises that the two of them will work together to keep that from happening. Raven joins them to lecture Wahoo about his father's behavior. The airboat is ready to depart for camp for the night, but Mickey has not returned. Wahoo knows there is no point in asking Link to wait. Link careens the airboat around the first bend, and Wahoo and the others see Mickey floating on the log with the stuffed gator. Link shows no sign of stopping, so Wahoo hurls his satchel, knocking Link's foot off the gas pedal. The boat stalls near Mickey, who hauls himself aboard. Raven and Derek see the scene from their departing helicopter overhead. Derek asks for a room with a Jacuzzi.



Chapter Ten and Eleven Analysis

Mickey sums up the problem with Derek wanting to put the real in reality TV by using only wild animals when he warns that "slow and dumb doesn't mix with wild and raw" (p. 89).

Tuna reveals more about her plight when she explains that she fought back when her father hit her, kicking him where it hurts a man most. She adds that her father didn't even realize she had run away. Wahoo and Mickey debate whether to call the police or not, a question that sadly resonates for people in fact as well as in fiction. When Tuna deftly pops pills into the unwilling Mickey, she demonstrates her experience at appeasing a difficult authority figure.

Tuna is a huge fan of "Expedition Survival!" She has no idea that Derek Badger is a sham, and Wahoo doesn't have the heart to tell her. Tuna will have to learn that her father is not the only man capable of disappointing her. Tuna and Wahoo bond over the fact that they both hate their fishy names. Charmingly, in a show of independence from their parents, they agree to call each other Lucille and Lance. They also bond over their complicated personal lives and their love of animals. Tuna is spunky and resourceful, telling Raven she is a taxonomist and deflecting questions about her black eye by talking about Raven's outrageous hair.

Even in the Everglades, not all reality is real. Sickler, the owner of a souvenir shop and airboat tour service, has positioned a stuffed gator nearby so no tourists can ask for their money back because they didn't see any alligators. Mickey shows the ultimate disrespect for this ripoff by jumping onto the stuffed gator in the water and floating around. Once again comedy is used to make a point. This scene begins a long-standing animosity between Mickey and an airboat driver named Link.



Chapter Twelve

Chapter Twelve Summary

Chapter Twelve: Mickey's cell phone is waterlogged because Link tossed him into the water, so they can't call Wahoo's mother in China. The Crays set up a small camp away from the TV crew, including a separate pup tent for Tuna. Tuna wants to take a walk, and Mickey insists Wahoo must go with her because he is a gentleman. They come upon some of the crew, relaxing over steaks and beer. Tuna wants to turn off their flashlights and get closer, but Wahoo says they shouldn't spy. Tuna insists it's not spying, it's observing. Tuna is unhappy to hear everyone is making fun of Derek Badger. She is a long-time fan and she has not yet seen for herself that he is a sham. A member of the crew gets up and walks toward Wahoo and Tuna, preparing to relieve himself against a tree nearby. They can't reveal themselves, or Mickey will be fired. Tuna shakes a nearby bush and growls softly, causing the man to run back to the group. In his haste he drops a copy of the "Expedition Survival!" script. Wahoo wants to keep it, at least overnight, to get some idea what they might be in for.

In the script a helicopter camera zooms in on Derek, supposedly struggling alone in the Everglades. He explains to a camera that he must find dry ground and build a fire before sundown, when the predators will come out. He claims that everything he eats and drinks will come from the "savagely but magnificent wilderness" (p. 115). He holds up a Swiss knife and a clean straw, his only tools for survival. He feels something slithering between his ankles, mentions how dangerous many creatures in this environment can be, then he reaches down and grabs the creature. The name of the creature is indicated by a blank, to be filled in as the scene is shot on location. He kills the creature. He says he gets no joy from killing a wild creature, but he must do so because he is weak from hunger.

Wahoo knows he can't show the script to his father. Tuna is disillusioned. She didn't realize the show was scripted. She thought everything just happened. She feels stupid for thinking Derek Badger was really starving whenever he swallowed a mouse or a salamander.

In the Jacuzzi at his luxury hotel, Derek returns his room-service lobster, complaining that it is too small. His Australian accent has disappeared. He thinks about how to make the new episode of "Expedition Survival!" his best ever. His contract is up for renewal and he needs more money to pay for a ninety-foot yacht he is having refurbished. New features are to include a billiard parlor and a small movie theater. Derek feels invincible since his encounter with Alice. His desire for greater wealth and fame shut out any lingering thoughts of caution. Derek wants to be "poked, stung, scratched, clawed, chewed and chomped by authentic denizens of the Everglades" (p. 121). The narrator makes a straight-out promise that Derek will get his wish.

Chapter Twelve Analysis

Tuna has an interesting way of rationalizing her behavior, calling it observing rather than spying when she and Wahoo eavesdrop on some of the TV crew. The two friends acquire a script for the Everglades episode of "Expedition Survival!" Of course, by definition, a reality show shouldn't have a script, but such is reality in the world of Derek Badger and Raven Stark. Tuna is disappointed to learn the show is scripted, but she still doesn't know that Derek has no survival skills. Wahoo is smart enough to realize that advance knowledge of the planned scenes might help him to better manage both the wildlife and his temperamental father.

It is hard to imagine that viewers of the show believe Derek Badger survives in the wilderness with only a Swiss knife and a straw, but that is the premise. The creature that will slither between Derek's ankles in the Everglades episode is represented in the script by a blank line, to be filled in when Mickey supplies a specific wild creature.

The narrator could not make it more plain that Derek is about to get his wish, to be poked and clawed by authentic creatures of the Everglades, than with this statement: "And he will get his wish" (p. 121). Foreshadowing could not be made any more obvious.



Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Thirteen Summary

Chapter Thirteen: Wahoo has a nightmare about Tuna being chased by her abusive father. The man is faceless, because Wahoo cannot imagine such an evil person. Mickey asks Tuna what she is reading, and to Wahoo's admiration she fibs that it is a script for "Hamlet," in which she is to play Ophelia. After that, Mickey has no further interest in what is actually the "Expedition Survival!" script. Mickey asks Tuna if she has any more headache pills and she offers to trade some for coffee. Wahoo asks for coffee too, even though he normally doesn't drink it. Tuna suggests dining with the crew, due to the smells wafting from their camp, but Mickey insists on cooking their breakfast. Seeing Derek would ruin his appetite, he says. Everyone but Derek gathers supplies and departs via airboat for the location of the opening scene. Link and Mickey exchange hostilities. The director radios a four-minute warning as a helicopter approaches in the distance. One of Derek's trademarks is jumping blindfolded from an aircraft into his location, dumb and pointless according to Mickey. Tuna is excited to see Derek jump from the helicopter. Even Wahoo is impressed by his graceful landing. But when someone pulls the jumper into an airboat and he removes his blindfold, it is clearly not Derek. The man wears padding under his shirt and has hair dyed the same orange color, but he is a professional skydiver. His tan is real, not sprayed on. Tuna is devastated to learn the Jump is bogus. Next the helicopter lowers a basket containing Derek, his pudgy legs dangling through the webbing. Derek positions himself near the waterlogged parachute for the camera shot, then needs to be rescued when he gets tangled up in the cords.

Mickey and Wahoo enter the water to find a wild snake for the next shot. Despite his double vision, Mickey's eyesight is keen when it comes to hunting snakes. Mickey realizes that Derek plans to kill and eat the creature he catches, but Mickey has a secret plan. Wahoo warns his father not to give Derek a poisonous snake, because that could land him in jail. Wahoo notices Tuna back on the airboat, deep in conversation with Link. Wahoo wonders what they could be talking about. Mickey is pleased when he catches a water snake. Wahoo is relieved because, although it can release a foul musk, the water snake is not venomous. Wahoo rejects his father's suggestion to name the snake Fang, because he imagines it will soon end up dead and roasting over Derek's campfire. Tuna badgers Wahoo, because she does not want Wahoo's father to allow the snake to be killed. Mickey reveals that he has a plan involving heat. The airboats are hidden so they don't appear in the overhead shot that depicts Derek all alone, sloshing through the Everglades. The scene is shot from the helicopter, then the pilot radios that he is leaving due to incoming weather. The director tells the pilot to be back by six to pick up Derek and Raven. Derek and a cameraman enter the swamp and Derek begins his speech about trekking for hours, then the part about feeling something moving between his ankles. Derek continues, explaining that snakes are sluggish when chilled, active when warm. As part of his plan, Mickey had been warming Fang the snake under his shirt, against his bare chest. On cue, Mickey places Fang in the water, between Derek's legs.



Derek grabs the snake and chaos ensues. The lively snake bites Derek repeatedly on his arms and once on his chin. The director is too distracted to yell cut. Derek is too shocked to let go of the snake. He tries to continue with his scripted lines, but he is forced to let go when the snake bites his thumb. Derek splashes in the water and the snake escapes. Tuna looks at Wahoo and he tries not to laugh.

Chapter Thirteen Analysis

Symbolic of Derek's version of reality TV, his trademark skydive from a plane into the wilderness is performed by a stunt double, padded and dyed to resemble Derek. Tuna begins to see the reality that is Derek Badger, when he is gingerly lowered to the ground in a mesh basket.

Mickey realizes that Derek plans to kill and eat whatever creature Mickey wrangles for him, so he formulates a plan. He catches a non-venomous water snake and keeps it in his shirt, warming its core temperature with his own body heat so it will be very active when Derek grabs it underwater. Tuna, ironically, uses mild violence to remind Wahoo that the water snake shouldn't be killed and eaten by Derek.

Weather problems are foreshadowed when the helicopter pilot announces he has to leave the area. Luckily for Derek, they already shot the aerial scene that implies he is trekking all alone through the marshy Everglades.



Chapter Fourteen and Fifteen

Chapter Fourteen and Fifteen Summary

Chapter Fourteen: Derek is rushed back to the campsite for treatment for his snake bites. He demands transport to his hotel, but the helicopter is grounded due to an incoming storm. Derek scolds Mickey about the snake attack. Mickey reminds him that it was his decision to use wild animals instead of Mickey's tame ones, and that there is no such thing as a snake whisperer. Production is shut down due to thunder and lightning.

Wahoo and Tuna take shelter in her pup tent. Tuna tells Wahoo that she memorizes the Latin names of animals as a way to escape from the craziness of her daily life. Wahoo feels sick and has to leave her tent. Compared to Tuna, Wahoo has it easy. He wanders in the rain and finds himself in the main camp. Wahoo asks Raven if he can use her phone. He promises to pay her back. She says there's no need, since it's a company phone. Wahoo explains that his mother is in China and Raven still says yes, admitting that she calls her mother every day. Raven is from Alabama, despite the impression she gives by the use of her exotic accent. Wahoo and his mother have an almost telepathic connection. Wahoo tells his mother about Tuna and her father. Susan thinks they should call the police after they finish the TV job, and Wahoo should find out if Tuna has any other family she could stay with. Susan is amused to learn that Wahoo's friend has a fish name too, because it's a fishy coincidence.

Derek throws a tantrum when he learns he can't return to his hotel for the night, because of bad weather. He even puts a gash his own tent when he hurls a tree branch. A nearby lightning strike sends Derek running for cover. No one on the crew had thought to stockpile dry wood before the storm, so they use wooden folding chairs to make a fire to cook dinner. Derek eats huge amounts of chicken, rice, and cheesecake, while Raven worries about his ever-expanding gut. Derek wonders if they could alter the footage of the snake attack, using CGI, to make the water snake look like a deadly cottonmouth or rattlesnake, but Raven reminds him of his recent vow to put the real back into reality TV. Changing the subject, Derek orders her to have someone fix his ripped tent. Just then a woman from the catering staff screams. A bat has landed on the cheesecake platter. Raven wants to go get Mickey, but Derek wants the cameramen to set up some lights.

Chapter Fifteen: Back at the little camp, Mickey is asleep. Wahoo apologizes to Tuna for running off. He asks if she ever thought of calling the cops, but she doesn't respond. Tuna tells him that Link the airboat driver asked about her black eye. Link thought maybe Wahoo had hit her. Tuna told Link about her father, and Link said his father used to hit him and his sister. too. Tuna thinks her mother will leave her father eventually. Wahoo can't sleep. He wakes his father, who seems to be having a nightmare. Mickey has a bad headache. Mickey and Wahoo talk again about what to do about Tuna, and she overhears them. She reminds them that it is her life. Just then they hear screams.



A Florida mastiff bat lay huddled on the cheesecake platter because its internal sonar had malfunctioned. It can't fly away because it is hypersensitive to light. Derek grabs the disoriented bat, talking to the camera about his need to survive despite the fact that he has no dry wood for cooking, then he lowers it toward his open mouth. The bat doesn't want to be eaten, so it attacks, clamping down on Derek's tongue. Mickey is immediately called to remove the bat. He communicates with Derek, commanding him to answer questions by blinking his eyes. Mickey does not like handling bats, because they often carry diseases and sometimes they have rabies. He tickles the bat with the stem of a fern until it releases Derek's tongue and flies off into the night. Mickey, Wahoo, and Tuna depart for bed.

Chapter Fourteen and Fifteen Analysis

Derek habitually blames everyone else for his misfortunes, but Mickey reminds him that it was his choice to use wild creatures rather than Mickey's tame ones. Derek, of course, hears none of it. Even the weather conspires against Derek, in his self-centered view, preventing him from taking a helicopter to a luxury hotel with room service. He throws a tantrum and rips the tent that is to be his shelter for the night, in an ultimate show of immaturity.

Wahoo is nearly sick when he learns the real reason why Tuna likes to memorize the Latin names of animals. He cannot bear the thought of her being abused. He needs to hear his mother's voice, the ultimate voice of reason, security, and love. Susan Cray has a special relationship with her son, Wahoo, teetering somewhere between mother to son and peer to peer. Susan offers an option Wahoo hadn't considered—finding out if Tuna has other family members she could stay with. Across many miles, Wahoo's mother helps him to feel better. Raven admits that she, too, needs to hear the voice of her mother, despite the fact that she has long abandoned the Alabama accent she grew up with.

Wahoo learns that Tuna has confided in Link about her father's abuse, and that Link had also been abused as a child. These days, no one would dare abuse the strong and massive man, but Link is vulnerable when he thinks back on his childhood. He also feels protective of Tuna, who is small and innocent.

It is indicative of the crew's general lack of preparation to withstand the elements, that they have to burn wooden chairs to cook dinner. They had neglected to collect and protect some firewood beforehand.

Derek seizes an opportunity to handle and try to eat a bat that landed on a cheesecake platter in the catering tent. This is not the way a true survivalist catches his dinner, of course, but Derek does not care. With no firewood available, Derek tries to consume the creature raw and alive. The bat, in self-defense, bites Derek's tongue and won't let go. The narrator points out, snidely and to the delight of the reader, that Derek's shrieks were not written in the script. The ever-competent Mickey causes the bat to release its

grip on Derek's tongue by tickling it. Raven's total lack of connection with nature is revealed when she urges Mickey to kill the innocent bat. Mickey, of course, refuses.



Chapter Sixteen, Seventeen, and Eighteen

Chapter Sixteen, Seventeen, and Eighteen Summary

Chapter Sixteen: Wahoo assumes their job is over and they should go home, since Derek will need rabies shots. He mentions the possibility of getting a plane ticket so Tuna can join her mother in Chicago, but Tuna rejects the idea. Mickey emerges from the scrub with a pair of rat snakes. Link arrives, looking for Derek. The reality star isn't in his tent this morning, and an ambulance is waiting for him back at the souvenir shop. Mickey bags the snakes and the group sets off to find Derek. They encounter another search group, including Raven, whose red hair is laced with spiderwebs. The director wonders if a bear got Derek, but Mickey explains there would be blood and bones. Mickey thinks Derek is hiding. They hear the sound of an airboat firing up. Link cries out that it is his boat and goes running toward it.

Gerry Germaine is the executive producer of "Expedition Survival!" His office is in Studio City, California. He drives a yellow Ferrari and wears nine-hundred-dollar loafers. He rarely watches his own TV shows, but he scrutinizes their budgets. Gerry answers to the Untamed Channel, which airs all of his shows, and he thinks "Expedition Survival!" would be better off, and less expensive, without Derek Badger. He has mixed feelings when Raven calls to say Derek is missing. He does not want the police to be involved, does not want the story to hit the media. When Raven mentions rabies, Gerry Googles the symptoms. Gerry doesn't want to send a helicopter to search at one thousand dollars per hour, but when Raven presses him he agrees to four hours only. Raven can't believe Gerry is so uncaring when a man's life is at stake.

Sickler's other two airboats arrive over an hour later, ready to chase after Derek in Link's stolen airboat. Unfortunately, one boat breaks down and the other boat has to rescue the first. Eventually other airboats arrive to carry everyone back to Sickler's shop, where they plan their next move. Mickey packs his gear, thinking his job is done, and he asks Wahoo where Tuna is. Wahoo says she is in the souvenir shop. Raven asks Mickey to stay and help with the search. Mickey agrees, because there are many ways Derek could die in the Everglades. Wahoo finds Tuna, and he can tell that she is keeping something from him. Tuna just says she wants to ride in the same airboat as Link.

Chapter Seventeen: In a pillowcase under the mattress in Derek's trailer is a clue to his disappearance. He has hidden DVDs of the "Night Wing Trilogy," movies based on a book series about vampires. Derek has never read the books, but he loves the movies. Derek had assumed the bat was disabled when he tried to bite it, so he was shocked when it fought back. Hours later he woke up in his tent, feverish and confused. His tongue was swollen from the bite and from infection. His first instinct was to run and hide, which he did, with only a flashlight and a high-tech Helmet Cam. Later, perched in a fig tree, Derek started to wonder if he might have been bitten by a vampire bat. He



decided he must battle his demons, much like the hero in the vampire trilogy, in order not to become a vampire. The next morning, Derek heard an arriving airboat and saw Raven's search party pass beneath his tree. They never looked up. When he had an opportunity, he made his way to Link's airboat and took off. He traveled erratically until he grounded the airboat. Derek went flying, landing on his Helmet Cam, then ending up in a patch of poison ivy. He panicked when a shaft of sunlight hit him, thinking he might catch fire or melt, so he hid under the airboat, chanting magical phrases from the "Night Wing Trilogy."

Sickler figures he will make good money as long as Derek is missing, because the crew will need supplies. He agrees not to talk to the media, at least for now. A burly, unshaven man with matted hair and dirty clothes enters Sickler's shop. First he asks for a beer and then he asks if Sickler has seen his daughter. The stranger shows a picture. Sickler recognizes the girl, minus her recent black eye, but he does not say so. The stranger says his daughter needs medicine because she has Floyd's disease, very rare, seen in only one in twenty-two million kids. Sickler doesn't want to get involved, so he says he hasn't seen her. Then the stranger reveals that the girl had called him from this very shop, and he lunges at Sickler. The big, out-of-shape man grabs his claw hammer from behind the counter. The stranger tries to apologize, but Sickler doesn't like the look in his eyes.

Chapter Eighteen: By sunset no one has seen any sign of Derek. Despite the impression given to television viewers, Derek had never before been lost during a shoot. He likes to stay near the refreshments. Raven is frustrated and frightened. Mickey explains that they can't do anything more until tomorrow. He doesn't know why Derek would hide, he says, but then again he understands animals better than he understands people.

Wahoo and Tuna decide to check out the end of the "Expedition Survival!" script they found. Derek has supposedly carved a canoe from a log, using only his pocketknife. He wants to head home because he is too exhausted to wrestle another giant gator. Then, conveniently, a small plane passes overhead and spies Derek, a tiny speck below. Derek rejoices and the credits roll.

Tuna notes, with disgust, that no one can carve a canoe with a pocketknife. She asks, what if Derek is dead? Wahoo has considered that possibility as well, but he says the airboat is probably just out of gas. Tuna says she used to really love "Expedition Survival!" She would watch it on the televisions at Walmart after her dad passed out. Wahoo knows that whatever Derek is doing in the Everglades, he isn't carving a canoe.

Derek emerges from his hiding place after sunset. He manages to swallow three snails and a frog, despite his swollen tongue. He has already finished the gallon of drinking water that was on Link's airboat. Derek still doesn't feel like a vampire. He would rather have a Coke than human blood. He checks his teeth for fangs. He is itchy from poison ivy, but in his feverish confusion he wonders if the itch could be vampire-related. Derek decides to record his transformation into a vampire using the Helmet Cam. He props it



up in the airboat and tries to speak, but his tongue is too swollen, so he gives up. He vows the dark side will not get him.

Chapter Sixteen, Seventeen, and Eighteen Analysis

The middle chapters of "Chomp" bring new characters and new plot twists.

The plot takes one strange twist when the bat-bitten Derek disappears from the camp. No one knows about Derek's fondness for vampire movies, so no one can suspect that Derek thinks he has become a supernatural, blood-sucking creature. Mickey merely surmises, correctly in part, that Derek is hiding for some reason. The sound of Link's airboat engine confirms that theory. The omniscient narrator reveals, in flashback, that Derek spent the night in a feverish delirium. He thinks he must be alone in the woods in order to fight the evil spirits inside him.

The plot takes yet another twist when Gerry Germaine is introduced into the story. Gerry is interested in the bottom line, not in the well-being of Derek, and in fact Gerry would like to see Derek disappear permanently. This is the real reality of show business. Raven is forced to balance her loyalty toward Derek with her desire to keep her job and perhaps earn a promotion.

An ominous development is the arrival of Tuna's drunk and abusive father, Jared Gordon, at Sickler's souvenir shop. Sickler is not usually one to worry about other people, but he feels inclined to protect Tuna from her father.

Tuna obviously feels vulnerable and scared. She also feels betrayed by Wahoo and Mickey for plotting behind her back more than once, even though she knows they want what is best for her. Tuna wants to be near Link, a kindred spirit.

Derek brings some comic relief in the midst of his suffering and delusion, when he checks for fangs and worries that he might catch fire in the sunlight.



Chapter Nineteen and Twenty

Chapter Nineteen and Twenty Summary

Chapter Nineteen: Mickey tells Wahoo he slept poorly. Mickey says if Derek flipped the airboat, the propeller would have turned him into slaw. Otherwise, his body fat might keep him alive for a week—if he didn't do anything stupid. Everyone is gathered at the dock near Sickler's shop, listening to a pep talk from Raven. Mickey admits he feels sorry for Link, because the missing airboat is his whole life. He tells Wahoo that if Link had really meant to run him down with the boat, he wouldn't be standing here now. The Indian drivers are nervous, hearing thunder in the distance, because tree islands and metal airboats are magnets for lightning bolts. Wahoo notices Tuna at a distance, staring at the parking lot. Suddenly she wheels around and runs full force, her face full of fear.

Tuna's father, reeking of beer, visits Sickler once again in his shop. Sickler still says he hasn't seen Tuna and grabs his claw hammer. The man insists that Sickler is lying. Mickey enters the store and says he will drive the stranger to where the girl is, in his pickup. He introduces himself and the man responds that he is Jared Gordon. Sickler doesn't want Jared to find his daughter, to beat on her some more. Sickler asks how the girl got her black eye, and Jared responds that he knew Sickler had seen her. He says that black and blue marks are a symptom of Floyd's disease. Jared pulls out a revolver and declares that Mickey will take him to Tuna.

Link prefers a solitary life. He has never watched "Expedition Survival!" and he is not impressed by what he has seen during the shoot. He only took the job because it paid two hundred dollars a day. Link had been on other manhunts in the Everglades, and usually the people are found hungry, sunburned, and eaten up by mosquitoes. They rarely die from snake venom or gator attacks. He is more worried about his airboat than about Derek. He urges the Miccosukee airboat driver he has been assigned to ride with, to hurry up with his breakfast. Just then a panicked Tuna runs to him, begging for help. She and Link jump onto the airboat, and Wahoo somehow jumps on as well, and Link revs the engine despite the driver's surprised protest. Raven yells that the other teams aren't ready yet. Just then Jared Gordon shows up, one arm locked around Mickey's neck, the other aiming and firing at the escaping airboat. Link feels a pain below his shoulder blade as they take off, and later he realizes he has been shot. He stops the boat just before he collapses. Tuna and Wahoo find a first-aid kit. Tuna tells Link that her father was the shooter. Wahoo promises Link he isn't going to die, just before Link falls asleep. Wahoo is experienced in first aid. He rips away Link's shirt and discovers that the slug broke into pieces. Tuna admits that her father found her because she had called him from Sickler's shop, wanting to remind her father to feed her hamster. Wahoo applies antibiotics and gauze on the gunshot wound, pushing aside thoughts that Link might die so his hands will stay steady. He can't believe everyone is in this mess because of a hamster, yet he understands. He isn't sure where they are and he doesn't know how to drive an airboat. He worries about what his impulsive father might be



doing, back at the dock. Wahoo considers himself to be more calm and cautious, but then again, he has never been tested. He asks Tuna if her father was trying to shoot her. Tuna responds that she chooses to believe he was aiming for the engine. They hear another airboat approaching from a distance.

Chapter Twenty: Derek knows vampires can't stand exposure to sunlight, but he isn't sure about dark, cloudy days. He takes a chance. Remembering a scene from a past episode of "Expedition Survival," Derek uses his overturned Helmet Cam to catch rainwater for drinking. The swelling in his tongue and the itching are receding, and Derek feels some disappointment. Part of him wants to become a vampire so he can defeat the evil curse. He is very hungry. The previous night was his first spent truly alone in the wilderness, a fact that would have shocked his fans. Rain is filling up the airboat. Derek starts to worry that it might sink. He bails using the Helmet Cam for about fifteen minutes, until he is too tired, and then, despite lightning in the area, he foolishly sits under some trees, using the Helmet Cam for a stool. He grabs and swallows a foul-tasting butterfly just before lightning strikes.

On the phone, Raven tells Gerry Germaine that Derek has not yet been found. She has to tell him that two of their airboats were hijacked due to a family dispute. Gerry doesn't want to hear about the family drama, even when he is told there was gunfire. He wants to know who is searching for the star of his show. Raven explains that they have monsoon conditions and the airboat drivers are worried about the gunman. Gerry realizes they have to call the cops. Raven says she already did, but they won't start looking for Derek until the gunman is found. They say an experienced survivalist ought to be able to survive a monsoon. Gerry isn't sorry to hear the news. He has a New Zealander in mind to take over the starring role on "Expedition Survival!" Raven tries to save her job by saying they probably have enough footage to stitch together an episode no matter what happens to Derek. Gerry reminds her that they have no ending.

Wahoo thinks about a day when he was little, when he stood mesmerized on the tracks while a train approached. He didn't jump to safety until the last moment. He feels the same sort of sensation now, huddled with Tuna and Link on the airboat in the wind and rain, with another airboat speeding toward them. Their boat is partly hidden by sawgrass. Wahoo worries they will be run over. He orders Tuna to lie flat in case they are hit. Wahoo scrambles up to the top of the propeller's safety cage, despite the danger of being hit by lightning, to signal the other boat for help. But suddenly Wahoo jumps down and flattens himself. He tells Tuna that the other boat is being driven by Mickey, and Jared is holding him at gunpoint. Wahoo tries desperately to wake Link, the only one who can drive their airboat.

Chapter Nineteen and Twenty Analysis

Tuna's story takes a terrifying turn when she sees her father's Winnebago in the parking lot at Sickler's. She runs to find Link, the person she feels connected to in their common bond of abuse, and Link steals an airboat to help the young girl. All Link ever wanted was to live a solitary life and drive his airboat. His reward for befriending Tuna is a



gunshot in the back, from a pistol fired by Jared Gordon. Tuna, trying to cope with the enormity of what has happened, chooses to believe that her father was firing at the engine, not at her or anyone else.

Mickey automatically tries to distract Jared from finding Tuna when the opportunity arises, and as a result he becomes a hostage. He knows that Wahoo is in danger, along with Tuna, because Wahoo will do his best to protect the girl.

In the wilderness, Derek proves repeatedly that he is no survivalist. He sits under a tree during a lightning storm, with predictable results.

Raven and Gerry discuss their problems in their Hollywood way, considering how an episode of "Expedition Survival!" might be pieced together from existing footage, and how a replacement star might be available if Derek does not survive. Derek has no way of knowing that his life hangs in the balance in two ways: physically, alone in the Everglades; and professionally, as his producer prepares to carry on without him.

Wahoo acts fast when another airboat speeds toward theirs. First he signals for help, then he hides when he realizes the other airboat contains Tuna's dangerous father, holding his own father hostage. Wahoo must figure out a way to keep Tuna safe and help his father, when he doesn't even know how to drive the airboat. Clearly he will have to be brave and impulsive like his father when the time is right, and he might have to choose between saving his father, his friend, or perhaps himself.



Chapter Twenty-One and Twenty-Two

Chapter Twenty-One and Twenty-Two Summary

Chapter Twenty-One: The tree under which Derek took shelter is struck by lightning. The bolt travels down the tree, through the roots, and into the Helmet Cam he is using as a stool. Derek is thrown and he does not remember the lightning strike. He feels a current flowing through him; he feels the urge to fly like a hummingbird or a bat. The transformation is happening, so he thinks. He isn't even hungry, which is further proof that he is becoming a vampire. Derek finds a hole in his shorts and a tender spot on his bottom, which he believes is "the mark of the undead" (p. 215). The narrator calls the wound "the mark of the stupid" (p. 215). He realizes his airboat too full of water to be of any use. Derek can't build anything, so he goes to sleep while waiting for nightfall.

Mickey Cray had had a gun pointed at him once before, during an ATM robbery. Now Mickey wishes he had his own gun, which is hidden under the seat of his truck back at Sickler's place. Jared is reckless with his gun, and he is drunk. Not only did he fire at the airboat carrying his daughter, but he also shot at the stuffed gator known as Old Sleepy. Mickey saw Wahoo and the other airboat as they sped by earlier, but luckily Jared was looking the other way. Mickey hopes that Link has piloted them back to safety by now. Jared orders Mickey to stop their boat and get him a beer. Jared had grabbed a twelve-pack back at Stickler's shop. Mickey asks why Tuna ran away, and Jared responds that she forgot who was the boss. Mickey says she looks scared. Jared says it is just respect. They hear another airboat, and Mickey starts his engine to drown out the sound. He takes his airboat in an elaborate figure eight to confuse Jared, but then they hit a log.

Wahoo explains to Link that Jared just went by in an airboat, with Mickey as a hostage, and Link agrees to teach Wahoo how to operate the airboat they are in. The pedal is for gas and the stick is for steering, he says. There are no brakes. Wahoo drives carefully and gradually he gets the feel of maneuvering the airboat. He isn't sure what they will do once they catch up with Jared and Mickey. Lightning cracks nearby and they have to get out of the water. A piston blows just as they reach shore. Link says it isn't Wahoo's fault, because this airboat's owner doesn't take care of his equipment. Wahoo is worried about his father, held at gunpoint. If Mickey gets a headache he could lose his better judgment or crash their airboat. Link says he is having trouble breathing. Wahoo wonders if a fragment punctured Link's lung. He realizes they must take Link back to Sickler's place when the weather clears, leaving Mickey to fend for himself. Link starts to pray.

Chapter Twenty-Two: Raven's loyalty to Derek is sometimes shaky, but she takes pride in doing her job well. A police sergeant tells her they must find the gunman before they can search for Derek. She knows the sergeant is right. She also knows the media have arrived at Sickler's shop and members of the "Expedition Survival!" crew are taking bets on when Derek's body will be found. TV reality has been thwarted by real reality. Raven



realizes that her dream of becoming a big-time TV producer like Gerry Germaine is probably over. She isn't really sorry, because she realizes that sitting in an office and handling problems by phone might not be much fun. Maybe she can find another job like this one, with exotic locations and excitement.

When the airboat crashes, Mickey lands on a soft bed of cattails. He hopes Jared is dead or injured, but Tuna's father comes out of the water with his pistol still pointed at Mickey. Jared orders Mickey to grab the remaining beer and start walking. They make their way through the muck, seeking higher ground, as the storm continues. They stop while Jared has two beers. Jared asks Mickey what they should do next. Mickey responds that they should wait for help. Jared rejects that idea because he wants to find his daughter. He orders Mickey to the ground, then takes aim at a heron for no reason. After the gunshot, which missed the bird, Mickey thinks to himself that there are only three bullets left.

Wahoo and Tuna decide to explore while they wait for the weather to improve. They find a python coiled around a bird. Tuna is upset at the sight. Wahoo realizes that memorizing the Latin names of animals and watching nature shows isn't the same as entering their world. He comments that humans can be more brutal than animals, and Tuna thinks he is talking about her father. She is not angry, however. Tuna loses her bright green flip-flops in the mud. They come upon an airboat and approach quietly. It is the wrong color, however. The one carrying Mickey and Jared has a sparkle green hull, while this one is hand painted in dull camo. Tuna recognizes it as Link's airboat, the one Derek stole. They hear a grunt and an odd chant. Derek tells them to go away. He awkwardly climbs a tree and recites anti-vampire chants from one of the vampire movies. Wahoo says they need his airboat. Derek says it's full of water, and Mickey says the three of them need to bail. Just then a shot rings out and a heron flies away. Derek's Helmet Cam falls from his head and he dangles upside-down. He yells for someone to catch him, with no trace of an Australian accent, and then he falls.

Chapter Twenty-One and Twenty-Two Analysis

The narrator is in high form here, calling Derek's injury from lightning "the mark of the stupid" (p. 215). The reader might imagine Derek flapping his arms, trying to fly like a hummingbird or a bat. This comic relief gives the reader a rest, between scenes of tension and potential violence.

Mickey is disgusted to hear Jared say that Tuna's look of fear is actually about respect. He begins counting the bullets fired so far, hatching a plan to overpower his kidnapper. Mickey is calm and calculating now, but a headache could hamper his judgment at any time.

Wahoo must step into the role of an adult and learn how to drive a big airboat. Sometimes even the professionals have trouble, but Wahoo is very careful. When he blows a piston, Link is kind enough to tell him that it is the owner's fault for not maintaining his equipment. Wahoo and Link are becoming friends, despite the fact that



Wahoo's father does not get along with Link. Breathing heavily, Link starts to pray, in the first and only religious reference in the novel.

Raven's loyalty to Derek starts to wane as she considers her future. She realizes, after calmer reflection, that of course the police must find the gunman before they send a search party to find Derek. She realizes that she might not even want the promotion she had been working so hard to obtain, because she craves excitement. She does not want to be stuck behind a desk, managing crises by phone.

Wahoo and Tuna see a snake killing a bird, and Tuna is upset. The snake must eat to survive, however. That is nature's reality, unlike the fake reality when Derek supposedly kills a creature for survival. Wahoo remarks that humans can be more brutal than animals, and their thoughts drift to Tuna's father. Killing for survival is one thing; killing due to drunkenness or meanness is another. The reader is left to wonder about the green flip-flops Tuna leaves behind.



Chapter Twenty-Three and Twenty-Four

Chapter Twenty-Three and Twenty-Four Summary

Chapter Twenty-Three: Mickey plans to trick Jared into wasting his three remaining bullets, then jump him. Jared is drunk and restless. Mickey pretends he hears a bear and he points to some moving branches. Branches are moving everywhere, due to the wind, but Jared says he sees. Mickey tells him to take a shot to scare the bear off, and he does. Now six feet to the right, says Mickey, and Jared fires again. He fires a third time, using the last bullet. Mickey eyes the pistol, but Jared tells him to wander over and see if the bear is gone. Mickey plays along, then he is frustrated to see Jared reloading his gun.

Derek survives his fall from the tree unharmed, but he sports many previous injuries: the nose nip from the snapping turtle; the many bites from the water snake; the scrapes from Alice the alligator; the rash from poison ivy; and the swollen tongue from the bat. Derek warns Wahoo and Tuna to leave him before sunset, but they don't understand why. Finally Tuna realizes that he thinks he is a vampire. She once read the first book in the "Night Wing Trilogy," all the way through, even though she thought it was terrible. Derek refuses to help them bail water out of Link's airboat until Tuna threatens to reveal Derek as a phony on Facebook, then he agrees to help them bail. Even in his feverish state, Derek recognizes a genuine threat to his career. Derek is useless at bailing. Tuna can't believe she ever thought Derek's television adventures were real. She no longer wants an autograph. Tuna doesn't want to let Derek take a break from bailing, but Wahoo suspects he has an infection from the bat bite and tells him to rest. Wahoo realizes he needs to get medical attention for Link, but he also feels responsible for his father being in danger. Wahoo had talked Mickey into taking the "Expedition Survival!" job, and he had talked Mickey out of quitting more than once. Tuna apologizes. She says she shouldn't have run away, she should have hidden in the huge garden department at Walmart. They hear three gunshots in close succession, then a pair of male voices. Apparently Mickey is still alive, but Wahoo, Tuna, and Derek need to hide.

Chapter Twenty-Four: When the weather breaks, the police send airboats and helicopters into the area to find Jared. Raven locks herself in Derek's trailer to avoid the media, who want to make a connection between the missing survivalist star and the deranged gunman on the loose. The director leaks to a tabloid that Derek was bitten by a bat. Fans buzz on Facebook and Twitter. Gerry Germaine is pleased, because the publicity will bring high ratings. He prepares a two-hour tribute to the late Derek Badger, just in case. He tells Raven that he is flying in a potential replacement from New Zealand, who actually does his own parachute jumps. Raven is dismayed. She feels certain that Derek is still alive.

Derek won't be quiet as he hides with Wahoo and Tuna, so Tuna offers him some of the same pills she had given to Mickey and her own father on many occasions. The pills work their magic. Wahoo asks to see the bottle, so he can get more for his father. Tuna



explains that the pills, which she calls Raguserup, are only placebos made of sugar. "Raguserup" spelled backwards is "pure sugar." The pills are a trick of the mind. Wahoo worries that his father, like Tuna's, must be a whack job, since the pills work so well. Tuna tells him that their fathers are very different. Wahoo asks if Tuna can stay with Derek while he goes to check on Link, and Tuna agrees. Wahoo feels responsible for the safety of everyone in his group, since his father is not there to help. It is a new feeling for him, "gut-check time" (p. 250). He finds Link weak but sitting up. Link had tried, unsuccessfully, to walk. Wahoo has to ask if Link really meant to run over his father the other day with his airboat. Link smiles and says he only meant to scare him. Wahoo says he and Tuna were fooled, and Link responds that Mickey wasn't afraid. Wahoo starts to leave, to get the airboat, when they hear many engines approaching. Link suggests Wahoo should build a big bonfire.

Mickey is running out of patience with Jared. Working with animals, Mickey is more used to dealing in instinct than in psychology. Despite a great quantity of beer, Jared keeps up with Mickey and keeps his pistol ready. They hear airboats in the distance, but Mickey knows that when the sun sets soon, searchers will have a tough time finding anyone. Jared seems to sober up, realizing his plan to recapture Tuna isn't working out. He hatches a new plan, to escape to the highway. Mickey says the highway is too far away for walking, so Jared says his plan B is to bargain with the police, trading Mickey's life for an airboat and freedom. Jared even reveals that he might go to Harbour Island in the Bahamas, where the sand is pink and people ride horses on the beach. He will come back to deal with Tuna sometime in the future. Mickey suggests they make a fire to attract the police sooner. Jared agrees. While gathering wood, to Mickey's horror, he sees a small human footprint. He rubs it out and says they need to find better wood somewhere else, but Jared disagrees. Mickey tries to trick Jared into going the wrong way, then tries to punch him, but Jared strikes back.

Chapter Twenty-Three and Twenty-Four Analysis

Mickey's plan to make Jared use all of his bullets is brilliant but unsuccessful, because Jared carries extra bullets in his pocket.

In these chapters events are speeding toward a climax. The narrator cleverly switches from one set of characters to another, with events overlapping between the two. For example, Mickey tempts Jared into firing three shots in one scene, then in an adjoining scene Wahoo and his companions hear those three shots. Using this technique, tension is heightened and the reader is drawn with bated breath toward the climactic scene, Wahoo's moment of truth, his coming-of-age event.

Wahoo and Tuna both feel guilty about the situation they are in. Wahoo had talked his father into taking this television job, and Tuna had chosen to run away and accompany Wahoo into the Everglades. Of course their decisions have helped to bring them to where they are now, but the adults involved must bear most of the responsibility. Besides, Wahoo and Tuna both acted out of good intentions, not evil.



Tuna no longer wants Derek Badger's autograph. She sees him as a buffoon. She understands how to manipulate him into action, however, by threatening to trash his reputation on Facebook. Neither Tuna nor Derek realize that the media frenzy has already begun, or that producer Gerry Germaine has all but replaced Derek with a new star.

Tuna reveals at last that her special pills, called Raguserup, are actually sugar pills. Their healing power, she explains, is all in the mind. "Raguserup" spelled backwards is "pure sugar," cleverly enough. A big statement is being made here about using chemicals as a crutch, be they legal or illegal, in pill form or liquid.

Link and Wahoo come to a new understanding. Link explains that he never would have hit Mickey with his boat and that Mickey was never truly afraid. This is part of Wahoo's journey, to learn not to always take things at face value.

Mickey bargains with Jared, helping him to hatch an escape plan since he can't seem to find his daughter. But then Mickey sees Tuna's footprint and knows she must be nearby. He tries unsuccessfully to manipulate Jared away, to no avail. Both groups—the fathers and the children—decide to build bonfires to attract the searchers, albeit for very different reasons.



Chapter Twenty-Five

Chapter Twenty-Five Summary

Chapter Twenty-Five: Wahoo smells wood burning and wonders if Derek actually started a fire, but when he approaches he sees Tuna sitting cross-legged with her head down, Mickey with a bloodied brow and bound wrists, and a man who must be Tuna's father, Jared. Jared waves Tuna's flip-flop in the air as he paces back and forth. Wahoo overhears Jared's current plan, to escape with Tuna, with Mickey driving Link's airboat. Mickey says he can't drive, because he sees double since Jared hit him in the head with his pistol. Tuna tells her father that Mickey has had a concussion for months. She stalls for time by suggesting they give Mickey a chance to recover. Jared tells her to give Mickey some of her pink pills. Mickey remarks that Jared must be proud of the shiner he gave his daughter. Tuna gathers more wood for the fire, but Wahoo thinks it is still too small for searchers to notice at night. Wahoo waits and listens. He wonders what happened to Derek. Jared gives Tuna a pocketknife and tells her to untie Mickey. Mickey protests that the pills haven't worked yet, but Jared doesn't care. Wahoo searches for a stick or rock to use as a weapon. Mickey agrees to take Jared to the highway if he will leave Tuna behind to wait for rescue. Jared says no, because she had Floyd's disease. Tuna says she has no such thing, but Floyd is the name of her hamster. Mickey says that if Jared won't leave without Tuna, then he won't be leaving at all. Jared points his gun, preparing to shoot. Wahoo fills with rage. He must do something. Wahoo appears at the edge of the trees some distance away, jumping up and down to distract Jared. He holds up Link's waterlogged phone and threatens to call the police. The phone, he says, has GPS. Then he runs off into the woods, hoping that Jared will follow and Mickey can jump Jared. Tuna tells her father not to shoot, because Wahoo is sick in the head. Mickey moves between Jared and Wahoo just as Jared fires. Wahoo yells, "Pop! No!" (p. 265) and Jared is pleased. Now he understands how everyone is related.

Derek had gotten lost in the woods after relieving himself. He hears gunshots and moves toward them, thinking they are signals from rescuers. In his head he concocts a new ending for this latest episode of "Expedition Survival!" Soon he hears snorts and sees a bulky shadow. He draws his small pocketknife and tells the creature to scam. The creature, a wild pig, doesn't scam, but instead it charges and flings Derek into a tree. He holds on for dear life. The pig circles, then leaves. Derek tries to get a better hold in the tree using his knife, but the blade breaks and he falls to the ground.

Mickey looks at Wahoo and says, "Don't tell your mom" (p. 268). Jared had shot him in the left foot, the same one that Beulah the python had recently chewed. Mickey's big toe is missing. He says that now he and Wahoo match, referring to Wahoo's missing thumb. Wahoo wraps his father's foot in his T-shirt, torn into strips. Tuna explains that Mickey and Wahoo are animal wranglers, working for "Expedition Survival!" Jared still insists that Mickey must drive the boat, even though he can't walk. Wahoo makes a torch, using his "Expedition Survival!" jacket and a branch, then lights it in the fire, and he



hands it to Tuna. Wahoo and Jared take hold of Mickey on either side, and help him hobble to the water's edge. Everyone but Jared bails out the boat for about an hour, then Wahoo volunteers to drive. He explains that he learned how earlier in the day. Jared wants only Mickey, however, and Mickey makes his way to start the engine. At first the engine won't start, then it does, and then Mickey shuts it off again due to the arrival of Link. Link orders Jared out of his boat. Tuna lunges at her father, and he pushes her down. Everyone warns Link to stop, but he keeps moving toward Jared. Jared takes aim, but he fails to notice Wahoo attack. Mickey watches, helpless, as Wahoo, Tuna, and Link all struggle with Jared and his pistol. Mickey starts the engine at the right moment, sending a spray of water at Jared, but Jared keeps his grip on the gun. Link collapses as a helicopter approaches. Wahoo and Tuna keep Link's head above water and guide him to shore. Jared fires in the air. Mickey says he will take Jared wherever he wants to go, now that the kids are out of the boat. Jared lunges to shore and grabs Tuna around the neck, kicking Wahoo in the process. Mickey tries to help and he falls. Jared commands Mickey to get up or be killed, but Mickey says he can't. Just then the helicopter finds Jared in a beam of light. Jared swears, then takes aim at the cockpit. Wahoo almost looks away, but then from nowhere Derek charges at Jared, knocking him and Tuna back into the water. Tuna grabs the gun. Jared is pinned underwater, and he can't understand why someone is biting him in the throat.

Chapter Twenty-Five Analysis

Both Wahoo and his father show bravery and selflessness in this chapter. Wahoo bides his time and tries to draw fire away from Mickey and Tuna, but Mickey makes the ultimate sacrifice by stepping into the path of the bullet. Fortunately, Mickey is only shot in the foot, the same foot that had been chewed on recently by Beulah the python. In the midst of all the tension, Mickey asks Wahoo not to tell his mother about the gunshot, but to blame everything on Alice the alligator.

A final showdown takes place on Link's airboat, with Link arriving to take revenge on the man who shot him. Mickey offers to take Jared anywhere, now that the kids are out of the boat, but that statement inspires Jared to go and grab Tuna by the neck. The police are there, hovering overhead in a helicopter, and a standoff seems inevitable. But then Jared decides to do the unthinkable—he aims his gun at the cockpit. All hope seems lost.

In an ultimate combination of bravery, just deserts, and comic relief, a delusional Derek Badger charges at Jared and bites him in the neck. Derek has no vampire fangs, but he does draw blood. And he saves the day.



Chapter Twenty-Six, Epilogue

Chapter Twenty-Six, Epilogue Summary

Chapter Twenty-Six: Derek realizes he isn't really a vampire, because he did not like the taste of Jared's blood. Wahoo and Tuna thank him for coming to their rescue. The helicopter hovers overhead, its spotlight trained on Jared. Jared is tied up with vines and rope, knotted securely by Wahoo and Link. He has painful bite marks on his neck, but they would have been worse if Derek had had fangs. Wahoo used all of his strength to pry Derek off. Wahoo sits next to his father, who is resting on the deck of the airboat. Mickey says he is proud of Wahoo, then asks him once again to tell his mother that Alice chomped his foot. Link is upright but breathing heavily. Derek asks what everyone plans to say to the police. They agree to tell the truth, except for the Night Wing vampire stuff. Tuna asks Derek for his autograph after all. She beams when he signs it, saying that he is her fan. Jared complains and Tuna stuffs one of his socks in his mouth. A rescue boat comes to take Link and Mickey to a hospital, along with Wahoo. Tuna stays behind with her father, Derek, and the police. When the police arrest Jared and ask him his name, he doesn't respond. Tuna says he is homo sapiens, but a lame specimen.

Epilogue: Derek's final episode of "Expedition Survival!" airs three months later, digitally enhanced to make him look like less of a klutz, and with Alice the alligator portrayed as a wild creature in the episode's final scene. At the request of the Untamed Channel, which does not want to encourage children to try stupid stunts, the bat-eating incident is omitted from the show. The director does play the clip, however, at the crew's end-of-season party. Jared watches the episode from jail. His lawyers advise him to plead guilty to all charges, but he hasn't yet made up his mind. Raven is taking a cross-country vacation in Derek's motor coach, visiting many famous landmarks and natural wonders. Raven had composed a press release, touting Derek as a hero who saved four lives, and got him booked on many top-rated talk shows. Despite the high ratings for the Everglades episode of "Expedition Survival," Derek was replaced on the show by the New Zealander Gerry Germaine had been considering, because Derek had foolishly asked for even more of a raise following the media frenzy. Gerry offered Raven a job with the revamped show, which Raven turned down until she Skyped with the new man, Brick Jeffers. He was good-looking, charming, and smarter than Derek, so Raven accepted the job. Derek watches final episode on board his yacht, sulking. There is no video of his one true act of bravery, tackling Jared Gordon, but the edited version of "Expedition Survival!" shows him in a good light. He is fielding offers from other networks for a new show. Unfortunately, they want him to do his own stunts, and he is very much out of shape. Link recovers from surgery to remove a bullet fragment from his lung. He calls Wahoo on his new phone, saying he can have another airboat driving lesson any time. Being a private person, Link is uncomfortable with his new-found fame among airboat drivers. He names his airboat "Lucille," in honor of Tuna, whose abusive father reminds him of his own. Sickler's shop has become a tourist attraction. He has mounted Old Sleepy on the ceiling, telling visitors that it is the alligator Derek wrestled to exhaustion on "Expedition Survival!" Wahoo and his family, including his mother, are



reunited at home. Susan does not believe that Alice took Mickey's big toe, but she is happy to find that their debts have been paid. Mickey no longer has headaches or double vision. He hobbles about, caring for his animals, and one day Beulah the python chomps on his cast, getting her teeth stuck. Gerry Germaine tried to withhold Mickey and Wahoo's pay, saying that they cost the show thousands of dollars because of their involvement with Tuna and her father, but Julie Cray threatened that they would sue for unsafe working conditions, plus lost future wages for Mickey since his foot is permanently injured. Gerry paid the family. Wahoo and Tuna stay in touch. Tuna is living in Chicago with her mother. The two texted for a while, with Wahoo using only one thumb, until a monkey grabbed his phone from his pocket and destroyed it. Now they speak occasionally by phone. Wahoo misses Tuna. They planned to see each other during Jared's trial, but since he might plead guilty, that might not happen. Tuna promises she will visit soon. They still call each other Lance and Lucille.

Chapter Twenty-Six, Epilogue Analysis

Chapter Twenty-Six and the Epilogue tie up loose ends and provide many feel-good moments. The bad guy, of course, goes straight to jail. Tuna makes a taxonomy-related jab at her father, calling him a homo sapiens, but a poor specimen. The reader will remember that her father's abuse drove Tuna to study taxonomy as a coping mechanism.

Derek realizes he is not a vampire, because he does not like the taste of blood. His stint on "Expedition Survival!" has come to an end, but other offers are coming in. Unfortunately, most of them will require him to lose weight and do his own stunts—a daunting prospect. But such a commitment would bring more reality to reality television.

Their days together in the Everglades have forged a true friendship between Wahoo and Tuna, or, rather, Lance and Lucille, even though she has moved from southern Florida to Chicago. They text for a while, with Wahoo using only one thumb, until a monkey destroys his cell phone. They still talk sometimes, using regular phone lines, and the reader is left to wonder if they will become a couple in the future.

Deception and outright evil exist in the world of "Chomp," but in the end everyone gets what they deserve. Sometimes reality can be very exciting.



Characters

Wahoo Cray

Wahoo Cray, a boy about thirteen years old, is the main character of "Chomp." His parents are Mickey and Susan, an animal wrangler and a language instructor, and they live together in southern Florida. The story is told primarily from Wahoo's point of view. Wahoo is named, to his embarrassment, after the wrestler and football player Wahoo McDaniel. Wahoo plans to change his name when he is old enough. He is missing one thumb. Alice the alligator, one of his father's many animals, bit it off by accident when Wahoo was showing off for a girl during Alice's feeding time. Wahoo is a mild-mannered and thoughtful boy. He cannot even put a face to the evil in his nightmares when he learns that his friend, Tuna, has been abused by her own father. He does everything he can to help Tuna, first with friendship and emotional support, then, ultimately, with an act of heroism when he tries to distract Tuna's gun-wielding father from shooting Tuna, Mickey, or an airboat pilot at the climax of the novel. Wahoo and Tuna call each other Lance and Lucille, because they dislike their fishy names.

Mickey Cray

Mickey Cray is the husband of Susan and father of Wahoo and Julie. He is an animal wrangler. Ever since he was hit on the head by a frozen iguana, suffering a concussion, he has been confused and he sees double. He has been unable to work since the accident, and the family is in danger of losing their house. Out of necessity, Wahoo books Mickey as an animal wrangler for an episode of a reality show, "Expedition Survival!" Mickey's hands look fake, like Halloween props, because they have been bitten so many times. He clenches and unclenches his fists when he is angry, and sometimes he acts without thinking. He signs contracts without reading them first. Mickey's wife says he has the ideal occupation because he gets along with animals better than people. Mickey has a strong sense of right and wrong, especially where animals are concerned, and he will fight for what he believes in. During the course of the novel, Mickey puts his life on the line for others numerous times.

Tuna Gordon

Tuna is a girl from Wahoo's class. She has curly ginger hair and is small for her age. Tuna is named for an aunt who worked in a sushi bar. Tuna and her father live in a Winnebago in a Walmart parking lot in Florida. Tuna's father is a drunk who abuses her. Tuna's mother is in Chicago, caring for her own mother. Tuna memorizes the Latin names of animals as a means of escape from her troubled home life. She is savvy, concocting placebos to help control her fathers' moods and hiding from him in Walmart when necessary. When her father gives her a black eye, however, Tuna runs away from home. That is when she happens to see Wahoo at Walmart, beginning a once-in-a-



lifetime adventure. Tuna loves "Expedition Survival!" and she is thrilled when she is invited to watch the filming of an episode in the Florida Everglades. She is unaware that reality TV sometimes isn't real. Tuna and Wahoo call each other Lucille and Lance, because they dislike their fishy names.

Derek Badger

Derek Badger is the host of a reality show called "Expedition Survival!" Most of his stunts are staged. He has a round belly and hair more orange than blond. His Australian accent is affected and his tan comes from a spray bottle. During each episode of his show Derek supposedly parachutes alone into a remote area, but the jump is performed by a stunt double. Derek is then supposed to make his way back to civilization, building shelters and killing animals to eat for survival, but when the cameras stop rolling he enjoys room service at fine hotels. Derek's real name is Lee Bluepenny. Derek has no formal training in biology, forestry, or survival skills. His background is in show business, as a dancer. Derek's secret passion is vampire movies, from Bela Lugosi to "Night Wing Trilogy." He isn't brave, but he is willing to take crazy risks in order to get entertaining footage for his show. As a result, while they are filming "Expedition Survival!" in the Everglades, Mickey Cray has to rescue Derek Badger many times.

Raven Stark

Raven Stark is Derek Badger's senior production assistant. She has a shining stack of red hair and wears clothes too fashionable for wilderness settings. Although she is from Alabama, her accent hints of faraway places. Her main job is keeping control of Derek Badger—preventing him from eating too much or getting into trouble.

Susan Cray

Susan Cray is the wife of Mickey and mother of Wahoo and Julie. She teaches Mandarin Chinese, mostly to American businessmen. Because of her husband's concussion and impulsive nature, she often treats him more as a son and relates to her son as an adult. During most of the action in "Chomp," Susan is in Beijing, earning money to keep the family from losing their house.

Julie Cray

Julie Cray is the daughter of Mickey and Susan, also the sister of Wahoo. She has a normal name because Susan chose it. Julie is away from home at law school, and she sometimes helps Mickey with contract negotiations and other legal issues.



Donny Dander

Donny Dander is an animal wrangler who lost his importing license. He had tried to smuggle thirty-eight rare South American tree frogs in his underwear. He is hired to watch Mickey Cray's array of animals while he is away, despite misgivings on Mickey's part.

Sickler

Sickler is a portly man who was once run out of Tennessee for selling fake rubies out of a fake mine. He now owns a souvenir shop on the Tamiami Trail in the Florida Everglades. He also owns three airboats, offering tourists one-hour excursions. Sickler promises a full refund to anyone who doesn't see at least one alligator on the tour, but he has planted a stuffed gator on a log near the dock, so people are never disappointed. The gator is nicknamed "Old Sleepy." "Expedition Survival!" uses Sickler's shop as a center of operations during their Everglades shoot and also pays for the use of the three airboats. Sickler is no saint, but he does make some effort to protect Tuna from her abusive father when he arrives.

Link

Link is an airboat driver, beefy and dull-eyed, employed by Sickler. He pilots the "Expedition Survival!" crew into the Everglades. Link and Tuna form a special bond, because they are both victims of abuse at the hand of their fathers.

Gerry Germaine

Gerry Germaine is the executive producer of "Expedition Survival!" He has a canary-yellow Ferrari. He also produces "Rattlesnake Roundup," "Shrimp Wars," and "Polar Madness," all from the comfort of his Hollywood office. He rarely watches his shows but he always watches their budgets. Gerry is anxious to replace the difficult and overpaid Derek Badger as the star of "Expedition Survival!"

Jared Gordon

Jared Gordon is Tuna's father. He gets drunk every day. He is burly and unshaven, with red-rimmed eyes. He gives his daughter a black eye, causing her to run away and join Wahoo on an adventure in the Everglades. Jared is a dangerous man. He tracks Tuna in the Everglades and wields a gun, injuring two people and threatening many more.



Objects/Places

Alice the Alligator

Alice the alligator is one of Mickey Cray's animal stars. She is twelve feet long and tame, larger than her wild counterparts because she is fed regularly and generously. She has appeared in many films, documentaries, and commercials. She once bit off Wahoo's thumb by accident, when he was showing off while feeding her some raw chicken. When Derek Badger mounts Alice and tries to wrestle, the pandemonium makes for some great television footage. Of course, the shots of Mickey Cray jumping in and saving Derek's life are edited out.

Beulah the Python

Beulah is a fourteen-foot python, owned by Mickey Cray. After Wahoo forgets to feed Beulah her usual dinner of raw chicken, Beulah takes an opportunity to chomp on Mickey's foot and coil around his legs. Beulah is not so lively on the day when Derek Badger tries to wrestle with her.

Luxury Motor Coach

Although Derek Badger works hard to convince his reality show audience that he is roughing it in the wilderness each week, desperate for food and shelter, he spends his time off-camera in a luxury motor coach, complete with air conditioning and fancy gadgets. In addition, Derek spends his nights in luxury hotels.

Everglades

The Everglades are subtropical wetlands in southern Florida. Dangerous and exotic creatures lurk within, including alligators, crocodiles, venomous snakes, and panthers. Most of the action in "Chomp" takes place in the Everglades, as a production crew attempts to shoot a reality show featuring Derek Badger, a made-for-TV survivalist who manhandles the wildlife.

Old Sleepy

Old Sleepy is a stuffed bull gator that Sickler has mounted on a log near his dock in the Everglades. The stuffed gator ensures that he will never have to follow through on his guarantee of a full refund for any tourist who doesn't see at least one alligator during their hour-long airboat tour.



Airboats

Airboats are a common form of transportation in a designated section of the Everglades, popular for guided tours. In most of the Everglades, designated as wilderness, the loud airboats are prohibited. Link the airboat driver is devastated when a feverish and confused Derek Badger steals his airboat, because it is his livelihood.

Taxonomy

Taxonomy is the ordering of animal and plant life by characteristics, using Latin names, into groups ultimately defined by genus and species. Tuna Gordon memorizes the Latin names of animals as a form of emotional escape from her abusive father.

Walmart Parking Lot

A Walmart parking lot in southern Florida is where Tuna lives with her drunken father, in a dilapidated Winnebago, since their home was foreclosed on by the bank. Sometimes Tuna goes inside the Walmart to watch her favorite shows in the television department, when her father is snoring too loud.

Florida Mastiff Bat

The Florida mastiff bat is the largest in the southeastern United States. It is an endangered species, probably carried from Cuba to Florida during a hurricane years ago. Unlike most bats, it flies in the deep of night, not at dusk. The mastiff normally avoids humans, except when cornered by someone foolish like Derek Badger.

Floyd's Disease

Floyd's disease is an illness that Tuna's father claims she has, in order to convince people that he must find her. It supposedly strikes one in twenty-two million kids. Jared says Tuna could go into a coma or die if she doesn't take her medicine. He also says that Tuna's black and blue marks are a symptom of Floyd's disease. Floyd is actually the name of Tuna's hamster.

Flip-Flops

Tuna wore lime-colored flip-flops with rhinestones when she ran away from home, not realizing she would end up trekking through muck in the Everglades with Wahoo Cray. At one point she simply leaves them behind and goes barefoot. Her abusive father, Jared, is just about to give up his search for her when he finds one of her flip-flops.

Raguserup

Raguserup is the name of the pills Tuna sometimes gives to her father when he is drunk or angry, to calm him down. Tuna's pills also help Mickey Cray with his headaches and Derek Badger with his assorted aches and pains. All three men feel better. None of them realize that the pills are made of sugar, a placebo to trick the mind. "Raguserup" spelled backwards is "pure sugar."



Themes

Survival

Survival is an important theme in "Chomp," which chronicles production of a reality show called "Expedition Survival!" Audiences at home believe they are watching Derek Badger, reality star, go to extremes in order to survive alone in the wilderness. They see him kill and eat wild creatures, supposedly so he won't starve, but after filming ends he enjoys gourmet meals. They see him build shelters and canoes, but those things are actually built by crew members or natives. They hear him talk about hiking to the point of exhaustion, but between scenes he rests in his luxury motor coach or a fine hotel. Derek Badger is a survivalist in name only.

Tuna Gordon is initially a fan of this reality show, believing Derek Badger is truly struggling to survive. She does not mind when Derek kills and eats a snake or a rat or other innocent creature, because she believes he is starving. When Tuna sees a snake killing a bird in the wild, however, the brutal reality of survival hits her hard.

In the novel Derek struggles to survive in spite of his own ego, recklessness, and feverish delusions. Wahoo, Mickey, Tuna, and Link struggle to survive against forces of nature and an evil man with a gun. The will to survive is strong within us all, whether man or beast.

Animal Rights and Conservation

"Chomp" contains a great deal of information about the proper treatment of animals and population management. Mickey Cray, an animal wrangler, is willing to let his animals be used in television shows and movies, but only on his terms. He often finds and rescues non-native animals from the wild in southern Florida, because he knows they have no natural enemies and would otherwise crowd out native species. Mickey will not turn these captured animals over to the government for reward money, even though he and his family are in debt, because he knows they would be euthanized. In the unfairness of fate, Mickey gets a concussion when a non-native iguana, frozen during a cold snap, falls from a tree and hits Mickey in the head. Mickey's son, Wahoo, also has a healthy respect for animals and their well-being, learned from his father. Derek Badger, on the other hand, views animals as mere props, to be used in any way necessary to boost the ratings of his popular reality show. Derek usually gets his comeuppance, however, as when he tries to eat a live bat and it bites down on his tongue. In the world of "Chomp," those who abuse animals are ultimately punished.

Reversal of Parent/Child Roles

In "Chomp," several characters exemplify the reversal of the usual parent/child relationship. Wahoo must look after his father, Mickey, at the request of his own mother,



Susan. Wahoo is the one who books jobs for his father, takes care of many animals on their property, and worries about the family's finances, because Mickey has suffered a concussion. Mickey is still a strong father figure in other ways, though, grounded in his desire to protect the helpless and do what is right.

Tuna has to manage her father, who is drunk and abusive. She invents elaborate schemes and concocts placebos in order to survive.

Wahoo and Tuna exhibit great maturity at their young age, probably about thirteen, because responsibilities have been thrust upon them. And yet, they both show vulnerability. They both need someone to talk to, someone to trust. Wahoo turns to his mother, temporarily working on the other side of the globe, and Tuna turns to Link, who knows what it means to be a victim of parental abuse.

Style

Point of View

"Chomp" features an omniscient narrator. The thoughts and actions of all characters are available, but the narrator focuses primarily on Wahoo, Mickey, Derek, and Raven, as needed to propel the story. The narrator adds background information when necessary, as when, for example, the narrator explains the unusual circumstances surrounding Mickey's concussion (p. 1). The narrator sometimes foreshadows events or even predicts the future, as when Derek muses that he looks forward to being "poked, stung, scratched, clawed, chewed and chomped" by creatures in the Everglades, and the narrator states outright: "And he will get his wish" (p. 21). The narrator sometimes injects a bit of humor, as when Derek is bitten on the tongue by a mastiff bat and the narrator states, "The shrieks were not part of the script that he'd hastily composed on a paper napkin following the bat's unexpected arrival. The shrieks were totally spontaneous" (p. 157). The omniscient narrator not only describes events for us from the best vantage points, but also adds entertainment value and flair.

Setting

Most of the action in "Chomp" takes place in the Everglades, where a production crew attempts to shoot a reality show featuring Derek Badger, a made-for-TV survivalist who manhandles the wildlife. The Everglades are subtropical wetlands in southern Florida. Dangerous and exotic creatures lurk within, including alligators, crocodiles, venomous snakes, and panthers. The most efficient mode of transportation in the area where the novel unfolds is by airboat, designed for tourist excursions but difficult to maneuver. The Everglades offer many opportunities for Derek to put himself and others in danger. The Everglades also provide a harsh and mysterious backdrop to the drama of a gunman on the loose.

Additional scenes take place at the south Florida home of the Cray family and their menagerie. At home, Mickey and Wahoo have greater control over their animals. They even have a set in their backyard, designed to replicate the Everglades, which was once used for filming by Disney. Nevertheless, accidents happen. For example, on their own property Wahoo lost a thumb to Alice the alligator and Mickey is bitten and partially constricted by Beulah the python. Derek's confrontation with Alice the alligator takes place on the Everglades set on the Crays' property, but his injuries are the result of his own recklessness.

A few other locations are mentioned, including the Walmart parking lot where Tuna lives, Sickler's souvenir shop, and Gerry Germaine's office in Hollywood.



Language and Meaning

"Chomp" features much editorializing and many puns about the nature of reality, as inspired by the filming of a reality show called "Expedition Survival!" When reality star Derek Badger decides he wants to use only wild animals in the show, he remarks, "From now on, we're putting the 'real' back in 'reality'" (p. 87). Of course, he doesn't take long to backpedal. When things go very wrong during the filming of the show, the narrator observes, "The Everglades show was in chaos, completely out of control. 'Real' reality had thwarted TV reality" (p. 226).

Tuna uses taxonomy, the study of animals' Latin names, as a coping mechanism to block out the horror of her home life. She takes great pride in sharing her knowledge with Wahoo and Mickey. At the end of the novel she insults her drunk and abusive father taxonomically, calling him a lame specimen of *homo sapiens* (p. 279).

Both Derek Badger and Raven Stark affect fake accents—his Australian and hers generically exotic—to create alternate realities for themselves.

Mickey Cray literally says "bleeping" when he wants to swear, as inspired by television censors. Thus he brings the altered reality of television into his everyday speech.

Structure

"Chomp" is divided into twenty-six chapters, each about nine to fifteen pages in length, plus an Epilogue. The story is told by an omniscient narrator, in the form of dialogue, descriptions, and frequent peeks into the characters' private thoughts. Sometimes the narrator makes a side remark, either to inject humor or to foreshadow coming events.

The main plot of the novel involves Wahoo Cray and his animal wrangler father, Mickey, who are hired to manage the wildlife during the production of a show called "Expedition Survival," with the current episode being shot in the Everglades. The star of the show, Derek Badger, lacks survival skills and has no useful knowledge of wildlife. Wahoo and Mickey must do their best to keep Derek safe, with some help from Raven, a production assistant. In addition, young Wahoo must look after his father, who, partly because of a concussion, tends to be temperamental and impulsive. Subplots involve the wacky delusions of reality star Derek Badger, who thinks he is turning into a vampire, and also the sad story of Tuna, Wahoo's friend from school, who travels with the group to the Everglades because her alcoholic father had given her a black eye.



Quotes

"Mickey had named him after Wahoo McDaniel, a professional wrestler who'd once played linebacker for the Dolphins. Mickey's son often wished he'd been called Mickey Jr. or Joe or even Rupert—anything but Wahoo, which was also a species of saltwater fish."

Chapter One, p 1-2

"Watching the cab speed off, Wahoo's father looked forlorn. 'It's like she's leaving us twice,' he remarked.

"What are you talking about, Pop?"

"I'm seein' double, remember? There she goes—and there she goes again."

Chapter One, p. 6

"Mickey got chomped all the time; it was an occupational hazard. His hands were so scarred that they looked fake, like rubber Halloween props."

Chapter One, p. 6

"He arrived on the Everglades set just as Derek Badger was emerging from the air-conditioned motor coach that served as a dressing room. The vehicle was jet-black and as big as a Greyhound bus. Derek wore crisply pressed khaki shorts, a matching safari shirt and hiking boots splattered with wet oatmeal to look like mud.

"What a poser,' Mickey said.

"Chill out, Pop.'

"Don't we have some fire ants?"

"That's enough."

Chapter Five, p. 40

"Although loyal viewers of 'Expedition Survival!' never would have guessed, Derek Badger dined like a king during his televised survival missions. No matter how remote the jungle setting, his contract required sumptuous five-star menus: steak, lamb, lobster, sockeye salmon, homemade pasta, pheasant or venison, accompanied by fresh garden vegetables and of course an array of rich, artery-clogging desserts.

"Naturally, these feasts were consumed off camera, so as not to spoil the illusion of hardship."

Chapter Six, p. 53-54

"During their 150 million years of existence, alligators have survived global upheavals that wiped out thousands of other species—volcanic eruptions, raging floods, sizzling droughts, melting glaciers and crashing meteorites. After all the other great dinosaurs vanished from earth, the hardy gator remained.

"The most serious threat to emerge was man, who in the twentieth century began killing the reptiles for their hides, which were used to make expensive purses, belts and shoes. By the 1960s, alligators had been slaughtered to the brink of extinction throughout the southeastern United States, their main habitat. Eventually the government stepped in



and halted gator hunting until the species bounced back, which didn't take long."
Chapter Seven, p. 65-66

"What do you need me for?' his father said to Derek. 'You're gonna fake the rest of it, same as you always do.'
"Derek didn't seem even slightly insulted. He twirled the sash on his robe and said,
"You're the most fearless man I've ever met, Mr. Cray. With you guiding us on location, we won't need to "fake" anything.'
"In our line of work,' Raven cut in, 'it's known as "re-creating" events for the camera."
Chapter Eight, p. 76

"What really happened to your eye?' Wahoo asked.
"I told you, I fell down.'
"Mickey said, 'That's bull. Somebody slugged her.'
"Tuna's cheeks turned red. Wahoo was shocked that his father would say it aloud and embarrassed for Tuna that it was probably true.
"Mickey bent down and whispered, 'Was it your old man?'
"Tuna pulled away. 'So what if it was?'
"Has he been drinkin' tonight?'
"Her eyes welled up. 'Every damn night,' she said quietly."
Chapter Nine, p. 81

"The nose-nipping scene would be digitally added to a secret DVD of Derek's spectacular blunders that would be played on a giant flat screen when the crew of 'Expedition Survival!' held its annual end-of-the-season party, which Derek never attended because he considered himself too important."
Chapter Nine, p. 84

"No tame animals, darling. This time we're going totally raw and wild.'
"Raven glanced apprehensively at the director, who said to Derek, 'Why not have a few ringers handy, just for backup? They've got a gimpy bobcat that I'm sure we could use in a scene or two—'
"No more faking it, mate. From now on, we're putting the "real" back in "reality."
"Raven didn't like the sound of that."
Chapter Nine, p. 86-87

"They make him sound like a horse's ass,' Tuna whispered cheerlessly.
"You know how people talk when the boss isn't there.'
"Tuna hadn't been around Derek long enough to know the truth. She was a genuine fan, one of millions, so it would take a while for her to accept that the real-life Derek was a different person from the one she saw on TV. Earlier, Wahoo had noticed her disappointment when she'd learned Derek was staying at a luxury hotel, not roughing it in the swamp as he pretended to do on the show."
Chapter Twelve, p. 112

"As always, I've brought no food or water on this expedition. Everything I eat and drink—and believe me, I'm bloody famished—will come from the natural bounty of this



savage but magnificent wilderness."
Chapter Twelve, p. 115-116

"'I watch his show every week,' said Tuna, 'and I never knew the whole thing was written out beforehand. I thought all that stuff just, you know, happened.'"
Chapter Twelve, p. 117

"Most people who were nearly drowned by a twelve-foot gator would feel grateful to be alive and not eager to repeat the foolhardy behavior that had gotten them into that situation. No such contemplations entered the mind of Derek Badger as he sipped French wine and admired through soapy toes the twinkling lights of downtown Miami. His reckless brush with death actually made him feel invincible."
Chapter Twelve, p. 120-121

"'I told you, I study a lot.' Tuna paused to wait out another roll of thunder. 'Before the bank took our house, I'd just go in my room, lock the door and start Googling like a fiend. Some nights, I worked on insects. Other nights it might be fish or amphibians, whatever. I'd sit there and say their scientific names over and over again until they stuck in my head.'

"'Too much like homework. I couldn't do it,' Wahoo said.

"'Sure you could—if your old man was trashed out of his skull and acting like a maniac. Then you'd find a place of your own to hide,' she said, 'and something to keep your mind off all the craziness.'

"'Wahoo felt his face turn hot and he thought he might be sick.'"

Chapter Fourteen, p. 139

"'What's her name? Your new friend.'

"'It's not important.'

"'Are you kidding? Tell me.'

"'Wahoo braced himself. 'They call her Tuna.'

"'Susan Cray laughed warmly. 'Wahoo and Tuna! Maybe it's fate.'

"'I knew you'd think that was funny.'

"'Hey you've got to admit. It's quite a fishy coincidence.'"

Chapter Fourteen, p. 147

"'I'm sure I'll hear from Daddy, soon as he needs his laundry done. That's the usual program. He's the king of fake tears and phony apologies.'

"'You've run away before'

"'Tuna looked up. 'Sure. Twice.'

"'And you go back.'

"'Yeah, but it's not like forever. Mom's serious about leaving him.'"

Chapter Sixteen, p. 162

"'How badly hurt? You think he might... die?' Gerry Germaine had pondered such coldhearted fantasies before. It would be a humongous night for the show's TV ratings if Derek Badger failed to survive one of his survival expeditions. It would also open the way for him to be replaced with another actor who wasn't as pompous, demanding and



clumsy. Plenty of guys would jump at the job, for half the pay."
Chapter Sixteen, p. 168

"The director and crew of 'Expedition Survival!' were worried that Derek Badger had been stricken with rabies, but Derek himself was worried about something even worse. He spent the remainder of the night clinging to the branches, wondering if by morning he'd be hanging upside down by his feet, sporting bat wings and fuzzy crinkled ears."
Chapter Seventeen, p. 175

"Contrary to what TV viewers were led to believe, never in the history of 'Expedition Survival!' had Derek actually been lost. He always stayed close to the snacks and beverages.
Chapter Eighteen, p. 182

"'Look, I know he's a total goober,' Tuna said, 'but I used to love, love, love his show. Every Thursday night, nine o'clock. Just about the time my dad would pass out.'
"Wahoo could picture the scene all too clearly, though he still couldn't put a human face on Tuna's father.
"She went on: 'The Walmart has a real good TV department—that's where I go to watch "Expedition" and "Shrimp Wars" if Daddy's snoring too loud."
Chapter Eighteen, p. 187-188

"Derek wasn't in a good place, either physically or emotionally. Although the bat that had chomped him wasn't carrying rabies, the germs from its saliva were toxic enough to blur his pampered sense of reality. In his overheated mind, the Night Wing vampire movies now loomed as true to life as a National Geographic nature documentary."
Chapter Eighteen, p. 190

"Wahoo couldn't picture his father standing around doing nothing while some drunk with a pistol went nuts. It wasn't Mickey Cray's style to lay back. When trouble sprang up, he usually got involved in a major way. Wahoo thought of himself as more calm and cautious—but then again, he hadn't really been tested."
Chapter Nineteen, p. 202

"Standing up, he felt a painful sensation on his butt. Reaching around, he discovered a hole in the backside of his khaki shorts, and inside that hole was a tender wound—a small burn caused by the lightning bolt punching through the Helmet Cam, which of course Derek didn't recall.
"'It's a mark!' he exclaimed. 'The mark of the undead!'
"Actually it was the mark of the stupid, which is what you get for sitting under a tree during a thunderstorm."
Chapter Twenty-One, p. 215

"The situation called for patience, which was not Mickey's strong suit.
"The truth was he didn't like guns, period. He seldom carried one and, when he did, often didn't bother to load it. At the moment, his own pistol was under the front seat of



his truck back at Sickler's place. For once, Mickey wished he'd brought it with him."
Chapter Twenty-One, p. 217

"The Everglades show was in chaos, completely out of control. 'Real' reality had thwarted TV reality."
Chapter Twenty-Two, p. 226

"Tuna rolled her eyes.

"'Mr. Badger, if you don't knock it off,' she said, 'I'm going on your Facebook page and rat you out big-time. I'll tell all your fans how you got lost in the Everglades and started whining like an epic crybaby. I'll tell about your bogus parachute jump and the bat on your tongue and the puny little water snake that almost gave you a heart attack and how you can't even climb a tree, you're such a pitiful phony. Is that something you want the whole world to know?'

"Derek paled. 'Hold on, sweetie, don't get your knickers in a knot. I'll help you with the boat.'"

Chapter Twenty-Three, p. 240-241

"In his father's absence, Wahoo had come to feel responsible for the safety of everyone on the island—Derek, Link and especially Tuna. It was a new experience, being out of Mickey's shadow. Things looked different to Wahoo now that he was making the key decisions. Gut-check time, as his dad would say."

Chapter Twenty-Four, p. 250

"The option of doing nothing had never occurred to Wahoo, even for a split second. He was acting on gut reflex and pure adrenaline. There'd been no time to ponder the extreme danger of tangling with Tuna's whacked-out father. The man plainly intended to shoot Link—and not just in the foot, either. His pistol had been leveled at the center of Link's forehead when Wahoo had sprung at him."

Chapter Twenty-Five, p. 272

"'It's not even a full moon,' Tuna pointed out.

"Derek Badger shrugged. 'What can I say?'

"He had no future as a vampire. Jared Gordon's blood had tasted awful."

Chapter Twenty-Six, p. 276



Topics for Discussion

Describe Wahoo Cray's basic personality traits. How did Wahoo come to have such an unusual name? Why does Wahoo have only one thumb? List ways in which Wahoo changes from a boy into a man by the end of "Chomp".

Describe Mickey Cray's relationship with animals, both in the wild and in captivity. Why does he keep so many animals? Why doesn't he surrender the non-native animals he captures to the government for reward money?

What is the relationship between Wahoo and Mickey as the novel begins? Why does Susan expect Wahoo to look after his father while she is away in Beijing? Does the relationship between Wahoo and Mickey evolve by the end of the novel? If so, how?

Why have so many non-native animals been illegally imported into southern Florida? Why do many of these non-native animals end up in the wild? What is the impact of non-native animals on the environment?

Compare and contrast ways in which Alice the alligator and Old Sleepy are used for entertainment, education, and/or profit. Which owner shows more responsibility in the ways he allows his animal to be used, and why?

In the world of "Chomp," are reality shows real? List several ways in which "Expedition Survival!" projects an image that is different from reality.

Is Derek Badger a competent survivalist? Why or why not? Use examples from the novel to support your position.

List some of the injuries suffered by Derek Badger during the filming of the Everglades episode of "Expedition Survival!" Is Derek to blame for all of these injuries? When Derek handles animals, is he generally being brave or careless? Is he justified in killing creatures for nourishment while he is in the wilderness?

Why did Tuna run away from home? Why do Wahoo and Mickey decide not to call the police, regarding Tuna? Why do Wahoo and Mickey invite Tuna to join them in the Everglades? Why does Tuna develop such a close friendship with Link, who is generally a loner?

What is taxonomy? Why is Tuna obsessed with taxonomy? Why is Tuna such a fan of "Expedition Survival!" early in the novel? Over the course of the novel, why does Tuna vacillate between wanting Derek Badger's autograph, not wanting it, and then wanting it again?

What is Floyd's disease? Why does Tuna's father tell everyone that Tuna has this illness? Are Raguserup pills an effective treatment?



Why does Tuna's father abuse her? How does Jared figure out where Tuna is hiding from him? Why does Jared go to such extremes, including gun violence, to retrieve his daughter? Does Jared love Tuna? Does Tuna love Jared? Why does Tuna call Jared a homo sapiens?

What is the primary theme of "Chomp?" How is the main plot structured, in order to support this theme? What lesson might the author, Carl Hiassen, hope the reader will take to heart, after reading "Chomp?"