

Darkly Dreaming Dexter Study Guide

Darkly Dreaming Dexter by Jeff Lindsay

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Plot Summary

"Darkly Dreaming Dexter" is a novel by Jeff Lindsay. Dexter Morgan is a blood analysis expert, who also happens to be a serial killer. Dexter's foster father, a police officer named Harry Morgan, taught Dexter how to kill in a way that will keep him from getting caught. Harry also taught Dexter to only kill people who deserve to die. As a result, Dexter only targets serial killers and child molesters. When, through his sister, Dexter gets involved in the case of a new serial killer who kills with an absence of blood evidence, Dexter finds his serial-killing soul mate. The only question is, will Dexter help his sister bring the killer to justice, or will he save this killer for his own brand of justice. Darkly Dreaming Dexter is an amusing twist on an old formula that will leave readers rethinking their own definition of justice.

Dexter works for the Metro-Dade Police Department. He is called to the scene of a murder by his sister, a police officer with vice. A prostitute has been murdered and Deborah wants to work the case so she can put herself in a position for a promotion to detective. When Dexter arrives on the scene, he discovers a murder that fascinates the killer inside of him. The victim is completely devoid of blood.

Deborah begs Dexter to help her solve this murder. Dexter is reluctant because he wants to find the killer and learn how he kills his victims, after which Dexter will then kill him. However, Dexter is aware that Harry, his foster father, would want him to help Deborah. Dexter agrees. While Deborah and Dexter begin their investigation, Detective LaGuerta, who is officially in charge of the case, begins her own. LaGuerta starts off on the wrong foot when she misinterprets some evidence and assumes the killer was interrupted during his latest kill. LaGuerta has her people concentrate on finding a witness, while Dexter has Deborah looking for a refrigerated truck. Dexter believes that rather than having been interrupted, the killer has grown bored with his routine. Dexter suggests the killer will kill again, quickly and bigger than before.

While Deborah looks for the refrigerator truck, Dexter goes on a date with his girlfriend. When Dexter was a child, his foster father discovered Dexter was unable to feel human emotions and had homicidal tendencies. Rather than seek counseling, Harry teaches Dexter how to indulge his needs without getting caught. Harry teaches Dexter about forensics as well as schooling him to only target people who deserve to be killed. Harry also teaches Dexter how to get along in society despite his inability to feel. Part of these lessons is the need for Dexter to seek female companionship. This is why Dexter has a girlfriend. Rita, his girlfriend, is a survivor of domestic violence and is not interested in sex. This makes Rita the perfect woman for Dexter, since he would never engage in sex.

At the end of Dexter's date, he sees a crime scene in the same area where the other victims were found. Dexter knows this must be another one of the Tamiami Trail killer's victims. Dexter stops to check it out and once again is fascinated by the completely bloodless way in which the killer kills. Rita is put off by Dexter's fascination with the killings; however, Dexter is so excited, he does not notice her distaste. Dexter drops



Rita off at her house and in his excitement, he kisses her, which causes Rita to become agitated. Dexter watches her run into the house and is convinced that she will never want to see him again.

Over the next few days, Dexter begins to have dreams about the Tamiami Trail killer. It seems that Dexter dreams the details of the killer's future kills. These dreams cause the desire to kill in Dexter to come to life. Dexter takes a chance and kills a man he has been watching for a while. This kill is not as well organized as Dexter's crimes normally are, and he is nearly caught. The thrill leads Dexter to do something he would not usually do. Dexter has intimate relations with Rita. A few days later, Dexter goes for a drive in the middle of the night to clear his head, and he finds himself chasing a refrigerator truck like the one he imagines the killer would use. When Dexter loses the truck, he pulls to the side of the road only to have the truck reappear. The driver maneuvers the truck past Dexter and throws something out the window. It turns out to be a woman's head.

While Dexter submits to LaGuerta's questioning about the woman's head, they receive word that another body had been found. The body is at the ice rink of the local professional hockey team. Dexter once again sees the beauty in this kill, and he is more anxious than ever to find this killer. Later, Dexter discovers the killer has been in his house and left a message. Dexter believes the killer is talking directly to him through his victims. Understandably, Dexter is disappointed when it seems that LaGuerta has caught the killer. However, Dexter soon realizes that LaGuerta's prisoner is not the real killer.

Dexter warns Deborah that the killer will strike again. When the killer does kill again, the police find only three heads, each with an object that seems to be a message just for Dexter. Dexter tells Deborah that not only are these by the same killer, but suggests that the rest of the bodies are more than likely going to be found at the ice rink. Deborah and Dexter go to the ice rink and find the bodies arranged in a closet to spell out a message. While investigating this display, Deborah stumbles on an employee of the ice rink, who takes videos of the parking lot every night in order to post images of the hockey players on a fan website. This camera picks up an image of the killer, a killer who looks just like Dexter.

Deborah gives Dexter a few hours to figure out what is going on before she turns in the evidence. However, before Deborah can retrieve the images, she is kidnapped. Dexter goes in search of Deborah and is followed by Detective LaGuerta. LaGuerta has come to believe that Dexter has something to do with the murders. However, LaGuerta trusts Dexter enough to separate while they search the docks for a shipping container in which Dexter believes the killer is waiting. Dexter finds the killer first. The killer looks just like Dexter and turns out to be his brother. The killer wants Dexter to help him kill Deborah. Before Dexter can refuse, LaGuerta comes into the container. The killer stabs LaGuerta and continues to insist Dexter help kill Deborah. Dexter refuses, so he and his brother kill LaGuerta instead.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Darkly Dreaming Dexter is a novel by Jeff Lindsay. Dexter Morgan is a blood analysis expert, who happens to also be a serial killer. Dexter's foster father, a police officer named Harry Morgan, taught Dexter how to kill in a way that will keep him from getting caught. Harry also taught Dexter to only kill people who deserve to die. As a result, Dexter only targets serial killers and child molesters. When, through his sister, Dexter gets involved in the case of a new serial killer, who kills without blood evidence, Dexter finds his serial killing soul mate. The only question is, will Dexter help his sister bring the killer to justice, or will he save this killer for his own brand of justice. Darkly Dreaming Dexter is an amusing twist on an old formula that will leave readers rethinking their own definition of justice.

Dexter has been waiting for the right moment to take the priest. Dexter has done his homework and is confident that the priest is an appropriate victim. Dexter waits in the man's car until the coast is clear and then he directs him to drive to a remote house. The priest seems to recognize the house and is frightened by Dexter's knowledge of it. When they walk into the house, the priest is confronted by the decomposed bodies of seven children. These are the victims of the priest's cruelty that Dexter has dug up out of the garden. Dexter forces the priest to look at the bodies for several minutes before taking him into another room. This room has been prepared before hand with every surface covered with plastic in order to aid in clean up. Dexter fastens the priest to a table with duct tape and begins his work. Before Dexter kills the priest, Dexter hears the priest whisper thank you.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Dexter is a serial killer. The writer introduces this fact in the first few paragraphs of the novel by allowing Dexter to tell his story in the first person point of view. Dexter's thoughts are completely consumed with the priest he is about to attack. At first, the reader sees this situation on the surface and believes that Dexter is about to attack not only an innocent man, but a holy man who should be above such horrors. Dexter allows the reader to think he is a monster beyond compare. However, when the priest and Dexter arrive at their destination, the reader is confronted with evidence that proves it is not Dexter who is the monster, but the priest.

The priest has murdered seven innocent children. If there is anything more sacred than a priest, it is a child. The idea that a priest could kill a child is outrageous, and it brings out deep emotions in the reader. When Dexter makes it clear that he intends to kill the priest for his crimes, the reader almost wants to stand up and cheer. One should never condone murder, but in this case, it seems like justice. In this way, Dexter the serial killer suddenly becomes a likable character.



Chapter 2-3

Chapter 2-3 Summary

After finishing with the priest, Dexter returns to his apartment in time to clean up for his day. Dexter arrives at work; he is a blood analysis expert for the Metro-Dade Police Department. He finds a message from his foster sister, Deborah, on his answering machine. Deborah is at the scene of a murder and wants Dexter to come down. Deborah wants Dexter's insight on the crime. Deborah is a police officer working vice, but she desperately wants to be a homicide detective like her father. Deborah is hoping that this murder, since the victim is a prostitute, will be her stepping stone to a promotion. If she can solve the case, that is. This is the fifth murder of its kind, and Deborah knows it is going to be a big deal when the killer is caught. Deborah also knows Dexter has some sort of instinct about these things and wants all the help he can offer.

Dexter goes over to check out the body. It is immediately clear, however, that his expertise is not necessary. There is absolutely no blood on or in the body. Dexter is fascinated with this because the blood and its ensuing mess has always been the only unpleasant aspect of Dexter's hobby. While Dexter is admiring the killer's work, the investigator from the medical examiner's office shows Dexter where the killer left one of the victim's legs unfinished. Dexter then goes over to where the lead detective, Detective Migdia LaGuerta is talking with a potential witness. Dexter listens to the detective berate the witness in such a way that it is clear she is not going to get any information from the frightened man. LaGuerta is an inept detective, but she is good at politics; this is why Dexter believes she has made it as far as she has.

Dexter talks to LaGuerta for a few minutes. LaGuerta is flirting with Dexter, but he has so little experience with women, he does not realize this is what she is doing. LaGuerta learns that the second leg was not cut completely and thinks this means the killer was interrupted. LaGuerta does not take into account the fact that the killer wrapped all the body parts before disposing of them. A few minutes later, Captain Matthews arrives. Matthews assigns Deborah to the case, since she has been working with the prostitutes in the area and might have important contacts. LaGuerta is upset by this because she does not like Deborah.

Chapter 2-3 Analysis

Dexter finishes killing the priest just in time to go to work. Dexter works for the Metro-Dade Police Department. This job seems rather ironic for a man who is also a serial killer, however, if the reader thinks about it long enough, it might appear to be an appropriate job for a killer. Who could be more apropos to get into the mind of a murderer than a fellow murderer. Once Dexter arrives at work, he finds a message



waiting for him from his sister. Deborah is a cop who wants to be a homicide cop like her father. However, Deborah is stuck in vice, arresting johns.

Dexter goes to the scene and discovers the work of a killer he cannot help admiring. Dexter does not like blood, ironically enough, but has been unable to avoid the unpleasantness of it during his kills. This killer, however, has found a way to overcome this obstacle, and Dexter admires his skill. Dexter moves around the crime scene watching everyone do their jobs and learns some useful information. The killer did not finish his cuts on one of the victim's legs. The detective in charge is inept and believes this means the killer was interrupted. Detective LaGuerta clearly does not have the deductive reasoning skills to pursue a killer as intelligent as this one. LaGuerta thinks the killer was interrupted but took the time to individually wrap each piece of the victim's body. This mistake in assumption alerts the reader that LaGuerta will most likely not be capable of catching this killer. Not only this, but LaGuerta's reaction to Deborah being assigned to the case suggests that Deborah will not be supported or given the opportunity she needs to angle for a promotion.



Chapters 4-5

Chapters 4-5 Summary

Dexter takes his boat out after work in order to think over the events of the day. Dexter is excited and fascinated by this new killer. This fascination makes Deborah's request of his help difficult. Dexter wants to find the killer so he can kill him but not without asking a few questions first. Dexter struggles with this desire as he considers Deborah's request. If Dexter helps Deborah, the killer will be arrested and tried for his crimes, taking him out of Dexter's reach. However, Deborah is family, and Harry, their father, would want Dexter to help her.

When Dexter was fourteen, his foster father, Harry, took him on a camping trip. During this trip, Harry confronted Dexter with his knowledge that Dexter had been killing animals in their neighborhood. Harry asked Dexter about his urge to kill and whether he wants to kill people as well. Dexter admitted that he did and only restrained himself because he knew his foster parents would be unhappy about it. Harry thought about this for a while and then told Dexter he would need to learn how to control his urges, but that there were people in the world who deserved to die. Dexter thinks back on this time now and decides he will help Deborah.

At work the next day, Deborah is waiting for Dexter. Deborah knows that Dexter knows something, and she badgers him until he tells her. Dexter says that instead of looking for a witness who might have interrupted the killer, they should be expecting a bigger and better kill. The killer was not interrupted; he has simply become bored with his routine. Deborah rushes off with this theory and leaves Dexter to work.

Chapters 4-5 Analysis

Dexter takes his boat out in order to clear his mind. Dexter is excited by this new killer. It is as though Dexter has found a master to learn from, and he very much wants to be a good student. However, Dexter is conflicted by Deborah's request that he help her find the killer. Deborah is Dexter's only living family, so he knows logically he should support her, even though he feels no emotional ties to her. In fact, Dexter feels no emotion at all due to whatever event caused him to become a serial killer.

Dexter's foster father knows about Dexter's homicidal tendencies. As surprised as the reader is at this revelation, the reader is more surprised to learn that Harry does nothing to stop Dexter. The theme of morality makes its most noticeable appearance in this chapter as the reader begins to comprehend what Harry has decided to do. Harry does not seek help for his homicidal son; instead, Harry teaches Dexter how to kill in such a way as to not get caught. Harry also teaches Dexter to only kill those who deserve to die. The reader wonders if this was the right way for Harry to handle the situation in a



moral sense. It seems in this case, it was a good thing, since Dexter has become a successful member of society, if one forgets that he is also a serial killer.

At work the next day, Deborah begs Dexter to tell her what he thinks of the Tamiami Trail case. Dexter finally tells her that he does not believe the killer was interrupted as Detective LaGuerta has suggested. Dexter says that the killer is simply bored with his routine, and they should expect him to escalate and to do it soon. This information is so insightful that many people did not see it. Dexter does seem to have an instinct when it comes to these things.



Chapters 6-7

Chapters 6-7 Summary

Dexter goes on a date with his girlfriend, Rita. Rita is a victim of domestic abuse, who is just beginning to put her life back together. Due to her past experiences with men, Rita is not interested in sex, which makes her the perfect girlfriend for Dexter. Dexter does not like sex because it is messy and requires specific emotional responses of which he is not capable. Rita is also perfect for Dexter because she has children. Despite Dexter's lack of emotion, he likes children and enjoys being around Rita's children.

Dexter and Rita go to dinner and then for a walk on the beach. Afterward, Dexter is taking Rita home when he sees an active crime scene. Hoping it is another victim of the Tamiami Trail killer, Dexter stops and tells Rita he needs to see if they need his help. It is in fact another Tamiami Trail victim. This time the killer has completely exposed one of the victim's bones by removing all the flesh. The killer has not only accelerated but has begun to experiment. Dexter is so excited by this that he tries to kiss Rita when he drops her off at home. Rita is frightened by Dexter's uncharacteristic attempt at affection and rushes into the house. Dexter does not really notice her fear because of his overwhelming focus on the killer. That night Dexter dreams about the killer and his victims.

The next day, Dexter meets Deborah for breakfast. They discuss the latest victim. Deborah tells Dexter that this victim shows signs of having been kept at a very cold temperature. Dexter realizes that the killer is cooling the victims in order to slow the flow of blood. Dexter tells Deborah to look for a refrigerated truck that has been stolen in the last few days.

Chapters 6-7 Analysis

Continuing to explore Dexter's character, the reader learns Dexter has a girlfriend despite his inability to feel the same emotions as all the people around him. Dexter has been told to fit in, to do things that other people do, so he has gotten a girlfriend. This girlfriend is damaged, so she is perfect for him in that she does not expect him to have sex with her or to be emotional with her. Dexter and Rita are more buddies than lovers, spending most of their time in athletic pursuits. The introduction of a girlfriend is important not only because it shows how far Dexter will go to be normal, but it also shows that Dexter is more capable of human interaction than he believes.

Dexter and Rita happen upon another crime scene. Dexter is excited to see that it is another victim of the Tamiami Trail killer. The killer has experimented with this victim by de-fleshing a bone. This killer has taken all the things that Dexter has done and gone a step further. Dexter's reaction is like that of a student faced with a master. Dexter is learning from this killer, and he also feels a sort of kinship to the killer that he has never



experienced before. There is a connection between Dexter and the killer that is underscored when Dexter dreams about the killer. Later, Deborah tells Dexter that the latest body showed signs of extreme cold. This fact shows Dexter that the killer is experimenting with different ways to keep the victims from bleeding a great deal. Dexter is impressed by this and again feels he has a lot to learn from this killer.



Chapters 8-9

Chapters 8-9 Summary

Dexter attends a meeting to discuss the Tamiami Trail killer, even though he is not officially on the case. Sergeant Doakes is not happy to see Dexter there. Doakes seems to be the only cop in the entire building who senses something not right about Dexter. However, Detective LaGuerta insists on Dexter staying. During the meeting, Deborah brings up the idea of a refrigerated truck, but Detective LaGuerta shoots down the idea without even considering it and makes Deborah look like a fool in the process. Dexter consoles Deborah as best he can and pushes her to continue to look for the truck anyway.

Dexter dreams about the killer again. This time the dream is detailed and involves participating in the murder of one of the killer's victims. Dexter is disturbed by these dreams and is afraid he might be losing his mind. Dexter decides to go for a drive, going through the same neighborhoods he imagines the killer haunts. While driving these streets, Dexter sees a refrigerated truck. Dexter follows it, although the possibility that it is the truck the killer has stolen is unlikely. The driver seems to be aware of Dexter following him and takes him on a wild goose chase, finally disappearing in a more prosperous area of town. Dexter pulls over to the side of the road to collect himself, reminding himself that it was not likely the killer he was following. As Dexter sits there, the truck reappears, having pulled out from behind a gas station. As the driver goes by, he throws something out the window. Dexter gets out of his car and discovers a woman's severed head by the side of the road.

Chapters 8-9 Analysis

The conflict between Deborah and Detective LaGuerta becomes more apparent during a meeting to discuss the Tamiami Trail case. LaGuerta very publicly denounces Deborah's ideas about the refrigerated truck, making herself look good while making Deborah look like a fool. Dexter watches this and, instead of defending his sister, finds the whole thing amusing. Dexter's reaction underscores his lack of emotion regarding his sister and possibly shows his desire to sabotage the police case in order to find the killer himself, despite his pledge to help Deborah.

Dexter dreams about the killer, and his dream includes details that make him question his sanity. It is ironic that a serial killer would question his sanity, since he already appears to have mental health issues, adding to the more comical aspect of this novel. Dexter decides to go for a drive and cruise some of the areas that were highlighted in his dream. While doing this, Dexter comes across a refrigerated truck and decides to tail it in the hopes that it is driven by the killer. Dexter loses the truck and feels as though he has made a fool of himself when suddenly the truck reappears. The driver throws a human head at Dexter, proving that it is in fact the killer. Dexter is not outraged by this

as someone else might be, but excited because it is proof he is not insane. This episode also suggests that the killer is aware of who Dexter is, adding to the odd connection that Dexter already feels with the killer.



Chapters 10-11

Chapters 10-11 Summary

Detective LaGuerta interviews Dexter about the human head, asking him all the wrong questions and flirting with him. After a time, Dexter begins to realize that Detective LaGuerta is coming on to him and is at a loss as to how to handle the situation. When Detective LaGuerta tells Dexter that the rest of the victim's body has been found at the ice rink where the local professional hockey team plays, he convinces her to take him with her to the scene. The body has been placed in the goal on the ice.

Doakes is on the scene, as well as Deborah. Deborah wants to know why Dexter was driving around in the middle of the night, the one question LaGuerta should have asked but did not. However, they are interrupted when one of the investigators from the medical examiner's office finds a foreign object inside one of the carefully-wrapped packages of human parts. It is the rear view mirror from a vehicle. Dexter believes the mirror is from the refrigerator truck. Deborah points out that that makes the case in Metro-Dade's jurisdiction rather than Broward County, which is where the ice rink is located. Deborah goes to tell this to LaGuerta, only to be shot down once again. Dexter suggests that Deborah learn to play the politics game a little better, causing her to become angry with him.

Dexter goes home to think over this new evidence. Dexter believes the rear view mirror is meant to be a message for him, but it is unclear what it might mean. While Dexter is still struggling with this, Deborah calls. Deborah has found the refrigerator truck; however, it is too little, too late. LaGuerta has made an arrest. LaGuerta not only arrested a guard at the ice rink with a criminal history, but she has managed to get this man to confess. The case is closed and Deborah is still stuck in vice.

Chapters 10-11 Analysis

LaGuerta comes to the scene of Dexter's run-in with the Tamiami Trail killer only to ask him all the wrong questions and fail to get to the bottom of the situation. LaGuerta seems to have only one thing on her mind and that is how to get Dexter in bed. Dexter is uncomfortable with this once he realizes it. LaGuerta's behavior further reveals her ineptness as a detective and her need to please the men in her life. LaGuerta further characterizes herself when she bullies Deborah and tries to make her look like a fool. LaGuerta is clearly threatened by Deborah and is determined to keep her from becoming successful as a detective.

The discovery of the mirror stuffed in one of the packages at the ice rink is an interesting turn of events. Dexter believes this mirror is a message for him personally, suggesting the killer is telling him that he sees him. The reader is unsure if this is Dexter's own paranoia, or if the killer has really taken an interest in him. If this is true,

however, the reader is left with many questions, including the question of how the killer became aware of Dexter. Not only this, but the reader is also curious what lies in the future for Dexter if the killer has really taken an interest in him.



Chapters 12-13

Chapters 12-13 Summary

Dexter is unhappy that there has been an arrest in the Tamiami Trail case until he gets a closer look at the accused. The security guard is a run of the mill wife beater, who has been arrested a few times for robbery and domestic abuse. Dexter knows this man is not capable of the mastery of the Tamiami Trail killings. Dexter warns Deborah that LaGuerta has made a mistake and that the real killer is still out there. The killer will kill again, and next time, it will be on a larger scale simply to show the cops what huge idiots they have proven themselves to be. Dexter advises Deborah to go to the captain and tell him that she believes the killer is still on the loose. That way, when the real killer does kill again, Deborah will look like the smarter detective.

On Monday when Dexter returns home from work, he feels as though someone has been in his apartment. Nothing is missing; however, there is a Barbie doll head stuck to his refrigerator door and a Barbie body in the freezer. Dexter knows these are gifts from the real killer. Dexter does not tell anyone about this visit, but sees it as an invitation to play. Dexter can feel his inner darkness, his Dark Passenger, begin to stir. It is too early to need to kill again, but this case is agitating the Dark Passenger and causing Dexter to lose control. As Dexter fights against this need, he reaches out to Rita by making a date to see her later in the evening.

Chapters 12-13 Analysis

Dexter believes the man LaGuerta has arrested is the wrong man despite his confession. LaGuerta has once again shown her poor detecting skills by arresting and believing the first criminal she comes across. Dexter knows this man could not kill the way the killer has, because this man is not intelligent enough nor patient enough. Dexter knows the real killer will return, and he confides this in Deborah. Deborah still desperately wants to be transferred to homicide but believes now her chance is gone. Dexter assures her this is not the case and advises her to put her career on the line. Deborah trusts Dexter enough that she agrees, despite her basic instincts telling her not to. This touches on the theme of politics, as Deborah slowly begins to learn to play the game.

Dexter knows someone has broken into his apartment, and this is confirmed when he finds a Barbie doll in his freezer. It is another message from the killer. For some reason, the killer has targeted Dexter. The reader has no idea why this might be, since Dexter is not even officially involved with the case. However, the reasons behind this interest on the killer's behalf might help both Dexter and the reader identify the killer. Later, as Dexter continues to work the case in his mind, the darkness inside of him comes awake. It is too early, and Dexter is not prepared, but the instinct to kill proves to be difficult to control. Dexter reaches out to Rita in a move that surprises him as much as it does the

reader. Dexter is showing some human instincts by reaching out to the woman in his life. However, the reader is unclear what this means and only in reading the next few chapters will the consequences be revealed.



Chapters14-15

Chapters14-15 Summary

Dexter stakes out the janitor of an elementary school, who he has been investigating for several months. Dexter had dismissed this man as one of his victims because he could not prove the man was the reason several young girls had gone missing from the school. However, tonight Dexter is desperate, and this man is the best target he has on short notice. Dexter follows the man when he leaves his house and ends up at a construction site where the man steals copper wiring from the walls. Dexter follows the man into the building and prepares himself with some plastic wrap that happens to be lying around. Dexter would normally be wearing a mask and coveralls, but he has to make due with what is available tonight.

Dexter corners the man on a stairwell and takes him by knife point to a makeshift table. Dexter then straps the man to the table with tape and asks him about his crimes. The man denies the crimes at first, but after Dexter begins to cut him, the man admits his crimes. Dexter goes to work on the man, nearly forgetting his surroundings until he hears the static of a radio. A security guard has approached the building. Dexter quickly kills his victim and slips out a window, escaping bare moments before the security guard would have seen him. Dexter goes straight to Rita's house from the construction site, expecting her to break up with him over the kiss he forced on her during their last date. However, Rita has staged a seduction for him. Dexter allows Rita to seduce him, only to be confused and surprised when it is all over. Later that night, Dexter dreams about the Tamiami Trail killer again in surprising detail.

Chapters14-15 Analysis

The Dark Passenger inside of Dexter has become insistent. Dexter goes to the home of a man he has investigated and could not convincingly condemn. The man is a janitor, who might be responsible for the deaths of five young girls. Dexter does not like to kill someone unless he knows for sure they are guilty of terrible crimes, touching on the theme of morality. However, tonight Dexter is desperate. The depth of Dexter's desperation shows when he comes to this victim completely unprepared. All Dexter has is a knife. Dexter makes due with the materials on hand and experiments with this victim in a way he has not done before. Dexter is nearly caught because of his decision to go without proper preparation. Dexter has become dangerously spontaneous, something that is out of character for him.

Afterward, Dexter goes to Rita's house. Dexter is flying high on adrenaline after killing spontaneously for the first time. Dexter allows Rita to seduce him, much to his own surprise. This shows the reader how exciting the kill was for Dexter, suggesting this might not be the last time he will indulge in this type of uncontrolled murder. Later, Dexter dreams of the Tamiami killer again. The detail of Dexter's dreams is

overwhelming and suggests to the reader some sort of inside knowledge or ESP connection with the killer. The intensity of this connection makes the reader feel as though the killer might be someone Dexter knows or is connected to on a spiritual level. This narrows the field somewhat and makes the reader think that perhaps the killer is someone close to Dexter.



Chapters 16-17

Chapters 16-17 Summary

Dexter recalls the first time he killed a person. It was while Harry was slowly dying in a hospice. One of Harry's nurses was giving too much medication to her patients, hastening their deaths. Harry was possibly going to fall victim to this behavior and was aware of it. Harry told Dexter what was happening and suggested to him that he stop her. Deborah was in the room and thought it was a matter of clarifying the doctor's orders. However, Dexter knew what his father meant. The nurse would be Dexter's first human kill.

Dexter collects slides with a single drop of blood from each of his victims; however, Dexter forgot to get a drop of blood from his last victim. The murder is in the paper the next morning. Deborah calls, believing this murder is one of the Tamiami Trail killer's victims. Dexter plays along, encouraging that belief. Later, when Dexter goes to work, he arrives early. Dexter goes to Vince's lab and finds the evidence from his crime scene. Dexter steals a sample of blood to make a slide for himself. When Vince walks in on Dexter, he pretends to be looking for the file because Deborah wanted him to take a look at it. Vince believes him and sends him on his way. In his office, Dexter finds LaGuerta waiting for him. LaGuerta is troubled by the new murder and wants to find evidence to prove it is a different killer. This places Dexter in the awkward position of proving his crime is the work of someone else. Dexter agrees to look at the case and find something to prove it is not a crime committed by the Tamiami Trail killer.

Chapters 16-17 Analysis

Dexter not only learned how to kill from his foster father, but his father also picks out his first victim. When Harry is dying in a hospice, a nurse begins feeding him too much pain medication in order to hasten his death. Harry is frightened and gives Dexter permission to kill the woman. Again Harry's behavior brings into question his morality, touching on this theme, and leaving the reader wondering if Harry did the right thing. For Harry, killing the nurse saved his life, however little time he had left. However, the reader is left wondering if this murder was justified by sending a nineteen-year-old young man to commit it.

Dexter keeps a souvenir of his crimes, a single drop of blood on a slide. However, Dexter forgot to take a souvenir of his last victim. While in the process of doing this through the crime evidence at the lab, Dexter is once again nearly caught. Dexter manages to get out of it, claiming he wants to look at the reports for Deborah. Deborah believes the killer is the Tamiami Trail killer despite certain differences in the victim choice. However, if it were the Tamiami Trail killer, LaGuerta would look like a fool. Therefore LaGuerta comes to Dexter hoping for proof that it is not the Tamiami Trail killer. Ironically, this leaves Dexter in the unique position of both proving and disproving

that his own crime was committed by the Tamiami Trail killer, a man who has become a hero of sorts to Dexter. Again the reader is reminded of the theme of morality as Dexter is put in a position to manipulate the fates of several people in his life.



Chapters 18-19

Chapters 18-19 Summary

Dexter meets Deborah for lunch and he encourages her to continue with the Tamiami Trail case. Dexter convinces Deborah that the murder case of the night before, his own crime, was committed by the Tamiami Trail killer. Later in the afternoon, however, Dexter presents LaGuerta with a convincing report against the idea that the Tamiami Trail killer committed the same crime. LaGuerta is so happy with Dexter's report that she attempts to seduce him. Dexter backs away so quickly that LaGuerta ends up on the floor, embarrassed.

That night Dexter has a dream that the Tamiami Trail killer is killing not one victim, but three, all at once. Early the next morning, Dexter gets a call from Deborah telling him there has been another murder. When Dexter arrives at the scene, he is greeted with three severed heads that have been carefully staged. The heads each have a prop attached to them. The first is a rear view mirror from a vehicle, the second is a Barbie doll, and the third is attached to drywall. These things seem to be messages for Dexter. The fact that there are three, like the dream, leaves Dexter once again questioning his sanity. Dexter now begins to wonder if he is committing these murders in his sleep and is simply unaware of it.

Chapters 18-19 Analysis

Dexter convinces Deborah that his own crime is the work of the Tamiami Trail killer, while at the same time telling LaGuerta that the Tamiami Trail killer could not possibly have committed this crime. Dexter is playing these two women against each other for his own gain. By telling Deborah that the work is that of the Tamiami Trail killer, he keeps her hopes up and her focus on looking for the real killer. By telling LaGuerta that the killer is a different person, he is moving LaGuerta out of Deborah's way until the killer can show his hand. All in all, Dexter is attempting to help Deborah by lying to both women. Not only that, but Dexter is protecting himself by keeping both woman from looking for the real killer of the janitor. It is a dangerous game that is bound to backfire, leaving the reader anxious to see how it all plays out.

That night, Dexter dreams about the Tamiami Trail killer again, this time in detail. Dexter dreams the killer is working three victims at once. The next morning he gets a call from Deborah informing him that this is exactly what the killer has done. The police have found three heads that have messages left for Dexter. The entire situation makes Dexter once again question his sanity. Now Dexter begins to wonder if he is the Tamiami Trail killer, somehow killing these victims in his sleep. This idea seems far fetched, but the coincidence of Dexter dreaming of the killings and then having them come true seems too much to believe. There are few explanations that are not as outrageous as this one, leaving the reader anxious to learn the true identity of the killer.



Chapters 20-21

Chapters 20-21 Summary

Dexter moves around the crime scene, watching the technicians go about their jobs in eerie silence. Normally, the technicians and cops approach a crime scene with humor, but even veteran investigators are disturbed by what they see at this scene. LaGuerta arrives and brings along three reporters. LaGuerta tells these reporters that the murders were perpetrated by another killer, not the Tamiami Trail killer. The reporters openly question this logic, since it seems far fetched, but LaGuerta is determined to convince them otherwise. Captain Matthews arrives during this discussion and becomes enraged that LaGuerta would bring reporters to a crime scene. Matthews sends the reporters away and reprimands LaGuerta for her actions.

Dexter leaves the scene and encounters Deborah. Dexter updates Deborah on what is happening and encourages her to investigate on her own, even though she is not technically on the case. Dexter knows the rest of the bodies will be found soon, and he wants Deborah to be the one to find them. Dexter thinks about where the killer might have left the bodies, and the ice rink comes to mind. Deborah and Dexter jump in her car and rush to the ice rink. Once there, they talk an employee into allowing them into the building. There are no bodies on the ice so Deborah gives up, disappointed. However, when the employee opens the janitor's closet and begins screaming, Dexter knows their search has not been in vain.

Chapters 20-21 Analysis

This crime scene is more horrendous than many of these police investigators have ever seen, causing them to be quiet and reverent. The reader gets a true sense of how bad this scene is by the reaction of the people who are investigating, since these people have seen the worst of humanity and joked their way through it. However, Dexter does not seem to be disturbed by it except to wonder if perhaps he committed the crime in his sleep somehow. This further enhances Dexter's character, once again showing the reader the depth of Dexter's lack of emotional response.

LaGuerta brings reporters to a secured crime scene and expresses to them that this murder could not have been committed by the Tamiami Trail, killer despite the fact that the modus operandi is very similar. The reporters can see that LaGuerta is trying to save her reputation and do not buy her speech. Captain Matthews can also see what LaGuerta is doing and puts an end to it. No amount of politicking, a theme of the novel, will save LaGuerta's reputation this time. LaGuerta's poor detecting skills are finally out in the open. The reader can only guess at what will happen to her career now.

Deborah arrives on the scene despite the fact that she is not officially on this case. Dexter encourages her to investigate, perhaps for her, perhaps so he can find the killer.



Either way, it appears to the reader that Dexter is acting selflessly, since he has begun to suspect that he is the perpetrator in this case. Dexter and Deborah go to the ice rink in hopes of finding the rest of the victim's bodies. Dexter's instincts appear to be off this time until the janitor opens his closet and begins to scream. As LaGuerta is going down for her ineptness, Deborah makes a discovery that could put her on top, just as Dexter had hoped would happen when he manipulated both women several chapters back. Now the reader can only hope everything works out the way Dexter has planned.



Chapters 22-23

Chapters 22-23 Summary

After Deborah calls in the crime scene, there is a struggle over jurisdiction since the ice rink is in Broward County. The Metro-Dade police believe they should run the scene because the bodies belong to the heads found in their jurisdiction, but the Broward County police believe there is no proof these bodies belong to those heads. Finally the conflict is settled by the state police, who give jurisdiction to Metro-Dade. During this struggle, Dexter has been looking at the display in the janitor's closet. The killer has arranged the body parts in such a way that they spell out "Boo." Dexter finds the whole scene familiar, especially the closeness of the closet, and again begins to wonder if perhaps he has committed this crime himself.

LaGuerta arrives on the scene. Still angry over the scene with the reporters and annoyed that Deborah found the bodies, she assigns Deborah to interview the rink employees and then puts her back in vice. Deborah is angry and taking a great deal of it out on Dexter. Dexter accompanies Deborah when she goes to interview the employees. The first person they interview is a computer tech. In his office they find a web cam that has been focused on the parking lot. The computer tech videos the professional hockey team when they come and go from the rink and posts the video on a fan website. The camera was on the night before. Dexter and the computer tech scan through the video and discover that it has captured the killer arriving at the rink. The problem is, the killer looks a lot like Dexter.

Deborah is upset by this revelation. Deborah tells Dexter she has to turn him in; however, Deborah gives Dexter until that night to clean up the image and prove it is not him. Dexter puts the images on a CD and takes it home, running it through every program he knows to try and clean it up, to prove it is not him. However, even Dexter cannot be certain the image is not him. Dexter once again begins to wonder if he has somehow been committing these murders in his sleep. Finally Dexter gives up, unable to clean up the images anymore, and falls asleep.

Chapters 22-23 Analysis

While the police childishly fight over jurisdiction, Dexter takes a look at the bodies. They have been positioned to spell out the word "Boo" on the floor of the closet. Dexter knows this message must be for him and finds himself wondering what it means. Dexter again begins to sense that the scene is familiar and wonders why that would be. Again Dexter considers the idea that he somehow committed these murders in his sleep. The reader is beginning to wonder the same thing, especially when Dexter and Deborah discover the web cam footage that shows a person who greatly resembles Dexter arriving at the ice rink in the middle of the night. Despite the fact that the suspect is driving a vehicle Dexter has never seen before, he begins to wonder again if that man



could be him. Dexter cannot say for sure it is not, causing Deborah to have to make the choice between family, a theme of the novel, and the law.

Dexter is determined to prove the image is not him, as much to himself as Deborah. However this proves to be impossible with the grainy footage. Dexter is now in a position where he knows he will be going to jail if Deborah turns him in. Deborah loves Dexter and knows she should protect him, again touching on the theme of family, but she is determined to obey the law. Deborah believes this is what Harry would do in her position. Ironically, Dexter knows Harry would not, since Harry is the one who taught him how to keep from getting caught. Dexter once again displays his lack of human emotions in this situation. Dexter gives up and goes to sleep rather than allow his fear of jail to keep him awake.



Chapters 24-25

Chapters 24-25 Summary

Dexter is awakened by the phone. Captain Matthews wants to know where Deborah is. Deborah signed out to visit Dexter but never returned. Dexter knows immediately that Deborah never made it to his apartment and must have been taken by the Tamiami Trail killer. Dexter wonders what he should do and realizes a normal person would go looking for Deborah. Dexter goes to his car and finds another Barbie doll there. Dexter knows without a doubt that Deborah has been kidnapped. Dexter wonders what to do next. The doll has a suitcase with the name of a cruise line on it. Dexter thinks it is a clue to go to the docks. When Dexter arrives at the docks, he drives around trying to think of where the killer might take Deborah. Dexter sees the storage containers behind a secure fence and realizes the containers fit the killer's need for tight, enclosed spaces. Dexter parks his car to try to figure out how to get in to the secure area. Suddenly Detective LaGuerta pulls up beside him.

LaGuerta began suspecting Dexter after the three heads were found that morning. LaGuerta decided that Dexter set her up with the report stating that the construction site killing was committed by a separate suspect. In addition, LaGuerta has known for a time that Doakes suspects Dexter of illicit behavior, so she decided to follow him. Now LaGuerta believes Dexter is at the docks to commit another murder. Dexter explains to LaGuerta about Deborah's disappearance and tells her that he suspects the killer is inside the secure area. While still not trusting Dexter, LaGuerta decides to check out his story. LaGuerta uses her badge to get them inside the secure area. Then Dexter convinces LaGuerta to separate, each looking in a different direction. Dexter follows his instincts as he begins searching the containers, quickly finding a refrigerated container in which Deborah is strapped to a table.

Chapters 24-25 Analysis

Dexter receives a call from Captain Matthews looking for Deborah. Dexter realizes that Deborah left to come to his apartment but never made it. Dexter thinks of Harry and knows Harry would want Dexter to be concerned about his foster sister. Deborah is family, a theme of the novel, and Dexter should look for her. Dexter goes to his car and finds another Barbie doll there. Dexter takes the clue and goes to the docks, realizing the killer must have Deborah in one of the storage containers. However, the containers are behind a secure fence. Dexter is desperate to get behind the fence, leaving the reader wondering about his motivation. Does Dexter want to save his sister, or is this just an excuse to finally meet the killer he considers a master. The reader is also left wondering if there really is a killer, or if Dexter kidnapped his own sister while he was asleep. Dexter wonders the same thing and wants to prove to himself that he could not have committed all these crimes in his sleep. This seems to be his only chance, but he is thwarted when LaGuerta shows up.



LaGuerta has finally shown she has some skills as an investigator. LaGuerta has known for some time that Doakes is suspicious of Dexter, but LaGuerta has only chosen now to act on these suspicions. Dexter made LaGuerta look like a fool with his report stating that the construction site murder could not have been committed by the Tamiami Trail killer. Now she wants revenge by pinning all the murders on him. Ironically, LaGuerta is on the right track but for the wrong reasons. Dexter convinces LaGuerta that Deborah is in danger, and she helps him get behind the secure fence. However, LaGuerta mistakenly allows Dexter to search the containers on his own. Dexter finds Deborah. The reader sees Deborah all alone and is anxious to move to the next chapter to find out if there is a killer or if Dexter is the only suspect.



Chapters 26-27 and Epilogue

Chapters 26-27 and Epilogue Summary

Dexter stares at Deborah and wonders how he knew to find her here. Dexter thinks he must have put her there. However, this theory is blown out of the water when a man steps out of the shadows. This man looks exactly like Dexter, only bigger. The man begins to speak, asking Dexter if he remembers this place. Dexter does not, but a memory is slowly beginning to make its way to the surface. The man tells Dexter how when he was four and Dexter was three, their mother crossed a drug dealer for whom she worked. The drug dealer killed their mother by chopping her into pieces with a chainsaw along with several male associates. The drug dealer then left the two little boys in the pools of blood for three days before they were finally rescued by the police.

The Tamiami Trail killer is Dexter's brother. Dexter is both shocked and excited by this idea. Dexter's brother, Brian, explains how he found Dexter and learned that Dexter, too, was a serial killer. Brian began to imagine the two of them killing together. Brian wants Dexter to help him kill Deborah. Before Dexter can respond, LaGuerta comes into the container. LaGuerta pulls her gun and shoots Brian just as he manages to stab her in the gut. Dexter is left standing over Deborah with the knife in his hands. Dexter wants to kill; the Dark Passenger is raging inside him, but the memory of Harry's teachings keeps him from committing the act. LaGuerta raises up and tries to shoot Dexter, but she is too weak and is brought down again by Brian. Brian encourages Dexter to kill, but still he resists.

Brian gets away and LaGuerta is dead. Deborah now knows about Dexter and, like Harry, has vowed to help protect him. Dexter thinks about LaGuerta and how good it felt to kill her with his brother's help. Dexter wonders if he will see his brother again. Dexter does not know, but he does know that life will never be the same again. Dexter also thinks about Doakes. Doakes thinks he knows Dexter's secret. Perhaps Doakes will be the Dark Passenger's next victim.

Chapters 26-27 and Epilogue Analysis

Dexter finds Deborah and still believes that he somehow kidnapped his sister in his sleep. However, this proves to be untrue when a man, greatly resembling Dexter, steps out of the shadows. This man knows a great deal about Dexter and is excited to see him. Dexter is confused, beginning to remember things long forgotten. Finally the truth of Dexter's past is revealed, confirming everything the reader has suspected and everything that Dexter has questioned. Dexter was left at the scene of a terrible murder for three days when he was just three years old. This trauma caused the emotional scars that have left Dexter an emotionless serial killer. It is this trauma when Dexter was just a toddler that has contributed to Dexter's personality as a serial killer.



The Tamiami Trail killer is Dexter's own brother. Dexter is both relieved by this news and excited. Dexter has a brother, someone just like him, with whom he can share his darker side. However, Brian wants to share Deborah as their first kill. Dexter turns to Deborah and ponders the question. This dilemma touches on both the theme of family and morality. Dexter cannot kill Deborah because she is the only family he has. Beyond this, however, Dexter also knows that he cannot kill Deborah because it goes against everything Harry taught him. Deborah has done nothing wrong; she is not the criminal Harry taught Dexter to kill. Dexter cannot kill Deborah, yet his Dark Passenger wants to kill.

When LaGuerta walks into the container, it seems all is over for Dexter. However, Brian stabs LaGuerta before she can hurt anyone. Brian then continues to encourage Dexter to kill Deborah. Instead, Dexter turns his knife on LaGuerta. LaGuerta fits Dexter's morality radar better because she is an inept detective, who has allowed criminals to go free and has locked up men who did not deserve it. Not only this, but LaGuerta threatens Dexter's safety. Now Dexter will be safe. At least for a while, assuming Doakes cannot prove any of Dexter's crimes. However, Dexter also knows he must deal with Doakes, something he vows to do soon. Now Deborah knows about Dexter and seems as committed as her father to protect him, despite the fact that she once wanted to turn him in as the Tamiami Trail killer. It is an ironic twist of fate that Deborah has learned the truth and decided to protect her foster brother. Then again, it could just be another example of the theme of family, a sister protecting her brother.



Characters

Dexter Morgan

Dexter Morgan is a blood analysis technician for the Metro-Dade Police Department. Dexter spends his days trying to figure out how crimes played out based on the blood left at the scene. Dexter has great instincts when it comes to these crimes, especially serial murders. Everyone thinks Dexter is a geek, who just happens to come up with lucky guesses. However, many of Dexter's guesses are based on experience. When Dexter is not working for the police department, he engages in his own dark fantasies. Dexter is a serial killer.

When Dexter was a small child, he was discovered at a crime scene by a police detective. Dexter is adopted by this police officer and his family. As a teenager, Dexter begins to indulge in dark behaviors, such as killing neighborhood dogs. When his foster father, Harry, learns of this, he confronts Dexter. Dexter confesses to a dark desire to kill. Instead of putting Dexter in therapy or turning him over to the police, Harry decides to help Dexter to learn how to use his dark side in a positive way. Harry teaches Dexter to only kill people who deserve to die, such as other serial killers. Dexter also learns how to fake emotions in order to help him fit in. Dexter is empty inside, and he often does not feel the same emotions that other people feel. Therefore, Dexter has learned to pretend so that other people will not see how empty he really is. In this way, Dexter is able to hide his sociopathic nature. Dexter even has a girlfriend, even though the idea of sex does not appeal to him.

Dexter has no memory of his life before Harry Morgan found him. However, when strange murders begin to take place and the killer seems to have taken a strange interest in him, Dexter begins to work on instinct. Dexter is fascinated by the other killer's bloodless techniques and by the idea of finding this man and killing him himself. The closer Dexter gets to the killer, the more he begins to feel a connection to the man. Finally, Dexter discovers exactly what that connection is. The killer is a brother Dexter did not know he had.

Deborah Morgan

Deborah Morgan is Dexter's foster sister. Deborah has grown up in the shadow of her cop father. Deborah wants to be as good a cop as her father was; however, Deborah has been assigned to vice and spends her nights trying to catch men soliciting prostitutes. It is an unsatisfying assignment, and Deborah would much rather be a homicide detective. Unfortunately, promotion in the police department is based more on political ability than detecting skills. Deborah is a talented police officer; she simply does not have the patience or the charm to play the political game.



Deborah knows that her brother has certain instincts when it comes to serial murders. When prostitutes are targeted by a serial killer, Deborah begs her brother to help her solve the case in order to earn a promotion. Dexter is reluctant because he finds this killer fascinating. Dexter thinks the killer is a master, who has a great deal to teach him. Dexter would like to catch the killer himself so he can talk to him before he kills him. However, Dexter feels that he would love Deborah a great deal if he could feel emotions and that Harry would want him to help her. Dexter begins working the case with the hope of helping Deborah solve it.

Deborah makes several big discoveries on the case, but she is overshadowed by Detective LaGuerta, who dislikes Deborah. Deborah seems to be getting no where. However, Deborah discovers a video that shows the killer. Unfortunately, the man in the video looks like Dexter. Deborah is prepared to turn her brother in, but is kidnapped by the real killer before she can. Dexter goes in search of his sister, once again because he knows it is what would be expected of him. When Dexter finds his sister, he also finds his long-lost brother. The brother wants Dexter to help him kill Deborah, but Dexter refuses. When all is said and done, Deborah has become aware of who Dexter is and has made the decision to protect him, just as her father had done.

Harry Morgan

Harry Morgan is a police detective, who found Dexter at a crime scene. Harry takes Dexter in to his family and raises him as his own son. When Dexter is a teenager, Harry discovers that he has sociopathic tendencies. Rather than seek help for his son, Harry embraces reality. Harry knows that Dexter is going to become a serial killer no matter what anyone does to stop him, so instead Harry teaches Dexter how to indulge his darker side in a way that will keep him from getting caught. Harry teaches Dexter all he knows about crime scenes and how to make sure he does not leave any evidence behind. Harry also teaches Dexter to only kill people who deserve to die, such as other serial killers. Finally, Harry teaches Dexter how to get along in society without revealing his lack of emotion.

Harry becomes Dexter's moral compass. Every time Dexter is faced with a situation in which he does not know how to act, he thinks about Harry. When Deborah asks Dexter to help her find the Tamiami Trail killer, Dexter does not want to. Dexter would rather find the killer himself and then kill him. However, Dexter realizes that Harry would want him to help Deborah, so he does. Later, when Deborah is kidnapped by the killer, Dexter is faced with two dilemmas. The first is whether or not to search for Deborah, which he decides to do since he realizes it is what a loving brother would be expected to do. Second, Dexter is asked to kill Deborah. Dexter wants to kill because that is his baser instinct; however, the thought of Harry stops him from harming Deborah.



Vince Masuoka

Vince Masuoka is a lab tech who works for the Metro-Dade Police Department. Dexter and Vince work closely together since they are both lab techs and their work often applies to the same cases. Vince is an awkward man, who often tries to make crude jokes in order to fit in with the other cops and lab techs. Vince also seems to have a certain affection for Deborah and often makes jokes at her expense due to her required uniform for vice. Vince has a laugh that Dexter finds fake. Dexter likes Vince because he seems to be pretending like Dexter is. Dexter feels a kindred soul in Vince because of this falseness in his social skills.

Angel Baptista

Angel Batista is an investigator in the medical examiner's office. Dexter and Angel often work together on their many cases. Dexter finds Angel at the scene of the first Tamiami Trail killer's victim. Angel is the one who points out to Dexter the lack of blood in, on, and around the body. It is also Angel who points out that the killer did not finish cutting up the body but left one leg in fewer pieces than the other. From this information, Dexter concludes that the killer is growing bored with his ritual and searching for a more elaborate way to kill his victims. This information helps Deborah make several breakthroughs in the case.

Detective Migdia LaGuerta

Detective Migdia LaGuerta is a female detective in charge of the Tamiami Trail killer case. Detective LaGuerta is an inept investigator, who has only gotten to the position she holds due to her ability to play the political game. LaGuerta charms everyone, including the press. LaGuerta is known for handing out as many promotional pictures of herself at press conferences as information on the cases being discussed. During the investigation of the Tamiami Trail killer, LaGuerta makes an arrest and obtains a confession from a man who is not the real killer. By doing this, LaGuerta gets all the credit for solving the case and ruins Deborah's chances of using the case to gain a promotion. When the killer kills again, LaGuerta is left looking like a fool. LaGuerta blames Dexter for this because he gave her information that made her feel secure in the arrest she made. LaGuerta begins to follow Dexter and finds him searching for Deborah shortly after she is kidnapped. LaGuerta helps Dexter get into the secure docking area where he believes the kidnapper to be. She then walks in on Dexter and the killer discussing their common past. LaGuerta is stabbed by the killer and later murdered by both Dexter and the killer. LaGuerta is buried a police hero.

Captain Matthews

Captain Matthews is the head of the homicide division for which Dexter works. Matthews decides to put Deborah on the Tamiami Trail killer case because he knows



her father and is aware that she has connections in the prostitution community that can help the case. Deborah sees this as a sign of trust and hopes to use it to gain a promotion. Later, when LaGuerta makes an arrest, Deborah goes to the Captain and tells him she does not believe LaGuerta has the right man. When the killer kills again, Deborah, who had previously appeared insubordinate, looks as though she is a gifted detective. Deborah hopes the Captain will give her a promotion, but instead he allows LaGuerta to continue to block Deborah's ambitions by placing her on the fringes of the investigation.

Sergeant Doakes

Sergeant Doakes is a large, black detective, who does not like Dexter. Dexter believes that Doakes sees in Dexter the darkness that leads Dexter to kill. In a way, Dexter believes that Doakes is the same as he. Dexter thinks the only difference between himself and Doakes is that Doakes puts his dark energy into catching bad guys through the law. However, Dexter suspects that perhaps there is more to Doakes' dark side of which no one is aware. Perhaps Doakes is a closeted serial killer as well. In any case, Doakes seems to be watching Dexter very closely, and toward the end of the book, Dexter becomes worried that Doakes might discover his secret one day. After LaGuerta is killed, Doakes seems to be more intent on proving Dexter is a murderer. Dexter decides that he will have to dispose of Doakes before Doakes can expose his dark secret.

Tamiami Trail Killer

The Tamiami Trail killer is a person who has been kidnapping and murdering prostitutes. This killer takes his victims and bleeds them out before freezing their bodies and cutting them into pieces. The killer then wraps each body part and dump them in Dumpsters along the Tamiami Trail in Miami. After Dexter and Deborah begin investigating the case, they discover that the killer is using a refrigerated truck to keep the bodies cold. Shortly after this, Dexter has a run-in with the killer. The killer throws a woman's head at Dexter's car before going to the local hockey rink and displaying a wrapped body on the ice. Dexter thinks this might be a message to him personally. This seems to be confirmed when he returns home and discovers that someone has left a mutilated Barbi doll in his freezer. Dexter feels a connection to this killer and begins to wonder if he is committing these crimes in his sleep. However, it later turns out that the killer is a brother Dexter never knew he had.

Rita, Astor, and Cody

Rita is Dexter's girlfriend. Rita was married to a drug addict, who abused her terribly. Rita is paranoid about sex and afraid to allow Dexter to touch her. This is the perfect woman for Dexter since he has no interest in sex. Rather than spend time in romantic clutches, Rita and Dexter spend much of their time in athletic pursuits. However, one



night when Dexter is emotionally excited by the Tamiami Trail killer, he and Rita are intimate. Dexter is disgusted and confused by his reaction to Rita.

Astor and Cody are Rita's children. Although Dexter cannot feel emotions for adults, he has a special place in his heart for children. Dexter adores Rita's kids and feels he could give or take Rita, but he would desperately miss her children should Rita throw him out of her life. Dexter sees how the children's father's behavior hurt Rita's children, so he wants to be a good role model for them in order to prevent any further damage. Dexter does not want Astor and Cody to turn out like him.



Objects/Places

Barbie Doll

Dexter finds a Barbie doll in his freezer after chasing the Tamiami Trail killer on the streets of Miami and having a head thrown at his car. Dexter also finds another doll in his car after Deborah is kidnapped.

Dark Passenger

Dexter calls the part of him that kills his Dark Passenger.

Slides

Dexter keeps a slide with a blood drop from each of his victims.

Silk Mask

Dexter wears a silk mask when he kills his victims.

Wrapped Bodies

The Tamiami Trail killer wraps the body parts of his victims before disposing of them.

Knife

Dexter's weapon of choice is a knife.

Plastic Wrap

When Dexter kills the elementary school child molester, he uses plastic wrap off some sheet rock in order to protect his clothing, since he has not thought to bring along other protection.

Storage Containers

Dexter finds Deborah at the docks in a storage container after she is kidnapped by the Tamiami Trail killer. It is in this storage container that Dexter recalls the tragedy that brought him to Harry Morgan, and where he is faced with the decision of whether or not to kill his sister.



Refrigerated Truck

The Tamiami Trail killer steals a refrigerated truck in order to keep his victims cold while he cuts up their bodies. Dexter finds this truck and follows it before the killer outsmarts him and throws a woman's head at his car.

Ice Rink

The Tamiami Trail killer leaves a body in the goal at the local ice rink after his run-in with Dexter. Later, the killer leaves a message in a closet at the same rink with body parts. It is a surveillance video from this ice rink that identifies the killer as possibly Dexter.

Web Cam Video

An employee of the ice rink uses a web cam to videotape the comings and goings of the professional hockey team. This web cam captures the killer entering the ice rink the night he leaves the message in the closet. This image resembles Dexter.

Photographs

LaGuerta likes to hand out professional pictures of herself at press conferences despite the fact that they have nothing to do with the cases being discussed.

Duct Tape

Dexter uses duct tape to secure his victims to the surface on which he works on them to keep them from struggling.

Tiamiami Trail

The Tamiami Trail is a section of Miami where there is a high rate of prostitution and crime. This is where the Tamiami Trail killer picks his victims.



Themes

Morality

Harry knows that Dexter will eventually indulge his desire to kill a human being. Harry also knows that Dexter's desire to do this does not stem from the way he was raised but rather from the horrible crime that ended his mother's life and left Dexter an orphan. Harry could attempt to get counseling for the boy, but decides instead to teach Dexter how to kill without getting caught. Harry teaches Dexter not only the skills he needs to know in order to protect himself but also teaches him to only kill people who deserve to die. By doing this, Harry gives Dexter a moral excuse for what he is doing. The first time Dexter kills someone, it is a nurse that Harry asks Dexter to kill. The nurse is killing her patients by giving them too much medication. Harry needs her to stop before she kills him.

Morality is a cloudy idea. Different people see morality in different ways. Some people might believe that what Harry does with Dexter is irresponsible and dangerous. However, Harry sees it as accepting reality and making it possible for Dexter to indulge an impulse he most likely would not be able to suppress in a way that will keep him and innocent people safe. Harry is a police officer and he knows how to catch a killer; therefore, he knows how to protect one. Harry teaches Dexter these things, and also teaches him to only kill people who deserve to die. Dexter targets killers, child molesters, and other criminals. All the people Dexter kills are people who deserve to be in jail, but for some reason justice has been defeated in each of their cases. It is this unique idea that makes morality a theme of the novel.

Family

Dexter cannot feel emotions for other people. Emotions are a novelty that Dexter can fake but cannot feel himself. Dexter is aware of what he should be feeling in different situations, which is what makes it possible for him to fake emotional responses, but he has never really felt anything. Due to this, Dexter does not have any special attachment to Deborah. However, Dexter knows he should have feelings for Deborah, so he acts with her in a way he thinks is expected of him. Deborah is the only family Dexter believes he has in the world, so when she comes to him and asks for his help in the Tamiami Trail killer case, Dexter gives his help despite the fact that he would rather search out the killer himself.

Dexter has the same lack of feeling for Harry as he does Deborah. Dexter knows he should be grateful to Harry for teaching him how to protect himself, how to act in social situations, and how to deal with his darker side. Dexter openly admits if he could love, he would love Harry; however, Dexter cannot feel these emotions. Dexter uses Harry as his moral compass, thinking of Harry every time he makes a choice of victims or is faced with a social dilemma.



When Dexter learns the identity of the Tamiami Trail killer, he finds out he has a brother. Dexter is shocked by this revelation. More shocking, however, is the circumstances by which the two brothers were separated. Now Dexter understands why he felt a connection to the killer and why blood was such a big factor in the killer's murders and in his own life. When the reader looks at all three of these relationships, it is clear that family is an important theme of the novel.

Politics

Deborah wants to be a police detective like her father before her. Deborah is a good cop with a good record; however, Deborah does not know how to play the political games necessary to advance her career. Dexter tells Deborah over and over how to play the game, but she refuses. Deborah feels that she ought to be able to advance her career solely on her work. Deborah does not realize that it is charm and politics that advance careers.

LaGuerta know how to use politics, even though she is a terrible cop. LaGuerta arrests the wrong killer and manages to get a confession, deciding based on bad detective work that she has the right man. Even when Deborah tells LaGuerta she is wrong, LaGuerta continues to insist that she has the right man. Faced with new murders from the killer, LaGuerta still insists that she has the right man. The only reason LaGuerta is a detective and Deborah is not is because LaGuerta knows how to promote herself to both her bosses and the press. It is for this reason that politics is a theme of the novel.



Style

Point of View

The point of view of the novel is first person. The novel is completely narrated by Dexter Morgan. Dexter tells the story as he sees it, including two murders he commits during the course of the novel. This point of view allows the reader intimate insight into Dexter's mind and his lack of emotions. The reader is not sheltered from Dexter's Dark Passenger. In fact, Dexter takes the reader along on two of his kills, showing the reader almost every detail except for specifics on the torture to which he subjects his victims.

The point of view is a dangerous choice in this case. The novel is about a serial killer. However, the writer has chosen to use the serial killer as the narrator of the novel, using first person to allow the reader the most intimate relationship with this main character. This is a dangerous choice because an emotional attachment to the main character is essential for a novel to work. Attaching the reader so intimately to a serial killer is difficult, since a serial killer is rarely a sympathetic character. However, the writer makes this point of view work in this case because this serial killer is unique. While Dexter gains pleasure from killing his victims, he chooses his victims in such a way that the reader feels as though Dexter is performing a valuable service for society. As bad as Dexter's crimes are, they are rarely worse than those of his victims. It is because of this moral high ground that this point of view works.

Setting

The novel is set in Miami, Florida. Miami is a tourist town full of sunshine and crime. Dexter enjoys living in Miami not only because he likes the sun and the beaches but because there is plenty of work for him both as a blood analysis expert and serial killer. Dexter has no shortage of work or number of killers needing to be "brought to justice." In this way, Miami is almost like another character in the book. Miami is alive with people—people who indulge in leisure activities that often lead to criminal activities. It is this custom that makes Miami the perfect place for both a cop and a criminal to live.

The setting of the novel works because it does become like another character in the story. The reader would be hard pressed to believe the circumstances of the novel if it were set somewhere like Minnesota or Ohio. Crime does happen in these other places, it just seems more common in a place such as Miami. Miami is about leisure, about beauty, and about crime. Miami is the perfect place for a man like Dexter, who lives most of his life faking his way through normal human interaction. The fact that Dexter is also a criminalist who moonlights as a serial killer only makes Miami more perfect for his needs.



Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is precise English. At times, the language is stiff, stilted, as though it is being presented by someone who is not excited by normal emotions. There are also times when the language is excited, slurred, void of normal punctuation. At these times, the reader is given a unique insight into a man who believes himself to be void of normal human emotions. The reader discovers something that the man himself might not know—that he does feel emotion. Dexter is not as void of emotion as he believes himself to be; he simply at times does not recognize what he is feeling as emotion.

The language in this novel works well because it helps to reveal things about the narrator that even the narrator himself does not know about himself. The narrator is a serial killer who believes he is unable to feel normal, human emotion. However, there are times in the novel that the narrator expresses himself in such a way that it is clear that he does, in fact, feel some of the most intense emotions known to humans. Dexter has deep feelings for Rita's children, concerned that they might one day end up like him. Dexter also has feelings for Rita, even though he claims that he does not. The reader can see these emotions in Dexter's narration when he describes a sexual encounter the two shared. It is these small things and the way in which Dexter describes them that the reader begins to see the emotion under the surface, and it is why the language in this novel works.

Structure

The novel is divided into twenty-seven chapters and an epilogue. Each chapter is fairly short, most describing one or two simple scenes within its few pages. The chapters are filled with both dialogue and exposition. There are a few chapters that consist of a great deal of inner monologue as Dexter, the narrator, attempts to work out the few clues of the murder case and figure out who the killer is. This inner dialogue is filled with self doubt, as Dexter struggles with the obvious clues and tries to find the hidden meaning within them.

There is only one main plot, the search for the Tamiami Trail killer; however, there are several subplots. One of these subplots is Dexter's sociopathic need to murder. Dexter seeks out victims who are criminals themselves and unlikely to ever be brought to justice. Another subplot is Deborah's desire to be a police detective. Deborah enlists Dexter's help with the Tamiami Trail killer case, hoping he will provide some insight that will help her solve the case and secure a promotion. These subplots are fully supported by the main plot and are brought to a satisfactory end when the main plot reaches its climax.



Quotes

"Neatness takes time, of course, but it's worth it. Worth it to make the Dark Passenger happy, keep him quiet for another long while. Worth it just to do it right and tidy. Remove one more heap of mess from the world. A few more neatly wrapped bags of garbage and my one small corner of the world is a neater, happier place. A better place." Chapter 1, pg. 12

"Whatever made me the way I am left me hollow, empty inside, unable to feel. It doesn't seem like a big deal. I'm quite sure most people fake an awful lot of everyday human contact. I just fake all of it."
Chapter 2, pg. 15

"No blood at all. I could hear that phrase repeat itself in my head, louder each time. No sticky, hot, messy, awful blood. No splatter. No stain. No blood at all. Why hadn't I thought of that?" Chapter 2, pg. 22

"And another part was that in the best tradition of Miami watercraft, most of the other boaters seemed to be trying to kill me. I found that very relaxing. I was right at home. This is my country; these are my people." Chapter 4, pg. 36

"There are plenty of people who deserve it, Dex...'
And with those few little words he gave a shape to my whole life, my everything, my who and what I am. The wonderful, all-seeing, all-knowing man. Harry. My dad."
Chapter 4, pg. 43

"Nothing else loves me, or ever will. Not even—especially—me. I know what I am and that is not a thing to love. I am alone in the world, all alone, but for Deborah. Except, of course, for the Thing inside, who does not come out to play too often. And does not actually play with me but must have somebody else." Chapter 5, pg. 50

"How wonderful to have such an authentic human experience. Now I knew what it was like to feel like a total idiot." Chapter 9, pg. 90

"I made the human choice. Funny when you think about it; me, making a human choice. Harry would have been proud." Chapter 13, pg. 130

"Many times in my life I have felt like I was missing something, some essential piece of the puzzle that everybody else carried around with them without thinking about it. I don't usually mind, since most of those times it turns out to be an astonishingly stupid piece of humania like understanding the infield fly rule or not going all the way on the first date." Chapter 13, pg. 132



"Stop her? Was it possible? Could he mean—stop her? Until now Harry had helped me control my Dark Passenger, feeding him stray pets, hunting deer; one glorious time I had gone with him to catch a feral monkey that had been terrorizing a South Miami neighborhood. It had been close, so almost human—but still not right, of course."
Chapter 16, pg. 165

"For a few moments I just sat and thought about life's cruel ironies. After so many years of solitary self-reliance, I was suddenly pursued from all directions by hungry women. Deb, Rita, LaGuerta—they were all apparently unable to exist without me." Chapter 18, pg. 181

"The tip of the knife winked and froze in place. The Dark Passenger could not send it down. Harry could not pull it away. And there we were." Chapter 27, pg. 284



Topics for Discussion

Why does Dexter target the priest? Why does Dexter have the priest take him to the house out in the country? What is the significance of this house? Why does Dexter talk about laying out the priest's victims for him to see? What is the point in this? What about Dexter's behavior suggests the theme of morality?

Why does Dexter go to the scene of the Tamiami Trail killer's latest drop point? What fascinates Dexter about this killer? Why? Why does Deborah ask Dexter for help? Why does Dexter agree to help Deborah?

Compare and contrast Deborah and Detective LaGuerta. How are these two alike? How are they different? Is Deborah more honest because she refuses to play the politics game? Is LaGuerta a bad cop because of the politics or simply because she is inept? How could these two characters benefit each other?

Discuss Doakes. Why is Dexter leary of Doakes? What about Doakes suggests that he knows about Dexter's moonlight hobby? Is Dexter afraid of Doakes? Why or why not? Should Dexter be afraid of Doakes?

Discuss Harry. Why does Harry decide to help Dexter? Is Harry using Dexter for his own reasons? Is Harry wrong in doing what he has done? Is killing bad people a good excuse to allow Dexter to run wild? Is there ever a good reason to kill another human being? Under what circumstances would it be okay for Dexter to kill a person?

Discuss childhood trauma. Can trauma cause a person to become a serial killer? Is trauma an excuse for murder? Could Dexter have stopped the urge to kill with therapy? What if Dexter could remember his trauma? Could these memories have helped him prevent the murders? Should Harry have sought treatment for Dexter rather than teach him to kill?

Discuss family. In how many ways is family a theme to this novel? Why is family important to Dexter? Why does Dexter remain close to Deborah if he does not feel emotion for her? Why doesn't Dexter remember his brother? Would the ending be different had he remembered his brother earlier?