

Deadfolk Study Guide

Deadfolk by Charles Williams

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Deadfolk Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter 1 and Chapter 2.....	4
Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.....	6
Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.....	8
Chapter 7 and Chapter 8.....	10
Chapter 9 and Chapter 10.....	12
Chapter 11 and Chapter 12.....	14
Chapter 13 and Chapter 14.....	16
Chapter 15 and Chapter 16.....	18
Chapter 17 and Chapter 18.....	20
Chapter 19 and Chapter 20.....	22
Characters.....	24
Objects/Places.....	29
Themes.....	31
Style.....	33
Quotes.....	36
Topics for Discussion.....	38



Plot Summary

The first novel by Charlie Williams, *Deadfolk*, paints a disturbing portrait of an English town called Mangel that appears to be dominated by thieves and cutthroats. In the noir tradition of dark, violent fiction, and particularly the style called hardboiled crime, this novel is narrated by its central character and one of the town's principal criminals, Royston Blake. He works as a doorman at the popular Hoppers Wine Bar & Bistro, and at first, he seems to be a likeable enough sort, although clearly rough around the edges. The reader learns immediately that Blake's wife was killed in a fire at Hoppers, and that he was questioned in connection with her death, along with a co-owner of Hoppers, Lee Munton. It soon becomes apparent that Lee and his brothers, Baz and Jess Munton, are angry with Blake, which worries the doorman. Blake is the biggest, strongest man in town, but the Muntons are the most frightening family. What is more, Blake has "lost his bottle," or gone soft, since the death of Beth. One night outside the bar, Baz publicly humiliates Blake by pushing and slapping him, and whispers that he knows Blake killed his wife. The Muntons start following Blake around in their van, locally known as the Meat Wagon, which makes him even more nervous. While drinking with his two friends, Legs and Finney, Blake is demonstrating how to do a head-butt when he accidentally butts Legs, knocking him out. This creates uneasiness between the two men, which proves to be disastrous.

Blake describes how Lee Munton commanded him to burn down Hoppers for the insurance money. Blake had Finney do the job, but Blake does not know how Beth got inside the place after hours. When Blake asks Legs for advice about the threat of the Muntons, Legs counsels him to catch Baz Munton alone and beat him up. Blake does so, but goes too far, and kills Baz. He puts the body in his cellar. The next day, when he goes downstairs to dispose of the body, it is missing. Meanwhile, Lee Munton tells Blake he must help the brothers rob Hoppers, or else they will tell the police what they know about Beth's murder. Blake complies, but they encounter the new owner, Fenton, who is asleep in the office. When it looks like the Muntons will shoot Fenton, Blake intervenes and then gets away. The Muntons have stolen something in a box that Fenton wants back. He offers Blake half-ownership of Hoppers if he will retrieve this object, but he will not say what it is. Blake agrees and a series of confrontations, thefts, chasings, and killings occur as the Muntons, Blake, and a mysterious man who has come from another town all vie to obtain this thing that Blake calls a "doofer." Blake, who is admired by several women in town, gets help from them and from Finney. Eventually, Finney confesses to Blake that he put Beth in the bar before he burned it, because she was having an affair with someone else. The other person turns out to have been Legs, who is also the one who told the Munton brothers that Blake had killed Baz. Amidst a welter of double-crosses and lies, the chase for the doofer finally ends in a bloodbath. Blake emerges unscathed but there is no doubt now that he is every bit as bad as the novel's other thugs and murderers.



Chapter 1 and Chapter 2

Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 Summary

Deadfolk, by Charlie Williams, is the story of a young thug named Royston Blake who works as a doorman at a bar in a small English town. The novel, a vivid and often uncomfortable portrait of small-town ignorance and violence in the style of hardboiled crime fiction, revolves around events pertaining to the death of Blake's wife, Beth, in an after-hours fire at the bar. Chapter 1 begins with a newspaper report of her death at age 25 in the club, called Hoppers. The article says the joint owner, Lee Munton, and Blake, age 28, were questioned. The story then switches to a first-person account by Blake, who is standing outside town on East Bloater Road when he sees a van known as the Meat Wagon going past. The Meat Wagon's presence worries him, and he gets into his own Ford Capri and drives back toward his hometown, Mangel, but he then sees the Meat Wagon blocking the road. Lee Munton gets out. He wants to be sure Blake is not trying to leave town. Later, Blake is in the Paul Pry, his favorite drinking spot, with his two buddies, Legs and Finney. They are drinking and telling stories about fighting. Prompted by the others, Blake demonstrates on Legs how he head-butts an opponent, which is his specialty. For the first time in his life, he misjudges. Instead of stopping his head inches in front of Legs, he accidentally butts him, knocking him out. When Legs revives, bleeding, he keeps drinking. He tells a story about a fight in a soccer game that makes everyone in the bar laugh, but Blake can tell his friend is angry with him, and he figures this is when everything started to go wrong.

In Chapter 2, Blake and Finney go up the road from the Paul Pry to Alvin's Kebab Shop and Chippy, where they buy kebabs. Walking, Fin tells Blake he should not have butted Legs, but Blake has not been thinking about it, because he figures it is water under the bridge. The Meat Wagon goes past and stops, but Blake just waves into the van's tinted window as they walk by. Fin says the Muntons are after Blake, which enrages him. He shoves Fin around, asking what he has heard, and Fin admits that people are saying Blake is a "bottler," which means he has turned cowardly. Fin wants to know why this is happening, but Blake considers his friend stupid, and tells him nothing. He sees a woman in a car who resembles his girlfriend, Sally, and wishes he were with her now. Blake leaves Fin, but cannot go home yet, because there is nothing for him there, now that Beth is dead. He walks around, and then goes to Leggsy's place. Legs lets him in, they drink and watch TV as usual, and Blake apologizes for the head butt. He says he is worried about the Muntons, and Legs says if he needs help, to come to him.

Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 Analysis

In this novel, the reader is immediately immersed in the strange and dangerous world of the protagonist. After the short news article that describes the death of Beth, which will become a central event in the story, the voice becomes that of Blake, whose heavy dialect is full of grammatical errors and slang. More than any other attribute, this dialect,



which is shared by all the other characters, creates the sense of a place far removed from that of most readers. The threat to Blake's safety posed by the Munton brothers is quickly introduced in the form of the Meat Wagon, and an eventual showdown between the brothers and him is foreshadowed. The rough camaraderie between Blake and his two friends threatens to sour after he accidentally head butts Legs. Another foreshadowing takes place when, as the narrator, Blake says at the end of Chapter 1 that everything went wrong after that head butt. When Fin notes to Blake that the Muntons are after him, Blake's rage not only demonstrates his ability to be violent even toward his best friends, but also indicates the extent of his concern about the Muntons. When he forces Fin to say what he has heard and Fin replies that everyone says Blake has lost his "bottle" or mettle, his almost indifferent reaction suggests that he already knew this, and what he does not like is that everyone else now seems to know it. His unwillingness to go home, because Beth is no longer there, shows that Blake's feelings of weakness stem from the death of his wife. When he tells Legs that the Muntons are after him, it is an attempt to enlist support from the only friend he has whose judgment he trusts. Legs responds appropriately, but without warmth, as if he were going through the expected motions. In just two chapters, the author already has stranded Blake in an unnerving situation, in which it appears he is without the potential of getting real help from anyone.



Chapter 3 and Chapter 4

Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 Summary

Blake wakes late and is still worried about the Muntons. He thinks of having seen someone who resembled Sally in a car the previous night and decides to go to her place. When he gets there, he can smell the stale beer and body odor of another man, and asks who has been there. She is surprised, because they are not supposed to ask such questions about one another. She will not say who was there. He starts shouting at her and calling her a "slapper," or a loose woman. She runs into the bedroom and shouts that he is a "bottler." He kicks the door open and gets her to admit that people are saying he let someone push him around and call him names when he was on duty as the doorman at Hoppers. They make up, but then he finds a Munton Motors business card on the floor, and she admits her visitor was one of the brothers, Baz Muntun, her former lover. Baz told her he was the one who had slapped Blake around and called him names outside the bar. Blake repeatedly denies he is a bottler, and Sally tries to entice him into bed, but he leaves.

Chapter 4 begins with Blake describing the father and three brothers of the Muntun clan as the most feared people in the history of Mangel. He suggests that he was once close to their sister, Mandy Muntun, but adds that he does not brag about it. He is driving in his beloved Capri as he has these thoughts and then arrives at the Paul Pry and greets the bartender, Nathan. Blake orders a meat pie and chips. While he is waiting, he reads about a fisherman landing a 20-pound barbel, a species of carp, on the River Clunge. As he eats, he asks Nathan if he has heard anything about Blake, but the bartender says no. In the next section, Blake describes letting a handful of underage girls into the club. He pats one of them on the bottom, as he often does, but she accuses him loudly of molestation. The crowd is aroused. Baz arrives and roughly shoves Blake against the wall. He whispers to Blake that he is a wife killer and that he hates Blake. Later, Blake goes into the club and collects his pay from Rachel, the bartender. He then visits Legs at his place. They drink beer as Legs flips compulsively through TV stations. Blake reminds Legs that he said he would help him with the Muntuns, and Legs says he has an idea: Blake should stand up to them. Blake says he has lost his bottle, but Legs denies it. He says Blake should get one of the brothers alone and beat him up. Blake passes a restless night in the chair and when he wakes, decides he has things to do.

Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 Analysis

When Blake discovers that his girlfriend, Sally, has been sleeping with her old boyfriend, Baz Muntun, his isolation deepens. At the same time, the pressure of the Muntun presence in his life intensifies. The impression created by the author in this scene is that the Muntuns are closing in on every aspect of his life and that those closest to Blake cannot be trusted. Even so, he lets Sally off the hook fairly easily, as if the fight is going out of him. Chapter 4 begins with a declaration of how tough the Muntun clan can be



and how everyone fears them, which helps to explain Blake's hesitancy. His mention that he once was close to Mandy Munton is another foreshadowing of the role that past relationship will play in future events. At this point, the reader cannot be sure why the Muntons are after Blake. The only clue we have is that Lee Munton was questioned by police after Blake's wife, Beth, died in the fire. Once again, the author foreshadows a future plot development when Blake reads in the newspaper that a man caught an unusually large barbel on the river. The scene outside Hoppers, during which Baz pushes Blake against the wall, is a flashback that explains why people are saying Blake has lost his bottle, although the scene is portrayed in present tense. The reader knows it is a flashback only by the content of the scene. The next scene, in which Blake collects his money from Rachel in the bar, is a continuation of the flashback that exists principally to establish his relationship with Rachel. In the final scene, when he visits Legs and asks for help concerning the Muntons, the response from Legs is advice. He reasons that Blake must fight one of the brothers to reestablish his reputation as a brave man. This is a clever idea, because it allows Legs to sound helpful but requires him to do nothing. It raises doubt in the reader's mind that Legs is really willing to help his friend. That doubt already was planted by Blake's earlier assertion that everything went wrong after he head-butted Legs, and now it looks as though Legs is keeping his distance from the trouble with the Muntons. Even so, Blake's resolution to do something after he awakens the next morning suggests that the advice of Legs, whose cleverness he respects, may be exerting an influence on him.



Chapter 5 and Chapter 6

Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 Summary

Blake goes home, cleans up and drives to the Paul Pry at 11 a.m. He decides to hint to Nathan that he is about to start a row with Baz Munton, expecting that Nathan will spread the word. Nathan says Baz will be in a neighborhood called Norbert Green, and advises Blake to be on guard. Blake goes to Norbert Green, a dangerous place to be walking alone. His plan is to waylay Baz as he leaves a pub. He sees Baz at a distance and takes a short cut through yards to confront him on a path by the graveyard. Baz repeats his charge that Blake murdered Beth and advises him to get out of town. Blake replies that nobody ever leaves Mangel. They get into a staring match, but Blake's eyes begin to water. He blinks, and Baz attacks. Blake falls and Baz begins kicking him, but Blake pulls out a large wrench he always carries and smashes Baz in the face several times. He walks away and then returns, realizing he has killed Baz. He drags the body behind bushes, and then gets his car and drives to retrieve the body, but sees a gravedigger. He tells the simpleminded fellow that his mother has had an accident and the gravedigger runs off. Blake puts Baz's corpse into the Capri and drives to the Paul Pry. He washes up and, as he has a beer, he tells Nathan not to mention to anyone that they had discussed Baz. Nathan wants hush money, so Blake gives him his entire pay. He drives home, puts the body in his cellar and then drives to Sally's house, where they have intercourse.

Chapter 6 begins with Blake falling asleep at Sally's place after sex. He dreams, as he usually does these days. In the dream, Beth is berating him because a light bulb in the kitchen has to be replaced. He awakens yelling and Sally, who is usually very gruff, is kind to him and says she loves him. She wants to go away with him but he explains to her that nobody leaves Mangel. She complains that everyone calls her a slapper and calls him a bottler, but he says he will fix that. He goes home to get ready for work, and remembers asking Beth once if she thought he looked like Clint Eastwood, to which she replies that actions, not looks, are what count. Blake is feeling very good, which he realizes is because he killed Baz Munton. At Hoppers, the new owner, Fenton, asks to have a word with him. Fenton is worried because Blake left his post for a while the other night, after Baz shoved him. Blake recalls that he had stepped around back for air, but rather than giving Fenton this information, he just assures him it will not happen again. Fenton is very worried that if someone strange enters the club, Blake might not catch him. He then mentions that he wants to change the club's name from Hoppers Wine Bar & Bistro to Café Americano, and asks Blake's opinion. Blake says it is not a café and it is not American. That night, Blake is once again confident at the door, but after work he becomes worried that the Muntons will discover he had killed Baz. He gets into his car without noticing a man named Jess in the back seat.



Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 Analysis

Blake's decision to take the advice of Legs and catch one of the Muntun brothers alone shows not only that he has faith in his friend's judgment but that he feels a desperate need to prove his own bravery to himself. When his eyes begin to water in the staring match, he blinks because it will not do if Baz thinks he is crying, which again indicates Blake's preoccupation with machismo and uncertainty about his courage. When he produces the wrench and batters Baz to death, it is clear that he is still quite capable of extreme violence, but the author has instilled in the reader thoughts about whether there is necessarily a direct relationship between Blake's violence and his courage. The way he tricks the gravedigger into running home to check on his mother is a commentary on the mental aspects of Blake's dog-eat-dog life. He has fought and killed Baz because Legs told him to do so, and he has avoided detection by fooling the gravedigger, which shows a hierarchy of cunning that operates in tandem with a hierarchy of physical strength. The limitations of Blake's intelligence are made clear in his decision to ask Nathan to say nothing, which is tantamount to a confession, and then to put the corpse in his own basement. Blake's desire for sex after committing the murder shows the close connection for him between aggression or violence and love. This is further demonstrated by his dead wife's anger toward him in his dream, in which changing a source of light in the kitchen, a place of sustenance, is symbolic of Blake exchanging Beth for Sally. When Sally pronounces her love and wants to go away, his automatic reaction is that this is impossible, because he is convinced that Mangel holds everyone in place. His realization that he feels wonderful because he killed Baz is a frightening moment, at which the reader realizes that Blake is not troubled by his conscience. This allows him to placate Fenton, whose concern about someone strange getting into the club foreshadows problems Fenton will have. Fenton's ideas for changing the name of the club, which Blake dismisses as ridiculous, are symbolic of Fenton's desire to refashion the sordid life in Mangel. Blake's only emotion about killing Baz, aside from satisfaction, is a return of his fear of the Muntuns and Chapter 6 ends on the cliffhanger of a man waiting for Blake in his car.



Chapter 7 and Chapter 8

Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 Summary

Blake explains that Tommy Munton, the deceased father of the three sons, was a criminal with a good mind for business who started Hoppers and turned it into a bar popular throughout the region. After Tommy died, the brothers mismanaged the business. Lee Munton told Blake to burn down the bar for the insurance money. Blake, who greatly admired Hoppers, did not want to do it, but finally agreed and enlisted Finney to do the job. On the selected night, Blake could not get his Capri started, so he called Beth and told her if he called again in 15 minutes, she would have to come pick him up. His car started and he went home. He dozed on the couch, and then checked on Beth in the bedroom, but she was not there. He realized she must have gone to get him and, in the distance, he could see Hoppers burning. In the next section, Jess has a knife to Blake's throat, which reminds him of his father, who was an abusive, knife-wielding drunk. Jess, who the reader learns is one of the Munton brothers, tells Blake to drive to a place called Strake Hill, where the Meat Wagon awaits. Lee emerges from the van and gets in the car. He says they want Blake's help in robbing Fenton at the bar, which Blake does not want to do. Lee asks if Blake has seen Baz lately and Blake says the last time was a few nights ago outside the bar. Lee reminds him of what Baz had said about Blake killing Beth. Lee says he has proof, and he knows Blake has to help with the robbery. He and Jess get out of the car and Blake drives home.

Chapter 8 begins with a morning call to Blake from Finney, reminding him that they will be going drinking with Legs that night. Blake lies in bed, thinking about a dream in which Beth complained about him killing her. As he gets up and makes breakfast, he thinks about a robbery done long ago by Legs, Finney and himself, at the house of an old lady whom they discovered kept the putrefying corpse of her husband in an upstairs bedroom. Blake assures himself he is not avoiding the truth, as she was, but instead of checking on Baz, he goes to the gym. He has not been training for months and is out of shape. He sees Legs, who it turns out has been going to the gym regularly. They take turns bench-pressing weights, which becomes an unspoken contest, as the two exchange mild insults. Legs asks if Blake did anything about the Muntons, but Blake says he has not seen them. Legs says he heard Baz was missing and that people were saying Blake killed him. This alarms and angers Blake. His arms and chest burning from the weight-lifting, he goes home and watches Rocky 3 on video. He has seen it often, but enjoys it again, because Rocky was washed up and came back to be champ, which gives Blake heart. He shadow boxes around the living room, and then ventures into the basement, only to discover that the body of Baz is gone.

Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 Analysis

In telling the "back story" of how the fire at Hoppers began, Blake talks directly to the reader, as if filling in details for a friend or acquaintance. His respect for Hoppers as an



institution and his pride in his position as head doorman are evident. It is also clear that Finney will do whatever Blake tells him to do and will enjoy doing it. Throughout the night of the arson, by his account Blake has no idea that Beth somehow got in the club after hours. The next scene shifts back to the present, with Jess holding a knife to Blake's throat in the car. When they arrive at Strake Hill and Lee blackmails Blake into helping with the robbery of Fenton by threatening to release proof of some kind that Blake murdered Beth in the fire, the plot is advanced without bringing the disappearance of Baz to the fore. This is important, because recognition by the brothers that Baz is dead obviously would force a confrontation with Blake, whom they immediately would suspect as the killer. Instead of this confrontation, the author places the men in an uneasy alliance.

In Chapter 8, Blake does not feel like going drinking that night when he gets the morning call from Finney, but he succumbs to the plan, which shows the power of peer pressure in his small world. He has had another bad dream, which implies that his conscience still functions, although it does not seem to be available to him in waking life. His concern is whether he is avoiding the hard job of dealing with Baz's body. He assures himself this is not the case and yet he goes to the gym, of all places, instead of removing the evidence of his crime. The rough banter between Blake and Legs at the gym is based more on competition and manipulation than on trust and friendship, which shows the shallowness and mistrust at the heart of this relationship. Blake's closest friend is not really a friend and he understands this on some level, but he maintains a surface belief that they are "mates." Surrounded by danger and with no real friend, Blake can find solace and inspiration only in a movie, which, of course, is about a defeated fighter who miraculously regains the championship. Blake has seen this film many times, but only now does he make the conscious connection between himself and Rocky. This gives him enough gumption to go into the basement, where a big twist in the plot awaits in the disappearance of Baz. Once again, the author has provided a cliffhanger ending to the chapter, which is typical of fiction in the hardboiled tradition.



Chapter 9 and Chapter 10

Chapter 9 and Chapter 10 Summary

Blake frantically searches every inch of the cellar, but finally must admit that Baz's corpse is gone. He sits on the kitchen floor, drinks whisky from the bottle, and considers two possibilities: someone has taken the body, or Baz was not actually dead and got out of the cellar by himself. A third possibility, that Blake has gone crazy, occurs to him, but he quickly dismisses it. The next scene is inside Hoppers. Blake, chatting with Rachel, notices a piece of cable behind the bar, but neither of them knows why it is there. Fenton enters and tells Blake to take out the garbage. Blake is insolent, but he obeys, and Rachel responds flirtatiously to his attitude. When he returns, a big man enters and asks intrusive questions in a strange accent about the ownership and the door staff. Blake becomes aggressive, and the man leaves. Blake remains angry and Rachel placates him with peanuts and a chat. That night, after the bar closes, Rachel tells Blake that Fenton wants to talk to him, but he goes home instead. He drinks a beer, masturbates on the couch in front of soft porn on TV and falls asleep. He is awakened by banging on the front door, where Lee is waiting.

In Chapter 10, Lee, Blake, and Jess drive downtown in the Meat Wagon and slip into Hoppers by the back door, to which Blake has a key. The Muntons are armed. All three men go to the stockroom, where Jess quickly manages to open the safe. They take the money, and then Lee leads the way to Fenton's office. Jess picks the lock, but they find Fenton asleep at his desk, holding a shotgun in his lap. Lee hits Fenton with a lamp, knocking him off his chair. Jess finds another safe behind a cabinet, but cannot get it open. Fenton begins to regain consciousness and Blake goes to the bar, gets the cable he had seen earlier, ties Fenton's hands, and puts a garbage bag over his head with a small breathing hole. He also begins thinking about grabbing Fenton's shotgun. Lee kneels on Fenton's chest and hits him, trying to get him to give the safe combination, but Fenton insists he does not know it. Lee puts his shotgun against Fenton's leg and threatens to fire. Blake grabs Fenton's shotgun, points it at Lee and tells him to stop. He says Lee cannot fire the shotgun in this place, because it will be heard. Lee reluctantly agrees, puts down the gun, grabs a marble ashtray and smashes Fenton's fingers. Blake points the shotgun at Lee and pulls the trigger.

Chapter 9 and Chapter 10 Analysis

The disappearance of Baz's body constitutes a major twist in the plot and Blake's two main explanations, that someone took the corpse or that Baz was not actually dead, are the only plausible ones. Blake's insolence toward Fenton at Hoppers and his flirtation with Rachel are evidence that his frame of mind is now largely self-confident, despite his recognition that the missing corpse could pose a big problem for him. The big man who comes to the bar and asks about Fenton immediately brings to mind Fenton's concern about strangers entering the place. Blake's aggression is both reminiscent of his



promise to Fenton to be tough and a display of his own cockiness in the wake of attacking Baz. It is clear now that regarding himself as a dangerous man is central to his self-image. He feels so strong that he does not even bother to heed Fenton's request, through Rachel, for Blake to speak to him after work. His self-pleasuring at home is matter-of-fact, like eating or sleeping, which enhances the impression of how dominated he is by primal instincts. Again, the chapter ends with a cliffhanger, in Lee on the doorstep.

Chapter 10 looks at first like it might be a routine robbery of Hoppers, but after they clean out the safe, Lee's decision to go to Fenton's office provides another twist in the plot. Fenton's presence in the office means they either will have to kill him, or risk the chance that he will recognize their voices and be able to identify them later. Fenton's insistence that he does not know the combination to the safe, even when being threatened with a gun, is hard to believe and raises the question of what could be in the safe that would make him so protective of it. Blake's decision to grab Fenton's shotgun might seem a little surprising, in that he has been a robber since his youth and has not shown loyalty to Fenton before now. The explanation is that his loyalty is to Hoppers and to his job as doorman, which in effect makes him the protector of the place. An assault on Hoppers amounts to an assault on his self-image. If a thug can be said to have integrity, then Blake's integrity is being challenged. Also, he fears and distrusts the Muntons and he is aware that they might soon discover Baz's death, if they do not know about it already. Shooting them might be a good way out of this mess for him. It would make him a man of action, as Beth once told him he should be.



Chapter 11 and Chapter 12

Chapter 11 and Chapter 12 Summary

Chapter 11 begins with Blake telling the reader that when he was about fifteen, he killed his father. He describes his father coming home drunk and feeling mean, as usual. Yelling, his father came upstairs and Blake knew he would be beaten again. His father slipped and climbed the rest of the way on hands and knees. When he reached the landing, Blake shoved him to his death. He then called the police, who did not question him and later he thought maybe they knew what happened but figured Blake's father deserved to die. After that, his life as a thug took its course, until Beth died, and he lost his bottle. He says he loved her, despite their troubles, and did not kill her, but nobody believed him. In the next section, he is back in Fenton's office, pulling the trigger on Lee, but it turns out the shotgun is not loaded. He dashes to the door, narrowly escaping a blast of buckshot from Jess's gun. He drives out East Bloater Road, to the countryside, and the comfort of a distant horizon. When he gets back, he hopes that the Muntons will forgive him if he gives them his share of money from the robbery, but he knows this is a foolish thought. He drives to Sally's place, but sees Lee's face in the window. He tries to get away, but the Capri will not start and Lee taps on the car window and tells him to come upstairs. As soon as he walks into Sally's place, Jess knocks him out with a cricket bat. When he comes to, Sally is with him. She has called an ambulance, which he does not want. He has a huge lump on his head, and he realizes the men have crudely tattooed the word "Cunt" on his arm. Sally is frightened and then becomes angry and screams at Blake. He pushes her down and she orders him out of the apartment. He leaves, but not before asking to borrow money.

In Chapter 12, Blake buys food at the corner shop and is chastised by Doug, the shopkeeper, who regards him as a vicious thug, which astounds Blake. Outside his house await two policemen he knows, Plim and Jonah. They ask about his head and he tells them he fell down the stairs. They go inside and question him about the disappearance of Baz and Blake's confrontation with him outside Hoppers. They ask where he was at lunchtime two days ago and he says at the Paul Pry. When they leave, he calls Nathan to provide the alibi, but Nathan has heard about the robbery and wants what was in the safe in Fenton's office. Blake promises to get it, even though he does not know what it is. He dons a wig as a disguise and goes to the Munton home in Norbert Green. Mandy Munton, the sister, answers the door. She recognizes him immediately. Mandy thinks he has come to see her, because they kissed once when she was twelve. Now she is nineteen and they quickly have sex on the kitchen counter. He confesses that he has come for what he calls the "doofer," or whatever it was in the safe. She says she can get it for him. He should meet her in the graveyard at nine that night, and they will run away together.



Chapter 11 and Chapter 12 Analysis

The revelation at the start of Chapter 11 that Blake killed his father comes as a shock, but the father's viciousness makes the deed seem understandable. Nevertheless, this bad start to Blake's life set him on the course of thuggery, which he apparently embraced until Beth's death deflated him. His admission that he loved her and did not kill her rings true, in the light of how devastated he seems to be by her death. Also, Blake appears to a reliable narrator, which is to say that throughout the book so far, the reader has been given no reason by the author to disbelieve Blake. It is not surprising, however, that nobody in town believes he did not kill Beth, because he has been a violent criminal all his adult life. By now, the reader is aware of this fact, but it has been revealed so gradually that the author has managed in the meantime to make his criminal protagonist a likeable character, which is vital to making the story engaging. After Blake's attempt to kill Lee fails, his flight to the countryside symbolizes a longed-for escape from the oppression of Mangel, which he knows will never occur, because he is trapped within his own life. He has not the imagination, the wit or the courage to leave his hometown. The subsequent beating and tattooing he receives from the Muntons at Sally's place is all but inevitable and perhaps represents the punishment of fate for the destructive choices he has made. Blake's response is to keep fighting. After he gives the police his alibi concerning Baz's death and calls Nathan at the bar, Blake goes straight to the lair of the Muntons. His wig is a funny commentary on his low intelligence and sex with Mandy is a kind of revenge on the Muntun brothers. It also furthers the plot, when Mandy agrees to help him get the doofer and wants to leave town with Blake.



Chapter 13 and Chapter 14

Chapter 13 and Chapter 14 Summary

Blake drives around the countryside, uncertain of what to do next. He tries writing down ideas on the back of a parking ticket, but nothing comes. In the afternoon, he goes to Hoppers and has a beer. When Rachel asks why he is there so early, he says it is to see her. She says they will get together after work and leans over the bar to kiss him, which he has never seen her do with anyone before now. This pleases him for a moment, but he is worried about the robbery. He goes to Fenton's office, which is locked. Fenton finally gets the door unlocked, using his teeth, because all his fingers are broken. Fenton does not realize Blake was in on the robbery. Tearfully, he pleads with Blake to get back the object that was in the office safe, but he will not say what it is. He offers Blake a fifty percent share in Hoppers and Blake agrees, on the condition that the name is not changed to Café Americano. He borrows fifty pounds and leaves. In two short scenes, Blake imagines townsfolk talking about him losing his bottle, but he eventually decides it will work out all right. He goes to the Paul Pry and Nathan reminds him that he wants the doofer in exchange for his silence. Finney shows up, smelling like he has not had a bath for weeks. Finney takes him to a corner table and confesses that he is the one who has Baz's body.

Chapter 14 begins with Blake telling the reader that Finney had always been a cunt, obviously a terrible slur, which he says means Finney sticks his nose in others' business and messes it up. They go outside, Finney goes to urinate and when he returns, Blake punches him in the face, knocking him down. Finney starts crying and explains that he came to Blake's house, found the cellar door open, and thought Blake had fallen downstairs. He found Baz's body and put it in his car, to protect Blake. They go to the car, and Blake pries open the trunk, which was jammed shut. Nathan comes outside and says he knows that the two have Baz's body in the trunk. They drive to the River Clunge and drag the heavy body toward it. When they pause for a smoke, Finney kicks a can and begins booting it around like a soccer ball. Blake drags the body the rest of the way, but encounters a man he knows, named Danny, who is fishing. Figuring he has no option, Blake beats Danny to death with his wrench. In the next scene, Blake is in the car waiting for Finney, who reappears with two huge barbels that Danny had caught. They go back to town, where Blake gets rid of Fin by telling him he is meeting Sally for a drink. He drives to the graveyard at Norbert Green, where he encounters Jess. They fight, and Blake is about to win when he is hit from behind and goes down.

Chapter 13 and Chapter 14 Analysis

A perfect example is given of Blake's uncertainty about how to extract himself from the mess he is in when he goes to Hoppers and finds himself kissing Rachel, only a short while after he has become involved with Mandy Munton. The implication is that his love life is just as chaotic as his activities in thuggery. Often, in hardboiled crime fiction, the



character victimizes himself and must rely on lucky breaks to get out of jams. Such is the case when he goes to Fenton's office and not only discovers his boss is unaware of Blake's involvement in the robbery, but is offered a fifty percent share of the pub if he can retrieve the doofer. Of course, this is hardly an easy escape from his predicament, as he does not know what or where the doofer is and, in any case, he already has promised to bring it to Nathan. Instead of a true escape from his troubles, promises are all he really extracts from Fenton, along with fifty pounds. His main concern is for his own safety and for what people think of him.

Circumstances again come to his temporary rescue, when Finney resolves the question of Baz's whereabouts. Instead of being pleased, Blake's reaction to this news is to pummel his friend. He does not relent in his contempt for Finney even after hearing that the theft of the body was done to protect him. Stopping for a smoke as they drag the body to the river would be ridiculous in its stupidity, if the low intelligence of these two had not already been so firmly established. Fin's near-idiocy is further established when he starts playing soccer with a tin can and forgets all about dumping the body. When Blake decides Danny must die, his logic is indisputable from the vantage point of a multiple murderer. Even though Blake has been portrayed as a likeable fellow, it has been clear now for some time that he is a ruthless killer when he thinks it necessary. He is also a foolish man, as he again demonstrates when he sees Jess at the graveyard, apparently does not suspect that another Munton might be nearby, and is rather predictably hit from behind. By this point, the ability of Blake to even survive his many mistakes has become one of the novel's main entertainments.



Chapter 15 and Chapter 16

Chapter 15 and Chapter 16 Summary

Chapter 15 opens with Finney and Blake in Fin's car, which still stinks powerfully of Baz's corpse. They are hiding from the Muntons in an area called Muckfield, near where they once robbed a mechanic. Blake is woozy and cannot recall what happened. Finney says Mandy hit him from behind with a piece of headstone. Blake asks why Fin was there and he says he was following him, in case he got into more trouble. He hit Mandy, but he assures an anxious Blake that he did not kill her. Fin mentions that everyone says Mandy had sex with all three of her brothers. He points out the mechanic's shop, which is now boarded up, and reminisces fondly about hitting the man over the head with a battery. He says he saw him the other day on a park bench, drooling, with a nurse in attendance, which made Finney proud. Blake silently reflects that such things seemed all right at the time, as folks had it coming to them. He asks if Mandy had anything with her. Finney says she had box, which he kicked away as he was dragging Blake to the car. A dog picked up the box and ran off with it. They look for the box in Norbert Green, which makes Finney intensely nervous. They start talking about the night of the fire at Hoppers, and Finney confesses that he not only knew Beth was inside the bar, he actually knocked her out and put her in there. He did it for Blake, because she was "bad news" and was sleeping with someone else. Blake is enraged and begins strangling Fin to death, but is interrupted by the sight of a dog. He follows it to a house, and tries to climb over the fence, which falls down completely. The gravedigger he had met earlier emerges from the house. Blake says his fence was installed incorrectly. He asks if the dog had a box, and the man says he did, but someone came and claimed it. He cannot describe the man, because it was dark, but remembers he was smoking Regal cigarettes. Blake goes back to Fin's car, which is empty, so he has a nap.

Chapter 16 begins with Blake dreaming about playing cards in the kitchen with Baz, Beth and the fisherman Blake killed by the river. Blake's father is behind them, breathing heavily. The cards are all kings of hearts with the face of Nathan the barman. The fisherman starts fondling Beth and has sex with her on the counter. Blake awakens and hears someone tapping on the window of the Fin's car. He gets out and walks away quickly. When the person approaches from behind, he whirls and punches. Mandy falls down with a broken nose. Blake apologizes, and then asks why she hit him in the graveyard. She takes him to an abandoned garage where they can hide, and then says she hit him to protect Jess, but she did not know he would be there. She says she has a special relationship with her brothers and Blake knows what she means. Just now, she was leaving town, saw Blake asleep and figured it would be wise to awaken him. She asks if he is coming with her. Blake explains to her that nobody can leave Mangel. She gives him a pistol for protection, kisses him and walks away. He has never had a gun and cannot wait to try it out. He knows he has done some bad things, but his head is muddled and he cannot easily recall what they were. He thinks of the doofer in the box,



in the hands of someone who smokes Regals. He hears sounds in the adjoining garage, looks through a crack in the cement wall and sees Lee Munton, with Jess and Finney.

Chapter 15 and Chapter 16 Analysis

In Chapter 15, the depravity of Mangel and of Blake and his friends is fully established. First, Finney makes the observation that Mandy had an incestuous relationship with all her brothers and then he mentions seeing the victim of a long-ago bashing, who is brain-damaged from the assault, and being proud to witness his ruined state. The horror of these revelations is heightened by Fin's casualness, which shows his absence of morality. Blake is just as bad, thinking that the ruination of someone's life was all right, because they needed some money, and people have it coming to them. When he attacks Fin, he surely would have killed him, had he not spotted the dog. In other words, only greed and Blake's single-minded quest for the doofer saved Fin. By now, the doofer has taken on symbolic significance, because it is all Blake wants, and yet he does not know what it is. Indeed, his whole life is like that. Blake is a man who is so confused that he does not even know what would make him happy or fulfilled. Such goals are beyond his imagination. All he can do is follow the trail of an unidentified object that everyone seems to want, which was borne away in the jaws of a dog. His discovery that the box is now in the possession of man who smokes Regals foreshadows a showdown with that man. Blake's dream in Chapter 16 brings together the victims of his crimes, demonstrating again that his conscience still functions, but at a level unavailable to him in waking life. When Mandy asks if he will leave town with her, his reply that nobody leaves Mangel suggests that Mangel's virulent effect will stay with its inhabitants no matter where they go. Mangel is a kind of curse, a prison, a hell on earth. Mandy gives him a pistol, which thickens the plot but can only reinforce his imprisonment within his own mind. If he even has trouble remembering the bad things he has done, how could he ever hope to become a better man? He certainly is not thinking about self-improvement, other than in terms of getting his hands on the doofer. Once again, circumstance arises to help him, as he spots the Munton brothers with Fin.



Chapter 17 and Chapter 18

Chapter 17 and Chapter 18 Summary

As Blake peers through the crack in the wall, he sees that Lee and Jess are torturing Finney. Jess is holding a large chainsaw that he calls Susan, as Lee tries to get Fin to admit that he killed Baz and to tell where he put the body. Fin will not tell and Jess slowly cuts into him with the chainsaw, which causes Blake to vomit. He does not know what to do and then remembers the pistol. He tries to get into the garage, but the door is locked. He sees a heavy engine block and with a great effort, he picks it up and throws it through the door. Jess comes through the hole with the chainsaw and Blake fires the gun, but at first it does not seem to have much effect. Blake dodges the saw, and Jess falls to the ground, clutching his bloody groin. Blake rescues Fin, whose ears have been cut off. Lee has somehow escaped. Blake takes Fin to the hospital. Outside, Blake pulls an old man off his moped and drives away. He goes to Leggsy's place, but nobody answers the door. Someone runs at him and he knocks him out. It is a paperboy. The newspaper carries a story about Blake, who is wanted in connection with the death of Dan Draper, the fisherman. The article mentions that Blake was diagnosed as clinically insane after Beth's death and spent 18 months in an asylum. Blake does not like the photo with the story, because he looks too good, and it shows how he has let himself go lately. He takes the kid's anorak as a disguise, finds his wig in his pocket and throws his black leathers into a garbage bin. He goes to Hoppers, where Rachel immediately recognizes him. She is miffed that he missed their date, but she has read about him in the paper and she kisses him. She says a man named Mick Runter is interviewing for Blake's doorman job. Blake puts on sunglasses, leaves Hoppers and bumps into the brain-damaged mechanic on the sidewalk. He tells the man that he and his friends were the ones who dropped the battery on his head, and he says the man should thank him, because it got him out of Mangel, into the clouds. He orders a kebab and is immediately recognized by the seller.

In Chapter 18, Blake ambushes Mick Runter when he gets out of his car, and hits him with the wrench. He drags him into an alley and puts on Mick's doorman's clothes, which are too tight. At Hoppers, Rachel reminds him the police are after him, but he says the door must be manned. He goes to Fenton's office and reminds the boss of their deal. Fenton says the deal is off, because Blake is a wanted man. Blake notices two Regal cigarette butts in the ashtray on Fenton's desk. Just then, someone comes in and hits Blake from behind. When he comes to, he sees the big man with the strange accent who had asking about Fenton. He has a knife to Fenton's neck, which he slices open, killing him. The office safe is open and empty. The man pokes the blade into Blake's neck and threatens to kill him also, unless Blake can give a reason why he should not do so. Blake says he is head doorman and the man gets off him and starts laughing. Blake puts his hand around the gun in his pocket and notices the box with the doofer sticking out of the other man's pocket. He pulls out the gun, which turns out to be the wrench. Blake dodges the man's attack, gets out the pistol and pulls the trigger, but it does not fire. The man throws the knife, but Blake sidesteps it, jumps through the



window to the ground and runs away. He jumps into Mick Runter's car. The big man tries to stop him and Blake almost runs him down as he escapes.

Chapter 17 and Chapter 18 Analysis

As the story nears the end, its pace picks up, principally through depiction of violent scenes. Fin's dogged refusal to say what happened to Baz shows a loyalty to Blake that is intense, even though it is misplaced; a classic case of honor among thieves. Blake's effort in throwing the engine through the door indicates the extent of his strength when he is angry or otherwise motivated, and he does not hesitate in taking Fin to the hospital. Hitting the paperboy and then reading the newspaper is blackly comical, as if Blake cannot achieve the simplest thing without pounding someone. The news that Blake was diagnosed clinically insane comes as shock, but is typically delivered by the author in a low-key, matter-of-fact fashion. More black comedy follows with Blake's inept disguise, but his soulless encounter with the brain-damaged mechanic and his rationale about the injury being a favor to him bring the reader back to reality of the protagonist's vicious life. Blake's attack on Mick Runter is utterly in keeping with his view of the world and his place in it as Hopper's head doorman. The job and its title are central to Blake's self-image. He could no more give that up than he could leave Mangel. In Fenton's office, Blake spots Regal cigarettes, which suggest to him that whoever has the box containing the doofer has been in the room. Yet again, Blake is hit from behind, which would be ridiculous in any genre other than hardboiled crime or so-called noir fiction, where frequent battering of the protagonist is an accepted plot device. The fight with the big man and Blake's escape combine black humor with action, as the story races toward its conclusion.



Chapter 19 and Chapter 20

Chapter 19 and Chapter 20 Summary

Having nowhere safe to go, Blake enters the Paul Pry. Nathan refuses to serve him, saying that a man's character is judged by his actions and Blake appears to have no character. Nathan quickly changes his tune when Blake says he has the doofer for him. This gets him a beer. He says the doofer is in his car but he had to take the whole safe, because he could not get it open. Blake asks Nathan what the doofer is, but Nathan will only say that he knows Fenton came to Mangel to hide. He says Legs was in the bar looking for Blake. He finds Legs at his place, where they sit in front of the TV and drink beer, as usual. Blake tells what happened to Finney. Legs responds that he knows Blake killed Beth. Blake thinks about the time he found a pack of Regals in his bedroom. This prompted him to be nicer to Beth, but she did not respond. He came home early one day and heard her in the bedroom, having sex with the Regal smoker. Legs lights a Regal and looks at Blake. They admit the truth to each other and Legs describes being with Beth that night. After she went to pick up Blake, Legs followed her, but he arrived when Hoppers was ablaze, with her car parked in back. Legs says he told the Muntons the whole story. He then answers a knock at the door and returns with Jess and Lee Munton.

In Chapter 20, Jess is wrapped in bandages, stinks of urine, and is woozy from painkillers. Lee points a shotgun at Blake's groin, but Legs says he cannot shoot Blake in the apartment. Lee agrees to take Blake to Hurk Wood instead. As they go down the fire escape, Blake tells Lee that Legs stole the doofer from Mandy and gave it to Fenton, who then signed over half of Hoppers to Legs. Uncertain about whether to believe this, Lee puts Blake in the back of the Meat Wagon, but nobody gets in the front. Blake sees Mandy through the window to the front seat, and she says her brothers picked her up on the road and she is glad to be taking Blake to Hurk Wood, because he killed Baz. The brothers then throw a barely conscious Legs into the back. On the drive, Blake and Legs realize the big man's corpse is in the van with them. Legs says he loves Blake, which Blake figures is because he is frightened. When the van stops, Jess puts the chainsaw in the back, and then knocks out Legs with a gun butt. The brothers point shotguns at Blake and tell him to use the chainsaw to decapitate Legs. Blake hesitates and Lee rakes a round of buckshot along the top of his scalp. Someone fires again, and blood sprays everywhere. In the final scene, Mandy is outside the van with her rucksack and Blake thanks her for shooting her brothers. He apologizes for killing Legs, saying her brothers forced him. She walks away. He puts Leggsy's head back with the body and covers it with his bloody leathers. The other three corpses are in the van, as well. He starts to drive the van away, and then notices the box with the doofer in it on the dashboard. He grabs a spade and heads out to the woods, planning to be at the Paul Pry for a beer when it opens, doofer in hand.



Chapter 19 and Chapter 20 Analysis

Nathan's observation about a man's actions and character is a satirical commentary by the author on how badly confused these people are about such fundamental principles. The satire deepens when Blake lies that he has the doofer and Nathan quickly drops his critical pose. To him, Blake's theft of the doofer, which he would give to Nathan as the price of his blackmail, is the action that would make Blake a man of character. When Blake and Legs confront each other in the flat, it becomes clear that Blake has been aware for some time that Legs was Beth's lover, but he did not want to face the fact. The Regal cigarettes he found in the bedroom are the proof and they also indicate that Legs took the doofer from Mandy in the graveyard. True to form, Blake does not think clearly and get out of the dangerous situation in which he finds himself after Legs confesses that he told the Muntons the whole story. After the Muntons arrive, Blake has the presence of mind to tell them about the theft by Legs of the doofer, but his only motive seems to be revenge, as the information cannot help Blake to escape his predicament. Blake cannot trust his best friend, and neither can Legs trust Blake. As usual, the only thing that can help Blake is circumstance and it comes through for him again in the form of Mandy, who has a change of heart about protecting her brothers. Blake is a little unhappy about having killed Legs, but it is nothing serious. He is happy to have the doofer, which will get him out of trouble. He cannot think beyond that and a beer at the pub. Blake is a man of action, but the actions are all wrong, and the character is almost all bad.



Characters

Royston Blake

Royston Blake, the novel's narrator and protagonist, is the 30 year-old head doorman at a popular bar in Mangel. Very large and strong, he takes great pride in being the most imposing man in town. Blake loves his job, which gives him a feeling of status in the community. As the story progresses, it becomes apparent that Blake has a history of criminal activity, including theft and battery. His rather simple approach to life, taking it essentially moment-by-moment, at first seems harmless if a bit foolish, but later proves to be a terrible weakness and a threat to others. Blake, it turns out, has very little conscience. He is entirely out for himself and cares about others only insofar as they represent comfort, satisfaction or some other advantage to him. What had initially appeared to be a pleasant enough, if somewhat rough fellow, is gradually revealed to be a murderous thug. His relationships with women are based on self-satisfaction and he has only two male friends, disdaining one and mistrusting the other. He moves through the story committing one act of violence after another and often being on the receiving end of violence. He is interested in drinking, eating, sex, his car and his job. He has no insight into the flaws in his character, and is actually surprised the few times that people point out his viciousness. Late in the novel, it is revealed that he was diagnosed in recent years as clinically insane and spent 18 months in an asylum. He has a kind of code for some of his behavior, such as a rule against hitting women, but he breaks such rules. He is capable of feeling fear but stands up well to threats and violence, with which he has dealt all his life. He is not very smart and he is highly dangerous, yet through humor and a very gradual revealing of Blake's faults, the author rather amazingly manages to make him hard to dislike.

Finney

Finney is one of Blake's two closest friends, although their friendship is largely one-sided. Finney admires and is fiercely loyal to Blake, but those emotions are not returned, in part because Fin is an inane and ridiculous person. He is often incapable of thinking clearly, he has no apparent sense of right and wrong, he is prone to destructive acts and he has a strange attraction to pain, almost as if he enjoys it. Like Blake, he is a small-time hood with no sympathy for his victims. He even expresses pride over seeing a man he had hit with a car battery during a robbery years ago, now brain-damaged and drooling beside his nurse. In another scene, when he and Blake are dragging a body to the river to hide it, Fin becomes so excited about kicking a tin can as if it were a soccer ball that he forgets all about disposing of the corpse. Women mistrust and dislike him, probably with good reason. It turns out that Fin is the one who murdered Beth, which he did because he thought she and Blake were not getting along and Beth was cheating on him. Such misplaced loyalty would be unbelievable in anyone other than an amoral fool like Finney. Even so, when the Muntons catch him and torture him with a chainsaw, trying to get him to confess that he disposed of their dead brother, he endures the loss



of both ears and numerous cuts on his torso without admitting the truth. He just keeps telling them that Blake will make them sorry when he gets hold of them. Finney is a bad combination: a psychopath who is too stupid to even realize how dangerous he is.

Legs

Legs is the third friend in the trio with Blake and Finney. He is probably the brightest of the three men and Blake often looks to him for advice. Even so, he is just as vicious and heartless as they are. He is apparently a good soccer player, albeit a dirty one, and he lifts weights, which keeps him in good shape. He holds a grudge against Blake that only deepens after Blake accidentally head-butts him in a bar. Legs is clever enough not to admit his dissatisfaction with Blake. Instead, when Blake comes to him for help with the Muntons, he advises him to catch one of them alone and beat him up. When Blake instead ends up killing Baz Munton, Legs executes the ultimate treachery against his best friend, telling the other Muntons about the murder. The excuse Legs later gives for this action is that he believes Blake killed his wife, Beth. Legs does not display any remorse that he was having an affair with Beth behind Blake's back. What is more, he steals the doofer that Blake is trying to get and sells it to Fenton, just as Blake intended to do, in exchange for the same half-ownership of the bar that Blake was promised. At the end, when Legs realizes he will probably be killed, he tells Blake he loves him. Whether this is a last-ditch attempt to manipulate Blake into helping him somehow, or whether he really means it is hard to know. He certainly has not acted as though he loves his friend and it is likely that Legs does not love anyone but himself. He cries from fear in the moments before his death, displaying a cowardice neither of his two friends apparently has. By then, the death of Legs is hardly an event to evoke the reader's compassion.

Sally

Sally becomes Blake's girlfriend after Beth's death. She used to work as a stripper at Hoppers, where she was the mistress of Baz Munton. Sally is known around town as a "slapper" or a woman of loose morals. She has a lusty attitude toward men and she even has sex with Baz for old times' sake when she is supposed to be Blake's girlfriend. She reminds him that they have an open relationship, but she seems to have a special fondness for Blake. She even says she loves him and wants to leave Mangel with him. On the other hand, Sally is given to towering rages when Blake does or says something she does not like. Her usual demeanor is aggressive and short-tempered. On the rare occasion when she displays tenderness toward Blake, stroking his face, for example, he is always surprised. Eventually, after he refuses to go away with her and the Muntons come to her house, threatening her, she becomes enraged with Blake. She says she hates him and never wants to see him again. Sally is a survivor who lives a hardscrabble life in an uncaring town, but she is utterly out of touch with her own emotions. Her brittle exterior seems to have penetrated to her soul. Like many of the characters in this book, whatever might have been good in her has been twisted and wrung out, leaving only bitterness, suspicion, and anger. She is the sort of person who



remains on the offensive against all others, because it is the only way she can see to prevent herself from falling apart.

Beth Blake

Beth Blake does not appear as a living character in the book, although her death provides a central point around which the plot revolves. She is Royston Blake's wife and died in a fire at Hoppers before the time in which the novel takes place. Much of what the reader learns about Beth comes through Blake's reminiscences about their life together. In his eyes, Beth was the sort of person who would do a favor for him just so she could complain about it for days afterward. She and Blake had been sleeping in separate rooms for 12 months before her death. Eventually, the reader discovers that during this time, Beth was having an affair with Blake's best friend Legs. Blake declares that he loved her, but the reader does not come to know how she felt about either her husband or Legs. Blake reveals that after he realized she was having an affair, he gave her flowers and perfume, but she did not respond to such overtures. The reader also knows that Beth did not like Finney, which certainly was a piece of good judgment, but overall, she remains an enigma throughout the novel.

Mandy Munton

Mandy Munton is the 19-year-old sister of the three Munton brothers. She has had a crush on Blake since he kissed her when she was twelve years old, and when he comes to the Munton house on other business, she immediately thinks he is there for her. It turns out that all Mandy's brothers have had an incestuous relationship with her, yet she does not seem to detest them for it. She retains loyalty to them until the very end, when they are about to kill Blake, and then she shoots two of them in the back. Mandy is the only person in the book who manages to get out of Mangel. She just walks away, carrying a rucksack, and although she is hardly an inspiring figure, she is one of the few characters toward whom the reader is likely to feel sympathy.

Lee Munton

Lee Munton is the eldest of the Munton brothers. He is the brain trust of the group, although he apparently mismanaged Hoppers after it was left to the brothers by their father. Lee is the one who decided Hoppers should be burned down for insurance money and he forced a reluctant Blake to cooperate, which indicates the strength of his presence. Blake considers the Muntons to be the toughest family in Mangel and Lee is its head.

Baz Munton

Baz Munton, the second brother, is overweight, obnoxious and arrogant. Outside Hoppers, he pushes a surprised Blake against the wall and insults him, telling him he



knows that he killed his wife. Baz then has sex with his former mistress, Sally, who is now Blake's girlfriend. When Blake waylays Baz on a lonely path, Baz shows no fear. He remains arrogant and aggressive, right up to the end of his life.

Jess Munton

Jess Munton is the main killer among the Munton brothers. His weapon of choice is a giant chainsaw that he nicknames Susan. He carries a tattoo on his arm that reads, "Susan." He is a big man, strong and enthusiastic about doing physical damage to people. He enjoys torture.

Tommy Munton

Tommy Munton, the father of the Munton clan, died before the action in the novel begins. He was a criminal who invested the money he made from robbery in starting Hoppers. He had a head for business and turned the bar into a highly popular, profitable place before his death from what Blake describes as "old shrapnel."

Nathan

Nathan is the bartender at the Paul Pry, where Blake drinks with Legs and Finney. He is a conniving and clever fellow, who knows all the gossip around town and is out to make the best of it for himself. When Blake asks Nathan for an alibi concerning a robbery, Nathan agrees on the condition that Blake must give him the most sought-after piece of the loot. Nathan considers himself to be an intelligent man and he is the one who guesses that Fenton, the Hoppers owner, is in hiding. Even so, the main difference between Nathan and the others seems to be that he is a little more devious than most of them.

Fenton

Fenton is the owner of Hoppers. He came from out of town and bought it after the fire, which partially destroyed it. He renamed it Hoppers Wine Bar & Bistro, in an attempt to make it sound more classy, and he plans to rename it again as Café Americano, to make it exotic. Fenton is a dandy, with a floppy head of hair that turns out to be a wig. He tries to be tough and aggressive, especially in his roll as Blake's boss, but it does not work well. He is very afraid that someone strange will get into the club and it turns out he was right to be afraid.

Rachel

Rachel is a bartender at Hoppers. She is a saucy young woman with a keen interest in Blake. He says she has never shown interest in anyone else when she is at work, but



she kisses him over the bar on several occasions and is eager to get together with him. Little comes of this flirtation, though.

Blake's father

Blake's father, whom he simply refers to as "my old man," also died before the action in the novel begins. Midway through the story, Blake reveals his father was an abusive drunk who regularly threatened him with a knife and, at age 15, Blake killed him by pushing him down the stairs.

Dan Draper

Dan Draper is a man Blake knew vaguely from school, whom he sees fishing by the bank of the River Clunge. This is unfortunate for Dan, because Blake is about to toss a body into the river and he cannot have any witnesses. Blake hammers Dan to death with a wrench.

Doug

Doug is a shopkeeper in Blake's neighborhood. Blake has known him for years but hardly spoke to him except to buy necessities, until one day when Doug astonishes Blake by berating him for being a worthless thug who helps to ruin the town. This is the only time in the novel when anyone stands up and says the obvious about any of the thieves and murders who populate the story.

Mick Runter

Mick Runter is a man Fenton hires to replace Blake as head doorman at Hoppers after Blake becomes wanted by the police. Blake knows Mick and has no respect for him. He ambushes him outside his car, knocks him out and puts on Mick's doorman's outfit.

Plim and Jonah

Plim and Jonah are two policemen who question Blake about the disappearance of Baz Munton. Blake, who knows them from school days, handles them with ease and unconcern.



Objects/Places

Mangel

Mangel is a fictional town in England's West Country where the novel is set. It is a defeated place, full of people who apparently have not the ability or will to leave and start afresh somewhere new. Mangel also is overrun with thieves and murderers, who have little trouble dealing with the law. The place is like a trap or a prison. It is symbolic of what people can do to themselves when their rules of law and common decency are not diligently applied.

Hoppers

Hoppers Wine Bar & Bistro is where Blake works as head doorman. It used to be called simply Hoppers and its current owner, Fenton, wants to rename it Café Americano.

The Paul Pry

The Paul Pry is a pub favored by Blake, Legs and Finney. They meet there regularly.

East Bloater

East Bloater is a wooded community on Mangel's outskirts. Blake drives there sometimes to look at the horizon and dream about the world beyond Mangel, which he knows he will never see.

Hurk Wood

Hurk Wood is a forested area where the Munton brothers take people against whom they have a vendetta, to kill them.

The River Clunge

The River Clunge is where Blake and Finney dispose of Baz Munton's corpse and where Blake sees Dan Draper fishing and kills him because he is a witness.

Leggsy's flat

Leggsy's flat is where Blake and Legs get together on several occasions to drink beer, watch television and work out problems or plans.



Norbert Green

Norbert Green is the area of town where the Munton brothers live. It is a very dangerous place to be alone at night.

Alvin's Kebab Shop and Chippy

Alvin's Kebab Shop and Chippy is where Blake likes to buy kebabs.

Ford Capri

The Ford Capri 2.8i is Blake's beloved car. Legs describes it as a rust pile, but Blake considers it to be the finest make of automobile imaginable.

Meat Wagon

The Meat Wagon is a dirty, white van with the lettering "Munton Motors" on its side. Nobody knows exactly why it is called the Meat Wagon, but everyone is afraid of it, because people who go in the back might not come out alive.

Susan

Susan is a giant chainsaw owned by Jess Munton, who also has "Susan" tattooed on his arm. Jess uses Susan to torture and kill people.



Themes

The Entrapment of Place

When characters in fiction say they have to get out of this town, it generally means they feel the expectations of others, and their response to those expectations, are suffocating them. In *Deadfolk*, the town of Mangel is so suffocating that most of the characters do not have the will or strength to leave. Even the title, *Deadfolk*, refers not only to graveyards that play a role in the plot and the numerous characters who are killed, but also to its inhabitants, who are dead to any of hope of a better way to live. Mangel is an extreme example of an insular town whose citizens create their own prison through ignorance and incuriosity concerning the outside world. The narrator, Royston Blake, often says nobody leaves Mangel and he is pretty close to right about that. Mandy Munton, the one character who finally manages to get away, first must kill her last two living family members, who earlier prevented her from leaving. That takes courage to do, because Mandy will carry a host of terrible memories into her new life. Such memories and the experiences that give rise to them are the ties that bind the citizens to Mangel. Blake cannot go, because Mangel is everything he knows. All his memories and experiences are there and he cannot separate them from the place. If he were to leave Mangel, in a sense it would be like leaving himself behind. This powerful identification with a place, so strong that it becomes what a person is, can make it virtually impossible for some people to leave home. Yet to leave would be the best thing such people could do, because they would be liberated. They could remake themselves, striving for change or improvement. In a new place, they would not be held back by the preconceptions everyone has about them. In this book, although leaving Mangel would be a rebirth, the question is, would Mangel leave the leaver?

Greed Is Blind

Blake and many other characters in this book are driven by their desires for money and possessions. Greed dominates and propels their everyday activities. They have no interest in spiritual or intangible values and clearly would scoff at any suggestion that such values are worth having. The main symbol in this novel is a thing unknown to Blake, what he calls a "doofer," in a small box. Everyone wants it but nobody will tell him what it is. Perhaps some of the others, like Blake, do not know what is in the box. In a sense, it does not matter. Each person wants it because others want it. The doofer represents greed in concrete form. Invisible, like a virus or curse inside the little box, the doofer is symbolic of greed's power as an idea or emotion. Among people with no spiritual values, greed can make the pursuit of material goods and money seem like the most important thing in the world. In this novel, one of the author's themes is that greed is blind to values that make life worth living, and those who allow themselves to be driven by greed end up with lives so constricted and miserable that they are hardly worth living. When Blake finally gets the doofer at the end of the story, his plan is simply to give it to Nathan as a bribe to help keep Blake out of jail, even though he still is



wanted by the police in connection with the death of a man Blake murdered. All the frantic chasing has merely piled up bodies and misery. The greedy are blind to what can truly make their lives worthwhile.

Character Determines Action

Several people in the book comment on the relationship between actions and character. Beth tells Blake that how a person looks is not important; his actions are what demonstrate his character. Sally also believes a man is what he does. She thinks if Blake will not stand up to the Muntons, it shows he has lost his "bottle" or nerve. Nathan also tells Blake that a man's character is judged by his actions and no action means no character. Such ideas about character might not be wrong, if they accounted for forethought and morality. In other words, the people in this novel fail to realize that true character requires, as a prerequisite, good decision-making about what the most just and kind action would be in any given situation. Such considerations, guided by a strong moral compass, are missing in this novel's characters. Their actions are based on short-term self-interest. What the author is suggesting in his exploration of this theme might best be demonstrated by inverting the phrase "actions determine character." It is really character that determines one's actions, good or bad. Most of the people in this story have bad or flawed characters and that is the very reason why they get up to no good. Sadly, the ideas they hold in common, which are so debased that they cannot be called values, cause one bad action after another, in a kind of feedback loop that seems to poison the entire town. Mangel is feeding on itself, eating itself alive. Wrong thinking and the bad choices such thinking promotes has made Mangel a hell on Earth.



Style

Point of View

The novel is told entirely from the viewpoint of its narrator and protagonist, Royston Blake. Throughout the book, Blake gives no indication that he is dishonest or unreliable as a narrator, although it is a given that seeing the world solely through his eyes does not provide a complete picture of relationships in the novel. Blake has many conflicts with other characters and he often acts with extreme aggression and selfishness, but he also exhibits candor about the type of person he is, which makes his narration of events seem believable. He is not trying to cast himself in a good light, primarily because he has such a limited sense of right and wrong that he does not regard himself as a bad person. The author uses this single point of view as a way to reveal important plot points gradually. Blake is not aware of who is responsible for key events that occurred before the action in the story begins and during the time in which the novel is set. He makes these discoveries along with the reader, which creates a kind of complicity or sympathy with him, even though he is a thug and a killer. Indeed, the first-person narrative in this novel has such a confiding tone that Blake sometimes speaks directly to the reader, saying "you," as if the reader were right beside him. It also allows the author to create a full portrait of this man's self-absorbed yet unreflective inner life, and it is central to the difficult task of creating reader interest in a character who is neither kind nor intelligent.

Setting

The fictional town of Mangel in England is the novel's only setting. Various communities in the Mangel area are visited or inhabited by characters, but an important refrain in the book is that nobody ever leaves Mangel. The only two characters who arrive in Mangel from elsewhere in England are murdered there. The farthest reaches of town are in the wooded community of East Bloater, where hills rise to the horizon, giving a sense of expansiveness and a promise of the wider world. Royston Blake goes there to look at the skyline, but that is as far as he gets. Mangel itself is not described in concrete terms. It has streets, bars, shops, flats, garages, alleys, parks and graveyards, but no details are provided to create a particular sense of place. Even the most dangerous parts of town, such as Norbert Green, where the lethal Munton family lives, or Hurk Wood, where they take their victims, are essentially just names. The author is concerned with creating a sense of foreboding, entrapment and constant danger, but he does this through the thoughts of the protagonist and his encounters with other characters, rather than through a portrayal of the town itself. As a setting, Mangel is highly significant, because it represents a place of living death, a prison or hell that holds everyone in its relentless grasp. It is a terrible place to be, and perhaps this is why the author refrains from describing it in concrete terms. Perhaps he would rather leave it as a setting to be largely imagined by the reader. When he mentions a bar or a flat, he allows the reader



to populate it with details appropriate to an oppressive place. In the end, Mangel subsists largely as a setting in the mind.

Language and Meaning

This novel is filled with slang, spoken in a dialect that surely is not representative of a real area of England, but that nevertheless is evocative of the so-called lower class. The narrator and all the other characters speak in the same fashion. At first, their language might seem forced or overwrought, but it is used so consistently that it soon assumes believability. The grammar is terrible, especially the use of past and present tense, and verb-subject agreement. For example, characters frequently say, "I were" and "We was." The narrator, in particular, frequently says "us" when speaking of himself, which is reminiscent of the Queen's royal "we," in a degraded way. Blake often will say, "It were us," in place of, "It was me." The characters also make a grammatical error common among the undereducated British, in saying, "me" instead of "my," as in, "That were me friend." To compound the strangeness of this dialect, the characters frequently use profanities and they also employ many slang words, which can be difficult to comprehend even when read in context. A key slang term is the general suspicion that Blake has "lost his bottle" and it takes a while to realize this means he does not have the same nerve or drive he used to have. His girlfriend, Sally, is called a "slapper," which is understandable in the context of her sleeping around. There are many other such terms, such as "lairy" for someone who is acting tough, "gob" for mouth, "flob" for spit and "scran" for food. The grammatical oddities and slang also are combined with strange and funny observations, which makes the language in the story quite entertaining, if a little difficult to follow. It also is the novel's most powerful device for establishing the very unusual world in which the reader is immersed. Through the characters' language, the author constantly reinforces the point that these people are severely undereducated and lacking in what most people would call common courtesies.

Structure

The novel is divided into twenty chapters of roughly equal length, each one headed only by the relevant number. The first chapter begins with a headline, followed by a short newspaper article that sets up a main plot point, but the other chapters generally follow on with the storyline. Occasionally, the author fills in the "back story" with an anecdote related by the narrator, Blake, about something from the past that bears importance to the action in the novel. For example, in one scene midway through the book, Blake thinks back fifteen years to when he pushed his abusive, drunken father down the stairs, killing him. In other scenes, he recounts his life with his now-deceased wife, Beth. Shifts from one scene to the next, in which some time has elapsed, are indicated with the simple device of three horizontal dots centered on the page. Sometimes, such a break is used when Blake moves from one topic to another in recounting the events of the story and of his life, and sometimes it just means he drove from one setting in town to another place. For the most part, the story moves chronologically, as events unfold,



become complicated and are resolved. This straightforward structure is combined with the action-oriented plotting of a noir thriller to create a headlong effect that carries the story along swiftly. Indeed, probably the most important role played by structure in this book is its help in streamlining the plot. Key events and revelations are a direct result of the plotting rather than being manipulated by structural tricks, which are almost absent in this novel.



Quotes

"Sight of the Meat Wagon has never been summat to warm a feller's cockles." (Chapter 1, p. 1)

"He fired up the engine, eyes still stuck on mine like a terrier's teeth on a robber's ankle." (Chapter 1, p. 5)

"No one leaves Mangel, Sal. It ain't an option for folks like us." (Chapter 6, p. 73)

"Like any happily married couple, we'd had our ups and downs. But you know how it goes. It gets to the point where the downs just keeps on going down, making up for all the ups you had at the start." (Chapter 7, p. 87)

"Fish can't say much about water cos water's all he knows." (Chapter 11, p. 129)

"It were like Mangel were the only town that really existed, and all the rest were just illusion, blurred around the edges and hard to focus on." (Chapter 11, p. 131)

"Jonah grimaced like he had a mouthful of vinegar and earwigs." (Chapter 12, p. 146)

"Not that Rocky III gave us any bright ideas nor nothing. I'd be the first to confess I wouldn't know a bright idea if it did a shite in me pocket." (Chapter 12, p. 152)

"And it done the trick. My burglary arrests dropped off like a leper's toes." (Chapter 12, p. 153)

"Come on,' I says, putting my hand on her dainty shoulder and making an effort not to play with the thin strip of cotton that didn't cover it up." (Chapter 12, p. 156)

"There'd been moments, when your tail's up and you can't smell the shite for roses. But moments was all they'd been." (Chapter 13, p. 164)

"It were a blackness surging outwards from somewhere in me belly, making us numb all over but mad for blood." (Chapter 14, p. 192)

"It were a peculiar feeling. I were so overcome with anger that my whole body were good as paralyzed." (Chapter 15, p. 198)

"I'd broken plenty of noses in my time—mostly with my head, but a large number by hand—and I knew what a snapped bridge felt like." (Chapter 16, p. 210)

"His mouth hug agape. A trickle of flob dangled from his lower lip." (Chapter 17, p. 236)

"The blunt barrel of Jess's sawn-off prodded against my stretched trousers from underneath, right on me tightening knacker sack." (Chapter 20, p. 276)



Topics for Discussion

In hardboiled crime novels such as this one, the reader can expect to find plenty of people being beaten up and even killed, but in this novel, did you have trouble believing so many bad things could happen in such a short time? What was your personal reaction to this, and what do you think was the author's intention in creating so many scenes of violence?

The author takes a serious risk in using Royston Blake, a thoroughly bad character, as the story's narrator and its protagonist. Discuss how you think Charlie Williams went about trying to make Blake an engaging fellow for the reader, even though he's a criminal, and whether you think that effort was successful.

When Legs admits to Blake that he told the Munton brothers about the murder of Baz Munton, Legs says the reason he did it was because Blake had become too cocky. Later, he says he loves Blake. Do you think these statements are true? How would you assess the relationship between the two men, especially the attitude of Legs toward Blake?

Sally says she loves Blake, although not long after this pronouncement she screams that she hates him and never wants to see him again. What's your assessment of her real feelings toward Blake, and why does she have those feelings?

Do you think Blake loves Mangel or hates it? He certainly doesn't believe he could ever leave it. Why does it have such a grip on him?

Why do you think Blake never gets to find out what the doofer is? Of course, at the end of the story, he has it in his grasp and apparently will open the box to find the answer. What's the point of all this mystery about it?

Some books are pure entertainment, but so-called literary fiction generally also contains insights into what it is to be human. Some novels written in specific genres, such as the hardboiled crime style of this one, can also be literary fiction. Tell whether you think this novel is either pure entertainment or literary fiction, and give your reasons why.